

Section 1: widening participation strategy

Supports access to learning in support of the successful participation in higher education of members of those groups which have traditionally been underrepresented in the higher education sector

Mission, management and culture

The Mission of the Arts University College at Bournemouth is to provide a high quality professional environment for its staff and students, to allow them to study, research and practise art, design, media and performance to the highest standards, so that they can contribute to the cultural and economic development of society.

1. The Arts University College at Bournemouth is a leading university sector institution offering specialist education in art, design, media and performance across the creative industries. It aspires to enhance cultural and economic life at regional, national and international levels, and to generate and disseminate new knowledge.

What are our core values?

2. The Arts University College at Bournemouth values:
 - being able to provide a supportive environment in which every student is encouraged to fulfil their own potential, from Saturday Art School through to postgraduate study
 - collaborative working with industry and other education providers
 - collective working within a creative community
 - diversity and individuality
 - entrepreneurship and engagement with the creative industries
 - equal learning opportunities for all
 - excellence in research, scholarship, teaching and learning
 - freedom of thought and its appropriate expression
 - high standards of work expressed in a professional context
 - practitioners who are able to be critically reflective and are able to apply such reflection
 - to their work and the work of others
 - the provision of an education that enables learning to continue after study with us
 - staff and the contribution they make collectively to the local, regional and national and international cultural and social economies.
3. The University College believes that higher education should be available to all those who have the capacity to benefit from it. It also believes that diversity is an essential aspect of the learning environment within the creative arts and design, and that in consequence there is an obligation on us to ensure that we are providing appropriate opportunities for students from all backgrounds to access our undergraduate and postgraduate offer.
4. The University College further recognises the economic and social imperatives of ensuring equality of opportunity for all groups. It acknowledges that some positive action is required to raise aspirations from certain under-represented groups, and to offer a supportive, welcoming environment to those communities who have not historically participated within higher education.

5. This is a challenging time both for higher education institutions, and for prospective students. Students are required to make a greater financial commitment in support of their own learning, which will impact on their decisions about what and where to study (as well as whether or not they wish to enter higher education at all). Similarly, the University College is operating within this challenging “marketplace” for higher education, and is seeking to expand its offer. Whilst the University College’s courses continue to meet target, growth is likely to be sustainable only if the quality of applicant is maintained; and as student numbers increase, this will involve extending the pool of applicants to include those who have the potential and the ambition, but who may previously not have considered an application.
6. In meeting its legal and moral obligations, therefore, the University College is also delivering against its own strategic objective to increase diversity; and delivering its own target student numbers. This is in addition to supporting a strategic aim of the Funding Council. The implementation of the Widening Participation Strategy, and the associated Access Agreement, will meet all four of these imperatives.
7. From summer 2009, the Widening Participation team will be based within the Directorate of Academic Services, which contains the support services which are directly linked to the academic work of the University College (Library; Registry; and Student Services). The Widening Participation Manager reports directly to the Director of Academic Services, who holds senior management responsibility for this area of the University College’s work, and for monitoring the performance of the dedicated postholders.
8. However, the work undertaken in support of the Widening Participation Strategy is carried out by staff across the University College. The Equality and Inclusivity Committee is responsible for maintaining committee oversight of the work conducted in support of the Strategy, and monitoring the effectiveness of activity. This also aligns reporting on Widening Participation with reporting on the Single Equalities Scheme, which eliminates overlap or duplication, and enables a coherent and comprehensive picture to be developed. The Equality and Inclusivity Committee receives a progress report against the relevant action plans at each meeting, and makes regular report to Academic Board.
9. In addition, the University College prepares an annual report on Widening Participation, which includes both a commentary on activity, and a report on performance against the agreed indicators, which will be the essential mark of success. This report incorporates the current annual report on HESA Performance Indicators, and also reflects upon the operation of the Access Agreement. The report is considered in detail by the Equality and Inclusivity Committee, and the final version is presented to Academic Board.
10. In 2008 the University College launched a new Learning Strategy which promotes flexibility of learning style, and targets the achievement by each learner of his/her potential. This builds on the strategy of student-centred learning which empowers the learner to reach beyond their existing education and knowledge backgrounds, promoting a process of academic transformation. The University College is aware of the potential for an increased focus on diversity through the curriculum, and supports the intention of that Strategy to encourage a wider range of engagement through the learning experience.
11. The University College continues to review its curriculum offer and to ensure that, through both mode and subject of study, it is providing opportunities to those from under-represented groups. This includes conducting relevant research to identify both challenges and aspirations, and to determine how best these can be met through the curriculum offer. There is explicit appreciation of the specific value of a diverse but inclusive community in which collaboration between students, and the application of learning across discipline boundaries, can teach the value of difference. This

complementarity is a feature of undergraduate and postgraduate awards at the University College.

12. The University College provides holistic support through a professional Student Services team. All new students are screened for possible dyslexia, and relevant students are supported through the process of DSA Application and subsequent needs assessment, including payment of the fees for Educational Psychologist appointments. A dedicated team of professional, qualified staff provide learning support; disability support; counselling; and careers advice, as well as general advice on matters such as finance and accommodation. Student Services is an enabling and empowering service which supports and encourages all students, irrespective of background, to value and take responsibility for their own learning.
13. The changing nature and diversity of the University College community offers opportunity for innovation in the delivery of the student experience of education, and the needs of learners from all backgrounds are taken into account when developing or reviewing other University College policies and strategies relating to pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, support and resources. This will be achieved both through a regular review of this Strategy, and also through ensuring that other relevant policies and strategies take account of, and are aligned to, these intentions.

Strategic objectives

Aims of the Strategy

14. The University College's Widening Participation Strategy aims to support the successful participation in higher education of members of those groups which have traditionally been under-represented in the higher education sector; the specialist sector; and within the region / sub-region.
15. As such, its over-arching aims include:
 - To raise the aspirations of those who may not traditionally have considered higher education as a viable option, but who have the capacity to benefit
 - To support the progression of under-represented groups onto higher education courses
 - To provide a support infrastructure which secures excellent retention and achievement from students from under-represented groups.

History of achievement

16. Historically, the University College prioritised three key objectives for its widening participation activity: aspiration-raising within the local, sub-regional and regional community; increased application and enrolment rates from target groups; and well-directed on-course support to secure retention and achievement. It identified the themes of curriculum; region; specialism and community to characterise its work.
17. However, it accepts that some of its early work on aspiration-raising was not carefully enough targeted, and it was always aware that its approach would not have an immediate impact on enrolment numbers. Recent activity has focused much more strongly on activity which is likely to lead to applications to further or higher education courses, and subsequent successful achievement on these courses.
18. Widening participation activity has included relationships with a range of key external stakeholders which has resulted in partnership and collaboration to expand opportunities for broader student groups. This revised articulation of the Widening Participation Strategy continues to build on the strength of existing activity, with clear aims and objectives for the next three years. It builds on the student lifecycle model in its approach to aspiration raising, pre-entry activities, admission, transition, student experience and delivering student success.

19. The University College will maintain and strengthen its relationships with a range of key external stakeholders and organisations so as to maintain genuine partnership and collaboration to expand opportunities for broader student groups:
- i) Through engagement with Aimhigher, it seeks to raise the aspirations and achievements of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and ensure the greatest impact in widening participation work, building on the HEFCE review of widening participation published in November 2006. Raising aspiration, achievement and recruitment should not ignore the structural, cultural, discursive and material constraints that particular social groups face.
 - ii) Through engagement with the National Arts Learning Network (NALN), the University College has supported the provision of coherent progression routes for non-traditional learners within the creative arts subject areas. It is envisaged that, following the demise of the NALN in July 2009, this work will be continued through the United Kingdom Arts and Design Institutions Association (UKADIA), and the University College will continue to engage fully with this project.
 - iii) Through engagement with the South West Lifelong Learning Network, the University College worked to support the provision of progression routes to higher education within the context of lifelong learning. The University College would be pleased to discuss further with any regional partners the opportunities there may be to extend these developments within the creative arts, but such opportunities are likely to be limited.
 - iv) The University College will continue to offer targeted outreach activity which inspires and encourages applications from under-represented groups and invites involvement and engagement from academic course teams.
 - v) The University College will continue to identify, and work with, schools and colleges with a high proportion of non-traditional students and an historically low participation in higher education, to raise aspiration and to encourage application to the University College's courses.
20. The University College monitors implementation of the Strategy through regular reviews of progress against the associated action plan. However, the success of the Strategy will ultimately be determined not through the successful completion of relevant actions, but through the confirmation of a community which welcomes and values students from a wide range of backgrounds. As such, the critical indicators of success are:
- Increasing applications, interviews and offers from target groups (as well as enrolments and retention)
 - Meeting target performance against the HESA Performance Indicators
 - Student satisfaction ratings for non-traditional learners which are comparable to those of the University College as a whole.
21. In particular, the University College notes that it has had a particular challenge in recruiting from lower socio-economic groups, and from low participation neighbourhoods. These are areas where the University College intends that its new strategy will have a serious impact.

Fair access

22. The University College believes that higher education should be available to all those who have the capacity to benefit from it. Both location and subject range impose certain challenges for a specialist creative arts and design institution on the boundary of the south-west and south-east regions, and both the Widening Participation Strategy, and the associated Access Agreement, have targeted improvements in

performance against the HESA Performance Indicators for admissions from young student groups (although retention figures already comfortably exceed the Location Adjusted Benchmarks).

23. In support of these objectives, the University College will:
- Implement its Access Agreement, and through the provision of bursary and other financial support encourage applications from, and retention of, under-represented groups
 - Continue to offer provision which is accessible to non-traditional students
 - Continue to provide excellent student support services which meet the needs of a diverse student body.
24. In determining its objectives, and measuring progress, the University College notes the importance of national benchmarks and norms, such as the HESA Performance Indicators. Success against nationally recognised markers will be a sign that the University College has been effective in devising and delivering its strategy. The University College has a comprehensive schedule of targets and milestones which was approved as part of the Access Agreement and continues to be monitored and, as appropriate, updated to reflect improved performance. This schedule is attached to the Strategic Assessment.

Admissions

25. The University College operates a fair Admissions Policy and associated procedures which were developed with reference to the QAA Code of Practice and the principles identified by the Schwartz Review of admissions. This area of work is also informed by the work of the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) team. The Admissions Policy is approved by Academic Board, and is subject to regular review. (The Admissions Policy is attached as an appendix to this Assessment.)
26. The majority of higher education courses offered by the University College do not make offers to students without interview, at which the applicant presents and discusses a portfolio of work. The purpose of the interview process is to identify those students who have the capacity to benefit from the particular intentions and philosophy of the course, as well as its teaching and learning approaches. Offers are not made on the basis of projected, or actual, grades in previous qualifications of study, but on the basis that the student has demonstrated the necessary skills and aptitudes to be successful on a course of this nature.
27. The Policy and procedures respect equivalent entry qualifications from vocational learners. The University College will continue to monitor relevant literature to identify the impact of cultural, social and educational background on qualifications and participation, and take account of findings as appropriate, particularly where qualifications are key in exploring rates and types of participation.
28. The University College believes strongly in the importance of maintaining the academic standards of its awards, and is mindful that any diminution would devalue the educational experience of both traditional and non-traditional learners. However it is further aware of the danger that some applicants or students may be overlooked or disregarded because of their particular educational background. Regular training will therefore be provided to ensure that staff with responsibility for admissions decisions, curriculum development, learning and teaching and assessment are aware of the value of different routes into higher education, and their probable impacts on learning.

Section 2: widening participation policy and practice

Widening participation commitments

29. The University College introduced its Access Agreement in 2006, following detailed research and discussions into the most effective way of attracting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds. One of the features of the Access Agreement is the focus on specific and targeted support for students on-course which is designed to assist in meeting their daily needs. The University College took the view that the provision of large financial bursaries, whilst intuitively attractive, might be counter-productive as they would reduce the number of students who could benefit. Larger bursaries would also be selective, and the University College wished its bursaries to be open to all who were eligible, with selectivity (where required) only on the basis of need, rather than the basis of academic performance.
30. In consequence, alongside the statutory bursaries, the University College has introduced an automatic bursary for those whose household income is slightly higher than the minimum; but otherwise has introduced a range of support which is only indirectly financial, through the provision of a reduction in Halls fees; and free bicycles and local travelcards. The Access Agreement fund also contributes towards the costs of Educational Visits; and a specific hardship fund has been established to meet unexpected financial hardship from students within these groups.
31. The challenge of delivering the Access Agreement is twofold: firstly advertising and promoting it, especially amongst target groups; and secondly encouraging students within the University College to take advantage of the support which is available. The Marketing team ensures that relevant information is disseminated through publicity materials, including the website and the Directory, and promotes the University College's offer. Likewise, the Admissions team reminds all those to whom offers are made of the need to make their financial details available to the Institution, so that they are fully able to benefit from the offer.
32. Comprehensive information for potential applicants, students, parents and teachers on the sources of, and application processes, for all Government grants, loans and bursaries is available through the website. This information allows individuals to determine their eligibility for financial support according to their personal circumstances. The Student Services team provides advice and guidance to students and potential students about the different types of financial support which may be available to them, and acts as a central source of information, as recommended by the National Audit Office.
33. The University College has appointed an Additional Grant Administrator who engages with marketing activity as appropriate; identifies eligibility of bursary recipients; liaises with academic staff to ensure that all those who are eligible are fully supported through the Arts University College Additional Grant; promotes the opportunities for additional grants to students; and administers awards to recipients. The Widening Participation team reviews the University College's agreed link institutions on a regular basis to ensure that they remain appropriate, and are engaging proactively with the support available.
34. The Access Agreement is subject to annual review to update any financial information, or to revise or introduce new provision for students from non-traditional groups. However it is only now, following the third year of operation, that there is an opportunity to review comprehensive cohort data and to make any judgements about the impact the Access Agreement may have had. Given the relatively small numbers involved, and the complexity of establishing clear causal links on matters of enrolment, retention, progression and achievement, this will be an ongoing priority.
35. The University College has also developed relationships with a range of key external stakeholders and organisations so as to maintain genuine partnership and

collaboration to expand opportunities for broader student groups. It will continue to engage with the management and consultative bodies of Aimhigher, the South-West Regional Development Agency's widening participation group, the NALN and other relevant organisations.

36. Through engagement with Aimhigher, the University College seeks to raise the aspirations and achievements of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and ensure the greatest impact in widening participation. Aspiration-raising is supported through a wide range of projects for those from non-traditional backgrounds. This includes offering dedicated workshops in creative subjects such as photography and film; the delivery of targeted summer schools; offering Taster Days and campus visits; and undertaking curriculum projects with schools.
37. In addition, mentoring support is provided for students progressing from the National Diploma onto higher education courses to secure this critical transition period.
38. Through engagement with the National Arts Learning Network, the University College has supported the provision of coherent progression routes and delivered curriculum developments for non-traditional learners within the creative arts subject areas. The NALN was the only national HEFCE-funded lifelong learning network focused on the creative arts, and sought to ensure a more diverse and better qualified workforce for the Creative Industries.
39. The vision of the Network was to encourage 'progression to higher education in the arts to all who have the potential to succeed, regardless of background'. This enabled non-traditional learners to progress to the University College, supported through Additional Student Numbers secured by the Network and with bursary support through the Access Agreement. The University College will maintain its active participation in the National Arts Learning Network, as it links up with the UK Art and Design Institutions' Association (UKADIA), continuing to share good practice and contribute to the network. It will also maintain and extend Progression Agreements with FE colleges, schools and academies as appropriate, overseen by the Progression Manager, employing the National Arts Learning Network model.
40. Through engagement with the South West Lifelong Learning Network, the University College worked towards progression routes to higher education with a focus on lifelong learning. The Network sought to create and implement agreements specifically to give better access participation and progression opportunities for vocational learners, particularly those traditionally under represented in HE in the South West. The aim was to create opportunities for those from the workplace and community based education, and the University College demonstrated its active commitment by developing specific continuous professional development (CPD) units for museum staff, to be offered at Level 6 and potentially leading to further study within higher education. In turn, this led to a decision to develop and implement a full CPD framework for the University College, which will permit further blocks of learning at Level 4 and above to be accredited, with the associated benefits for employees.
41. The University College continues to develop its work with link schools and colleges, and monitors the success of this collaboration. Currently a total of 13 schools and colleges are identified for this collaboration, but this remains under review. The University College has a policy of targeting schools and colleges which have a high proportion of non-traditional students, a low conversion to higher education, and a strong portfolio within the creative arts. It is intended to increase the number of linked schools and colleges over the coming years, but no specific target is set for this work as the intention remains only to link with those institutions which are local, or where there is a realistic prospect of conversion to higher education at the University College.
42. The University College engages with schools through offering a wide range of activities. This includes Portfolio Advice Days, where groups of non-traditional

learners from selected schools and colleges attend the College to meet with academic staff and to discuss their portfolio, and how best to present themselves and their work as part of a future application for higher education. In addition, they have a campus tour, visiting studios where current students are making work, and have the chance to learn more about the higher education experience.

43. As a specialist arts, design and media HEI in the South West the University College is uniquely placed to offer professional expertise in resource, staff and academic collaboration, building on its established track record of successful links with schools and colleges.
44. The Arts University College recognises the need for higher education institutions to develop sustainable school-HE relationships to support national strategies and through, in particular, shared governance and strategic planning arrangements in Academies. While the approach of one school seeking specialist 'Academy' status did not proceed in the academic year 2008/09, the University College remains committed, where appropriate, through its range of school and college arrangements to investigate such opportunities.
45. Schools/Colleges and other stakeholders provide a vital link in mapping of enhanced curriculum, improved provision, attainment, raising the profile of arts, design media and performance, information and guidance and professional development. This involves work around exploring initiatives which have developed and informed curriculum, e.g. ongoing professional development and increased school/HE dialogue, 14-19 diploma consultation. Further, this explores those opportunities which have engaged teachers in a real and meaningful way offering clarification and enrichment of curriculum.
46. The University College provides mentoring support for students on the National Certificate, National Diploma and Foundation Diploma to support progression into higher education. A pilot project for students on selected foundation degrees which supported success and progression to Honours awards has proved so successful that from 2009/10 it will be extended to cover first year students on all degree courses.
47. In addition, the University College has an established compact agreement between its higher and further education provision, including the National Diploma, which guarantees up to 150 places without interview. It has developed informal links with a number of schools and colleges with a view to developing progression agreements, but these will always be subject to rigorous review to ensure that only students with the capacity to benefit are offered places on University College courses.
48. The recommendations from the National Audit Office indicate the need for rigorous evaluation of individual activities and the University College maintains its existing 'robust approaches to evaluation when setting up activities which aim to widen participation, and uses the results to promote and direct those activities which the evidence indicates are the most effective'.¹ This accords with the College's approach, in particular to partnership working with schools and colleges.
49. The College has worked to develop links with the Borough, employers, community groups and education providers to encourage participation from under-represented groups and in accordance with HEFCE good practice guidelines work towards a strong, sustainable presence in low participation neighbourhoods by considering 'ways in which [we] can make significant and measurable contributions to the social, educational and economic transformation of these areas'. The University College is conscious of the imperative to make potential applicants believe that they can achieve, and integrate within the higher education environment. It will continue to deliver targeted activity with students; dedicated marketing and promotional materials; and liaison with both staff and students. The intention of such links is to

¹ *Widening Participation in Higher Education*, National Audit Office, June 08

raise aspiration, application and achievement through the continuation of targeted activities. Other than those already mentioned above, these include engagement with work-based and adult learners; the development of courses, and smaller blocks of learning which are targeted at employer groups; active participation in Extended Services initiatives where the College's specialist resources are available for Summer School activity². The University College also led the recent Unity in Vision Intercultural Community Workshop and Celebration, featuring 200 participants.

50. In addition, the University College acknowledges the central importance of ensuring that prospective students are given the information, guidance and support they need to make effective learning decisions. Staff are aware of the need to raise the levels of information held by relevant stakeholders (who may be careers advisers, teaching staff, group organisers or parents) who may have a significant influence on a prospective student's decision but may not be fully aware of the range of options available within the creative arts and design. This is a difficult group to access, and hence work is conducted in a variety of ways, including through electronic media but also through outreach work, marketing, mentors and other events. Events such as information days / evenings for careers and HE advisers have often been poorly attended, and consideration will be given to alternative ways of disseminating up-to-date information in an accessible way.
51. The University College continues to offer a pre-entry summer study course to non-traditional entrants both to prepare them for a return to academic study in higher education and also to familiarise them with the University College, improve self-confidence and help socialisation.
52. The University College does not consider that current national data on student:staff ratios is helpful, as it marks only one element of the complex network of guidance reference points available to students. Alongside scheduled teaching time, staff with creative disciplines are often available in the studio during independent study time to discuss techniques or offer more general advice on project work. Technician staff are also present on a regular basis to advise and assist. Thus the actual support available to students is significantly more than indicated by the nationally published data. The University College has invested significant proportions of its widening participation funding into this support network, and its excellent retention rates – consistently better than its benchmark for students from non-traditional backgrounds, as well as all students – are testament to the success of this approach.
53. Further on-course support is provided through a comprehensive student support service which includes counselling and careers advice, together with general advice covering finance, accommodation and matters of disability and student welfare. Particular focus is given to disability support, with 5.5 FTE staff dedicated to the support of disabled students both through the provision of advice and guidance, and working with staff across the Institute to improve disability provision. The Institute conducts a comprehensive screening and advice session for all students at enrolment, and follows up any student who shows indications of dyslexia or another specific learning disability. It also arranges appointments with the Educational Psychologist as appropriate, and pays the cost of these appointments.
54. In addition, all students are entitled to two tutorials per year to discuss their general academic progress and areas of strength and weakness. This supplements an academic staff model which is designed to be supportive to all students, both by a generous allocation of academic staff time, and through regular support and guidance provided by technician demonstrator staff.
55. In addition, the Senior Careers Adviser offers sessions to all students on alternative careers outside the discipline area, with College-wide presentations on possible career opportunities.

² National Council for Educational Excellence, June 2008

56. At the same time, the College seeks to enable students to access postgraduate education, either at the University College or through the NALN, noting that it is the successful postgraduate of today who is the inspiration of tomorrow, either as employer, teacher or in other ways as a role model.
57. The University College will continue to offer Foundation degrees to encourage the non-traditional learner who is attracted by the more vocationally-focused qualification. It has developed dedicated Honours routes for many of these awards, noting that the student cohort often feels more comfortable progressing to a further award with its peers, and which is a natural extension of their dedicated area of study at Level 6. Progression to dedicated Honours routes have been more popular than progression to other suitable named awards, and student feedback confirms that this is a motivating factor for them. Further Honours routes will be developed and implemented over the life of this Strategy.
58. The University College will also continue to investigate opportunities in the part-time market, although in practice it has proved difficult to secure sustainable cohorts over time for more than two or three awards. The satisfaction, progression and achievement rates for part-time awards suggests that these are run very successfully, but there is limited take-up despite a significant subsidy in terms of cost.
59. Employability is key on all University College courses. This is delivered through a coherent programme of transferable and employability skills through all three years of an Honours degree course, with identified outcomes, which supports an excellent DLHE achievement which is consistently above the benchmark identified in the HESA Performance indicators. In addition each course runs an Industry Liaison Group, containing significant regional and national employers within the discipline area, to discuss enhancements to the curriculum, and the expectations of employer groups. These groups meet at least twice per year (with one meeting often taking place in London), and significantly enhance the currency of the curriculum.
60. The articulation of this Widening Participation Strategic Assessment, which develops the project-based nature of much previous widening participation into planned and coherent initiatives, points to the need to raise University College awareness at all levels. Awareness raising within an institutional context aims to respond to the needs of students from non-traditional groups and impact positively on their experience. This is aided through the dissemination of activity from the Widening Participation team; attendance at committees and fora; staff role models; staff development to support the learning experience of students from non-traditional backgrounds; and the inclusion of both business support and academic staff in staff development activities to support widening participation.

Targets and milestones

61. The University College developed a comprehensive schedule of targets and milestones as part of its Access Agreement, which took account of the HESA performance indicators as well as internal management data. These have been approved by the Office for Fair Access.
62. Additional targets have been developed in support of the extended activity covered by the full Widening Participation Strategy. These will also be included in the annual report on widening participation activity, and include the following:
 - Increased enquiries and applications from under-represented groups
 - Conversion rates at each stage of the admissions process for under-represented groups which are comparable with the University College average
 - Retention and achievement rates for under-represented groups which are comparable to the University College average

- Student satisfaction ratings for non-traditional learners which are comparable to those of the University College as a whole.
63. The University College has conducted a major review of applicant and student profile, noting potential differentials through the admissions process and on-course. However, internal management data is not always reliable for this, as a high proportion of applicants do not identify socio-economic class or disability at this stage of the process, which may lead to unrepresentative figures. This is particularly the case in a relatively small institution with something under 1000 new entrants from the UK in each academic year. The National Audit Office survey concurs with the University College's experience that "data on student characteristics is not sufficiently complete or unambiguous to identify accurately the extent to which certain groups are under-represented in higher education".³
 64. Likewise, given the numbers of students involved in some groups, some apparent change in performance may be incidental, and simply result from the different profile of applicants and students. Hence the University College adopts a cautious approach to its milestones and targets, and does not consider one year's performance, whether positive or negative, to be indicative of a definitive trend, which must be demonstrated over time.
 65. Alongside management data, the University College will conduct focus groups with specific target students to understand better their experience on the course. There is currently only limited and inconclusive evidence to suggest any differential in experience, but this will enable any issues to be identified such that they can be addressed. In some cases, this will coincide with work also being undertaken in support of the Single Equalities Scheme.
 66. Given the nature of its student body, the University College does not consider the Performance Indicator relating to state-school students (its historical percentage being over 95% annually). In addition, it has been agreed that the Indicator relating to mature students without previous experience of higher education and from a low participation neighbourhood should not be prioritised. The reason for this is primarily geographical; there are few low participation neighbourhoods within travelling distance of the University College and, whilst applicants are always given equal consideration, there are insufficient of them to make this a viable target. Courses have been developed with a particular focus on mature students, but few meet the criteria for this indicator, and priority has been given to other indicators in the first instance.
 67. Each of the other indicators has a firmly established target, which is included as an Appendix to the Access Agreement. In practice, the Access Agreement sought to build on existing provision, and hence did not take steps to address issues relating to disability, or to provide additional support for retention other than financial assistance to prevent those who were in danger of leaving the course for financial rather than academic reasons.

Evaluation: evidence of success

68. As noted above, the indicators of success include reference to the characteristics of applicants and entrants to the University College, but also to retention and achievement by target group, and also to student satisfaction ratings as evidenced through the National Student Survey and, equally significantly, the internal Student Perception Survey. These are reported annually through the Equalities Committee to Academic Board.

³ *Widening Participation in Higher Education*, National Audit Office, June 2008

69. The University College acknowledges that much of its work with younger learners from under-represented groups cannot easily be measured. The reasons why these learners may ultimately decide not to enter higher education are complex, and they are not always known by linked schools or colleges, as the learner may well have to continue their further education at another establishment before making an application. However, the University College does monitor progression from linked schools and colleges to its own further and higher education programmes, and this is included in the annual report. These data also enable an overview of the efficacy of engagement with each linked school or college, and links are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that this work is effectively targeted.
70. Students who have progressed to higher education at the University College from linked schools and colleges have confirmed, in interviews and through surveys, that the widening participation work conducted was key to their decision to work towards a place on an Honours degree course. The realisation of the opportunities available to them within higher education, and their potential to access these opportunities, has been central to raising their own aspirations and inspiring greater confidence and self-esteem. This has been particularly true of students from black and minority ethnic groups, who have reported that their aspiration to study at the University College was a direct result of earlier interventions. These reports, from prospective and current students, are of great value to the University College in identifying effective activity which can form the basis of future planning.
71. Similarly, there is evidence of success in the performance of schools and colleges with whom the University College has established partnerships. At the Special Schools and Academies Trust Conference, one school discussed how the work of the University College had both enhanced the curriculum, through supporting school staff and students, and offering a workshop opportunity for Gifted and Talented students; and improved provision, through the introduction of new software packages supported by the College. The School, which had twice been placed in special measures, reached their highest total of 30% Grades A-C in 2007, with 100% of art and design students achieving this qualification from a previous total of 21%.
72. At another link school, a long-standing collaboration has been refined to give more explicit targets and goals. School students have valued the opportunity for collaboration with a specialist higher education of arts, design and media and teachers have had the opportunity to develop the schools design technology GCSE curriculum to produce work broadly within a professional context. GCSE students have become familiar with the HE environment and have gained confidence through their participation in a catwalk show, and appreciate the chance to show their work to a public audience. This has resulted in significantly improved GCSE results in art and design (as well as increased interest in the course), and subsequently applications to further and then higher education courses both at the University College and elsewhere.

Investment in widening participation

73. Widening participation remains a significant aspect of the University College's future strategy. It is a reflection of the importance of this area of work that the University College currently commits approximately £1.5 m to widening participation activity. This is from the following funding streams (all figures approximate):

HEFCE WP allocation	800,000
HEFCE teaching grant	12,000
HEFCE TESS allocation	0
Other HEFCE funds:	0
NALN	40,000
SWLLN	10,000
Aimhigher	35,000

HEFCE Summer School grant	8,000
Access Agreement AFI (15-20%)	600,000
TOTAL	1,505,000

74. The funding is allocated as follows below (all figures approximate). The figures take account of all the associated costs of activity. This includes staff time, management costs and any associated space charging, as appropriate. Where activity is designed to support the non-traditional learner, but will also benefit other students, the figure given is the proportion of the total cost which is deemed to be associated with the non-traditional student cohort (around 35-40% of University College enrolments).

Bursary support	580000
Administration and management costs	69500
Employer engagement	8000
Schools liaison	22500
Disability support	117500
Support for student retention	325000
Summer schools	20000
Development of professional units*	15000
Mentoring support*	10000
Curriculum development	100000
Marketing	30000
Saturday art school	30000
NALN and other partnerships	15000
Career advice and guidance	20000
Staff development	30000
Part-time subsidy	60000
Portfolio Advice	25000
Creative Workshops	10000
Taster Days	10000
Local community engagement	7500
TOTAL	1,505,000