

# Wiltshire College & University Centre

## Access and Participation Statement 20-21

### Introduction

The Higher Education Strategy for Wiltshire College & University Centre aims to empower people to make personal transformations to meet the demand of the local community. Wiltshire College has an inclusive ethos to enable people in the local community to upskill and gain professional qualifications, meeting the demands from industry and employers. It also aims to promote upward social mobility through higher education qualifications and training. It highlights the ambition of the college to continue to develop full and part time degrees, higher education courses and higher level and degree level apprenticeships. The college's Higher Education Strategy actively explores flexible delivery models for higher education, working with awarding bodies to offer students the best possible fit for their needs, accommodating students who need to study while working, have caring responsibilities or need a differentiated approach to learning. A holistic approach is taken when developing higher education courses with awarding bodies to enable an accessible curriculum for all students, reaching out to students who traditionally would not consider studying at university. Pedagogies used by higher education teachers enable students to develop academic skills and become independent learners. Teaching, learning and meeting the needs of students is our core business.

### Access

One of the college's strategic aims is to increase the number of level 3 students progressing into higher education at the college from 6.4% to 10%. Our ambition is to ensure level 3 students who study at the college fully understand the options available to them as they complete their level 3 programmes. Level 3 students who progress into higher education at the college are a distinctive group of learners and will include local students with caring responsibilities, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and young people with anxiety/mental health difficulties who would find leaving home to attend university more difficult. They will also include students who prefer studying in a smaller, more nurturing environment which is close to home. Targeting this group of young students means enabling opportunities for improved life chances, especially for young people who would not normally consider going away to a university. Wiltshire is a high employment area, so many young people are able to secure work on completion of level 3 courses. However, the earning potential and career prospects are much lower. It is the college's ambition to inspire more level 3 learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, from the local community to continue into higher education.

The college will engage with level 3 students and their parents more closely to ensure understanding of our HE offer, including understanding the different types of higher education such as higher nationals, foundation degrees and higher level and degree apprenticeships. This will include post level 3 information evenings in September, engaging with the new tutorial system to inform students of subject specific information, offering taster events or 'lecture sit-ins'. This is particularly important for students who find transitions difficult. Students will have the opportunity to meet with academic staff enabling students to have a smoother transition in a safe, known environment.

Curriculum planning uses student data, feedback from employers and discussions with academic teams. Clear progressing routes will be explained to level 3 students and their parents at the start of their level 3 journey providing a clear route and options to aim for at level 4 and beyond. Our ambition is that all level 3 students, including those from social economically disadvantaged backgrounds, ethnic minorities and disabled students will see higher education as 'their story' and engage with higher education to improve life chances.

Outreach work to schools, open events at the college and targeted events such as 'women in engineering' will enable young people to understand our local offer, and the option of learning within a smaller, safer

environment, supporting more vulnerable students. Being able to visualise and discuss opportunities enables young people and their families to 'think bigger'.

Analysing data, the college is aware of the reducing numbers of mature students enrolling on our higher education courses. There are many reasons for this, including increased student fees and accessibility of courses. Wherever possible the college will develop part time options for all higher education programmes, enabling more access for mature students with additional responsibilities as carers or with significant work commitments. The college will continue to explore innovative flexible delivery models with awarding bodies to better meet the needs of mature students and employers. The college also aims to have competitive course fees to encourage applications from mature students and students from socially disadvantaged areas.

Alongside our already established Access into HE courses; the college had developed foundation years with new life sciences foundation degrees. This will enable students who have level 3 qualifications, but not in science to access STEM subjects and employment, reflecting the changing working landscape and Government agenda for STEM.

The college has a friendly professional HE admissions team who work closely with each other and academic teams. From the first point of contact with the college, the HE Admissions team are 'people with names' who develop a relationship with applicants. They will follow through with a student who may have difficulty with the application process, or who is a non-traditional applicant ensuring they have additional support to access higher education. Wherever possible applicants are offered an alternative route into higher education if they do not have the entry criteria to succeed, for example by recommending an access course or additional GCSEs and connecting them with the people in the college who can offer these courses, ensuring applicants have every opportunity to realise goals and ambitions.

The higher education academic teams, wherever possible, will plan teaching to be delivered on full days, so that students can organise their time more efficiently, supporting parents or students with additional responsibilities and needs. This means a full-time degree can be delivered over two/three full days, rather than spread over five days, enabling better access for students. This is particularly important in a rural area where transport can cause difficulties.

Wiltshire College & University Centre is part of the National Outreach Programme and belongs to a network of eight universities and colleges, raising awareness of higher education. This work influences the other work the college is investing in as the college is very aware of the deprived wards in the area. The college employs four Marketing Officers who work with local schools promoting awareness of routes into university and our own higher education courses, highlighting 'the degree on your doorstep' and the support available.

The college's new website will better meet digital expectations of young people and their families, to ensure the local community is informed of the college's offer. The college has invested in the website which will enable perspective students to access instant information. It will also enable students to understand a learning path to their careers, so not just a level 3 programme but a map to higher education into a career, as discussed earlier. The aspiration here is to inspire young people to 'think bigger' about their future and to have a long-term goal. This is particularly important for vulnerable young people, young people who are carers, from socially deprived background and who have been 'looked after children' and need to study locally. As noted above, with low unemployment there is great attraction for young people to gain employment and not realise their full potential. By inviting young people and their families to consider a whole journey, it is hoped more young people will choose to stay and study higher levels. The college is also piloting more visual information. For the new life sciences foundation degrees, a video has been made to ensure that perspective students understand what 'life sciences' are, to have a peek and be inspired by the opportunities life sciences can provide. A webinar, which will be on our new website, is being produced to give insight to what is studied on an HND, (and what an HND is) to enable perspective students 'to imagine' that they could also access this learning. It is expected that this approach will support an increase in internal applications and encourage young people who would not continue into higher education, to stay and engage in a higher-level course. To understand that higher education does not have to be a 3-year commitment, that there are different

approaches. It is believed that this will attract students from more complex backgrounds, including students with mental health issues, and caring responsibilities. It is hoped that by making the website reflect the local community more, the local community will access the college more, increasing diversity.

The college has invested in new career hubs. These are more accessible, more central in the college to invite students in and consider their next steps, reflecting the whole college focus of being aspirational and 'thinking bigger'.

Maths is a particular barrier to access into higher education, particularly for STEM subjects. The college is committed to offering applicants opportunities to develop maths skills before enhancing on their STEM programme, ensuring students can achieve and enabling non-traditional and widening participation student's opportunity to access higher education, where maths skills are the barrier. The college is exploring different models with awarding bodies to implement a bespoke 'maths readiness programme'.

### **Success**

Analysis of data shows positive outcomes from our students for pass rates and continuation rates. The data shows an overall 98.31% pass rate from last year and 94.59% continuation rate. We continue to reflect and build on this success ensuring we are able to support all students to succeed.

Tutorials are the key to success for many of the students studying at the college. The availability of tutors to support students who have additional learning needs, and other barriers to learning is implicit within the programmes and is embedded within the ethos of the college. This is not only evident within the programmes, but also within the Learning Resource Centres (LRC) where LRC staff will support individual needs of students. This approach creates a safe environment for all students to work in but is particularly supportive for more vulnerable students or students who need some additional support. It enables a personalised approach to learning and leads to greater success for all students, but particularly students who need that extra support.

Tutorials are supported by a tutorial monitoring system which aids communication and signposting for students, for example counselling or wellbeing support. It also highlights when students are at risk, for example, through noting poor attendance. As registers are compulsory in the college, the tutors know quickly if a student has not attended learning sessions. This leads to investigation and support for the student by putting actions in place to encourage the student back into college. An attendance policy is in place to ensure students get the best out of their course. This approach is particularly important for students who may feel isolated, for example, financial isolation causes barriers to learning and attending. The structure of the college and attention to attendance means issues surrounding finance can be resolved quickly wherever possible. For directly funded courses the college can support students with a hardship fund, for franchised students our HE admissions team will support students to apply for additional funding with their partner institution.

Differentiated approaches to teaching and learning can be made due to the unique relationship's tutors have with their students. An advantage of a smaller teaching team and smaller student cohorts means that learning and teaching is differentiated for students, enabling access to the curriculum. The college invests considerable resources in supporting teachers across the college with learning and teaching, ensuring all students are achieving. This includes higher education teachers. Learning coaches, who are experienced in delivering higher education, will support new teachers but also teachers who may want to improve their teaching or who have a student who requires an alternative way of learning. Together they will investigate appropriate pedagogies to engage students and ensure the student is able to access learning. Further support is also available if needed from a psychologist.

Technology Learning Hubs are available to support both students and staff with e-Learning. Students can book one to one support to ensure they are able to access the college e-Learning systems remotely, as well as accessing programmes such as 'One Note' which can 'read' documents to students and digitally note-take, removing barriers to learning. Students have an induction from the learning technologists at the start of their course which introduces students to the range of e-Learning resources and opportunities the college offers.

Electronic learning via Moodle (eStudy) enables equal access to resources and excellent communication to students. Course materials are, whenever possible, available to students before lectures and teaching sessions to enable students with dyslexia and other learning needs to access presentations, making notetaking more accessible. How e-resources are used on programmes are regularly reviewed by students during Student, Staff Liaison Committees, this enables the student voice to positively enhance technology to support learning.

Wiltshire College is committed to supporting the well-being and mental health of all students. Each campus has a wellbeing adviser to support students with personal, social, health and wellbeing matters on a day-to-day basis. A counselling service is also available to all full-time and part-time students.

Widening participation students often have barriers to learning due to financial issues and concerns. The Student Services Centres offer students advice and guidance on fees, grants and discounts, transport to college, childcare and accommodation. There is a dedicated higher education team to support higher education students.

Equality and Diversity is at the heart of everything we do at the college. It is a place where everyone can be themselves without fear of discrimination or harassment and be supported to achieve to the best of their ability. Our 'safe and respectful culture' is embedded and implemented throughout the college and we expect our higher education students to be models of good practice for all our students in the way they behave and the language they use. We have an Assistant Principal who has responsibility for equality and diversity and sits on the Higher Education Board of Studies and Higher Education Strategy Group, to ensure the equality and diversity is considered in all approaches taken.

New higher education programmes, wherever possible, are developed with an appropriate apprenticeship route. The close relationship between workplace assessors and the academic team is crucial for student apprentices to be successful. Assessors for the apprenticeships belong to the department delivering the qualification; this ensures excellent oversight and communication regarding students and their academic progress as well as maintaining good links with employers. Maths and English tutors support apprentices within the workplace as required which enhances achievements for widening participation students.

## **Progression**

Destination data shows that most students who study locally stay locally to work. This reflects the characteristics of many students studying at Wiltshire College & University Centre as they often have additional responsibilities and are unable to leave the area, therefore not actively seeking high level jobs further afield. Our ambition is to ensure that these students progress into graduate jobs within the local area or continue with a higher level of study. Many graduates do gain graduate level employment, although some occupations are not considered graduate destinations. For example, degrees in early years where graduates choose to stay in early years settings as they wish to improve outcomes for young children; this requires high level expertise and knowledge but unfortunately is not highly paid. The college needs to develop improved ways of reporting on such destinations as high quality early years provision and specifically the qualifications of managers is linked to higher Ofsted ratings, which has a positive impact on the local community.

Working with university partners in a franchised relationship enables more connections with higher level degrees with routes mapped from our foundation degrees and undergraduate programmes. Support and discussions from the university partners with students and academic teams will highlight expectations of taking study further. Visits to university partners make the institution appear safer for students and the level 4, 5, 6 courses which are delivered at the college, scaffold academic development well, so that students will be able to succeed at a higher level wherever possible.

Higher Education courses delivered at the college have a strong vocational element, with many students working in a relevant industry alongside their degree or in work placement. This enables all students to develop industry specific skills, making them more employable. In addition, graduate attributes, which are embedded within higher education encourage students to develop wider skills to support good employment opportunities. Placements are usually found by the student, however, if a student needed special consideration the college has a dedicated Work Experience Manager with responsibility for higher education, who, with the academic team would endeavour to find an appropriate work experience/opportunity for the student enabling employability skills to develop.

The strong link with industry helps support the high levels of progression of our students into subject related industries and professional careers. Many alumni graduates keep in touch with their college academic teams and continue to support the college.

There are qualified dedicated careers advisors on each campus who can support students with CVs, interview workshops and support with graduate employment. The new career hubs give more emphasis to career guidance for both students and staff.

### **Student Voice**

The college works in partnership with students. Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) have been developed with students as the student voice forum. The approach taken is that all students, not just student representatives attend these meetings four times a year for full time courses, and three times a year for part time courses. This gives all students the opportunity to have a say, be involved in consultations and enhance the student experience. This inclusive approach supports students who would not readily offer themselves as a student representative to have a voice and influence the higher education experience in the college. The SSLCs feed into the Higher Education Board of Studies, if possible, by student representatives, or by presenting key points from SSLC minutes.

There is a higher education student who is elected as a member of the governing body. Higher Education students are also encouraged to take up positions on the student union.

### **Peer support**

The college has introduced a higher education annual exhibition where final year students present their final year projects/work to peers, level 3 students, potential applicants, alumni, awarding bodies, employers and local business, the governing body as well as the students' families. This event celebrates the student's work, disseminating their good practice to others and showcasing what they have achieved on their journey through higher education. Potential applicants from the local community and our level 3 students can talk with the students and see that 'someone like them' has produced successful level 5/6 work. This encourages engagement with higher education and supports upward social mobility. Employers also have the opportunity to discuss with final year students their projects and work which supports excellent links with employers and employment opportunities.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

The college uses a reflective and reflexive approach to monitoring, evaluation and improvement. The student voice is heard and consulted with through Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) which discusses the whole student life cycle with students throughout the academic year (four times). There are set agendas with each SSLC committee ensuring all elements of the student journey are discussed at appropriate times throughout the year. Comments from the SSLCs are reported to the Higher Education Board of Studies (HEBoS) (for academic comments) and the Higher Education Business Support Group (HEBS) for non-academic comments (such as issues with the physical environment). Students can request particular comments to be presented to the HE meetings on their behalf at the SSLC. These can be presented by a student representative who can attend the meeting, or by writing the comment on the SSLC minutes which is

passed to the HE administrators to include. This approach supports the non-traditional student, who has significant additional responsibilities and would find attending meetings external to their course impossible. Programme teams are responsible for reporting back to students from the HE meetings as appropriate (via Heads of Departments, Assistant principals or Head of Higher Education). It is expected that most issues and concerns will be managed by the academic team. SSLCs are also used to consult with students on new policies and procedures and new course developments etc. SSLCs include all students, so all students including those with protected characteristics and widening participation students have a voice and can contribute in the decision-making process.

Unit/Module evaluations review the student perspective of the taught element of the programme anonymously and in addition to the SSLCs. These are evaluated by the programme leader and included in the annual course reviews, highlighting any actions and discussed with students at the SSLC.

External surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS) give an oversight of the student perspective, however only limited HE courses are included in this. Specific course actions are included in the annual course review and discussed with students at the SSLC.

A thematic analysis is carried each year on the SSLCs, the NSS, External Examiners reports and work experience survey. A report is written for each and presented to the Governing Body. Individual course actions are included in the annual course review and discussed with students at the SSLC.

College actions are discussed at HEBoS and HEBS and inform department Self Evaluation reports and the College's Quality Improvement Plan.

A Higher Education Strategy Group oversees the strategic development and operation of the College Higher Education curriculum. Its remit is broad and will include relationships with partner Universities, the college's responsibilities to external organisations such as the OfS and QAA, reviews curriculum development and it will review internal operational issues.

## Targets

- To grow student numbers to meet LEP priorities, local business needs and the needs of local students who would not traditionally be able to access HE out of area. This includes students with protected characteristics and from socially disadvantaged areas.
- To continue to develop accessible higher education programmes, meeting LEP priorities and the needs of the local community. This includes working with awarding bodies to 'think differently' about our offer.
- To remove barriers to learning by implementing a 'maths readiness' programme for STEM subjects.
- To further develop the support we give to students by using blended learning to aid academic studies at level 4, 5 and 6, and to have this separately as students engaging with level 4 can be overwhelmed when presented with level 6 information, especially less confident students or students with additionally learning needs.
- To continue to develop the college's website to ensure the college offer is reaching our target audience; mature students, students with protected characteristics, students from socially deprived areas which includes our own level 3 students. Engaging with our target audience will enable improved life chance opportunities.
- To collect and analyse destination data in addition to the external agencies so that the college can better understand student destinations, reflect on it to improve progression, but also to 'tell the graduate story' better.

- To continue to develop the technology hubs and Makerspaces in the Learning Technology Centres. Providing eLearning support in college supports students who do not have access to technology at home, especially students who are financially challenged or who have not had much experience with technology. Students will have the opportunity to try something new, with support, even if it not part of their course, for example 3D printers and virtual reality. This will build confidence, will enable students to perhaps develop a creative presentation and be more employable. This also supports disabled students as technology can assist learning and teaching in many ways. Higher Education students will also be able to borrow laptops if theirs fails at a crucial time. The 1-1 support offered by learning technology coordinators is invaluable for the student experience.
- To continue to invest in tutorials as student feedback identifies this support is the lifeline to success when students are having difficulties and need support. Tutorials are the main safety net that enables students to continue with their studies and achieve.

**Trowbridge Campus**

College Road, Trowbridge,  
Wiltshire, BA14 0ES

**Chippenham Campus**

Cocklebury Road, Chippenham,  
Wiltshire, SN15 3QD

**Lackham Campus**

Lacock, Chippenham,  
Wiltshire, SN15 2NY

**Salisbury Campus**

Southampton Road, Salisbury,  
Wiltshire, SP1 2LW

Tel: 01225 350035 [www.wiltshire.ac.uk](http://www.wiltshire.ac.uk)

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