

## Access and Participation Statement

2018-2019

The University of Law's vision is to be the university of choice for the professions, by driving innovation in applied education to deliver outstanding employment outcomes.

The University of Law is committed to providing high quality education to a diverse community of students. Historically we were known for our postgraduate law courses, for students aiming for careers as solicitors or barristers, but our offer has diversified considerably in the past six years. We now offer undergraduate courses in Law, Business and related subjects. We have also diversified in modes of provision (additional part-time and online modes as well as full-time, face-to-face tuition).

We operate from eight campuses and have partnerships with several other universities to deliver postgraduate courses on their premises. Our undergraduate courses run from seven campuses and have grown significantly over the last six years. Nonetheless they still represent a small proportion of the University's total student numbers.

The University is a welcoming and inclusive environment where onward progression and career success are vitally important for all our students. We focus on professional education and are proud of our differentiating ethos. Indeed the professional practice backgrounds of the teaching staff, the expertise from professional colleagues in the Careers Service and inclusion of an employability programme in the undergraduate curriculum is testament to this commitment. Our employability statistics<sup>1</sup> have consistently exceeded 90% even though the population size means that small numbers can skew the statistics.

Our outstanding provision of Higher Education has been evidenced by securing Gold Award in the Teaching Excellence Framework and a commendation in relation to the enhancement of learning opportunities in the findings from the Quality Assurance Agency review, both in 2017. We are committed to investment in our systems, activities and associated staff development to enhance performance of underrepresented groups within the context of our overall strategic objectives, specifically preparing students for the professional workplace, whether in law or other work.

The University of Law started offering an undergraduate degree in 2012, enrolling 111 students on a two-year accelerated degree. Although we have increased the number of undergraduate degrees offered, enrolling over 700 students in September 2018, our overall undergraduate student numbers are relatively low. Our broader strategic aim over the next five years is to increase our undergraduate student body. We are basing our analysis on three year rolling averages, in line with the approach taken elsewhere, eg in the TEF, to identify gaps of equality of opportunity in relation to access, success and progression.

A working group of the University's Widening Participation and Access Committee of the Academic Board reviewed and revised our Widening Participation and Access Strategy in 2017. That working party, which included the Student Association President, reviewed our internal data and sector benchmarks where available; it concluded that the University should focus on four underrepresented and disadvantaged groups in terms of socio-economic background, ethnicity, age and disability. These were selected because we wanted to reduce identified gaps in access, success and progression for these groups. In addition, because we have complete datasets we can reliably check our progress against our current position and targets.

In our data analysis we have measured groups as follows:

- POLAR 3 (sub-grouped by quintile)<sup>2</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> Derived from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey

<sup>2</sup> We do not easily have access to other contextual data such as IMD, so we have used POLAR as our proxy for socio-economic background

- ethnic background (sub-grouped as: Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British, Information refused, Mixed, Other ethnic background and White);
- age (under 21, 21 and over);
- disability (sub-grouped as: Specific Learning Difficulty (Dyslexia); Deaf/Hard of Hearing; Wheelchair User/Mobility Difficulties; Mental Health Difficulties; Unseen Disability - Diabetes, Epilepsy, Heart Condition; Multiple Disabilities; Disability/Special Need/Medical Condition Not Listed; Autistic Spectrum Disorder or Asperger Syndrome; No disability);
- care leavers (care leaver or not).

We have counted underrepresented groups as falling into POLAR 3 quintile 1; ethnic background other than white or information refused; age of 21 and over; disability identified by a student at any stage during their student lifecycle; care leaver. About 25% of our students fall into more than one underrepresented group. Where students belong to more than one underrepresented group, our analysis shows that they are more likely to be BME in combination with another underrepresented group.

We currently offer online degrees over four or six<sup>3</sup> years; by 2019 we will have a broader offering of online degree options, which we believe will enhance access.

We are a diverse, inclusive university, welcoming applicants from all backgrounds and supporting students through their studies with us to successful completion and progression into the workplace. Our ambition is to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed to the best of their ability.

As a university with eight campuses in different parts of the country we are very conscious that the student bodies at each campus vary. Each campus is to some extent reflective of its local community and therefore the groups that may be underrepresented at one campus will differ from those at another. We embrace that diversity and seek always to be sensitive and responsive to the character of the particular mix of students at each campus.

A broader aim over the next five years is to increase our undergraduate student body. We want to reach as broad a body of students with the potential to succeed as possible and we want to help those students succeed.

In terms of setting ourselves targets in the University's Access and Participation Plan, where we have not identified a gap in outcomes for underrepresented groups we will aim to maintain our performance while increasing the number of students. Where we have identified a gap we aim to increase both number of students and improve the performance of underrepresented groups. We have set targets in terms of change to a current percentage, rather than reducing any internal future gap.

An important target is improving our capture of comprehensive data, so as to be in a position to evaluate other underrepresented groups in future. We will subscribe to a learner analytics service which will help us monitor students through their study, with the intention of increasing continuation, completion and pass rates.

While the ultimate aim must be to eliminate gaps, we also want to set realistic targets. Having reviewed our data, and the initiatives we are putting in place, we think that a general aim of halving current gaps over the next five years is realistic.

Our ambition is to build on our already diverse and inclusive community, encouraging application and enrolment from a broader range of students from underrepresented groups. We also have targets to improve completion, pass and good pass rates for identified groups.

Our ambition is to support students beyond short-term job hunting into long term professional employment. We are investing in online resources and we will run events which outline the

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<sup>3</sup> Our current six year programme is available only as a solicitor apprenticeship

opportunities and practical challenges as a career develops. This will benefit all students but we plan to contextualise our activity in a way that strengthens the position of those who may have relatively limited social capital (particularly important for access to the legal profession) and/or face specific challenges in the workplace. Our students have the opportunity to be mentored by members of our alumni network, which again can strengthen the position of those with relatively limited social capital. In addition, the University is strongly committed to *pro bono*, which offers students exposure to and networking with qualified lawyers and external practitioners, whilst putting their legal skills into practice. The University has always worked closely with a wide range of employers to ensure that their needs and ambitions are reflected in our programmes and in the support we provide to students. The legal qualification landscape will change significantly over the next few years and we must ensure that we adapt our programmes and delivery to ensure that students are well placed to progress. In particular, there is concern that the proposed changes will disadvantage some underrepresented groups and we, with other providers, will need to work with the regulators actively to challenge this.

Although BME is relatively well represented in solicitors' firms, the legal sector has issues with diversity<sup>4</sup> and our ambition is to work with the sector to reduce gaps in the workforce. For example, although women make up 48% of all lawyers in law firms, only 33% are partners, with only 29% at the largest firms. People with disabilities are not well represented, with only 3% of all groups reporting a disability, 2% of partners.

We work with a number of law firms to help them achieve their corporate social responsibility, diversity and inclusion strategies, including a number of recruitment schemes and *pro bono* projects. We sponsor the Black Lawyers Directory and provide workshops at their events and at a pre-National Law Fair workshop. We sponsor and host the Sutton Trust's Pathways Plus programme, open only to applicants who meet widening participation criteria, which seeks to enhance students' leadership and employability skills. We run a Step into Law programme, open to all prospective students, and we also fund participation in Legal Cheek events run across the country. We regularly participate in Law Society events aimed at mature career changers. We sponsor the Miranda Brawn diversity Leadership Foundation and host their annual diversity leadership lecture, aimed at 14-21 year old BME future leaders. Capturing this activity in terms of measurable targets and impact is challenging and will be further considered by our Widening Participation and Access Committee.

We have established an Employer Advisory Forum, which has access and participation as a standing agenda item, to consider how best to enable students from underrepresented groups to progress into (and then in) the workplace. We plan to undertake research into the best ways of working with the sector, working towards specific measures for subsequent Plans.

The Student Association President is a member of the Academic Board's Widening Participation and Access Committee. The Student Association has been involved throughout in the development of the University's Widening Participation and Access Strategy, which has been endorsed by the Student Association Parliament. The Student Association is fully supportive of the Widening Participation stance of the University and has contributed to this Access and Participation Statement.

This statement is an external student-facing version of our fuller University Access and Participation Plan.

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<sup>4</sup> For example see <https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/key-findings/law-firms-2017.page>