

Context

West Nottinghamshire College is a general further education college (GFE) located in Mansfield and Ashfield. Its main campus has benefitted from a £24 million capital programme, culminating in the £6 million Vision University Centre which opened in October 2016. Higher Education courses in Engineering are delivered at the college's Oddicroft Lane campus which opened in 2015 and in construction at Station Park which opened in 2008. The college holds a TEF Silver rating.

In September 2020 the vast majority of higher education provision will transfer to Nottingham Trent University (NTU) under an innovative partnership which will see the University occupy parts of the college's Derby Road centre and take sole occupancy of the college's current Vision University Centre. All but HND/HNCs in Engineering, Construction and Music plus a small number of level 4 and apprenticeship programmes at levels 4 and 5 will be transferred to NTU under this model. The partnership has been formed to recognise the need to significantly improve the local landscape for higher level skills, the areas immediately served by the college have some of the lowest progression rates to university in the country and have low levels of residents qualified at levels 4 and above.

According to indices of deprivation (IMD 2019), the East Midlands is the fourth most deprived region, including 7% of the 20% most deprived areas in the country. The Mansfield District, immediately served by the college, is one of contrast, comprising the rural Meden Valley and the former mining communities situated in Mansfield Woodhouse, Warsop and Forest Town. The district has several areas of social need and five ward areas fall within the serious social need category. While the level of cohesion within North Nottinghamshire is mixed, Mansfield is ranked amongst the most deprived districts regionally, in particular for both education, skills & training and employment. Social mobility is one of the lowest in the country.

The Centre for Cities Report cites that Mansfield and Ashfield will be one of the most affected areas in terms of automation with a predicted loss of 30% of employment opportunities by 2030 to automation. These factors, coupled with low aspirations and pockets of significant deprivation across both Mansfield and Ashfield, make the case for locally accessible higher education very strongly indeed. Research undertaken in 2014 by the University of Derby indicated a need to increase higher level skills within the local area by 46% to meet some of these challenges.

In particular, the college recognises the need to build aspiration locally, building 'pipelines for progression' for apprentices, local school students, existing college students and employers. This ambition is embedded within the college's vision statement:

A force for raising aspiration across our communities, where high performing staff encourage students to stretch the boundaries of their potential and, in partnership with employers, develop the workforce for the future.

And in its mission statement:

To provide skills to enable all students, employer partners and our community to thrive.

The College has been proactive in supporting the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Project (DANCOP), led by the University of Derby, and enabling the location of a DANCOP Hub at the college to support targeting of local wards in the project's aims. This partnership will be key in the college's widening participation strategy, as their objectives and the college's align in relation to improving student progression to HE from the quintile 1 gap areas. The college will continue to host outreach and in reach hubs as part of the DANCOP phase two project and will use this additional resource to trial approaches to engagement that are sustainable.

Areas that the college will seek to address through this access and participation statement

In identifying areas of priority for its higher level skills, the college has drawn on a range of data sources, both internal and external. The following priorities for action have been identified:

Access

Socio-economic disadvantage

The college recruits a significant number of its higher education students from quintiles 1 and 2, year on year its recruitment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is 30% above the all England averages for higher education institutions. This is a significant strength of the college. However, Mansfield and Ashfield continues to have some of the lowest progression rates to higher education (in some wards below 20%) and low levels of adults qualified to level four and above. The area scored 63rd out of 63 for level 4 and above qualifications in a recent Centre for Cities study.

As such, the college will work in partnership with NTU, Employers and local and district authorities to widen access to high quality skills at level 4 and above. In mapping a curriculum offer in partnership with NTU, the college will seek to ensure that there are clear pathways of progression from its further education offer. In addition, the college will work with NTU on the development of a joint offer of employer based higher level skills to develop adult skills needed for the future. The college will seek to improve the progression rates to higher education of its further education cohort by 10% in 2020/21.

The college will continue to work collaboratively through the DANCOP partnership to promote a higher level offer to young people from year 10 onwards.

Care Leavers

The college is the largest post-16 provider for provision for looked after young people in Nottinghamshire and as such is well placed to support progression to higher education for this cohort, not only to its own provision but to provision with other Higher Education establishments.

The college knows from work with its further education students and national data that approximately 6% of care leavers will progress into some form of higher education at 18 (Centre for Social Justice 12 by 24 report May 2019). The college will develop a comprehensive strategy to encourage more care leavers to access localised higher education through either the college or alternative pathways such as higher apprenticeships and has already commenced work with Nottinghamshire County Council and DANCOP on a project specifically targeted at this group.

The college aims to offer bursary and pastoral support for its LAC and care leaver cohort post-16 that raises aspirations and provides local pathways to higher education through NTU. The college will work with NTU to develop a local 'care leaver guarantee' for higher education. It would be the intention to double the entrants to higher education from this cohort by the end of 2020/21.

Success

The college's cohort of under-represented groups, particularly BAME and students with a disability are very small and account for less than 5% of the college's higher education student cohort in total. As such analysis of success for this cohort of students is challenging as one student makes a significant impact on data. Attainment rates for all students studying at the college at HND and HNC level are high and ranged from 88% to 100% in 2018/19, this is considered a strength of the college and as such is not featured as an area for specific development. However, the college has identified the following areas for improvement in relation to non-continuation:

BAME

Non continuation rates for students from BAME groups are consistently 10% below other student groups. Whilst the population of students is small this will be an area of focus in 2020/21. The college's BAME students are often drawn from Eastern European ethnicities where English may not be the first language. Additional support will be offered for students at FE level wishing to progress to HE, this support will focus on study skills, academic writing and referencing to ensure students feel confident when progressing to higher level study. The college will provide diagnostic assessment of English skills through initial assessment and targeted support will be provided where needed. In 2020/21 the college will introduce ESOL programmes back into its course offering with the potential for infill to be offered to students studying at higher level.

Non-continuation of apprentices from BAME groups are of particular concern (31% in 2018/19) and lack of prior experience of academic writing has been identified by those who did not continue as a significant issue in continuation. Additional study skills sessions will be offered for students on these programmes at the commencement of their apprenticeship programme.

Progression

Socio-economic disadvantage

Progression rates for students from quintiles 1 and 2 is below that for students from quintiles 4 and 5. This has been identified by the college as an area of focus as part of its commitment to ensuing positive outcomes for all its students. The college has a large and growing network of local employers and will work closely with them to provide opportunities for work placement and real life projects and employability skills in every aspect of its higher level curriculum. In addition, the college will continue to develop an apprenticeship offer at level 4 and above to provide alternative routes into graduate level employment for its students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The development of employer based academies and learning companies within its Further education offering will expose students at an earlier stage to the world of work and the expectations of employers. This will, in time, impact on progression to employment for all higher level students.

Students with an identified disability or learning difficulty

Employment rates for people with disabilities or learning difficulties are well below other students. The college will work innovatively with employers, other providers and with the local authority to generate a pipeline of 'disability confident' local employers, who are willing to provide opportunities for SEND students. This work at both further education and higher level will ensure 'golden threads' to employment for all learners. At higher level this will be achieved through an exploration of higher level work placement and assisted apprenticeships as an alternative and supported route into employment.

Student Engagement and Consultation

The college has robust mechanisms to involve students in the development and evaluation of its Access and Participation Statement. The mechanisms include formal surveys as well as informal face to face feedback.

The college elects a group of learner representatives from both FE and HE and this network is used as the primary focus for consultation and development of college strategy. As well as the national learner survey, the college utilises internal surveys for its students, these include questions around inclusivity and equality and diversity. Several thematic pulse surveys are undertaken throughout the year.

The college ensures that students are engaged with module and programme reviews.

Our ambition and strategy

The college's ambition for higher level skills is fundamentally embedded within its overall organisational approach to ensure that no individual within its local community is left behind.

The college has a strong track record in inclusion and equality of opportunity. Examples of how this strategy for inclusion is embedded across all aspects of its provision are included below:

- A regional reputation for excellence in its inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. The college's FE provision holds the largest contract with Nottinghamshire County Council for high needs learners in the county and Ofsted found the college's provision for high needs students good with outstanding features.
- A strong reputation locally for supporting vulnerable and at risk students. The college has been asked to share its work on mental health and supporting vulnerable students with a range of other education providers across the schools, colleges and HE sectors.
- A commitment to increasing the employability of local young people through the development of innovative and collaborative frameworks developed by employers and disseminated across educational providers.
- A strategic commitment to ensuring that the college not only develops the technical skills but the social and cultural capital of individuals to ensure they are successful in life as well as work.
- The college is a significant provider of apprenticeships within the local area with a commitment to providing a ladder of opportunity for local young people and adults through non-traditional routes into higher education.
- The college is an anchor institution within its local communities, working across partnerships with employers, local authorities and other agencies to ensure that high value and high impact employment opportunities are available within the area through continued inward investment and skills development of the local community.
- The development and delivery of powerful partnerships with other providers to accelerate local opportunities for prosperity.

Whilst recognising the specific nature and needs of higher education, the college has embedded processes for social inclusion, social mobility and widening participation into these well established and successful models for social inclusion. Teaching staff teach on both FE and HE curriculum and as such are able to advise and guide existing students into higher level study and will have a good understanding of the challenges and vulnerabilities of many of our HE students prior to their enrolment into HE study.

Alignment with other strategies

The college has a holistic approach to raising aspiration and participation at all levels of education. There are a number of cross college strategies and processes that enable this to aim to be at the centre of the college's mission, vision and values and ensures that higher education provision is part of a bigger commitment to social mobility, social inclusion and community prosperity.

At its heart is the college's Equality and Diversity Scheme which is a comprehensive statement of intent in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion. The college aims to go beyond legal requirements and ensure that provision at the college is accessible to all and, regardless of starting point, allows an individual to progress to higher level study and eventually employment. The scheme includes targets to improve progression into higher level study for students with protected characteristics.

The college sees its mission very much as a mechanism for enabling students to progress to a positive destination based on their career aspirations. The careers strategy and employability framework that support it set out how this will be achieved through both central forms of advice, guidance and support but additionally through curriculum delivery and employer engagement. Both of these strategies extend to include students on higher level provision. This strategy extends to opening up opportunities for non-traditional learners to enter certain sectors and work with employers on providing work experience and work placement and the embedding of an aspirational employability culture as part of curriculum development and delivery. The college has a stated aim to deliver not only the skills the community needs now but the ones it will need in the future.

The college's student support strategy sets out how the college will ensure that those with certain types of vulnerability or disadvantage will be supported to build personal resilience, to overcome barriers to learning and progression in order to succeed. This formal support mechanism for those at risk will be further developed for higher level students throughout the life of this plan.

The college has developed a cross college strategy to improve the pedagogy for students who have been the victim of childhood trauma. In November 2018, following national and international research into adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), Parliament published an overview of impacts of ACEs on educational attainment and progression. The college has been working with Nottinghamshire Public Health and the local authority to look at how cycles of deprivation and abuse can be broken with innovative strategies for teaching, learning and assessment and behaviour management. These approaches will be rolled out within its FE provision, with the hope that breaking down deep rooted and behavioural responses to education will lead to raised aspirations and potential engagement with learning at a higher level. This will include work with individuals to build resilience, self-confidence and ambition.

Activities and Support for Students

Many of the specific activities to address gaps in performance have been identified in the preceding sections. General mechanisms of support for students to encourage participation and access are included below:

- Study skills coaches within its further education provision tasked with improving study skills for HE including time management, self-study, referencing and confidence building;
- Student support coaches who work individually with students to overcome various barriers to success;

- Additional learning support which provides individually assessed support for students with disabilities or learning difficulties. They work with students to increase confidence and independence across all levels of study;
- A range of bursary and financial support for students who may be suffering financial hardship, this can help with travel, materials and equipment costs for study;
- An independent careers advice and guidance service with qualified level 6 careers advisors working one to one and with groups of students to plan progression and next steps based on career aspirations; and
- A work placement team, working across all levels of study to provide real experience of the work place.

In addition the following specific support is made available for higher level students:

- First in family bursary of £500 per student allocated on a first come first served basis;
- Student hardship funding up to maximum award of £1,000 per student; and
- Additional 1:1 tutorial support for students for higher level study;

Monitoring and Evaluation

The college has a number of mechanisms to review progress against delivery objectives. At programme level the college conducts programme and module reviews as well as full course review. Improvement in non-continuation and progression will form part of this review process at this level.

The college has a HE management group whereby colleagues involved with the management and strategic delivery of higher education can review and share best practice. Formal evaluation of the access and participation plan will be taken through this group twice per year.

The college's Higher Education Academic Standards Committee (HEASC) forms the link between the college higher education provision, senior leadership and formal governance structure. A formal evaluation of progress against objectives will be considered on an annual basis and then taken to the senior executive team and standards committee of the Corporation Board.

Achievement of widening participation objectives will form part of the college's self-evaluation document, which is produced at organisational as well as programme team level.

Finally, the college's HE provision is subject to formal quality review which is conducted on an annual basis.

Evaluation mechanisms will follow OFS guidance including the need to demonstrate a theory of change. The OFS self-assessment tool will be utilised to evaluate specific actions with changes made where progress is either not as expected or where performance deteriorates. The college is part of a number of sector based forums and in particular shares best practice with DANCOP partners, evidence therefore from actions and impact undertaken by the college to widen participation as well as evidence from the evaluation framework used by DANCOP will be used to inform and develop best practice to ensure the college meets its access and participation objectives.