2019-20 access and participation plan monitoring

Provider impact report

This impact report summarises the progress made by Cliff College against targets, objectives and written commitments set out in its 2019-20 access and participation plan. This document is a summary of information submitted by the provider to the OfS. This document is a self-report by the provider only and does not indicate any OfS assessment of compliance.

1. Ambition and strategy

Cliff College's ambition and strategy as detailed in the 2019-20 access and participation plan:

The ambition and stragegy we set out in our APP for 2019-20 is as follows:

Our strategic approach to increasing access and participation has led us to prioritise the following action points:

•   to maintain the current high proportion of students accessing the College from groups currently under-represented (part time, mature, low participation neighbourhoods, those with disabilities)

•   to increase the proportion of students coming from ethnic minority groups

•   to maintain the current relatively high performance of students from under-represented groups at the College (part time, mature, low participation neighbourhoods, those with disabilities)

•   to improve the performance of those students from ethnic minorities

•   to provide financial support to those students who might otherwise not attend a higher education institution through outreach, and in particular through our short course programme

•   to continue to facilitate entry to higher education of students who did not succeed at school or who have been out of formal education for a long time

To achieve this strategy, we have decided to allocate just under 50% of our tuition fee income over £6,000 to the access and participation agenda. These additional funds will be used to ensure that our activities are properly resourced so as to achieve our strategic objectives, while still maintaining a sufficient bursary fund to enable all those who qualify for financial support to receive an appropriate amount, according to their circumstances.

As indicated, the College believes that its current approach to access and participation is working relatively well. Therefore, much of our focus in this action and participation plan is on ensuring that we are able to continue that good work whilst stretching us in those areas that do require new approaches.

In terms of access, we will seek a marginal increase in the proportion of students from state schools. Currently, this is at the very high level of 94%, significantly above benchmark. Nevertheless, we have set ourselves a target of increasing this by another 2%. We do not believe that progress beyond that measure is possible. Part of the reason for this is that the small percentage of students who do not come from state schools are not students who have attended elite, fee-paying schools; rather they are students who have either been home educated or students who have come from low-fee, Christian schools. In other words, in practice, we are already attracting 100% of students from the kinds of educational provision that the OfS would support; it is just that the particular metric does not capture that.

We will also seek to continue attracting students from low participation neighbourhoods. Currently, 21% of our full time, undergraduate students come from Polar 3 quintile 1 neighbourhoods. It is our ambition to maintain this rate which is already far above benchmarks.

One of the most significant areas where we believe improvement is possible relates to access from low participation neighbourhoods amongst our part-time undergraduate students. Currently only 11% of these students come from low participation neighbourhoods against a benchmark of 15%. We will therefore seek to improve the proportion of these students from such low participation neighbourhoods. It is worth noting that our part-time undergraduate programme is a vocational training programme which specifically trains students in children, youth, family and third age work, offering additional specialisms in creative arts and sports ministry. Frequently, the people who choose this course already have paid employment as youth, children, third age or family workers, etc. We suspect that their postcodes of origin reflect their paid employment in these fields rather than the locations where the students might have originated, as many of the students are mature. Therefore, it might prove difficult to improve the proportion of students on this course from low participation neighbourhoods without the relevant jobs moving to those neighbourhoods; nevertheless, this will remain our ambition.

The biggest area where we think we can improve relates to our relatively poor performance in regard to students from ethnic minorities. Currently, only 8% of our student cohort is from an ethnic minority, against a benchmark of 12%. As already suggested, this partly reflects our particular location in the heart of the Peak District. Nevertheless, we have set ourselves an ambitious access target to improve the proportion of students from ethnic minority groups. We will do this by making available bursaries for such students. In addition, we will seek to develop

closer partnerships with ethnic minority churches in our area. The College already has close working relationships with a number of denominations and church groups, but we have not previously targeted black-led churches. This will now become a focus of our activity.

The College already has a relatively large proportion of students with disabilities, and we will seek to maintain this high figure by continuing to provide generous access arrangements for such students. Our experience has shown that many of our students with specific learning difficulties have gone through the whole of their school career with their particular learning difficulty undiagnosed. As a result, their school performance has suffered. The College takes a relatively large proportion of students via its non-standard entry route. These are students who do not meet the normal entry criteria but who have nevertheless demonstrated their ability to successfully study at degree level. It is often the case that students with undiagnosed specific learning difficulties come via this route, and the College has an effective support programme that both assists such students in being properly assessed, and then ensures they receive the support they require. The efficacy of this approach is demonstrated in the very good attainment figures we achieve with such students. Our ambition is to continue this highly effective approach.

Perhaps one of the areas where the College is most proud of its success is in the zero (indeed, currently negative) attainment gap that exists between students from low participation neighbourhoods and other students. The College is particularly adept at helping students who have struggled at school, and who lack confidence in their own ability, and therefore our goal is simply to continue the success measures that we have already achieved with these students.

In contrast, the College has not been so effective in ensuring that students from ethnic minority backgrounds succeed. We will therefore prioritise our activities to support these students. It is our view that the precise reasons why these students do not do so well varies from course to course, and so we will take a differentiated approach in each course in response to this issue.

We will seek to maintain the near zero attainment gap that exists between students with disabilities and those without. Given that many of the students with disabilities have specific learning difficulties, we do not think that we can eliminate this gap entirely, but we are confident that we can keep it at the low figure that we have already achieved.

Finally, we will increase the number of students in receipt of bursaries. In the last year, 6 students (3.5% of our total student cohort) received bursaries and within 5 years we anticipate that this will have doubled to 12 students (7% of our total student cohort). Such bursaries should facilitate even more access to students from underrepresented groups.

We have not identified any specific 'progression' targets. This is for two reasons. Firstly, our most recent progression figures are exceptionally good with just one student withdrawing from the course prematurely. It would be hard to know how to identify any particular 'progression' target based on that individual circumstance. In addition, the vast majority of our students leave the College and enter some kind of church-based work. While such roles are usually recognised as professional, their actual salary levels are usually low. This is a consistent pattern for our graduates and it is why our students come to study at Cliff College, as these are the kinds of roles to which they feel called. We do not therefore have the spread of graduate outcomes that would be typical of a large university.

We have also not identified a specific target relating to outcomes in schools and colleges. Less than 30% of our undergraduate students come from schools and colleges. The particular cohort that the College attracts – even at undergraduate level – are mature students who have often not done so well at school, but who nevertheless wish to enter higher education. There are two mechanisms that we use to facilitate the entry and success of such students. The first is that we have a non-standard entry process for our undergraduate degrees and many prospective students who do not have level 3 qualifications access our courses via this mechanism. Oftentimes, however, we have found that such students have the ability to succeed at higher education but lack the confidence. To address this, we also have a comprehensive programme of short courses. These courses are unvalidated, pitched at level 3, and run from anything from a single day to 5 day courses. As part of this programme, we have a series of 'Cliff College certificates in' which require the student to both attend the course and submit a piece of marked work at level 3. Our experience has been that these courses are an incredibly effective bridge for those mature students who have the ability but

lack the confidence as success on the course enables the student to appreciate their own ability to succeed at higher levels. Approximately 20% of our total student body has come via this mechanism. It is our view then that if we were to develop a target that mirrored raising attainment in schools, it should be based around maintaining the relatively high proportion of undergraduate entrants without level 3 qualifications.

Given our particular provision – theology degrees for students who are seeking church-based work – our collaborative provision is usually focussed on churches and denominational networks rather than schools and colleges. The College already does a huge amount of such work and many of our short courses are jointly run with such partners. At present, these include the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the Bible Reading Fellowship, Church Mission Society, and CVM. More details of this provision and how it encourages participation by under-represented groups are given in the following section: Access, Student Success and Progression Measures.

The previous two paragraphs are intended to explain why we have not developed specific targets relating to outcomes in schools, outreach programmes and collaborative provision. In effect, we already do much work in this area via our short course programme which is intentionally geared towards those without level 3 qualifications, provides a bridge to higher education and as such acts as a form of outreach, and is frequently collaborative. The College's view is that our existing success in this area simply needs to be continued, and that to develop specific targets might detract attention from the areas previously described which at least in the next two years we believe should be the focus of our attention.

The College is in the relatively early stages of developing effective monitoring and evaluation arrangements. None of our methods of monitoring are systematically embedded, and therefore a priority for the College is to embed such monitoring arrangements so that they become a normative part of our annual cycle of activity.

To that end, it is our intention to systematically monitor in 2017/18 and in each year thereafter the following admission, success and progression datasets:

•   proportion of young, full-time undergraduate students from state schools or colleges

•   proportion of young, full-time undergraduate students from low participation neighbourhoods

•   proportion of full-time undergraduate students who are mature

•   proportion of undergraduate students who are part time

•   percentage of part-time undergraduate students with no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhoods

•   proportion of students from different ethnic groups

•   proportion of all undergraduate students with a disability.

In addition, we will continue to monitor attainment measures for students according to their ethnicity, gender, age, disability status and polar quintile.

These datasets form the bedrock of our evaluation strategy and as such our approach to evaluation is firmly within an outcome / impact rather than process framework. As this is the College's first access and participation plan, we do not have previous plans or evaluation strategies with which we can compare our approach on this occasion. Nevertheless, our ambition is set out in our accompanying resource plan and our measure of success will be whether or not we are achieving the targets that we have set ourselves. To that end, the access datasets will be reviewed at our biannual board of studies (where student representation is significant), and at an appropriate academic board. The success datasets will be reviewed each summer as part of the annual programme review process. These programme reviews also have programme student representation present. All datasets (access, success and progression) will be reviewed annually each summer and a report will then be presented to the Cliff College Committee, the governing body for the College. This report will indicate how monies have been spent, and how well the College is progressing in terms of achieving its targets. It will also recommend actions that need to be taken in light of the evaluation that has taken place. Our overall aim is to continue with the good work that is

currently in evidence in regard to access, success and progression, and to improve the representation of ethnic minority students on our courses, and their subsequent success.

Cliff College is committed to the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and to providing an environment where individuals are treated fairly, with respect and dignity. This commitment extends to all the activities that the College undertakes and this access and participation plan has been produced in line with our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and our commitments as set out in our equality and diversity policy.

This access and participation plan was shared in draft form with elected student representatives at the January 2018 board of studies and again in this form with elected student representatives in April 2018. On both occasions, student representatives were invited to contribute to its proposals.

2. Self-assessment of targets

The tables that follow provide a self-assessment by Cliff College of progress against the targets approved in its 2019-20 access and participation plan.

Please note the tables contain only a summary of target milestones approved in 2019-20 access and participation plans. Full information can be found in **Table 8a – statistical targets and milestones** and **Table 8b – Other milestones and targets** of Cliff College's 2019-20 access and participation plan.

Any optional commentary provided against the targets is given in Annex B.

Statistical targets and milestones

Reference Number (lifecycle stage)	Description	Baseline year	Baseline data	2018-19 milestone	2019-20 milestone	Units of target	Comparison year	Actual performance in comparison year	Target self-assessment
T16a_01 (Access)	Increase the proportion of students from state schools	2016-17	94%	95%	96%	Percentage	2019-20	90	No progress
T16a_02 (Access)	Maintain the current high proportion from low participation neighbourhoods	2016-17	21%	20%	20%	Percentage	2019-20	26.3	Expected progress
T16a_03 (Access)	Improve our performance in attracting these students	2016-17	11%	13%	15%	Percentage	2019-20	7	Expected progress
T16a_04 (Access)	Increase the proportion of student from ethnic minority backgrounds	2016-17	8%	10%	12%	Percentage	2019-20	10.5	Limited progress
T16a_05 (Access)	Maintain the currently high proportion of undergraduate students with disabilities	2016-17	11%	10%	10%	Percentage	2019-20	12	Expected progress
T16a_06 (Success)	Maintain negative or zero attainment gap between students from low participation neighbourhoods and other students	2016-17	-4%	0%	0%	Percentage	2018-19	-2.6	Expected progress
T16a_07 (Success)	Improve attaintment gap between students from ethnic minorities and all other students	2016-17	6%	4%	2%	Percentage	2019-20	5.7	No progress
T16a_08 (Success)	Maintain currently low attainment gap between students with disabilities and those without	2016-17	2%	2%	2%	Percentage	2018-19	2	Expected progress
T16a_09 (Access)	Increase the number of students who have received bursaries towards their education	2016-17	6	8	10	Headcount	2019-20	10	Expected progress

Other milestones and targets

No data was returned for this section in Cliff College's 2019-20 access and participation plan.

3. Investment commitments

3.1. Access and participation investment for the last audited year

Please note that some differences in predicted vs actual spend may be due to reporting differences between academic and financial years.

Financial year	2019-20		
	Predicted spend (£)	Actual spend (£)	Difference (ppt)
Access investment	£10,000.00	£33,000.00	230%
Financial Support	£5,000.00	£5,000.00	0%

4. Action plan

Where progress was less than expected Cliff College has made the following commitments to increase the rate of progress against their targets.

Reference Number	Steps that will be taken in the future to make expected progress against target
T16a_01	We will continue to target student recruitment at applicants from the state sector.
T16a_04	We will work with black led churches, and with other Christian organizations and denominations to market and recruit to our programmes.
T16a_07	We will revisit this in light of the variation we have seen, and work with students. We will look to develop bespoke packages of support for students, with increased academic support, and increased welfare support as there is a range of social circumstances that have affected this cohort, especially within covid restrictions

5. Confirmation

Cliff College confirms that:

Student engagement
Have you worked with your students to help them complete the access and participation plan monitoring student submission?
No
Have you engaged with your student body in the design, evaluation, and monitoring of the plan?
Yes

Verification and sign off
Cliff College has confirmed that the information included in this impact report is accurate, that it has been compiled in line with OfS guidance, and that it is being submitted on behalf of the governing body of the provider.
Yes

Accountable officer sign off	
Name	Richard Saunders-Hindley
Position	Academic Director

Annex A: Commentary on progress against targets

Cliff College's commentary where progress against targets was less than expected.

No data was returned for this section in Cliff College's monitoring return submission.

Annex B: Optional commentary on targets

Cliff College's commentary on any of the targets listed in .

Reference Number	Optional commentary
T16a_01	As noted, our numbers are very small, with each student representing over 5% of the total.
T16a_02	
T16a_03	In relation to this specific metric 7% of this cohort come from POLAR quintile 1, although a further 17% come from POLAR quintile 2. The target in our APP related to the student body as a whole, which was 19.4% from POLAR quintile 1.
T16a_04	
T16a_05	
T16a_06	
T16a_07	
T16a_08	
T16a_09	