

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION STATEMENT 2020

Background

Dudley is a large college situated in the borough of Dudley and has a natural catchment area that includes parts of Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Birmingham, all areas that are ranked as some of the most deprived communities in England. (Dudley 104th, Wolverhampton 19th, Sandwell 8th and Birmingham 6th) – Source 2019 English Indices of Deprivation (IMD – Rank of average rank) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

A particular problem locally is the number of people with level 4 qualifications being below the national average (24.7% for Dudley, 22.2% for Sandwell, 24.9% for Wolverhampton and 33.1% Birmingham versus 40% in England overall) and participation in Higher Education substantially below national average (23% overall in the region, but 18% in some wards, compared with the National Average 32.9%). Source – NOMIS Annual Population Survey 2019 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/l1a/contents.aspx>

It is against this background that the college seeks to play its part in creating a fairer society by providing greater access to higher education for the local community. This will improve social mobility and stimulate the economic growth of the region.

Currently our ethnicity profile shows our higher level learners as a group are more diverse than the local community. 16.2% of our HE learners are from minority groups who make up 11.5% of the local population. 10.3% of our HE learners in 2019-20 declared a disability. *HE here includes level 4+ classroom based, HNC/D and higher apprentices (17.8% and 16.2% respectively excluding apprentices).*

Within our HE population, we have seen a small proportional increase over the last 3 years in minority learners as our numbers of engineering and construction students have increased, suggesting that our current measures are successful. Recruiting both female students and those from minority groups is a priority within these areas, supported by wider college and community STEM initiatives.

52% of our HE population is drawn from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2, reflecting the drive of the college to create vocational Higher Education opportunities to encourage participation. We continue to broaden our provision with this vision in mind. *HE here includes level 4+ classroom based, HNC/D and higher apprentices (59% excluding Apprentices).* Source – POLAR4 dataset taken from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/get-the-area-based-measures-data/>

Widening Participation Priorities 2020-23

In order to achieve our goal we have identified key widening participation priorities for 2020-23 these are:

- Simple and affordable fee structure.
- Effective and targeted marketing.
- Fair & effective admissions policy.
- Tutorial and additional support to improve retention.
- Flexibility of provision to enable growth.
- Targeted aspiration building for potential students.

Simple and Affordable Fee Structure

The college aims to provide the best possible service for its learners while maintaining the tuition fees at an affordable level. The college is keen to maintain this value for money approach in order not to deter potential students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds as tuition fees grow in other HEIs. However, we also need to ensure that we can cover the cost of teaching these students, who typically need more support particularly during the first year of the course.

Effective & Targeted Marketing

The college has carried out a great deal of targeted marketing to make sure that potential students are fully aware of the Higher Education offer. The HE section of the college has a presence at all the college open days, which is particularly important since often potential students turn up unsure what the next step is and whether they are capable of a HE course. HE specific open days and evenings are extending as student numbers grow to ensure there is a distinct HE experience in college. For all of our final year level 3 students we give a progression talk specifically aimed at breaking down barriers associated with progression to HE and helping students understand the breadth for L4 options. We celebrate our HE students' success publicly within our Higher Awards and Celebrating Success evenings and through mentoring programmes with lower level students.

Fair & Effective Admission Policy

When attracting students from non-traditional backgrounds it is crucial that the college can identify that the students have the appropriate skills required and that they are fully aware of the requirements of the course. In order to facilitate this all HE students have an interview with the admissions tutor for the appropriate course and they also complete an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy if this is not supported by their qualifications on entry. Applicants with nonstandard qualifications will also be considered where they have

significant professional experience within their chosen subject area. This is particularly important since the region not only has a lower rate of level 4 qualifications but also a lower rate of level 3 qualifications compared with national figures. If we have potential students for whom a HE qualification is not appropriate when they apply advice is available on how they can gain the appropriate skills/ knowledge or qualifications to enable them to make a successful application in the future. As an example we have developed a bespoke bridging course for prospective engineering students who do not meet the standard entry requirements.

Tutorial & Additional Support to Improve Retention

For those students that need additional support for study skills and Dyslexia we have a dedicated area of the college called the “Hub” where students can go for support. This has proved particularly useful in the past for HE students from non-traditional backgrounds when they are completing their first few assignments as they can have guidance in terms of presenting the information. We have also referred a number of students that have exhibited signs of dyslexia and they have had additional support. Another key part of our strategy is in the provision of tutorial support. With full-time learners this can be achieved in traditional ways using a timetabled session. However, for part-time learners who often work long hours and wish to maximise their time at college studying, tutorials are conducted via email and through the Virtual Learning Environment, although staff are available when required for face to face tutorials. We employ a mobile phone texting system when students miss classes that notifies them they have missed a class and to contact their tutor. We run a summer bridging programme for all continuing Level 3 students to ensure that they have the skills and confidence to start their HE studies successfully and to prevent early drop outs.

Flexibility of Provision to Enable Growth

A growth area for HE for the college continues to be Higher Apprentices. These will be recruited in two ways. Firstly, by progression of level 3 apprentices, where this is appropriate to the job role and the employer. Secondly, with employers that we work with, identifying other areas within the organisation that may benefit from an apprentice at level 4. The greatest challenge in offering the Higher Apprenticeship programmes is that a more flexible approach to delivery is required while at the same time maintaining the academic standards. We are developing new full time provision which matches skills shortage in the local area: in construction, engineering and sciences. We have underpinned this priority area with investment in new facilities, Advance and Advance II which allow access to high level technical training in advanced construction and engineering. We have also developed provision in line with student feedback in animal management and computer games design.

We are also continuing to develop specific progression routes into University for students to convert their HNC and D qualifications to full degrees in specific pathways. For example

HND Built Environment to BSc Quantity Surveying and HND Animal Management to BSc Animal Behaviour and Wildlife Conservation. We are broadening our partnership agreements with joint provision with Nottingham Trent University in Early Years Education and have a programme developed with Worcester University in Health and Wellbeing to allow local delivery of foundation degrees to Level 5 with agreed progression onwards.

We make extensive use of the VLE to provide material for students, this adding to the flexibility of delivery methods. It is currently used, and will remain, a supportive tool to supplement the lecture materials rather than a replacement.

Targeted aspiration building for potential students

As part of the [Aspire to HE](#) project led by Wolverhampton University we are working to increase the participation in Higher Education from our local areas. In particular the project targets wards which have the lowest participation in HE to improve outcomes for young people by increasing educational attainment. We deliver many strands of activity from focused individual support aimed at students unsure about progression to whole college activities to raise student aspiration and achievement. As part of the project we are also delivering masterclasses and English and Maths support in local schools to increase the grades of students who enter FE. In September 2017 we formed a [Multi Academy Trust](#) with 4 local schools to improve attainment levels and work more widely with a large number of schools, bringing learners in to college for gifted and talented workshops, theatre and English workshops and other vocational activities. We run an annual STEM event which aims to raise participation in STEM subjects and specifically those with a high local skills shortage and therefore job prospects and to broaden the work and study based opportunities that young people are aware of.

Evaluation of Widening Participation Strategy

We have been working to improve widening participation for our higher level programmes for a number of years, it is part of the ethos of the whole college running through all levels, and we monitor the success of this very carefully through retention and success rates. We involve students within this process through our learner voice process and with the support of the Lead Student Rep. During 2020-23 the college aims to continue and pilot some new flexible approaches to higher learning. We will be able to monitor the success through retention and achievement rates. Strategic outputs, developed through the college [Strategic Plan](#) are monitored through a publicly available [dashboard](#) which evidences the level of participation of differing student groups.