

West Thames College Widening Access and Participation Statement 2023-24

Vision

West Thames will be a vibrant college, inspiring all our learners to fulfil their dreams and ambitions. Our outstanding education and training will contribute to a prosperous and cohesive community.

Values

Underpinning this vision are our four shared values and beliefs.

Integrity Excellence Equality Respect

Widening access and participation is central to the ethos and culture of the College and encompassed within the vision. The college has an ongoing commitment to widening access and participation that sees education as a transformative tool that drives social mobility and enables students to achieve their full potential from whatever background. It seeks to include as wide a range of students as possible and to offer them a high-quality learning experience.

West Thames College is a medium-sized general further education college in the London Borough of Hounslow. The College has two sites, Isleworth and the Skills and Logistics Centre in Feltham. The majority of students accessing the College reside in west London boroughs, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hillingdon, Ealing, Hounslow, and Richmond.

The student population across all provision is reflective of Hounslow's population which is more ethnically and linguistically diverse than many London boroughs. The local community includes areas with high social deprivation rates and has asylum seekers and refugees in its population mix. At 19%, it has the third highest proportion of Asian/Asian British and Indian residents in the United Kingdom. Over 140 languages are spoken and 36% of residents do not speak English as a first language.

The College offers a broad vocational curriculum across qualification levels from pre-entry to level 6. The College delivers programmes of learning to approximately 6,000 students each year including approximately 1700 full time 16-19-year-old FE (Further Education) students.

Our Higher Education provision is small totalling approximately 150 students on full HE diplomas or certificates and approximately 70 students studying smaller level 4 awards. We work in partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University for our Teacher Training courses and Kingston University for the Foundation Degree in Early Years

Widening Access for Underrepresented Groups

Our Higher Education student population is small but very ethnically diverse including considerable proportion of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students. This helps to set us apart from most other institutions and highlights our commitment to widening access. For the 2022-23 academic year 60% of our Higher Education students were from a BAME group and 40% were in the white British or other white groups. Of the students in the BAME category 100% achieved their HNC or HND (Higher National Diploma) in 2022-23.

In the 2022-23 academic year 100% of our Higher Education students who declared a learning difficulty, disability or health issue achieved their HNC or HND (Higher National Diploma) qualification in 2022-23.

Widening Access and Participation Goals 2023-24

1- Support student retention and achievement through excellent teaching, learning and assessment

The College aims to provide an outstanding teaching, learning and assessment experience for our students. Most of our students have progressed to higher education through non-traditional vocational pathways. Excellent quality teaching, learning and assessment helps to inspire and engage students in their studies and enables them to succeed.

Our student achievement rate in academic year 2022-23 was 95% for our HNC and HND courses, and 99% achievement for our shorter level 4 and 5 courses. 100% of students who declared a disability, difficulty or health issue achieved their HNC or HND or short level 4 qualification in the academic year 2022-23.

2. Simple and affordable fee structure

The College aims to maintain an affordable pricing structure ensuring that courses are viable and sustainable but also accessible. We wish to provide the best possible service for our students while maintaining the tuition fees at an affordable level. The access and participation data dashboard published by the Office for Students shows that a significant majority of our higher education students come from areas of economic deprivation. The College is keen to maintain this value for money approach in order not to deter potential students, particularly those from areas of economic deprivation and non-traditional backgrounds.

3. Fair and supportive admission process

Many of our students have been out of education for some time, or they are first generation into Higher Education. The applications process can be daunting for these students. All students are offered individual support to assist them at each stage of the process by the Information Centre team and our curriculum teams. This support includes signposting and supporting students in making applications for student loans or the offer of support for students throughout the process where a learning difficulty or disability has been disclosed. It is essential that the College can identify that prospective students have the appropriate skills required and that they are fully aware of the requirements of the course. To facilitate this, students also complete an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy if this is not supported by their qualifications on entry. Students have access to all the information required during the application process through to enrolment and induction.

Applicants with nonstandard qualifications will also be considered where they have significant professional experience within their chosen subject area.

4. Support for students and student achievement

We aim to maintain our high-quality tutorial pastoral support framework. The College has highly effective learning and pastoral support structures that increase student retention (95% overall student retention rates for our HNC and HND and shorter level 4 and 5 courses in 2022-23). The tutorial framework is key to supporting students and enabling success.

We also aim to continue to develop digital technology to enhance teaching and learning and give greater access and flexibility of learning opportunities.

5. Develop and expand our Higher Education offer to ensure greater access

We aim to increase progression routes and access to higher level learning for our existing students through advice and guidance activities and a progression bonus for our full time NC and HND courses. Specific Higher Education events are scheduled to support students with this process, for example, the College Higher Education Fare and the annual Aspire Event. These activities enable students to make informed choices and decisions about their prospective course choices.

The College aims to increase the volume of short or part time level 4 and level 5 courses to increase access and meet the needs of employers and students.

6. Raise awareness of our Higher Education offer

The College aims to raise awareness of our Higher Education offer in the local community through advertising and local events like the Aspire progression and recruitment event in March. The College will maintain our school liaison and outreach work to increase awareness of higher-level skills education for young people. We will advertise our courses to a wider audience with a greater focus on various social media platforms.

Higher Education Students Progression and Destinations

West Thames College Higher Education leavers go on to variety opportunities, the significant majority progress to local universities or further study, whilst others progress directly to work or self-employment. The College is part of the West London Universities Further Education to Higher Education progression agreement, ensuring students are fully informed about local university progression routes. Curriculum teams are required to record their students' progression plans at the time they graduate. This information is shared with teachers and managers through the Higher Education Operations group and the Higher Education Strategic Group College; this information is monitored through in the annual Course Review and Evaluation.

Recognition of the Colleges Support for Students by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

In November 2015, The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at West Thames College.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree awarding bodies and other awarding organisation meets UK expectations.

- The quality of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities meets UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations.

The QAA review team identified the following features of good practice at West Thames College.

- The externality provided by the direct involvement of the Corporation in monitoring standards, quality, and the enhancement of learning opportunities (Expectations A3.3 and B8).
- The engagement with industry that ensures that the curriculum supports employability (Expectation B3).
- The comprehensive arrangements for student support which enable students to develop their academic, personal, and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The strategic approach to enhancement (Enhancement).
- The development and use of resources for digital literacy and e-learning (Enhancement).