

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION STATEMENT 2025/26

STATEMENT

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Department/Area	Higher Education
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OVERVIEW

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 is 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):

Local Authority	Overall IMD Ranking	Education Ranking	Employment Ranking
The Black Country			
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			
Herefordshire	88 th	75 th	102 nd
Telford & Wrekin	71 st	42 nd	48 th
Shropshire	100 th	95 th	104 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, Universal Credit Claimant rate is lower than the wider West Midlands and England as a whole.

Local Authority	% of residents qualified to Level 4+ ²	Universal Credit Claimant Rate ³
The Black Country		
Dudley	38.9%	4.8%
Sandwell	29.7%	7.1%
Walsall	28.4%	6.3%
Wolverhampton	45.7%	7.4%
The Marches		
Herefordshire	44.0%	2.7%
Shropshire	43.2%	2.4%
Telford & Wrekin	35.6%	4.1%
Regional/National Comparison		
West Midlands	42.9%	5.6%

¹ [File 11 - IoD2019 Local Authority District Summaries_upper-tier_.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)

² [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics \(nomisweb.co.uk\)](#)

³ [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics \(nomisweb.co.uk\)](#)

England	46.8%	4.2%
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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, our IoT 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 following partners:

- Dudley College of Technology
- Avensys
- University of Worcester
- Telford College
- Hereford, Ludlow and North Shropshire College

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

To get a longitudinal perspective on our student demographics, we have reviewed data from the 2021-22 to the 2025-25 academic years. This represents 2,203 students across all courses at Level 4 and above. This has yielded the following insights:

Ethnicity

The ethnic background of our students is as follows:

Ethnicity	Dudley College HE Learners 2021-2025 No.)	Dudley College HE Learners 2021-2025 (%)
English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	1,492	67.7%
Indian	127	5.8%
Any Other White background	115	5.2%
Pakistani	85	3.9%
African	64	2.9%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean background	59	2.7%
Any other Asian background	58	2.6%
White and Black Caribbean	40	1.8%
Caribbean	35	1.6%
Any Other Mixed / multiple ethnic background	24	1.1%

Ethnicity	Dudley College HE Learners 2021-2025 No.)	Dudley College HE Learners 2021-2025 (%)
Not provided	21	1.0%
White and Asian	20	0.9%
Bangladeshi	18	0.8%
Arab	15	0.7%
Chinese	10	0.5%
Irish	8	0.4%
Any other ethnic group	7	0.3%
White and Black African	5	0.2%
	2,203	100%

To make a comparison with local and national figures, these need to be consolidated into broader categories as follows:

Ethnicity	Dudley College (No.)	Dudley College (%)	National Comparison of Undergraduates⁴	Black Country Demographics⁵
White	1,615	73.3%	71.5%	68.6%
Asian	313	14.2%	12.9%	18.5%
Black	158	7.2%	8.5%	6.2%
Mixed Race	89	4.0%	4.8%	3.9%
Other	7	0.3%	2.3%	2.2%
Not Provided	21	0.9%	-	-

The data suggests that, in terms of the UK's undergraduate population, our provision attracts a higher than average proportion of White and Asian students, but lags behind for students from Black and Mixed-Race backgrounds. In terms of local demographics, our students from Mixed Race and Other backgrounds are broadly in line with the local population, while White and Black students are over-represented in comparison to the population as a whole. By the same measure, Asian students are under-represented. This data will be incorporated into our forthcoming HE Strategy and will inform outreach and awareness raising activities.

Disability

Declaring Disability	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Yes	269	12.2%
No	1,934	87.8%

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 just 8% of Level 4+ apprentices declare a learning disability or difficulty compared to 14% of undergraduates and 18% of the working age population⁶. As the majority of our IoT students are apprentices, this figure becomes more understandable

⁴ [First year entrants onto undergraduate and postgraduate degrees - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures](#)

⁵ [Population - Black Country](#)

⁶ [Tackling inequalities and lack of diversity across apprenticeships and skills training / Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#)

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 align with the national average.

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

Disability	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Autism spectrum disorder	26	9.7%
Disability affecting mobility	13	4.8%
Dyscalculia	4	1.5%
Dyslexia	84	31.2%
Hearing impairment	16	5.9%
Mental health difficulty	30	11.2%
Moderate learning difficulty	4	1.5%
Not provided	5	1.9%
Other disability	9	3.3%
Other learning disability	4	1.5%
Other medical condition (for example epilepsy, asthma, diabetes)	34	12.6%
Other physical disability	8	3.0%
Prefer not to say	5	1.9%
Social and emotional difficulties	6	2.2%
Speech, language and communication needs	3	1.1%
Temporary disability after illness	1	0.4%
Vision impairment	17	6.3%
TOTAL	269	100.0%

Across all student declarations (with some students declaring multiple disabilities), the most commonly reported specific disabilities are Dyslexia (31.2%), Autism Spectrum Disorder (9.7%), Mental Health Difficulties (11.2%) and vision or hearing impairments (6.3% and 5.9% respectively). Given the substantial number of students reporting 'other' disabilities or medical conditions (12.6%), there is perhaps a need to investigate any potential trends making up these categories (as they amount to over a quarter of declarations). 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 is formulated into a report which is uploaded onto the learner's eLP 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 a large number of 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, 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.

Gender

Provision	Male	Female
16-19	62.8%	37.2%
Adult	62.3%	37.7%
Total	62.4%	37.6%

Perhaps reflecting our curriculum offer and systemic gender imbalances in various industries, almost two-thirds of our HE students are male; this requires investigation into how we can increase the number of female learners in our higher level provision, as well as identifying if any specific barriers are in place that need to be addressed. From 2024-25, more data was collected in terms of gender difference, and this will be reflected in future Statements.

Disadvantage

Tundra Quintile	%
1	20.4%
2	29.0%
3	25.7%
4	19.5%
5	5.3%

Adult HE Quintile	%
1	50.4%
2	18.8%
3	17.1%
4	9.1%
5	4.6%

In line with our strategy, and reflecting local demographics, almost half of our 16-19 HE learners comes from postcodes in Tundra Quintiles 1 and 2 (the Quintiles with the lowest number of young people studying at HE level⁷); however, it should be noted that there is a significant gap in numbers between Quintile 1 and Quintiles 2-4, perhaps showing that more could be done to raise aspirations in Quintile 1 areas. This is reflected in the corresponding data for adult learners, where 69.2% of adult learners come from Adult HE quintiles 1 and 2, perhaps showing the importance of work-related and employer-led training in increasing the numbers of people qualified to Level 4. 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 collaboration with university partners, while working with major employers such as the NHS and local authorities raises the number of adult learners.

While we have a significant geographic reach (with learners coming from over 150 local authorities and 515 wards), the overwhelming majority (1,752) predictably come from the four Black Country local authorities and Birmingham City. For both 16-19 and adult learners, the wards which have the highest proportion of students are St. Thomas's, Upper Gornal & Woodsetton, St. James's and Castle & Priory. Broadly speaking, these are the wards which immediately surround the Dudley Learning Quarter and the majority of the Dudley Academy

⁷ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/>

Trust schools and are also some of the local wards that score highest in relation to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. This emphasises the importance of the College in raising local aspirations and tackling low attainment levels.

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:

- A simple and affordable fee structure
- Effective, inclusive and targeted marketing and engagement
- 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 Level 4 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

We continue to provide Higher Level apprenticeships in a number of areas, up to Level 5. Learners are often recruited from Level 3 provision, or through a vacancy advertised by the employer. We also see a number of employers utilise this route for upskilling staff. We work with employers to identify areas within the organisation that may benefit from an apprentice at level 4/5. We continue to develop new provision mapped to the skills priorities in the area, including those set out in the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and the West Midlands Combined Authority’s (WMCA) Growth Plan, including flexible modular provision. We have underpinned this priority area with investment in facilities that allow access to high-level technical training in advanced construction, health and engineering. We are also leading the Health Innovation Dudley project which sees the University of Worcester deliver their programmes from Dudley, allowing students with traditional barriers to entry, to access high quality university level qualifications directly mapped to local skills needs. We make extensive use of Microsoft Teams 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

and 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. As part of this, we support 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
29 September 2025