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FOREWORD

There’s never been a better time to be part of Solihull College & University Centre.

We continue to be at the forefront of innovation with investment in outstanding facilities for our students. Blossomfield Campus recently introduced new industry-standard science laboratories and virtual reality equipment. Woodlands Campus has the Centre for Advanced Aeronautical Provision, which features world-class flight simulators and a former Royal Navy Aircraft. School leavers, apprentices, university level and adult learners can thrive in facilities unmatched in the region.

We have recently upgraded the motor vehicle facilities to train our students to deal with new electric and hybrid vehicle and driverless technologies. We are at an advanced stage of significantly expanding construction plant training with a high-quality construction company in Solihull. We will have an Outpost area for employers in early 2021 to work closely with our Media and Visual Arts students to bring real life briefs for them to work. Our investment for these projects will be in the region of £2m supported by the Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership.

The College was graded ‘Good’ across all areas of the inspection framework by Ofsted in November 2016. We were granted government approval to use the “University Centre” brand due to the high numbers and breadth of our higher education offer and achieved top marks in a QAA review of our higher education provision. We were also the only college in the region to be graded TEF Gold for our HE work until our merger.

We have again been assessed as financially strong and resilient for the future with our funding body confirming our outstanding financial health.

We have invested in all of our subject areas to ensure the quality of our provision for students. We have the HQ of Solihull Chamber of Commerce based at the College. This has been a huge benefit to the College where the Chamber broker many of our employer links including work experience, expert inputs, offers of employment and apprenticeships for many of our students who have completed their studies.

We have been working with Stratford-upon-Avon College since our merger in February 2018. We are planning an exciting and expanded new offer at Stratford with an investment of £8.25m over three years to build upon many excellent areas of provision so there is a wider choice for our communities and modern, effective and efficient facilities for our students.

Other recent successes include being chosen as one of 12 education providers in the country to be selected to be an Institute of Technology (IoT). The IoT will provide higher level technical skills to meet the skills shortages in the region. We have been selected to pilot the next roll-out of the digital T Level in 2020, in preparation for the full roll-out of all subjects planned for 2025.

We aim to find a place for everyone, either at Solihull or Stratford, with courses offered from beginner right up to degree-level. With strong links to top employers across a range of industries, we ensure our courses are tailored to continuously evolving industry needs.

Our staff possess the expertise and drive to ensure students leave the College with the skills necessary to make their mark in their chosen industry or progress to the next level in
their education – whether with us at our own University Centre or at top universities across the country.

Our strategic plan for 2019-2021 outlines our plans to continue to be successful in meeting the opportunities and the challenges for the next three years.

John Callaghan
Principal and Chief Executive
1. **CONTEXT**

Solihull College and University Centre is in a very strong position as we begin the academic year 2019/20. However there are many challenges facing FE colleges in the coming years. Funding will be reduced and courses that have traditionally received funding remain under threat. The Government’s direction of travel is to continue to reduce public funding and to ensure that communities pay for their provision. There is also an increasing trend to rationalise the number of colleges and create larger institutions.

Future growth will be dependent on the ability to persuade students and employers that the opportunities they offer are worth investing in. Colleges that succeed in this will capitalise on these changes and turn them into opportunities.

The College has continued to maintain the market share of 16-18 provision despite the threat of academies with new sixth forms. As new schools and other 14-16 facilities develop, the College will have the opportunity to establish appropriate partnerships and alliances.

The relaxation in Higher Education (HE) student number controls provides the opportunity to grow the College HE offer; however we have seen the increase in “unconditional offers”. This not only impacts on recruitment but can result in students not achieving their stretch targets including maths and English. This has created a highly competitive HE environment so identifying the right strategic HE partnerships will be critical to success in this new era.

The opportunities available to colleges highlight the importance of partnership development. Funding for apprentices has changed with more opportunities to work in partnership with employers, while other funding opportunities may be decided by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). The College, through its existing partnerships and relationships, is well positioned to maximise these opportunities.

The most significant opportunity for the College is the UK Central (UKC) development, which will provide:

- An expanded airport runway which gives direct access to Asia and America;
- An improved National Exhibition Centre;
- A new high speed (HS2) station which will transform Birmingham International Station;
- A re-developed Birmingham Paradise and Smithfield zones;
- Working with partners on the infrastructure for the Commonwealth Games; and
- More job opportunities through the recently re-developed Resorts World and increasing attractions for visitors to the region.

The College has the opportunity to be a key player in these exciting new developments.
2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 West Midlands Combined Authority

- Local control of investment plans and funds for West Midlands priorities (transport and land reclamation for housing and employment);
- Local control of adult skills provision (AEB) from August 2019;
- A local employment service;
- The development of new devolved approaches to mental health, troubled individuals and youth justice services;
- Control over a more integrated local public transport system and influence over strategic road network planning;
- Devolved business support and inward investment system; and
- An integrated locally led approach to public sector land and property – One Public Estate.

The West Midland Combined Authority (WMCA) has the following constituent authorities:

- Birmingham City Council;
- City of Wolverhampton;
- Coventry City Council;
- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council;
- Walsall Council;
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council; and
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

This has key implications for the College and the funding of Adult skills. Adult skills funding will go through the combined authority from August 2019. The principal purpose is to engage adults in learning that supports wider economic and social priorities. Devolution of AEB will only be applied within constituent member areas, and the indicative budget will be approximately £112m for 2019/20 based on the current spend on residents.

The College has applied for increased flexibility in the AEB to provide vendor training and to focus more on projects where the measure of success will be outcomes rather than qualifications. We are prioritising digital and construction as well as working with SMBC to target NEET individuals in the north of the borough.


2.2 Learning and Enterprise Partnerships

The merger with Stratford upon Avon puts the College within two LEP
2.2.1 Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP

The Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP (GBSLEP) has a mission to create jobs and grow the economy – and in doing so raise the quality of life for all of the LEP’s population. This agenda must act as a key driver for the College’s direction of travel as all political parties seem to be committed to continuing this development. They have identified their priority sectors as follows:

5 key priority sectors:

- Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering;
- Life Sciences;
- ICT;
- Environmental Technologies; and
- Cultural Buzz.

Other key sectors:

- Adult Social Care;
- Construction;
- Transport and Logistics;
- Retail;
- Food and Drink Manufacture and Production; and
- Financial and Professional Services.

By aligning the College to the LEP priorities it has been successful in the following bids:

- Advanced Manufacturing Centre (City Deal);
- Advanced Aviation Centre (Growth Fund);
- Life Sciences (City Deal);
- Advanced Life Sciences (Growth Fund);
- Hybrid Vehicle Technology Training Centre (Growth Fund); and
- Robotics and Virtual Reality Learning Technologies Labs (Growth fund).

The College is developing:

- The Outpost: A Creative Technologies Hub at Blossomfield; and
- Construction Skills for Work Readiness working with RMF in Solihull.

https://gbslep.co.uk/resources/reports/gbslep-annual-delivery-plan-2019-20
2.2.2 Coventry and Warwickshire LEP

Coventry and Warwickshire LEP (CWLEP) is working towards a shared purpose: to grow the local economy, attract new investment, and increase prosperity.

The CWLEP priority areas are:

Key Priorities:

- Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering;
- Creative Industries and ICT;
- Intelligent Mobility;
- Professional Services; and
- Culture and Tourism.

Previously Stratford College was not able to access LEP Capital funding due to lack of match funding. We are in dialogue with the CWLEP to see if we can get support towards our major refurbishment of the campus.

The College is developing bids to fund specialist art equipment and hospitality and catering.

The College will continue to review all opportunities for working in partnership with other institutions, considering carefully the strategic impact of any relations.


2.3 Mission, Vision & Values

2.3.1 Mission

Solihull College & University Centre will make significant contributions to the local and regional economies and beyond, by providing high quality vocational education and training for individuals, employers and the wider community.

2.3.2 Vision

Our vision is to be the organisation of choice for learning for young people, adults and employers through their recognition of our excellent staff and distinctive experiences in vocational education and training.
2.3.3 Values
The College will actively promote fundamental British values:

- Democracy;
- The rule of law;
- Individual liberty; and
- Mutual respect for, and tolerance of, those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith.

Furthermore, the College recognises the importance of its core values in enabling it to achieve its strategic goals and priorities:

- Inspiring and supporting students to succeed;
- Striving for excellence, exceeding expectations;
- Recognising our responsibility;
- Respecting each other, and
- Sharing, caring and working together.

2.4 Strategic Goals

1. All students enjoying their learning, being ambitious and having very high standards of achievement enabling them to progress to employment and/or further study.

2. Excellent leadership and management that will ensure the highest possible standards of teaching, training, learning, assessment and support.

3. Management processes that maintain financial stability and continuously improve the efficient use of resources.

4. Innovative and responsive programmes that meet the needs of students and employers, respond to the demands of the LEPs and the WMCA as well as effective strategies which respond to economic growth and social priorities.

5. Resources and inclusive learning environments that are of a consistently high quality, support the College’s evolution, promote sustainability and inspire learning.

2.5 Annual Priorities 2019 – 2020
1. All students enjoying their learning, being ambitious and having very high standards of achievement enabling them to progress to employment and / or further study.

Outcomes

a All provision types will self-assess as outstanding or good.
b High levels of learner satisfaction from surveys for teaching and learning with 92% good or better.
c Achievement rates will be above national average for GFE colleges.
d Attendance will be at least 90% for full-time students.
e At least 90% of students will progress to positive destinations including employment, apprenticeships and higher / further education.
f All 16-18 full-time students will improve employability skills, maths and English and their personal development, behaviour and welfare.

2. Excellent leadership and management that will ensure the highest possible standards of teaching, training, learning, assessment and support.

Outcomes

a A broad evidence base will demonstrate that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently good or better across all provision types. The College has an ambition to achieve an overall Ofsted grade of “outstanding” for the next full inspection.
b At least 20% of 16-18 students who have attained a GCSE maths and 30% who have attained a GCSE English grade 3 will achieve a grade 4 or above.
c All students will have an appropriate learning plan that includes stretching and challenging targets.
d Progress at Level 3 will be in the top quartile for GFE colleges.
e Governors will further improve their engagement with students through learning walks and formal links to College areas.
f Significant improvement and impact will be achieved against the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).
g Adult progression will support the LEP and WMCA priorities and grow by 5% annually.
3. Management processes that maintain financial stability and continuously improve the efficient use of resources.

Outcomes

a. Robust and challenging recruitment, income and contribution targets for each curriculum area will be met.

b. A dashboard for Governors and managers that monitors the major risks identified by the FE Commissioner and drives up improvement in the areas identified by Ofsted and the College’s own self-assessment.

c. Growth achieved in our priority areas.

d. Resources reinvested to directly support growth strategies and quality priorities.

e. Students engaging directly with the design and monitoring of services and support that impact on their learning experience.

4. Innovative and responsive programmes that meet the needs of students and employers, respond to the demands of the LEPs and the WMCA as well as effective strategies which respond to economic growth and social priorities.

Outcomes

a. Apprenticeship recruitment will increase by at least 10% and higher education will maintain the previous year’s level of activity.

b. All full-time 16-18 students will have comprehensive study programmes designed to meet their needs and those of the world of work.

c. Growth in employer partnerships and the vocational specialisms that directly support local skills needs and priorities as identified by the LEPs for all learners and the WMCA for adult learners.

d. Increase in the collaborative work with local schools, SMBC, SuADC and local FE providers to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and takes into account good practice from the best providers.

e. To be an essential and proactive partner with the key decision making and influencing groups including the Local Strategic Partnership, the LEPs and WMCA Employment and Skills Board and the Chamber of Commerce to ensure the College continues to make a significant contribution to the economic and social wellbeing of its communities.
5. Resources and inclusive learning environments that are of a consistently high quality, support the College’s evolution, promote sustainability and inspire learning.

Outcomes

a. A Property and Capital Investment Strategy that ensures high quality learning environments for the benefits of all learners with a focus on the IoT and the Stratford campus redevelopment.

b. An IT infrastructure to support the future needs of the College and its students.

c. A ‘best in the sector’ external digital communication platform.

d. Access to information that will continuously improve and monitor individual and organisational performance at all levels and for all stakeholders.

e. Learning technologies and resources that will enhance and inspire the learning experience for students.

3. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 16-18

Strategic aims:

• To provide high quality relevant vocational education to 16-18 year olds;

• To ensure progression routes into higher education, work and apprenticeships; and

• To work with employers and the local community to develop a responsive curriculum.

Solihull College & University Centre has maintained the market share of student numbers at a time when 16-18 numbers have been declining and despite the threat of academies with new sixth forms. This has been achieved by:

• Improving the quality of teaching and learning;

• Improving the quality of the buildings and resources on all campuses;

• Ensuring progression opportunities for all our learners;

• Improving conversion rate of application to interview; and

• Exploiting digital and other marketing opportunities.

The demographics for Birmingham show a significant increase over the next 3 years
however for Solihull and Stratford there is no significant growth.

All Campuses have capacity for expansion in student numbers and the key areas targeted for growth are:

- Engineering;
- Motor Vehicle;
- Life Sciences;
- Computing;
- Digital;
- Construction;
- Health & Social care;
- Commercial Services; and
- Business.

These areas closely align with the LEP priorities and with potential employment opportunities. Other areas are also targeting growth; however this is uncertain until numbers are confirmed following recruitment.

The College is also targeting growth at Stratford with an enhanced Curriculum Plan for 18/19 particularly ensuring a broader Level 1 offer and clearer progression route to HE and employment.

The College is not expecting the numbers of part time 16-18 year olds to increase due to the raising of the participation age and the requirement for every 16-18 year old to have GCSE maths and English as part of their entitlement.

3.2 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a Government priority and a vital part of the College’s provision.

**Strategic aims:**

- To develop apprenticeships to respond to the needs of all local employers and target the identified LEP priorities;
- To work in partnership with employers to develop responsive provision from Level 2 to degree level. The College will ensure that this provision responds to their skills needs; and
- To make available opportunities for participation and appropriate ones for progression.

The College is targeting growth over the next two years. The following areas have been identified for growth based on Nomis data for Solihull, Birmingham and backed up by the GBSLEP and CWLEP region.
• Manufacturing;
• Construction;
• Wholesale and retail trade;
• Repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles;
• Accommodation and food service activities;
• Information and communication;
• Financial and insurance activities;
• Professional, scientific and technical activities;
• Administrative and support service activities;
• Human health and social work activities;
• Creative Industries and ICT; and
• Culture and Tourism.

The introduction of the apprenticeship levy for employers with a payroll cost larger than £3 million brought significant changes in the way apprenticeships are funded. This has increased the opportunities available to the College but has limited the opportunities for sub-contracting.

The College aims to increase apprenticeships year on year by 10% despite the fact the take up of apprenticeship places has drastically reduced over the last 2 years since the reforms were introduced.

### 3.2.1 Partnerships and Sub-Contracting

The College strategy is that it will engage in sub-contracting where it:

- Facilitates access to new and additional training opportunities for a range of students in employment and in the wider community;

- Improves working relationships with employers and other community providers whose offer complements existing College provision;

- Achieves growth, where this is consistent with College, local and regional strategic objectives; and

- Offers high quality delivery that enhances the College offer.

The Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) considers sub-contracting as a means of extending provision and developing expertise within colleges. The College will continue to develop sub-contracting to deliver Apprenticeships with organisations which complement and enhance the current delivery in response to regional and local employment and skills needs.
Indicative curriculum planning for 2019/20 has identified that there will be insufficient planned delivery to meet the AEB allocation for the merged college and it is anticipated that approximately £1.1m of sub-contracting will be required. An OJEU compliant procurement process will be undertaken in May 2019 to establish a preferred list of sub-contractors for 2019/20. An initial contract will then be awarded and increased if necessary, during the course of the year as actual College enrolments are known. The aim is to reduce sub-contracting by 50% to £600k by 2021 unless the WMCA encourages the college to work with new partners.

3.3 Higher Education

Strategic aims:

- To develop vocational pathways from full time further education provision and respond to the needs of local employers;
- To identify the most appropriate accreditation routes and develop HE provision through the most appropriate pathways; and
- To offer HE provision that is high quality and affordable.

Student number control was removed from September 2015 and maintenance grants were replaced by loans in September 2016. This may give the College opportunities to attract local students who in previous years may have studied away from home. Unlike the national picture, the College has been more successful in growing part time provision and it is expected that this trend will continue.

The College has defined its HE Strategy as providing vocational pathways to allow progression from further education provision. The pathways in key vocational areas will be developed to Level 6 / honours degrees and in some areas beyond. All vocational areas with strong further education provision at Level 3 now offer higher education provision at Level 4 and beyond.

Future developments:

- To Develop the capacity to validate programmes through seeking Degree Awarding Powers;
- Development of a coherent HE offer at Stratford upon Avon College that builds on their existing curriculum strengths; and
- Developing strategies for partnering with HEIs to offer degree apprenticeships.
The College rebrand as Solihull College and University Centre has been a key feature for our marketing strategy to distinguish us from local college's higher education offer. The rise in fees from partner universities will need to be closely monitored to ensure that this is not detrimental to our HE recruitment.

The College intends to apply for degree awarding powers subject to the guidance to be released.

3.3.1 Institute of Technology (IoT)

The College has been successful as the Lead Anchor FE Institution for the application of GBS LEP Institute of Technology to the DfE.

Focused on advanced manufacturing and engineering, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull ‘hub and spoke’ IoT (GBSIoT) model brings together leading sector employers, four universities, three FE colleges and multiple stakeholders across the GBSLEP area to reduce the skills gaps in the Advanced Manufacturing Sector.

The value of the Capital bid is £8m and will be shared amongst the core partners comprising of two FE Colleges and two universities. Each core partner will be paying towards the running costs of the IoT and this should be offset by increased revenue from additional students. The final license decision will be made by July 2019 with the IoTs planning to start provision from in September 2019 with a full opening by September 2020.

3.4 Adult Learning

Strategic aims:

- To work with the WMCA, local authority and local stakeholders to ensure the diminishing Adult Education budget is utilised effectively.

The government has the very clear view that the new Adult Education funds should be used to provide a local resource and that in the right circumstances it can be better for funding and responsibilities to be held at a local rather than national level. This view is reflected in the recent devolution agreement for the West Midlands which provides for the full devolution of the Adult Education Budget in 2019/20.

The College’s existing Adult Skills Budget is relatively small compared to the other Birmingham and Solihull Colleges. The College needs to ensure that the community education budget for Solihull and the adult budget for Stratford are protected moving forward as in essence these budgets are already devolved.

The Spending Review in November 2015 made it clear that there is limited funding available for this budget and the priority is to fund apprenticeships. The key priorities for the College Adult Education Budget remain:

- Full time adults;
• English and maths up to GCSE level; and
• Programmes for the unemployed.

The College is currently unable to allocate all of the available Adult Education Budget without support from Subcontractors. The College is committed to reducing this dependence over the next 5 years.

Since 2010, the College has had responsibility for the Community Learning Budget which was formerly the responsibility of the Local Authority. This is delivered in over 60 community locations within Solihull to over 1,000 learners. This work is targeted at learners who would not otherwise participate in learning. Colleges will have more freedom to provide non-accredited learning. The College will agree the priorities for non-accredited work in partnership with the local authority and stakeholders.

Loans were introduced for 2013/14 to replace funding for learners at Level 3 and above for students over the age of 24. From 2016/17 all19+ with a full Level 3 also had to take out a loan. This has had a significant impact on the number of full time adults accessing the College.

3.5 Full Cost

Full Cost income is a vital component of the College’s strategy. As public funding reduces, individuals and employers will be expected to contribute more to their education and training. The College will review the curriculum offer to ensure all opportunities for Full Cost development are exploited. The College will also make every effort to transfer any provision that ceases to be eligible for Adult Skills funding to Full Cost.

A significant proportion of the work takes place in the School of Business and Management & Professional and includes professional qualifications in management, marketing and personnel. The College designs bespoke training for local employers. There also appears to be increasing numbers of students who would rather pay the full fee than take up the option of a loan.

The rest is made up from shorter programmes in specialist areas which include programmes such as holiday French, dog grooming etc. This is a key area of growth for Stratford.

3.6 Global Strategy

The College will continue to pursue opportunities to ‘internationalise’ the College. This will be in relation to the College community and to promote global perspectives throughout the curriculum. Overseas partnerships will be explored and assessed, as appropriate, in relation to its potential benefits for the College and stakeholders.
3.7 Project Funding

The College will continue to consider all opportunities for bidding for projects that support the strategic objectives. This includes both revenue and capital bids.

There is recognition that Solihull College and University Centre is financially secure, resilient and has significant reserves. The College intends to lead on projects on behalf of the other colleges to ensure funding opportunities can be maximised.

The College has been very successful in attracting ESF funding and also leads a consortium bid on behalf of the GBS colleges. More bids are planned to support the running costs of the IoT and to generate additional funding streams for the College.

3.8 Timelines and Measurement

The Strategic plan is refreshed annually in the spring term in collaboration with key stakeholders, governors and staff and approved by corporation in their July meeting.

Progress against the annual priorities is reported to governors in the autumn term and is RAG rated. Governors receive regular reports such as the monthly performance management report and the Quality Improvement Plan and have access to their own dashboard which allows in year monitoring and challenge where appropriate.