



Access and Participation Statement 2018

Holy Cross has been a champion of Widening Participation since its establishment in 1878, one of the first Catholic educational institutions serving the whole community in Bury. Since this time, opportunity for all has remained a key component of the institution's vision and is embedded throughout its activities. Following incorporation in 1991, the college expressly partnered with all the schools of Bury regardless of denominational character, and in 1999 we initiated our University Centre.

From the outset, therefore, widening access and improving participation has been a crucial part of our mission. Our aim is to promote and provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it. This is vital for social mobility and economic competitiveness in the borough and is integral to our ethos inherited from the Daughters of the Cross, to have a particular commitment to those who 'find education difficult'.

Holy Cross has a proven track record in Widening Participation providing higher education to a diverse student body including; mature students, first generation students, students from low income families and low achievers from low participation neighbourhoods. We seek to encourage all students with potential to study at Holy Cross, without bias or prejudice as to their background, and having a particular regard to all the protected characteristics of the Equality Act.

We have a range of support and advice to help all to engage with our courses and make a significant and distinctive contribution to widening participation. We aim to achieve this through a co-ordinated strategy of advice and guidance, targeted support and provision of entry routes. An extensive programme of study skills, pastoral care, and HE preparatory classes at various stages of learning enhance the student experience and help those returning to education or coming from non-conventional routes. All the buildings used by the university centre have been significantly upgraded in recent years having a particular regard to disabled access.

Holy Cross admissions guidance offers an alternative entrance assessment for students who may have the potential to enter higher education through accreditation for prior learning but have few or no formal qualifications. Fifty-four students graduating in 2017 had gained admission to degree level courses by taking the alternative entrance assessment and 52% of these students achieved a first class or upper-second class degree classification. This demonstrates the learning gain for students who might otherwise find it difficult to gain access to Higher Education and highlights the success of Widening Participation at both Holy Cross and St. Mary's. In 2018 over 60% of new students achieved entry to a degree level course via an alternative entrance assessment and accredited prior learning.

Holy Cross College is very proud of student achievement with 65% of the students achieving a first class or upper-second class degree classification (over 60% of these achieved entry via an alternative entrance assessment) and a 100% pass rate in 2018.

A number of Holy Cross students have won the accolade of overall highest achieving student in their subject across the whole university despite their often unconventional educational background and extensive external commitments. The very high level of outcomes fully supports our mission and values to provide quality higher education to all who can benefit in the local community.

The blended learning model including evening taught sessions provides a unique higher education provision in the local area. This enables many students to be highly successful both academically and socially, demonstrating a significant learning gain which may not be accessible to our non-traditional students on mainstream university campuses.

A six week, free preparation for Higher Education programme is offered to potential students at Holy Cross to help in the transition to degree level study. Late applicants who are unable to attend this new programme are offered a pre-course study skills session. (A similar model of preparatory study is also offered at St Mary's campus to students at their centre).

The College Higher Education Local Impact Survey (2016) reveals that 72% of our students are mature (age 25+) "second chance learners" and 47% of students were in deprivation bands 1 to 5, demonstrating that Holy Cross makes a significant contribution to widening participation in the local areas. The TEF core metrics (2017) show that 56% of students were non-tariff under the criteria "entry qualifications". Holy Cross aims to continue to build on this provision by particularly encouraging such students under our widening participation strategy. This includes a particular aspiration to increase the proportion of male students and students from BAME backgrounds. We are part of a project by Greater Manchester (GM) Higher to focus on underrepresented postcodes and groups.