

## Teacher & Careers Advisers Conference

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025, 2:30-3:45pm

### Session: Widening Access and Participation – support for under-represented student groups in Higher Education

Facilitators: Anna Wooley, Widening Access Manager  
Louise McRae, Widening Access Officer  
Steph Rimmer, Widening Access Officer  
Jo McKenna, Student Success Officer

Welcome and introductions.

#### What is Widening Participation?

The terms 'widening access' and 'widening participation' refer to the activity undertaken by institutions to develop and support the aspirations and attainment of students from different social groups who may not normally consider higher education as an option or are under-represented within higher education.

The EHU Widening Access and Student Success Team deliver 3 strands:

**Widening Access:** providing pre-entry advice and guidance to students and supporters and delivery of targeted outreach programmes and activities

**Fastrack and Equivalencies:** preparation for HE access programme, a 6-week Level 2 equivalency course, and examinations

**Student Success:** on-course support programmes and activities and Student Advisory Panels

#### Who do we support?

Predominantly the team work with:

- Students who are or have been eligible for **pupil premium funding/ Ever6 free school meals or 16-19 bursary**
- Students who have studied **BTEC** qualifications

- Students from **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups**
- **Care-experienced and Estranged Students (CEES)**

Support is also offered to the following student groups:

- Students from **low participation neighbourhoods** (where very few people go on to higher education)
- Students who are the **first in their generation** to go to university
- Students who have **caring responsibilities and/or parental responsibilities**
- Students **living with a disability** or mental health condition
- Individuals who are **returning to learning** as mature students
- Students who have **refugee status** or are **seeking asylum**
- Students from **military families** or are **military leavers**
- Students with **criminal convictions**
- **Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman and Boatman** students

Historic data shows that 77% of Edge Hill students have at least one widening participation characteristic. It was also recognised that some students can meet multiple WP characteristics.

### EHU student body

Edge Hill student population currently meet the following characteristics:

- **48%** of students come with BTEC, Access or **alternative qualifications** rather than A levels
- **47.7%** come from household with **intermediate or routine/manual occupations**
- **49.7%** come from the **highest area of deprivation**
- **43%** (of those who know) are the **first in their family** to come to university
- **27.8%** come from the **lowest areas of higher education participation**
- **18.4%** have been eligible for **free school meals**
- **17.4%** have a reported **disability**
- **29%** are **mature students** (over the age of 21 when they begin their studies)
- **2.4%** have shared they are **care experienced** or **estranged** from their family
- **9.5%** are **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic** students

### Why widening participation?

Higher Education institutions are required to have an Access and Participation Plan (APP) to be a registered institution. The document is used to identify student groups believed to be most at risk of not getting the same quality of opportunity when compared with non-WP students within higher education and how we plan to address these.

Edge Hill's APP commenced September 2024 and will run until 2028. The plan focuses on 3 key areas of Access, Success, and Progression. The inclusion of an 'equality of opportunity risk register' used to identify the 12 main risks for students from WP backgrounds, for example, mental health, perception of higher education, and cost pressures. The full list can be found [online](#).

The plan is evidenced and data informed using the OfS data dashboard as well as Edge Hill's own internal data and is cross-referenced to identify where our biggest gaps are. As a result, intervention strategies are created to detail actions providers will take to challenge risks to equality of opportunity and the outcomes they expect to receive.

### Equality vs equity

When talking about WP, the question often arises of 'equality vs equity'. Consideration of this is made when producing strategies to ensure that action is positive and not viewed to be providing unfair advantage above other students. For example, it views support as being for specific student groups that start at a known disadvantage and providing support to them to give parity to the main student group.

### Theory of change

The team uses the 'theory of change' module to underpin their work and allows them to regularly review what students want. Consideration is placed on reviewing the current context or situation, and what problem the programme is attempting to address or resolve, with the aim being to identify the goal or objective the programme is trying to achieve, and the solution to this. Qualitative evaluation also supports this work.

### Wheel of belonging

To support with the above work, WP students are asked to complete the task 'wheel of belonging'. Students are tasked with identifying the 6 most important things to them that would make them feel like they belong at university, and then on a scale of 1 to 10, rank where they feel they are now.

In groups, session attendees completed their own 'wheel of belonging'. Discussion followed considering various student groups and factors that could affect their sense of belonging.

The top factors identified by EHU students were as follows:

Aspect of university	% of students who included this aspect on their wheel	Average confidence in this aspect
Academic Progress	80%	8.6 out of 10
Friendships	76%	7.4 out of 10
Finances	66%	5.2 out of 10
Safety	63%	8.9 out of 10
Hobbies	49%	5.9 out of 10
Social Life	41%	7.3 out of 10

It was also noted personal development, faith, self-care, and relationships were also valued by students.

The team also did further work with the students completing the task to understand their meaning of each of the above aspects they identified.

#### Dedicated support activity

As a result of the work undertaken by the WP team, the following support activities have been developed and are available for students to benefit from:

- **Diversity Access Programme** (for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students)
- **Ignite Access Programme** (for students previously eligible for **Free School Meals**)
- **Care-experienced and estranged students'** holistic package (CEES students)
- **Parents, carers and supporters' activity** (CEES, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority)
- **Uni Connect collaborative activity**, e.g. Discover Your Potential, Empower Academy, Pre-16 Tutoring, Future Writers, Raising Attainment activity, Re-settlers Events
- **Thrive programme** (for transition and first year on-course support)

The team work closely with staff and students with WP characteristics, i.e. Black Asian and Minority Ethnic, to attend sessions with prospective student groups with the same characteristics to aid connection and engagement.

The team also run an annual conference for people who support students with care experience and/ or have experience of estrangement, providing both CPD and networking opportunities.

#### Standard support activity

Students meeting one, or more, WP characteristics can also benefit from any of the standard support activities offered as follows:

- Support on researching and applying for HE and student finance, e.g. advising on courses and entry requirements, reviewing personal statements, mock interviews
- Assisting students to participate in any dedicated outreach activities that we offer
- Financial and pastoral support for students attending Edge Hill University Open Days and Offer Holder days
- Supporting students during results day, especially during the Clearing and/or confirmation processes
- Aiding students in their transition to Edge Hill once they have been made an offer to study with us

### Thrive programme

Thrive programme provides enhanced and on-course support for first-year undergraduate students from backgrounds that are under-represented at the university, and aims to:

- support equality of opportunity
- help all students to get the most out of their university experience.
- help students prepare for and settle into university life
- increase awareness of, and access to, the wide range of support services across the University
- support students to meet and make friendships with other students who may have a similar lived experience
- increase students' confidence in their ability to succeed

Support is provided via various methods including pre-arrival online sessions, on-course social support, 1:1 coaching, and Student Opportunity Fund career opportunities.

Thrive is continuously evaluated and updated as a result of the student voice and available data to ensure it remains up-to-date and relevant to the student body.

### Signposting to support teams

In addition to the support offered by the WP team, the University provides a suite of support teams available to support individuals throughout the student journey, as follows:

- **Inclusion Team:** supports students with autism, mental health, sensory impairment, mobility difficulties and medical conditions, (e.g. epilepsy, diabetes, heart condition, severe asthma)

- **SpLD (Specific Learning Differences) Support Team:** support team for students who have Specific Learning Differences such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and ADHD
- **Student Support Team:** supporting all students, especially students who are underrepresented in higher education such as Care Experienced and Estranged Students (CEES), transgender students and young adult carers
- **Money Advice Team:** offer guidance on all money-related matters including student funding and personal finances
- **Careers:** helps students develop their employability and find work opportunities
- **Faith and Community:** offer pastoral and faith support through the Chaplaincy Service to people of all faiths and none
- **Wellbeing and Counselling Team:** support students who may feel overwhelmed, stressed, anxious, or low in mood

### Working with you and your students

Session participants were encouraged to get involved by keeping in touch with their main contacts, utilising internal data, registering for and responding to newsletters, and engaging with the University webpages.

Participants were reminded that the team can support them via professional development session, supporting student success stories, activities to contribute to institutional commitments or action plans for target student groups, and by working together to engage with supporters and the community.

Participants were informed of focus groups the team hold with students and staff and encouraged participation in these.

To register interest, please contact the Widening and Access and Student Success Team by email to [wass@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:wass@edgehill.ac.uk), or QR code:

