

Durham Students' Union

Access Submission 2020-21

As a Union, we have worked closely with Durham University in developing their Access plans over previous years, including the 2020-21 plan. Below are our main areas of focus as a Union, based on the views of our Student Officers and the students they represent.

1. Increasing BAME student numbers

Background;

While Durham has made progress recently and a commitment to increasing the number of BAME students is present in the 2020-21 access plan, methodology remains largely unclear. Though the local area is one of the least diverse in the country, this should not be a barrier, given Durham's reach nationally. As a Union, we would welcome national level guidance from the OfS in this area.

Why this is important;

A more diverse environment enhances education, and as a University which positions itself as a "Global" institution, we feel Durham should reflect that.

To do so, Durham needs to think about how it appears from the outside, which involves a multi-faceted look at recruitment of students in this group.

Success in this area would include;

- Greater cooperation with BAME groups in the North East particularly, but also in other, more diverse regions outside of London, such as the Midlands.
- Specific target groups within BAME to be identified for particular growth, based on low participation or socio-economic status of that group in a particular area.
- Further work on curriculum reform to make curricula as diverse as possible.
- **Other examples:** Specific groups are identified in other APPs – such as Oxford – where particular groups – ie "Black/Black British" or "Asian/Pakistani"¹ are identified specifically for greater focus.

2. Continued focus on local students

Background;

While we welcome the increased focus on local students in the 2020-21 Access Plan, Durham's recruitment has not traditionally focussed on the local area, with

¹ Oxford's 2019-20 APP, paragraph 47 - https://apis.officeforstudents.org.uk/accessplansdownloads/1920/UniversityofOxford_APP_2019-2020_V1_10007774.pdf

large numbers instead coming from outside the North East, despite the fact that, according to HESA data, more North Eastern applicants come from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPNs) than any other part of the UK – some 23.9%². We define ‘local’ as students from the North East region, as identified by the Office for National Statistics (ONS)³, which takes in Teesside, County Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

Why this is important;

The University should take a greater role in the local area, and one of the ways in which it can do that is by placing a greater focus on recruiting disadvantaged students from the area. By recruiting more from the local area, Durham would prove that, as part of the local community, it would like to see that community thrive by providing the world-class education it is so proud of, to some of the most disadvantaged students in the country, who happen to be on its doorstep.

Currently Durham’s percentage of students from LPNs is very low – 5.6%⁴ - and could clearly do more to increase participation as the foremost University in an area of very low participation in Higher Education.

Success in this area would include;

- Students from the North East, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, should be a separate section of the agreement.
- This group should have specific recruitment targets, as a specific group, even if it counts towards broader LPN and ACORN targets.
- Data on the number of local students at Durham should be made available on the University webpages along with statistics for other groups.
- Work should particularly focus recruiting students from schools which have never sent someone to Durham before.
- We acknowledge the University’s use of contextual offers to bring in more disadvantaged students and feel this would be a useful tool for this goal in particular.
- **Other examples:** Bath’s school sponsorship scheme (9 schools) Oxbridge’s focus on bringing in students from schools who have never sent to Oxbridge before.

² HESA Data (POLAR3) – Region; North East, table WP1 - <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/07-02-2019/widening-participation-tables>

³ ONS regional classification, Section 2 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/eurostat> -

⁴ HESA Data for 2017/18 - <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/07-02-2019/widening-participation-tables>

3. Specific support guarantees

Background;

Contextual offers are a useful tool to ensure that previous attainment is understood in the context of a student's background, which are already in use across the University, and that we would like to encourage the further use of.

Evidence shows that there is a relatively small difference in degree outcomes based on attainment at A-level (*83% 1st and 2:1 for those with BBB, 91% for those with AAA⁵*), especially for some students with contextual offers, there may be additional factors which can impact academic achievement. As a result, support (both academic and pastoral) is particularly important for those students.

Why this is important;

Specific groups of students, such as BAME students, may also benefit from specialised support, which may take the form of a more inclusive curriculum, to maximise potential outcomes.

Success in this area would include;

- Focused academic support programmes through DCAD for recipients of contextual offers of all backgrounds.
- Specialised resources made available via DCAD to departments on curriculum reform to increase inclusivity for BAME and other groups (such as some curricular knowledge being “assumed” by seminar leaders).
- Further direct support for the First Generation Scholars' Network for staff and students.

4. More specific cross-referencing of data to identify disadvantage

Background;

Data sets such as POLAR (both POLAR3 and POLAR4) and ACORN are vital in helping universities to target access work to most effect. However, larger amounts of data is becoming available at an ever more granular level.

Why this is important;

POLAR and ACORN are, without doubt, useful tools with which to identify disadvantage, however to ensure that those in the most need receive support and

⁵ Durham's 2019-20 access agreement, Paragraph 6 (**original work by Dr Vikki Boliver**)

access opportunities, there should be greater use of more specific, data to identify disadvantage more clearly and target interventions precisely.

Success in this area would include;

- Use of metrics such as Free School Meals (FSM), in line with research conducted by Dr Vikki Boliver, in an expansion of the existing 20-school pilot programme
- Use of up to three indicators (from a wider selection of indicators) to inform recruitment planning and outcome analysis – a further extension of the University’s own analysis of how different sources of disadvantage intersect
- Identification of other potential indicators beyond those currently used.
- **Other examples:** Cambridge has a broad spectrum of datasets it lists, in which use of “up to three”⁶ measures, is cited as a specific goal.

5. Disaggregating disabled students group

Background;

Disabled students are currently recognised as a single group in Durham’s APP, rather than separating them out by different declared disabilities.

Why this is important;

We would like to disaggregate that group, as per the sub-groups defined in the University’s own statistics releases⁷.

Better disaggregation of this group in the APP would enable greater targeting of interventions, particularly to identify outcome gaps for students with particular disabilities.

Success in this area would include;

- Identify those sub-groups within the broader heading of “Disabled Students” in the APP.
- Work to identify differences in outcome, continuation and other associated measures for each of those sub-groups to identify gaps.
- Note different reasonable adjustments which are available to different sub-groups, and areas which new adjustments are being planned to help a specific group (such as the recent introduction of Lecture Capture).
- Work with our Students with Disabilities Association directly.

⁶ Cambridge’s 2019-20 APP, section 2.8 - https://apis.officeforstudents.org.uk/accessplansdownloads/1920/UniversityofCambridge_APP_2019-2020_V1_10007788.pdf

⁷ Durham’s 2018-19 full disability statistics - <https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/student.registry/statistics/summary/1.7disability/181-7.pdf>

6. Student Financial Support

Background;

Durham has maintained over a number of years that direct financial support for students is ineffective over the amount of £1900, based on research (Murphy and Wyness, *Testing Means-Tested Aid*, 2016⁸) that relies data gathered 9 years ago. Although changes have been made to the bursary system at Durham over the last 12 months, the maximum amounts set are still based on this figure, which is not consistent with other schemes nationwide (for instance,

Why this is important;

Tuition fees have increased three times this amount and a new methodology and research must be applied to be considered current data. It would be disingenuous to suggest that the £1900 impact level remains relevant to current and future students. The study also warns in its findings that “universities and policymakers should not simply assume that all aid to all student types will be equally effective” (2016: 27).

Success in this area would look like;

- Inclusion of alternative research into direct financial support for students to inform bursary scheme at Durham.
- Increased upper limit of financial support available to Durham students, in line with what is offered at comparator institutions (e.g. Oxford’s maximum bursary amount in 2018-19 was £3,700).

7. Leadership on Culture Change

Background;

Durham’s culture is often defined by its predominantly white, middle class student body and staff body.

Why this is important;

The culture of Durham University can be perceived as exclusionary by students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods, BAME students and other groups the APP hopes

⁸ <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1396.pdf>

to support in accessing the University. As a collegiate University with strong autonomy in academic departments, strong leadership on access issues is needed at many levels to create a more inclusive culture.

Success in this area would look like;

- Strong leadership at the executive level, expressing a clear vision for how the community can and must support widened access to the University.
- Close attention being paid to candidates' commitment to access and success initiatives when recruiting to leadership positions throughout the University.
- Departments and Colleges being able to deliver impactful interventions, such as the AIM initiative proposed in the APP.