

Swindon College Access and Participation Statement.

Swindon College is a medium sized further education college located in Wiltshire. We have approximately 1200 16-18 students, 4000 19+ students, 1000 apprentices and 400 Higher Education students. The college has a long history in Swindon beginning in 1843 educating employees of the Great Western Railway. In 1895 Victoria Road Technical College was built, establishing the first purpose built School of Art in the South West in 1896, alongside technical education. The first Swindon College campus was built in 1961, with North Star campus in 1975. We are now based on one campus at North Star Avenue, which was extended in 2006 and is close to the town centre, rail and road links. This campus has a range of well-equipped specialised workshops, studios and classrooms plus a Higher Education Student Centre and Learning Development Centre to support our students to succeed.

Our ambition is to ensure that the people of Swindon are served by an effective college that is working with the other schools and colleges in the area to make Swindon and the surrounding area stronger. The College strategy is designed to ensure that the College's HE provision reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community, focussing on employer engagement, inclusivity and both personal and academic development. Our aim is to enable all our HE learners to realise their full potential in an aspirational and supportive environment.

We know that local employers are struggling to meet their training needs from the local HE market, because the Swindon and Wiltshire area has a number of areas identified as a HE "cold spot" with significantly lower than expected participation given the GCSE results of the residents. We are also aware that the numbers of residents with higher level skills are low with only 34.2% of Swindon residents holding a university level qualification. Almost half of those achieving 10 or more GCSEs in 2011/12 didn't subsequently progress to university resulting in only 33% of young people progressing to higher education from Swindon. 15% below the English average.

The local area is over reliant on low value, high volume employment in sectors regarded as being at serious risk of not existing in the near future. With low paid employment declining, demand for education and training enabling access to new higher level jobs will increase, we see it as one of our key roles to support the people of Swindon and the local area to access the higher education opportunities they need to be able to sustain and improve their future. This includes breaking down barriers to entering the education system and supporting students through to the successful conclusion of their studies.

In order to support more of our students and the population of Swindon, to participate in and successfully complete their aim of studying for a Higher Education Qualification we offer the following:

- 1) Lower entry requirements than traditional Higher Education Institutions (HEI) along with flexibility for mature students with work experience in their chosen area of study.
- 2) The opportunity to study close to home resulting in lower living costs whilst studying.
- 3) Lower course fees for higher education than a traditional HEI so that the local community and employers have access to affordable higher education.
- 4) Support with applying for and resolving Student Finance and Disabled Student Allowance issues.
- 5) In the main, smaller group sizes than a HEI with a strong emphasis on academic and pastoral support.
- 6) Screening to identify areas for improvement in academic skills, access to the HE Study Support Officer and workshops in term 1 to support integration back into education if needed (for example – using Moodle, email and other IT applications, social media, referencing, using the Learning Development Centre effectively).
- 7) A hardship fund for HE students in financial difficulty.
- 8) Provision of impartial information, advice and guidance. The college promotes its higher education opportunities to potential students in the workplace, through open events, through progression talks to internal students, 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.

- 9) The College delivers progression and higher education talks to its Level 3 learners – both 16-18 and adults and actively provides support for UCAS applications and accessing financial information through its Careers Team.
- 10) To support the smooth transition into higher education and the retention of students, all HE students participate in a dedicated HE induction programme, which introduces students to the requirements of the course, academic regulations, resources and the support available.
- 11) We offer a range of curriculum pathways to help you to progress to higher level study and many of our programmes are available in full time and part time modes of study.
- 12) Support with Job searching, applying for jobs, preparation for interviews in your final year.
- 13) Student Voice - student's opinions on their experiences during study are valued and canvassed through individual group forums in each Semester. This provides timely action and feedback on matters affecting study, and improves communication and participation.

We also work with our university partners and other organisations to provide opportunities for students to find out more about studying at a higher level, this includes visits to their institutions, guest speakers, mentors, and support with UCAS etc. For example:

- a) Study Higher works with young people in school in years 9 -13 who live in specific geographical areas across Swindon. Study Higher is working closely with schools, colleges, and other stakeholders to deliver inspirational and informative activities and events. Local schools and colleges take part in the Study Higher programme, being selected according to the number of pupils they have that reside in target wards where participation in HE is lower than expected given their GCSE grades. Oxford Brookes University lead Study Higher locally as part of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP).
- b) The University of Gloucestershire have an Outreach and Widening Participation Team recruiting and training students from across faculties each year, to mentor students age 14-18 in local schools and colleges. These students have the potential to progress to higher education and benefit from the support of current university students. Engineering and other STEM subjects as well as new delivery models such as degree apprenticeships, are development areas for the University of Gloucestershire's work in widening participation.

If you are interested in accessing activities linked to any of these programmes click [here](#) for information about Study Higher Events or [here](#) for the University of Gloucestershire Outreach and Widening Participation activities

We know from analysis of our data and feedback from our students that there are areas where we should be doing better. For example, the following groups are currently underrepresented: care leavers, students on free college meals and students from areas of multiple deprivation. So we will ensure we target some of our development work and recruitment activities to focus on ensuring that we have better representation from these groups. We do have some key areas to celebrate – we have really strong continuation data, this shows that we retain our students through the duration of their course at levels consistently above the sector benchmark regardless of their characteristics or mode of study. Our full time students from POLAR categories 1 and 2 (the most deprived) do significantly better on our programmes than the national average. Areas that we are focussed on improving are clear. We must do better at supporting our students into highly skilled employment or further study, some of our performance in this area is accounted for in the type of curriculum offer we have which typically involves lower paid or self-employed work initially, for example Art courses, Health and Social Care and Early Years. However, we recognise that the qualifications our students leave us with should enable them to access higher level work and we need to help with aspiration and confidence to apply for and prepare for these roles. Perceptually, our mature students feel less supported so if you fall within this category we will discuss with you at interview what support you will need to be successful in your future goals and discuss the services we have available to help remove some of these barriers and feel better supported.