



Access & Participation Plan 2023-24

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. This Plan 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 College's HE Quality & Strategy is available here:

<https://www.halesowen.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Higher-Education-Quality-and-Strategy-Policy.pdf>

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.

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 can 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 College's curriculum has been carefully developed in response to the demands of the local community and economy, considering 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.

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 and, establishment of the University Centre in 2020, has 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 HUB team, the college also works with both Aspire to HE and Aimhigher Uniconnect strands to encourage aspiration and progression to higher education.

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, can 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 are working closely with UniConnect, 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 UniConnect 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 HE 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

HE students will be offered the opportunity to meet with a member of staff for information, advice and guidance 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 hours 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.
- 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.

3. Future Plans and Investment

There is 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 platforms are used to engage and inform students before arriving and to support transition.

Halesowen College's Higher Education provision for 2023-24 is as follows:

With Pearson	In partnership with University of Worcester
HNC Animal Management	FdA Early Years
HND Animal Management	FdA Learning Support
HNC Applied Sciences (Forensics)	Diploma in Education & Training
HND Applied Sciences (Forensics)	
HNC Business	
HND Business	
HNC Computing	
HND Computing	
HNC Creative Media Production	
HND Creative Media Production	
HNC Engineering	
HNC Art & Design (Photography)	
HND Art & Design (Photography)	
HNC Sport & Exercise Science	
HND Sport & Exercise Science	
Level 5 Therapeutic Counselling	

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