

HE ACCESS & PARTICIPATION STATEMENT 2023/24

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Scope

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; this is in contrast to the Marches, which is generally less deprived, as shown in the table below (with 1st being most deprived and 151st being least deprived, based on 151 local authorities¹):

The Black Country

Local Authority	Overall IMD Ranking	Education Ranking	Employment Ranking
Dudley	74 th	40 th	41 st
Sandwell	8 th	4 th	8 th
Walsall	26 th	10 th	21 st
Wolverhampton	16 th	18 th	7 th

The Marches

Local Authority	Overall IMD Ranking	Education Ranking	Employment Ranking
Herefordshire	88 th	75 th	102 nd
Shropshire	71 st	95 th	104 th
Telford & Wrekin	100 th	42 nd	48 th

Particularly relevant to our HE provision is that, within our catchment area, the number of people with level 4 qualifications is below the national average (see table below); the unemployment rate is also considerably higher than the average. Generally speaking, the Marches has more residents qualified to level 4 and above, although the area still lags behind the national average; however, with the exception of Telford and the Wrekin, the unemployment rate is lower than the wider West Midlands and England as a whole.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/853811/loD2019_FAQ_v4.pdf

Local Authority	% of residents qualified to Level 4+ ²	Unemployment Rate ³
Dudley	35.1%	4.1%
Sandwell	27.2%	6.0%
Walsall	26.9%	8.2%
Wolverhampton	35.2%	7.5%
The Marches		
Herefordshire	39.4%	1.8%
Shropshire	41.8%	2.9%
Telford & Wrekin	35.1%	5.0%
Regional/National Comparison		
West Midlands	38.9%	4.6%
England	43.2%	3.6%

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.

Data Insights

Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Dudley College	IOT	Overall	National Comparison ⁴
Asian	4.3%	11.2%	9.1%	12.2%
Black	9.5%	8.2%	8.6%	8.7%
Mixed Race	1.7%	4.8%	3.9%	4.5%
White	84.5%	75.8%	78.4%	72.6%
Other	0%	0%	0%	2.0%

² <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/contents.aspx>

³³ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/asv2htm>

⁴ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/higher-education/first-year-entrants-onto-undergraduate-degrees/latest>

Data indicates a disparity in the number of students from an Asian and a Mixed-Race background studying at Dudley College, although this discrepancy does not seem to follow through to our IOT provision. This indicates a need to fully investigate this discrepancy with the College's EDI lead and carry out greater outreach to students from these backgrounds, initially among the College's existing level 3 students, ensuring that progression is fully monitored and supported.

Disability

Declaring Disability	Dudley College	IOT	Overall
Yes	25.9%	7.4%	13.0%
No	74.1%	92.6%	87.0%

The data shows a significant under-representation of IOT students declaring a disability. While this is clearly a cause for concern, it reflects the national picture reported by the Institute for Apprenticeships; this states that 8% of Level 4+ apprentices declare a disability compared to 14% of undergraduates and 18% of the working age population⁵. As the majority of our IOT students are apprentices, this figure becomes more understandable and represents a need to overcome barriers that students with disabilities clearly face when participating in higher-level apprenticeship. Within this context, however, it appears that our classroom-based HE students are more likely to declare a disability than the national average.

Looking more closely at the types of disabilities declared by students gives us the following breakdown:

Disability	Dudley College	IOT	Overall
Autism spectrum disorder	20.0%	5.0%	14.0%
Disability affecting mobility	3.3%		2.0%
Dyslexia	33.3%	25.0%	30.0%
Hearing impairment	6.7%		4.0%
Mental health difficulty	13.3%	5.0%	10.0%
Moderate learning difficulty	6.7%		4.0%
Not provided	6.7%		4.0%
Other medical condition (for example epilepsy, asthma, diabetes)	3.3%	35.0%	16.0%
Other physical disability	3.3%		2.0%
Prefer not to say		5.0%	2.0%
Social and emotional difficulties	3.3%		2.0%
Vision impairment		25.0%	10.0%

⁵ <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/about/newshub/news-events/tackling-inequalities-and-lack-of-diversity-across-apprenticeships-and-skills-training/#:~:text=Data%20on%20disability%3A%20People%20with.%25%20of%20working%2Dage%20population.>

Overall, the most commonly reported disabilities are Dyslexia (30%), Autism Spectrum Disorder (14%), Mental Health Difficulties (10%) and Vision Impairment (10%) – there is also a need to investigate any potential trends making up the ‘other’ category (16%).

Support is in place to support students declaring a disability - learners identifying dyslexia on their application are invited to a follow up assessment with dyslexia team, whereupon a Specialist Dyslexia Tutor completes the Dyslexia Adult Screening Test. The result of the test will be formulated into a report which is uploaded onto the learner’s eLLP and, where required, weekly specialist support sessions are provided by members of the Dyslexia team.

In terms of mental health support, the College has trained 47 staff as Mental First Aiders to support students and act as first point of contact for any needs. The College also has a counselling team who offer appointments and a drop-in service. Charlie is the College Therapy Dog and assists students with anxiety. To support neurodiverse students, we have acquired and are piloting Cognassist to support with assessment of students and online support which they can complete in their own time, and all staff have been provided with neurodiversity training. We continue to upskill staff to ensure they have the knowledge to support specific students (such as those with a hearing impairment) and signpost students for support.

POLAR Quintiles

POLAR Quintile	Dudley College	IOT	Overall
1	30.2%	21.2%	23.9%
2	23.3%	28.6%	27.0%
3	20.7%	18.2%	19.0%
4	11.2%	17.5%	15.6%
5	14.7%	14.5%	14.5%

In line with our strategy, and reflecting our local demographics, half of our Higher Education students come from postcodes in Quintiles 1 and 2 (the Quintiles with the lowest number of young people studying at HE level⁶). We will continue to monitor this while engaging with young people from these postcodes prior to them progressing to Level 4 education or training; this is largely through our schools engagement activities and our participation in the Aspire to HE project.

Working with Students

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.

⁶ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/>

- 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 the universities of Worcester and Wolverhampton. 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. We are also supporting the Dudley Academies Trust and Millennium Point's STEM Highfliers project, through which local secondary school pupils have the opportunity to build a working biplane. We will continue with these activities and expand them in line with wider College progression activities.

Dudley College of Technology
6th September 2023