

Access and Participation Plan

RNN Group

2019-20

Aims and Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of this plan is to set out rationale and justification for charging fees above £6165 at RNN Group above the basic fee level. This plan also explains the methods of evaluation of impact of, improvements in the educational outcomes of students from a variety of backgrounds and groups who have not traditionally participated in Higher Education.

This Access and Participation Plan relates to the setting of fees for UK students entering Higher Education programmes at RNN Group, including Rotherham College, North Notts College, and Dearne Valley College for 2019-20.

The Access and Participation Plan outlines the College's continuing commitment to widening access by providing equal opportunity for students to participate in education and succeed. The College continues to focus on the strategic aims of the National Strategy for Access and Student Success in Higher Education, driving forward change, which focuses on the student lifecycle, from access, continuation, student success and progression to further study or to/within employment.

This plan has been completed in consultation with the Higher Education student body at RNN Group. The monitoring of Access and Participation Plans and milestones will continue to have student representation.

The plan will be freely accessible to all learners and external persons. The plan will be published on all RNN Group College websites, under the Higher Education documents section for Rotherham College, Dearne Valley College, North Notts College, and University Centre Rotherham websites.

Assessment of current performance

RNN Group has made positive improvements to our access and participation activities over the past few years, with continuation, progression, and student success all improving. The student population at RNN Group does have a low percentage of some under-represented groups within our student demographics, which are target groups we are actively encouraging to apply to the College.

Please note that, historically, RNN Group has recorded performance as an overall numerical grade. Due to the need to ensure the below under-represented groups are targeted and supported, during the 2018/19 academic year, RNN Group will create a baseline data set to identify trends and areas of exceptional need in future academic years.

During the 2018/19, RNN Group is committed to creating a baseline dataset of attainment, continuation and progression data for each group below. This will include identifying data trends for all target groups and lifecycle stages.

Where possible, RNN Group is committed to disaggregate data within the targeted groups, by gender and by ethnicity. In additional, analysis of intersectional data will also be conducted.

The recording of overall data has shown a general increase in continuation, attainment and progression over the past five years. However, RNN Group acknowledges that the overall data may be hiding underlying issues regarding underrepresented student groups or subgroups. RNN Group will now record academic data alongside demographic data in order to delve in to the data we collect for future support of different student groups.

The majority of our students are from areas of low higher education participation, to which we have students recognised as such by their postcodes. RNN Group works closely with our local NCOP and this data is readily available. As such, this key student group will be one of the groups (below) that we will annually track and support.

In addition, we will be able to report on our UCAS and TEF metrics data, as well as our Higher Education Statistics Agency data that we receive annually. The tracking we do internally, but as an overall, will now be desegregated from the 2018/19 academic year to develop internal data sets.

The historical overall data will be our internal baseline marker and will measure continuation, attainment, and progression in comparison to the subgroups to identify variations between overall and subgroup metrics.

Students recruited from low participation neighbourhoods

The most recent Teaching Excellence Framework demographics spreadsheet for RNN Group indicated that 73% of our Higher Education learners come from areas that have the lowest participation rates (POLAR quintiles) in Higher Education, in POLAR areas 1 and 2. The figure below demonstrates that our capacity to cater to low-participation students is exceptional.

		FULL-TIME		PART-TIME		TOTAL	
		Headcount	%	Headcount	%	Headcount	%
POLAR	1	39	41%	20	34%	59	39%
	2	28	30%	24	41%	52	34%
	3	10	11%	10	17%	20	13%
	4	12	13%	5	8%	17	11%
	5	5	5%	0	0%	5	3%

The Rotherham and other local areas are where the pre-dominant amount of our learners come from, and we actively continue to recruit from these areas. RNN Group is committed to offering university-level education to those who do not normally attend higher education. This is a strategic aim that we have achieved and will expand upon with the new University Centre Rotherham building opening September 2018. A physical space dedicated to higher education in the community is expected to give a focal point of aspirational opportunities for the community to look towards.

Student Success

A priority for the College is to ensure all of our students achieve a positive outcome once they graduate from us. RNN Group's internal data indicates a continued improvement in our higher education student's achievement rates. From 2013, our students have improved in overall achievement rates by 4.4%.

Academic Year	Achievement Percentage
2013/14	84.5%
2014/15	89.4%
2015/16	87.8%
2016/17	89%

(Higher Education Achievement Rates: September 2013 - June 2017)

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Students

The percentage of UK undergraduate students that enter RNN Group from BME groups remains below the national average. RNN Group currently has a population of 93% White ethnically identified students across our higher education population. We do take in to consideration that as a College, potential students are interested in attending an University and the large cities of Sheffield and Leeds are close by. Although this does not address the issue of low recruitment amongst BME groups, this is one indicator of the issues RNN Group faces when recruiting any potential students.

Mature Students

RNN Group's mature student intake continues to be above the national benchmark, with 33% of our population between the ages of 21-30, and 24% above the age of 30.

Student Success

Internal data shows that our mature learners are as likely to achieve as their peers. Over the last five years, the average achievement rate for mature learners has been within a 3% margin of their peers. In addition, our mature students have good progression outcomes, with over 90% going into highly skilled employment or additional study.

Disabled Students

RNN Group's percentage of students with an identified disability is 15% of our higher education student population, which is in line with the overall figure for the sector (14% of UK

students, HESA, 2016-17 data). This is an increase from 10% in the 2013-14 academic year. RNN Group is very pleased to see an increase in the recruitment of this population. The College continues to focus on supporting the performance and progression of all of our disabled students.

Student Success

The continuation rates of our students with disabilities (93.4%) is below those students without disabilities (96%), with a difference of 2.6%. although this is in-line with our TEF comparator group, RNN Group is making strides in our Additional Learner Support department to provide additional support to reduce this gap. The percentage of disabled students going on to highly skilled employment or study is in-line with our TEF comparator group, but is below those students without disabilities (82.4% compared to 87.6%).

Care Leavers

Similar to the majority of the sector, RNN Group has a low percentage of care leavers on higher education courses at the College. Due to the very low numbers of care leavers recruited, we are unable to provide a clear analysis of their performance. We do closely monitor progression and attainment on all of our learners and will continue to do so for this cohort of student.

Ambition and Strategy

RNN Group is highly committed to widening participation and community outreach. We believe in an ethos of accessible education for everyone by targeting the barriers to Higher Education that potential students may face. We will continue to research and identify specific challenges that potential students in our community may face before entering university-level education.

The above underrepresented groups have not previously been recorded separate to an overall review of continuation, attainment and progression. As such, the 2018/19 academic year will acquire a baseline of data that will be utilised to identify any groups that need additional intervention support. This is the strategic baseline needed to move forward and create targeted and robust activities for these learners. The activities created for the 2019/20 Access and Participation Plan will be adapted and reviewed to reflect the targeted needs identified from the baseline data. Where necessary, RNN Group is committed to investing in key projects and activities related to recruitment strategies and widening access activities for target groups. As RNN Group is already closely embedded in our local NCOP, the creation and implementation of bespoke activities can be completed quickly.

The College is an institution that is open and accessible to all, regardless of background. We believe in the importance of education and what affect it has on a person's future. To support this, the College offers a range of widening participation interventions at all stages of the student life cycle to support current and potential future students. RNN Group's bursary

scheme provides our students with financial support to cover books, travel, or another financial barrier that is unique to a student.

Through our partnership with HeppSY+, we have two Graduate Interns that permanently work from our three colleges, offering widening access opportunities to our Further Education learners. They remain impartial to RNN Group as we wish to continue with supporting widening access opportunities to our local student population.

Student Life Cycle

To support our strategic aims regarding a lifecycle approach to widening participation, the Higher Education team have appointed two new staff to work with our current and potential future students to address the barriers faced by those in the local community. The new posts allow our widening participation students to have bespoke support to aid their continuation and progression at RNN Group.

These two posts began at RNN Group in March 2018 and work closely with the two Graduate Interns we have as a partnership agreement with HEPPSY+ (South Yorkshire's NCOP). Together, a 12 month activity plan is in development that outlines the barriers to education we have identified and the demographic groups we need to target and expand recruitment.

Targeting

Our widening participation activities are targeted at under-represented groups within RNN Group. While we prioritise supporting all under-represented groups identified in this plan, the College has taken the strategic decision to focus on two groups in particular for the 2019-20 academic year:

- Students with Disabilities
- Mature Learners

Collaboration

As a College, we are committed to enhancing our access activities through collaborative efforts with partners. Together, we have been able to pull resources and share best practice activities for the extension of our widening participation activities.

We are a part of the South Yorkshire NCOP (HEPPSY+), working alongside universities and colleges in the region to develop aspiration activities and the sharing of widening participation information amongst Years 9-13 students. RNN Group has been a member of NCOP since its inception, and the current projects in place for widening access activities include, but are not limited to:

- External university visits
- Improving resilience and confidence building activities
- Teaching cover and tutoring support
- Parents HE advice evening

- Marketing resources

Equality and Diversity

Due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010, with the impact of RNN Group's planned activities on individuals with protected characteristics having been considered. RNN Group's widening participation and equality and diversity strategies align and work together to ensure compliance and sensitive understanding in relation to the Equality Act 2010. The main responsibilities for ensuring the College adheres to its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 falls within the Human Resources department, which is led by the Director of HR. The Director chairs the Equality, Diversity and Safeguarding Group that is filled with representatives across the different departments of the College. The Group feeds in to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) via the Director of HR, which is a member of SLT.

During the development of the Access and Participation Plan, due regard has been made to the Equality Act 2010 and the potential disadvantaging of said groups.

Consultation with Students

During the development of the Access and Participation Plan, students have played a fundamental part in the creating of activities and evaluating the outcomes of activities and research. With the utilisation of our Student Representatives, focus groups of learners from across different subjects, Part Time and Full Time, and young and mature students, were drawn from our higher education student population to consult on the plan at different key stages. Representatives from our Student Union were also consulted during the development of the plan.

Due to a long Easter break and the summer months, RNN Group was unable to acquire student consultation at certain points in the development of the plan. However, students will remain involved in the development, monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities for the 2019-20 academic year.

Access, Student Success and Progression Measures

To promote attainment raising in the local area, RNN Group will commit to working closely with the Rotherham and North Notts Councils to support local primary schools in the development of Maths and English, as a particular focus. By working with the councils RNN Group will be able to more closely focus on the needs of the community through the information gathered by the councils on areas of further improvement that RNN Group can be of focused support.

To help support people in the above areas, the College will promote and run awareness raising events and activities in the community and local schools and as part of our employer engagement activities to promote HE and higher-level skills provision at RNN Group. A strategy has been to utilise our validating organisations to articulate progression routes and career paths that are available, at open evenings and events. Feedback from such events have been extremely positive and may be a contributing factor in the current growth of the

College's HE provision. In addition, the College has adapted an additional strategy of working with local employers and providing free training to employees, as a taster for HE.

The 16-18 years old support and promotional activities with level 2 and level 3 College learners is undertaken through tutorials and supported by Progress Coaches, who are attached to each curriculum area. Increasing our outreach activities and resources will be used to enhance the existing activities and target 'cold spots' in partnership with Sheffield City Region Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP), and the recently formed and funded, Sheffield City Region Network for Collaborative Outreach, known as HEPP & CO. A clear demonstration of this strategy is shown through the use of the HEPP Outreach bus that targets local 'cold spots', as well as visiting the College itself.

Through our partnership with HeppSY+, our two Graduate Interns offer widening access opportunities to our Further Education learners.

Access Measures

A range of Access activities are undertaken to promote Higher Education at the College which include specific Higher Education (HE) curriculum tasters, presentation evenings/talks, UCAS application activities, Student finance activities, HE open evenings, progression boards and Careers events.

Over the next three years the College is committed to maintaining the drive to increase HE participation by developing access routes for HE study for adults and providing the development of higher level skills for employers and employees, whilst continuing to support HE progression for young people from schools and colleges. Furthermore, the College has moved most of its' HE provision to FD or Hons degree. Part of this move has been to maximise progression routes from level 3 provision, such as Access to Nursing, with long-term progression routes articulated within the awarding institutions' offers. In these instances, the awarding institutions provide a wide range of professional career pathways, giving the learner structured direction in terms of potential careers.

The cornerstone for the proposed HE development will be feedback and partnerships with local and city region employers and in supporting the higher levels skills requirements of the Sheffield City Region's Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Plan.

The majority of HE students recruited onto full time HE programmes are existing RNN Group FE students who have progressed internally and live within the catchment areas of the College.

Student Success

Overall pass rates for students studying on Higher Education programmes at RNN Group have increased from 87.8% in 2015-2016, to 89% in 2016-17. In addition, our achievement rate has remained strong with a 96% rating for 2016-17.

Improvements in overall success rates have been assisted through the implementation of study skills support, which all HE learners are encouraged to access. Alongside this, a HE

study skills coach has been employed, with the dual role of additional support for study skills and providing additional support for learners in terms of exploring relevant progression opportunities. This has been particularly enhanced on the Sports programmes, where a clear progression route through to level 6 has enhanced motivation in this curricular area. Additionally, increased stringency has been placed on entry requirements, which have improved the suitability of learners on HE programmes.

Improving student success has been assisted with the improved quality and enhancement of student learner opportunities, which was commended during the Dearne Valley College 2014 QAA visit and report. Additionally, further enrichment themes were highly praised by the QAA report, particularly around utilisation of on-line VLE related resources. This is complimented by RNN Group adopting Dearne Valley College's 2017/18 Access and Participation Plan commitment to providing learners with a bursary to support the learners during their studies. These commendations by QAA underlie the support networks that are provided by RNN Group for its HE students.

A range of activities will take place to support these and, as an indicative list, include the following:

- Advice and guidance sessions on an individual basis and via group tutorials for both employment and further study.
- Events aimed at specific sector employment linked to our curriculum areas.
- Employer days on campus where opportunities for employment are discussed with those already in work and/or offering opportunities for work.
- Develop resources evidencing the learning journey from level 1 through to postgraduate, aligned to employment opportunities across the portfolio and Apprenticeship provision.
- Showcase event open to external guests highlighting our final level students' achievements.
- Guidance in paper, electronic and verbal forms on finance options for further study.
- Subsidised additional qualifications on some programmes.
- Subsidised industry related trips, visits and study tours.

Financial Support for Widening Participation Students

Qualifying Criteria		Bursary
1	Any first year HE student (with fees above £6165) who has progressed from a Further Education College, Sixth Form College and/or school, with 90% attendance by the end of the first semester.	Up to £200.00 in value for the first year of study to support the development through a financial grant to allow the learners to pay for books/materials/etc.
2	Any first year HE student (with fees above £6165) who is or has been employed within the Sheffield City Region, with 90% attendance by the end of the first semester.	From 2020-21, Year 2 and 3 students will receive bursary support for Continuous Professional Development, related to the relevant area of study.

(2019-20 bursary support for full time HE students)

Higher Education students at RNN Group who live in a POLAR 1 or 2 postcode will receive a £200 bursary from the Access and Participation financial investment. The remaining HE students who fit the above criteria will receive the bursary from a separate RNN Group financial investment. From the evidence earlier in the Plan, 71% of RNN Group's full-time HE students live in a POLAR 1 or 2 postcode, allowing for 29% additional learners to be covered by RNN Group.

In addition to the £200 bursary as detailed above, RNN Group also manages a Student Opportunity Fund budget for learners with unforeseen financial difficulties. As financial concerns over the breadth of a course could be an unexpected barrier to education, RNN Group has developed a Student Opportunity Fund budget where learners can apply for emergency financial support. The amount of financial support and the nature of the emergency is evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

For example, 60% of RNN Group's Higher Education provision is part-time, with the majority of the part-time provision taken up by mature students. As these learners tend to have families and work to support their families, financial uncertainty can keep them away from their studies. In a case from last year, the Fund paid for the utility bills of a learner for one month. This allowed the learner to cover all other financial costs they had incurred, and were able to continue their studies without needing to extend their working hours.

Evaluation

The bedrock of our evaluation approach for continuation, progression, and attainment recording has been quantifiable data, collected at the start of, during and after each academic year. This has involved comparisons of current data with target levels as part of RNN Group's evaluative strategy.

Key aspects of RNN Group's data collection is as follows:

- We evaluate recruitment numbers, continuation, academic performance, progression within the course between years, destinations at 2 months before graduation and 9 months after graduation, progress to postgraduate study. We will extend this to include the recording of performances from the key under-represented demographics identified in this plan.
- METHODS – surveys (quantitative and qualitative) and interviews administered by the HE team, data provided by management information, use of external data collection and survey providers.
- National and regional benchmark data are used to as a market to judge the significance of progress.
- Data is reported to the college's senior leadership team and to the Quality Standards Committee (twice annually) which is chaired by a Governor and

which reports to the Board. Analysis will contextualise the data with the HE strategy goals.

- The HE action plan (tactical actions to achieve strategic goals) is updated after each review, with refreshed or additional actions.
- We collaborate with other colleges which work with our validating university (Hull) and within the AoC HE network to share our experiences on an annual basis.

Approach to Current and Future Research and Reporting

RNN Group has seen a steady increase in student numbers over the last five years and has seen an increase in continuation, attainment, and progression numbers. However, underlying concerns related to underrepresented groups have not been previously addressed and it is RNN Group's strategic decision to identify underrepresented groups and evaluate each by continuation, attainment, and progression. With this data collected, RNN Group can work with our NCOP partner HEPPSY+ and the Higher Education Team and Marketing Team to create marketing and activities plans that will attempt to reduce any attainment gaps identified.

Historically, RNN Group has utilised our internal systems to identify overall continuation, attainment and progression numbers for all Higher Education students enrolled. To utilise our use of quantifiable data collection, we will now cross reference our academic recorded data with demographic subgroups that have been identified within this Plan. Where possible, we will attempt to identify trends in previous years by completing an academic versus demographic review with historical data. However, the data we have on file cannot be guaranteed as reliable as each College within RNN Group used different recording software before merger. The integration of our systems would make any data anecdotal. The first plan of RNN Group is to create a baseline of reliable data to use as a comparison for future academic years.

During the 2018/19 academic year, the subgroups will be identified and tracked via our internal systems of student progression reviews. RNN Group reviews each student's progression through an academic year via interviews with their tutors and any formative assessment feedback received. At the end of Semester 1, RNN Group will have the first set of data to identify any gaps between subgroups and our historical overall data that we can use as a metric. This will be the basis of our methodology going forward.

In addition, we have adopted the principal of explaining to participants in activities how we will evaluate the impact of the activities in the future, covering how we are likely to do this, when, and ensuring that GDPR principles and permission to contact are included in communications.

The evaluation process is an ongoing activity, based on learning and enhancement of our processes. At the end of Semester 1, RNN Group will review if this collection of evidence

via formative feedback is a viable option due to a review of any gaps between data collected and overall data from previous years. This is a new process for RNN Group and will be reviewed annually. The reporting of this data will be given to the Senior Leadership Team and RNN Group’s governance twice annually for tracking and monitoring purposes.

Investment

RNN Group will spend approximately 49% of additional fee income on access and participation activities within the community, alongside outreach and bursary commitments. This equates to over £139,000 per year on access and participation commitments, based on current student population projections. In addition, RNN Group will invest £70,000 in non-accountable expenditure. This is in-line with the 2018/19 investment commitment.

Area of Expenditure	Estimated Amount 19/20	% of Higher Fee Income
Access	£14,200	4.9%
Success	£33,554	11.7%
Progression	£18,803	6.5%
Financial Support	£73,400	25.5%
Total	£139,957	48.7%

RNN Group is invested in the activities created, and to be created, for widening participation and outreach. We as a College are confident that these activities will support and benefit the under-represented groups identified in this plan.

Provision of Information to Students

RNN Group believes in transparency between the College and its students. The College publishes its strategic aims for widening participation on our websites, along with our previous Access and Participation Plans, QAA reviews, and our Higher Education Strategic Plan.

The College will continue to provide clear financial support and information to all current and potential future students via our website and other social media channels. In addition, we have a printed prospectus with financial information that is provided to the local primary and secondary schools in the region, and is available at each RNN Group campus.

At point of application and offer, fee levels are available online and via UCAS to give potential students the information they need prior to making a decision to study with us or elsewhere.

This Access and Participation Plan will be available to all current and potential students via our website.

Table 8a - Statistical targets and milestones relating to your applicants, entrants or student body

Stage of the lifecycle (drop-down menu)	Main target type (drop-down menu)	Target type (drop-down menu)	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this a collaborative target? (drop-down menu)	Baseline year (drop-down menu)	Baseline data	Yearly milestones (numeric where possible, however you may use text)				
							2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Access	Attainment raising	Other statistic - Applications (please give details in the next column)	Tracking activity increase of HE aspiration activity at local schools	No	Other (please give details in Description column)	20%	24%	25%	26%	26%	26%
Student success	Disabled	Other statistic - Disabled (please give details in the next column)	Achievement of completers at Level 5 and Level 6	No	2016-17	64%	68%	69%	70%	70%	70%
Progression	Other (please give details in Description column)	Other statistic - Other (please give details in the next column)	Tracking of where students go towards employment or further education after graduation	No	2015-16	84%	85%	85%	86%	86%	86%
Multiple	Low participation neighbourhoods (LPN)	Other statistic - Other (please give details in the next column)	Identifying individuals from Polar 3 areas and encouraging HE academic study	No	2016-17	40	2% increase	2% increase	2% increase	2% increase	2% increase

Table 8b - Other milestones and targets.

Select stage of the lifecycle	Main target type (drop-down menu)	Target type (drop-down menu)	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this a collaborative target?	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones (numeric where possible, however you may use text)				
							2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Access	Other (please give details in Description column)	Management targets	Meet Target Student Recruitment Number	No	2016-17	421	458	462	471	482	491
Access	Other (please give details in Description column)	Management targets	Develop a minimum of two new programmes each year	No	2016-17	4	2	2	2	2	2
Access	Other (please give details in Description column)	Strategic partnerships (eg formal relationships with schools/colleges/employers)	Progression events for schools and colleges in the S. Yorkshire region	Yes	2016-17	2	4	4	4	4	4
Access	Other (please give details in Description column)	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Attendance at Higher Education Open Days	No	2016-17	420	430	440	450	460	460
Access	Other (please give details in Description column)	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Internal promotion of higher education within the college as a positive	No	2016-17	310	330	350	370	390	390
Access	Other (please give details in Description column)	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Maintain collaborative regional partnerships aimed at widening participation in the S. Yorkshire and Humber regions	Yes	2016-17	2	4	4	4	4	4