

1. PROVIDER CONTEXT

The RNN Group (the Group) is an education and training provider, meeting the needs of thousands of employers, adults and school leavers every year. The Group has sites situated within the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) and the Bassetlaw Local Enterprise Partnership (D2N2) area which includes: Rotherham College (RC); North Notts College (NNC); Dearne Valley College (DVC); University Centre Rotherham (UCR); Retford Post-16 Centre; Idle Valley and the National Fluid Power Centre (NFPC). The Group:

- Supports 11,000 learners annually across a range of 14,000 different education and training programmes and over 1,400 apprentices across a range of frameworks and standards;
- Employs more than 1,000 people
- Works with more than 600 employers and businesses;
- Has an annual turnover of £36m;
- Serves areas with economic, social and educational disadvantage.

The Group's Strategic Vision is to: *'lead innovation and skills within our communities'*. The Group's mission is: *"Through our strategic relationships with all the communities we serve, our education and training will provide exceptional opportunities for people throughout their lives. Our Centres of Excellence will be inspirational and we will be agile to the needs of our employers, stakeholders, schools and the community"*. The Group's core values are: *"We are inclusive, we have integrity, we are one team, we deliver"*.

The Group's Higher Education & Skills Strategic Plan 2022-2026 sets out five key priorities to drive forward higher education in the region:

- To increase higher education & higher level skills opportunities within the region;
- To provide a high quality educational experience that meets the needs and aspiration of students, employers and the local community to support high levels of student success;
- Develop the management and governance of higher education;
- Provide opportunities for staff to undertake research-led scholarly activities which inform curriculum planning and implementation;
- Increase student belonging, satisfaction and engagement, particularly amongst those from low participation areas to successfully overcome disadvantage barriers to achieve positive outcomes.

The Group has also recently made a commitment to the HEA Fellowship for staff. This is international recognition of a commitment to professionalism in teaching and learning in higher education and demonstrates that practice is aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF).

Only 25.1% of the population in the local area are educated to level 4 or above, compared to the national average of 38.3% (Rotherham Employment and Skills Plan, 2019 and D2N2 Local Skills Report, 2022). As the Group serves an area of economic, social and educational disadvantage, it has a strategic commitment to increasing local and regional participation in higher education (HE) as set out in its Access and Participation Plan (APP 2020/21-2024/25). The Group works closely with organisations such as UniConnect to enhance student progression into HE within South

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Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire and the Group's Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DECO) sits on the Board of the Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY).

The Group educates school leavers, employees and those re-joining the workforce, through a range of HE programmes primarily awarded by the University of Hull, Sheffield Hallam University, University of Huddersfield and Pearson, with a variety of other programmes spanning a range of different awarding organisations. The Group actively promotes the following principles across its programmes and throughout its Group network:

- A learner-centred approach that encourages active student engagement;
- Inclusive learning through the promotion of equality, diversity and equality of opportunity;
- A working partnership between students and all staff who facilitate learning;
- Learning, teaching and assessment practices that are transparent, inclusive and fair;
- Curricula that are relevant, and closely aligned with partner universities, where relevant;
- Effective mechanisms to continuously enhance the student experience;
- Motivated academic and support staff, and the provision of on-going staff development;
- HE teaching staff are actively supported and encouraged to undertake scholarly activities to ensure best educational practice are being adopted and applied;
- A high-quality learning environment.

In July 2020, executive leaders of the Group were in widening participation discussions along with Bassetlaw District Council and key employer stakeholders such as NHS Trusts Doncaster/Bassetlaw and Barnsley, key education stakeholders such as the University of Derby and Nottingham Trent University and key civic stakeholders such as the Bassetlaw Community and Voluntary Service (BCVS), with the intention to raise the higher education opportunities and aspirations for local residents. The Group's Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO) is the strategic lead and has led on the curriculum design which has a focus on higher level programmes in health, care and digital to meet the local skills gap needs and to address the lower than average percentage of residents with qualifications at level 4 or above. The DCEO has worked collaboratively with Bassetlaw District Council to design the higher level skills centre and the curriculum. The DCEO has communicated clearly and gained appropriate approval from the Group's leaders, governors, staff and potential students during all stages of the project. In February 2022, the higher level skills centre opened and the Group was the first education provider to deliver health programmes to local residents. 'The Bridge Skills Hub' is Bassetlaw Council's flagship regeneration project in Worksop town centre. This new £3.5million state-of-the-art education hub opened fully in September 2022 and has created additional higher level education opportunities for the Bassetlaw community to meet the emerging needs of local and regional employers which have not previously been available. The Skills Hub offers L3 Access to HE: Health provision, L4 Counselling, Foundation and BA Top Up degrees in childcare and health as well as higher level apprenticeship provision in Adult Care. This provides additional, local progression routes for students who wish to access HE and offers an appealing 'study at home' option which is proving to be favourable during the current cost of living crisis.

The Group transforms the lives of its students and tutors showcase this very well. The Group is proud of its Beacon nominated student support programme (2022), its Pearson Land Based Learner of the Year (2021), its Apprentice of the Year (2022), its Guild of Bricklayers learners (2021). These accolades showcase the importance placed on supporting students beyond purely the academic.

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Senior leaders and managers have made good progress in improving the quality of education. Significant progress has been made to strengthen the effectiveness of the governing board. The board comprises of individuals covering all key skillset areas including HE, and the improved effectiveness of the Board contributed to an overall effectiveness judgement of Good in the Group's most recent Ofsted inspection (Nov 2022) and good judgements across all provision types and key judgements. Inspectors reported "*leaders and managers have worked hard to improve the quality of provision that they offer to learners and apprentices*" and "*board members carefully scrutinise reports and data to ensure that they provide effective support, scrutiny and challenge, ensuring leaders maintain their strong focus on rapid and continuous improvement*".

The most recent QAA HE Review (HER) was conducted at Rotherham Group of Arts and Technology during 2014 (QAA Higher Education Review: Rotherham Group of Arts and Technology, 2014). The QAA reviewers concluded that the enhancement of student learning opportunities was to be commended, and the maintenance of academic standards of awards, offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies met UK expectations. The quality of student learning opportunities and the quality of information produced about its provision were also identified as meeting UK expectations. The report highlighted five areas of good practice and no recommendations. Previously QAA reviewed NNC and DVC under the IQER process with the review teams reporting confidence in all aspects of the reviews.

The Group recruits between 400 and 600 HE students annually and delivers higher education provision to a cohort of students which are not the UK's average HE demographic. The Group's HE student population predominantly (79%) comes from the local community; 76% of students are from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2; and over one-quarter of students (32%) declare a disability. Mature students comprise 62% of the HE population across the Group. In addition, 59% of the Group's HE students are not studying for a first degree, most are aiming instead for a sub-degree qualification. The majority of the Group's full time (FT) HE students are further education students who have progressed internally and live within the Group's catchment area. Therefore, the Group adheres to an ethos of providing accessible and affordable local classroom-focused learning in HE provision, ensuring geography and economic status should not be a barrier to accessing HE or completing a HE qualification. Table 1 below highlights the demographic make-up of the Group's HE student cohort, between 2019 to 2021:

Table 1: Internal RNN Group TRACE data

Demographic Group	% HE population 2021/22	% HE population 2020/21	% HE population 2019/20
POLAR Quintiles 1 and 2	76%	73%	75%
Mature Students	62%	69%	69%
Part time Students	33%	40%	40%
Students declaring a disability	32%	27%	24%
BAME students	15%	16%	14%
Care Leavers	0%		0.4%

The Group delivers HE provision at three campuses, with the majority of students (79%) located at the University Centre Rotherham (UCR), approximately 8% at DVC and 13% at NNC. The Group's HE provision and the opportunities it offers to its local communities are highly valued, such as the investment of £10.5 million in the construction of the UCR, a building dedicated to traditional HE and

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higher level skills provision in the Rotherham area. The Group has developed a wide portfolio of subjects to meet employer needs, student interests and the needs of the local communities at Level 4 and above which incorporates Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Diplomas (HND), Foundation Degrees (FD), Bachelors and Masters degrees as well as a variety of 'other' qualifications, awarded by a range of nationally recognised awarding bodies (RNN Group HE Curriculum Planning Level 4+).

The Group also delivers apprenticeships in collaboration with local employers but, in line with the scope of the TEF exercise, evidence relating to apprenticeships is not included in this submission.

Students have reviewed the content of this report and have been provided with opportunities to contribute to its content, particularly sections 2 and 3. The content of this report has also been reviewed and approved by the Executive and Senior Leadership Teams of the Group as appropriate for submission.

2. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

2.1 Teaching, Learning & Assessment Practices

The Group's Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy is informed by a variety of stakeholders including through students' views and experience; staff innovations and development; and employer feedback. The Strategy encompasses pedagogy and provision, curriculum, delivery, e-learning, student affairs, professional development, reporting, monitoring and review, quality and standards. The Strategy is the primary resource developed and devised for student engagement and academic success for the Group's students and was regularly reviewed and amended during the pandemic in response to government and awarding organisation guidelines.

HE teaching staff (tutors) are experts in their fields, they are carefully recruited to ensure they possess both the appropriate academic qualifications and industry expertise to deliver excellence in teaching, learning and assessment. Tutors design and sequence the curriculum so that students acquire relevant new knowledge and skills from solid foundations. They establish students' starting points accurately and use these effectively to plan appropriate learning and support. For full time students, this is reflected in overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching which is 1.9% above the Group's benchmark for the four years in scope (OfS TEF dashboard data, 2022) and satisfaction with the quality of assessment which is above the benchmark by 6.4%. It is further reflected via student attendance which remains very high at 89% and is consistently above the Group average (for all HE, FE and other students combined). Satisfaction of part-time (PT) students with teaching and assessment is disappointing based on the aggregate NSS data which is below benchmark, but is based on the views of only 60 students across 4 years. Internal review has shown that the dissatisfaction is primarily located within the FdA Early Childhood Studies part time evening programme, comprising predominantly of mature female students who were in full time employment and who were juggling domestic and caring responsibilities. Despite a personalised approach to learning and academic development, these students found it particularly difficult to engage with online learning during the pandemic. Satisfaction for current cohorts of students is much higher (RNN Group Induction Survey, 2022).

The results from the National Student Survey were below that of the previous year, with overall satisfaction at 63.16%, which was 13% below the national benchmark. The overriding reason for this drop in satisfaction, was due to the feedback provided by the students on the BSc Computing

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and Systems Development course, where overall satisfaction for the final year students was only 16.67%. The reasons for this were twofold; firstly, like many institutions across the education sector, the Group has experienced issues retaining suitably qualified computing staff with particular specialist technical experience, so students have experienced a lack of continuity; secondly computing students struggled to engage with online delivery during periods of lockdown, citing reduced access to specialist software within the UCR computing suite as an issue. Interventions implemented to address this are outlined in detail in section 2.8 Student Voice, below.

The Group publicises and implements principles and procedures for assessment that are explicit, valid and reliable. The assessment of students is inclusive, transparent and promotes effective learning to support student success. The timing of assessment is well planned and enables effective and appropriate measurement of students' achievement of the intended learning outcomes, which is reviewed at the end of each semester. The Group has a maximum time for return of assessment feedback of 20 working days. The timeliness of feedback is essential to enable students to use the feedback to improve their next piece of assessed work. Over the previous four years, NSS student satisfaction with assessment and feedback is 82.5% which is above benchmark (TEF Data Dashboard, 2022). The quality of teaching and feedback is acknowledged by students during focus groups who report "The teaching and feedback are always swift and well-written. The feedback is always genuine with constructive ways to improve work rather than trying to meet a criteria. It feels personal to each learner." The Group measures the effectiveness of assessment methodology through value-added measures such as improvement to high grades, reviews of degree classification outcomes, employability skills and student satisfaction and progression.

The student experience measure for 'Assessment and feedback' for full-time students has been consistently strong for the last 4 years, being cumulatively 6.4% above benchmark. This trend is replicated for almost all groups of students, including students from deprivation quintiles 1 and 2 and students who declare a disability, and is clearly a key strength in the student experience. This reflects the impact of the supportive and developmental nature of feedback that students receive commencing from the very start their of programme as evidenced by a 97% satisfaction score in the internal Group survey for the question "I am completing work and getting useful feedback" (RNN Group Induction Survey, 2002). One of the key features of the assessment feedback, as noted by External Examiners, is the acknowledgement of employability skills and assessors' support on how to develop these skills further. For example, "this is a valued programme that provides students with a well-supported progression route into the professions" (EE report, BA (Hons) Education and Professional Development, 2021/22). This is also demonstrated in the positive progression data 'Student Outcomes', particularly for part-time students, which is 6.3% above benchmark.

The assessment process is thorough and supportive. Formative feedback across all subjects leaves students knowing exactly what they need to do in order to progress and this is consistently praised in External Examiner (EE) reports. For example, in the EE report for BA Education & Professional Development course, the EE complimented the feedback stating that "the assessors provided detailed feedback that offered clear assessment decisions and areas for development and the assessment feedback is linked directly to the learning outcomes. There was a clear distinction within the assessment instruction and the assessor's feedback regarding the change in the level from FHEQ5 to FHEQ6 and the assessor highlighted success and areas for improvement", (EE report, BA (Hons) Educational and Professional Development, 2021/22).

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Another example of outstanding assessment feedback and practice, highlighted through External Examiner reports came from the EE report for the FdSc/BSc Sports Science that stated “there is evidence of excellent, consistent feedback across modules and tutors (this is well above that seen at three other local HEIs offering similar sport provision)”, (EE report, FdSc/BSc Sport Science, 2021/22).

The Group places a particular emphasis on an inclusive curriculum, with approaches to teaching and learning that reflects this inclusivity. As outlined in its Access and Participation Plan, the Group has a commitment to equality of opportunity and an approach to teaching and learning that reflects this commitment. The OfS TEF data dashboard shows greater satisfaction with teaching for students who have reported a disability and students from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2. This is testament to the Group’s commitment to making teaching accessible for all, including under-represented groups, which is at the heart of the Group’s ethos, vision and values.

All staff who teach on HE programmes have extensive links with industry or engage with relevant scholarly activity which helps to inform their teaching and ultimately enhances the experience of the students. Examples include:

- FdA/BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies – As part of the Work Based Learning module, tutors work closely with local employers, including nurseries and pre-school settings, using visits to observe students in the workplace. These links with employers ensure staff are conversant with changing industry knowledge and practices. This knowledge is used to constantly review the curriculum and ensure teaching and learning is current and up to date. Such collaborations within this sector, have ensured programme content reflects the knowledge and skills that employers require from graduates. Very positive employer feedback has informed the successful re-validation of both programmes delivered within this subject area. This qualification has been further developed following on from the government’s education recovery in early years curriculum to include speech and language delay, personal social and emotional development, physical development and readiness for the next stage of education to ensure students are aware of the lost and missed learning this group of children have experienced.
- FdA Tourism and Hospitality Management – The Curriculum Team Leader for this programme has completed their MSc in Sustainable Tourism. This has enabled the programme to be re-contextualised, in response to student feedback, with a sustainable approach to the industry as a key theme;
- BA (Hons) Popular Music, Performance and Production – All staff who teach on this programme are employed in the industry of music performance and production. The course leader is employed by Sheffield Theatres as the conductor at The Lyceum Theatre, which hosts nationally acclaimed productions. Other members of the teaching team are performing musicians or music production professionals, working in a self-employed capacity, in addition to their teaching commitments;
- FdA Professional Practice in Health and Social Care – The Programme Leader for this course has completed a PhD in Psychology, demonstrating a high level of academic scholarly activity. As part of this scholarly activity, the course leader has also had peer reviewed work published in a number of scholarly journals, including in the Journal of International Therapeutic Communities;
- BA (Hons) Theatre, Acting and Performance – The teaching staff have extensive industry links, which enable the use of a wide range of guest speakers to be utilised, which ultimately provide employment opportunities within the local industry. Industry links include: Radio Sheffield; Rotherham Youth Theatre and ‘A Mind Apart’. Students have utilised these links to set up their

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own theatre company, which has been widely publicised in the local media. Furthermore, a member of the teaching team has recently achieved a PhD in Theatre and Acting, providing an example of additional academic scholarly activity in this subject area.

All new tutors employed to teach on HE programmes must meet the Recognised Teacher Statutes framework, which is structured in line with validating universities. For entry by academic qualification, the tutor's qualification must be relevant to the discipline and should be at least at Honours level, but preferably Masters level. For entry by experience, staff should possess no less than three years' relevant teaching experience including sustained engagement in relevant scholarly activity or relevant professional qualifications or no fewer than three years' other relevant professional/ industrial experience.

In response to the pandemic lockdown, staff quickly moved teaching, learning and assessment online using Google Classroom. All HE provision was moved to a distance learning format and assessments modified, in line with the awarding university/body guidelines. All assessments for university validated programmes were reviewed and where validated assessment activities were not possible, assessment tasks were adjusted in line with approval from the designated academic contacts. This meant that despite the difficult circumstances, teaching, learning and assessment was able to continue for all students. Where students faced digital poverty, the Group responded quickly to provide them with the necessary IT equipment to allow them to fully engage with teaching and learning. The success of this transition is demonstrated in the continuation and achievement data (TEF data dashboard) for the years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which were in excess of pre-pandemic data levels. This upward trajectory in pre-pandemic indicators, is further reflected in the Group's Higher Education, Self Evaluation Document (2022).

The positive actions taken to modify teaching in line with the pandemic restrictions, is further endorsed by the very positive NSS feedback from full-time students in year three of the TEF dashboard data. In addition, positive feedback was received from both the students themselves, as well as external moderators, regarding the flexible response in the move to on-line learning and assessment which was well-planned, synchronous and asynchronous to meet personalised needs. Specific comments from the External Examiners complemented the teaching team on their rapid and effective response to the pandemic, for example, External Examiner identified the staff team as "dedicated academic staff, who managed to facilitate a final year (online) exhibition for the graduation cohort", they believed this to be a 'magnificent achievement, one which enabled students to be successful in achieving learning outcomes'. (Creative Studies EE Report, 2020). This feedback and the response to assessment activity, in light of the restrictions was reflected across all the Group's HE provision.

Distance and independent learning during the pandemic and beyond were generally well received by most students, particularly the full-time younger students, which is reflected in the very positive year 3 NSS data, which is above benchmark in all areas, significantly for the quality of teaching, assessment and feedback and academic support. However, a number of the more mature part-time students did find the lack of face to face tuition more challenging, which is also reflected in the year 3 NSS data (OfS TEF data dashboard). However, the positive continuation data for part-time students in year 4, despite the restrictions, is testament to the hard work and flexibility of staff and students, during this period, to ensure that these part-time students succeeded on their programmes and in to positive destinations..

To enhance the student experience and to put teaching and learning into context, a number of visits are used to enhance learning and provide the opportunity to put learning into context. Some examples are as follows:

- FdA Tourism and Hospitality students visit Manchester Airport to gain a strategic overview of the airport's management structure. This Airport in particular is a key strategic contributor to the travel and tourism industry in terms of how they have responded to changes in the tourism market over time, focusing in particular on the airport's green strategy, thereby providing exceptional learning opportunities for students;
- Initial teacher training students take part in collaborative conferences at the University of Hull to network with their peers and widen their knowledge of the education sector;
- HNC/D Animal Management students work alongside the Yorkshire Wildlife Park to study species of animals outside of those in the Group's small zoo and farm collections;
- Employability skills are seamlessly embedded into FdA/BA Sports Science programmes to raise aspirations and maximise progression into employment; for example, students are required to attend a mock interview assessment with a panel comprising Managers, course tutors and sector industry specialists;
- FdA Professional Practice, Health & Social Care students work in a series of clinical settings to compliment the academic and theoretical elements of their programme and to develop their understanding of the wide range of opportunities within the care sector;
- Creative Arts students work on collaborative film and photography exhibitions at the Wentworth Woodhouse historic building;
- Students from Theatre, Acting & Performance and Theatrical Hair & Media Make-up work on live productions at local theatres;
- Theatrical Media Make-up students work in collaboration with the NHS to deliver enhanced simulation training which involves students creating Moulage makeup to support the training of medical professionals and creating the visual symptoms of medical conditions to allow for accurate diagnosis by trainee Doctors.

2.2 Curriculum Development

The Group HE Strategy 2022-2026 focuses on providing students with a high quality, flexible and diverse higher level curriculum that is accessible for all and meets the skills and needs of the South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw communities. To achieve this a wide range of employer forums are utilised to inform the curriculum planning process. This ensures the curriculum offered by the Group has a clear focus on developing the knowledge and skills students need to gain managerial level employment or move on to further study in the industry or sector they are interested in. HE Leaders and managers work effectively to plan and provide a curriculum that meets the needs of individuals, the local community, employers, local authorities, HE authorities and regional priorities. Labour Market Intelligence and the SYMCA & D2N2 Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP's) are also used to inform curriculum planning, which ensures the curriculum is both relevant and equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to move into the regional and national graduate labour markets.

Employers make a significant contribution to programme design through the validation process, which enhances the student experience. Local employers contribute to programme design through focus groups, highlighting the skills gaps in the relevant sector. This is an ongoing process with employers and students contributing to the annual review process, which informs programme

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modifications and in some cases re-validation of the whole programme. This process has led to employers contributing to the delivery of programmes, either by contributing as guest speakers or providing students with live briefs to use as a focal point for research projects. For example, local employers, such as Pyronix, Peoplesafe, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and Growtraffic were consulted during the shaping of the BSc Computing and Systems Development programme, to ensure that students were equipped with the skills required to gain employment in the sector. These employers also committed to work with the Group to provide live briefs, to help provide students with assessment and expected skill standards they should be developing whilst on programme. The same approach has been utilised in the validation of all HE programmes, that have been validated through partner universities, to ensure the appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies form part of the curriculum.

A key strength of the Group's teaching is the links with employers and the incorporation of real projects in collaboration with local employers or travelling abroad to broaden skills and knowledge. For example, FdA Graphic Design students collaborate with the Sheffield design agency Eleven Design to create exhibitions for a project which focused on typography inspired by Rotherham's signage and buildings both historical and modern. The exhibition came from a live brief from the design agency that the students worked towards to create their own interpretations. In addition to employer links, the creative industries curriculum area collaborate extensively between courses using visits both at home and abroad to work together on creative productions, working with local employers, such as Radio Sheffield, Rotherham Youth Theatre and 'A Mind Apart'. Through such collaborations with employers, a significant proportion of the Group's students have progressed into local graduate employment, instigated by the employer links established through the work-based elements of their course. This is evidenced through the Progression data (OfS data dashboard, 2022), for the Design, Creative and Performing Arts subject areas, where progression rates are above sector benchmarks, in particular the Creative Arts and Design sectors, where the Progression rates are materially above the sector benchmark.

Every academic year, each programme goes through an Annual Monitoring Review, in line with the annual monitoring cycle of the Group's collaborative partners. This ensures each programme is annually reviewed in terms of student achievement and progression, student feedback and external examiners reports. Through this process, along with student module evaluations, programme modifications are proposed, to ensure each programme is compliant with the Group code and that the curriculum remains current and relevant to students.

2.5 Support for Students

The Group has smaller class sizes than the norm in HE, which is pivotal in providing personalised teaching and learning and is a key strategic priority. Typically, students work in groups of 10-15 supported by a tutor with a recognised teaching qualification, technical expertise and industry experience. For some students, this is a key reason to study HE at the Group. HE students receive a minimum of one-hour personal academic support from their tutor each week. This personalised approach contributes to a high level of student engagement with their studies and promotes a culture of active commitment throughout their course.

Surveys confirm this one-on-one support is highly valued by students. The TEF data dashboard shows satisfaction with academic support, is 0.4% above benchmark. This is further supported by internal survey data, which showed satisfaction with study skills support at 91% (RNN Group End of

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Year Survey, 2022) and further supported during focus groups, with students reporting “The course really challenges students creatively and pushes them to achieve their best as well as push them out of their comfort zone to achieve the best work they can whilst offering stability and support. Students are always engaged and always ask questions which may change a perspective and broaden their thinking”. The Group provides students with a comprehensive HE tutorial programme, with each HE student having access to a weekly group tutorial programme, which provides academic and study skills support. In addition, each HE student is given access to an individual tutorial programme. The Group effectively utilises a Student Progress Review (SPR) process, which is used to identify students who are at risk of leaving their programme, or not completing their programme. Students identified as being at risk of non-completion are provided with additional pastoral and academic support from the HE Achievement Coach. This role is dedicated entirely to supporting HE students who are at risk of not completing their programme, or have significant support needs. Particular attention is given to students who have been identified in the Group’s Access and Participation Plan as having a continuation and achievement gap. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the SPR process continued and a specific emphasis was placed upon pastoral support for students who were studying from home, or were experiencing financial or digital poverty.

Additional academic support is provided by the Group’s library services. Summer tutorial sessions are provided to students who are internally progressing from Level 3 programmes to Level 4 programmes, to support them as they move in to a higher-level educational environment. This transition programme is called ‘HE study demystified’ and the sessions consider the purpose of ‘academic’ work, the locating and appraisal of reliable ‘scholarly’ sources, the basics of Harvard referencing and the fundamentals of academic writing. The summer schools are also extended to external applicants before they commence their HE programmes. Students are also given the opportunity to re-visit this programme, once they have started on their course. This initiative began in 2016, is integral to retaining students in their first year of study. This process has been developed further, where returning students take a refresher tutorial programme on research and writing skills during the summer to reinforce good study skills before the start of each new academic year. As the Group traditionally recruits around 75% of its students from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2 and around 50% of its student population are mature students, returning to education after an extensive period away from education, these summer schools are an essential tool in providing these students with the confidence and a basic grounding in academic skills before returning to HE. This process has been instrumental in securing good continuation rates for both full time and part time undergraduates, which are consistently above numerical thresholds (OfS Student Outcomes Data Dashboard, 2022)

2.6 Continuous Professional Development for Staff

Continuous professional development (CPD) at the RNN Group is excellent. Tutors benefit from a wide range of internal CPD and external partner university and awarding organisation events, which address a range of teaching competencies. The focus of this development schedule is aimed at developing the teaching and pedagogic practice of staff who specifically teach on HE programmes. Workshops typically involve external academics as well as employers, providing a forum for sharing good practice and ensuring the knowledge and skills that students require to progress into employment or management roles are embedded into their courses.

Training events support staff in all aspects of their practice and range from the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) to the development of pedagogical skills as well as ensuring staff remain

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up to date with industry standard competencies and can reflect current practice within their sector. A key part of this process is to allocate CPD days to all HE teaching staff, to ensure industry standards are maintained and are reflected in their teaching. Inspectors, during the Ofsted visit commented positively on this aspect of the Group's CPD, reporting "staff take part in frequent industrial updating to keep their vocational knowledge and practice current" (Ofsted, Nov 2022). Developing teaching practice around the VLE and the Google suite of products has been particularly relevant during and since the pandemic, to ensure the student experience has been maintained to a high standard. This enables the teaching staff to deliver a relevant curriculum, which addresses a wide range of teaching styles, aimed at maximising student learning. This excellent industry expertise is recognised by students, who comment "a lot of if not all staff are industry professionals in their own right and have worked within their fields before becoming teachers. They possess a lot of inside knowledge that the internet or YouTube videos couldn't help you with; that being small tricks of the trade. This then helps further develop professional practice and allows students a sense of security when attempting to venture out into the working world".

The Group operates a peer observation process, that continued throughout the pandemic. The peer observation process is recognised by staff and students in playing a valuable role in improving the quality of HE teaching and learning and the student experience. This process allows teaching staff to observe fellow practitioners and share good practice, as well as identify areas for development. The value of this process to tutors is clear, based on the depth and detail provided by observers on the HE Peer Observation documentation. This form of scholarly activity, as well as developing their own practice, has provided a template for professional development activity within the HE teaching community across the Group. Areas of good practice that have been identified over recent academic years include the following:

- Effective use of stretch and challenge, through effective questioning, which supports students in the development of higher knowledge and understanding;
- Students were effectively directed to towards independent learning and self-directed study, so students were able to structure their own learning;
- Appropriate pace of the sessions kept students engaged throughout;
- Effective use of the Google Classroom (VLE), creates an additional dimension to the teaching and learning on the course;
- The teacher was able to identify opportunities for students to engage with a critical thinking approach to their studies;
- Clear links were made to employability, which were clearly contextualised in the teaching being observed.

Currently, 60% of the HE academic staff hold a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education, 8% hold a Level 5 Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector qualification and an additional 16% hold a Certificate in Education and 6% hold a degree with Qualified Teacher Status or BA Education & Training. The remaining 10% have extensive industry experience and are currently working towards their teaching qualification. The Group actively encourages and supports its staff to undertake higher degrees, 32% of staff currently hold a Master's Degree in their specialist subject with staff undertaking Masters programmes having 50% of their tuition fees paid. The Group currently has five additional staff currently studying for a MA degree. Additionally, two HE teaching staff have doctorates within the field of the subjects they teach. This gives academic staff opportunities to become more engaged in current theoretical and practical studies that they, in turn, have brought into the classroom for the betterment of their students. For staff with FE-recognised teaching

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qualifications wanting to develop their HE pedagogy, the Group supports up to 75% of tuition fees to undertake a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Most staff choosing this development opportunity do so with the Group's own Teacher Education provision.

The Group has also recently made a commitment to the HEA Fellowship for staff. This is international recognition of a commitment to professionalism in teaching and learning in higher education and demonstrates that practice is aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). The Group is working with another FE provider which will facilitate improved academic collaboration between HE staff.

All new staff are provided with a comprehensive induction and, if relevant, specific guidance to teaching in HE. Mentoring support is also available through both programme teams and the Quality Improvement Practitioner Team. The Group uses a bespoke teaching observation scheme that has been designed for vocational HE and is fully aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) (Advance HE). Teaching observations are used to encourage staff to further reflect and improve on their practice, giving appropriate attention to the knowledge and skills specific to teaching at higher levels. Students report that their tutors are highly knowledgeable, committed and experienced practitioners who make a positive contribution to their learning experience. The QAA HER team concluded that the "wide-ranging opportunities provided to academic staff to develop learning and teaching practices informed by the reflection and evaluation of professional practice is good practice".

Tutors are experts in their fields. For example, all tutors on Counselling & Therapeutic Practice programmes are qualified to BSc and/or MSc in Counselling Practice, are current National Health Service (NHS) and private practice practitioners and are members of the BACP professional body for counselling. All tutors use their significant knowledge and expertise to improve the sequencing of the curriculum, inform their teaching and enhance the student experience. Tutors on Beauty Therapy programmes are qualified to Level 5 in their subject specialisms, have been supported to undertake CPD to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise in up to date emerging clinical and non-clinical beauty therapy techniques. They have also presented at skills workshops to showcase their outstanding industry skills to employers and staff at other education institutions.

Tutors across most curriculum make very good use of the Group's Employer Academies to improve the design, development and delivery of HE programmes. For example, Sports Science students have access to new technologies in exercise and fitness via the Rotherham Titans Employer Academy; Engineering students attend master classes at the National Fluid Power Centre in specialist hydraulics to develop their skills to a higher. Tutors in Hair & Media Make up received an Association of Colleges Beacon Award commendation for the Edge Award for Excellence in Real World Learning for using "live brief employer assessment". Tutors use this research, innovation, expertise, professional practice and employer engagement well to ensure students receive outstanding academic experience for its students.

2.7 Learning Environment including Digital Resources

NSS feedback for learning resources, is broadly in-line with benchmark data, with 74.5% satisfaction. Internal survey data (RNN Group end of year survey, 2022), echoes this with 77.7% satisfaction with IT resources. A strategic approach and an effective strategy for providing and managing good quality and sustainable learning resources has been implemented and promoted amongst staff, students

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and other stakeholders. This shared understanding coupled with significant investment has resulted in improvements to learning environments that provide every student with an equal and effective opportunity to achieve their intended learning outcomes. This is particularly the case for the UCR, which is a purpose built and dedicated HE campus.

Capital investment in HE programmes is reviewed on an annual basis. The OfS Capital Fund is allocated to different curriculum area areas each year, ensuring all areas get appropriate investment. A large proportion of investment has been made in digital resources, as well as clinical resources to support the healthcare curriculum and creating artistic studios to support Art and Design programmes. These resources are highly valued by students who report “the resources that the University provides are brilliant, for example, cameras and other resources are high quality and allow students to be prepared for working with industry-standard equipment. This allows great support whilst trying to work throughout the course and really helps set you up as you move forward into the industry”.

Each floor of the UCR building has a large social space with quiet study pods to allow for social and/or study opportunities for students. HE leaders and managers worked with student focus groups and the final version of the social learning spaces were informed from student feedback and research into good practice. The construction budget allocated funding to these proposals and the projects were developed in the new and innovative facility that opened for the academic year 2018/19.

In response to COVID-19, learning and assessment was transferred over to online Google Classroom platforms. This meant despite the difficult circumstances, teaching, learning and assessment was able to continue for all students. Where students faced digital poverty issues, the Group responded quickly to provide them with the necessary IT requirements, with some also receiving specialist software to allow all them to fully engage with teaching and learning, at no cost. The provision of these IT resources enabled students to continue to have a high-quality learning experience, despite being unable to access the resources on campus.

The Group maintained its Google Reference College Status in 2022, (only 9 other Colleges have received this to date), which is awarded for the outstanding use of technology to drive positive learning outcomes and recognises the Group’s use of Google Workspace to promote innovation in education. This led to the Group being invited to showcase its digital journey at British Educational Training & Technology Show (BETT) 2022. Currently, over 255 staff members have gained Certified Google Educator Level 1 status, with 25 also achieving level 2. The Group currently has three certified staff with a further five currently working towards becoming Google Coaches.

Very good use has been made of the Group’s partnership with Google Education and C-Learning to enhance the implementation of the curriculum. Several Digital Technical Assistants and Google GoTo roles have been created to support curriculum areas to use Google Classroom to extend learning beyond the classroom which students enthusiastically engaged with. Tutors have added formative assessments, interactive questions to presentations, video links and theoretical research links to set high expectations and improve student focus and participation. These resources proved invaluable in the response to the COVID-19 crisis with students speaking positively about the quality of online support offered to them.

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The Group provides a large amount of professional level resource for its Engineering students. The students benefit from industry-standard hydraulic, pneumatic and electronic equipment. The equipment has been supplied by over 60 partner companies, including: HYDAC Technology Ltd, Danfoss Power Solution, HUSCO International, Sun Hydraulics Ltd, Kawasaki, and Shell.

The Group boasts its own theatre, where the BA (Hons) Theatre, Acting and Performance students annually showcase their talents to fee-paying audiences. This is supported by a rehearsal studio to enable performance students to rehearse and practice productions. Students from the BA (Hons) Music, Performance and Production course are also able to access fully equipped studios for rehearsals and are also able to use the theatre setting for musical productions. In addition, the UCR has an outdoor amphitheater, to enable students on performance related programmes to showcase their productions in an outdoor setting.

Students on digital programmes benefit from industry standard resources, such as gaming specification hardware, which is supported by software which is widely used in the industry, such as Zbrush, Substance Suite and Maya. BSc Computing and Systems Development students are provided with access to the latest software and hardware technology that is replaced with new equipment every two years. Significant investment has been made in resources for Media and Graphic Design students, including the installing of industry standard Apple iMac's, along with the licenses for the Adobe suite, which enable students to access software packages, not only in the UCR but also from home, which is a significant investment in resources to support these courses. In addition, recent investment in Media and Photography equipment, enables students to have hi-definition editing resources, on location and away from studios in the UCR.

The Group has a wide range of other specialist resources to support its diverse HE portfolio. At the DVC campus, Animal Management students have access to a large and varied animal collection with over 250 animals. These include large and small exotic mammals, companion mammals, aquatics, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, farm livestock, horses and avian species.

The UCR has a modular library with furniture that can easily be moved for private study and group work usage. The library was developed in close consultation with HE students and was opened for their sole utilisation. Following significant investment, all library services have been updated to offer a self-service provision, providing students with access to physical resources out of normal working hours. Students also have access to the Library's databases, search engines, online archives and e-resources to support them in their studies and research. This has resulted in an increase in library usage from the same point of October last year and a variance in the way the library is used by the students.

2.8 Student Voice

The Group regards its relationship with its students as one of a partnership, ensuring their views and experiences inform the Group's quality systems, with the purpose of understanding and enhancing all aspects of the learning experience. The Group adheres to a shared vision of enhancement, responsibility and academic pursuit. It recognises the views of students, individually and collectively, should inform quality systems with the purpose of improving the student educational experience both for current and future cohorts. The Group is committed to involving students in its planning, decision making, and quality enhancement and assurance processes in relation to teaching and learning.

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To ensure students have a positive start to their studies, the Group starts the academic year with an induction survey. Overall satisfaction at 85% in 2022/23 is above that of the previous year. Satisfaction for questions relating to feeling happy and settled, high expectations and assessment regulations are consistently above 95% (RNN Group, HE Induction Survey, 2022).

Post-induction and end of academic year surveys are also conducted to ensure HE students are offered multiple opportunities to provide feedback on the whole of their learning experience. The HE Achievement Coach meets with the HE Student Voice Forum three times per year to discuss the feedback from these surveys which is used to inform the ongoing development of HE provision. These forums pay particular attention to HE curriculum design; learning experience; assessment and feedback; guidance and support and facilities. Minutes of meetings demonstrate students speak positively about “being challenged by tutors to push themselves to learn new skills and work independently”; “the flexibility and freedom offered to HE students to choose the context of their work”; “assessment deadlines being realistic and manageable”; and “quality of materials on Google classroom”. The students also reported the HE Student Forum “provides a great opportunity to have their voice heard” (Minutes of HE Student Forum, Dec 2021).

Progress has been made to re-establish the Group’s student union and student governor presence, as this was an area that suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic. A student union election was held in autumn 2022 which led to 15 students being democratically elected to positions on the student union committee. This committee feeds back to leaders and managers on teaching and learning, student support, student experience and facilities. Closer collaboration with the Clerk to the governing body has resulted in two students being appointed as student governors. One attended the National Student Governors Conference in November 2022 and works closely with leaders and managers and the student union to influence change. The Group now employs approximately 30 students as ‘Student Ambassadors’, students went through a competitive recruitment process to obtain these paid roles which report directly to the Marketing & Recruitment Team. All successful applicants received a comprehensive induction to prepare them for their roles which involve contributing to the design and delivery of activities and events.

Each student has a formal opportunity to feedback to module leaders on their experiences so that they can evaluate the effectiveness of the module. This is coordinated by the HE Coordinator, with individual module feedback provided to programme leads. The module feedback is used in multiple ways to inform any minor and major modifications. Module feedback has informed minor modifications to the BA Media, Moving Image and Photography, BA Music, Performance and Production and the BA Business Management programmes.

The active approach to gathering student feedback and coordinating the HE Student Voice agenda within the Group has continued to evolve, with student representation of all courses at most levels. Feedback has been used to make amendments to on-line delivery models, including where students were experiencing problems in accessing teaching. The subsequent amendments were particularly effective for students who were balancing work commitments with part-time study. Reviewing progress on the commitments outlined in the Access and Participation Plan is now an integral part of the Student Voice process.

The 2021/22 NSS data was disappointing in comparison to national benchmarks. Overall satisfaction was 10% below the national benchmark for the sector. The number of responses for the majority of

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provision did not meet the thresholds to be included in the Group's published data. One programme which did meet the threshold was the BSc (Hons) Computing, this programme has significantly affected the Group's overall score. The reasons for this were twofold; firstly, like many colleges, the Group has experienced issues retaining suitability qualified computing staff, so students have experienced a lack of continuity; secondly computing students struggled to engage with online delivery during periods of lockdown, citing reduced access to specialist software within the UCR computing suite as an issue. To address this, when lockdown restrictions were lifted, computing students were among the first to return to full time face to face sessions to enable them to access specialist resources; a market force supplement has been added to salaries of both existing and new roles to maximise staff retention; the services of specialist computing recruitment agencies have been utilised to attract suitability qualified staff swiftly; and staff have been offered access to additional CPD opportunities.

3. STUDENT OUTCOMES

3.1 Attainment

Tables 2 and 3 set out the Group's OfS Overall Student Outcomes data over the four year TEF period. These continuation, completion and progression outcomes reflect the focus on ensuring students receive an outstanding experience both in terms of teaching and learning and student support.

The majority of the Group's provision falls under the category "other undergraduate" (UG). The significant majority of outcomes are well above threshold for continuation, completion and progression for both full time and part time students. Continuation and completion for full time first degree students has been impacted by the effects of the COVID pandemic, where students struggled with the challenge to commit to three years of study.

Table 2, OfS Overall Student Outcomes Data for full time students, 2022

Level	Continuation			Completion			Progression		
	RNN Group Indicator Value	Numerical threshold %	RNN Group % above	RNN Group Indicator Value	Numerical threshold %	RNN Group % above	RNN Group Indicator Value	Numerical threshold %	RNN Group % above
Other UG	79.3	75.0	99.0	75.0	65.0	100	46.7	45.0	65.4
1st degree	78.1	80.0	24.2	75.0	75.0	49.2	62.4	60.0	66.9
PGCE	86.3	85.0	58.3	87.2	85.0	63.1	Low	Low	Low

Table 3, OfS Overall Student Outcomes Data for part time students, 2022

Level	Continuation			Completion			Progression		
	RNN Group Indicator Value	Numerical threshold %	RNN Group % above	RNN Group Indicator Value	Numerical threshold %	RNN Group % above	RNN Group Indicator Value	Numerical threshold %	RNN Group % above
Other UG	80.7	55.0	100	79.4	55.0	100	74.6	65.0	97.9
1 ST degree	Low	Low	Low	89.7	40.0	100	Low	low	Low
PGCE	78.4	75.0	67.3	86.5	75.0	97.8	Low	Low	Low

3.2 Continuation

The continuation rate of 79% for students on full time programmes is in line with the benchmark value. The rate for students on part time programmes at 81% and is materially above benchmark (OfS TEF data dashboard, 2022). This strong continuation for part time students can be linked to flexible timetables which accommodate students' work commitments. This shows a solid quality of education in terms of keeping students on programme who subsequently go on to successfully achieve their qualification, with performance comparable to similar providers within the sector. This is particularly impressive when the characteristics of the student population are taken into consideration, with 73% of the student population residing in POLAR quintiles 1 and 2 and living in a relatively deprived region, with the associated challenges associated with high levels of deprivation and with little or no previous family experience of HE.

A number of interventions have been put in place to close this gap and support students from these under-represented groups, including a targeted bursary and targeted interventions through the Student Progress Review process. The positive impact of these interventions are reflected in the latest internal Continuation data (RNN Group, Internal TRACE data), which shows Continuation for students with a disability in 2021/22 was 80% (1% above the overall HE student population) and was 79.59% (0.59%) above the overall student population. It is also worth noting that the OfS denominator for Asian students continuing with their education, is only 30, so is a very small sample number.

Induction and freshers' activities ensure students have an exciting introduction to college life, and are aware of, and quickly start developing, the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to prepare them for their next steps. Employer master classes are delivered by industry experts such as Wella, Equans (low carbon energy solutions company) and Rotherham Titans to highlight the importance of employability skills development. A series of residential trips and visits develop students' independence and resilience. Students enjoy fun activities such as: escape rooms; inflatable assault course activities; bush craft activities; karaoke; photo booths; dragon boat racing and rocket league competitions. These activities are valued by students and help them establish friendship groups and develop a sense of belonging to the College and their RNN HE student community (RNN Group Induction Survey, 2022).

Student Progress Reviews (SPR), as highlighted on page 10, section 2.5 Support for Students above take place at two points each academic year and identify student who are at risk of either leaving or not achieving their programme. Students who are at risk are referred to the HE Achievement Coach to discuss appropriate and differentiated academic and/or pastoral support and intervention strategies. This additional continues until the student is deemed to be no longer at risk.

3.2 Completion

The overall completion rate of 75.0% for students on full time programmes and 79.7% for students on part time programmes (TEF data dashboard, 2022) is broadly in line with benchmarks. This is as a result of a combination of the excellent teaching and assessment support described above. Additionally, the wide range of academic and pastoral support available to all HE students enables them to successfully complete their qualifications.

Completion rates for full-time students who are 31 or over are materially below the benchmark rate. Focus Groups were held to ascertain potential reasons for this, where feedback identified students were struggling to juggle domestic responsibilities, alongside work and academic commitments, which led to them leaving their programmes early. The substantial improvement from Year 3 at 67.6% to Year 4 at 81.4% is as a result of the excellent use of the SPR process to implement additional pastoral and academic support for the remaining students to ensure they were able to successfully complete their programme.

3.3 Progression

Overall OfS progression data shows all types of HE provision are above the threshold for progression of students into professional or management level employment after graduation (OfS Data, 2022). This is a clear and positive indication that the Group's graduates are developing the appropriate skills to move into relevant employment and their course is preparing them for the relevant industry/sector. This is further supported via outstanding rates of satisfaction in internal surveys, where satisfaction is at 100% for questions relating to the importance of developing the appropriate work skills (RNN Group Induction Survey, 2022).

Progression rates for part-time students is 6.8% above the benchmark. The positive progression rates for part-time students is a reflection on how finely attuned the curriculum is to the local employer market and the way it is design around local LMI in both the Rotherham and Bassetlaw areas, with extensive use of employer engagement used to inform the HE curriculum offer. The majority of part time students are in employment and in a number of cases are sponsored by their employers. Therefore, the part-time curriculum has been designed to complement the needs of local employers. This is particularly the case for Engineering provision, which has consisted of Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas, which are the preference of local and regional employers, such as Engie, Europa Engineering and Brunton Shaw. The curriculum has been designed and sequenced in consultation with local employers to enable the students to progress to graduate level careers with their employers. A similar model is used to design other part-time programmes, such as the BA Early Childhood Studies and FdA Learning Support, which is designed and validated in collaboration with local employers to meet the needs of the local education and early years market.

Progression into employment for full-time students is broadly in line with benchmark. Males in particular have a positive progression into graduate employment, being 5.6% above the benchmark. A high proportion of students enrolled on to Childhood Studies, Learning Support and Education

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programmes are female and although the majority of these students continue in employment with their employers on completing their qualifications, and while they may have increased responsibility will not necessarily have changed roles. Therefore, they are most likely to have self-reported that they are not in graduate jobs as they secured their positions prior to completing their HE qualification.

Progression into employment is excellent for students on Counselling and Therapeutic Programmes. Tutors' very strong links with employers and the sequencing and design of the work placement element of the programme mean that most students progress into positive graduate level employment. Destinations for this cohort of students include: Assistant Mental Health Practitioners; Counsellor for South West Yorkshire NHS Trust; School Mental Health Support Worker Rotherham and Counsellor for Barnsley Mind.

Progression into employment for graduates on the Sport and Exercise Performance programme is also strong. Tutors plan and deliver a programme that is enriched with a wide range of activities involving stakeholders, employers and Alumni groups. As a result, students have progressed into graduate level employment as Youth and Community Coaches, Advanced Apprenticeship Physio Therapy Assistants, Sports Leads at Primary and Secondary Schools and Further Education College Lecturers. A number have also progressed onto Master Degree Study in Sport & Exercise Science.

Progression into employment is also positive for graduates progressing into the Creative Arts and Design sector. This is testament to the excellent employer links the creative sector has with many students moving into employment through links made during their studies. The majority of these links are forged through outstanding employer engagement and tutors who continue to work in the industry who ensure students benefit from their substantial links with the industry. For example, several students have performed or worked backstage at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Most students take part in local performances and projects through Arts Council Funding in association with Break Out Arts and Rotherham Council. A group of students have opened their own theatre companies and others have obtained employment performing or producing in a range of production companies and theatres such as The Lantern and The Drama Studio (Sheffield), Crows Eye Productions and Liverpool Art Museum.

3.3 Pass Rates

Internal data outlined in Table 4, below, demonstrates 2021/22 end of year pass rates for students across all levels of study are very good at 93.66%, demonstrating that if retained, the majority of HE students are highly likely to pass their programme.

Table 4, RNN Group Internal TRACE data, 2022

	Overall	L4	L5	L6	L7
2021/22	93.66%	92.55%	95.24%	91.80%	100%
2020/21	83.49%	76.80%	85.06%	86.49%	100%
2019/20	92.83%	89.04%	96.63%	92.94%	88.89%

These excellent achievement rates, which inevitably dipped during the COVID pandemic, are testament to the outstanding levels of on-programme support students have access to and the Group's commitment to delivering HE provision to a non-average cohort of students.

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3.4 Support & Interventions

Research conducted by the London School of Economics on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic found most students missed over half of their expected days in the classroom and on average lost around a third of the learning they would have benefited from. The research also found students from the poorest homes experienced a higher learning loss than the most affluent students (London School of Economics, 2021). The Group's students continue to experience the long term effects of the pandemic on their mental health and many are suffering from the current financial crisis.

All HE students benefit from a well-planned and structured tutorial provision. Each student receives regular and beneficial academic and study skills support during these tutorials. Further support is available from the HE Achievement Coach who provides one to one support and signposts students to other services. Staff used the Group monitoring systems effectively to manage any safeguarding or mental health concerns.

The Group effectively utilises the Student Progress Review (SPR) process, to identify students who are at risk of leaving their programme, or not completing their programme. This process ensures students receive appropriate pastoral and academic intervention and support from tutors, the HE Achievement Coach and Support Services accordingly and has led to outstanding satisfaction rates for student support which are at 97% and above (RNN Group Induction Survey, 2022)

A wide range of mentoring and counselling support is available to support students with their mental wellbeing. Students are provided with 24hr online support via the online mental health platform "Togetherall" where clinical professionals moderate online communities and facilitate training and self-help strategies. Additional support is available through external partners such as Tamkeen, Mesmac, Rotherham Rise and Change, Grow, Live.

The Group has a hardship fund to support students with financial difficulties, support is offered on a sliding scale depend on their circumstances. A panel is held regularly where applications are discussed and support is allocated accordingly and have resulted in nearly one third of students on Level 4 provision and above accessing financial support.

3.2. Educational Gains

The Group serves an economically deprived region, with high rates of economic inactivity and low rates of employment. August 2022 GCSE results demonstrated a widening gap between the number of young people achieving good passes in English & maths (E&m) nationally in comparison to locally. Additionally, labour market intelligence shows only 25% of adults in the region meet the government's basic E&m requirements of a grade 4/C in comparison to 40% nationally. Only 25.1% of the local population are educated to level 4 or above, compared to the national average of 38.3%. Consequently, ensuring students are supported to improve their knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development skills is a golden thread running through all HE programmes.

The Group delivers HE provision to a non-average cohort of students, which is not typical of the UK's average HE demographic as outlined in Table 1 "Internal Group TRACE data" on page 3 of this document which shows 76% of the Group's HE students reside in POLAR quintiles 1 and 2, which is up by 3% in comparison to the previous year, meaning the majority of the Group's HE students are from areas that are the least likely to take up higher education. This demonstrates the Group's clear commitment to widening participation and social inclusion and is a clear representation of the

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Groups role in providing HE opportunities for the local and regional community. Even though the number of mature students has decreased in comparison to the previous year, this still means the average the Group's average HE student is likely to be a local, mature student from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2, who has not accessed higher education by traditional routes.

The Group made the strategic decision that in light of the lower HE participation rates in the region, there was a need for an extended range of affordable, high quality HE provision available locally, as outlined in Table 2 "RNN Group HE Course Offer" on page 4 of this document. The Group has therefore, set out five key priorities to drive forward higher education in the region in its Higher Education & Skills Strategic Plan 2022-2026:

- To increase higher education & higher levels skills opportunities within the region;
- To provide a high quality educational experience that meets the needs and aspiration of students, employers and the local community to support high levels of student success;
- Develop the management and governance of higher education;
- Provide opportunities for staff to undertake research-led scholarly activities which inform curriculum planning and implementation;
- Increase student belonging, satisfaction and engagement, particularly amongst those from low participation areas to successfully overcome disadvantage barriers to achieve positive outcomes.

The Group transforms students' lives. Staff use a range of methods that are differentiated to meet the individual and differing needs of specific student groups. For example; timetables for students on Accounting qualifications have been adapted to allow for school runs, given many have young children and students whose second language is English have benefitted from additional one to one tutorial support and exam preparation to support them with technical language.

Practical assessments for students on Media Makeup qualifications whose religion prohibits the use of certain products have been adapted so students can still achieve their qualifications. Additionally, Asian bridal makeup is offered as an enrichment opportunity to enable students to develop their skills, support their local community and meet local employment requirements. All students benefit from the use of an online submission process, via the platform Turnitin, ensuring those who are unable to attend are still able to meet assessment deadlines.

Tutors use the SPR process effectively, to establish students' starting points and identify those who are at risk. This process ensures students receive appropriate pastoral and academic intervention and support from tutors, the HE Achievement Coach or other support services. Consequently, students have a very good awareness of their abilities and needs, particularly in relation to developing academic and employability skills.

Tutors provide students with helpful support via well planned one to one tutorial provision and via signposting them to additional support services. Tutors ensure the curriculum is planned and sequenced to develop students' personal skills that help them build their confidence and resilience. This is evidenced by course feedback from students who report:

- "The course has changed my life and impacted in many positive ways. It has propelled me emotionally and professionally and given me so many new opportunities in my career and general life" (L4 Counselling Student);

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- “The course has impacted me in many ways, it has given me my confidence back I have found myself again after feeling lost for so long, but mostly it has made me realise that being me is enough and by being me I am having an impact on others’ lives and being part of their journey and helping in some way” (L4 Counselling Student);
- “This course has challenged me and helped me so much more than just the education. Times have been tough, yet I still turn up to college knowing I have full support with learning and overcoming personal hurdles” (L5 ACCA Student).
- “Academic support is brilliant, there is so much of it. Tutors and members of the staff are so friendly and accommodating, never once do you feel like a burden. They are always happy to help in any capacity whether it is checking over work or trying to apply for a job. There is a real sense of community and humanity. You are made to feel like a person and not just the number you are assigned when you start the course” (L4 Cert Ed Student).

Peer observations find students are stretched to demonstrate and develop higher level skills very well. Evaluation of the observations found: “all students were challenged to use higher research skills, with emphasis placed on primary vs secondary research and the quality of findings”; “stretch and challenge questions were utilised to promote more critical thinking and to ensure this could be applied to practice. Throughout the session, the learners consistently reflected on their own practice which demonstrated the link between theory and application” and “technical language & terminology was used throughout and learners were expected to be able to explain these terms (RNN Group, Peer Observation Analysis, 2022).

The HE admissions process is flexible and user-friendly. Prospective HE students can apply for a course via the Group’s website at any point in the year, as well by using the traditional UCAS approach. The Group holds a number of face to face and virtual open days to enable prospective HE students to view facilities and speak with staff. These open days take place on weekends, week days and evenings to meet the differing needs of students. Following application, prospective HE students are invited to an interview which provides an additional opportunity to meet teaching and support teams. E&m skills may also be assessed at this point for those students who may not fully meet entry requirements and to identify any additional support requirements. If the interview has a successful outcome, the prospective HE student will receive either an offer or a conditional offer for a place on the course of their choice. The Group places high importance on students’ prior knowledge and experience as well their starting points, adopting a highly flexible approach to offers being made.

Literacy and numeracy development are central to all HE programmes and internal surveys demonstrate all students understand the importance of this (RNN Group Induction Survey, 2022). GCSE resit programmes are offered free of charge to students who have not already achieved a high grade, especially in English or maths. Academic writing is embedded into all HE programmes to support students with the transition to HE. Further academic writing and referencing support is available via the Group’s Library Service and is accessed via the majority of first year students who find it valuable during the first term of their studies (RNN Group Induction Survey 2022). It is not only Level 3 students progressing into HE who have found the summer tutorial sessions and the ‘HE study demystified’ programme invaluable in supporting them in their HE journey. These activities have been integral in supporting students to develop their skills to a higher level and has been instrumental in securing good continuation rates for both full time and part time under-graduates, which are consistently above numerical thresholds (OfS Student Outcomes Data Dashboard, 2022)

Staff have developed highly effective relationships with employers and other local education providers who contribute to the planning and sequencing of the curriculum and enhance the student experience. For example, the Group is the only college in the UK to have entered into a partnership with the NHS within a simulation area. This has then led to a further relationship being developed with Paramedics who work alongside Sheffield Hallam University. These partnerships enable staff to embed a simulation module within the Media Make Up programme where, with support from paramedics, students embed prototypes within real-life simulated exercises. Students work alongside these organisations at multiple points throughout the year and receive feedback from the medical professionals on their skills development.

The Group's Employer Academies are linked to local skills needs and delivery specialisms, with employers sponsoring the intent and implementation of curriculum, providing enhanced work experience opportunities for students. Successful engagement with employers across the majority of the Group's provision support the high progression rates into employment as outlined earlier in the report.

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