



Activate Learning

Access and participation plan 2020-21 to 2024-25

Introduction

Activate Learning is a forward-thinking education group that aims for far-reaching, progressive change and impact through learning.

The Activate Learning Group is comprised of secondary, further and higher education, apprenticeship and workforce training, consultancy, international, commercial business and social enterprise. Activate Learning is united by a common purpose; **work-ready talent for business, and to**

1.

The Activate Learning Group is on an ambitious mission to transform lives through learning by enabling opportunities, creating life chances and generating prosperity for individuals and communities. In achieving this mission, Activate Learning Group is committed to advancing equality of opportunity, respecting and celebrating difference, eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation and fostering good relations.

Higher education provision is located within the Colleges division of the Activate Learning Group, which comprises:

- Banbury and Bicester College
- Bracknell and Wokingham College
- City of Oxford College
- Guildford College
- Merrist Wood College
- Reading College

Activate Learning Group currently has partnership arrangements for its higher education provision with

1.

Group / Year	Activate Learning			Variance	Variance
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2013/14 to 2017/18	2016/17 to 2017/18

As a result, Activate Learning Group is cautious about the positive gap in performance based upon one year of limited data and will therefore undertake to review this during 2019/20 by aggregating data across 2017/18 and 2018/19 to identify a more accurate level of performance. We will therefore aim to set a target in a variation of this plan by 2020/21. In the meantime, we will analyse reasons for withdrawals in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20, undertake student focus groups and monitor the progress of students to identify specific reasons for non-continuation. Once identified, we will implement measures during 2019/20 to address any issues that may arise.

Attainment

Similarly, due to the very small number of students in EIMD Q1 and POLAR Q1 (<10) OfS data is currently unavailable between 2012/13 and 2015/16. In addition, as a result of the recent mergers Activate Learning Group's HE data set is only available for 2016/17. However, as previously mentioned, the number of students in this cohort is very small and as a result it has not been possible to construct any meaningful analysis.

Against the background of limited data Activate Learning Group will therefore undertake to review this by aggregating data across 2017/18 and 2018/19. This will facilitate the more accurate identification of performance and enable us to set a meaningful target in a variation of this plan by 2020/21. In the meantime, we will analyse reasons for withdrawals, grade profiles in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20, undertake student focus groups, individual student fual student fual student fuar0 595.32 8fta9 will facilitate the fuF1

1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

Access

Group/Year (full-time)	Activate Learning					Variance 2013/14 to 2017/18	Variance 2016/17 to 2017/18
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18		
Asian	7.0%	6.0%	4.0%	7.0%	3.0%	-4.0pp	-4.0pp
Black	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	3.0%	3.0%	+2.0pp	0.0pp
Mixed	2.0%	3.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	0.0pp	0.0pp

Although there is limited data available in the OfS AP Data set for the attainment of BAME students. Activate Learning Group's own data- indicates the attainment rates for BAME students have increased by 7.0pp between 2016/17 and 2017/18 but remain below the rate for White students. Due to the small numbers of students involved it has not been possible to disaggregate this data. However, Activate Learning are committed to including the disaggregation of BAME in developing our data capabilities so that it can be reported on as from January 2020.

It will therefore be a specific target within this plan to introduce measures to improve the attainment rates for BAME students enrolled on higher education programmes at the Group to 76.0%, in line with attainment rates for White students by 2024/25. In addition, Activate Learning Group will take measures to develop its own data set which will include the disaggregation of BAME and also, high grades e.g. 1st, 2.1, Merits and Distinctions, by January 2020 to facilitate the disaggregation of attainment.

Progression to highly skilled employment or higher-level study

It has not been possible to assess the proportion of BAME students who progress to highly skilled employment or further higher-level study due to very small numbers and the subsequent lack of available data. Going forward, as a result of the significant expansion of HNC provision, particularly in Engineering, Sport and Construction, BAME student numbers are forecast to increase beyond the OfS reporting threshold (>10). Therefore, targets will be introduced

HNC rather than two-year (part-time) programmes. This in turn will decrease the number of 'traditional' part-

Activate Learning Group has recognised the particular needs of mature students and has made structural changes to delivery and assessment schedules and increased the level of additional study support provided in order to incr

embedded in the policies, procedures and practices of the Group, which are detailed in our Equality and Diversity Policy⁴

Aim 2: Our aim is to establish an approach to access that encourages and supports all groups in society to participate and succeed in higher education

Objectives for Aim 3:

Activate Learning Group aims to have increased the proportion of BAME students enrolling across the Group by 5.0pp

In order to eliminate the gap between continuation and attainment rates for BAME and those for White students, Activate Learning Group plans to introduce a number of measures including; the introduction of HE Study Support tutors at Merrist Wood College, Guildford College and Bracknell and Wokingham College campuses as from September 2019, which will bring it in line with the support offered to students across the rest of the Group. In addition, the appointment of HE Student Ambassadors and enhanced tracking of attendance and assessment for BAME students in order to identify those 'at risk' will be implemented to enable positive interventions to be made in a timelier way.

Mature Students

Continuation rates for mature students have reduced slightly but remain above the rates for young students. Activate Learning Group plans to eliminate the attainment gap that has emerged between Mature and Young students by initially embedding and evaluating the measures which have recently been put in place such as; structural changes to delivery schedules, revised assessment schedules to avoid bunching of assessment and increasing the level of additional study support provided. In addition, the Group will continue to work with other providers to transfer credit where students need to relocate due to work commitments, so that they can complete their qualification elsewhere.

Disabled students

The Group aims to further enhance the positive performance of disabled students by engaging with its employer advisory groups to establish opportunities for student work experience; improving careers advice in line with the GATSBY benchmark, and establishing an Alumni network to provide additional advice and guidance. In addition, a placement bursary will be established to support disabled students in accessing work placements and experience. Activate Learning Group will also undertake to ensure that all HE Programme Coordinators and all HE Study Support Tutors are provided with Mental Health first aid training as from September 2019.

Estranged students

As from September 2019, Activate Learning Group will invite students who are estranged from their family to self-declare this at the point of entry on the enrolment form, which will include an explanation as to what the information will be used for. In addition, applicants for September 2020 entry will also be asked to self-declare this on their application form.

Based upon the data collected for estranged students, Activate Learning Group will undertake a review to determine what support, if any, is required to support students and will, if appropriate, include additional targets and support for these students in future iterations of this plan.

3. Strategic measures

Strategies to increase Access

In 2020/21, Activate Learning Group will spend 13.0% of the higher fee income on access activities designed to widen participation in higher education. This includes the appointment of an HE Outreach Officer and an allocation of funding for related activities. A further 26.3% of the higher fee income will be allocated to bursaries for new and continuing students if they meet the eligibility criteria detailed below;

1. Activate Learning Group will provide a phased cash bursary of £1000 for all full-time and part-time (pro-

circumstances which could not have been predicted at the start of their studies. The hardship fund is a grant and is therefore non-repayable.

In determining the level of hardship funding awarded to students, the following groups of students will receive priority:

- Students with children (particularly single parents)

- Disabled students (especially where the DSA allowances are unable to meet particular costs)

- Care leavers

- Carers

- Estranged students

- Homeless students

Alignment with other strategies

This access and participation plan is closely aligned to the Group's overall strategic approach and focus on equality and diversity, which also identifies gaps in the performance of underrepresented groups and their peers and sets out a series of objectives, proposed actions and outcome measures. In addition to identifying gaps within each faculty, which are monitored and actioned through faculty performance boards, each of the group service areas of Activate Learning also have a set of objectives related to enhancing equality and diversity. At the end of each academic year, a full impact review is undertaken which reports upon the extent to which gaps in retention; attendance and achievement have been closed for underrepresented groups in comparison to their peers.

As a result, where gaps have increased or remained significant, this is summarised for each faculty and included in their implementation plan for the following year. Where significant gaps are identified and if there is a risk of a further increase, then a Group Rapid Intervention Project (GRIP) will be constituted to address the issue until it is resolved.

3.2 Student consultation

Activate Learning Group has taken action both formally and informally to ensure that students have been involved in the preparation of this plan and that the student voice is heard through each stage of the student lifecycle going forward.

In developing this plan, a representative group of students have been consulted through formal mechanisms as well as focus groups held specifically to gain student feedback and input to the plan. Issues raised through those processes highlighted areas of concern in respect of financial support, for example; whilst students welcomed the bursaries provided in their first year of study, they were concerned that similar support was not available for subsequent years even though their financial circumstances remained similar. Students also requested improvements in careers advice and an increase in additional learning support.

The lack of financial support has been noted elsewhere in the plan as having a significant impact on students' progression to employment or further study, particularly for land-based students at Merrist Wood College. This approach has also facilitated the consultation on specific deliberate steps to address the issues identified leading to some of the steps, and how they will operate, which are outlined in this plan including the introduction of a Work Placement Bursary, Student Hardship fund and an increase in HE Study Support tutors.

Activate Learning Group recognises the challenge of consulting with a student body that is not only spread across seven separate campuses, but also located in three different counties. In addition, that body is also, predominantly made up of mature students who study on a part time basis which is recognised in the way the student consultative processes have been developed.

The Group has in place a formal student consultative process which has been used to inform the development of the Access and Participation plan and will inform the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the plan. This process includes:

- HE Student representatives for each programme;
- HE Student Ambassadors (new role) on each campus;
- Higher Education Learning Partnership/HE Student Ambassador Campus Forums;
- Programme Committees which are held once each term,

These are supported by informal mechanisms which include: focus groups to address particular issues and topics, social media (Facebook and Instagram), email and Activate Learning Group's virtual learning environment.

Activate Learning Group will also ensure that HE Student representatives have access to relevant and appropriate training, including but not limited to equality, diversity and inclusion, the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and data interpretation.

To ensure the plan is continually monitored, evaluated and enhanced, Access and Participation has been introduced as a core agenda item on all Staff/Higher Education Student forums including each of the Campus HE Forums.

3.3 Evaluation strategy

Activate Learning's evaluation strategy underpins our entire plan, all its aims and objectives and is based upon the recommended OfS approach. Measures include:

- Utilisation of the OfS Evaluation Self-assessment tool, working towards achieving 'Commended' in all areas
- Utilisation of the OfS Financial support toolkit to evaluate the effectiveness of financial support
- Establishing an institutional data set which enables Activate Learning to effectively track and evaluate performance across the student lifecycle
- Adoption of a mixed methods approach that combines and triangulates qualitative and quantitative, primary and secondary data, as appropriate, to ensure we have the knowledge required for robust and context specific evaluation.
- Further increasing our engagement with students to gain greater input into our planning, monitoring and evaluating.

Aims of our evaluation

The overall purpose of our evaluation work is to enable Activate Learning to meet its institutional objectives by developing a robust evidence base for the Group's widening participation activity. As such, the evaluation plan has the following aims:

1. To enable Activate Learning to evidence the impact of its widening participation activity in order to meet the expectations of the Office for Students regarding Access and Participation plans.
2. To inform the development of widening participation interventions as a result of evaluating the impact of activities undertaken within Activate Learning.
3. To align the evaluation of widening participation activity within Activate Learning's timelines for reporting and evaluation of higher education, in order to inform operational planning and internal/external reporting.

In order to achieve these aims, the following objectives have been identified. While they are divided below into three work strands; data, evaluation and evidence, and research, there will naturally be synergies and interdependencies between them.

Data

- a. Conduct timely and effective analysis of evaluation data in order to facilitate detailed end of year reporting which enab1 0 5-04C>-4<0053>11<00440057>4<004C>-4<005200510003>4<0044>11<0046005

e. Align annual and ongoing evaluation of widening partici

Activate Learning acknowledges its responsibility under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 for ensuring that the governing body is also responsible for overseeing the development of the access and participation plan and for monitoring its performance. This will be undertaken by providing updates

5. Appendix

The OfS will append the following items from the fees and targets and investment documents when an access and participation plan is published:

1. Targets (tables 2a, 2b and 2c in the targets and investment plan)
2. Investment summary (tables 4a and 4b in the targets and investment plan)
3. Fee summary (table 4a and 4b in the fee information document)



