

Access and Participation Statement 2022-23

Dudley College is committed to increasing the number of local residents who progress into higher levels of study. The number of adults with a level 4 or above qualification in the borough are below national rates and many residents and employers do not choose to invest in university study. The College has therefore developed a long-term strategy to support more residents to study at higher level, through an innovative approach to collaboration and non-traditional study routes.

Dudley College is 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 74th, Wolverhampton 16th, Sandwell 8th and Birmingham 6th)¹.

A particular problem locally is that the number of people with level 4 qualifications is below the national average (35% for Dudley, 27.5% for Sandwell, 35.4% for Wolverhampton and 40.4% Birmingham² versus 43.1% in England overall³). Research from the Black Country Observatory indicates that there is a need for a further 102,011 people across the subregion to obtain a Level 4 qualification to equal the national average⁴.

The development of our approach to higher level skills through collaboration continued to evolve in 2016, when the College worked with the Gatsby Foundation and ministers to develop the initial prospectus for an Institute of Technology. The single biggest development in meeting the needs of our local transformational sectors is the creation of Innovation Park, Dudley. This new park will ultimately provide three new developments linked to priority higher skills needs. The first of these is the Black Country & Marches Institute of Technology (IoT), which opened in September 2021. One of the first wave IoTs and a brand-new build costing £22m, this new facility offers technical training at higher level in manufacturing, modern construction methodologies, digital and medical engineering linked to healthcare. Most of the provision is through apprenticeship delivery, therefore removing financial barrier for students and employers whilst supporting the local delivery model and technical content that our employers demand. Delivery is provided through the College itself, Avensys, Incomm and University partners.

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.

Based on HNC/D data from academic year 2020-21, the reported ethnicity of our students broadly matches local demographics; with 22.5% of our students having a BAME or mixed background against 22.9% of the wider Black Country population. In terms of specific groups, the most significant disparity is among students from Asian backgrounds (9.6% of students vs 12.7% of the local population). In terms of gender, there is a male/female split of 65.2%/34.8%. This represents the traditional make-up of our core technical provision (with its focus on STEM subjects), and points to a need to engage more women and girls in STEM subjects throughout their education, not just at higher levels. The number of students reporting a disability is 17%, which aligns with the OfS national average. 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. Our overall HE success rate in 2020-21 was 95%.

In order to support more of our students and Black Country communities to participate in, and successfully complete, their aim of studying for a Higher Education Qualification, we offer the following:

- Simple and affordable fee structure.
- Effective, inclusive and targeted marketing and engagement.

¹ File 11: Upper-Tier Local Authority Summaries, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

² https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157188/subreports/quals_compared/report.aspx

³ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/gor/2092957699/report.aspx>

⁴ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/2759917e537744d38d83f4d8d7bd9ee5?item=3>

- 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 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. Alongside this, we will continue to work with funding agencies to provide subsidised or fully funded programmes wherever possible.

Effective, Inclusive & Targeted Marketing and Engagement The college has carried out a great deal of targeted marketing to make sure that potential students are fully aware of our Higher Education offer. HE has a presence at all college open days, particularly important since often potential students are uncertain around the process to follow and the general entry requirements; a face-to-face presence therefore helps us to make the concept of HE open and accessible. Building on this, HE specific open days and evenings are extending as student numbers grow, ensuring a distinct HE experience in college. For all 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 of L4 options. We celebrate our HE students' success publicly within our Higher Awards and Celebrating Success evenings and through mentoring programmes with students on lower-level courses.

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. To facilitate this, all HE students have an interview with the admissions tutor for the appropriate course, as well as completing an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy if this is not evidenced 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 electronically, 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 dropouts. Learner Voice processes ensure that all learners have a say in the provision and development of their courses.

Flexibility of Provision to Enable Growth A growth area for our HE provision continues to be Higher Apprentices. These will be recruited in two ways; firstly, through the progression of level 3 apprentices where this is appropriate to the job role and the employer. Secondly, we will work with employers to identify 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 academic standards. We are therefore continually developing new full-time provision, which matches skills shortage in the local area, particularly in construction, engineering and science. We have underpinned this priority area with investment in new facilities that 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, and are 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 our VLE to provide material for students, adding to the flexibility of delivery methods and providing a supportive tool to supplement lecture materials rather than replacing them.

Targeted aspiration building for potential students We are working to increase the participation in Higher Education from our local areas. We target wards which have the lowest participation in HE to improve outcomes for young people by increasing educational attainment. To achieve this, we carry out several strands of activity, from focused individual support aimed at students unsure about progression to whole college activities to raise student aspiration and achievement. We are also delivering masterclasses, English and Maths support in local schools to increase the grades of students who enter FE. In September 2017, we formed the Dudley Academies Trust with four local schools to improve attainment levels and, more widely, also work with many schools outside the Trust, bringing learners into 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 with high local skills shortages and to broaden the work and study-based opportunities that young people are aware of.

Dudley College of Technology
12th July 2022