

# Cirencester College - HE Access and Participation Statement

## Background

Cirencester College has been established for 25 years and was re-designated as a Sixth Form College in 2011. Cirencester College is a Beacon College and has been judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted since 2007. The college serves 2200 full-time and 570 part-time students drawn from a wide rural area as well as local centres of population; approximately half of students come from south east Gloucestershire and west Oxfordshire and half from Swindon and north Wiltshire.

The majority of College activity is delivered on the Fosse Way Campus, where recent additions such as a new classroom block, a sports hall and a new purpose-built STEM building provide excellent facilities for learning. Approximately 87% of delivery is at FE level (16-19 A-Level and BTEC) with the remainder principally comprising about 100 apprentices and 100 HE students (approximate figures for 2016-17).

The College has a local reputation for high achievement and student care through prioritising student choice, experience and aspirational outcomes leading to strong value added measures. There is a strong emphasis on inclusiveness, support and safeguarding. Leaders ensure equality of opportunity and promote diversity effectively so that the ethos and culture of the College counters any form of direct or indirect discriminatory behaviour. The College is far less selective with entry than many competitor institutions; entry requirements are based on research around the minimum grades required to succeed.

## Ethos, Mission and Vision

The College's mission addresses the needs of its respective stakeholder communities. Situated in a town in a rural area, it faces the challenges of participation (particularly linked to access to transport), opportunity creation and cost-effective delivery that are as demanding as those of some deprived urban areas.

**Mission:** *To be an outstanding Sixth Form College, serving our community of stakeholders, enabling learners of all abilities to realise their full potential.*

**Vision:** *A dynamic and outcome-orientated Sixth Form College that recognises and responds to the needs and aspirations of all community stakeholders; our reputation for inclusivity, employer engagement and academic excellence makes us the destination of choice for 16-19 year olds in the local and surrounding areas.*

Clearly the main focus of the college is its 16-19 provision, but HE is strategically important in terms of progression and meeting local needs.

## HE Strategy

The HE Strategy has been formulated to ensure the College's HE provision reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community: focussing on inclusivity, academic excellence and employer engagement. Its aim is to enable all HE learners to realise their full potential in an aspirational and supportive environment and has widening participation at its core:

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- To develop and provide suites of Foundation Degree and Higher National Certificate/Diploma programmes by working with a limited range of partner institutions, whilst ensuring that we have sound partnership arrangements in place and work effectively with key organisations.
- To widen HE participation in the college catchment area, both in terms of progression of our own L3 students and niche provision for students in the wider region. HE provision should reflect the needs of college students, local community and employers by developing programmes in large L3 subject areas, where progression to HE is below average and in niche subject areas, based on employers' priorities and needs, focussing on areas of expertise.
- To fully integrate with the college employer engagement functions; GFirst LEP project bids linked to LEP regional economic priorities; the College STEM strategy; and align HE future development more closely with higher level apprenticeship delivery within the local and regional community.
- To prepare learners both with the academic skills to further their academic study and the vocational skills for specific employment sectors.
- To manage risk and meet statutory requirements by continuing to develop a high quality but affordable HE infrastructure by ensuring we have the necessary processes, structures and capacity in place to respond when growth is possible.
- To ensure an HE standard student experience through staff development and investment in facilities and to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities based on student voice and quality assurance procedures.
- To ensure the quality of academic standards by embedding an understanding of the academic infrastructure and the requirements of HE level teaching across all our programmes; with a particular focus on developing HE pedagogy.

## HE Provision

The local area has a low unemployment rate with economic activity levels between 77 and 80% and a high proportion of the local population with degrees. However the wider catchment reveals a mixed pattern, with some wards with low HE participation rates (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/coldspots/>). The Cirencester College catchment area extends far beyond the town, including Swindon where areas have some of the lowest levels of HE participation in the country (11<sup>th</sup> lowest). Contextualised HE participation rates highlight greater variety, where many wards in Cirencester itself are below average, when taking factors such as GCSE attainment into account.

Cirencester College does not have degree awarding powers, so has consequently developed a suite of programmes (some directly funded and some franchised) with partner awarding bodies. In 2016-17, the College delivers four jointly developed/taught programmes with the Royal Agricultural University, also based in Cirencester and an additional foundation degree with the University of the West of England. The college also offers an HND and teacher training qualifications (Award/Diploma in Education and Training) with Pearson. The College is in the process of developing further HE courses, in alignment with our HE strategy. All the HE provision we have offered has been designed

to build on Level 3 strengths and to develop local pathways from that provision in order to widen participation.

Widening access through the design of our HE courses is exemplified through:

- low entry requirements (with flexibility for mature students with experience)
- local provision (minimising living costs)
- delivery models (designed to enable students to combine work and study)
- modest fees (where college can determine)
- small group teaching with strong academic and pastoral support
- two individualised learning plan meetings per year (including careers and HE progression)
- additional learning support where required
- peer mentoring programme
- student voice (many have stated they would not have attended a 'traditional' university)
- bursaries to support students from low income households (franchised courses access partner university financial support)
- hardship fund for HE students in financial difficulty
- working on widening participation activities with university partners
- student visits to university partners
- high success outcomes of WP students at top-up level

### Broader widening participation activities

As a predominantly FE provider, widening participation activities focus on both local schools liaison, plus the extensive progression support provided to the College's 16-19 students.

#### Schools' liaison

Schools' liaison comprises an extensive programme of activities and engagement across a large number and wide range of local schools. Specific activities include:

- Mentoring to Years 9 – 11 (different ability levels), using student ambassadors, which includes study skills guidance, exam and revision tips, advice on picking their GCSE options, post 16 guidance – careers and courses.
- 'Transition Mentoring' where the school identifies students who have applied to the College who they feel would benefit from some extra support in making the transition to studying at college. It includes tours, one-to-ones with ambassadors and generally getting to know someone who is already here and who can put their mind at ease.
- All ambassador mentors are given training / support by the schools' liaison team.

#### Events

Cirencester College offers a programme of events on-site for local and prospective students, including:

- Choices Days (Y10 students can experience a day in college through a timetabled day of lessons in their chosen subject areas)
- Big Bang Event is open to primary and secondary schools in the area, focussing on STEM activities
- Open Days (the local community are welcomed to the college to discover more about its provision)
- HE and Employer convention (for College students and some invited groups from other providers)

- The effectiveness of events is evaluated through feedback from participants

#### Collaborative outreach

Cirencester College is part of the local HEFCE-funded National Collaborative Outreach Programme, aimed at raising HE progression from targeted areas. The College works closely with the other county HE providers through a variety of activities and programmes in targeted schools.

#### FE support and progression

The majority of the students at Cirencester College are on FE study programmes; students come from very mixed backgrounds, with a significant number from low participation postcodes. Students are offered:

- Comprehensive tailored tutorial support (including one-to-one progression meetings)
- Careers guidance service
- Extensive progression support
- Additional learning support where required
- Means-tested bursaries
- Student voice opportunities
- Pastoral and welfare support

Students from deprivation postcodes and those on free school meals are monitored closely and the college has recently identified major reductions in the gaps in success rates between students from high and low deprivation postcodes.