



# **Higher Education Strategy**

## **2013-14 to 2016-17**

## 1.0 Introduction

This document outlines Tameside College's strategic plan for higher education from 2013-14 to 2016-17 and provides a rationale for delivery (and the type offered) of higher education within the local community it serves. It has been produced in response to the continually changing landscape of higher education within further education, but also in relation to the college's overarching strategic aims. It serves to reinforce the college's priority of designing and delivering a tailored and high quality higher education offer within the Tameside region whilst simultaneously stimulating further demand for higher-level qualifications within the local area. The college is committed to meeting the needs of learners through the alignment of higher education provision to local and national priorities. The college also recognises the need to reposition itself within a student-led market.

Alongside outlining recent changes in the development and management of higher education, the strategy presents clear strategic aims and objectives for higher education at the college. It has been developed in conjunction with the college's stakeholders and is intended for use as a working document.

Higher Education provision is central to the college's mission and strategic plan. In partnership with a number of higher education institutions, the college's aim continues to be on enabling local people to overcome barriers and access vocationally relevant higher-level qualifications.

### 1.1 Tameside College Mission

*'Tameside College will transform lives by offering first class education and training in order to improve employability and generate economic prosperity.'*

### 1.2 Institutional Core Values

- Respect for learners and staff
- Equality and diversity
- Success for all
- Professionalism
- Excellence in service delivery
- Commitment
- Transparency

### 1.3 Background to Tameside College

Tameside College is a medium-sized, general further education college located eight miles east of Manchester city centre. The College was formed in February 1998 from the merger of Tameside College of Technology and Hyde Clarendon College. It operates on two main sites in Ashton-under-Lyne and Hyde in the borough of Tameside. It is a successful college with a comprehensive portfolio of provision to meet the needs of local people from pre-entry through to level 7. The College was inspected by Ofsted in June 2009. Inspectors judged overall the College to be a good and improving college with outstanding features. Inspectors judged the quality of provision, leadership and management, the college's capacity to improve and rated its overall effectiveness as good. In 2010, the IQER process identified confidence in standards and quality of learning opportunities and placed

reliance on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the college is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Tameside is situated within Greater Manchester in the North West of England and covers an area of 40 square miles. Tameside is the 42nd most deprived borough nationally (out of 326); almost 20% of LSOAs in the borough are in the 10% most deprived nationally (IMD 2010). Tameside Metropolitan Borough has a population of 219,700 (ONS Mid-year Estimates, 2011). Although Tameside has a lower than average unemployment rate, there is a considerable issue with economic inactivity. The recent economic downturn has had a disproportionate effect on the local economy which has an over reliance on the manufacturing sector.

In 2008, employment in Tameside was concentrated in Public Admin, Education and Health (27.6%), Distribution, Hotels and Restaurants (26.1%), and Manufacturing (19.3%). Employment in Manufacturing is almost double the rate found nationally and wages are relatively low at 15% below the national average and 7.5% below the North-West average. Within Greater Manchester over the period 2004 to 2014 there is projected movement of employment towards knowledge-based industries and the continued decline in traditional forms of employment including engineering and manufacturing. Tameside is expected to have a slower return to pre-recession

Tameside is not as diverse as England and Wales as a whole, but there are significant localised populations of people with Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage. There has also been significant growth in residents from Eastern Europe. Overall, the percentage of residents of BME origin stands at 9% compared with an England and Wales average of 16.4% (Census, 2011).

In 2012/13, 2,648 full-time learners and 5,891 part-time learners enrolled at the college. 568 learners enrolled on apprenticeship programmes and 722 on Work Related Learning programmes. Of these, 2,895 learners were aged 16 to 18 and learners 5,358 were aged 19 and over. Of the 16-18 year olds, 47% were at level 3. For learners aged 19 and over, 31% were at level 3 and 5% were at level 4 or higher. Overall, some 18% of students were of minority ethnic heritage (compared to 9% in Tameside) and 57% of learners were from a postcode classified as disadvantaged.

The prescribed higher education offer is narrow and runs across the programme areas of Teacher Education, Sport, Engineering and Construction. In 2012/13 the college introduced new education pathways through the University of Chester and in 2013/14 introduced a range of WBIS pathways. For prescribed HE the college currently works with: the University of Chester, University of Huddersfield, Manchester Metropolitan and Edexcel with University of Chester being the most significant partner in terms of HE student numbers (53% of our provision). Edexcel remains a vital part of the HE portfolio with 40%.

Numbers studying on higher education programmes are low and have been declining for the past few years. In November 2013 223 students were studying on prescribed higher-level programmes. The college is accredited to deliver a range of Level 4 awards for non-prescribed HE through a variety of awarding bodies including ILM, C&G and AAT awards. In 2012-13 there were 232 students at the college studying non-prescribed higher-level programmes. Much of the provision studies included work-based qualifications that included professional qualifications at Level 4 in Care, Business

Administration, Management, Counselling and Teacher Education. This provision is not the subject of this strategy.

There are a number of HEIs within a short distance of the college: Manchester University, Manchester Metropolitan University and Salford University are close by, as are Bolton and Huddersfield Universities and Oldham University Centre. Ashton Sixth Form has an HE offer, as does Stockport University Centre and The Manchester College is one of the largest providers of HE within FE in the country who are currently preparing to apply for awarding powers.

HE income amounts to approximately 3% of the College's income.

#### **1.4 Institutional Strategic Plan and Objectives**

Strategic objectives for the whole institution are stated within the College's Strategic Development Plan for 2013-14 as:

Strategic Objective 1 – Improve Quality

Strategic Objective 2 – Maintain Financial Strength and Improve Ability to Compete

Strategic Objective 3 – Develop the college

#### **1.5 Review of the Higher Education Strategy**

A rationale for higher education was written in the initial HE Strategy, developed as a result of HEFCE's request for Further Education Colleges to adopt a more strategic approach to planning their HE provision. In light of significant changes in the funding of HE courses and various changes in the structure and management of the college, it was deemed necessary to revisit the strategy to ensure that the HE Strategic Aim and Objectives remain current and in line with the college's institutional strategic plan.

The college mission necessitates a full portfolio of qualifications which includes higher education programmes. However, the college has recognised the need to take a more strategic approach to HE and this has led to a review of the college's position in the market and a refocusing of priorities around HE development. The curriculum offer is currently designed to provide local opportunities for study to a community with low levels of educational attainment and traditionally, high levels of deprivation. Amongst Tameside residents, current participation rates in higher education are low, despite the breadth of higher education provision across the Greater Manchester region. Consequently, the borough-wide attainment of qualifications at level 4 is beneath national rates. However, the college also recognises the need to improve the communication and information links to promote internal progression from a wide number of learner currently enrolled on Level 3 programmes.

Against this context, this strategy views higher education as a fundamental driver of economic and social change within the borough. The rationale for the provision of higher education programmes within the college is therefore linked to the vision to develop and provide a high quality, responsive programmes embedded in employability and widening participation. Our key focus is to:

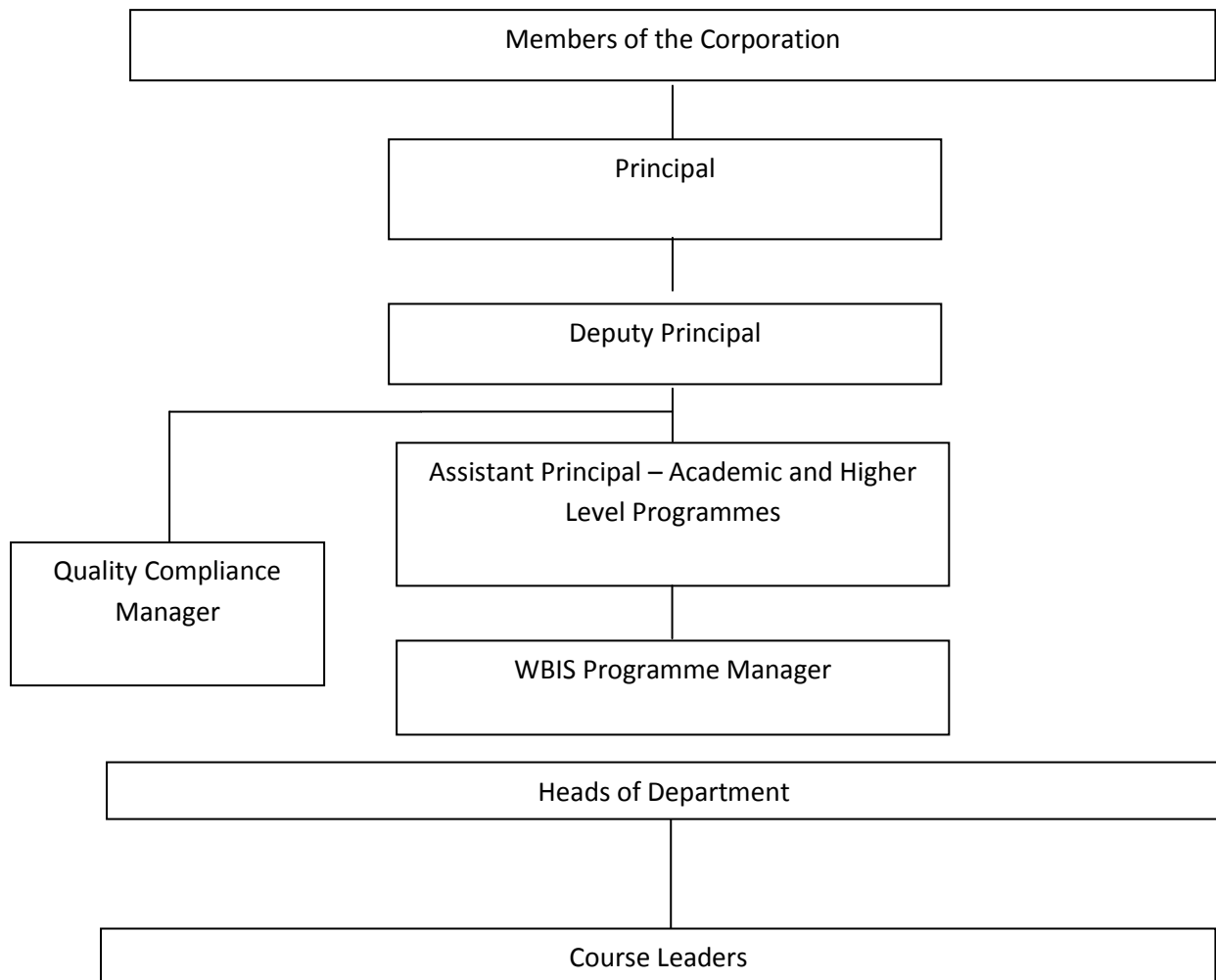
1. Respond to the training needs of local people and businesses

2. Improve learner choice for progression for level 3 learners
3. Equip local people with the skills to become lifelong learners
4. Generate income stream

HE is explicitly identified at a strategic level through College Strategic Objective 2 – Maintain Financial Strength and Improve Ability to Compete.

In 2012-13 the college underwent a restructure of its curriculum which included a new structure for managing the HE provision. The college consists of 9 curriculum departments all managed through the Deputy and two Assistant Principals (curriculum). Higher Education programmes are offered the majority of the 9 curriculum areas. All Higher Education is delivered on the colleges’ main site although some units/ modules are delivered at Tameside Centre for Enterprise. The responsibility for the quality of programme delivery sits within the curriculum areas but the Deputy and Assistant Principals have oversight of the HE curriculum. The HE Quality Managers Group meets once a month to review the performance of all HE programmes.

**Table 1: Current management structure of HE provision**



## 2.0 Higher Education Context

### 2.1 Educational Attainment

Key stage 4 performance in Tameside is lower than the national average on every key measure. Fewer school leavers achieve 5 or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A\*-C including Maths and English GCSE – 56.8% locally compared to 59.4% nationally. Fewer pupils achieve grades A\*-C in Maths and English GCSE – 57.9% locally compared to 60.0% nationally, and just 12.3% of pupils achieve the English Baccalaureate, compared with 18.4% nationally. A report recently published by OFSTED showing the percentage of pupils attending good or outstanding schools by local authority area ranked Tameside as the worst in Greater Manchester and 5<sup>th</sup> worst nationally.

The proportion of working age residents qualified to NVQ Level 4 or above is just 21.0% compared to 32.9% in Great Britain, and 14.1% of residents have no qualifications at all compared to a GB average of 10.6% (Source: ONS Annual Population Survey, 2011).

Post-16 participation in Tameside is currently lower than the national average. In 2012 The proportion of school leavers choosing to study A levels or Level 3 vocational qualifications – the prerequisite for entry into higher education – was 47% at 16-18, and 31% at Level 3 and 5% at level 4. The raising of the participation age from September 2013 may impact positively upon this.

Compared with both the North West and with Great Britain as a whole, the Tameside region has a less qualified workforce with only 17.5% of the people in the workforce qualified to Level 4 and above which is 6.9% beneath the North West and 9.6% behind Great Britain. The percentage of the workforce with no qualifications is 3.3% higher than the North West and 5.1% higher than Great Britain at 28.1%. (Source: Annual Population Survey: Office for National Statistics, 2011 data).

**Table 2. Working age qualifications**

|                              | <b>Tameside</b>  | <b>Tameside</b> | <b>North West</b> | <b>Great Britain</b> |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Highest level of qual</b> | <b>(numbers)</b> | <b>(%)</b>      | <b>(%)</b>        | <b>(%)</b>           |
| Level 4 and above            | 30,994           | 17.5%           | 24.4%             | 27.1%                |
| Level 3                      | 21,371           | 12.1%           | 12.9%             | 12.1%                |
| Level 2                      | 30,600           | 17.3%           | 15.8%             | 15.2%                |
| Level 1                      | 28,347           | 16.1%           | 13.6%             | 14.2%                |
| Other qualifications         | 7,871            | 4.5%            | 5.1%              | 5.2%                 |
| No qualifications            | 49,547           | 28.1%           | 24.8%             | 23%                  |

Source: ONS annual population survey

While the low levels of educational attainment are a significant factor in the limited participation of Tameside residents in higher education, it conversely provides the college with the opportunity to design and delivery bespoke courses to increase higher education participation rates.

## **2.2 The Higher Education Market in the Greater Manchester Region**

Greater Manchester has a wide broad range of higher education provision primarily from four universities. This is complemented with programmes offered in a large number of further education colleges, sixth form colleges and private training providers. There is a university presence in all boroughs in the Manchester City region except for Tameside and Trafford. As a consequence, the range of provision available to local residents is that offered at Tameside College and a limited portfolio at a local sixth form.

Internal progression from Level 3 programmes to HE is limited with most students preferring to study at local universities for HE. The vast majority of students on HE programmes are 21 years and over with almost all learners studying part-time. The college attracts many students with modest academic qualifications, but supports students extensively in order to achieve their highest success possible.

The new HE funding regime from 2012 did not drive an increased recruitment at Tameside, despite the setting of a competitive tuition fee. It has been recognised that a significant investment in the marketing of our HE offer needs to be made and more work needs to be done to engage local employers with the HE offer.

## **3.0 Strategic Aims and Objectives**

### **3.1 HE Strategic Aims**

Tameside College's higher education strategy has five key themes:

1. Developing higher-level programmes that employers demand and value
2. Maximising internal progression opportunities and providing access routes for new entrants to higher education
3. Developing an accessible higher education curriculum with a range of study options
4. Delivering an outstanding learner experience as a result of outstanding teaching and learning
5. Developing a viable HE curriculum to all learners that offers value for money

### **3.2 HE Strategic Objectives**

1. Engage local people on accessible higher education programmes which address local and regional skills gaps
2. Increase range of higher-level programmes in college portfolio
3. Increase annual income from higher education by 20%
4. Increase number of internally progressing students by 10% each year of the strategy
5. Improve the HE environment for students and staff

6. Feedback from students on HE programmes to show at least national average rates through the NSS

This strategy will strengthen the existing HE offer at Tameside College. It will provide both a high quality teaching and learning experience, and a range of learning opportunities to local learners as a result of improving access to higher education study. Through collaboration with partner awarding bodies, the HE offer will meet student and employer needs and deliver programmes in an efficient, flexible and sustainable way. It will be driven by working with employers in the development of work-related higher education to meet the skills requirements of their workforce. By increasing the number of people in the workforce qualified to level 4 or above, employers will benefit from a more responsive and innovative workforce. A more able workforce with greater technical capability will deliver higher value added products and services. Changing the economic base of Tameside will attract new employers to the borough and create a virtuous circle for economic regeneration. By involving employers in curriculum design, it will ensure that programmes deliver the skills that employers' value.

## **4.0 Proposed Changes and Contribution to Objectives**

### **4.1 Management and governance of higher education**

- 4.1.1 Table 1 shows the reporting structures for HE.
- 4.1.2 Structured quality systems will continue to differentiate themselves from those in place for FE.
- 4.1.3 Separate operational planning to define HE as distinct from core college
- 4.1.4 Course Reviews are completed annually to assess the strengths and areas for development of all courses within the HE portfolio. The documentation for these reviews are separate from those used in the evaluation of FE courses and are mapped to the UK Quality Code. The course reviews culminate in a separate self-assessment document written for HE provision as distinct from that written for FE provision. Performance Reviews of courses take place three times a year to assess progress from Self Assessment. HE programmes are subject to calendared Wider Reviews – an internal quality mechanism used to investigate aspects of provision both within curriculum areas and across college. Lesson observations are input into a Lesson observation database so that themes emerging from HE provision can be analysed separately. Students' views are gathered in a variety of ways including questionnaires, student forums, end of module evaluations, and representation on Boards of Studies and this feedback is integrated into the course review process. External examiner report findings are both included in course reviews and reviewed in Boards of Studies. Examiner reports are monitored centrally to ensure that any actions are completed. Sharing of good practice is highlighted at HE Forums, using the College VLE and through partnerships with other colleges.

### **4.2 Curriculum Development**

- 4.2.1 The college has reviewed progression routes open to current level three learners. The college is planning to provide a responsive curriculum and appropriate progression programmes. Internal progression is key in the success of the college's growth of HE and clearly recognises the local market for the colleges HE study.



- 4.2.2 Building on the success of current Higher National Certificate/ Diploma programmes, the college will broaden this offer across a range of curriculum areas. These programmes will provide progression opportunities to current level 3 learners.
- 4.2.3 The college will further develop the range of WBIS courses available in response to local business needs. This will provide a range of entrepreneurial/ management/ leadership pathways and also provide a range of programmes that could also be offered on a full cost basis. It will develop student enterprise and entrepreneurship that enhances employability. These courses will also provide more flexible patterns of study on a work-based model.
- 4.2.4 Curriculum offer will be audited to ensure that it meets the expectations of the QAA Code for Higher Education.
- 4.2.5 Robust, calendared, internal course validation will ensure that course teams can justify how the proposed provision meets the objectives of the college HE strategy, the requirements of the local market, sustainability, quality and cost. Current programmes will be re-validated every three years.
- 4.2.6 Curriculum departments will integrate different patterns of delivery into their offer including an increase in blended learning approaches. They will develop an HE offer that will include flexible modes of delivery as well as different points of entry/ exit.
- 4.2.7 Curriculum development will provide a tailored, local offer in areas of Health, HBT, Computing, Engineering and Teacher Education as well as WBIS pathways.

### **4.3 Resourcing the Higher Education Offer**

- 4.3.1 Sustaining and growing higher education will require the recruitment, retention and development of appropriate staff. The recruitment of staff at the college will be managed in line with current recruitment policies and practices through the Human Resources Department.
- 4.3.2 To continue to maintain excellence in teaching and learning across HE programmes, staff will be supported in professional updating and scholarly activity.
- 4.3.3 As part of the college's ongoing Accommodation Strategy, HE provision will be housed in a number of new builds/ refurbished accommodation during the life of this strategy. A key focus will be on the 'HE-ness' of the estate.
- 4.3.4 To further develop a flexible blended learner delivery model in HE programmes, the college will continue to expand the delivery of on-line higher education through the use of the VLE and ensure that study resources are available to all learners through programme-specific Learning Box sites.

### **4.4 Professional Development**

- 4.4.1 It is the College's policy that teaching staff are required to commit to studying a PGCE/Certificate in Education if they do not already hold a professional teaching qualification.
- 4.4.2 Teaching staff within the college are expected to record their continuous professional development and undertake a stipulated amount of CPD within each academic year. The college will support all teaching staff to deliver outstanding teaching and learning through internal CPD, membership of professional bodies, industrial placements, or externally-delivered long courses.

- 4.4.3 Teaching staff are expected to engage with the CPD programme on offer through collaborative partners.
- 4.4.4 A review will be conducted into the contracted hours of contact time for lecturers with a view to increasing opportunities for scholarly activity. The review will include, but not be limited to, the financial case for contract variance, teaching and assessment workloads and requirements for quality assurance.
- 4.4.5 The College will seek to establish a research strategy to enhance the quality of learning opportunities for students and foster an academic culture.

#### **4.5 Recruitment, Retention and Progression**

- 4.5.1 Recruitment will focus on the communities of Tameside and the surrounding boroughs. The college has already reviewed curriculum offer at other HEIs within the Manchester City region. Duplication of provision will be avoided.
- 4.5.2 Recruitment will concentrate on progression opportunities for level 3 students already studying at the College, both on 16-18 course and Access to Higher Education pathways. HE events will take place in order to raise aspirations and promote internal links. Some HE units/ modules will be delivered as part of targeted Level 3 programmes.
- 4.5.3 The college will seek to develop a short transition programme to provide entrants with appropriate academic skills, particularly important for those who have been out of education for some time.
- 4.5.4 Higher Education programmes will be monitored closely and retention rates discussed during the college's performance review cycle (part of the quality monitoring schedule). Recruitment, retention and progression will also be monitored through HE Quality Managers Meetings and departmental Boards of Studies.
- 4.5.5 To develop progression routes for students who have traditionally not progressed to higher education including Apprentices, and to provide an access point for new entrants, the College will either develop bridging programmes that provide a foundation of academic skills.
- 4.5.6 To work with employers, schools and local sixth form colleges to maximise outreach. Develop projects to raise the aspirations of young people to progress into locally based higher education and training.

#### **4.6 Employer Engagement and Work-based learning**

- 4.6.1 Growth in the range of higher-level provision is inextricably linked to the maintenance of existing and the development of new relationships with local employers and their representative bodies.
- 4.6.2 The College will develop opportunities for employers to contribute to curriculum development and delivery design. Employers will take a formative role in the development of programme content and the modes of study available.

#### **4.7 Collaboration with University Partners**

- 4.7.1 The College remains fully committed to the quality assurance arrangements of each partner institution and will continue to adhere to the systems in place to ensure academic standards are met and that students are provided with equitable learning opportunities.
- 4.7.2 As an Associate College of Manchester Metropolitan University, the College will collaborate primarily with the university on matters of Higher Education development. However, in circumstances where MMU does not have the desire to expand provision or students would

significantly benefit from arrangements with other institutions, the College may develop provision with other HEIs.

- 4.7.3 College staff will continue to be encouraged to foster links at the curriculum level with partner institutions and participate in collaborative arrangements for CPD.

#### **4.8 Student Satisfaction**

- 4.8.1 Over the period of the strategy, the college will aim to score higher than FE average across all key sections of the NSS.
- 4.8.2 The college will deliver a student charter that puts the student experience first.
- 4.8.3 The college will develop programmes that provide outstanding learning opportunities whilst simultaneously delivering value for money.

#### **Summary:**

Tameside College is currently known as a provider of niche higher education provision particularly within the areas of Teacher Education and Engineering. By 2016-17 the college will expand its provision and offer a more coherent range of vocational and professional education and training opportunities that is of the same high quality. By enhancing its range of curriculum at Level 4 and beyond, the college aims to remain the primary provider of higher education programmes in Tameside