



West Kent and Ashford College

Access and Participation of Service and Strategy

2017/2018

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Introduction

West Kent & Ashford College (WKAC) is a large College of Further and Higher Education in Kent with approximately 1700 full time students at campuses located in the towns of Tonbridge and Ashford. We have a varied demographic of students from Kent, London and East Sussex who study at the College. Students at West Kent & Ashford College are offered a variety of Level 3 qualifications including A' Levels in a wide range of pathways and vocational routes such as BTEC's and Apprenticeships. In a typical class there are around 15/20 learners and all full time learners have the opportunity to study functional skills or GCSE's alongside their main programme. Our Higher Education (HE) Provision consists of 275 Higher Education students. There are 76 students at our Ashford Campus and 199 at the West Kent College Campus. We work in partnership with University of Kent (UoK), Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), the University of Greenwich (UoG) and we deliver Pearson Qualifications. The majority of our provision 43 % lies with University of Kent. 67.6% of our students are mature age students. Currently 27% of our students are in quintile one and two, with 14% in quintile three.

In 2014, the College became part of the Hadlow Group expanding the opportunities for curriculum development, resource sharing and cross group referrals for learners to widen their knowledge of the opportunities available. The College has excellent links with industry providing both work experience and employment opportunities and Faculty Industry Liaison Meetings (FILM's) take place throughout the year.

What is Widening Participation?

Some learners who wish to progress to Higher Education (HE) face a number of barriers and obstacles. For example, if you come from a lower socio-economic background you are less likely to study at a HE level than your more affluent peers. In addition, if you are disabled, a mature learner returning to study with non- traditional entry qualifications, come from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background or you have grown up in care then you are less likely to study at HE level. Other barriers to HE include being the first in the family to consider HE, finding the cost of study prohibitively expensive or taking vocational qualifications.

Priorities and target Groups

- Raise awareness and expectations of the Higher Education offer in the local community
- Mature students returning to education with non-traditional entry qualifications
- Students from BME
- Students from deprived postcode areas
- Increase retention of vulnerable students on programmes

The College will measure its progress against its participation and performance targets at the Higher Education Group meetings, which meet regularly and are formally assessed on an annual basis and reported to the College's Quality Team and reviewed by the College

Governors and Principal.

The College is part of the Kent & Medway Progression Federation (KMPF) and engages with a range of networking partners including Association of Colleges (AoC) and Mix Economy Group (MEG).

Feedback from students is sought and there is a strong Learner Voice programme in place giving learners the opportunity to raise concerns and put forward suggestions for improvements that they have identified to make their learning experience more effective. The College holds a HE Conference every year giving the learners the opportunity to engage in a Q & A session with members of the Senior Management Team. In addition to this, the event will be themed to cover current 'hot topics' and guest speakers are invited to speak to the learners giving them the opportunity to record the event as a CPD activity.

Provision of Information to Students

Information for learners on fees and any additional costs are available in the College prospectus and College websites.

The prospectus provides learners with information covering the targeted support that is available whilst studying on HE courses and how it can help them to achieve their qualifications. The College prides itself on the high level of academic and pastoral support provided.

Applications, Careers team, Course Tutors and the Marketing team will provide information covering fee level and financial support available at careers events, taster days, and other off site marketing events that the College attends throughout the year.

The HE Support Mentor provides guidance on the fees and financial help available and are happy to discuss financial arrangements before starting a course and are available on site for learners whilst on their course.

Transition Support- Level 3 to HE

The College offers a range of Access to HE courses for mature students returning to education aimed at breaking down barriers and increasing confidence in the ability to succeed at HE level.

WKAC have a dedicated Outreach Coordinator who attends schools and events to promote the HE offer to a wide range of learners in the local area. A marketing strategy is in place to promote the WKAC HE offer to the local community and hard to reach areas of the population. Keeping warm activities are promoted and learners are encouraged to attend open days and events such as the Art & Fashion shows.

When reviewing the possibility of progressing from a L3 qualification onto a HE programme the primary points of support will be the Course Tutor and the HE Support Mentor. The tutoring team are able to advise on the UCAS process including personal statement writing and reference requests and arranging visits to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The

College maintains a high level of academic support through small classes with high level of access to academic tutors.

The College provides counselling and welfare support providing confidential help with any personal issues and challenges. In addition to this service, we have a team of support staff that can help with a range of personal problems, including emotional, family, financial or health-related issues.

Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) team: when making choices regarding HE progression, the CEIAG team are a valuable source of support regarding institutional information, specific course choice and financial advice. The team deliver a range of tutorial workshops and one to one appointments for both internal and external applicants to support learners with their UCAS applications.

All learners are interviewed for their chosen HE course giving them the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the course and to meet the lead tutor. It also gives lower achieving learners the opportunity to explain their course choice and understanding of the subject in more detail to help them secure an offer.

WKAC run a Summer School to support the transition of learners in to HE and those learners who are moving up an academic year to help them prepare for their course and to introduce them to the study skills they will need to be successful.

Partnership links with the local Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) enable WKAC learners to access information and awareness raising sessions around their HE options. In addition, many local HEIs offer taster day and weekend residential programmes that enable WKAC learners, in conjunction with the Curriculum, to visit local campuses. HEIs attend the College to promote HE and every Level 3 group receives at least one progression talk/workshop covering HE options.

These partnerships with local HEIs also enable learners to access ambassadors and mentoring programmes, whereby potential HE learners can be supported by present HE learners that then offers guidance to make the HE transition a positive experience.

Student Financial Support- Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF): in instances where a learner is considering their HE options but encounters a financial barrier to visiting campuses or attending programme interviews, they may be able to apply for financial support from the discretionary Learner Support Fund. Further details can be gained through Student

Support Services on each campus and are also outlined within the Learner Financial Support Policy- available on SharePoint or by request.

Socio-Economic Barriers

The College has directly and indirectly funded Higher Education learners and the tuition fees are set below the government cap to encourage engagement from the local community.

Progressing to HE can have significant financial considerations, however there may be support available in the form of bursaries, scholarships and loans.

Financial advice can be accessed through the HE Support Mentor, Careers Hub Personal Tutors and HE Departmental staff.

The College facilitates the National Scholarship Scheme, advising learners of access and options.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Typesoffinance/DG_171571.

Since 13/14 WKAC have been administering learner loans via Student Finance England and the Student Loan Company (SLC), this is including the Advanced Learner Loans. Loans can be applied for to cover the cost of fees and living or maintenance costs. More information regarding the SLC can be found here:

<http://www.slc.co.uk/>

The College has an internal HE bursary fund .This is a fast accessing emergency fund which enables HE students to gain support at a time when extreme financial problems may result in withdrawal. Typically it has been used for travel after job loss, materials and assessments. It also has a loan facility which typically can bridge the gap for late applicants before student loans come in. This has been extremely successful with student retention.

For learners who have been in care, there are additional funds available. Further information in the Looked After Child (LAC)/Young Care Leaver (YCL) Status section below.

Financial Support for Disabled Learners: sources of extra financial help for disabled learners are available; these include both learner finance and benefits. These are paid in addition to the standard learner finance package and include:

- Disabled Students' Allowances (from Student Finance England)
- Access to Learning Fund (from the institution)
- Disability Living Allowance (from the Disability and Carers Service at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP))
- Employment and Support Allowance (from Jobcentre Plus)
- Incapacity Benefit (from Jobcentre Plus)

Once an application has been made for Disabled Students' Allowance, the College may be able to support the application through the completion of diagnostic assessments or support the applicant to navigate the application process.

Additional Learning Needs

All learners that apply to WKAC that have declared a learning need and/or physical disability are sent a questionnaire to identify what support they will require. All such learners are invited in for a meeting with the ALS team prior to starting their course so that appropriate support is in place at the start of their course.

As identified above, some learners are able to apply for financial and educational support through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

Once a DSA application has been processed, needs assessment completed and an award made, the applicant will receive a report listing equipment and other support they can get for their course.

- specialist equipment to support studying such as computer software or a higher-specification computer
- non-medical helpers
- finance to meet any extra travel costs incurred due to the disability
- other disability related costs of studying

More information regarding the DSA can be found here:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG_10034898

Ethnicity Implications

WKAC works hard to ensure that its recruitment and promotional materials are representative of the local population in relation to ethnicity profile.

The WKAC Student Union (SU) has actively sort to recruit a learner from this protected characteristic to its Black, Minority Ethnicities SU Officer post.

Equality and Diversity

WKAC is committed to being an inclusive College, where all feel safe and valued. Our strategy aims and core values reflect the environment on which our learners study and live safely and with dignity and one in which our staff work effectively to foster and develop an atmosphere of respect and understanding where discrimination is not tolerated.

All our stakeholders are recognised as unique individuals, representing an array of different characteristics which set each other apart whilst uniting all in the College culture and mission 'To support all our students to achieve their full potential and aspire to excellence'.

First-in-Family obstacles

As part of the Support Mentor work with transition learners, and the work of the Support Mentor for HE with learners studying at a HE level, issues specifically encountered by learners who are the first in their family to progress to studying at a HE level are identified and support provided. The most common issue that can be accommodated is information finding, the Support Mentor and Personal Tutors support learners by supplying information resources and linking learners with points of contact for additional advice such as the CEIAG team, the Student Loans Company and Student Finance England. Learners are also able to attend open days and are provided with appropriate marketing materials.

Looked After Child (LAC)/Young Care Leaver (YCL) Status

Looked After Children (LAC) and Young Care Leavers (YCLs), those aged up to 24 years, will have had an experience of being supported by the local authority care system.

WKAC has two Designated Members of Staff (DMS), identified as the lead for the support of both Children in Care, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Care Leavers. The DMS's coordinate a team of Support Mentors who offer one to one support for these learners ensuring course related support, financial entitlement is gained and education support is put in place via the Personal Education Plan (PEP) or Pathway Plans. The WKAC DMSs are members of the Kent and Medway Designated Member of Staff Operational and Strategic group, the role of which is to increase the participation, progression and success of Children in Care and Care Leavers at key stage 5 and above. Membership of this group enables the sharing of best practice and information relating to the support of Children in Care, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Care Leavers.

Learners in this group may be able to access a one-off bursary of £2,000 from the local authority. This financial support can be accessed through the Personal Advisory service via the local authority. Further information can be found here:

<http://www.becomecharity.org.uk/>.

WKAC has a fulltime HE Support Mentor who is available to both full and part-time students. They are a specialist who advise and support with student finance, enrolment, welfare matters, counselling referral, and benefit information. They can act in an advocacy capacity and provide both academic, pastoral and study skill support.

17-18 Strategy- Points for Development:

- To up skill the HE Support Mentor and Personal Tutors to ensure they are able to offer HE specific advice regarding learner finance, learning support and raising aspiration work.
- To maintain links with local HEIs to ensure that partnership work is developed in

line with local and national developments including mentoring work and access to specific financial support.

- To maintain the active participation on the Young Care Leavers in Post-Compulsory Education Partnership for Kent and Medway operational and strategic groups as well as the Kent Designated Member of Staff.
- To introduce, via the eLLP, the screening of all Level 3 WKAC learners for widening participation characteristics, and ensure that additional support is provided via the Support Mentor Team.
- Develop a WKAC mentoring scheme, utilising the skills and experience of existing WKAC HE learners to be partnered with Level 3 WKAC learners as a peer support option.
- To work collaboratively with KMPF on the National Collaborative Outreach Program (NCOP) to support Higher Education opportunities to targeted outreach groups.