

City of Sunderland College Access and Participation Statement 2025-26. (EPNE, Sunderland College, Hartlepool Sixth Form, Northumberland College).

At the College, we are committed to widening participation in higher education by providing equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, ethnicity, or personal circumstances. We recognise that higher education plays a key role in transforming lives and the economy, and aim to ensure that students from diverse social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds can access, succeed in, and progress in and from their studies with confidence. The vast majority of the College's higher education students are from areas where students are least likely to access, continue and progress in HE (quintile 1). The percentage number of entrants in quintile 1 has increased over the years 2020.21-2022.23 (OfS available data).

North East and Local Areas context

Education Partnership North East recruits and delivers education to some of the most deprived areas in the UK. 54.6% of households in the North East are classed as deprived in at least one dimension, the highest rate in England and Wales. Sunderland has the highest % of deprived households at 58.5%, Northumberland has 51.5% and in Hartlepool 57.8% of households are deprived in at least one dimension. In the North East, 89% of all constituencies have at least one in four children growing up in poverty.

The College is fully committed to positively influencing the region, through supporting widening access and providing an alternative HE provider for students who may not wish to study at HEIs. For example, the College has chosen to have fees below the rate where an access and participation agreement would be required as a way to make HE affordable to our communities. In 23/24 EPNE 69.4% of students were classed as disadvantaged, a -0.2% decrease on 22-23. 25.6% of our students were included in multiple categories and 53.8% of HE students resided in deprivation postcodes which is 4.6% lower than 2022/3. The College's offer is vital to serving the needs of the community as a result.

Our higher education strategic approach has 4 key aims of which aim 3 highlights accessibility and widening participation to strengthen the College's impact upon social mobility. We will achieve this by:

1. Ensuring a focused approach upon raising students' attainment and preparation for higher education at Level 3.

We will continue to offer targeted activities and programs to engage prospective students from underrepresented backgrounds, including through school engagement, gold standard destination activities, careers information advice and guidance, higher education / university visits and talks. The College is also part of the North East University

Collaborative Project (NEUCP) providing our students with access to a variety of higher education and raising aspiration opportunities.

2. Having a fully inclusive and integrated support offer in place sensitive and responsive to groups underrepresented in higher education and meeting the needs of our student population.

This includes offering high quality academic support and student support, and a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities that enrich the student experience and enhance employability. Student hardship, Principal scholarships, bursary schemes and free breakfasts are used as examples, to reduce financial barriers that may prevent students from pursuing higher education. A full year of student activities are in place that promote inclusivity and celebrate cultural diversity, which all students can access. We aim to create an environment where all students feel valued and supported throughout their academic journey.

3. Further improving the impact of proactive interventions to prevent attrition in all curriculum areas.

We provide tailored academic and support services for students from diverse backgrounds, including a one stop student support within our Future Ready Hubs at each campus, mental health services, career guidance, and a counselling service.

4. Creating marketing materials mindful of inclusion and accessibility of students from diverse backgrounds.

The College recruit students from areas of deprivation and with the majority from areas where students are least likely to access, continue and progress in higher education. The entry criteria for the College's HE programmes are lower tariff, and the College supports applications from non-traditional entrants. Modes of delivery for HE is based on meeting student and employer needs, so as a result some programmes are offered both full and part time, with day or evening delivery and via higher apprenticeships. The College predominately delivers Level 4 and 5 technical qualifications again to meet the needs of the local communities and skills, this is vital provision for some individuals who would have limited opportunity to access higher education.

5. Admissions

The College is committed to an admissions process that treats all applicants fairly, with equity and dignity following the principle of right student, right course. Given our North East locality, the College's vision, and values, widening participation is at the forefront of everything we do to engage with groups who would not otherwise enter or benefit from higher education. Our engagement with students, families and local communities is deep rooted and supports social and community cohesion in the area. The College has a key role to play in raising aspirations and awareness of the educational, progression and subsequent employment and study opportunities available to potential students. The nature of our student population is such that the provision of information about the

different forms of student support available is an important component of the services we make available to them.

In summary, the College understands that each higher education student's journey is unique, and we strive for excellence in everything we do to remove barriers to success at every stage of the student journey. Our higher education strategic approach ensures that all our students can thrive in their education, in their career and in life in general. The College benchmarks its progress against widening participation statistics, ensuring it maintains or exceeds sector-wide improvements in access, retention, and student success. Regular impact reviews inform ongoing improvements.