

Cliff College

UKPRN: 10007912

2019–20 access and participation plan

Assessment of current performance

By way of context, Cliff College is a small, alternative provider which trains students in the single discipline of theology, offering degrees from undergraduate through to masters and doctorates. We are validated by the University of Manchester.

We currently have 165 students (headcount) which represents approximately 100 students (FTE). Therefore, it is important to recognise that by the time we have stratified student numbers in the table below, we are often left with very small absolute numbers. For that reason, we have not provided data on some of the disadvantaged groups in the tables below as to do so would be both meaningless statistically, and potentially identify individual students and their characteristics, and thereby breach data protection regulations.

We also provide no data regarding care leavers as currently we have zero self-declared care leavers at the College. Given the size of our College, we would expect to have approximately 5 care leavers, and therefore the zero self-declaration may reflect the fact that not all care leavers are willing to be identified in that way; it may also reflect the fact that a very small minority of our students apply through the UCAS system, less than 5% of our total student body. It is also important to note therefore that UCAS data does not cover the vast majority of our study body.

Access

Our access data has been analysed in terms of those parameters for which national benchmark data is available. As a current alternative provider, Cliff College is not provided with locally adjusted benchmark data which would enable us to more meaningfully compare our data with what could be expected.

In 2016/17, our access data revealed the following characteristics:

	Cliff College	National Benchmark
Proportion of young, full-time undergraduate students from state schools or colleges:	94%	90%
Proportion of young, full time undergraduate students from low	21%	11%

participation neighbourhoods		
Proportion of full-time, undergraduate students who are mature	35%	21%
Proportion of undergraduate students who are part-time	56%	9.5%
Percentage of part-time undergraduate students with no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhood	11%	15.6%
Proportion of students who are white	92%	80%
Proportion of all undergraduate students with a disability	11%	6.6%

As is common with many small alternative providers, the above data demonstrates that the student cohort at Cliff College is not typical of that which attends a large university. In particular, it should be noted that the majority of our provision is part-time. Almost all (90%+) of our postgraduate students are part-time, and more than half of our undergraduates are part-time. Partly in line with this, the majority of our undergraduate students are also mature. Of our full-time undergraduates, 35% are mature, far higher than the national benchmark; the figure for part-time undergraduates is 80%. Therefore, overall, just under 70% of our undergraduate students are mature. Finally, in line with our particular location in the heart of the Peak District, only 8% of our student body is from ethnic minority groups. This, clearly, is much lower than the national picture but is actually a significantly higher proportion than is the case in the Peak District national park, where just 2.4% of the population is from an ethnic minority. In summary, the Cliff College student community is predominantly part-time, mature and white.

As will be clear from the data above, Cliff College is performing relatively well in terms of attracting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We have a higher than benchmark proportion of students from state schools; amongst our young, full time undergraduates, we have a significantly higher proportion of students from localities with low participation rates. This is not quite the same in respect of our part-time undergraduate students, where the proportion from low participation neighbourhoods is slightly less than the national benchmark. As indicated, we have significantly higher proportions of mature and part-time students, two groups that

often find access to higher education difficult. Finally, we have a significantly higher proportion of students with identified disabilities than the national benchmark.

It is clear that, on the whole, Cliff College has been successful in attracting students from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds. The primary exception to this is in relation to students from ethnic minority backgrounds; we intend to address this in the years ahead.

Success

The College has also been relatively successfully in ensuring that students from disadvantaged backgrounds succeed while they are at College. The table below indicates average attainment scores against a range of characteristics. This data relates to attainment during the 2016/17 academic year:

Average attainment scores (2016/17) by range of characteristics:

	All students	Full time undergraduate	Part time undergraduate	Postgraduate
Polar 3 quintile 1	64.4	58	71.3	59.5
All other polar quintiles	60.3	58.9	59.6	61.1
White	61.3	If the 'all students' figure were broken down by programme then some boxes would be reporting on less than 5 students and potentially identifying individuals. Therefore, the disaggregated data is not included.		
Ethnic Minorities	54.7			
Mature	60.4	54.7	61.7	n/a
Young	61.1	62	60.2	n/a
No disability	60.8	If the 'all students' figure were broken down by programme then some boxes would be reporting on less than 5 students and potentially identifying individuals. Therefore, the disaggregated data is not included.		
Disability	58.9			

The table above indicates that, in respect of attainment, the College is performing very well in regard to a range of disadvantage characteristics. Students from the

lowest participation neighbourhoods are either performing as well as their peers or, in respect of our part-time undergraduates, significantly better than their peers. Overall, students from those neighbourhoods are actually outperforming students from the rest of the country.

Similarly, on average mature students are doing just as well as their younger peers. This is not so clearly the case for our full-time, mature students, but even there the difference in average attainment grade is relatively small.

Perhaps, most surprising is the fact that students with disabilities are on average performing only very slightly less well than those without disabilities. The majority of these students have specific learning difficulties, and as such one might expect that this translates into lower academic performance. It is a testament to the support that they are receiving that there is minimal difference between those students and their peers.

The one area where there is clearly room for improvement relates to students from minority ethnic groups. Our access data has indicated that we have relatively few students from ethnic minorities, and those students we do have do not seem to perform as well as other students. Having said this, these figures relate to just 11 students and it is possible that what we are observing is a small cohort effect. I suggest this because the smallest gap in attainment exists in the cohort where we have the largest absolute number of ethnic minority students. We have not provided disaggregated data in the table due to the small absolute numbers. This is clearly an area where more work and monitoring is required.

In 2016/17, the College enrolled 52 new students on validated programmes. Currently, 51 of those students (98%) are still enrolled in higher education; 50 of them (96%) are still enrolled on the courses they originally joined; one student took an exit award and has continued their studies elsewhere; one student has left higher education. This represents excellent continuation rates for all groups of students on all courses, both part-time and full-time. For statistical reasons, it would be inappropriate to consider any further the characteristics of the single student who withdrew or to draw any conclusions from their withdrawal. There is also a danger of identifying them if we drew attention to their characteristics.

This successful approach to attracting and retaining students from disadvantaged backgrounds is not accidental, but is part of a deliberate strategy which, as the data above indicates, is proving effective.

Progression

In 2016/17, just 14 undergraduate students graduated from the College. In the DLHE survey, we received complete responses for 14 of these students (100% response rate). Their responses indicated the following features:

- 8 out 14 (57%) were working in professional / managerial posts
- 1 out of 14(7%) was working in a non-professional / managerial post

- 4 out of 14 (29%) were doing other things
- 1 out of 14 (7%) was neither employed.

We are a theological college, and the majority of our students are training for some form of mission or ministry work. The ‘other things’ category therefore usually involves graduates who are travelling or who are doing church-based internships or who have taken on full-time family/caring responsibilities.

In addition, the College completes its own graduate employment survey for post-graduate students. The results of the most recent of these surveys which relates to students who graduated in the 2015/16 year reveal the following characteristics:

- 11 out of 11 (100%) were in employment (both full time and part-time)
- 3 out of 11 (27%) were in part-time employment
- 2 out of 11 (18%) were in part-time further study
- 10 out of 11 (91%) were in professional / managerial roles and 1 out of 10 did not disclose the nature of their employment, so 100% of those who responded were in professional / managerial roles
- no-one was neither employed nor in further study.

Prior to DLHE, the College completed its own graduate employment survey for all graduates, and the results of that for 2014-2016 are indicated below (all figures are percentages):

	2014	2015	2016
In employment	92	92	96
Doing further study	15	16	21
Both employment and study	10	10	17
Further study only	5	6	4
Neither employment nor study	4	2	6

The combination of our very small absolute numbers and the transition from our own graduate employment survey to DLHE in 2016 means that it is impossible to conduct meaningful analysis of graduate outcomes by disadvantage characteristic. For instance, the 2–8% who are neither employed nor studying usually represents just one or two individual students and therefore analysis of their individual characteristics would not be meaningful statistically. Having said this, it is the College's intention to continue to collect this data on a rolling basis from this point forward and once we have three years worth of DLHE data we should be able to make meaningful statements about the impact of disadvantage on subsequent employment and study. In the meantime, it remains the case that we have a high proportion of students in professional/managerial roles, and a high proportion in employment or further study.

Ambition and strategy

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 disadvantaged 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.

Access, student success and progression measures

Our approach to access and participation comprises a number of different elements:

1. In the first place, the College has a long history of attracting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We have been an educational institution for more than 100 years, and delivered validated degrees for more than 20 years. Throughout this time the College has welcomed and witnessed the success of students who would not have otherwise attended a higher education institution. The College has a high proportion of students who do not have standard qualifications on entry. This means that the College has built up expertise in working with such students to help them succeed in higher education. This success is built on a recognition that such students require holistic support and care that goes far beyond their educational needs, to include emotional, psychological, pastoral and spiritual support. The College faculty has an open door policy, and all faculty routinely spend informal time with students over coffee and lunches in addition to formal tutorial and lecture slots. These close relationships mean that faculty are able to spot early those students who are struggling and to provide the appropriate support that will help them succeed. In a larger University such students may simply go unnoticed and flounder; in a relatively small College like our own, they are able to succeed due to the personal, supportive environment that is provided. This activity has been taking place for some years which is why our success measures for students from under-represented groups are so good. The one new piece of data that creation of this plan has generated is that students from ethnic minorities perform, on average, less well than those who are white. All programme leads will be required to consider this information and to investigate the particular reasons why the ethnic minority students on their programmes may have performed less well than other students, and to respond appropriately.
2. The College has an extensive and growing programme of unvalidated short courses. These courses range from a single day to five full residential days in duration. Entry to these courses is completely open, but they are pitched at level three. Students who undertake the five-day 'certificate' courses are also required to submit an assignment which is assessed using level four criteria. These courses have proven to be especially effective in acting as a bridge for those with minimal prior academic experience and/or who lack confidence in their academic ability in enabling them to build up the confidence they require to apply to, and then

succeed on one of our validated courses. Approximately 20% of our students on validated courses attended one of these unvalidated courses prior to joining their validated course. We view this provision as central to continuing to attract students who would not otherwise access higher education provision. It is one of the reasons why we have such a high participation rate from mature, part-time students. It is also important to note that the short course programme is loss-making for the College, and so the vast majority of any extra funds from higher fees would be devoted to continuing to run and expand this provision. As already indicated, it is these short courses that we run collaboratively with a range of relevant partners.

3. In order to attract mature students and those with family or work commitments, the College has deliberately created part-time provision that is delivered on an intensive basis. Following many conversations with such students, this is the pattern of teaching that they indicate can be most easily fitted around their existing life choices, as it enables students to study alongside other responsibilities. Some of our programmes also involve a significant placement component which also enables students to maintain their current volunteer or work arrangements alongside their study. This flexible approach to learning provision has also proved to be effective in attracting non-traditional and, in particular, mature part-time students.
4. The College has a long history of successfully attracting students with a range of physical and specific learning difficulties. We have already indicated the relatively high proportion of students that we have with specific learning difficulties; College faculty are familiar with how to work with such students to ensure they succeed academically. The College also provides additional help to such students, as appropriate to their particular learning need.
5. Finally, the College runs a generous bursary scheme to assist students with financial difficulties. In the last academic year (2016/17) the College distributed just under £3,500 to six students under the terms of this scheme. It is our intention to expand this provision in the years ahead. The bursaries, which take the form of fee waivers, range from £100 to £750. They are awarded to students who qualify for the full Government Maintenance Grant and who have at least one of the following indicators as being from a group under-represented in higher education:
 - low HE participation neighborhoods [POLAR groups 1]
 - care leavers & young carers
 - students with disabilities
 - students from ethnic minorities.

As previously noted, on the whole, the College is doing well in attracting students

from disadvantaged groups and in enabling them to succeed. Therefore, much of the activity described above is focused on continuing to ensure that the activity which brings about those outcomes is embedded in the life of the College and is able to continue. The primary area where this plan identified a new area of activity relates to students from ethnic minorities. As discussed, we will address this issue by intentionally seeking new partnerships with ethnic minority churches, and as noted above we will also extend our bursary scheme to specifically include this group of students. In this way, we believe that our access and participation plans are focused on the right students at the right stage of their lifecycle.

Investment

As previously indicated, the College intends to spend just under 50% of its additional income on access and participation activities. In 2019–20 this is estimated to amount to £15,000 and is broken down in the following way:

	2019/20	2020/21
Short course programme	£10,000	£10,000
Bursaries	£5,000	£5,000
Total	£15,000	£15,000

For further details of our projections, see Table 5 of the accompanying spreadsheet.

At 50% of our extra income, it is worth noting that these totals are substantially higher than the 15% that is required for an institution like our own.

In addition to these figures, the College continues to invest in our short-course programme in particular. In 2019/20, with the support of the Methodist Church, we intend to invest at least a further £20,000.

Provision of information to students

Prior to the start of the 2019/20 academic year, all current students will be provided with the bursary application form and information regarding eligibility for bursaries. This information will also be made available on our Moodle – which is our internal Virtual Learning Environment.

For prospective students, the same information will be made available on our website (in the recruitment section) and all enquiries will be directed towards the same information. It will also be highlighted in our ‘How to Apply’ documents which accompany each programme.

Fees and other course information, including course length, modules, assessment procedures, and so on, are made available on our website and on our Moodle VLE. The College will also publish this access and participation plan on its website once approved.

* course type not listed.

Full-time and part-time course fee levels for 2019-20 entrants.

Please enter inflationary statement in the free text box below.

We will apply annual increases in the fee in line with the amount set by Government each year.

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	BA Theology	£7,000
First degree	BA Mission and Ministry	£7,000
Foundation degree		*
Foundation year / Year 0		*
HNC / HND		*
CertHE / DipHE		*
Postgraduate ITT		*
Accelerated degree		*
Sandwich year		*
Erasmus and overseas study years		*
Other		*
Franchise full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		*
Foundation degree		*
Foundation year / Year 0		*
HNC / HND		*
CertHE / DipHE		*
Postgraduate ITT		*
Accelerated degree		*
Sandwich year		*
Erasmus and overseas study years		*
Other		*
Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		*
Foundation degree		*
Foundation year / Year 0		*
HNC / HND		*
CertHE / DipHE		*
Postgraduate ITT		*
Accelerated degree		*
Sandwich year		*
Erasmus and overseas study years		*
Other		*

