TEF Year Four provider submission
Shrewsbury Colleges Group
UKPRN: 10005822

Provider Context

Shrewsbury Colleges Group was formed by the merger of Shrewsbury Sixth Form College and Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology on 1st August 2016. The merger was a type B merger with the corporation of Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology dissolving and transferring all assets to Shrewsbury Sixth Form College. Shrewsbury Colleges Group therefore is a designated sixth form college, though the range and breadth of provision mean the college is effectively a tertiary college. The move to merger pre-dated the Marches Area Review, though the Area Review validated the decision. The merger was strongly supported by the Local Authority and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Shrewsbury Colleges Group operates as a single college delivering provision across three campuses. The majority of Higher Education teaching takes place at the London Road campus in a designated HE Centre, opened in September 2018.

The College has grown its Higher Education numbers by 20% over the last five years, particularly part time numbers which have increased by 35%.

The Board of Governors approved a new Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan in March 2018. The vision of the college is for all students to make outstanding progress. The mission of Shrewsbury Colleges Group is to:

- provide outstanding academic and vocational education and training for all 16-19 students and adults
- be a local centre of excellence for Higher Education,
- and be the college of choice

The commitment to Higher Education reflects the local context. Shropshire is a Higher Education 'cold spot' as there is no university in the county. Shrewsbury Colleges Group has been delivering Higher Education for over 25 years, firstly working with the University of Wolverhampton but more recently in partnership with Staffordshire University. The college has worked with Pearson since 2010. In 2015 we commenced delivery with direct funding through HEFCE (now OfS) for HNC and HND. The University of Chester has established the University Centre Shrewsbury as a campus situated within the town which also offers Higher Education opportunities. A Memorandum of Understanding was established in 2017 between SCG and the University Centre Shrewsbury focusing on progression. We also have an agreement with the local authority to share student accommodation in the town centre with the University Centre Shrewsbury.

Our Higher Education Strategy underpins our actions to realise our ambitions as set out in our mission. The purpose of the college's Higher Education provision is to support participation of three groups of students. Firstly, the college provides progression routes for students who have completed advanced level courses and who want to continue their studies at a higher level but also wish to study locally. Secondly, the college provides opportunities for adults who wish to return to study, following a career break, or to develop their existing career. Finally, the college provides opportunities for those who are employed to enhance their skills for their benefit and for the benefit of their employers. Providing local, high quality, affordable Higher Education has helped the college widen participation.

Shrewsbury has a population of 72,000 and Shropshire has a high economic activity rate and high levels of employment amongst the 16-64 population. The Shropshire labour force is comparatively well qualified, at least compared to the West Midlands, but supports fewer professionals. Shropshire also supports an above average number of people working in skilled trades occupations. Self-employment is high and Shropshire supports a primarily small-business economy with comparatively few large employers. Nevertheless, like other counties, there are pockets of deprivation in Shropshire where the rate of unemployment is higher.

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The Marches LEP priorities are 'Supporting Business', providing a physical infrastructure fit for business needs, skills investment, driving the transition to a high value, low carbon economy and supporting socially excluded and marginalised groups. Shrewsbury Colleges Group has secured over £450,000 LEP investment funding to assist in meeting these priorities through the Growth Deal with Government, to develop one of three advanced manufacturing training hubs in the region. Skills development is a critical part of the LEP's local response to the government industrial strategy, with key strands including engineering, construction, health and social care and STEM. The college's Higher Education offer clearly supports these aims with programmes in construction, engineering and counselling. The principal of Shrewsbury Colleges Group principal sits on the Board of the Marches LEP.

HEFCE (now OfS) research states there are areas with lower youth participation in Higher Education and with low adult Higher Education qualification rates situated to the north and the outskirts of Shrewsbury town. Our widening participation activities are targeted in these wards as part of our involvement in the Higher Horizons National Collaborative Outreach Project (NCOP). The number of students we recruit from the most disadvantaged post code areas has increased over the last three years from 66 students recruited from POLAR Quintiles 1 and 2 in 2016 to 75 in 2018.

Count of STEN_Student_ID	Column Labels		
Row Labels	2016	2017	2018
POLAR Quintile 1	51	57	62
POLAR Quintile 2	15	12	13
POLAR Quintile 3	52	79	69
POLAR Quintile 4	72	82	71
POLAR Quintile 5	35	30	34
Grand Total	**225**	**260**	**249**

There is a clear structure for Leadership and management of the college's Higher Education provision. Higher Education is a standing item on the agenda of the Senior Leadership Team which meets weekly. Strategic leadership is provided by the Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality who reports to the Principal/CEO. The Higher Education Lead oversees the quality of Higher Education provision at Shrewsbury Colleges Group and has been instrumental in identifying areas for enhancement and improvement over the last five years. The Higher Education Lead reports to the Group Vice Principal.

The College has policies and procedures for Higher Education which have been devised in line with the Quality Code, our partner's policies and procedures and the College's general policies and procedures. These policies and procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure they are current. The College has a Higher Education Quality Handbook given to all HE staff and which is published on the College's intranet. This is used by staff to ensure they understand and are following the correct processes and support students effectively.

The governance of the College consists of the Board of Governors and a committee system which is robust and fit for purpose to ensure sufficient and appropriate scrutiny and challenge. The Board has a determination of 19, comprising 11 independent governors, 3 staff governors, 2 parent governors, 2 student governors and the Principal/CEO. The Board has appointed a Higher Education Lead Governor who is experienced and well-respected and one of its two student governors is specifically selected from the HE Student cohort. The body with ultimate decision-making powers for the College's Higher Education activity is the Board. The Quality, Standards & Curriculum Committee has clear Terms of Reference were set up specifically to scrutinise the College's academic arrangements and outcomes, including the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

of the College's provision and student experience and engagement. Higher Education is a standing item on the Committee agenda.

The College was subject to a QAA Review in May 2018. The QAA review team formed the following rounded judgements about the Higher Education provision at Shrewsbury Colleges Group:

- There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.
- There can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.

There were no specified areas for improvement.

Teaching Quality

The diverse and innovative approaches to professional development at Shrewsbury Colleges Group have continued to engage teachers and create momentum for enhancement of practice. Strong organisational commitment to and investment in the principles of collaborative professional learning has been instrumental in sustaining and promoting a range of strategies. These include an annual teachers' conference; a team of Teaching and Learning Good Practice Leads; Innovation Projects; Excellence visits; designated training days for mandatory and focused sessions; a framework of professional learning communities; peer review, and coaching/mentoring.

Shrewsbury Colleges Group is committed to improving teacher subject knowledge and pedagogical skills in order to improve student achievement and share best practice and exemplary teaching through integrated processes of professional learning interventions, peer review, coaching and training and development. Our approach is set out in the HE – Teaching and Learning Strategy. The development of dual professionalism amongst HE tutors is facilitated through pedagogical interventions and the introduction of excellence visits, an initiative that encourages teachers to visit other providers with a proven record of effective practice. For example, the Higher Education Lead was accompanied on a visit to Newcastle under Lyme College (NUL) in October 2018 by two Curriculum Leaders and two HE tutors to discuss delivery of Higher Level BTEC provision in Sport, Performing Arts, Art and Design and Health and Social Care and share good practice.

All Higher Education staff are appropriately qualified, supported and developed; they are encouraged to adopt innovative and creative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in order to enhance student motivation and engagement. The college is committed to offering opportunities for Higher Education staff to develop pedagogical skills appropriate to those delivering high level programmes of study and update their sector knowledge. All Higher Education staff are encouraged to undertake CPD both internally and externally for which a budget is allocated.

All staff new to teaching Higher Education receive Induction Training this includes an introduction to the Quality Code and how the College operates within both these expectations and the requirements of the awarding bodies, to ensure each student has a positive experience whilst studying with us. The Colleges Head of Learning and Teaching Enhancement acts as a mentor to new Higher Education staff providing pedagogical support appropriate and relevant to their experience.

The Head of Learning & Teaching Enhancement is a Senior Fellow of the HEA and undertook the Higher Education in FE Course delivered by Dr Bill Esmond, Derby University in association with the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) earlier this year. Learning from the programme will inform approaches to professional development for Higher Education Tutors going forward and relevant aspects of this course is being disseminated through the Higher Education Tutor Forum.

The Higher Education Tutor Forum meets every six weeks, this forum provides the opportunity for Higher Education Tutors to share good practice and the Head of Learning & Teaching Enhancement

uses this forum to support tutors in undertaking scholarly activity. The College recognises the importance of research in order to enhance practice. Across the College there has been a sustained focus on effective assessment and feedback which has been reflected in the work undertaken by the network of curriculum based Learning Communities which meet every two weeks throughout the year. Several Higher Education Tutors have adopted an action research approach to determine the most effective approaches to feedback for Higher Education students. This research was prompted by the need to promote student engagement in the assessment and feedback process and enhance the impact on subsequent assessment. Improved outcomes for students on HE courses indicate that the changes to practice have had a positive effect and will be developed further.

The Peer Review process is well-established and has been further developed following feedback from teachers, sector networking and research into best practice. The current system encourages staff to work in partnership with two other colleagues, often from different curriculum areas, to identify an aspect of teaching, learning and assessment that the individual teacher would most like to develop through professional collaboration. The emphasis remains on using a coaching approach in professional discussions, thereby encouraging teachers to explore possible ways of enhancing practice, and to adopt a lesson study approach to the pre-review meeting which promotes a sense of shared responsibility – and learning – through the review process. The college also has a formal observation process which is carried out annually to ensure teaching practice is monitored and evaluated and to inform professional development at an individual and college level. The lesson observation process focuses on the impact on learning of key aspects of the pedagogical process. Observers identify ways in which teachers positively influence learner progress through effective practice and offer guidance on ways in which to further enhance the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. For example, encouraging learner autonomy through ownership of personal targets and dissemination of good practice through collaborative professional development forum.

Students are positive about the teaching and learning provided and how staff prepare them for assessment. In the spring 2018 Consultatives the FD Early Childhood students reported “staff are excellent at explaining things and will find alternative words if the meaning is not understood” and the Foundation Degree Counselling Year Two students reported “the teaching on the course is fantastic and cannot be faulted”.

Assessments for students are written to meet the approved Learning Outcomes for the module. Criteria are set against which student’s work is assessed in accordance with the descriptors which have been written and approved by the awarding bodies in line with the FHEQ. An Assessment plan is devised for each award, this is quality checked by the Higher Education Lead and shared with students. Progress against the Assessment Plan is tracked through MarkBook, an electronic tracking system.

All students are invited to a College Higher Education Induction to ensure from the outset they are aware of and provided with all the information they need to commence their studies, we ensure that assessment is covered during the Independent Learner session and that students understand the need to quote and reference correctly to avoid plagiarism. They are also made aware of the need to submit work to agreed deadlines and how to use the Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure if they are unable to submit because of mitigating circumstances.

The College uses the Turnitin software (through Staffordshire and through our own licence) for the majority of our HE courses. Turnitin doesn’t allow for multiple file uploads so it isn’t suitable for our Art and Design/Performance courses however all tutors have received training in relation to plagiarism and been made aware of the sectors concerns in relation to “essay mills” through the HE Tutor Forum.

Students who are unable to meet the agreed assessment deadlines due to circumstances which are beyond their control are able to apply for extenuating circumstances, either through the Universities process or through the Colleges, information on how to do this is shared at Induction. The Higher Education Lead chairs the Pearson Assessment and Award Board where results are ratified, results for Staffordshire University awards are ratified by the University. Newcastle Under Lyme College and

Shrewsbury Colleges Group have reciprocal arrangement and carry out the role of external moderator on each other's annual Pearson Award Board. This is a quality measure with the added value of allowing for the sharing of good practice across the two organisations.

External Examiners report high levels of satisfaction with the teaching and learning we provide. For example in 17/18 the EE for Engineering reported "[the] Teaching team [are] very passionate about education and the EE for Computing Science reported "Credit is given to the excellent way in which students are engaging with literature and adopting standard referencing techniques. For the level of qualification this is exceptional."

The quality of the student experience is monitored through a number of different groups. Higher Education student experience is a standing item on the agenda of the bi-weekly Academic Leadership Team. The Higher Education Lead chairs the Higher Education Enhancement Group which meets six times a year. This group is tasked with enhancing Higher Education students' experience whilst studying with us and the group agree and work to an annual action plan. The action plan is produced to respond to National Priorities, Local Priorities, the College's Higher Level Study Strategy, the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan and student feedback.

Learning Environment

Over the last six years Shrewsbury Colleges Group has invested heavily in its learning environment and the campus as a whole. In September 2018 to better facilitate our growing number of Higher Education students and to enhance their experience we opened a new Higher Education Centre. An existing building on campus was redesigned and renovated. The new Higher Education Centre has been designed as a Community of Practice, the HE Lead is based here along with HE Tutors and the HE Study Support Tutor. The Centre has five classrooms, an IT room, Social/Kitchen space and study rooms. Students contributed to the design and have commented favourably on the space and the exclusivity it affords them. The Marches Local Enterprise (LEP) invested £44,000 for ILT resources in the IT room.

Throughout the year we hold regular Taster sessions for our HE programmes and Interview afternoons. Potential students who we identify may need additional support to commence their higher level studies are invited to undertake our evening HE Preparation programme which runs for three weeks at the end of the summer term. This programme covers:

- Expectations of higher level study
- Critical thinking
- Effective research
- ICT skills.

Evaluation of the sessions has determined that participants find the sessions useful and feel it helps them to prepare for commencing their course.

All HE students are invited in to a HE Induction event in September prior to their course starting. This afternoon covers:

- Welcome Talk
- Moodle & file management
- Time management & Plagiarism
- Developing as an independent learner
- Student Charter & Student Voice
- Time with Tutor and Student Social
- Enhancement opportunities and student experience

Evaluation of this event has determined that participants find the afternoon useful, with 88% of respondents in September 2018 identifying that they particularly enjoyed the opportunity to meet their tutor and fellow students prior to the course commencing.

Study skills is embedded into all of our programmes. In addition, the college has also employed a Higher Education Study Support Tutor since April 2017. Her role is primarily to work with Higher Education students who have additional support needs (55 students in 2018/19), however she is also available to support students with short term needs, for example assignment planning. If a student requires support with assistive technology she refers them to the Assistive Technologist employed by the College to provide support with software, apps and reader pens. Hours are flexible and due to the increase in part time students she often works in an evening to provide support. Feedback on the support she provides is wholly positive. One in particular student was referred to the Study Support Tutor in May 2017 due to concerns over her progress in her first year. The student required support with developing effective research and reading skills, referencing and planning. After attending serval weeks of lessons the student's grades improved and she provided the following feedback – *"After a stroke I decided to return to studying and the opportunity to train in a new career. Whilst I enjoyed the course, the academic side I found tricky especially since my illness. VT helped me to plan and supported me in learning all I needed to know. Since seeing VT my grades have improved and I am now coming out with first class marks! VT is very easy to get along with, provides a wealth of knowledge and tailors her support to individual's needs. I cannot thank her enough for all the help she has given me and I would highly recommend her services to others."*

The College employs an ILT Coordinator, who supports staff (and students) in their use of the available technology for teaching and learning and continually seeks out new developments to enhance and incorporate into teaching delivery and resources. The range of technology enabled resources includes the use of Augmented Reality (AR). Augmented Reality is the process of super-imposing computer generated content over a live view of the world. Learners use digital devices, to scan an image which enables learners' to view videos and resources for information, instruction or reinforcement. Learners are encouraged to learn independently and at their own pace, inside and outside of the classroom and workshops. The use of Augmented Reality for teaching, learning, and support has helped to realise the potential and benefits for student use (theory, instruction, collaboration, resources). Some of the outputs have showcased some of the innovative uses in specific teaching process and delivery. It has enabled students to communicate, collaborate and be involved in the learning process and for information. The use of Augmented Reality for HE study skills and targeted resources have been incorporated within the HE Centre in the form of resource posters and learning cards for information and reinforcement.

Consultatives with students are conducted twice a year with student reps and the Higher Education Lead chairs these meetings. Actions identified are collated into a report and monitored through Academic Leadership Team. The questions used in the Consultatives were reviewed in 2016/17, aligning them to the National Student Survey (NSS) questions. This had a direct impact on our survey results as students had a greater understanding of what they were being asked to assess.

Students at Shrewsbury Colleges group are surveyed annually for the National Student Survey by IPOS Mori. In 2017/18 out students reported particularly high levels of satisfaction in academic support (95%) and learning opportunities (100%) with overall satisfaction coming out at 92.31%, a 13.59% increase on the previous year.

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The teaching on my course	Learning opportunities	Assessment and feedback	Academic support	Organisation and management	Learning resources	Learning community	Student Voice	Overall satisfaction
92.31	100	80.77	94.87	89.74	84.62	88.46	86.54	92.31

We worked with HEFCE in 2016 to develop an action plan to address the NSS feedback we had received for 15/16 from a particularly dissatisfied group of Counselling students. Their dissatisfaction related to the organisation and management of the course due to staff turnover. Unfortunately this had a negative impact on our overall results for that year as this group equated to 36% of the overall respondents. It is clear from the results in each of the subsequent years that these issues have been addressed and that there is positive trend data for student satisfaction.

Feedback from students is regularly considered at Academic Leadership Team and the Higher Education Enhancement Group) and helps to shape the Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan and the annual Enhancement Plan. Students expressed an interest in accessing an overseas residential study visit trip through Consultatives in 2015 and as a result we have offered a foreign trip annually to all Higher Education students. This has proved very popular and in 2018 the Higher Education Lead took 40 students and 6 tutors to Milan. The trips are devised to enhance the students' learning but also provide opportunities for the students to network, this has resulted in some cross College activity, for example the Performing Arts students commissioned the Photography students to take their portraits for their portfolios in 2017 following the trip to Barcelona.

The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) stocks the reading lists for all programmes either in hard copy or electronically. Reading lists and LRC stock are regularly reviewed with the Course Tutors. At Induction, students are provided with an introduction to the LRC and an overview of the Virtual Learning Environments available to them – Moodle and Blackboard (for Staffordshire University students). Later more detailed sessions are offered to cover access to our partner university library and e-resources, including guidance on referencing and practical information skills. HE students reported 84.62% satisfaction in relation to Learning Resources we provide in the 17/18 NSS. Students also reported high levels of satisfaction in the Summer Consultatives, in particular the BA in Education students who felt very supported by the LRC staff and found them to be highly responsive to their requests.

In 2018 we applied to join the Office for Students (OfS) and produced an Access and Participation Statement as part of the submission, setting out the following ambitions for the next three years:

- Increase recruitment by 5% from our identified cold spot areas by offering a bursary aimed at students from low income households
- Increase the number of students applying for DSA in relation to Dyslexia by offering a subsidy towards the post 16 Dyslexia Test
- Increase achievement rates by 5% for students with a declared learning difficulty or health problem through dedicated support by the Study Support Tutor
- Standardise personal tutoring available to students to ensure it is equitable
- Further Develop the peer mentoring programme

These ambitions are supported by the Governing Body. Achievement against them will be monitored at the termly meetings of the Enhancement Group.

Shrewsbury Colleges Group promotes the benefits of Work Placements to its students with all students being able to access placements through The Agency team. There is a group policy in place which covers all work experience and volunteering opportunities. The Agency sources and

matches over 800 placements each year. In addition, students are able to source their own placements independent of the Agency, examples of this include the PGCE and Counselling students. The Foundation Degree in Sport includes placements which are sourced by The Agency supported by a student-led matching process. In addition, students who are not required to complete a placement as part of their course are able to request a placement and support from The Agency. The Agency works with employers to assess the appropriateness of the placement for each student level, referring to the curriculum to create an occupationally relevant bespoke job description for each placement. The Agency also conducts workplace H&S assessments by trained staff who hold either the IOSH or NEBOSH qualification. The Agency provides advice and support to students with support needs or special requirements to ensure that they are able to access work placements.

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

A strategic aim of the College is to "develop a curriculum, which provides progression opportunities for students and also considers the identified skills gaps in the local area". All of our programmes have a Professional Development module, the focus of these modules alongside developing study skills and tutorial support is progression. We have a guest speaker programme and ensure all students have advice and guidance on progression to top up degrees and employment. Many of our students, particularly in our Education faculty, obtain promotions at work whilst studying with us. All students have access to one to one tutorials and are encouraged to produce individual learning plans focusing on achievement and progression.

The College is a member of numerous business networking groups and promotes the Higher Education offer to employers for their current workforce. Annual Careers Week events include bespoke sessions for Higher Education students by Careers professionals and industry speakers as well as Higher Education sessions to inform students about progression opportunities to Higher Education at the College. A monthly newsletter is emailed to all HE students and staff from The Agency team which has information about Higher Education open days, summer school activities and Higher Education support for writing personal statements. The Agency also assist HE students with Career Planning, enrichment activities such as volunteering and work experience opportunities and operate our Job Shop to assist students gain employment. Shrewsbury Colleges Group is also part of the Prospect Graduate Careers Network and the National Association for Student Employment Services as part of its commitment to impartial and professional careers and progression guidance for students. In the 2016/17 SPOC survey 97% of students reported that they were sure they had made the right choice of course/subjects.

The College actively works with employers ensuring courses we deliver meet local needs. This has been particularly successful in engineering where through close collaboration with employers and Staffordshire University new units have been developed to align with industry requirements. Eleven of our Engineering Students participated in the GradEX exhibition at Staffordshire University in 2017/18, this event featured work by students from across the Engineering Faculty and gave them the chance to showcase their work to prospective employers. Shrewsbury Colleges Group students scooped 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes at the exhibition, which continued a strong legacy of achieving well in the competition since our first entries in 2010. Over this period students have competed against Staffordshire University and their multiple partner's highest achievers and secured a total of three 1st places, two 2nd places, two 3rd places and fifteen highly commended. The projects are all industry based and often (when the student is employed), company lead around their role or a project within their company. This has over the years resulted in several solutions to issues that companies experience and they have taken forward the students work as the resolution. This includes leading companies/organisations, such as Doncaster's Aerospace Components Ltd, Caterpillar Shrewsbury Ltd, British Gas, BT group, Stadco Ltd, Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust, Nidec Corporation as well as smaller SMEs and micro businesses. The winner of the GradEx18 competition, was an employee of R M Group, where he designed and produced an 'Automated Brick Surface Texture and Orientation Detection System', which the company required development of, to ensure their bricks were packaged on pallets correctly, with the textured surface facing outwards. The automation

of the system was required to replace a very slow and labour intensive manual system which they currently use.

IGraduate undertook the Destination of Leavers survey (DLHE) in 2017/18 for our BTEC Pearson provision, 41 students responded out of a population of 43 (95%). The results indicate that 73% of our BTEC leavers left for a positive destination with 22% working, 41% continuing to study and 10% working and studying. In addition, 82% of students felt prepared to apply for and undertake further study. This is reflected in the indicator for “Highly skilled employment or study” in our metrics for 2018 which was above the benchmark at the 1.96 standard deviation and 2 percentage point level.

Our success in this area is reflected in the reportable metric in relation to “Highly skilled employment or further study”, this is above the benchmark (at the 1.96 standard deviation and 2 percentage point level) for both part time and full time students.

Student outcomes when considered by Gender, Polar and Disability indicate no concerning statistical differences and historically our students have achieved very well. In the last two years since appointing our study support tutor and adopting a more structured approach to personal tutoring we have seen an increase in achievement at the higher grades, 73% of students achieved a distinction or a merit in 17/18 in comparison to 41% in 15/16, 75% of students on the BA in Education achieved a First or a 2/1 and all of our students on the PGCE FET (Further Education course) passed their course successfully.