TEF Year Three provider submission

Provider Context

Holy Cross Catholic Sixth Form College and University Centre was founded in 1878 by a Catholic religious order, the Daughters of the Cross of Liege, who came to Bury with the purpose of providing education, serving the needy and widening participation. It is on a compact site near the town centre of Bury, located within the heart of the community, with good transport links, recruiting students from local high schools and the Greater Manchester and South Lancashire area. What was originally a small private school grew into a larger grammar school for girls, and in 1979 became a mixed Catholic sixth form college serving the whole community.

As noted above, Holy Cross has been a champion of Widening Participation since its establishment. The theme of opportunity for all has remained a key component of the institution's vision and is embedded throughout its activities. Following incorporation in 1991 the college expressly partnered with all the schools of Bury regardless of denominational character, and in 1999 we initiated our University Centre.

When Holy Cross expanded into higher education, its vision was to become a centre of excellence providing locally based education for undergraduates. From the outset, widening access and improving participation in higher education has been a crucial part of our mission. Our aim is to promote and provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it. This is vital for social mobility and economic competitiveness and it is also integral to our ethos inherited from the Daughters of the Cross, to have a particular commitment to those who "find education difficult". Liverpool Hope University was the first partner for providing degree programmes and making a major contribution to widening participation and sharing the College's mission and ethos.

Holy Cross has an outstanding track record in Widening Participation being a provider of higher education for a diverse student body including: Mature students, First generation students, Students from low income families and Students from low participation neighbourhoods. We aim to make a significant and distinctive contribution through a coordinated strategy of advice and guidance, targeted support and provision of entry routes.

We seek to encourage all students with potential to study at Holy Cross, without bias about their educational, cultural, religious or financial background – and we have a range of support and advice to help all to engage with our courses. This includes considerable provision in pastoral care, study skills, advice and guidance, to help those returning to education or coming from non-conventional routes into higher education. All students have a personal Support Tutor and a range of focus groups and fora exist to ensure extensive student feedback and support opportunities, formal and informal.

All taught sessions take place at Holy Cross in the evenings, during the week, allowing students to fit studying around other work and home commitments. All our courses follow a 'blended learning' model that includes face-to-face taught sessions and completing work

online from home. Many students find that this model of study fits well around their existing commitments.

Holy Cross is committed to providing a distinctive learning environment in which excellent teaching is at the forefront of the student experience.

Teaching Quality

All Holy Cross students (on our own HEFCE numbers) are undertaking courses of study that result in an award from Liverpool Hope University (LHU). In fact, all of the teaching is provided by experienced LHU teaching staff who are subject to rigorous quality assurance processes for teaching and learning. The TEF year 2 statement of findings commended LHU for "…all aspects of satisfaction with teaching quality are outstanding" as part of LHUs recent TEF Gold Award in June 2017. Liverpool Hope University underwent a full QAA Higher Education Review in December 2015: As an outcome of this full QAA Institutional audit, the University was commended for 'The enhancement of student learning opportunities'. The following five points of good practice were identified in the Review Report (all relate directly to what the TEF seeks to use to form a judgement):

- 'The early and considered engagement with internal and external stakeholders during the design and approval of programmes'.
- 'The University's strategic, comprehensive and coordinated approach to supporting staff development to enhance learning and teaching practices'.
- 'The effective integration of student support services with the academic provision to enhance students' engagement with their studies'.
- 'The Communities of Practice, which provide an effective platform for identifying, developing and sharing good practice to enhance learning and teaching'.
- 'The significant emphasis on development and improvement within the annual monitoring process, which informs the University's strategy and priorities for enhancement'.

Despite our confidence in the quality of teaching provided by LHU staff, we take full responsibility for these students as appropriate under the legal agreement and in ways that are consistent with the Quality Code.

The long standing relationship between Liverpool Hope and Holy Cross has existed for over eighteen years; this collaboration is referred to as the 'Network of Hope' (NoH). Fundamental to the success of this Network, Holy Cross staff and students are instrumental in helping to assure the quality of teaching and learning. Our students provide insightful feedback through student representatives, surveys, focus groups and directly to staff on their educational experience. Student views, both individually and collectively help to inform improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

Holy Cross staff contribute to NoH monthly meetings which are an important part of quality assurance. These meetings often include the discussion of a wide range of teaching related issues and developments, such as curriculum/course delivery and design, student assessments and feedback. Holy Cross students and staff contribute to LHU relevant departmental reviews. Holy Cross staff also attend relevant University Programme and Assessment boards, providing and obtaining information regarding assessments and achievements. At the most senior level, Holy Cross is represented on the strategic Vice Chancellor/Vice Principals meeting, and the Principal serves on LHU Senate where overall quality mechanisms and programme specifications are decided and reviewed.

All students are allocated a Holy Cross Higher Education support tutor to provide pastoral care and support. The support tutor role includes liaising with academic tutors for assigned courses and university staff on student related matters, act as University co-ordinators and work in collaboration with course co-ordinators and University administrators to ensure smooth operations of the university programmes. Support tutors meet individually with all tutees as part of our quality assurance; teaching and learning are an important part of these meetings. Support tutors also provide a comprehensive general study skills programme throughout the academic year.

All face to face taught sessions take place in groups of no more than 25 students, which we believe helps to achieve our aim of building positive relationships between staff and students. This approach helps to promote debate and discussion and facilitates the quality of the student teaching and learning experience.

Learning Environment

As noted above, Holy Cross is on a compact site near the town centre, a Sixth Form College during the day and a University Centre in the evening, both able to utilise all the resources. Holy Cross is a modern well-equipped college providing students and staff with a positive learning and teaching environment. All teaching takes place in well-resourced rooms, including a computer, projector, video playing facilities and many rooms have interactive whiteboards. We have a well-resourced library and excellent IT facilities. Library and IT facilities are available from 9:00am to 8:30 pm Tuesday to Thursday and 9:00am to 4:00 pm Monday and Friday. In addition, all our students have access to Liverpool Hope campus including their Library and IT facilities.

All taught sessions take place in small class sizes (again - as noted above - maximum 25 students), making the learning process a more individualised student experience than is typical for many courses in more conventional universities.

Holy Cross higher education support tutors provide students with a high standard of individualised pastoral support and expert advice on a wide range of issues, including pre-course advice, study skills, DSA applications, student finance and careers advice. Holy Cross students also have access to student support and well-being services at Liverpool Hope.

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Holy Cross are very proud of student achievement with 62% of students achieving a first class or upper second class degree classification and 100% pass rate in 2017. A number of our students have won the accolade of highest achieving student in their department at LHU, despite their often unconventional educational background and practical challenges. This very high level of exceptional outcomes fully supports our mission and values to provide quality higher education to all who can benefit in the local community. The blended learning model including evening taught sessions provides a unique higher education provision in the local area. This enables many students to be highly successful both academically and socially, demonstrating a significant learning gain which would not be available on mainstream university campuses.

Holy Cross student outcomes/achievement supports the quality of teaching, particularly when taking into consideration student demographics including entry requirements, with many of our students having no formal level three qualifications, demonstrating excellent learning gain. The core metrics show that 56% of students were non-tariff under the criteria “entry qualifications”. The core metrics also show that continuation was 88.4%, achieving a neutral flag which we consider excellent, with many of our students coming from what was traditionally regarded as Widening Participation backgrounds.

Holy Cross has an alternative entrance assessment for students who after initial advice we believe have the potential to be successful in higher education, but have little or no formal qualifications. 54 graduates in 2017 gained admission to degree level courses by taking the alternative entrance assessment, 52% of these students achieved a first class or upper second class degree classification. This finding further supports excellent outcomes and learning gain for students who might find it difficult to gain access to HE, suggesting a rigorous high quality teaching and learning environment at Holy Cross.

The College Higher Education Local Impact Survey (2015/16) reveals that 72% of our students are mature (age 25+) “second chance learners” and 47% of students were in deprivation bands 1 to 5, demonstrating that Holy Cross makes a significant contribution to widening participation in the local area. 11% of graduates in 2017 interrupted their studies during their educational journey, but with the high level of support and advice provided by Holy Cross HE support tutors, they were able to make significant learning gains. Our graduates, many from unconventional backgrounds have a positive impact on their families and the local community.

Special Note on the Metrics criterion - Highly skilled employment and further study.

At first sight, the lower percentage score relative to core metrics benchmarks on highly skilled employment can be largely explained by student demographics and the type of courses offered at Holy Cross (over 90% of students are studying education courses). A significant proportion of our students are in employment prior to starting their course at Holy Cross and aim initially to continue in the same employment throughout their course and after graduation. A large proportion of our students work in the education sector (for example as teaching assistants or nursery staff) and have decided to enrol on a degree course to further their knowledge and career within the same sector. Immediately on leaving they do not “gain” employment but remain in existing employment, which they have had throughout their degree, but then begin to progress within their organisations over subsequent years. Many

of our students have chosen to study at Holy Cross because of the distinctive blended learning model of delivery, including evening taught sessions and close distance to home, precisely so they can remain in their jobs, supporting their families. The Higher Education Local Impact Survey shows that the student average travel distance is 5 miles with the metrics showing that 89% of students fall into the category “local” under the criteria “local students”. The core metrics reveal that 93.4% of our students are in employment or further study six months after graduation. However their real progress comes in subsequent years, as we know from those who remain in contact and/or go on to postgraduate study.

In fact, one of our key strategic aims is to increase the provision of courses including post-graduate study which we believe will provide the opportunities for further study for many of our graduates and increase the number of students ultimately entering highly skilled employment and further study.