

# Nazarene Theological College

## Access and participation plan

2020-21 to 2024-25

### 1. Assessment of performance

- i. Nazarene Theological College (NTC) is a validated college of The University of Manchester, offering courses in the broad area of Theology. Previously falling under the designation of an 'alternative provider,' the College has some 300 students (140 FTE), and its validated awards are offered at undergraduate, taught postgraduate, and research degree level.
- ii. As a small college, with a range of programmes, statistical information needs to be supported by qualitative narrative: at times, numbers are so small that they are not statistically significant; and on occasion, provision of data on students in specific categories could risk identifying students.
- iii. As the data below reveals, the natural student demographic of a theological college is rather different from that of a public university: this presents opportunities and challenges, many of which are particularly focussed around access, participation, progression, and completion. As a result, the goals articulated in this Access and Participation Plan reflect very closely the institutional goals of the College: part of our strategic vision is to "Develop flexible and accessible approaches to education for all, recruiting widely for a diverse student body" whilst we "Enhance learning experiences for all students."

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

- i. The College has, for the last four years, returned data to HESA, and so the data in this section and beyond is drawn primarily from that material. Since the data is only, at this point, the limited submission required of 'alternative providers' (rather than the more comprehensive data required of HEIs), there are some places where data is simply not available, or where the College has had to rely on its internally-generated data (where this is the case, such data will be noted). Prior to this year the College has not had formal monitored interventions for a structured access and participation plan, and so although we can identify our current status, it is not possible to identify, retrospectively, 'progress in closing gaps' in any systematic way. However, the College is committed to monitoring this data as it becomes available, and this plan is indicative of that commitment.
- ii. **Access:** The College has data on access and participation, based on under-represented sectors of society. The following access data are considered in light of national averages, rather than more nuanced locally-adjusted benchmarked data, which are not yet available for alternative providers. As a result, the data analysis is at times rudimentary, but does allow us to identify broad patterns and trends; areas of success; areas of challenge.
- iii. The data reveals that NTC is performing strongly on measures of widening access, when measured against HE data for England as a whole. Table one, below, reveals the following information about students from low participation neighbourhoods: that admissions for 2017-18

showed that 14% of young, full time students were from POLAR 4 quintiles 1 & 2 (an agreed measure of a low participation neighbourhood), against a national benchmark of 11.6%. 31% of all undergraduates at NTC were from POLAR 4 quintiles 1 & 2, against a national benchmark of 27.7%; 40% of part time students (with no previous HE) were from POLAR 4 quintiles 1 & 2, against a national benchmark of 9%; and 32% of mature FT entrants (with no previous HE) were from POLAR 4 quintiles 1 & 2, against a national benchmark of just 12.5%. The College is using Polar 4 Quintiles 1 and 2 as a measure of disadvantage because of small overall numbers.

- iv. These data reveal that Nazarene Theological College is performing well in terms of attracting students from neighbourhoods that identify, nationally, as disadvantaged and low participation: undoubtedly this reflects, in part, the distinct nature of the intake at alternative providers when compared with HE more broadly, but the College is of the view that its 'urban reach' to faith-based students offers it an opportunity to address recruitment to this particular demographic.

<b>Table 1: Access Data based on POLAR quintile 1 &amp; 2</b>	<b>NTC Data 2017-18</b>	<b>Data for England 2017-18</b>
UK Young, FT students from POLAR 4 quintiles 1&2:	14%	11.6%
UK All FT undergraduate POLAR 4 quintiles 1&2:	31%	27.7%
PT with no previous HE from POLAR 4 (Q1&2):	40%	9.0%
Mature FT with no previous HE from POLAR 4 (Q1&2):	32%	12.5%

- v. **Success:** TEF Data in 2017-18<sup>1</sup> indicated that the continuation rate for NTC overall was 92.3%, or 7.3% above the national average. Although specific continuation data for POLAR 4 quintiles 1 & 2 was not available, the TEF data does report on the national 'Index of Multiple Deprivation' (IMD), used as the official measure of relative deprivation for specific geographical locations in England (in other words, serving much the same purpose as the POLAR quintiles). Although the actual figures for NTC were too small to be reported (so, they were suppressed to ensure data anonymity), the report indicated that NTC was 4.8 % above the national average figure.
- vi. The College's own success data for 2017-18, in terms of attainment outcomes of those from under-represented quintiles who finish with a qualification, shows a relatively small success gap – though with small numbers, it is difficult to determine whether this is truly representative. Table 2 indicates that, in 2017-18, there was only a 1.8% success gap for these students, down from 2.9% in 2016-17 (*Please note: data in table 2 and similar tables is aggregated by final student overall percentile grade, rather than by degree classification*). Over four year period (below), the average gap was 4.8%.

<b>Table 2: Average grades for those who finish with a</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>All Years Combined</b>

<sup>1</sup> This TEF data was received in 2017-18, but the data set was for 2016-17.

qualification based on POLAR quintile					
Polar 4 under-represented quintiles 1 & 2	55.2	48	55.8	52.5	54
All other polar quintiles	58.5	62.3	58.7	54.3	58.8

**vii. Progression to employment or further study:** Since the previous DLHE survey was migrated to 'Graduate Outcomes' in 2017-18 (surveys for which are still outstanding), the data available for this plan is drawn from the combined DLHE data of the 2015-16 and 2016-17 leavers. This data indicates (see table 3) that, given very small numbers (a total of 29 students), there is, by some measures, a 'progression gap' to employment for POLAR 4 under-represented quintiles: although an equivalent number, overall, report being in employment or education (85% vs 86%), a lower proportion of these graduates are in full time employment; and a higher percentage are unemployed. Of those who are in employment, only one third reported being in professional employment- compared to two thirds of their peers. This is balanced by a higher percentage progressing to further study. Numbers are so small, however, that further detail would risk identifying individuals, and only a longer-term analysis will fully reveal significance.

Table 3: Progression to Employment or Further Study based on POLAR quintile	Polar 4 under-represented quintiles 1 & 2	All other polar quintiles	OVERALL (All students)
Full time employment	29%	47%	41%
Part time employment	14%	33%	28%
Further study	29%	5%	11%
Due to start work in the next month	14%	0	7%
Doing something else	0	10%	7%
Unemployed	14%	0	3%
Information refused	0	5%	3%
	% is of those in employment		
Professional Employment	33%	71%	65%
Non-Professional Employment	67%	29%	35%

## 1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

- i. **Access:** Access data for NTC (for 2017-2018 entry) when interrogated for ethnicity indicate that, for full time students, NTC is very close to the national average. The [OfS Data Dashboard](#) indicates that, over the period from 2015-16 to 2017-18, the proportion of white students at NTC has averaged 67% (noting a slight increase from 65% to 70% in 2017-18), against a slight reduction in and English providers to 69%. Table 4 notes that 30% of entrants are non-white (against national data of 31.1%). When part-time numbers are considered, NTC's data indicates that 40% of students are non-white (against national data of 14.6%). The aggregated and disaggregated ethnicity data for access is below: The College has not to this point in its analysis disaggregated BAME students for success or progression: this has not been a requirement for submission of HESA data. However, we have collected this data in our student information systems, and in future (from next year) will be able to analyse outcomes on the basis of it (we have not done so to this point because of the very small numbers in each sub-category: With small numbers, we will need to be careful to avoid the risk of identifying individuals).
- ii. Once again, these data reveal that Nazarene Theological College is performing well in terms of attracting BAME students, particularly in terms of part time students: undoubtedly this reflects the ethnicity of the church constituencies from which the College recruits.

<b>Table 4: Access Percentages based on Ethnicity</b>	<b>NTC data 2017-18</b>	<b>Data for England 2017-18</b>
Proportion White (FT):	70%	68.9%
Proportion White (PT):	60%	85.4%

<b>Table 4A: Disaggregated Access Data for 2017-18</b>	
Asian or Asian British - Indian	2.4%
Black or Black British - African	14.3%
Black or Black British - Caribbean	4.8%
Other Black background	2.4%
<b>COMBINED - Black (African and Caribbean and other)</b>	<b>21.4%</b>
Chinese	2.4%
Mixed - White and Black African	2.4%
Other Ethnic background	2.4%

- iii. **Success:** TEF Data (2017-18) indicated that, although the actual BME continuation figures for NTC were too small to be reported (again, suppressed to ensure data anonymity), the report indicated that NTC was 13.2% above the national average figure.
- iv. The College's own success data for 2017-18, in terms of attainment outcomes of those from under-represented quintiles who finish with a qualification, note a small success gap for BME students— though with small numbers, it is difficult to determine whether this is truly representative. Table 5 indicates that, in 2017-18, there was only a 4.5% success gap for these students, down from 11.8% in 2016-17 (data in table 5 is aggregated by final student overall grade, rather than by degree classification). Over four years, the average success gap is 6.3%, and this is an area that the College is determined to address.

<b>Table 5: Average grades for those who finish with a qualification based on Ethnicity</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>All Years Combined</b>

White	60.5	58.9	61	54.2	58.1
Ethnic Minorities	52.4	58	49.2	49.7	51.35

- v. Progression to employment or further study:** Once again, data available is drawn from the combined DLHE data of the 2015-16 and 2016-17 leavers. This data indicates (see table 6) that, given very small numbers (a total of 29 students), students from ethnic minorities outperformed other students in obtaining full time employment, and in proceeding to further study. However, there were also more BME students who reported being unemployed, and (as for the Polar 4 subgroup) a much lower percentage of those employed from this subgroup reported being in professional employment. Once again, the size of the sampling, even when two years are aggregated, is very small, means that drawing statistically significant conclusions from the data is difficult.

<b>Table 6: Progression to Employment or Further Study based on Ethnicity</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Ethnic Minorities</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>
Full time employment	36%	71%	41%
Part time employment	36%	0	28%
Further study	5%	14%	11%
Due to start work in the next month	9%	0	7%
Doing something else	9%	0	7%
Unemployed	0	14%	3%
Information refused	5%	0	3%
Professional Employment	69%	40%	65%
Non-Professional Employment	31%	60%	35%

### 1.3 Mature students

- i. **Access:** Table seven, below, indicates that 67% of all students admitted in 2017-18 were classified as mature students (considerably higher than the national average for this characteristic). In addition, 32% of mature FT entrants were from POLAR 4 quintiles 1 & 2 with no previous HE, against a national average of just 12.5%. The nature of theological study tends to attract mature students, many of whom respond to a vocational calling later in life. The small cohort numbers mean that intake patterns vary from year to year: last year, 89% of full-time undergraduate students were listed as mature, and that percentage is lower this year, but still well above national average. Between 2015-16 and 2017-18 the proportion of full-time mature students fluctuated between 80% (2015-16) and 60% (2017-18). It is the goal of the College to keep this percentage consistently high – but even the lower number was well above the national average. [The OfS Data Dashboard](#) reveals that the proportion of mature students (full time) in 2017-18 was 60% of all entrants (against an average of 76% over the three year period 2015 – 2018), and an average of 28% in all English providers.

<b>Table 7 Access Percentages based on Age</b>	<b>NTC data 2017-18</b>	<b>Data for England 2017-18</b>
Mature Students (FT & PT)	67%	12.6%
Mature FT with no previous HE from POLAR 4 (Q1&2):	32%	12.5%

- ii. **Success:** TEF Data (2017-18) indicated that, although the actual mature student continuation figures for NTC were too small to be reported, NTC was 7% above the national average figure.
- iii. The College's own success data for 2017-18, in terms of attainment outcomes of mature students who finish with a qualification, indicates a very small (statistically insignificant) success gap: less than 3%, taken over a four year period).

<b>Table 8: Average grades for those who finish with a qualification based on Age</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>All Years Combined</b>
Mature	54.4	60	57.3	52.2	55.6
Young	61.1	56	62	55.3	58

- iv. **Progression to employment or further study:** Data is again drawn from the combined DLHE data of the 2015-16 and 2016-17 leavers. This data indicates (see table 6) that, given very small numbers (a total of 29 students), mature students were more likely than young students to be employed (full or part time), to progress to further study.

<b>Table 9: Progression to Employment or Further Study based on Age</b>	<b>Mature</b>	<b>Young</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>
Full time employment	42%	40%	41%
Part time employment	33%		28%
Further study	13%		11%

Due to start work in the next month	4%	20%	7%
Doing something else	4%	20%	7%
Unemployed		20%	3%
Information refused	4%		3%
Professional Employment	61%	100%	65%
Non-Professional Employment	39%		35%

#### 1.4 Disabled students:

- i. Access: Table ten, below, indicates that 32% of FT students admitted in 2017-18 self-identified as disabled (considerably higher than the national average), and 40% of part time students (again, well above average). 11% of students were accessing DSA – again, higher than average, but not by such a significant amount. The College has not to this point in its analysis disaggregated disabled students (for success or progression), though it has done so for access (see table 10A): this has not been a requirement for submission of HESA data. However, we have collected this data in our student information systems, and in future will be able to analyse outcomes on the basis of it. With small numbers, we will need to be careful to avoid the risk of identifying individuals, as often categories will have only one student. The small cohort numbers mean that intake patterns vary from year to year: last year, 27 of all undergraduate students were listed as in receipt of DSA, and that percentage is lower this year, but still well above national average. [The OfS data dashboard](#) reveals that over a three year period the proportion of full time students with a disability averaged 35% (fluctuating between 40 and 30%), well above the national average.

<b>Table 10: Access Percentages based on Disability</b>	<b>NTC data 2017-18</b>	<b>Data for England 2017-18</b>
Proportion of FT Students with a disability	32%	14.6%
Proportion of PT Students with a disability	40%	14.8%
FT Students accessing DSA	11%	6.8%

<b>Table 10A: Access Percentages based on Disability (Disaggregated) 2017-18</b>	
A specific learning difficulty	14.3%
A mental health condition	9.5%
Two or more impairments	2.4%
A social/communication impairment eg autism spectrum	2.4%
A disability not listed	2.4%
A long standing illness	2.4%

- ii. **Success:** TEF Data to 2017-18 indicated that, although the actual disabled student continuation figures for NTC were too small to be reported, NTC was 1.8% above the national average figure.
- iii. The College's own success data for 2017-18, in terms of attainment outcomes of disabled students who finish with a qualification, indicates a very small (statistically insignificant) success gap: less than 2%, taken over a four year period.

<b>Table 11: Average grades for those who finish with a qualification based on Disability</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>All Years Combined</b>
No disability	58.1	58.8	57.2	53.4	55.9
Disability	52	58	59	52.3	54.7

- iv. **Progression to employment or further study:** Data is again drawn from the combined DLHE data of the 2015-16 and 2016-17 leavers. This data indicates (see table 6) that, given very small numbers, disabled students were more likely than students with no disability to be employed (full or part time), and to be employed in a professional role.

<b>Table 12: Progression to Employment or Further Study based on Disability</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>No disability</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>
Full time employment	50%	45%	41%
Part time employment	33%	22%	28%
Further study		13%	11%
Due to start work in the next month		5%	7%
Doing something else	17%	5%	7%
Unemployed		5%	3%
Information refused		5%	3%
Professional Employment	100%	53%	65%
Non-Professional Employment		47%	35%

## 1.5 Care leavers

- i. The College does not currently keep data on Care Leavers, and to this point has not been required to submit this data to HESA. We look forward to doing so in future years, and reflecting on engagement in this area. We are aware of a handful of care-leavers who choose to study at the College, but there may be others of whom we are not currently aware. We will review the range of data we collect from applicants, and will start to collect this data from next year's intake. However, that will take a further three years before we are able to comment on success and progression data.

## 1.6 Intersections of disadvantage

- i. The College has limited data on intersections of disadvantage, and this is primarily internal.
- ii. **Access:** Table thirteen, below, indicates intake data for 2017-18 only. It has been difficult to find comparable data for England. However, based on the fact that the one comparable data set (non-white, polar 4 Q 1 & 2) sees NTC ahead of the national average, it is likely that other intersections also reflect a higher than average level of access.

<b>Table 13: Access Percentages (Intersections of disadvantage)</b>	<b>NTC data 2017-18</b>	<b>Data for England 2017-18</b>
Non-white with a disability	11%	Not available
Non-white and from POLAR 4 (Q1&2)	14%	7%
Non-white and mature	19%	Not available
Mature & with a disability	14%	Not available

- iii. **Success:** The College's own success data for 2017-18, in terms of attainment outcomes of students with an intersection of disadvantage, over a four year period, is outlined in Table 14. Compared to the NTC average, the greatest disadvantage is recorded in those who are mature and non-white (a gap of 6%, or approximately half a degree classification) and those who are non-white and polar 4 Q 1 & 2 (a similar success gap). This is, of course, due in significant part to the disadvantage experienced by these students prior to entry, evidenced by the range of entry characteristics that are closely coupled to performance: it is not an 'unexplained' gap. These are wider social issues, and we recognise our part in helping to correct these patterns of disadvantage, a commitment which must take place alongside a wider government commitment to invest in early years education, in social inequalities, in support for those on the margins of society.

<b>Table 14: Average grades for those with an intersection of disadvantage</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>All Years Combined</b>
NTC Average	57.4	58.75	57.7	53.1	56.4
Non-white and mature	51	58	49.2	49.6	50.4
Mature with a disability	58	58	57.3	52.6	54.7
Non-white and polar 4 (Q1 & 2)	51.8	58	49.7	47.6	50.3
Polar 4 (Q1&2) & Mature	52.3	50.3	55.8	52.2	52.8
Polar 4 (Q1&2) & with a disability	58	None	61.5	51	53.1

Non-white and with a disability	None	58	None	51.5	<b>53.7</b>
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- iv. **Progression to employment or further study:** The College does not have data for this category.

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

- i. The College does not currently have data on other groups who experience barriers in higher education.

## 2. Strategic aims and objectives

- i. This Access and Participation Plan has been developed in line with the institutional strategy of the College: part of the College's strategic vision is to "Develop flexible and accessible approaches to education for all, recruiting widely for a diverse student body," with the goal to "Enhance learning and 3 identify these groups for interventions; experiences for all students." The College is of the view that these strategic priorities, owned across the institution, form an excellent foundation for this Access and Participation Plan.
- ii. The College has identified three strategic aims, which serve as the foundation for its Access and Participation Plan, based on its analysis of student access and participation data:
  - a. To continue its commitment to widening participation by striving to maintain the level of engagement and access from under-represented groups: mature students; non-white students; students from low participation locations; students with a disability; students who are part-time; other who experience barriers in higher education; those with multiple intersections of disadvantage.
  - b. To continue its commitment to increase support to those students from under-represented groups where a success gap is evident, and maintain support where a success gap has been eliminated.
  - c. To continue its commitment to enhance opportunities for progression to (professional) employment, through establishing careers partnerships and investing in placement-based learning.
- iii. This strategy will be achieved by the College committing resources from the additional income generated by fees over £6165. The commitment is to invest income from those additional fees, to ensure that the initiatives are appropriately resourced.
- iv. The College's overall aim is to maintain its already high level of access and participation, and to focus attention on key areas of success and progression. As a result, much of the detailed strategy in this area will examine approaches to supporting students who have already been admitted to study.
- v. In terms of access, with 14% of young, full-time undergraduates from low participation neighbourhoods in 2017-18, we will continue to recruit and support such students at levels that exceed national averages (11%). Given the very small numbers in these categories, it is realistic to expect numbers to vary, but we have set ourselves a target of maintaining numbers from low participation neighbourhoods at or above 33% over a three-year cycle.
- vi. Currently 67% of students are mature students: the goal is to see this maintained and slightly increased, to 68% over the next five years – though this is already well above the national average.
- vii. We will seek to increase the proportion of undergraduate students who are part-time: currently this stands at 15% for the whole undergraduate cohort, with this year's intake at 12% - above the national average of 9.5%. In light of more generous maintenance support now available for such students, we have set our APP target for this portion of the cohort at 16.5%. Already, the percentage of our overall student body that is part-time well exceeds

this number (when postgraduate numbers are included), with 62% of all students registered as part time.

- viii. The College has an enviable record in terms of supporting access for students with disabilities: in 2016/17, 27% of new undergraduates had some form of disability, far in excess of the average, of 6.6% (and, indeed, higher than the College's own percentage in previous years). This rose in 2017/18 to 32% for full time students, and 40% for part time students. This is testament to the strong levels of personal and professional support offered to such students both by the College's Learning Support Unit and by the approach by the College in general, where strong pastoral care and counselling systems support students with mental health needs, support for which begin at the point of application. The College aims to continue to target a level of access for students with disabilities that is above-average. In resourcing this, the College is investing in improving accessibility across the campus, from developing disabled toilet facilities in an area where they are currently somewhat remote (completed September 2018), to developing access for students with mobility issues to parts of the English-heritage-listed administration building by sensitive renovation (currently awaiting planning permission), projects which together will entail a capital outlay of some £300,000.
- ix. It is particularly in the areas of retention, progression and success that the College intends to target resources in its Access and Participation Plan.

## 2.2 Target groups

- i. The College has targeted the following groups for particular focus, in the light of the data presented above:
- ii. **Target Group 1:** The College will target **BAME students**: the key points in the cycle that have been identified as of concern are the areas of *success* (a success gap of 6.75% to students who are not BAME) and *progression to professional employment* (where this is below levels for white graduates). The College will continue to focus on access, despite this rating being above the national average, as this is a key element in the College's own strategic vision.
- iii. **Target Group 2:** The College will target **students from low participation neighbourhoods** (Quintiles 1 & 2). The key points in the cycle that have been identified as of concern are, again, the areas of progression to employment and progression to full time employment, where available data indicates that numbers are below institutional averages. The College will continue to focus on access, despite this rating being above the national average, as this is a key element in the College's own strategic vision.
- iv. **Target Group 3:** The College will target **disabled students**, to maintain the very high standard of performance that has been attained over recent years, and to seek to ensure that all students who are eligible are supported to register for DSA (currently only 35% of students who self-identify as disabled claim DSA).
- v. **Target Group 4:** The College will continue to target **mature students**, as this is the area in which the college specializes. In this case, the intent is to maintain and slightly increase the above-average level of access; to ensure that internal systems support the particular needs of mature students in terms of continuation and success; and the distinct employment needs of mature students are identified and addressed.

- vi. **Target Group 5:** The College will target those with multiple intersections of disadvantage: mature, non-White students from low participation neighbourhoods; mature disabled students; non-white mature students. Although the College has limited data on these areas where disadvantage characteristics intersect, there is evidence that these students have particular challenges. The key point of need in the cycle is continuation and success.

## 2.2 Aims and objectives

In light of Office for Student advice, the College has reviewed the targets which are detailed below: initial iterations of these targets were relatively conservative, largely because of the structural, long-term disadvantage experienced by most of these target groups, and the challenge of reversing those systemic issues within the relative short space of a student's HE degree studies. However, recognising the importance of this stage in shaping a student's prospects, and, based on projections of increased Government investment that will target disadvantage in those earlier stages, we have established more ambitious targets – particularly when attempting to address targets relating to success.

- i. **Target Group 1: BAME students.** The aim of the first of the College's interventions (PTS\_2) is to reduce the success gap between white and non-white students from the current grade-gap of 6.75% (over a four year period) to a reduced gap of 3.8%, (with an accelerating trajectory to see this gap close more swiftly over time beyond 2024-25). The goal is to reduce this gap over a five year period, with the College also being committed to seeing this trajectory continue beyond 2025, to ensure a sustained and ongoing commitment to closing this success gap: however, it should be noted that this is not an 'unexplained gap,' but is due in significant part to the disadvantage experienced by these students prior to entry, evidenced by the range of entry characteristics that are closely coupled to performance (non-white students have, on average, a lower academic achievement profile at the point of admission than their white peers who do not fall into categories of disadvantage). The aim of a further intervention is to increase the level of progression of non-White students into professional employment. Currently there is a gap of 29% between white and non-white graduates, with only 40% of non-white students gaining professional employment: the goal is to see this level rise to 45% over five years, and so to close the gap from 29% to 23%
- ii. **Target Group 2: Students from low participation neighbourhoods** (Quintiles 1 and 2). The aim of the intervention (PTS\_1) is to reduce the success gap between LPN students and their peers, from the current grade-gap of 4.8% to a gap of 2.6%, over a five year period (with an accelerating trajectory to see this gap close more swiftly over time beyond 2024-25). The College is committed to seeing this trajectory continue beyond 2025, to ensure a sustained and ongoing commitment to closing this success gap. However, once again, this is not an 'unexplained' gap, but is due in significant part to the disadvantage experienced by these students from Quintiles 1 & 2 prior to entry, evidenced by the range of entry characteristics that are closely coupled to performance (students from quintiles 1 & 2 students have, on average, a lower academic achievement profile at the point of admission than their peers who do not fall into categories of disadvantage). The aim of a further intervention (PTP\_2) is to increase the level of progression of polar 4 Q 1 and 2 students into professional employment. Currently there is a gap of 38% between Q1 & 2 and other graduates, with Q1 & 2 at only 33% entry to professional employment: the goal is to increase that level to 40% over a five year period, and to thus close the gap to 31%.

- iii. **Target Group 3: Disabled Students:** The aim of the intervention is to maintain the level of access, success, and progression for students with a disability. In particular (PTS\_4), the College will seek to ensure that a greater proportion of students who are eligible are supported to register for DSA. Currently 35% of students who self-identify as disabled claim DSA, and the goal is to increase that to 40% within five years.
- iv. **Target Group 4: Mature Students:** The aim of interventions is to maintain and slightly increase the level of access, success, and progression for mature students who have a second factor of disadvantage, to maintain and slightly increase the level of access (PTA\_1, PTA\_2) to ensure that internal systems support the particular needs of mature students in terms of continuation and success; and address the distinct employment needs of mature students. The aim is to increase the percentage of mature and disabled students to 16%, and Mature BAME students to 21%, over five years (PTA\_1 & 2).
- v. **Target Group 5: Multiple intersections of disadvantage:** The College will continue to focus on access for students with multiple measures of deprivation (PTA\_1 – PTA\_3): comparison with national averages are not available in most cases. The aim of intervention PTS\_3 is to address issues of continuation and success. The aim is to reduce a current grade-gap of 6% to a gap of 3.3%, over a five year period (with an accelerating trajectory to see this gap close more swiftly over time beyond 2024-25). As noted previously, the College is committed to seeing this trajectory continue beyond 2025, to ensure a sustained and ongoing commitment to closing this success gap. Again, this is not an 'unexplained gap, but is due in significant part to the disadvantage experienced by these students prior to entry, evidenced by the range of entry characteristics that are closely coupled to performance.

### 3. Strategic measures

- i. The College will implement the following strategic measures in each of these areas:
- ii. **Target Group 1: BAME students:** (PTS\_2,) To address the achievement gap for non-white students and for students from low participation neighbourhoods, the college has acted to invest in peer learning support workers. These support workers, successful graduates of the College, are themselves mature students, and (if possible) will be from low participation neighbourhoods and non-white backgrounds. They work with our learning support team in delivering study skills, in mentoring students, and in shaping peer learning opportunities. The College has agreed to move from one person in this role to two persons, and has now moved to employ a dedicated Learning Support coordinator (whereas previously this was a role carried by the Librarian). The College will also target postgraduate bursary support to BAME students, to raise aspirations and develop capacity (PTP\_1). In 2019-20, the College will also review its tutorial structure, to ensure that its structures are effective in ensuring BAME students make use of their personal tutors.
- iii. **Target Group 2: Students from low participation neighbourhoods** (Polar quintile 1 and 2). The College has entered into a partnership with a faith-based Careers Organisation (PTP\_2), to support students into professional-level employment, as part of its strategic commitment to helping all students into employment: this builds on the already strong connections with employers in the sector established through placement-based courses.

- iv. **Target Group 3: Disabled Students (PTS\_4)** The College has invested in additional learning support staff, and a dedicated Learning Support Coordinator, in order to ensure that students have the support they need to flourish, and, for those who need it, to complete the DSA application process swiftly. The goal is to increase the take-up rate of DSA for those who self-identify as disabled, from 35% to 40%, in order to increase the level of academic support and thus raise the level of success for these students.
- v. **Target Group 4: Mature Students:** We are taking two steps to ease financial burden for all students, but this is particularly a challenge for mature students, with their range of financial obligations: first, we have moved to increase our hardship bursary, targeted specifically at this group: this will be by application, and awarded based on need, by the Awards Committee, and will seek to reduce withdrawals due to finance. Second, we are intending to remove, from 2019-20, an additional charge that such students currently pay, over and above their tuition fees, to cover validation costs, a benefit of some £600 per year: internal analysis of withdrawal statistics indicates that just under 10% of students withdraw for financial reasons: the College is trying to reduce both the actual financial burden of this fee, and the additional stress and anxiety that it causes to the student (the total funding commitment for this will depend on the number of students recruited: current cost estimate is £12000 for each intake, of which approximately 92.6% are in a target category of mature, not-white, or with a disability). This seeks to address issues of access and progression. Each of these students will benefit by £600 in each year of their studies (pro-rata for part time students) We will also adjust our timetabling to make the issues of childcare less problematic, by starting the teaching day later, and offering some units twice, to allow greater flexibility and choice.
- vi. **Target Group 5: Multiple intersections of disadvantage:** The several interventions above will address many of the obstacles faced by this group. As more data is collected about the nature of these issues, a clearer strategy can be developed. The College has moved to invest in delivering a selection of foundation units, as routes into study, for Mature, BAME students who are not ready to register on a course of study (PTA\_2). Some of these will be delivered in off-site locations, through collaboration with a range of churches, so that learning opportunities are taken to the doorstep of the student. These classes are subsidised by the College (students pay only forty percent of the full cost), and are designed to support students into study, or to function as self-contained learning experiences for those who do not choose to progress into a full course of study.

### 3.1 Whole provider strategic approach

- i. **Overview:** The College's *Strategic Framework* explicitly articulates a commitment to "develop flexible and accessible approaches to education for all, recruiting widely for a diverse student body," and to "enhance learning experiences for all students." The NTC 'Vision to 2030' document affirms this strategy, underlining a commitment to 'be flexible, accessible, and offer excellent support structures', and 'to broaden accessibility and provision of high quality education.'
- ii. These documents have been considered and adopted by the College's *Board of Governors*, so inform the highest level of the College's strategic engagement. But they have also been shaped and developed by a continual iterative process, involving all members of the College's faculty and staff (in explicit reading and revising of the documents), and drawing on student participation, both through specific student

representatives on the bodies that consider these strategic documents (there is student representation on the Governors, and on the Academic Board and Administrative Council) and through separate student forums which have fed into the text of these documents.

- iii. This articulation of a commitment to access and participation within the strategic framework means that the College's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) regularly reviews the College's ongoing commitment to and progress on these issues, and they are reflected in the ongoing reviews of programmes and systems.
- iv. **Theory of Change:**<sup>2</sup> The fact that NTC has established access and enhancement as strategic priorities informs the theory of change held by the institution: it helps 'articulate the assumptions about how change happens' (Rogers, 2011), since it shows that an APP is integral to institutional identity. The College's theory of change has, at an organisational level, identified the following *aims*: to ensure that the College continues to recruit widely for a diverse student body, and enhances the learning experiences for all students – particularly those students who show a 'success gap' in their academic experience.
- v. The desired *outcomes* are as follows:
  - a. to maintain the College's strong record of access and widening participation at the point of admission and registration, ensuring admission outcomes are ahead of national average figures for the sector;
  - b. to improve the pattern of success for students with a range of disadvantage characteristics when this is mapped against average student performance and, in particular, to target an improvement in completion statistics for these students.
  - c. The College will *measure* the effectiveness of interventions in the following ways:
    - i. Comparison of year-on-year data for access, participation, and progression, within and beyond the College on a range of characteristics, to provide a broad assessment of the extent to which the range of interventions have been effective;
    - ii. Since a number of the interventions invite but do not require student participation, a comparison of performance between those who have engaged in the particular support and/or progression interventions and those who have not, and (where appropriate) between the performance of students prior to intervention and following it;
    - iii. Survey of students who have engaged with activities designed to contribute to desired outcomes;
    - iv. Undertake focus group research to allow a range of students to consider the data set and the college's initiatives to address issues of access and participation.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of 'Theory of Change' is contested, but it can be seen as 'a way of thinking (overall approach), a process (doing a TOC analysis), and a product (the result)' (Hivos, 2015, p 13). This APP understands the concept to be about 'articulating those many underlying assumptions about how change will happen in a programme' (Rogers, 2011), and will use the idea of an 'outcomes chain' to interrogate how (or whether) interventions attain desired outcomes.

- vi. **Alignment with other strategies:** As noted above, the College’s Strategic Framework explicitly articulates a commitment to “develop flexible and accessible approaches to education for all, recruiting widely for a diverse student body,” and to “enhance learning experiences for all students.” The College’s Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Policy explicitly “recognises different educational backgrounds and abilities. The College is committed to widening access of under-represented groups to higher education and facilitating the learning of these students without standard academic qualifications where and as appropriate.” The Policy commits the College to providing “excellent Learning Support to students with Specific Learning Difficulties;” to the “to the on-going professional development of its teachers, holding regular Faculty Training days.” The Faculty Handbook notes that the College “fosters a safe, but challenging environment of learning within each programme, so that students learn as part of a supportive and diverse community.”
- vii. The College’s admission policy follows the Schwartz Report (2004) in its commitment to transparency; to fairness; to widening participation. It affirms the findings of the report that ‘it is fair and appropriate to consider contextual factors as well as formal educational achievement, given the variation in learners’ opportunities and circumstances.’ It affirms that “The College welcomes applications from people with additional support needs. We operate procedures to ensure that these applications will be considered appropriately and that applicants with additional support needs will be provided with appropriate support for the application process and subsequent study.”
- viii. The College’s Equal Opportunity Statement notes that “We believe in equal opportunities: we are actively opposed to discrimination in society and endeavour to demonstrate this through all our activities, including our employment practices.” Further, “course content and teaching demonstrates a commitment to social inclusion, cultural diversity and the elimination of discrimination and oppression. Every opportunity is taken to address inequality, both with staff, students and placement organisations.” This is a key value affirmed by the College. The ‘Equal opportunities’ noted in the statement are expressed in admissions policies that affirm widening participation; they support the College’s commitment to addressing issues of discrimination, and to providing support (human resources; financial resources) where that is needed in order to ensure that the statement is an embodied value, and not just an espoused one. The strategic framework draws these policies together, so they are not just disparate documents, but a coherent, strategic declaration to “enhance learning experiences for all students.”
- ix. **Strategic Measures:** The College’s Access and Participation Plan has identified a range of *inputs* which it intends to use to reach the outcomes identified above. In the area of *access*, the following investments will be made in order to maintain or improve the strong record of access:
- a) The College will invest in delivering a selection of foundation units, as routes into study, for students who are not ready to register on a course of study. Some of these will be delivered in off-site locations, through collaboration with a range of churches, so that learning opportunities are taken to the doorstep of the student. These classes are subsidised by the College (students pay only forty percent of the full cost), and are designed to support students into study, or to function as self-contained learning experiences for those who do not choose to progress into a full course of study. Wong

(2015) writes that prior development in academic skills proves to be a key ingredient in academic success.<sup>3</sup>

- b) Since many of our students are non-traditional, mature, students from low participation neighbourhoods, finance is often an issue for them. Erisman and Steele (2012) identify concern about finance as a key issue for non-traditional students<sup>4</sup>. We are taking two steps to ease their financial burden: first, we have moved to increase our hardship bursary (this is awarded according to need, by application). Second, we are intending to remove, from 2019-20, an additional charge that such students currently pay, over and above their tuition fees, to cover validation costs, a benefit of some £600 per year to the 92.4% of students who fall into the primary categories of disadvantage.
  - c) The College receives many enquiries, and a number of applications, from potential non-traditional students from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not have the necessary entry requirements for admission. The College has actively explored offering a foundation year, but, unfortunately, our validating university has indicated that it will not support this initiative, and so the plan could not move forward. Having undertaken a feasibility study about mounting its own access course, the College has instead come to an agreement in principle with Trafford College for collaborative delivery of an Access Course that would be split-site: most of the course completed at one of the Trafford college sites, with one unit delivered at NTC. This is designed to offer students the advantages of a well-established access course, combined with the attraction of participating in the more intimate and familiar environment of the small confessional college, allowing them to successfully transition back into education –something most adult learners struggle with.<sup>5</sup>
- x. In the areas of *success*, the following investments will be made in order to ‘close the success gap’ that the College has identified:
- a) To address the achievement gap for non-white students and for students from low participation neighbourhoods, the college has moved to invest in additional peer learning support workers. The intention is for these to be successful graduates of the College, themselves mature students, and (if possible) from low participation neighbourhoods and non-white backgrounds. They will work with our learning support team in delivering study skills, in mentoring students, and in shaping peer learning opportunities. The College is also appointing a dedicated Learning Support Advisor – a role that was previously covered by the Librarian.
  - b) Anxiety issues are identified as a key challenge for more than half of adult learners (Erisman and Steele, 2012). To address issues of mental health and related issues of student need, the College has acted to invest in pastoral support by increasing staffing levels in the area of pastoral care, and to invest in mental health training for the chaplaincy team, who also support peer-led mental health initiatives.

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<sup>3</sup> Billy Wong, “By Chance or Plan? The Academic Success of Nontraditional Students in Higher Education,” *AREA Open*, Vol 4, No. 2, April-June (2018), pp 1-14

<sup>4</sup> Erisman, W. , & Steele, P. (2012). From contact to completion: Supporting returning adult students in obtaining a college credential. HigherEd Insight, Washington DC

<sup>5</sup> Ross-Gordon, J. M. (2011). Research on adult learners: Supporting the needs of a student population that is no longer traditional. *Peer Review* , 13(1), 26–29.

- c) To address the challenge of coping with the step-change from level four to level five, and from level five to level six, the College will introduce a process of rolling induction (rather than concentrating all of its induction activities in the first year). This will see study skills sessions developed for level five and six, to ensure students adjust well to changing expectations.
  - d) The College will make timetabling adjustments, to help parents with young children, by starting the academic day later, and aligning with school holidays. Newson et al (2011)<sup>6</sup> noted the importance of shaping the timetable and the timeliness of its distribution “so that those who have caring responsibilities can make practical arrangements.” Erisman and Steele (2013) observe that 75% of mature students felt that flexible schedules were of critical importance to them.
  - e) The College will continue to invest in Pastoral Care and Community: Wong (2015) comments that ‘academic success [of non-traditional students] is motivated and supported by key personnel such as ...tutors/staff, and members of the wider community.’
  - f) The College will resource staff development: ‘raising staff knowledge and awareness’ is part of the ongoing investment, in light of our distinct learning community. Recent faculty development sessions (‘Critical Thinking with Non-Traditional Students’; Mental Health for PhD Students; Rethinking Induction) have followed this thread. The College has also delivered training in Mental Health First Aid to a range of faculty, staff, and students.
- xi. In the area of *progression* to employment, the following investments will be made:
- a) The College will partner with a faith-based careers organisation, to offer regular careers advice for students and to support Careers and Networking events, aimed both at students approaching graduation and at recent graduates.
  - b) The College will continue to invest in partnering with employers, particularly through developing placement-based learning opportunities, to give students experience in the fields in which they wish to pursue employment.
  - c) The College will develop an employability strategy by 2020-21, that will more fully articulate its strategic approach to progression to employment for all students, with particular consideration for those who are disadvantaged.

### 3.2 Student consultation

- i. A draft of the Access and Participation Plan was considered by a student focus group, which contained mature students, students, from a BAME background, and students with a disability. The APP was revised in light of that meeting. This revised draft was circulated to the elected student representatives, for their feedback and revision. The plan was evaluated by the Undergraduate Working Group, and will be monitored by the Academic Board, and there are student representatives who are elected to it on both of those bodies, to represent their peers. Students are also uniquely placed to help their peers, and the

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<sup>6</sup> Carey Newson, Dr Almuth McDowall, Professor Mark NK Saunders *Understanding the support needs of matures students*, University of Surrey, 2011

College will make use of students (and recent graduates) who have themselves overcome disadvantage to support their peers.

- ii. Following consultation with students, the College (a) revised its timetable, to make it easier for parents to drop off and pick up children, and (b) agreed to include the previously additional validation fee in the student loan amount. All other initiatives were discussed with students representative groups, but these two were directly linked to student concerns and proposals.

### 3.3 Evaluation strategy

- i. The College intends to evaluate its activities through careful collection of data. Some of this will be through the provision of **narrative evidence**: typically, through surveying students who have been involved with the activities, and staff members who have delivered or supported them, to see if there is consensus about the quality and impact of these interventions. This will be linked to published field-based research to offer a coherent explanation for perceived effectiveness (or its absence).
- ii. The College will also undertake **empirical enquiry**, by tracking students who participate in the range of interventions undertaken by the College. In most cases, the intervention will be directed to all students (such a timetable changes or universal fee adjustments) and so the comparative data set will be with previous College cohorts or with national averages, and so will offer evidence based against other groups, in other times or places.
- iii. In a limited number of cases, the College will be able to undertake **empirical enquiry that can suggest a causal linkage**. This would apply to interventions where students can choose whether or not to take advantage of specific activities – in areas of access, where a potential student takes the College’s pre-degree taster courses; in areas of continuation and success, such things as optional peer support or learning support sessions; for progression into employment, involvement in career advice opportunities or placement learning. This will involve the College recording levels of participation in these activities or initiatives, and comparing outcomes with those who did not participate. With relatively small populations, it will be difficult to identify definitive causal links, but a general trend will be evident, particularly when mapped over several years.
- iv. The College will (from September 2019) have an APP Subcommittee that will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this plan, and be responsible for keeping other internal bodies informed about effectiveness and revisions.

Target Group	Intervention	Evaluation Strategy
1: BAME students:	Invest in Peer Learning Support	Survey of participants to determine their perception of effectiveness; map continuation and success outcomes of those who participate against their peers who do not.
	Postgraduate Bursary support	Map PGT progression into further study rates, in light of raised profile of available funding for BAME students
2: Students from low participation neighbourhoods	Foundation units for pre-degree study	Survey of participants’ experience of these access routes to determine effectiveness of localised delivery; map continuation and success outcomes of those who progress to degree-level study after these foundations against the wider student population.

	Access Course Partnership	Survey of participants' experience of this access route to determine effectiveness of collaborative delivery; map continuation and success outcomes of those who progress to degree-level study after completing access courses against the wider student population
3: Disabled Students:	Additional learning support staff	Survey of participants' experience to determine effectiveness of support; map continuation and success outcomes of those who make use of these interventions against the wider student population, and those with this disadvantage who do not make use of support. Track levels of access to DSA
4: Mature Students:	Easing financial burden by absorbing validation costs	Map withdrawal rates in new system against previous levels, to determine if this has a positive correlation with continuation and progression.
	Adjust timetabling to ease childcare issues	Survey of participants' experience to determine effectiveness of intervention; map withdrawal rates for new structure against previous levels, to determine if this has a positive correlation with continuation and progression.
5: Mature, non-White students from low participation neighbourhoods:	Multiple interventions (above)	Survey of participants' experience to determine effectiveness of interventions; map continuation and success outcomes against the wider student population, to determine if the interventions have a positive correlation with continuation and progression.

- v. **Strategic Context:** The College is fortunate in having academic administrators with a rich background in HE systems, despite being a small institution. One has a PhD in Educational Administration (HE); a second is pursuing a PhD in HE: Research, Evaluation and Enhancement, with support from the College. The College has invested in support systems and staff to enable evaluation to take place (a new Student Management System is being introduced), and has ensured it is at the forefront of statistical change by participation in the Alpha+ projects for the HESA Data Futures project. The data on access and participation is not only held within the academic office; it is presented to and considered by the wider faculty, and informs our institutional vision.
- vi. **Programme design:** The College has clearly identified its target groups, and, based on consideration of the literature, designed interventions to address the points of support that are required at the moment of the student life-cycle that has been identified as needing engagement. In some cases, the nature of feedback can only be assessed in terms of participant satisfaction or a broader comparison with national averages for similar cohorts, or previous performance from internal data. In most cases, empirical enquiry through statistical analysis will be undertaken to inform assessment of the effectiveness of interventions.
- vii. **Evaluation Design:** The College has considered the need both for internal generation of data, to guide the implementation of its access and participation agenda, and the need for this to be accessible for a wider audience: the students themselves, and regulatory bodies – both the validating university and national regulatory agencies. The Academic office has identified points in the year where assessment will be undertaken: initial access data will be considered in November of each year, and then in the spring when more comprehensive datasets have been compiled (in connection with UCAS data and HESA outputs); success and continuation data will be considered in early summer, in line with the preparation of

data for the College's examination boards; and progression to employment data will be evaluated when the Graduate Outcomes data is released.

- viii. **Evaluation Implementation:** The collection of data has been centralised to the academic office, and the office of the Registrar, to ensure the access to data is appropriately limited: an additional part-time staff post has been created to allow capacity for data analysis. Design of evaluation instruments will be considered by the College's Research Ethics Committee prior to implementation. At this point, evaluation will only be directed at cohort and subgroup level, and not at the level of individualised change. Evaluations will be considered in the first instance by the APP Subcommittee.
- ix. **Learning:** The College recognises that the evaluations it is implementing have their limitations: in some cases, it is impossible to have control groups because of ethical consideration, and so data analysis will not be able to establish causal connections. In almost all cases, subgroup numbers make reaching statistical significance challenging, and at times are so low that statistics need to be redacted to ensure data protection is not compromised. Data from initial evaluation of Access will be considered each autumn by the APP Committee, who will report to the College's Academic Board (including all faculty) and Board of Governors, whilst the more comprehensive access data set will follow the same route in the spring, but also be included in the Annual Review process; data on success and continuation/withdrawal will be considered each summer by the APP Committee at the point where Graduate Outcomes data is released, by examination boards, and by the Academic Board (then again considered during the Annual Review); and data on progression to employment will be reviewed by the APP committee and then considered as part of the annual review (that review is considered by the joint Working Groups, by Faculty, and by Academic Board). The Annual Review process ensures that outcomes of evaluation become part of the College's rolling 'action plan,' and so where changes is required this will be implemented and then reviewed in turn.
- x. The College is part of a network of theological Colleges, validated by The University of Manchester, and the Colleges have agreed to work collaboratively to share good practice, including the consideration of evaluation outcomes on Access and Participation, on an annual basis. This sharing of learning has been noted as 'good practice' by our validating university. The hope is that we might also be able to develop shared interventions in due course.

### 3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

- i. The College's Board of Governors will monitor the performance and implementation of the plan: specifically, the Academic Subcommittee of the Board will consider the annual report on the plan, and the way in which the College is adjusting and revising it in light of evaluations. The Student Body President is part of that subcommittee, and will be a key part of that monitoring.
- ii. The College Dean is responsible for monitoring the processes of Access and Participation, and for ensuring that reporting takes place at the appropriate time. If the data reveals that the situation is not improving, but is in fact showing regression, then the APP subcommittee will propose revisions to the plan. The reporting of data is already well embedded in the institution: we have a twenty year record of close scrutiny of admissions, registration, and progression data, which has identified a range of subgroups as they vary over time. This data goes twice annually to the Academic Board and the Board of Governors, and is

interrogated regularly by the Academic Office and the Senior Leadership Team. The additional categories that the APP introduces will fit in to this already established process of review.

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

- i. The College provides all students with detailed fee information at point of admission: this sets out the fee levels upon admission, and identifies the range of any increases that might take place during the duration of the course of their studies (i.e., may be raised by up to the RPI figure). This will include any eligibility for financial support for students from underrepresented groups, the level of that support, and the criteria attached to that, for each year of their studies..

## **5. Appendix**

The OfS will append the following items from the fees and targets and investment documents when an access and participation plan is published:

1. Targets (tables 2a, 2b and 2c in the targets and investment plan)
2. Investment summary (tables 4a and 4b in the targets and investment plan)
3. Fee summary (table 4a and 4b in the fee information document)