TEF submission, January 2018

Introduction and Context

The Trafford College Group (TCG) is a successful General Further Education College formed from a merger between Trafford College and Stockport College in April 2018. Both colleges have been delivering higher education for over 25 years. In collaboration with our primary university partner Sheffield Hallam University, HE is central to our ambitions to act as a catalyst for change and provide a transformative educational experience through enabling economic regeneration and social inclusion. We currently have just over 600 students on prescribed higher education programmes.

The College operates from three campuses along a 10 miles stretch of South Manchester. As a mixed economy provider of further and higher education that serves our local community, our success is contextualised to meeting the needs of our local economy and the wider context of Greater Manchester. Our work with key local, national and international employers such as Manchester Airport, Kellogg's, Siemens and John Lewis enriches our students' experiences, providing them with essential graduate skills and attributes that they need to support them to succeed.

A key strand of our higher education strategy is to provide an outstanding, high quality and enjoyable teaching environment, embedding a culture of enhancement and collaboration, which has been reflected in our most recent TEF award of Silver (June 2018). The College was ranked top in Greater Manchester and joint 3rd for student and employer satisfaction which endorses the culture of excellence in which the College operates.

More recently, the College was granted University Centre status in July 2018 by the Department for Education. Additionally, TCG is one of only 12 providers to be admitted to the new Chartered Institute of Further Education whose aim is to bring together the best training providers across the sector to raise standards, which is Illustrative of the trust and confidence that TCG has within the HE sector. The TEF Panel (TEF Year 3, 2018) noted that students from all background achieve excellent outcomes, along with a strong student satisfaction. Our high quality accessibility initiatives were noted, alongside our Higher Level Skills Development Strategy which aims to ensure that the curriculum has relevant vocational, professional and developmental elements including industry recognised vendor qualifications.

TCG mission as an educational provider is 'unlocking potential, fostering success.' With underpinning values

WE LIVE OUR VALUES

BOLD | AMBITIOUS | RESPECT | COLLABORATE & TEAMWORK | PROFESSIONAL

Local Context

The College Group operates within the boundaries of two local authorities. Stockport, where the majority of all full time Higher Education provision is located, has severe areas of deprivation and shows 14% of the population live in the 20% most deprived areas nationally. Stockport has two neighbourhoods (60,511) positioned within the 2% most deprived areas in the UK and only 25% of pupils in these areas achieve 5+ GCSEs (including English and Mathematics) at grade A*-C while the average for Stockport is 58.4%.Trafford district is ranked 120 out of 152 upper tier local authorities in England (where a rank of 1 is the most deprived authority on the measurement) This makes Trafford the least deprived authority in Greater Manchester on this measure.

The working population for Greater Manchester is less qualified than the national average, with those holding qualification at level 4 and above 3.4% lower than England.

The forecast for Greater Manchester indicates that over the next decade employment will grow by 3% per annum which is very positive.

The sectors expected to drive employment growth are business, financial and professional services, culture and creative and construction, reflected within our Higher Education Strategy.

College Context

Prior to the formal merger in 2018, transitionary joint college structures, committees and working groups were established to prepare for the merger. The Transition Board took several decisions in advance of the merger, and the regulatory framework for higher education within the merged College was established and developed early in the 2018 including academic and management structures were fully operational by the date of the merger in April 2018.

Two months after merger in June 2018, the College Group was reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and received the highest accolade in both meeting the quality and standards for HE and the quality of the student experience with no essential recommendations and no actions relating to teaching excellence.

The HE landscape suggests a decline in mature students entering higher education. As a further education College that delivers higher education and in line with trends of College based HE, our market share tends to be with students 21+. Our data shows that in 2016/17 mature students accounted for 75% of the entire student body and 73% in 2017/18. These students are often working and caring alongside studying.

Our data shows a high percentage of students drawn from areas with the least participation in higher education. The TEF data shows 44% are recruited from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2 in 2016/17 and 40% in 2017/18.

The proportion of males and females have shifted slightly in 2016/17 at 49% male and 51% female and in 2017/17, 55% male and 45% female, whilst there has been some fluctuation year-on-year, the College's data is broadly in line with the national profile (43% male and 57% female in 2016/17 HESA).

Despite the worrying national picture of the decline of part time students, the College data shows that part time students have increased from 49% in 2016/17 to 52% in 2017/18. We anticipate this number to grow through our employer responsive team to meet the needs of the local economy through the Apprenticeship and work-based provision.

In 2016/17 and 2017/18 14% of students declared a learning difficultly or disability when compared against the benchmark of 10%.

The College BME students represented 24% in 2016/17 and 23% in 2017/18 which is representative of the wider community with 21% of Greater Manchester identifying as other than White-British.

Performance against TEF metrics:

The initial starting point for TCG is a dual hypothesis (at least 35% of students in each mode) of Bronze/Silver based on negative flags totalling 1.5 in full time and negative flag 1 for part time. However students on a course lasting 2 years or more are in scope for the National Student Survey and continuation rates. For TCG this means that approximately 50% of our students are not represented within the TEF metrics and is therefore disproportionate. Working in partnership with the student body, this jointly prepared submission provides commentary against each TEF criteria as well as additional quantitative and qualitative data to support our case for excellence.

Teaching on my course

In the most recent NSS data (i.e. the year in which the College was formally merged), out-performing the benchmark by 2.1% and increased from the previous year by 4.1%.

Assessment and Feedback

The improvements over the three years have been exceptional. The overall satisfaction with assessment and feedback improved from 74.6% in 2015/16 to 85.1%. This score exceeds the benchmark by 6.5 points.

Academic Support

Whilst our performance against the benchmark gives a z-score of -2.1, there has been an improvement from year 1 to year 3 of 4.7% (76.0% to 80.7%). 2016/17, (the only year to be below the benchmark at 73.7%).

Continuation

The metrics shows that the College is -0.2 below its benchmark (86.8) for continuation, however the year splits indicate that for 2015/16, the College was 0.5% (87.3) above its benchmark, a slight decrease of 1.5% (85.8) in 2016/17 and increased by 1.5% (87.3) in 2017/18.

Employment and Further Study

The core metrics is based on 2 years of data, giving the College an aggregated score of 92.6% whilst year 1 (2015/16) is non-reportable, our DHLE shows 97% of our graduates progressed into employment or further study, 61% employed, 11% studying, 18% employed and studying, and just 3% unemployed.

Highly Skilled Employment

Our performance against the highly skilled employment metric is impacted significantly by the vocations we deliver not being classed as highly skilled employment. The majority of our provision is level 5 vocational HE such as Foundation Degrees and Higher Nationals. Our employment and Further Study is high, the majority of our students either progress to a BA Hons progression degree or seek employment. These would not be classed as HSE 6 months after graduating as defined by the Standard Occupational Classification.

The TCG NSS rates puts the College ahead of many Gold TEF rating Further Education Colleges (of which there is 14). For example using the most recent NSS data (2017/18), TCG would be ranked 4th for teaching on my course, 3rd for assessment and feedback and 10th for Academic Support. Overall satisfaction from 2016/17 to 2017/18 improved from 79% to 83%, placing us 9th when compared against GOLD TEF FE providers. A strong improvement bearing in mind the Stockport College was 67% in 2016.

Teaching Quality (TQ)

The TEF metrics demonstrate that FT student satisfaction is very positive and much improved in the last academic year (comparing splits from Year 2 and Year 3). Overall, teaching on my course is 86.1% compared to 85.2% benchmark. More notably, satisfaction for teaching has increased from 84 to 88% from Year 2 (2016) and Year 3 (2017). This is above 6 (of 13) Colleges that received a Gold TEF in 2018.

QAA (2018) reported that the “Learning and Teaching Strategy in 2016-17, which was mapped to the Quality Code and UK Professional Standards Framework. Since the merger, progress has been made in developing a new Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Strategy that was approved by the College Board in June 2018. The appointment of a Scholarly Lead has helped to support this work and to instil values of partnership and scholarship in the College's learning and teaching”.

A strategic focus for higher education has been to ensure further assurance and enhancement of the HE student experience, with a significant emphasis on students as partners in quality, and staff engagement in teaching and scholarship. This culture of continued improvement is underpinned by the HE Partnership Strategy. The strategy has been developed in consultation with students, including specifics in relation to the now well-understood 10-point plan, used by staff and students when reflecting on teaching practices through the likes of peer observations and student forums.

The previous Learning and Teaching strategy and the Student Engagement Strategy have been deliberately merged to create the Partnership strategy in order to reflect our belief that students have agency in the process of their own learning and make a significant contribution to the structure and methodology of teaching. TCG believes students are partners in the pedagogical process.

The 10 point plan for Student Engagement has been embedded into the staff and student culture, proving an effective vehicle to measure performance, identify pedagogic strengths and areas for development.

As a strategic plan that encourages and facilitates high levels of student engagement with teaching and learning and general studentship, it reinforces the University Centre partnership ethos.

TCG engaged effectively with the student body as part of the QAA activities in the summer term, with QAA concluding that "Students were satisfied with the range of teaching methods employed." The Student Written Submission, involving engagement and feedback from all student groups, made several thematical judgements as part of this process, recognising the strengths of their teaching and learning experience at TCG:

Student Written Submission (QAA, June 2018)

"students have a positive view of the teaching and learning at TCG and find it helpful that the staff are approachable, helpful and knowledgeable"

"They like how personal the small teaching groups are"

"Tutors use different methods of teaching including: group work, presentations, discussions and debates which many students find really diverse and helpful"

"students have been "challenged' in a positive manner"

"Overall, student's at all three centres believe that they are challenged in their sessions with tutors going above and beyond to support learning"

As concluded by QAA, ""The review team found that an effective peer observation process in place at Stockport College had been implemented at Trafford College". Peer observations are now embedded as part of the HE culture at TCG, to inform individual and group developments, with all tutors completing at least one per term within and across campuses. Over the last 6 months several emerging thematic strengths and developments have been identified, which will form the basis of the mid-year HE Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Conference in January 2019.

The College Self Evaluation Document (SED) is an annual report and strategic commentary on the performance and management of Higher Education provision delivered at TCG, organised around the student journey. The College SED focusses predominantly on quantitative data and key performance indicators, whilst recognising that our students' achievements are many and diverse.

Learning and Teaching: Key Strengths identified in SED 2017/18:

- Good levels of student satisfaction and very strong student achievement.
- Introduction of a very effective peer observation scheme at Stockport, strengthening staff collegiality and facilitating the sharing of practices across subjects.
- Good engagement as early adoptees of the AoC national Scholarship project, including the publication of the TCG's first Scholarly Activity Journal and annual TLA Conference.
- Staff are highly qualified and experienced within their specialist areas, with good engagement in industry and scholarly activity to inform practice.
- Very strong academic, personal and work experience tutor support.

Valuing Teaching (TQ2)

One of the 5 key strategic drivers for HE, identified within the SED, is the "strategic focus on the enhancement of Teaching, Learning and Scholarship", through the sharing of best practice and strategic developments. The introduction of a scholarship and student engagement lead ensures the coherence of our Partnership strategy and that the focus is always centered on the quality of the student experience.

Already this academic year, TCG reported to the December 2018 Board:

- Full engagement in peer observations, with all HE staff completing at least one to date, and attendance at HE-specific CPD.
- Implementation of TCG commissioning of scholarship projects using an action-research model to better understand and respond to areas of development, including student employability, engaging in Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), and developing a student community. All of which will support and future shape our approach to policy and practice.
- A minimum of 15 staff scholarship projects in progress, approved in October.
- Development of a HE Learning and Teaching staff portal as a vehicle to share best practice, and encourages peer engagement, complemented by a Scholarly activity blog.
- The introduction of a TCG HE monthly staff award system in recognition of innovation in delivery and assessment, as well as more formal awards for excellence in teaching and outstanding contribution to student learning, made at the annual teaching conference.

In addition, very good progress is being made against those activities targeted for completion by the end of the academic year, including:

- Publication of the 2nd annual scholarship journal and intention for delivery at the AoC national annual conference and internal HE Conference.
- Staff engagement in industry practice, with at least 25% of HE staff completing 5-day industry engagement. Industrial updating for staff is a strategic priority, identified by Stockport as a development need, embracing models of practice at Trafford.

Staff spend time in the workplace with industrial partners and undertake partner in-house training to ensure that their teaching provision maintains academic rigour but also ensures employability and additional benefit to employers and employees, whilst supporting curriculum currency.

Teaching staff continue to communicate enthusiasm, and draw on scholarship, research and professional activity to facilitate student learning. Staff are highly qualified and experienced within their specialist areas, support by engagement in industry activity, which is reflected in their learning and teaching and valued by students.

The summer term saw the publication of the TCG's first Scholarly Activity Journal presented within the HE summer conference, helping to make explicit in the nature of some of the research being undertaken our commitment to establishing our students as partners in learning to ensure we build their confidence, independence and resilience to achieve at the highest level.

The HE peer observation scheme strengthens staff collegiality and facilitates a staff community and the sharing of practices across subjects. The peer review system has confirmed a number of key strengths including the planning and structure, academic content and level, tutor knowledge and industry application, respect and rapport between staff and students, and good student engagement in learning.

The TCG are confirmed as early adoptees of the AoC national Scholarship project, providing a framework for our existing scholarly activity (e.g. pedagogy, industry engagement) to enhance the student experience and teaching practice.

"The review team found that an effective peer observation process in place at Stockport College had been implemented at Trafford College. Staff confirmed that the process was both supportive and developmental. Observations take place twice a year and more frequently for new teaching staff. The College attempts to pair staff with particular areas of strength with colleagues who have identified development needs in a similar area. Similarly, staff reported that appraisal was

developmental and several staff reported that they were supported to undertake higher level qualifications". QAA, June 2018

A number of staff are supported to achieve HEA Professional Standards, and is now a minimum expectation for all permanent staff and those with course lead roles. Currently, over 50% have HEA or are being supported towards this, and over 90% have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Over 50% have a relevant Masters and 10% a Doctorate.

Student Engagement (TQ1)

As reported by QAA (June 2018), "The College has worked to develop a new higher education (HE) quality cycle … underpinned by a range of student engagement mechanisms and supplemented by a series of audits". On-line student surveys have been developed since merger and are a central part of the HE Quality Calendar, with termly surveys to reflect similar questions to the NSS and adapted relevant to the point of year and reported through to the Full Board of Corporation. The Board noted the positive survey results in December 2018 (the first full term of a merger), with an overall satisfaction for teaching experience above 93%, with STEM at 89%, Arts at 95% and Care at 97%. Other key performance indicators were also extremely positive and improved on previous years, reflecting a strong student experience, including student retention of 99.8% (just 2 'early leavers') and average attendance rates for all 3 schools over 85%.

The Partnership Strategy deliberately connects Teaching and Learning with Student Engagement and specifically the 10-point plan for student engagement. This reflects a connected approach to teaching and learning in which students are partners in the process both qualitatively and strategically and pedagogically in the development and enhancement of knowledge.

All courses across all 3 campuses have a designated course representative. All 3 Stockport schools have a lead representative as does the Altrincham and Stretford campus. The Student Engagement component of the Partnership Strategy details the mechanisms by which the student voice is collected, processed and effective in enhancing and assuring quality. The process, by having a nominated Student Engagement lead, has made a significant difference in both the collation and responsiveness to issues as they arise and confirmation that the cultural identity of the University Centre and wider student engagement initiatives – such as the 10-point plan – are supported and visible to all students.

As part of the student engagement model professional discussions, previously piloted at Stockport in 2017, are now full implemented across TCG, engaging students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement. These are an opportunity for a professional discussion between small student groups and the relevant programme teaching team, guided by the Scholarly lead. This allows for an open and honest forum to discuss approaches to learning, teaching and assessment and ideas for further improvement.

Student voice termly cycle: Stage 1: Student Survey; Stage 2: Professional Discussion; Stage 3: Student Rep Forum; Stage 4: Senior Management Review and Action; Stage 5: Report to Executive and Governors, fed back to Stage 2.

The Student Written Submission reported on good practice in relation to student engagement, with students valuing how TCG engage and respond to student voice:

Student Written Submission (QAA, June 2018)
"students felt that any concerns or complaints were taken seriously and promptly rectified by staff and tutors"

"Students are given many opportunities to give their view, and are listened to"

"There is always a staff member to talk to about concerns and this means that they can be resolved quickly"

"Students feel as though their voice is getting heard around the college as the Dean runs and attends student rep meetings.

"The student voice is listened to and there are representatives in which to share your views and concerns"

"Good links with student governor keeps students well informed"

Following from this, the annual SED identified key strengths relating to student engagement:

Key Strengths identified in SED 2018:
- Very good and improving student satisfaction.
- Increased levels of student engagement to inform practice.
- Good examples of student engagement in live project and/or community briefs.

A strength of the SED was the open and honest reflection on practices as a springboard to support further strategic developments as a merged entity. The SED, reviewed by staff, students and externals, and approved by Board identified 5 key drivers in 2018-19 to further enhance academic standards and student experience, including "a strategic focus on the improvement of student engagement, embracing as partners in quality and student learning", with associated actions monitored by the Committee and Board. This academic year the following steps have already been achieved:

- Consulted with lead student reps on the annual self-evaluation an improvement plan before publicising to all students in Term 1.
- Consulted, approved and communicated HE Partnership Strategy to all our students in the first 6-weeks.
- Identified Student Reps for all HE programmes across TCG within the first 6-weeks, supported through Rep training, and Lead Reps per campus.
- Formalised student rep system and engagement in HE deliberative and executive committees.
- Ensured good student engagement with TEF.

In addition, the following were identified and approved as developments within the SED that are now making good progress:

- Support and publish a scholarship commissioned project "approaches to support improved engagement with the part time student".
- Explore opportunities of creating an increased student community, including termly social events.
- Introduce an alumni community, building on the good practice at Stockport (Arts).

There are good examples of responding effectively to student feedback to enhance their student experience to illustrate how the College works closely with student representatives to secure positive student-led change within the TCG Higher Education provision. For example, in the last 12 months the response to student voice included: improved access to academic support during student induction (student satisfaction for induction over 95%); further investment in IT Capital budget to support HE delivery; and dedicated HE Study Area's within the library. Student Engagement at Stockport was reviewed by the QAA team in April 2017, concluding that student voice is strong, with the College placing considerable importance on listening to and working in partnership with students. An immediate activity led by the Dean of HE in the Autumn term (2016-17) was to review the NSS performance and to ensure that performance levels improve for 2016-17. In most cases, the lower levels of satisfaction related to resource, course organisation and management. It can be concluded that NSS and student feedback was responded to effectively in 2016-17 at Stockport, with key interventions reported to the Board. A number of these responses were significant and strategic, including a formalised approach to scheduled tutorials and support programmes for students, the introduction of a new HE support post, a full review of assessment practices to inform future curriculum developments, and a significant resource allocation for Arts. Following intervention, overall student satisfaction (NSS) rose from 67% to 81%. This rose again to 84% in 2018 for Stockport when viewed in isolation. Such intervention highlights the strengths in engaging with student feedback and the effectiveness of using this a tool to support enhancement of learning opportunities.

Equally, our Partnership Strategy recognises the value of engaging with students in scholarly activity. Examples include undertaking scholarly research with students as partners and engaging in external projects that lead to positive and tangible outcomes.

For example, students and staff led on the publishing of a second book for a local charity supporting Uganda Schools, incorporating students from Early Years Practice, Graphic Design and Illustration. There are many more

examples, always with a strong social and charitable dimension that are chosen specifically because they decentre and engage the students in a very deliberate way, encouraging collaborative and collective learning and engagement with staff that engenders a genuine enthusiasm to help and think of others.

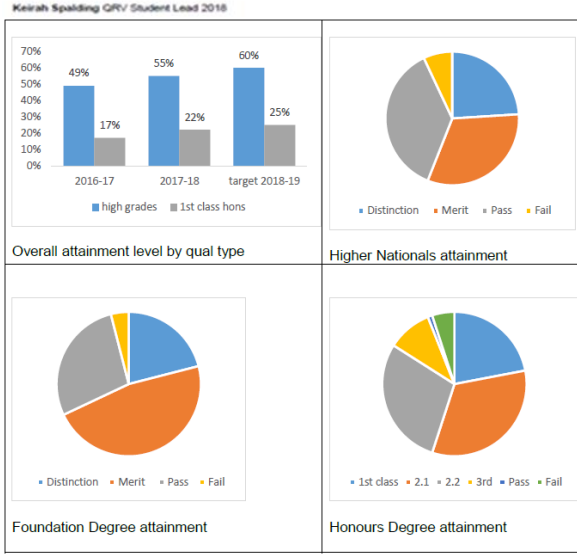
Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)

The approved annual Self Evaluation 2018 identified 'Good and improving levels of student attainment' as one of the key strengths of the merged College.

Student attainment improved for all qualification types. More than 1 in 2 students achieved a high grade, and 1 in 4 honours students achieved a first class. Almost 55% of Higher National students achieved high grades (merit or above), with a similar proportion achieving a 2.1 classification or above on Foundation Degree programmes. 55% of students on honours programmes achieved a classification of a 2.1 or above.

"On the whole students are very happy with the teaching standard and the curriculum being tailored to suit the level and needs of each course and individual student"

Keirah Spalding QRV Student Lead 2018



We value ourselves on providing strong levels of academic support. The development of academic skills is fundamental, and a strategic approach was taken to develop this specifically for HE at Stockport last academic year, with students supported through programmes and college wide activities. This includes taught input through academic tutorials and units, differentiated by the level of the student, academic skills resources available through Library+ sessions and programme area VLE, and assignment support sessions. Through the student feedback mechanisms, the College recognised the need to develop further support mechanisms and resources to support students' progress up between the levels. As an initial response, Stockport put in place a designated HE study room with drop-in support (i.e. HE Study+) and a revised academic support model from September 2017, valued by students and recognised through feedback. Impact measures include improvements in NSS and student achievement.

Tutor support at programme level is very strong, reflected in the previous Stockport QAA Student Written Submission across the whole Trafford College Group. Students value their tutor, their support, experience and expertise. Alongside this, we have a supportive and professional approach to work-based or placement learning, evidenced with our Health, Education and Care professions, which enhances the learning experience and employability.

Feedback (TQ4)

Student satisfaction for assessment and feedback has shown a 10% improvement from Year 2 to Year 3 splits, up to 85% (6% above bench) and above 11 (of 14) Colleges that received a Gold TEF in 2018. The Student Written Submission (QAA) identified strengths relating to assessment and feedback:

Student Written Submission (QAA, June 2018)
"Overall students tell us that they are satisfied with the level of feedback and how their work is assessed. They found their feedback helpful with the marked work returned in good time. The feedback was described as consistent, clear and constructive"

"Feedback is described by students as consistent and clear. Feedback gives clear insight into how to improve"

"Students across campuses comment that assessment encourage students to strive"

In addition, the Student Written Submission identified strengths relating more specifically to assessment and the External Examiner activity:

Student Written Submission (QAA, June 2018)
"The majority of students understand the role of external examiners and appear to be"

"Overall, there is a very clear understanding of the role of the external examiners across all the cohorts within the school. Their role in maintaining the quality and standards of the programmes has been explained well by the teaching staff"

QAA (June 2018) reported that "Feedback is provided in a timely fashion and indicators demonstrate student satisfaction with assessment and feedback. The review team also found examples of assessment being revised based on student feedback including the award of marks for group assessment".

Assessment and feedback was an area of focus within the annual SED, again identifying a number of strengths that were approved through the evaluation process:

Key Strengths identified in SED 2018:

- Consistency of assessment policies and student protection measures in readiness for merged entity.
- Good and improved oversight of assessment board practices across TCG
- Good examples of assessment practice in the majority of areas, responding well to External Examiner feedback.
- Good and innovative examples of assessment methods to support good practice activity.
- Some good examples of staff engagement in reflecting on assessment methods to enhance currency.

A "strategic focus on the standards, currency and vocational purpose of assessment" was identified as one of the 5 strategic enhancement drivers within the annual evaluation process. In supporting the achievement of this, a number of enhancement activities are now being led strategically including the sharing of best practice towards holistic assessment; termly 'assessment best practice' workshops; Thematic 'assessment' peer observations; Periodic review of all Higher Nationals, including engagement with employers and stakeholders to determine assessment design; and opportunities for higher grades (Higher Nationals); and focussed scholarship to inform employability strategy, with a particular focus on supporting higher level employment and the role of assessment design to enhance this.

A fundamental objective of the Transition Higher Education Plan, approved by the Transition Board and reported to Committees of the previous two Colleges, was to ensure a consistent approach to HE-specific assessment policies, procedures and practices across the two institutions which are understood by all stakeholders and meet regulatory expectations. The Dean of HE and Registrar led on a staff training and development programme, with the delivery of policy workshops and HE Teaching Conference between the two Colleges prior to merger, followed by briefings with all student groups with guidance materials.

Subsequently, QAA (June 2018) confirmed that "The College's assessment policy and procedures are well-defined and understood by students and staff".

The assessment of students in higher education at TCG is governed by the relevant partner HEI assessment regulations, with students enrolled on Higher National qualifications at the College being assessed in line with the TCG Higher National assessment regulation.

The college is represented at each partner university assessment board with assessment boards for higher national qualifications taking place at the college. Our partner HEI boards operate predominantly on a two stage process with a review of module and unit performance happening locally, within faculty or department, followed by a more expansive internal review and assessment board that is concerned with individual student performance, progression, confirming reassessment requirements and confirming awards. There is strong oversight of Higher National assessment board practices across TCG, managed by the HE Registrar, ensuring there is consistency across all higher education. Within this, all Boards are Chaired by the Dean of HE.

There are numerous examples of good assessment practice, responding well to External Examiner feedback. A review of External Examiner reports is completed by the Dean of HE and reported to HE Committee. Most recently, strengths included: the levelness of delivery and assessment; our innovative approach to assessment in Arts and the good use of live briefs; and assessment feed forward methods used in Childhood Studies to support readiness to the next academic levels.
QAA (2018) confirmed that "External examiners contribute fully at assessment boards and their annual reports are actively considered within the annual monitoring process and formal responses made".

Learning Environment (LE)

Since achieving Silver TEF last academic year, our student outcomes measures (e.g. achievement, attainment) have risen significantly, as well as confirmation of confidence by QAA, with no areas for improvement identified related to learning environment or student experience. Our student achievement is exceptional, (achievement being a measure of the proportion of students that started than final year of programme and achieved within that academic year). Overall, achievement for 2017/18 was 90%, representing a 10% points improvement compared to the previous year. Within this, achievement rates for Polar 1 and 2 students increased from 77% to 84%. A minimum target of 90% achievement has been set for this academic year, monitored by governors. To date, student retention is exceptional at 99% and therefore a good indicator that the achievement target will be achieved or exceeded, with pass rates (i.e. % of retained students that achieve qual) typically above 96%.

Student attainment is very good and improving, with over 55% of students achieving high grades, and over 90% of our Foundation Degree students' progress internally to the final year of honours programmes. TEF metrics report PT academic support as outstanding and in the top 10 percentile with a value of 87.6% against an 80% benchmark. There is a significant decline in Year 3 and male split metrics, associated with part time 'STEM' provision at Stretford (previously Trafford College). On the other hand, the PT education and early years programmes (majority female) are exceptionally strong. The latter were impacted positively by the Stockport inclusion of a structured tutorial and support programme which is now in place across the Group (i.e. Stockport and Trafford), with early indicators (i.e. internal survey) showing that this impact has been positive, with STEM student satisfaction for associated questions (e.g. resource and support) over 84%. In addition, we are completing focussed scholarship projects around engagement with the PT learner and reviewing our programme offer in engineering, where staffing has been a challenge.

The FT academic support has a negative flag of 76.8% against a bench of 81.6%, but risen sharply from 73.7 to 80.7% from Years 2 (2017) to 3 (2018) splits, illustrating the positive impact of recent strategic interventions and enhancement. The historic issue was with mature students (71% vs 85%), plus white female. This was predominantly associated with one course area (Health and Care) that has improved significantly following intervention, with the most recent internal survey (full HE student population, not just NSS) for this area reporting satisfaction rates for resources at 89% and organisation and management at 95%. Overall satisfaction rates for TCG were 89% and 93% respectively for these two questions, a significant improvement when compared to previous NSS responses.

PT continuation rate metrics are exceptional. However, these are excluded due to the nature of the offer within the current TEF rules (e.g. PT HNC). TEF3 reported PT continuation rates at 85.7% and with ++. Our own validated data sets show this has further improved to at 89% for 2016 entry against a 69% national bench, which would again expect to be a double positive flag.

Resources (LE1)
The Student Written Submission included 'resource' as a focused topic for student feedback within the publication, noting the following in June 2018:

"Students feel that resources in the libraries are good and include a good range of books, journals and online material. They also feel that the staff are very helpful and work hard to find relevant sources for individual students"

"There is good access to computers in and around the colleges as well as 3D, print, MAC suites and the photo studio. All technicians are also particularly helpful, and students are able to contact them out of their scheduled hours, which has proved helpful"

"Students believe that the learning resources are easy to access as are the tutors when they are needed outside of studio time"

"Students feel that Moodle … and believe that there are plenty of resources on the VLE"

Student and staff perception of resource continues to have focus with the recent student survey show good levels of student satisfaction. Where any concerns are raised through professional discussions, these are acted upon through the HE Committees with student representatives. Within the Programme Approvals Committee (PAC) and Periodic Review process, learning resource is integral to the approval, design and review of provision. Most recently, students are engaged in the development of the new University Centre building at Stockport currently under construction; and students at Altrincham and Stretford are engaged in discussion over future HE-specific identities at the two sites, including open learning and social spaces, as provision at the two sites strategically increases.

	Satisfaction Rates (Semester 1 2018-19)		
School:	STEM	Arts	Care
Overall, I am satisfied with the resources available to me to support my learning	84%	95%	89%

We are passionate about transforming lives for the better, with a dedicated and well experienced team of staff who support our students on their journey. Students benefit from a generous tutorial entitlement (QAA, 2017 and 2018), with students commenting favourably on the significant formal and informal support available to them (QAA, 2017 and 2018), ensuring that they reach their potential.

The approach adopted by the College is to provide students with a supportive vocational college HE experience. Typically, group sizes are smaller (average class sizes of 12), enabling tutors to build relationships with students and to offer targeted support or to direct students to the various support systems available in the College. Courses start earlier in the year than typical University programmes and students usually receive more hours teaching per week (average FT course has 450 annual contact hours).

Students benefit from well-resourced and highly valuable work experience placements and support within the Care school. Students within the areas of Health and Social Care, Early Years, Childhood Studies and Working with Children and Young People gain valuable and purposeful work placements, in most cases an enhancement to their study requirements. The designated HE work placement team work effectively with students to ensure that they attend a placement that meets their individual needs, in terms of specific areas of learning, appropriateness for purpose and accessibility, and communicate regularly to students.

The development of academic skills is fundamental, and a strategic approach was taken to develop this specifically for HE at Stockport last academic year, with students supported through programme and college wide activities. This includes taught input through academic tutorials and units, differentiated by the level of the student, academic skills resources available through Library+ sessions and programme area VLE, and assignment support sessions. Through the student feedback mechanisms, the College recognised the need to develop further support mechanisms and resources to support students' progress up between the levels. As an initial response, Stockport put in place a designated HE study room with drop-in support (i.e. HE Study+) and a revised academic support model from September 2017. The model is now being implemented across TCG.

The learning resource and support services in operation at the Colleges is considered a strength, with the opportunity of the merged entity through the HE Support Services Group to review and reflect on practices that exist, as well as potential opportunities for shared developments. The appointment of a HE Learning Resource and Enhancement Officer post supports assurance and enhancement of learning services and resources to enable and maximise student development and achievement.

Library+ provides extensive and responsive support for students' learning; supporting students in developing research techniques, using college systems and IT and related study skills to enable them to meet the intended learning outcomes of their programme.

Library and support staff are extremely well qualified and provide a valuable and effective service with HE students clearly valuing the support they receive from Library+, with 99% agreeing that 'Library+ helps them do well on my course' .

Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2)

Trafford College Group (TCG) was an early adoptee of the Association of Colleges (AoC) Scholarship Project, a national colleges project to support the development and embedding of a distinct college higher education scholarly ethos across the sector.

The College contributed to the development of the project, hosted events where the progress of the project was disseminated by the project leaders to college staff and discussion points and areas for improvement / consideration noted. All staff at the TCG as part of their scholarship and professional development are encouraged to utilise the online tools made available by the project to inform the thematic development of their own research, with over 15 staff (approx. 50%) engaged in action research currently, for publication ion the annual journal. In addition, staff have engaged collaboratively with our partner HEIU to share action research through joint presentations at the HEI scholarship conference.

The distinctive nature of College Based Higher Education (CBHE) in undertaking research that has at its core a desire to promote the integrity of teaching and learning and enhance the student experience. This provides the context by which the TCG has blended scholarship and student engagement within an overarching Partnership Strategy, embedded by the adoption of a 10-point plan which is aimed at students, tutors and college managers. The plan ensures that all stakeholders are working together with shared objectives, ensuring that the whole learning experience is enriched by student exposure to and involvement in an environment that places teaching, learning and scholarship at the forefront of its endeavors.

The 10-point plan for Student Engagement is based on the belief that teaching and teachers are central to student engagement and that pedagogy around emotional intelligence and values are central in maximising the potential of this partnership. This is all the more important when demographics of our students.

As a College with a strong community ethos, we look for innovative ways to engage and succeed with our students by having a 'wrap around' partnership approach. As a key part of our strategy we foster a learning environment that is enriched by student exposure to and involvement in learning that is self-sustaining, transferable and most importantly enables them to become active producers rather than passive consumers. (Point 9 the 10-point plan)

"The college provided a personal, individual learning experience where the tutors were interested and passionate about the subject. Not only was it focused on refining a practice, it was about recognising the importance of community"

Lucia Shaw Art School graduate

The students benefit and value the staff currency of knowledge and application to the workplace, with students commenting that that "they can see the link between staff research and the content of the course" and that they "like it when tutors share their own personal practice with students through lectures and workshops" (Student Written Submission, June 2018).

Relationships between the Colleges and employers such as Siemens form the bedrock of provision, providing high quality technical and professional training and also opportunities for teaching staff to gain wider experience and an understanding of employer needs through opportunities to spend time with employers and through accessing in-house training. Trafford's strengths in developing strong employer links to influence programme design, along with Stockport's formalised processes for programme approvals will now really enhance the curriculum of TCG.

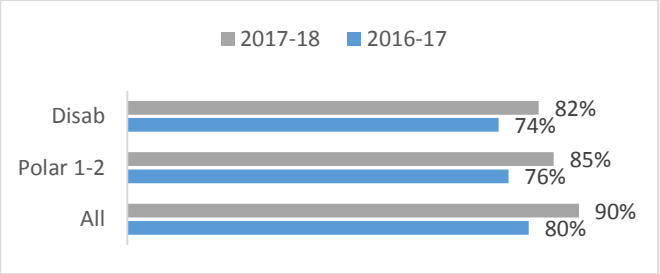
In 2018, TCG has commissioned and resourced 4 scholarship projects, including focussed scholarship to inform employability strategy, with a particular focus on supporting higher level employment.

A total of 10 action research projects, many of which co-led with students, were presented and published within the first TCG annual journal, with papers including 'Students as Partners', 'Self Evaluation Tool of Assessment', 'Student-Centred Practice' and 'Engaging students with charitable activity'. A further 15 projects, in addition to the 4 commissioned projects, have been approved and underway this academic year, for presentation at the June 2019 conference.

We aim to ensure that assessment remains vocationally relevant and students across all programmes work on industry relevant assessment activities and live project briefs, including our computing students who present their industry-led projects to employers through a showcase event. Likewise the areas of Construction and Engineering, where the majority are within the workplace, engage in peer group projects relevant to their industry – developing both subject knowledge and enhanced employability skills associated with project and groups work.

Personalised Learning (LE3)

Our student achievement is outstanding at 90%, 10% improvement from 2016-17 and a particular strength when considering local demographics and the student population. Whilst achievement rates has improved across all student groups, including from Polar 1 and 2 and disability. The gap still remains but is narrowing year on year and is a focus of our Access and Participation Plan.



Our overall retention is very strong and consistently achieving 93% and 85% in 2016-17 at Stockport and Trafford respectively, and 97% as TCG in 2017-18 (currently at 99% for Semester 1, 2018-19).

TEF data on widening provision shows that Trafford College positively encourages those that might not have access to higher level provision to participate and that outcomes for these students are good. This is fundamental to the College and its purpose. 95% of students are on undergraduate programmes other than a first degree, providing an accessible and industry relevant point of entry in to higher education. 70% of students are over 21 years of age, and 86% of students are local. 41% of students fall within the lower two quintiles of POLAR and 19% of students from the lowest quintile of Indices of Deprivation. 84% of students have medium, low or non-tariff qualifications on entry, with 34% of these having non-tariff qualifications.

The annual SED, published and approved by Board in December 2018, noted the following:

- Outstanding and much improved student achievement rates
- Strong levels of student retention maintained
- Highly accessible curriculum, raising engagement from WP groups
- Strong academic tutor support
- Highly valuable work experience placements and support within social sciences
- Good levels of library and study skills support
- Some good examples of engagement with industry

There are a range of methods in place to monitor and review student performance at programme level and module, including programme committees, mid-year reviews, student professional discussions, and assessment boards.

TCG provides an outstanding level of tutor support at programme level, recognised consistently through student feedback and supported though our achievement data, with staff going above and beyond to support our students and make a difference to lives.

"It is also appreciated that staff are supportive of students pastorally through the student learning journeys even when that journey becomes difficult" (Student Written Submission to QAA, June 2018)

Both Colleges previously recognised and celebrated student success stories. Specifically, within HE in the merged entity, we are building upon the outstanding practice recognised within HE Arts (Stockport) that celebrates success stories including student industry and competition awards, support for community projects and strong student destinations in to relevant employment through Alumni activity. This is a valuable exercise for many reasons, not least to raise student aspirations and provide positive role models for prospective and current students to support achievement.

Whilst there are most areas that capture module reviews, this practice was at a local level for most of the last academic year. A pilot module review for TCG was rolled out successfully in the summer term and is now implemented as standard practice at 3-points within the academic year, centrally managing module review reports to better monitor unit level feedback and attainment. In addition, further analysis of module-level performance is reviewed formally through the Assessment Boards, Chaired by the Dean for HE for all provision across TCG.

As an area for development, this academic year we are completing a scholarship project to inform the strategic implementation a more robust and consistent student peer support model which includes the establishment of a Peer Assisted Learning model, where students are trained to provide study support for other students and is designed to support participatory and collaborative working on a one-to-one basis or in small groups.

Student outcomes and learning (SO)

In June 2018, the College was awarded Silver in the TEF, noting that students from all backgrounds achieve excellent outcomes, demonstrating significantly learning gain and distance travelled. This is especially the case for those students drawn from underrepresented group (e.g. polar 1&2, mature, low tariff and may not have achieved well in compulsory education).

Since achieving TEF Silver, overall HE provision achievement rates have increased by 10% points from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (90%) and students from the areas of the least participation (Polar 1 and 2) have improved from 77% (2016/17) to 84% (2017/18).

Closing the gap for underrepresented groups in higher education is a key focus for the College and initiatives have been put in place to support this. The TEF metrics for the previous 3 years for "Teaching on my Course", "Assessment and Feedback" and "Academic Support" show no negative flags despite the aggregated metric showing a single negative flag for academic support, which is largely due to 2016/17. However this has improved significantly by 7 percentage points in 2017/18. The split metrics clearly show no negative impact for underrepresented groups. For example, polar 1&2, BME and disabled students are neutral for teaching on my course, assessment and feedback and academic support.

The contextual data from the TEF metrics shows that 70% of students enter higher education with low or non-tariff entry points. Our analysis shows that TCG achieve exceptionally well when considering their starting point. In 2016/17, 48% of TCG students achieved a first or upper second award; In 2017/18, 54% of TCG students achieved a first or upper second award.

Achievement and attainment for PT students is exceptional and shown improvements in the last academic year, since the TEF Silver. In 2016/17, 77% of our PT HNC students achieved their qualification. This rose to 95% achievement in 2017/18. Furthermore, 75% of

these achieved a high grade in 2016/17, increasing to 80% in 2017/18.

Around one-third of PT students' progress from the HNC to HND, with the decision often determined by the employer need (the vast majority are employer-funded). In both 2016/17 and 2017/18, 100% of those that progressed on to the HND completed and achieved that academic year.

Ensuring that TCG graduate progress into meaningful and sustainable employment is a strategic aim for the College and is part of the Higher Education Strategy. In the College's DLHE data (2017), the median TCG graduate salary is £24,000, which is higher than the national median of £22,000. The TEF metrics demonstrate that overall, students' progress well into employment or further study, 92.6% for full time and 97.7% for part time. However there is a double negative for highly skilled employment or further study for full time study and a single negative for part time.

According to DLHE, the definition of highly skilled employment is any occupation within the categories 1-3 of the Standard Occupational Classification (1. Managers, Directors and Senior Officials, 2. Professional Occupations and 3. Associate professional and technical occupations). This categorisation doesn't take the student preferred vocation and ambitions into consideration and evidently some providers may perform less well against this metric for reasons unrelated to teaching quality. TCG students know their career aspirations before they start their course; for example students who study a Foundation Degree In Early Years Practice or a Foundation Degree Professional Practice In Health And Social Care chose these courses to become Early year practitioners or Health Care Worker and our DLHE shows that 97% of these students enter employment or further study 6 months after graduating with the College. Our Art graduates often include self-employment, which takes much more time to establish.

Stockport College has a long history when It comes to Art and Design and over the years has produced outstanding graduates who have gone on to exceptional things, locally, nationally and internationally. Final year art students work is displayed and celebrated at the now prestigious Art Show in Manchester City Centre.

The contextual maps included within the TEF data set show that TCG students are local to the College prior to starting HE and remain local upon graduating. It should be acknowledged that regional economy impacts on providers employment and highly skilled outcomes. For example, 80% of students studying at Stockport have a Stockport postcode, and 91% are within Greater Manchester. This is a similar picture for Stretford and Altrincham. Less than 2% travel to learn in excess of 30-miles.

The proportion of residents employed in highly skilled occupations is currently 42% in Greater Manchester, versus 45% nationally. However through regeneration and investment in skills particularly through the Northern Powerhouse is perhaps a once in a generation opportunity for Greater Manchester to realise its economic potential. The three largest higher education institutions in the area all face similar issues progression students into highly skilled employment, showing below benchmark for highly skilled employment or further study metric in their recent TEF data.

The Greater Manchester Work and Skills Strategy 2016/19 suggest that there are more graduates in the region than graduate opportunities, Taking the developing local economy into consideration, there may be fewer opportunities for students to enter occupations defined as highly skilled, particularly 6 months after graduating. TCG is working with employers, local authorises and the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership (GMLEP) to increase economic growth, prosperity and career opportunities of students and their communities.