



2018-20 Access and Participation Statement

1. Introduction

Widening access and participation and inclusivity is central to Halesowen College's ethos and purpose, ensuring that everyone with the potential and desire to access higher education has the opportunity to do so. The HE Strategy is an intrinsic part of the overall strategic plan and reaffirms the College's commitment to the development and enhancement of its HE provision with clear aims and objectives within the strategic priorities. The key drivers for developing HE qualifications stems from the desire to add higher level qualifications to provide pathways for students from Level 1 to 5. This is supported by the following themes:

1. To remove barriers and raise aspirations for learners wishing to progress into HE.
2. To improve student choice, particularly for internal progression for Level 3 students.
3. To fulfil the training demands of local employers upskilling their apprentices and workforce.
4. To broaden curriculum pathways for clear progression routes to HE courses.

Our stated purpose, values and behaviours will underpin the work of the College over the three-year life of the Strategic Plan.

The College believes that no matter what challenges arise the following principles are adhered to:

- That students and the student experience are central to all decisions
- That the College provides the highest quality teaching and learning leading to excellent outcomes.
- That the College remains independent and continues to secure the financial resilience to do so.
- That the College works in partnership for the benefit of students, the community and the economy.
- That the College recognises and is recognised by others for its high quality provision, strengths and contribution to society.

With this in mind, Halesowen College undertakes to achieve the following four simple strategic aims:

1. To provide the highest quality teaching and learning leading to excellent outcomes.

2. To support the local community and economy by providing the broadest range of purposeful and appropriate educational opportunities.
3. To provide a College estate and other resources that are fit for 21st century learning.
4. To ensure that the College remains financially sound and is able to respond to the needs of learners, employers and the local community.

Our ambitions must also be contextualised to the educational, social and economic context of the Black Country.

Halesowen College primarily serves the communities of Halesowen, Stourbridge, Dudley and Sandwell. The majority of students are from urban areas including many wards that score highly on the index of deprivation. In the Black Country as a whole, participation in education is lower than national averages across all levels.

The number of people educated to degree level decreased in 2015 to 160,000. To reach the national average of 37% would require an additional 103,000 to be qualified at levels 6 or above.

The proportion of Black Country residents who hold no qualifications is currently more than double the national average at 19% (NA 8.4%), requiring an additional 76,000 qualified people to mirror the country as a whole. It has also been identified that where people are qualified, they are not necessarily educated in areas identified by the Local Enterprise Partnership and West Midlands Combined Authority as those that will contribute to local priorities and support their plans for regional transformation.

The latest data available for the Black Country suggests that the proportion of student who have achieved good grades (A*-C) in five or more GCSEs, including English and Maths has fallen in recent years to 49%, well below the national average of 54%. Last year more than 800 students enrolled at the College without a C in English, Maths or both, requiring higher levels of support, tuition and resit qualifications.

The College's curriculum has been carefully developed in response to the demands of the local community and economy, taking into account of the competitive local education landscape. It has comprehensively responded to the recognised need to promote and develop higher levels skills by providing linear vocational routes from levels one to three across the majority of subjects and one to five in a number of carefully selected curriculum areas. To date Halesowen College has not developed training in traditional trades routes such as brickwork, plumbing, motor vehicle studies, electro-technical or wood occupations, all of which are currently well served by other local providers.

In recent years, the College has further responded to national and regional priorities by developing a number of apprenticeship routes. Although still relatively small in number, this area of work defies national trends by growing rapidly and has resulted

in the College gaining a reputation for delivering high quality professional apprenticeships.

The College has worked hard to develop extensive educational partnerships. Links with universities, including being recognised as an Associate College by the University of Worcester, have complemented the College's higher level vocational pathways for students who are unlikely to access traditional university education.

Halesowen College works in partnership with many of the region's schools to help raise learners' aspirations and highlight suitable progression opportunities. In addition to the work of the College's Schools Liaison Team, recent projects have included; the Halesowen Collegiate School Programme; the University Access programme and the National Collaborative Outreach Programme.

The College draws students from three main areas: Dudley, Sandwell and West Birmingham. The areas served are primarily urban in character and include wards with high index of deprivation. From HEFCE POLAR data relating to participation in Higher Education, there is evidence that many of the census wards in the surrounding areas are in the lowest quintiles. For example, Bartley Green (19.5%), Rowley Regis (17.21%), Blackheath (20%) Cradley Heath/Oldhill (24.1%) and Lye (17.9%).

Unemployment in the West Midlands has risen to 2.4% of the working population. Figures from July 2017 – June 2018 show that 6.8% of the population in the Black Country are classified as unemployed against a national rate of 4.2%. The percentage of households that are workless in the Black Country is 20.3% against a national rate of 14.5%. In terms of adults with no qualifications, the percentage for the Black Country is 15.6% against a national average of 7.7%.

The development of adult GCSE, pre-access and the expansion of access pathways within the College has been in response to the skills deficit. Further the development of higher level apprenticeships in applied Chemistry, Biology and Engineering has been directly linked to the Black Country LEP transformational sectors. This also links to the Black Country's ambition to raise apprenticeship starts to 23,000 by 2033.

The proportion of students from BME backgrounds varies considerably between areas. For example, in Dudley the figure is around 11% whereas in Sandwell it is 23.3% that are from ethnic groups other than White British, 42% of residents in Birmingham were from an ethnic group other than White British (figures from 2011 census).

The profile of our higher education provision is predominantly part-time and also has a focus on linking to Higher Apprenticeship standards where possible. Full time provision is mainly delivered in partnership with the University of Worcester and thus DHLE data does not fully inform our assessment.

2. Ambition and Strategy for Implementation of the Access and Participation Plan

A key strategic priority remains to ensure that everyone, whatever their stage of life, has the opportunity to pursue their academic and career goals. In light of the analysis of current performance, identification of specific target groups and the intended work and activities planned is documented:

- Access and success of mature students
- Access of low participation groups
- Access of BME students
- Access and students of children who are looked after

In order to achieve our goal to widen participation we have identified the following priorities:

1. Affordable fee structure which is clear and transparent
2. Effective marketing – targeted at under-represented groups.
3. Fair and inclusive Admissions Policy
4. Raising aspirations
5. Support and guidance throughout the course to support retention and achievement

2.1 Access of Success of Mature Students

Research and data collected identified that 18-20 year olds are well represented in our HE provision, mature students are less well represented, particularly on HNC/D provision. The College recognise that mature students are a priority group and the engagement and access is nationally under-presented. Halesowen College will continue to offer a supportive and flexible programme to meet the needs and ambitions of mature students. The provision of full and part time options for HE courses is recognition that mature students often have wide ranging personal commitments to balance. Further, a well-established support network, including counselling, learning support and careers is in place to support all learners.

2.2 Access for Low Participation Groups

Halesowen College has an established programme to raise aspirations and attainment across the area. The 'University Access Project' (UAP) started five years ago as part of the Associate College relationship. The programme has involved six partner schools selecting students on pupil premium with no family history of going to university. The students undertake a variety of "masterclasses" at the College which culminate in a visit to the university. This year marks the first year students could enter university and at least one of this cohort has enrolled at the University of Worcester.

The College are also working closely with NCOP with local schools, businesses and communities across the West Midlands region to empower young people and equip them with the knowledge to succeed.

2.3 Access and Success of Children who are Looked After (CLA)

A post has been funded through NCOP to work with CLA, the aim being to ensure information, advice and guidance for CLA and one to one mentoring and support. Students will be encouraged to participate in university visits to raise aspirations, enable continuation and successful progression.

Linked to our widening participation priorities:

2.4 Affordable Fee Structure which is Clear and Transparent

The College aims to provide the best possible services for its students while maintaining the tuition fees at an affordable level. This value for money approach aims to support students who may be deterred as fees increase across the HE sector. This will, however, be done with a view to maintain quality, ensuring the cost of teaching is covered and the necessary support offered.

2.5 Effective Marketing – Targeted at Under Represented Groups

The College informs potential students of our Higher Education offer in a number of ways to ensure they are aware of the full range of courses on offer. The HE staff at the College have a presence at all College open events to ensure that any potential students turning up are given clear information, advice and guidance about HE courses. HE/Adult specific open evenings are also organised to recognise the distinct HE/Adult experience within the College.

2.6 Fair and inclusive Admissions Policy

All HE students will be interviewed to ensure that they have the appropriate skills required and that they are fully aware of the requirements of the course. Applicants with non-standard qualifications will also be considered where they have significant professional experience within their chosen subject area. This is particularly relevant 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. Thus, if there are applicants for whom an HE qualification is not appropriate when they apply, they will receive advice on gaining appropriate skills/knowledge to facilitate HE study in the future. The College has a wide range of Access courses to support progression on to higher level courses.

2.7 Raising Aspirations

The College is part of the Aspire to HE Project led by Wolverhampton University and the Aim Higher Project led by the University of Birmingham 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. The College has run targeted workshops and events for our own students from deprived postcodes as well as a wide range of school events and tasters.

2.8 Support and Guidance Throughout the Course to Support Retention and Achievement

For students with additional needs there is a dedicated learning support team as well as regular, scheduled 'drop in' workshops to assist with study skills. These 'drop in' sessions have proved particularly useful in the past for HE students from non-traditional backgrounds when they are faced with their early assignments. Students are also all provided with tutorial support. This can be traditional timetabled tutorials or for students who work long hour tutorials can be conducted via e-mail. To ensure that students reach their full potential, the College monitors student performance throughout their academic journey. Tutorials function to raise aspirations and provide students with feedback on progress. Data indicates that student satisfaction remains high and progression to further study and employment is good.

The College seeks to promote equality and diversity and the prevention of discrimination in all aspects of its activities. This is supported by recent accreditation of the Leaders in Diversity status.

Action taken by the College includes:

- Courses and services for those with particular needs.
- An on-suite nursery.
- Access to buildings, facilities and resources for those with restricted mobility.
- Assessment of the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in order to provide reasonable support.
- An annual theme week where students can explore issues of equality and celebrate diversity.
- Multi-faith chaplaincy service and a quiet room for prayer/meditation.
- Assessment and support if you have a learning difficulty or disability.

The College is committed to providing HE students with the best learning experience possible and regularly engages with students to enhance and improve their learning experience. All HE courses have a nominated student representative who meet at regular intervals throughout the academic year in meetings with the course team. There are also HE Ambassadors who promote the provision and represent student views.

3. Future Plans and Investment

The College is currently planning the re-development of Block 2 to create a Central Student Hub, which will be a one-stop shop for all student services and provide a

modern, high specification learning environment. An area of this block will be dedicated HE space and be the base for the Halesowen University Centre (HUC). This will also support the widening participation agenda offering talks on a wide range of academic and recreational topics.

There is also a longer term curriculum plan to develop new full time and part time provision to match priority skills needs in the local community. These will be based upon the 'professional;' ambition of the College and reflect the needs for higher level skills.

4. Provision of information to Students

Halesowen College is committed to providing information for prospective and current students about the learning opportunities we offer in an accessible and timely manner. We publish information that describes our purpose, values and overall strategy through:

- Our website which includes the Purpose, Values and College Governance
- The College's purpose and values are visible around the College estate.
- The College's Strategic priorities are available for all staff through briefings and other internal communication channels.
- College publicity materials aim to promote the College's Purpose and Values where appropriate.

We currently communicate the process of application and admission to the programmes of study by publishing the process on the website and in the HE prospectus. The next steps are explained in our correspondence and/or via UCAS.

Information is made available to prospective students to help them select their programme with an understanding of the environment in which they will be studying and the support available to them via open days, sixth form career events, detailed course information online and through the HE prospectus. Social Media is used to enhance engagement and communications with students.

For current students welcome and induction activities are held at the start of the year and at the January intake point to provide comprehensive, consistent information. The website, Moodle/Blackboard and Social Media are used to engage and inform students before arriving and to support transition.

Full time and part time course fee levels for 2019-20 entrants.