

## **Waltham International College**

### **Access and participation plan**

#### **2023-24 (plus 2024-25 to 2027-28)**

Waltham International College (WIC) is a small independent provider with experience delivering adult higher education (HE) programmes and has been delivering franchised degrees since 2019/20. WIC was approved for inclusion in the Register by the Office for Students in Autumn 2021. WIC supports individuals wishing to access vocational and enterprise-focused higher education from predominantly local areas with traditionally low participation rates in HE. Teaching is delivered and learning is undertaken at WIC's own premises utilising classrooms, open access IT and computer suites, a library, quiet study spaces, and student-centred social space, being supported with a comprehensive virtual learning environment and an on-campus, in-person student support services team. This is WIC's first access and participation plan relating to the delivery of validated provisions at East London from 2023/24.

#### **1. Assessment of performance**

WIC supports approximately 200 full-time undergraduate students enrolling per intake on franchise degrees on foundation level (also known as Level F or Year Zero) since the academic year 2019/20. WIC also delivers a 1-year level 5 Diploma in Education and Training (DET) programme, enrolling approximately 100 learners per year. No part-time learners are enrolled at WIC. The initial cohort of students will complete December 2023 and will be reported upon through our franchise partner. Prior to 2019/20 WIC also delivered 1-year level 5 diploma programmes in education and training to very small numbers of learners. Therefore, the data on the OfS Dashboard bears little resemblance to the educational operation and student engagement currently found at WIC.

Therefore, within the above context, while WIC has limited data on the participation of learners since 2019/20, and the numbers enrolled at each intake are particularly small, there is low confidence in meaningful gap analysis. The relatively small number of students means that we will not be able to discuss statistical data for every widening participation group at each level of access, participation and progression. Analysis of the performance of students at WIC has also been developed through "exit interviews" of those students withdrawing from the programme during the "Pandemic years".

In this section, therefore, our existing performance of franchise provision since 2019/20 will be considered to identify where WIC can further contribute to widening participation in and improvement of HE learning experience of underrepresented communities within London and the local environs. We have used information provided by our University partner alongside internal data sets as the basis for the evaluation of our past experience with prospective and registered students within the context of our franchise agreement.

WIC traditionally promotes and recruits students to its HE provision through conventional marketing methods within very local communities near the WIC campus. Of current students studying at East London Campus approximately 60% live within 5 miles, and 70% within 10 miles.

Promotion and marketing methods include traditional print advertising, advertising on local transport systems, internet-focused promotion including paid-for editorials and search engine optimisation, social media-driven promotion, personal recommendations by current or past students, and promotion through local community groups and charities.

The following discussion and data represent individuals within respective stages of the student life cycle:

- Access (positive recruitment and enrolment)
- Success
  - Continuation (transition from the first year of study to the second year)
  - Attainment (awarding of qualification initially enrolled upon)
- Progression (commencing highly skilled employment or programme of Further Study)

The College has not previously collected data on the destinations of leavers from degrees prior to 2019/20, and no student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year undergraduate degree programmes (first graduation December 2023).

We have used information provided by our University partner alongside internal data sets as the basis for the evaluation of our past experience with prospective and registered students within the context of our franchise agreement.

Comparative sector statistics considers the data as available on the OfS Dashboard<sup>1</sup> (the Dashboard) and the definitions within the *Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures* PDF<sup>2</sup>. All new starters are enrolled and registered on the foundation year or the Level 5 DET. Successful achievement of the foundation year provides eligibility to the learner to progress to Level 4 of their chosen degree. Based on progress from the foundation year to level 4, for the purpose of this Access and Participation Plan (the Plan), and consistent evaluation, it is considered that all current WIC-based HE students are accessing and studying undergraduate provision.

Detailed comparative conclusions are limited due to the following underlying points:

- OfS Dashboard 5-year aggregate data consider the following years (including student data pre-OfS regulation and pre-Covid pandemic),
  - access and attainment indicators: 2016-17 to 2020-21
  - full-time continuation indicators: 2015-16 to 2019-20,
- WIC data considers students on franchise provision from 2019-20 to 2021-22: wholly Covid pandemic experienced.

However, WIC is committed to utilising the data and analysis of this initial Plan as the foundation from which its strategic vision can be delivered and enhanced for the benefit of local students.

## **1.1 Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status**

### **Access**

WIC recognises the benefit of POLAR 4 classification and dataset as one measure of underrepresentation widely used across the UK HE sector. However, since the profile of the WIC student body is overwhelmingly mature (90%+), WIC considers the published Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data as a more meaningful comparator for our student body.

An analysis of socioeconomic data presents 57% of individuals successfully enrolled on WIC programmes originate from IMD Quintiles 1-2. This is reflective of the 5-year aggregate sector data (the Dashboard) which is approximately 53% for Q1&2 combined.

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<sup>1</sup> APP2022Mar\_SECTOR <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/about-the-dashboard-data/get-the-dashboard-data/>

<sup>2</sup> Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/d7a71acc-d547-454a-bda1-442a9761e6e6/technical-algorithms-for-institutional-performance-measures-core-algorithms-2022.pdf>

Indicative or actual household income data (including Free School Meals or Pupil Premium entitlement) has not been captured to date due to the student body (90%+) being over 21 years old.

Clearly, the access data relating to different socioeconomic indicators demonstrate different performance against the sector aggregate data, yet they are approximately consistent with the sector data for comparable provision. However, when the data is considered against *all UG* provisions across the sector, WIC accommodates much a higher proportion of deprived learners than traditional providers (IMD Q1-2: 57% vs 42%).

This data demonstrates that further analysis relating to the characteristics and factors of deprivation, at the intersection with other key under-represented characteristics is required.

## Success

### Non-continuation

Approximately 72% of all eligible aggregate students have transitioned beyond their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study.

Students from IMD Q1&2 communities present with lower continuation rates compared to those students from low (IMD Q3-5) deprivation communities (64% vs 69%). However, the difference in %-points is small and insignificant due to the relatively small cohort size.

However, WIC recognises that there is a gap of less than 10% between its relevant continuation rates and that of the sector (Sector Rates: IMD Q1-2 79%). This is not considered a significant gap due to the relatively small numbers of students in each WIC intake cohort, and the statistical impact when one or two students do not continue to the next year. Additionally, considering that 90%+ of students are mature and 57% are from IMD Q1&2, coupled with the fact that the very initial intakes commenced during the Covid-Pandemic period, the financial insecurities experienced by these communities due to the depressed employment market have a significant impact on those students continuing beyond year 1. This is reflective of the qualitative feedback from students seeking to withdraw/not transition to the next level of their studies.

WIC is committed to closing this % gap and supporting its local community, as demonstrated by the strategic targets presented below.

### Attainment

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20.

However, WIC notes the sector-wide gap of 16.6% with regard to IMD Quintile 5 students and IMD Quintile 1 area achieving good honours (1<sup>st</sup> or 2.1), and 72.2% of IMD Q1&2 students achieving good honours, as presented in the OfS Dashboard data.

### Progression to employment or further study

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20.

However, WIC notes the sector-wide gap of 3.5% with regard to IMD Quintile 5 students and IMD Quintile 1 areas for other UG students progressing into graduate roles or higher-level study as presented in the OfS Dashboard data (73.8% vs 70.3%). This is in contrast to the rate of first-degree students progressing beyond their programme (Q5 vs Q1: 69.7 vs 60.7). Based on knowledge of the sector, many students on “other UG” provision successfully progress onto level 6 top-up programmes hence the stronger progression rate for “other UG” Q1 students compared to “first degree” Q1

students who may not progress to PG provision or are able to access graduate employment roles within commutable distances of their IMD Q1 locations.

## 1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

### Access

WIC student community comprises approximately 62% individuals with BAME indicators which is significantly higher than the local London borough of Barking and Dagenham profile (52%). Currently, the data source available from our University partner does not provide the additional granularity of different ethnicities over time. Nevertheless, this is significantly higher than sector data of 27.5% for other undergraduate provisions and 31.7% for first degrees.

With improved granularity of data in the future, WIC is keen to analyse the experience of all ethnicities in our student community and also those who may be considering HE in the future from the local neighbourhood, leading to improved communication and support of prospective learners.

### Success

#### Non-continuation

Approximately 70% of BAME students at WIC have successfully transitioned from their first year onto their second year. This is reflective of sector data that presents 76.7% continuing onto the second year of other undergraduate provisions.

With respect to students who present as White, approximately 78% of WIC students continued onto the second year, compared to 84% across the sector.

The gap, for both BAME and White students, between WIC and Sector contexts of approximately 6% is not considered a significant gap due to the relatively small numbers of students in each intake cohort, and the statistical impact when one or two students do not continue to the next year.

In the WIC context, the 8% points gap between continuing BAME and White students is reflective of sector data and is therefore not significant in of itself. Additionally, as reported in a UK government report<sup>3</sup>, BAME individuals and communities are disproportionately impacted by Covid resulting in significant health inequalities. Based on “exit interviews” with WIC students considering withdrawal or non-continuation, Covid-related poor health certainly was a factor in these decisions. Therefore, in the absence of further data, this may be the reason for slightly higher rates of non-continuation at WIC.

Nevertheless, with an improved granularity of records leading to deeper analysis, WIC is committed to providing the resources and support to better enable students of all ethnicities to transition from Year 1 to Year 2.

#### Attainment

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20.

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<sup>3</sup>UK Government report: *Unequal impact? Coronavirus and BAME people*  
<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3965/documents/39887/default/#:~:text=Throughout%20the%20coronavirus%20pandemic%2C%20Black,recourse%20to%20public%20funds%20policy.>

However, WIC notes the sector-wide gap of 12% with regard to White students and BAME students achieving good honours (1<sup>st</sup> or 2.1), with 71% of BAME students achieving good honours compared to 83% of White Students, as presented in the OfS Dashboard data.

#### Progression to employment or further study

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20.

However, WIC notes the sector-wide gap of 0.5% with regard to White and BAME students for other UG students progressing into graduate roles or higher-level study as presented in the OfS Dashboard data (72% vs 71.5%). This is in contrast to the rates of first-degree students progressing beyond their programme (White vs BAME: 67.7% vs 61.4%). Based on knowledge of the sector, many students on “other UG” provision successfully progress onto level 6 top-up programmes hence the stronger progression rate for “other UG” BAME students compared to “first degree” BAME students.

### 1.3 Mature students

#### Access

WIC student community comprises approximately 92% individuals characterised as mature (21+ years old at the date of commencement), of which approximately 80% are over the age of 30 years, with significant life commitments (child care with associated pre-16 education expectations, care for older family members, employment, and long term rented/mortgaged accommodation commitments.). Whilst it is widely recognised across the sector that mature learners constitute the majority proportion of learners accessing other undergraduate provisions (approximately 2:1 ratio compared to under 21-year-olds; OfS Dashboard), WIC’s proportion of the student body as mature is significantly higher than sector data.

WIC is committed to supporting mature learners to access and participate in HE. WIC also recognises the incredible benefit of creating a diverse community reflective of all ages to contribute to our maturing culture of learning and also further the development of a cohesive community. Therefore, it is WIC’s strategic aim to also be a considered HE destination for local younger students as presented later in this plan.

#### Success

##### Non-continuation

Approximately 72% of young and mature students at WIC progress from the first to the second year compared to approximately 82% for the same indicators across the sector. This is not considered a significant gap due to the relatively small numbers of students in each WIC intake cohort, and the statistical impact when one or two students do not continue to the next year. However, WIC is committed to supporting all students regardless of age with appropriate resources to continue beyond year one, reflecting at least OfS published Sector Rates for similar students and provision.

##### Attainment

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20.

However, WIC notes the sector-wide gap of nearly 10% with regard to Young and over 21year old students achieving good honours (1<sup>st</sup> or 2.1), with 72% of mature students (dropping to 66.7% for

41-50-year-olds) achieving good honours compared to 81.3% young students (OfS Dashboard data).

### Progression to employment or further study

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20.

However, WIC notes the sector-wide gap of over 7% with regard to Young and over 21yr old students for other UG students progressing into graduate roles or higher-level study as presented in the OfS Dashboard data (68.7% vs 75.9%). This is in contrast to the rates of first-degree students progressing beyond their programme (Young vs Mature: 65.3% vs 70.7%).

## 1.4 Disabled students

### Access

Less than 5 students with declared disabilities and approximately 20 students with undeclared disabilities have commenced their HE experience since 2019/20, therefore this data is not presented. However, the proportion of individuals with disabilities seeking to commence their chosen HE programme with WIC is slowly increasing with each successive intake. As such WIC has supported students presenting with known symptoms and behaviours of various disability sub-categories (Cognitive and Learning, Poor Mental Health, Sensory Medical and Physical, Multiple Impairments, Social and Communication).

It is understood that within a high-density, mature and BAME community, there is often an established culture that is concerned about the public identification of disability. Therefore, trusted communication built upon deliverable outcomes is central to WIC's strategic aims to enable more individuals with disabilities to access HE.

WIC is committed to removing perceived and experienced barriers to accessing and participating in HE and has experience in supporting individuals with Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)<sup>4</sup> applications and associated communications. WIC has a strategic aim to be a central component within a neighbourhood network advocating HE to local individuals with disabilities, alongside promoting WIC as a considered HE destination as presented later in this plan to better reflect sector aggregate data (currently approximately 15%).

### Success

#### Non-continuation

Due to the very small number of known students with this indicator, data cannot be presented. WIC has supported such students in their studies through a range of interventions including:

- Re-locating class to a different room for improved mobility access
- Largescale printing of handouts for Visually impaired student
- Collaboration with 3rd party specialists to support online engagement during the pandemic study at home period.

WIC is committed to ensuring that students with disabilities achieve at least the same rate of continuation as all other students; that is, no negative gaps, as presented later in this plan, through facilitating an open and safe environment for declaring and discussing disability with opportunities to seek appropriate support and guidance.

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<sup>4</sup> DSA: <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa>

However, WIC notes the sector continuation rates of over 90% for students with and without disabilities continuing beyond the first year of the first degree, compared with over 81% of students on other UG students continuing beyond year one, as presented in the OfS Dashboard data.

#### Attainment

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20.

However, WIC notes the sector-wide gap of nearly 2% with regard to students with and without disabilities, with 79.7% of students without disabilities achieving good honours compared to 78.1% of students with disabilities, as presented in the OfS Dashboard data.

#### Progression to employment or further study

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20.

However, WIC notes the sector-wide gap of nearly 3% with regard to students with and without disabilities for other UG students progressing into graduate roles or higher-level study as presented in the OfS Dashboard data (69.5% vs 72.3%). This is in contrast to the rates of first-degree students progressing beyond their programme (With vs Without Disabilities: 65.6% vs 66.4%).

### 1.5 Care leavers

#### Access

WIC has no known care leavers or care-experienced learners within its student body. Due to the perceived negative dishonour in some BAME cultures of care, and that the majority of learners are over 30 years old, it is conceivable that WIC has unknowingly supported some learners. WIC recognises that care-experienced learners often face additional disadvantages related to access and continuation in HE, alongside general opportunities in life and future careers. These may include disruption to pre-16 education, limited social proficiency and poor mental health.<sup>567</sup>

WIC is committed to removing perceived and experienced barriers to accessing and participating in HE, and by care experienced individuals. WIC has a strategic aim to be a central component within a neighbourhood network advocating HE to local individuals with disabilities, alongside promoting WIC as a considered HE destination as presented later in this plan to better reflect sector access.

#### Success

##### Non-continuation

WIC has no known care leavers or care-experienced learners within its student body. Nevertheless, WIC is committed to ensuring that care-experienced students achieve at least the same rate of continuation as all other students within its community; that is, no negative gaps, as presented later in this Plan.

WIC notes the OfS Dashboard data does not present sector data for care experienced learners.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/care-experienced/>

<sup>6</sup> [Children's Social Care Report](#)

<sup>7</sup> [UCL Sept 2022 Does educational disadvantage persist among children of care leavers?](#)

## Attainment

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20.

We will continue to monitor attainment rates in relation to care-experienced students at WIC. WIC notes the OfS Dashboard data does not present sector data for care experienced learners.

## Progression to employment or further study

No student has yet completed their initial HE qualification due to all students enrolling on 4-year programmes since 2019/20. We will continue to monitor progression rates in relation to care-experienced students at WIC.

WIC notes the OfS Dashboard data does not present sector data for care experienced learners.

### 1.6 Intersections of disadvantage

Considering that limited historic access to detailed granular data has resulted in very limited analysis of existing data sets, further analysis of intersections of disadvantage has not been undertaken. Nevertheless, WIC is aware of the barriers experienced by its prospective and registered students when certain indicators are combined, particularly

- Ethnicity (BAME) of students from IMD Q1&2 neighbourhoods
- Age (Mature) of students from IMD Q1&2 neighbourhoods
- Age and Ethnicity of students (Mature/BAME and Young/White) from IMD Q1&2 neighbourhoods

Therefore, WIC is committed to capturing, recording and analysing the data at the intersections noted above within the initial years of this Plan, to better consider potential support solutions for these students and consider the institutional impact on access and participation if such solutions were embedded within regular operations for all students.

### 1.7 Other groups who experience barriers in higher education

Overall, WIC is committed to providing a local HE offer to the local neighbourhood primarily in Barking and Dagenham through local collaboration and networks. In providing this, our operation will be contributing to the promotion of, access to and successful progression through HE by traditionally underrepresented student groups in local, regional and national contexts.

Nevertheless, WIC is aware that individuals from refugee communities, military, and traveller (Roma, Gypsy) families are also traditionally under-represented in HE. To date, WIC is unaware of any students from these additional groups in its HE provision. Therefore, moving forward we will ensure the capture, record and evaluation of such indicators, to facilitate meaningful and successful HE experience within the body of the WIC student community.

## 2. Strategic aims and objectives

WIC's strategic aim can be summarised as "**changing lives through education**". This is achieved through collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, leading to the successful maintenance and development of our 3 strategic pillars:

- Students
- Community
- Innovation and research

Successful delivery of these strategic pillars enables WIC to be a key education provider in every local community, nurturing each individual's capacity in

- Mental resilience and growth
- Social inclusions, mobility and responsible citizenship, and
- Aspirational and rewarding careers.

### **Target Groups, Strategic Aims and Objectives**

Such a transformative ethos as articulated above aligns well with the high expectations of equitable access and participation of all students, particularly in underrepresented communities. The analysis of performance earlier does not indicate significant gaps between WIC students presenting with the same indicator types, however, the WIC rates are in places lower than sector aggregated rates. Improvement of WIC access and continuation rates as a reflection of Sector data are key access and participation strategic aims. Whilst we have no attainment and progression data, it is the strategic aim to sustainably achieve Sector aggregate data by the end of this plan.

As such, WIC's operations based upon practical, industry-related curriculum provide an opportunity for all WIC students, regardless of disadvantage, to develop and command the skills required to pursue successful future careers and establishment of sustainable enterprise.

The following table presents the Target Groups of learners that will benefit from WIC's Access and Participation activities, which are based on the analysis of current performance and strategic aims for 2023/24 to 2027/28. The table also presents the aims and objectives of our planned activities.

**APP Target Groups, Strategic Aims and Objectives**

<b>Who</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>Objective: by end of the plan</b>	<b>Continuation</b>	<b>Objective: by end of the plan</b>	<b>Attainment</b>	<b>Objective: by end of the plan</b>	<b>Progression</b>	<b>Objective: by end of the plan</b>
<b>T1 – Young students from IMD Q1&amp;2</b>	<b>X</b>	Increase young students on the programme from the current baseline to 20%, and combined indicators to 10%	<b>X</b>	To establish a baseline of no less than 70% at end of Yr3 and increase combined indicators continuation rates to “baseline plus 5%”				
<b>Strategic Aim</b>	To increase access to HE		To establish a baseline and increase continuation to Yr2					
<b>T2 – Young &amp; White students from IMD Q1&amp;2</b>	<b>X</b>	Increase young & white students on the programme from the current baseline to 10%, and combined indicators to 5%	<b>X</b>	To establish a baseline of no less than 70% at end of Yr3 and increase combined indicators continuation rates to “baseline plus 5%”				
<b>Strategic Aim</b>	To increase access to HE		To establish a baseline and increase continuation to Yr2					
<b>T3 – Mature Students</b>			<b>X</b>	Increase to at least Standardised Sector Rate (80%)	<b>X</b>	At least 75%	<b>X</b>	At least 60%
<b>Strategic Aim</b>			To increase continuation to Yr2		To achieve Standardised Sector Attainment rates		To achieve Standardised Sector Attainment rates	
<b>T4 – BAME students</b>			<b>X</b>	Increase to at least Standardised Sector Rate (80%)	<b>X</b>	At least 75%	<b>X</b>	At least 60%
<b>Strategic Aim</b>			To increase continuation to Yr2		To achieve Standardised Sector Attainment rates		To achieve Standardised Sector Attainment rates	
<b>T5 – Students with Disabilities</b>	<b>X</b>	Increase students with disabilities to 10% (Sector rate: 15%)	<b>X</b>	To establish a baseline of no less than 70% at end of Yr3 and increase to “baseline plus 5%”				
<b>Strategic Aim</b>	To increase access to HE		To establish a baseline and increase continuation to Yr2					
<b>T6 – Care Leavers</b>	<b>X</b>	Increase care leavers to 5%	<b>X</b>	To establish a baseline of no less than 70% at end of Yr3 and increase to “baseline plus 5%”				
<b>Strategic Aim</b>	To increase access to HE		To establish a baseline and increase continuation to Yr2					

## 2.2 Aims and Objectives

WIC believes the targets groups, aims and objectives presented above will contribute to improving local, regional and national equality of opportunity to access and benefit from HE, as discussed within WIC's operational context as follows:

### **KPMs 1 and 2: Gap in participation between most and least represented groups**

WIC is a non-selective HEI and therefore KPM2 is not relevant to its operation.

80%+ of WIC students to date are over 30 years of age. However, POLAR indicators consider the likelihood of young people (18-21 years) entering higher education. Therefore, our activity promoting HE to pre-18s will also include an evaluation of the POLAR indicators alongside IMD quartiles to consider the positive impact of the WIC promotional campaign within those geographical areas with traditionally low HE participation.

### **KPM 3: Gap in continuation rates between most and least represented groups**

WIC recognises that successful, on-time continuation from a student's first year provides a strong discipline and motivation to succeed throughout the programme and achieve the chosen qualification. Therefore, whilst the gap between low and high-represented groups at WIC currently is statistically insignificant, nevertheless WIC is committed to improving continuation rates for the whole student body without negatively impacting those from low participation groups.

### **KPM 4: Gap in attainment between white students and black students**

Currently, WIC has no attainment data, and there is no significant gap between BAME and White students continuing from the first to the second year of study. However, WIC anticipates improving continuation rates for the whole student body through targeted and mainstream pedagogic interventions, without negatively impacting those of different ethnicities. Improved continuation provides an opportunity for improved attainment of good degree outcomes.

### **KPM 5: Gap in attainment between disabled students and non-disabled students.**

Currently, WIC has no attainment data and a very small population of students with declared disabilities. However, WIC's strategic aim to promote and enrol local individuals with disabilities in HE programmes will contribute to this KPM.

## 3. Strategic measures

### 3.1 Whole provider strategic approach

#### Overview

WIC's strategic aim can be summarised as "***changing lives through education***". This is achieved through collaboration with stakeholders, leading to the successful enhancement of our strategic pillars:

- Students
- Community
- Innovation and research

Historically, WIC's marketing and recruitment operations for its franchise provision have resulted in access to HE at WIC for significant proportions of Mature and BAME learners as presented earlier. Through the current student profile and extracurricular activities, WIC has demonstrated that diversity, inclusion and equality are embedded in its culture and experience both in the classroom, social spaces and through engagement opportunities with the local community through the local authority, local enterprise and grassroots organisations.

WIC's philosophy for teaching and learning support has responded to the challenges that current learners have experienced in continuing through their registered programme, particularly within the context of the health and economic insecurities resulting from the Covid Pandemic. Since January 2020, WIC has

supported at least 30% of our learners overcome some barriers to continuation with material and financial resources totalling £115K.

This Plan, continues and formalises this approach, reflecting the expectations as established in the 2022-27 Strategic Plan, endorsed by the board of Governors, overseen by the Senior Leadership Team and delivered by the respective Leads in Marketing, Programmes, and Learning Support Teams. The WIC approach is monitored through the existing committee structure regularly reporting to the Board of Governors.

WIC monitors and manages an institution-wide Risk Register, reviewed regularly and overseen by external members of the Board of Governors. The Risk Register includes identified risks relating to student access numbers particularly those targets established by this Plan and Strategic Plan.

It is recognised that in preparing this initial Plan, WIC is to further develop its approach to design and delivery of access and participation interventions throughout the student lifecycle to better incorporate evaluation of impact. This will build upon our current continuous **Action Research Cycle** (Plan>Deliver>Assess>Evaluate) of academic provision to build a **WIC Theory of Change** for all access and participation interventions within the first year of the Plan considering:

- **Target** group of learners,
- **Objectives** of the intervention,
- **Inputs and Actions including Outputs** to deliver the objectives,
- **Expected Outcomes** over the short, medium and long term,
- **Measurement of Impact** of Outcomes.

Such a Theory of Change will inform the delivery and evaluation of this and future Plans at WIC and ensure that sustainable progress is being made towards its targets, whilst being aware of unintended consequences on existing student communities already well represented at WIC.

### **Overarching Objectives of this Plan**

- To increase and improve access to and participation in HE by the targeted underrepresented communities as identified in the Strategic aims;
- To improve the effectiveness of access and participation interventions by the proficient monitoring and evaluation of activity through data.

### **Inputs and Actions**

#### **Access**

- Investment in enhanced market research and community liaison related to
  - local schools with low HE participation experience, and
  - local community groups supporting individuals with
    - disabilities, and
    - care experienced.
- Collaboration with local HE networks including AccessHE, contributing to the “HE for all” message.
- Development and delivery of taster days for local school pupils.
- Formalised financial assistance funds for the target learners.

#### **Continuation**

- Sustained enhancement of and implementation of technology as a tool for teaching and learning for all students.
- Research and development of learning support interventions in support of the target learners to support continuation beyond year one.
- Formalised financial assistance funds to support continuation for the target learners.

#### **Success and Progression**

- Capture and evaluate of success and progression data of existing learners (initial graduation December 2023).

- Promotion and facilitation of appropriate progression opportunities.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Investment in internal resources to capture, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions within the context of published sector experience.

### **Expected Outcomes**

#### **Access**

- Improved access by the identified underrepresented individuals achieving OfS published Sector rates.

#### **Continuation**

- Increased continuation of WIC students beyond year one without gaps between students with different characteristics.

#### **Progression**

- Enabling all WIC learners to achieve professional employment opportunities in their chosen career, enterprise start-ups or progression onto suitable level 7 or 8 programmes.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Facilitation of a dedicated resource as Access and Participation Ambassador, with oversight of research and evaluation.

### **Measurement of Impact**

- Internal and sector data to be captured,
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, formal/informal comments to inform qualitative evaluations,
- Consideration of short, medium and long terms impacts.

#### **Alignment with other strategies**

This access and participation plan clearly articulates the WIC Strategic Plan 2023-28, with respect to engagement with diverse representatives of the local community and the various community stakeholder groups. As a result, this Plan and the targets established within the Strategic plan inform the Marketing and Recruitment strategy and the embedded principles of fair admissions<sup>8</sup>. The plan also informs WIC community engagement interventions for the purposes of Access.

Continuation, Success and Progression enhancements relate to the WIC Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy as aligned with the Validating University's strategy, alongside the Learning Support policy and calendar of activity. This plan engages and informs the WIC inclusive pedagogic approach that supports and ultimately benefits all students regardless of characteristics though:

- Considered design of physical and digital resources,
- Professional and social expectations on all WIC community (WIC Charter/Code of Conduct),
- Opportunity to reflect lived experiences within learning, assessment and industry experiences to enhance employability,
- Student-centric learning support interventions staged at relevant points of the academic calendar and level of programme,
- Continued reflection of and response to student voice across WIC operations and governance.

Finally, this Plan will be effectively underpinned by WIC's approach to student pastoral support and well-being as articulated in the Student Welfare Strategy.

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<sup>8</sup> [UUK Fair Admissions Code of Practice](#)

## Strategic measures

### Data Management

Year 1:

- Enhanced data capture at the point of admissions and enrolment using own student record systems,
  - Identification of all widening participation learner characteristics
- Development of an operational data analysis plan based on widening participation characteristics considering the whole student lifecycle,
- Enhanced data analysis by a dedicated institution officer

Year 2-5:

- Continued development and analysis of data,
- Enhanced evaluation of, and the amendment to, AP targets, measures and outcomes

### Collaboration

Year 1:

- Continued engagement with other local HE providers through NEON membership,
- Continued engagement with AccessHE community and widening participation activities,
- Continued engagement with the local council, employers and employer organisations reflecting East London (including Barking and Dagenham) economic development goals,

Years 2-5:

- Continued and enhanced engagement activity based on Year 1 networks

### Financial Support

The financial insecurities and concerns that face students throughout the HE sector have a significant negative impact on the potential for students to transition from level to level throughout their chosen programme of study. A study from Blackbullion<sup>9</sup> and NUS (October 2022)<sup>10</sup> indicates that between 75-90% of students are also suffering from poor well-being and mental health as a result of the current cost of living crisis particularly amongst learners who are mature, disabled, care experienced or from low socio-economic groups. These are also the WIC target student groups for access and/or success. WIC does not own or manage residential accommodation and therefore has limited influence on residential costs experienced by students.

In addition to the personal finance and budgeting masterclasses available through the WIC Welfare team, the following are a selection of automatic, non-repayable financial **Funds and Scholarships** to support access into and continuation through HE by all eligible students from the target groups. Note that the engagement scholarship is a single payment following successful enrolment, induction and participation in the first 4 weeks of the registered programme.

<b>Funds and Scholarships</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>£'s</b>
Engagement Scholarships	Disabled, care experienced, or white/young from IMD Q1&2	£1000 4 weeks from the initial enrolment
WIC Fee Waiver Fund	Disabled or care-experienced target groups	£9000 per annum
WIC Fund	Any white/young from IMD Q1&2 student	£3000 per annum

To be eligible for financial support, students must be residents in England in receipt of Student Finance England maintenance, and with a household income of up to £25,000. Additional criteria for the above funds:

- For students with disabilities: they must also have approved Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) applications,
- For care leavers and care experienced: they must have been in Local Authority care for a minimum of 13 weeks since the age of 14.

<sup>9</sup> [Blackbullion Report](#)

<sup>10</sup> [NUS Study 2022](#)

All registered students at WIC are eligible to apply for the following **Bursaries** to assist with costs that may be related to continuity or progression barriers. Students may apply more than once, and these will be allocated up to the maximum from a central ring-fenced resource, based on the assessment of the greatest demonstrable financial need, and according to the cost of transport for relevant journeys. Bursary applications do not consider student household income.

<b>Bursaries</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Maximum £'s</b>
Open Day Transport Bursary	Disabled, care experienced, or white/young from IMD Q1&2	Up to £100
WIC Hardship Bursary	Any student for support for living, travelling or studying costs	Up to £250
Digital Security Bursary	Any to student combat digital poverty (hardware or data)	Up to £200
WIC Progression Transport Bursary	All students for access Level 7 open days or employment interviews.	Up to £200

As data for student outcomes related to financial support become available, WIC will utilise the OfS Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit to monitor these outcomes and consider any revisions to this financial support model.

### **Access**

This Plan is for 2023/24 – 2027/28, however, marketing and promotional activity will commence in 2022/23 engaging with prospective target groups. Nevertheless, as a key focus of WICs strategy is to increase the proportion of students entering HE at WIC with previously stated characteristics, WIC has planned for the following measures:

### **Engagement with Local Schools (young white learners from IMD Q1&2)**

Year 1:

- Direct engagement with 2 schools within IMD Q1&2 wards,
  - in-school HE promotion activities with years 12/13 cohorts,
  - taster days for identified students,
  - college visits for School career/study advisors,
- Collaboration on localised HE promotion with AccessHE,
- Guaranteed interview for applicants with targeted characteristics,
- Pilot a dedicated admission day,
- Pilot a Student Buddy programme,

Year 2:

- Evaluate and enhance Year 1 piloted activities,
- Continued engagement with Year 1 schools,
  - As year 1, plus
  - In-school promotion activities with years 9-11 cohorts
  - WIC study advisors delivering academic skills sessions with years 12/13 cohorts
- Continued collaboration with AccessHE
- Pilot a WIC Student–School Mentoring programme.

Year 3-5:

- Direct engagement with up to 3 additional schools
  - Activities based on Years 1 and 2
- Evaluate and enhance Year 2 piloted activities.

### **Engagement with local community groups (care-experienced and disabilities)**

Year 1:

- Direct engagement with Local Authority (council) plus grass-roots voluntary (third) sector organisations
  - college visits for relevant career/education officers,
  - taster days for identified students,
  - taster day travel fund for identified students,
- Collaboration on localised HE promotion with AccessHE,

- Guaranteed interview for applicants with target characteristics,
- Pilot a dedicated admission day,
- Pilot a Student Buddy Programme,
- Pilot an early induction and enrolment day including
  - Focussed campus tours,
  - Review of assistive technology/specialised resource requirements,
  - Review of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) funding status and requirements,
  - Ongoing review of eligibility of internal and external financial funds/bursary's,
- Pilot a dedicated student support programme for learners with identified characteristics,
  - Monthly 1-2-1 sessions

Year 2:

- Evaluate and enhance Year 1 piloted activities,
- Continued engagement with Year 1 organisations,
- Continued collaboration with AccessHE,

Year 3-5:

- Continued direct engagement with and evaluation of local organisations based on Years 1 and 2.

### **Continuation**

With respect to continuation from year 1 to year 2, WIC students experience broadly similar results irrespective of characteristics. However, as previously noted, the rates are lower than OfS published Sector rates. As such WIC has the following plans to improve rates for all students without introducing performance gaps:

Year 1:

- Extend current academic study skills sessions beyond semester 1 in Year 1 timetable,
- Invest in human and digital resources for academic skills development,
- Develop and launch the Student Academic Ambassadors scheme,
- Develop and pilot a peer-to-peer academic programme for year 1,
- Research digital resources for "feedforward" support,
- Promote differentiated WIC funds and bursaries within the student population,
- Enhance the Data analysis and reporting capacity related to continuation from year 1.

Year 2:

- Evaluate and enhance Year 1 piloted activities,
- Enhance academic study skills provision using digital platforms,
- Develop and pilot digital "feedforward" support,
- Enhance WIC support funds and bursaries.

Year 3-5

- Continued delivery, monitoring and evaluation of interventions.

### **Progression**

With respect to progression following the graduation of an undergraduate degree, WIC does not have any metrics. However, based on student admissions processes, WIC recognises that a significant proportion of prospective students aspire to establish or enhance their own enterprise. Therefore, WIC has the following plans to monitor and promote progression rates for all students considering progression to Level 7 education, graduate employment and enterprise start-up:

Year 1:

- Continued expansion of local employer base to accommodate in-programme placements,
- Development of local internship scheme/competition for level 5 students,
- Development of Careers fair with local industry and Council,
- Research and promote post-graduate partnerships with local providers,
- Establish alumni monitoring programme.

Year 2:

- Implementation and scale-up of Year 1 activities,
- Continued delivery, monitoring and evaluation of interventions,
- Research demand for WIC Graduate Entrepreneur fund.

Year 3-5:

- Continued delivery, monitoring and evaluation of interventions,
- Develop, Launch and Promote the WIC Graduate Entrepreneur Fund.

### **3.2 Student consultation**

WIC enjoys and is committed to, active engagement and dialogue with its student body through several channels, not least the established community of student 70 elected Representatives. Student Representatives reflect the voice of students from Foundation year to level 6 studying all programmes and intakes, contributing to the discussion in and challenge of the operational and academic committees/boards.

The development of this Plan has been influenced by feedback from the student voice mechanism and experience to date of the Student Welfare, Academic, and Learning Support Teams. Draft interventions have been consulted upon with student representatives leading to refined criteria and new projects. WIC is aware that historically, individuals identifying as BAME or mature learners, have not initially declared a mental or cognitive disability, nor the experience of care. This is predominantly based on fear of rejection or stigma, as experienced by the individuals prior to applying to WIC. As such, formally consulting with students about these indicators has been limited, resulting in the current approach based on feedback received from the general student body. However, WIC is committed to tackling perceived prejudice and fear within the student community, seeking to reflect the lived experience of such learners through direct consultation over the period of this Plan.

The WIC Strategic Plan demonstrates a commitment to, facilitation of and support for a formalised institutional Student Guild with officers by the end of year 1 of this plan. WIC will support relevant Student Guild Officers with training and development in evaluation skills, in conjunction with the validating university Student Union and other student bodies. Through such a dedicated resource, detailed monitoring and evaluation can be undertaken in partnership with Students. This will ensure the planned interventions and anticipated impact are realised, whilst also responding to new or unexpected barriers faced by our current and prospective students regardless of disadvantage. As this initial Plan is implemented alongside the maturity of the Student Guild's strategic and operational proficiency, WIC anticipates the Student Guild will present an annual independent commentary on the effectiveness and impact of the access and participation interventions to date. It is expected that this will complement and contribute to, the formal evaluation aspect of the Plan.

WIC recognises the unintended barriers within communication through the use of inappropriate language and vocabulary in student communication, consultation documents and formal reports. Therefore, WIC is committed to ensuring clarity of speech and the use of relevant glossaries when engaging with students to mitigate such barriers.

### **3.3 Evaluation strategy**

#### **Strategic context**

WIC is a relatively small provider already supporting a predominantly under-represented student community (80% over 30 yrs; 62% BAME & 57% from IMD Q1&2). All the indicative interventions will be formalised by Summer 2023 (subject to the approval of this Plan). WIC has operational experience in supporting under-represented individuals and communities since its inception. WIC is committed to enhancing this activity through the development of a strong evaluation identity, embedded within its ethos and team, reflecting the WIC vision. WIC fully recognises and embraces the internal developmental requirements to embed a comprehensively robust data capture and evaluation operation, as confirmed by the OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment Tool.

Commencing in 2022-23, embedding in 2023-24 and maturing through the life of this Plan, WIC will establish a Widening Participation Action Team (WiPAT) consisting of the Operational Leads of Marketing, Academic Registry, and Quality to oversee design, delivery and evaluation of all access and participation interventions. The WiPAT will also consult with a senior Student Rep/Guild Officer and Governor to ensure student-centric strategic oversight and engagement with the institutional Risk Register. WIC has a membership of the sector-wide NEON group, and benefits from the support and insight of this community, whilst it recognises its developmental needs. Within this context, and to build the internal capacity, WIC is committed to training named officers in data capture and evaluation relevant to current and emerging sector expectations. This includes external training opportunities, and up to 20 days per annum of secured independent evaluation support consultancy accessed through the NEON network, for the life of this Plan.

In addition, WIC will invest in and further enhance the skill set of current outreach, recruitment, academic and student support teams to enable a more proficient understanding and application of existing research, tools, data capture and analysis in student access, retention, continuation and successful activity. This will enable improved reflection, monitoring and evaluation at team level rather than solely residing within the leadership and management structures.

### **Programme design**

Current and future planned interventions are based on the rationale that has been developed in response to known barriers, identified performance gaps, and reflect published and common intervention practices in HE. The planned interventions as overseen by WiPAT, will be amplified into detailed work streams with defined student-centric deliverable activities, reflecting the WIC theory of change and implemented by a senior WIC manager. Through active liaison with other HE providers and networks, including validating university partners, WIC interventions will reflect impactful, sustainable and current practices by design rather than accident.

Through the WiPAT channel, access and participation interventions including evaluation activities are considered by student representatives. As the formation of a formal Student Guild materialise the involvement and positive impact of the student officers, ambassadors and representatives will further enhance the appropriateness of these activities.

### **Evaluation design**

In order to accelerate the positive impact of the WIC interventions with the target groups and thereby contribution to local and national communities, WIC will adopt effective evaluation activities based on lessons-learned experiences of other HE providers through liaison with the NEON and AccessHE networks.

WIC will increasingly embrace a data-informed, evidence-based approach to evaluation considering quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This is embedded at the point of programme design in consideration of what and when data is captured. WIC will also use the OfS financial evaluation toolkit.

WIC recognises that current evaluation methodologies and mechanisms employed to date relate to Type 1 Narrative evidence with increasing use of Type 2 Empirical evidence. To improve the impact (including timeliness of impact) of the planned interventions, WIC will consider the potential for Type 3 Causal evidence, considering the scale and type of activity being delivered. This development will be enhanced during the whole life of this Plan as a direct result of the developmental activity of WIC capacity as stated above.

### **Evaluation implementation**

Data captured and securely stored in relation to this Plan is reflected in the current Privacy Policy and provided to individuals within relevant application forms and the registration process. WIC has a small Data Team and will continue to develop and enhance its own student records system/capability to enable comprehensive and timely monitoring and evaluation.

Internal data will be cross-checked against HESA/Jisc and OfS supplied data and also public datasets reflecting providers with similar student profiles. Sector definitions and application measures for retention and attainment are adopted to ensure a comparative analysis of performance.

Currently, progression data following graduation is not available (first graduates from December 2023). WIC will ensure that relevant agreements with the Alumni members are in place to enable longitudinal evaluation.

In the early phase of this Plan, an evaluation will be undertaken by the intervention managers as supported by WiPAT and an annual external evaluation consultancy. By year 3 of this Plan, it is expected that a dedicated Widening Participation officer role will be established to facilitate and coordinate the design, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of all access and participation interventions.

### **Learning to shape improvements**

The investment in the enhanced WIC student records system will enable WIC to undertake quantitative evaluation activity whilst also informing sample research populations for qualitative activity. Such capability will support WiPAT as the team responsible for the evaluation and dissemination of the progress of the various interventions within the WIC community. WiPAT will report to the Board of Governors through standing agenda items, senior management (including academics and professional services) and the student body through the Student Rep/Guild structures.

Whilst a comprehensive evaluation of each intervention will only be possible after some time due to the implementation of activities and experienced outcomes, WIC will facilitate reflection opportunities as outlined above to enable continuous refinement of existing interventions and the design of new ones.

WIC considers that the initial impacts of its access interventions can be evidenced within the first 3 years of this Plan; continuation interventions can be evidenced by the end of the Plan, and progression interventions will be evidenced beyond the life of this Plan.

### **3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan**

WIC recognises that the previous discussion on evaluation is dependent on effective and regular monitoring of the interventions.

Just as formal evaluation reports are presented to the Board of Governors, Senior Leadership team and Student representatives through the governance structure, so are regular monitoring reports against planned interventions. Regular and ongoing monitoring throughout the year undertaken by WiPAT enables a timely overview of progress and considers additional interventions, where required, if any intended outcomes may not be delivered. This will also include monitoring of delivery of the financial support packages.

Where evidence gathered over time (potentially beyond this Plan) indicates that the intervention may not have the expected outcome or impact, WiPAT will be able to consider an agile refreshment of the intervention to ensure the resource is most effectively used for the benefit of the target student groups, based on additional evidence gathering and analysis.

Monitoring evidence will be gathered from existing student lifecycle reports involving:

- Admissions
- Enrolment and registration
- Performance of classroom participation
- Performance of academic assessment
- Attainment at level (transition between levels)
- Attainment of awards (graduation)
- Progression – employment or further HE studies (Graduate Outcomes)

WiPAT will contribute to ensuring that the institutional Risk Register is updated on a quarterly basis.

To enable transparency of message and improved engagement with the WIC staff community, it is anticipated that a “dashboard” approach to visualising summary progress against stated access and participation targets will be developed. This will be towards the end of this Plan as the internal capacity for data capture, analysis, monitoring and evaluation matures.

WiPAT will also respond to and reflect further external access and participation data as provided by OfS or HESA/Jisc to ensure that the WIC approach to and implementation of interventions are having the desired effect and not resulting in any unintended consequences.

#### **4. Provision of information to students**

WIC is committed to ensuring that all individuals are aware of the opportunity for additional and applicable support to enable meaningful access and participation in HE. This includes fees, financial support, academic and pastoral support, etc, and is currently overseen by the Operations Management Committee and operationally led by the Head of Operations and Student Services. Public information is prepared by the Marketing team and approved prior to use.

WIC is committed to the timely communication of clear and accurate information related to the programmes being delivered, facilities available for learning, tuition fee and any related costs to be incurred by students. This information is available to all prospective students and other interested stakeholders, to enable informed decisions, primarily through the WIC website and in-person meetings with individuals. WIC's management of information reflects the guidance as produced and updated by the Competition and Markets Authority<sup>11</sup>. In addition to the website channel, this information is also contained in printed and digital marketing collateral as shared with prospective students at open days, or on request.

The new WIC-validated provision, to which this Plan relates, is expected to be first delivered in 2023/24. To enable clarity and consistency of cost information, a single tuition fee is set for both franchised and validated programmes. Any additional costs, such as travel, field trips or equipment requirements for particular courses are communicated in the relevant programmes information collateral and in person.

Current information, including eligibility criteria and how to apply, relating to funds, bursaries and scholarships are also shared through recruitment and admissions teams, induction activities and materials, the Student Rep mechanism and Student Welfare Team. As the new funds are developed and launched through the lifetime of this Plan, these will be collated and shared on a dedicated webpage within the core WIC website, as a reference to the various communication channels. This information, along with application guidance, will be signposted and referred to in particular correspondence with prospective and current students within the target groups highlighted in this Plan. This information will also be available on the WIC VLE.

All personal data shared with and collected by WIC, is governed by the current Privacy Policy as informed by the UK's Data Protection Act (2018) and GDPR. Details of the WIC Privacy Policy and use of data can be accessed directly from the WIC website.

#### **5. Appendix**

##### **Other references**

Competition and Markets Authority (2015): Guidance to Institutions of Higher Education 2015 Consumer Protection Law

Department for Education (2019) Principles to Guide the HE Sector on Improving Care Leavers Access and Participation in HE.

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Thomas, L, Hill M, O'Mahony, J and Yorke M (2017) Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change: What Works? Student Retention & Success programme. London: Paul Hamlyn

[HEA. \(2018\). Framework for student access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education.](#)  
[UCAS Good practice for Care experienced students](#)

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<sup>11</sup> Competition and Markets Authority (2015): Guidance to Institutions of Higher Education 2015 Consumer Protection Law