

## Higher Education Access and Participation Statement

City of Wolverhampton College has a long-standing reputation for commitment to and the successful implementation of strategies to widen access and participation of all students within the community we serve. The College recognises the value of education in transforming people's lives and actively embraces our role in the promotion of educational opportunities for all through our purpose '*defining futures*'.

City of Wolverhampton College is a large further education provider situated on two sites across Wolverhampton, with a satellite campus in Telford catering for commercial plastic injection and moulding training. The College has a natural catchment area of the city of Wolverhampton which also penetrates parts of the Black Country.

Wolverhampton has the second highest unemployment rates in the West Midlands and the Black Country, excepting Birmingham, and is 2<sup>nd</sup> in the UK for those aged 16+. Wolverhampton is ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the UK for unemployment rates for those aged 18-24 – also top in the for the West Midlands and the Black Country.

The Black Country is one of the most challenged regions in the country. It has the lowest proportion of total jobs relative to the working age population (with a density of 0.71, versus a national average of 0.86) and the highest proportion of the population who are unemployed (6.2%, versus a national average of 4.2%).

A particular problem locally is that the number of people with level 4 qualifications is below the national average (35.4% for Wolverhampton, 35% for Dudley, 27.5% for Sandwell, and 40.4% Birmingham versus 43.1% in England overall). Research from the Black Country Observatory indicates that there is a need for a further 102,011 people across the subregion to obtain a Level 4 qualification to equal the national average.

We see living and operating in an area of extremely high levels of social deprivation as a context, and not an excuse. It is against this backdrop that the College is seeking to provide greater access to higher education. This will provide young people and adults with the technical and personal skills they need to gain employment, to progress their careers and thus contribute to the City's economic, social, and cultural development.

What this means in practice is City of Wolverhampton College aims to:

- Provide opportunities for seamless progression for students who might otherwise not be able to successfully access higher education due to a range of barriers including social and emotional, cost and financial implications or lack of support.
- Raise aspirations by providing opportunities for students to study higher education in a learning environment that is supportive and inclusive.
- Provide students with a range of educational opportunities which enables them to develop the knowledge, behaviour and skills required to progress to higher level skilled employment.

### Higher Education Access and Participation Statement

- Develop relationships with local and regional businesses with the purpose of introducing Higher Apprenticeship pathways to support skills shortages.

Examples of how implementation of this commitment will happen at City of Wolverhampton College includes the following:

- The College maintains low-cost entry points to higher education so that the local community and employers have access to affordable higher education.
- The College provides information and promotes its higher-level opportunities to potential students in the workplace, through open events, through progression talks to its internal student population, in adult learning publications, on the College website and in other forms of social media – aiming to reach the widest audience by the use of many different media.
- The College offers students smaller group sizes in order to create a more personalised approach to learning.
- The College has developed its work with local employers to actively engage with them and promote its higher-level offer. This has enabled employees to have access routes to our higher education provision and supports to develop skills to enable career progression within the company.
- The College delivers progression and higher education talks to its level 3 students and actively provides support for UCAS applications and accessing financial information through its Student Services team.
- The College participates in activities with the Aspire to HE programme to encourage students to become more aspirational regarding progression to higher education, whether internally or externally.
- Applications are welcomed from all students irrespective of background. The College aims to place applicants on appropriate courses and provides appropriate support to enable students to succeed.
- The College operates a fair admissions policy with clear entry criteria for its programmes/courses.
- The College ensures that students are not discriminated against during the admissions process or during their time at the College. Where students do not meet the entry criteria, the College supports the student in identifying a suitable alternative programme of study that will enable access to higher education in the future.
- To aid retention, and ensure students have a smooth transition into higher education, the College operates a HE induction programme which introduces students to aspects such as academic regulations, college, and university resources (where applicable to the course), welfare support, and gives the opportunity to identify support required.