

Sandwell College Access and Participation Statement 2020-2021

1. Our College

Sandwell College is a general further education (FE) college situated in the West Midlands. The College's Central Campus is located in the centre of West Bromwich. Central St Michael's Sixth Form is our dedicated A Level centre housed in an extraordinary, post-modernist building next to a major retail development also in West Bromwich. Additionally, Cadbury Sixth Form College is the newest member of the Sandwell College group and provides high quality sixth form provision in Kings Norton. We primarily serve Sandwell Metropolitan Borough and the area of West Birmingham. Nearly two thirds of all Sandwell College's learners come from Sandwell with the remainder predominantly from West Birmingham wards.

The College offers higher education (HE) provision in education, early years travel & tourism, photography, public services and sport - all solely delivered at the Central Campus. The College has approximately 150 higher education (HE) students of whom approximately 70% study part-time.

The College delivers Pearson Higher Nationals across four subject areas allowing students to complete and achieve HNC before progressing to HND. Under a partnership agreement with the University of Wolverhampton, the College also delivers an FdA Early Years Services and a CertEd/PGCE Diploma.

Within the context of the community it serves, the College aims to work towards creating an equal society by ensuring access to higher education for the local community. This will positively impact on social mobility and stimulate the economic growth of the region. The College has focused on meeting learner needs and supporting our community and economy by improving quality, increasing participation and progression and building financial strength to ensure the College has a sound basis to put these plans into action.

2. Our Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision is:

- to provide an exceptional, innovative and inspirational teaching and learning experience leading to individuals' success; and
- to be at the heart of our community by working together with schools, employers and partner organisations to enrich lives, raise aspirations, encourage enterprise and improve social and economic well-being.

Our Mission is:

To provide and continuously develop and deliver high quality education, training and learning programmes that help improve the life chances and the economic prosperity of our learners, community and businesses.

Our Vision and Mission are based on our Values:

The College has high expectations of its staff and learners

- we put our learners at the centre of what we do;

- we believe in individual empowerment and development through education and learning;
- we believe in individual initiative and shared responsibility;
- we have pride in our college and our part in its success;
- we celebrate the diversity of all.

3. Widening Access Performance

The population of the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell is approximately 327,000 and is the largest in the Black Country and is proportionately younger than the rest of the region. Sandwell has had a larger population gain than any of the neighbouring Black Country boroughs (15% 2001 to 2018). Birmingham statistics show a 16% increase for the ten year period according to 2008 to 2018 estimates. The West Birmingham wards we serve have a young population similar to Sandwell and have also exhibited high population growth.

Sandwell ranks 13th out of 326 local areas within England for indices of high levels of deprivation; the average household annual income is £22,500, the lowest in the Black Country. Unlike other local authorities, there are no areas of affluence in Sandwell. In 2016, the percentage of Sandwell pupils gaining five or more GCSE subjects at A* to C, including mathematics and English, was 50% compared to a national average of 58%. The number of people with a level 4 qualifications is below the national average (21.1% in Sandwell compared with 39% in England overall). Participation in higher education is substantially below the national average (18% compared with national average 32.9%). The rate of unemployment is about 5.6% - above the national average (4.1%). Nearly three quarters of Sandwell College learners are from areas of high deprivation.

Access

The College has a relatively equal split of male (48%) and female (52%) HE learners.

In keeping with the local demographics, over 60% of the HE students are from POLAR4 quintiles 1 or 2 and near 80% are from IMD quintiles 1 or 2 - indicating high levels of multiple deprivation. The recruitment of disadvantaged students substantially exceeds sector averages: 28% of students nationally from POLAR4 quintile 1 & 2 postcodes and 40% from IMD quintile 1 & 2 postcodes. Accordingly, over 70% of the College's HE students are recruited with no or low tariff entry qualifications.

The current ethnicity profile shows the College HE student population is similar to that of the local community: 54% of HE learners are from Asian, black and other ethnic minority groups, compared to 29% in the HE sector nationally.

13% of our HE learners declared a disability in 2017-18 which is just below the sector average of 15%.

In terms of widening participation (WP), Sandwell College consistently out performs the sector in terms of access.

Success

The two key measures of success are retention and achievement.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Headcount	80	96	104
Retention	80%	89%	92%
Achievement	78%	84%	

There have been issues around student retention that has impacted on student outcomes. Improving student retention will be a focus of the College's activities over the next three years

Progression

Student progression is high with part-time student progression to highly skilled employment or further study at 90% - more than 10% above the benchmark.¹

4. Widening Access and Participation Priority

The College's over-arching WP priority is to improve retention of its HE students. In focussing on this priority, the College is committed to ensuring the diversity of its HE population is not diminished and, therefore, will maintain its successful range of access activities and practices. Once recruited, students need to be retained in order for them to achieve their qualification aims and progress to positive destinations. The College will enhance its monitoring of students with the purpose of early identification of those at risk of withdrawal or failure and targeted intervention, where appropriate. The key activities that the College will introduce and/or maintain are provided on the table below.

¹ Based on year 4 TEF metrics, published January 2019

	Topic	Activity	Action
Access	Fair & Clear Admission Policy	<p>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. Initial Advice and Guidance (IAG) was improved during 2018/19 with the introduction of a specialist careers advisor for HE. IAG policies and procedures were updated to ensure applicants are viewed holistically in terms of their prior academic achievements, work experience and career goals. All HE prospective students have an interview with the relevant curriculum tutor and undertake an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy if this is not supported by their qualifications on entry. Applicants with non-standard qualifications are 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. Advice is available for applicants for whom an HE course is not appropriate, on how they can gain the appropriate skills, knowledge or qualifications to enable them to make a successful application to step up to HE in the future.</p>	<p>The IAG will be reviewed and evaluated during 2019-20. Should this evaluation identify areas for improvement, this will be articulated in an appropriate action plan for implementation in summer/autumn 2020</p> <p>A specialist careers advisor was recruited in summer 2019 and will lead on advice and guidance on HE qualifications, finances and future progression. The post-holder will provide training to HE tutors in autumn 2019. The impact of this new post will be reviewed during 2019-20.</p>
	Affordable Fees	<p>The College aims to provide the best possible service for its students while maintaining tuition fees at an affordable level. A value for money approach aims to support those students who may be deterred from HE as fees exceed £9000 at other HE providers. The College aims to do this whilst maintaining quality, ensuring that we can cover the cost of teaching students, who typically need more support particularly during the first year of the course.</p>	<p>Fees will be maintained at 2019-20 levels for 2020-21: £5000 per FT student £2500 per PT student</p> <p>Students studying a partnership course with the University of Wolverhampton will be required to pay the tuition fee set by the University.</p>

Access cont.	Raising aspirations of young people locally	<p>As part of the Aspire to HE project, led by the University of Wolverhampton, 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 advice and guidance 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 KUDOS sessions in local schools to raise aspirations and give pupils relevant career choice information so they can make informed choices about their future.</p> <p>This aspect of the College's Access work covers its own level 3 learners studying A levels and vocational qualifications at its Central Campus, Central St Michael's and Cadbury Sixth Form College.</p>	<p>Funding for the Aspire to HE project has been extended for further two years to December 2020. The College will continue to participate in the project for the duration of the project and incorporate any good practice arising from the project in its access activities. If the funding for Aspire to HE is not continued, the College will look to continue its Access work in collaboration with the University of Wolverhampton throughout 2020/21 and beyond.</p>
	Preparing for HE Programme	<p>The College delivers a 'Preparing for HE Programme' to level 3 FE learners to supply them with the study, academic writing and research skills required to achieve at higher levels of study. The programme has been developed by the Head of HE with input from the student reps and HE tutors. The programme is delivered by the level 3 tutors with the support of HE tutors. This programme is taught throughout the year. Certificates are awarded for successful completion and awards are given for particularly strong dedication to the programme.</p>	<p>The College will continue to deliver the Preparing for HE Programme throughout 2019/20 and evaluate its impact on those College students who participated in the programme while studying at level 3 and have since progressed to HE at the College, albeit numbers are small so success data is unlikely to be statistically significant. Feedback from HE students who completed the Programme will be sought with a view to further refining the programme for 2020/21.</p>
	Providing routes into HE for adults	<p>Our adult work for those aged over 24 is focused on skills acquisition for those returning to, or entering, the workplace. The areas covered by the College in Sandwell and West Birmingham have significant adult populations with low level qualifications, in many instances below level 2. The College introduced Access to Higher Education - Social Science &</p>	<p>In 2019/20 the College runs Access to Higher Education courses in Education and Social Science & Health Professionals, plus Access to Teaching which is new for 19/20. The quality of these courses will continue to be closely monitored for their effectiveness in enabling</p>

		Health Professionals. In 2017/18 which was highly successful. 100% of students commencing the programme in 20-18/19 successfully achieved their qualification and progressed to degree courses.	adults to progress onto HE. The College will review its Access to HE portfolio in 2019/20, as part of its continual curriculum review process, and add further Access courses if student demand deems appropriate.
Success	Study Skills and Dyslexia Support	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 receive guidance in terms of presenting the information and structuring work which increases confidence in their ability. We have supported students who have been referred, sometime for the first time, for dyslexia by offering additional support.	While take up of support by the Hub is recorded and evaluated, the College has not consistently evaluated the effectiveness of this support and/or its impact on HE student success. The evaluation will commence in 2019/20 based on student engagement in the previous year and will continue into 2020/21.
	Tutorials	Regular tutorial sessions raise aspirations, provide students with feedback of progress and facilitate continued personal development. All full-time HE students have weekly timetabled tutorials. However, for part-time students who often work long hours and wish to maximise their time at college studying, tutorials were conducted via email and through the Virtual Learning Environment, with staff available for face to face support when required.	From 2019/20 all HE students, full-time and part-time, will have timetabled tutorials. Additional monitoring points have been introduced to identify students at risk; this monitoring will be overseen by the Head of HE termly throughout 2019/20 and 2020/21. Additional academic study skills development activities have been built into tutorials for 2019/20 and these will be evaluated during 2020/21

Success cont.	Performance monitoring	To facilitate students in reaching their full potential, the College monitors all aspects of student performance throughout their academic journey. Performance data is collated and reported to ensure equality and diversity indicators are considered and these are reported to the SLT and the College Corporation. Data collated for the past three years indicates very high levels of student satisfaction and success with 75% of College HE students accessing further study and 20% gaining relevant employment.	The new post of Head of HE and Academic Standards with oversight of the quality of HE courses was appointed in summer 2019. To support this role, a new post of HE Team leader was also appointed in summer 2019 with a remit to monitor performance across the whole of the HE provision. The improved performance monitoring will include development of WP dashboards to disaggregate performance by student characteristic with an aim to better target support and interventions. The Head of HE and Academic Standards will provide regular reports to the governing body. The improved monitoring processes will be evaluated throughout 2019/20 and 2020/21 with emphasis on student retention and the effectiveness of interventions.
	Induction	All new students receive an induction onto their course. Feedback from student surveys confirms this is effective and appropriately introduces them to their course, curriculum area and the College.	To provide greater academic study skills support, additional induction sessions on the library and IT will be introduced for new HE students from 2019/20. These sessions will be evaluated using student feedback to make improvements for 2020/21. Additionally, input from staff and students will be used to develop an advanced library and IT induction for returning HE students from September 2020.
Success cont.	Student environment	Providing the right environment for students is important to enable opportunity for study and socialising outside of timetabled sessions. The College provides a high quality student environment but is committed to continue to improve resources available to HE students.	In 2018/19 the College increased the number of online journals in response to HE student requests. The access to journals and online texts will be monitored during 2019-21 and further titles added as required. Further investment in resources will be made as needs are identified.

	HE student engagement	<p>The College is committed to continuously engaging with HE students to enhance and improve their learning experience. All HE courses have nominated Student Representatives who meet at regular intervals throughout the academic year in structured meetings with an HE manager to feedback on any issues, plan events and act as consultants for their respective groups. The HE representatives play an important role in shaping HE within the College, for example, they have supported the development of the HE centre and are annually engage with the College's curriculum review.</p>	<p>Significant changes to the student engagement process will be implemented in 2019/20 including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Head of HE will hold half termly meetings with student representatives; - one HE student representative will be elected as a student governor and sit on the Governors' Learning, Quality and Curriculum Committee. <p>The enhanced HE student engagement will be reviewed and evaluated during 2020/21. Should this evaluation identify areas for improvement, this will be articulated in an appropriate action plan for implementation.</p>
Progression	Employer Advisory Boards	<p>Each curriculum area has its own Employer Advisory Board (EAB). to help to improve the career prospects of our students. The EABs were developed in 2018 and will provide input into design of curriculum and assessment.</p>	<p>during 2020-21, the effectiveness and impact of the Boards will be evaluated and improvements made, where necessary.</p>