

University of Worcester Access and Participation Strategic Statement 2019-20

Since its beginning, the University of Worcester has lived its maxim 'Inspired for life', expressed through our culture of inclusion, creativity, effectiveness and friendliness. We believe in educating and supporting the whole person, championing intellectual growth and academic achievement for all who wish to study and engage with the university, whatever their background. We achieve this through a combination of collaborative work with our partners, our students and our community raising the aspirations of children and young people, championing accessible and relevant spaces and inclusive learning and teaching practice. The student voice is integral to this vision and we endeavour to create an environment which encourages democracy, progress, knowledge and principle where students become good citizens both within the university community and in the wider world.

Our Students

We have a long held commitment to welcome and support students from a broad range of backgrounds. The University is 8th out of 132 UK institutions for ensuring that people from all backgrounds have the chance to study at university (HEPI 2018). The university has consistently welcomed a high proportion of our students from some of the lowest participation areas in the UK; 30% of our students are from a POLAR4 Q1 area or IMD Q1 area. A significant proportion of our students come from within the West Midlands region with many coming from within Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Our students from BAME backgrounds make up 12% of our student body which is significantly higher than the local population of BAME which is 6.8%.

In order to achieve our ambition - that all of our students have equal opportunity to succeed - we have reviewed data for students across all stages of the student lifecycle; where we have identified gaps, we have set strategic goals to address these gaps.

Our Goals

Goal 1: To continue to grow applications and registrations from students from lower socio-economic groups; mature students; students from low participation neighbourhoods and other under-represented groups.

Goal 2: To improve student retention, as measured through HESA continuation rates, to at or above the benchmark for the majority of courses/subject areas and for the University overall by 2023, and to reduce the differences in withdrawal rates for disadvantaged groups.

Goal 3: To improve year on year student success, as measured through attainment of top honours for those groups where there remains a significant difference in outcomes, so that differences in outcomes are at least no greater than those at sector level in relation to gender, entry qualification, age and ethnicity.

Goal 4: To improve progression to highly skilled employment or further study to 1% above the benchmark for the majority of courses/subject areas and for the University overall by 2023, and to systematically reduce differences in outcomes for disadvantaged groups.

Goal 5: To further strengthen our whole institution approach to access and participation through the development of institutional practices in relation to delivery monitoring, evaluation, reflection and planning.

Our Strategy

Our established ambition and strategy in relation to access remains appropriate. Our strategy is to clearly understand the most effective practices across all aspects of the University's engagement with students, and use this knowledge to deliver an evidenced based approach to practice. We will continue to work towards the targets that we have set in previous Access Agreements in relation to outreach, collaboration and schools improvement work. Our whole institution approach is clearly delivering success for students and whilst we are pleased with our progress in this area we remain committed to continuous improvement. We will continue to invest in the successful graduate ambassador programme, our pre and post 16 outreach programmes, our collaborative work through the Aimhigher collaborative partnership and in our institution-wide work to develop links and partnerships with schools, colleges and other organisations.

In relation to student success and progression, our aim is to embed a culture whereby student retention and success is regarded as everyone's responsibility, and in which there are clear expectations about engagement with learning activities. Our whole institution

approach, where inclusion is at the very center of all of what we do, supports our aim to equip staff across the University with the knowledge skills and understanding of how to maximise opportunities for all; seeking continuous improvement in student engagement.

Impact

Our Access and Participation Plan is the key document which frames the institution's approach to fair access, success and progression across the student lifecycle. Oversight for the achievement of the aims set out in this plan sits with the Vice Chancellors Executive Board (VCEB); the most senior executive committee within the University.

Operational delivery will be supported through integration with the wider institutional strategies; the University's strategic plan, the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience (LTSE) strategy, and through the relevant committees; Academic Board, LTSE Committee and the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

We have made good progress in utilising evaluation evidence to plan interventions, this is evident across all areas of the student lifecycle where we have used data and evidence to inform programme design. This is particularly effective in relation to on programme support designed to enhance student retention and success. We are developing our expertise in the use of Theory of Change and this will form the basis of our evaluation strategy, embedding evaluation into the development and delivery of programmes from their inception. We will measure the success of our work through our adoption of an institution wide evaluation framework which will be supported through continuous review.

Review

We will review and re-publish this Access and Participation strategic statement annually in line with our annual impact report on our Access and Participation Plan.