



## ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION STATEMENT 2017-18

### 1. Background and Introduction

Arden University is a specialist provider of higher education by online distance learning and blended learning. Our core mission is to remove the barriers to higher education, inspire new ways to learn and enrich people and their lives. Our vision is to be known as the University that made higher education more accessible, engaging and beneficial to people everywhere.

#### *Our Purpose*

To unlock the potential in every student.

#### *Belief*

We believe that everyone, everywhere has a right to higher education. It's a path that leads to both personal progress and enrichment. For some, there are hurdles along the way. At Arden University we help you clear them. Our unique, flexible learning experience and supportive study programmes make Arden a pioneer in its field.

#### *Insight*

Many people, at different stages of life, are constrained in their ability to study and to progress – constrained by expectation, geography, financial circumstances, other commitments or even just by time. But within Arden students, and potential students, there is a desire to break free from these limitations, to work hard, enjoy learning and to become the best they can be.

#### *Student Population*

Arden University is committed to recruiting students from diverse backgrounds and supporting them to succeed. Given our unique proposition and target market, our approach to widening access and participation is broader than that of many more traditional universities. Our student body is a global one and we provide access to UK higher education for adult learners who may be unable to access more traditional study routes for many reasons. The majority of Arden students (92%) are mature students aged over 21.

Data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency for 2015-16 show that 12.7% of Arden's UK undergraduate students in 2015/16 came from neighbourhoods with low participation in higher education, which is ahead of the relevant benchmark.

## **2. Identified Priority Groups**

Arden University's identified priority groups are:

- Mature adults without HE qualification
- Part-time students with family and/or work commitments
- 'Disengaged learners', who may be young or mature, but they have previously disengaged from education and need guidance and support to progress their learning.

Our student population is international and diverse, bringing students of all nationalities and ethnicities together to study online and in the classroom. White students are a minority at 37%. The proportion of black students (including Black British) is almost equal to this at 36%. Asian/Asian British students comprise 11% of our student population, with students of mixed/multiple ethnicities comprising 5%.

## **3. Outreach and Student Engagement Strategies**

Arden undertakes outreach activities that are differentiated for its different learning modes – online distance learning and campus-based blended learning. Arden's "compressed blended" delivery model for blended learning allows students to combine the full benefits of its online learning materials and resources with face-to-face teaching timetabled across just two days per week, enabling them to fit their studies around work, family and other commitments. Outreach activities for online distance learning and blended learning include participation in information and recruitment events, from UCAS exhibitions to local college higher education fairs, open days and seminars, awareness raising with local schools and businesses, as well as local community marketing initiatives where the Arden team raise awareness of its flexible and supportive learning model through local outdoor events. One innovative example of this was Arden's 'Blue Sofa' campaign where the team visited shopping centres and busy streets near to Arden study centres to engage local communities, open a dialogue about the benefits of higher education and seek to help potential students realise that their personal barriers can be overcome.

Once students commence their studies with Arden, its flexible delivery models and leading edge virtual learning environment are the main mechanisms through which ongoing student engagement is facilitated. Arden's online platforms allow students to feel part of a learning community even if they are studying via distance learning. These platforms also support our innovative blended learning delivery model which provides face to face tuition in the classroom in addition to the full online interactive learning materials, to provide maximum support alongside accessibility.

As part of its strategy to provide access to higher education for anyone who is able to benefit from it, Arden admits a substantial proportion of its students (currently 26%, see Table 3 below) on the basis of prior experiential learning. All students have free access to a range of study skills modules which are supported by an academic skills tutor and are designed to equip students without a traditional academic background with the skills and attributes they need to succeed in higher education.

## **4. We Support People**

The University is acutely aware of the diverse challenges facing Arden students. The student support infrastructure at Arden is therefore modelled to meet the unique needs of its students – this makes the Arden model very different from that of a conventional university.

One of Arden's core values is – 'We support people'.

When we say that we support people, we mean that together, we have created a nurturing environment for our students and employees. We care about people and the positive difference we can make to their lives and that they can make on people around them. Our student support team carry out proactive 'reach out' and motivational activities with the students and will tailor these to individual students' circumstances. These activities include a routine 'check in' with the named student support coordinator following first assessment submission, extra support strategies for students who fail an assessment or whose academic practice has fallen short of the required standard, reach out activities for students returning from a period of leave, and programmes of more regular contact with students identified as vulnerable.

Individualised support is provided to applicants throughout the admissions process, with all potential students speaking, at least once but often frequently over an extended period of time, to a named admissions counsellor. This 'highly effective ongoing and personalised support provided to prospective students at all stages of the admissions process' was identified in November 2017 as an area of good practice by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

Arden University has specialist advisors in place to support disabled students and those with special educational needs. Applicants are invited to share any special educational needs during the admissions process, to enable requirements to be assessed and appropriate arrangements to be implemented prior to enrolment, but may be raised at any stage during the student's learning journey, at which point a student would be signposted to the relevant support.

Arden provides enhanced academic support for students who are returning to education, as a mature student or a 'disengaged learner'. For blended learning students this includes compulsory, weekly, core skills classes, in addition to the study skills provision (described in section 3 above) which is available to all students.

Arden's learning model facilitates a high level of individualised learning, particularly through assessment methodologies which routinely allow students to apply their learning in the context of their own employment or experience. This is a particular focus throughout distance learning and apprenticeship programmes but applies also in blended learning. For blended learning students a one to one coaching scheme has also been introduced.

Arden is also the first higher education institution in the UK to launch Studentline, manned by trained counsellors and fully qualified GPs, which provides all students with free access (24hr/365) to advice and counselling.

## **6. Access and Participation Priorities for 2017-18**

Arden University's access and participation priorities for 2017-18 are:

- To work with the relevant funding agencies to remove barriers to the launch of its online Access to Higher Education Diplomas, in order that potential part-time students in employment or with other commitments who are not yet academically equipped to enter a degree programme can be supported to progress towards higher education.
- To refine its motivational assessment capabilities in order to tailor learning and support mechanisms even more to the individual student.
- To increase the ways in which student demographic data is considered as part of internal monitoring and review processes and to more routinely collect and review such data on

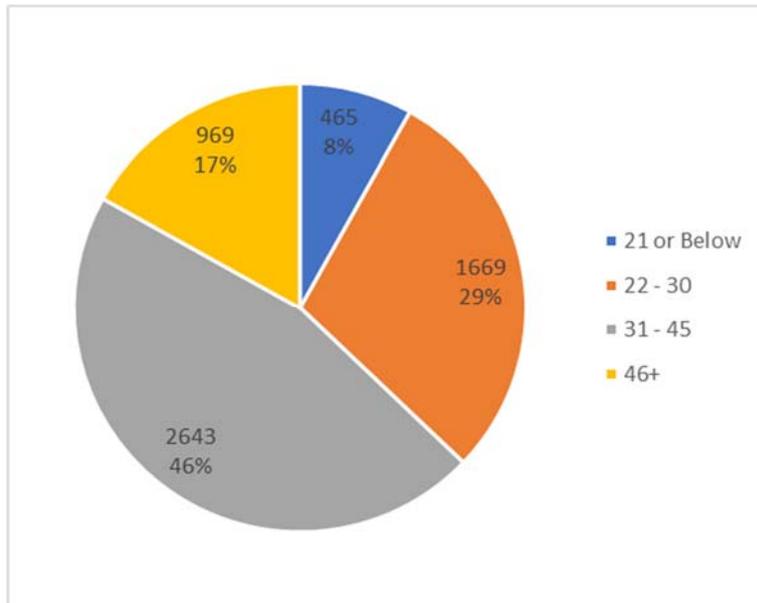
applicants, to ensure that student admissions and outcomes reflect the university's equality and diversity strategy.

- To utilise its online learning environment, expertise in individualised work based learning and flexible delivery strategies to launch a portfolio of higher and degree apprenticeships at levels, 5, 6 and 7 and, through employer outreach, to attract and build a network of employer partners to support this provision.
- To formalise its wide range of employer engagement and employer liaison activities in an approved Employer Engagement Strategy, including the launch of an enhanced Employer Advisory Forum.
- To further develop and extend its range outreach activities undertaken with schools, colleges and local communities.
- To continue to build and refine enhanced academic support strategies for students who are returning to education and further increase the focus on skills development, in order to retain students and improve success levels.
- To further develop its plans to raise student satisfaction levels around learning community, for both distance learning and blended learning students, including implementation of a pilot 'study buddy' scheme for distance learners.
- To expand its staff expertise in support for Special Educational Needs, particularly the provision of this support across its blended learning campuses.
- To enhance the personalised learning opportunities for its campus based students through the launch a new scheme of one to one coaching.

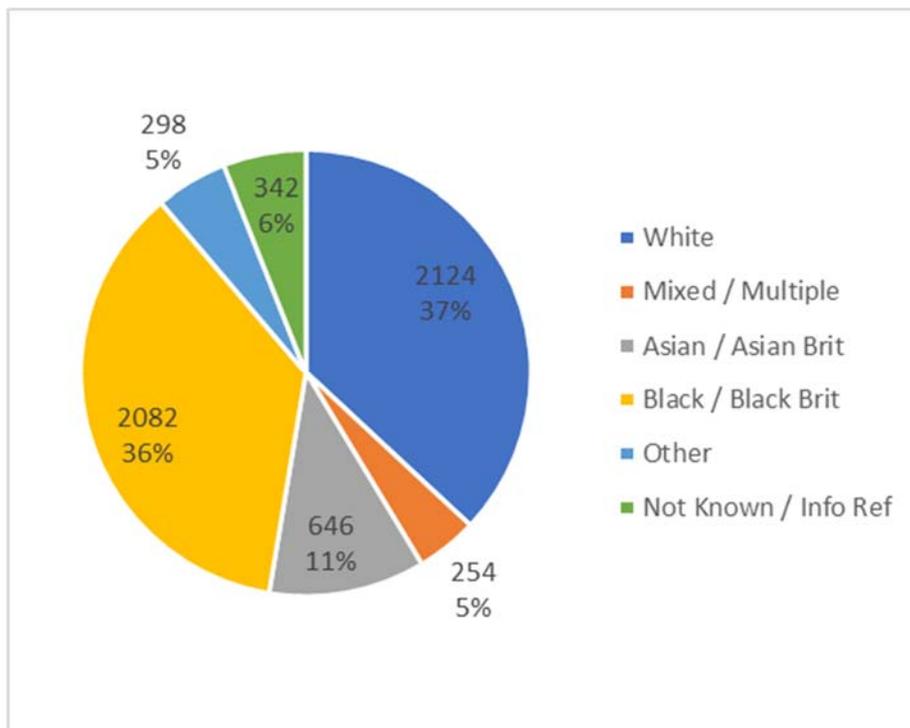
## Annex 1. Widening Participation Data

Arden's current student body is diverse, reflecting its strategy.

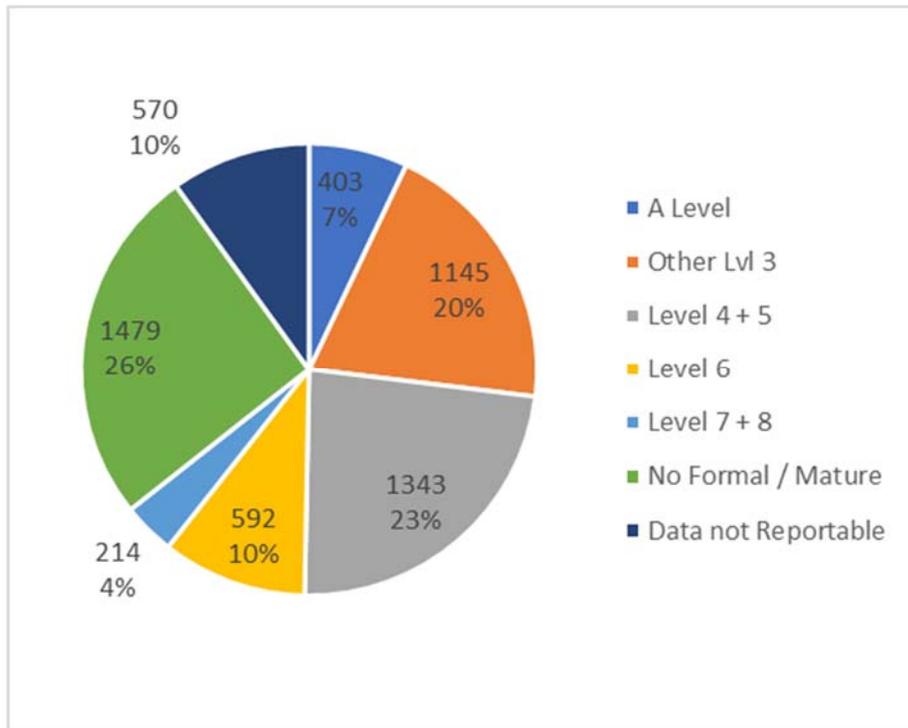
**Table 1: AGE**



**Table 2: ETHNICITY**



**Table 3: QUALIFICATIONS ON ENTRY**



Statistics based on student population on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017.