

## Social Mobility at University Alliance

### Introduction

University Alliance brings together 18 universities with a common mission to make the difference to their cities and regions. We use our experience of providing high-quality teaching and research with real world impact to shape higher education and research policy for the benefit of our students, businesses and civic partners. We innovate together, learn from each other and support every member to transform lives and deliver growth.

What you see at Alliance universities is large-scale social mobility in action. An average 40% of our students come from low socio-economic groups compared to a sector wide average of 34% and an average of 20% at Russell Group universities.<sup>1</sup> Students from less advantaged backgrounds and circumstances who enrol on Alliance courses are supported and encouraged into a better start in life.

The UK economy is increasingly knowledge-based with most new jobs in high skill areas and labour market demand for higher (Level 6+) skills continuing to grow. But Alliance universities' impact on social mobility goes beyond the traditional model of higher education. As forward thinking and flexible institutions, they are involved in a wide range of activities across different skills attainment levels (Level 4+). This activity has a huge impact on both social mobility and economic development throughout the UK.

University Alliance argues that:

- A. In an increasingly knowledge-based economy continuing to widen participation to higher-level study is essential for social mobility.
- B. Government policy should incentivise and reward partnerships across the entire skills ecosystem with the aim of creating smoother progression routes between institutions and according vocational and academic education parity of esteem.
- C. Universities have an important role in designing education other than degree-level study, ensuring it is relevant to local and national needs. Government must support greater flexibility for learners including degree apprenticeships, other workplace-based courses and part-time study.

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<sup>1</sup> HESA 2013/14, Participation of under-represented groups in higher education: UK domiciled young full-time first degree entrants

- A. In an increasingly knowledge-based economy continuing to widen participation to higher-level study is essential for social mobility.**
1. The UK economy is increasingly knowledge-based with most new jobs in high skill areas and labour market demand for higher (Level 6+) skills continuing to grow. According to the CBI, half of all jobs by 2022 will require workers to have completed some form of higher education.<sup>2</sup> UKCES states that “long term trends look set to continue favouring growth in [high skill jobs], making the sustained supply of new skills into the labour market an on-going priority”.<sup>3</sup>
  2. In this economic context, widening participation to higher-level study is essential. Social mobility will never be fully realised in a system where higher education numbers are restricted.
- B. Government policy should incentivise and reward partnerships across the entire skills ecosystem with the aim of creating smoother progression routes between institutions and according vocational and academic education parity of esteem.**
3. Many universities, including all in University Alliance, work closely with 14-19 education providers (schools, FE colleges and UTCs) to form an effective skills ecosystem. As well as ensuring diversity of provision, the partnership work that our universities undertake brings learning closer to industry and helps address ‘cold spots’ in areas of low participation. For example:
    - a) **Plymouth University** has around 5,000 students studying in a regional further education partnership registered on foundation courses, HNDs, HNCs and honours degrees. This has enabled access to higher education on a significant scale across a geographically large region with very few universities.
    - b) **The University of Greenwich** is a sponsor of the Medway UTC, along with MidKent College, Medway Council, BAE Systems and other local

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<sup>2</sup> Confederation of British Industry (2015), *Inspiring growth: CBI/Pearson skills survey 2015*, available from: <http://news.cbi.org.uk/business-issues/education-and-skills/gateway-to-growth-cbi-pearson-education-and-skills-survey-2015/>

<sup>3</sup> UK Commission for Employment & Skills (2015), *Growth through people: evidence and analysis*, available from: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/410289/GTP\\_EA\\_final\\_v8.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/410289/GTP_EA_final_v8.pdf)

employers and partners, which specialises in engineering and construction.

- c) **Portsmouth University** is engaged in extensive outreach and aspiration raising programmes – an incremental and increasingly intensive progression package from year 5 to year 13 which systematically develops an interest in higher study. Through this programme the university works actively with staff and pupils at schools and colleges across the region, raising expectations and providing practical support, including subject conferences and masterclasses, aimed at improving educational outcomes at 16 and 18 and making Higher Education a viable opportunity for more local children. The university also runs a number of franchised courses in collaboration with local FE colleges, including courses in business, education and engineering.
- d) The **University of Hertfordshire** works in collaboration with four local consortium colleges and other HE, enterprise and local authority partners to ensure that students in the local area have the best possible access to widening participation activities. The University set up Watford UTC which has a special focus on the technical skills, trades and technologies that support the computer and digital communication industries, hospitality and tourism. The University's involvement ensures the education on offer is relevant to industry, thereby giving students the best possible opportunity to secure employment after finishing. To date, more than 15,000 graduates of the University began their post-school education in the consortia colleges.
- e) The **University of Lincoln** sponsors the Lincoln UTC and two academy schools in Holbeach; one secondary and one primary. The University Academy Holbeach (secondary) is unique as it not only offers sixth form provision, but also a range of apprenticeship training. The HE participation rate in South Holland is one of the lowest in the country at 7% and since the University has sponsored the Academy, the size of the sixth form has increased from 9 to 275 and the numbers of students progressing to university has increased from 1 to 24. There are now over 80 students in apprenticeship training. The Lincoln UTC is also sponsored by Siemens and is designed to help address the shortage of engineering and other higher level skills in Lincoln and beyond.

- C. Universities have an important role in designing education beyond degree-level study, ensuring it is relevant to local and national needs. Government must support greater flexibility for learners including degree apprenticeships, other workplace-based courses and part-time study.
4. Alliance universities and similar institutions have a strong record of collaborating with industry in the design of qualifications. This includes courses that:
- Are co-designed and sponsored by employers
  - Involve flexible workplace-based placements
  - Are taught in university campus-based employer hubs
  - Are accredited by employer-led professional bodies
  - Are offered through part-time, distance learning or further education based learning routes.
5. They are therefore well-placed to deliver learning, at a range of attainment levels, that is transferable and offers progression opportunities beyond immediate employer needs. For example:
- a) In partnership with BMW, who have a regional base in Oxford, **Oxford Brookes University** offer foundation degrees in Electronic Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. With significant input from BMW they have developed a practice-embedded curriculum as part of BMW's apprenticeship scheme. Aspects of the course are delivered with local college partners and the course is accredited by the Institute of Mechanical Engineers and the Institute of Engineering and Technology. Oxford Brookes University also supports their local University Technical College (UTC) in Swindon, which has over 90 local and national business partners. The UTC is developing a curriculum driven by these businesses needs, with involvement from the Institute of Engineering and Technology and their Local Enterprise Partnership. Oxford Brookes University are launching a Mechanical Engineering Foundation Degree and Top Up Degree at Swindon College as a clear progression route from the University Technical College.
  - b) **Plymouth University** has worked on a Higher Apprenticeship in Construction with South Devon College which is approved by the Sector Skills Council for the construction industry (CITB-Construction Skills) and is endorsed by some large employers such as Seddon Group and Lovell

Partnership as well as the Federation of Master Builders. This Higher Apprenticeship includes a Plymouth University Foundation Degree, which means that students gain an academic qualification whilst also gaining practical experience.

- c) **Coventry University** set up Coventry University College (CUC) in 2012 in response to concerns that higher fees might deter non-traditional students from applying to higher study. The curriculum has been designed to provide qualifications from Foundation Level to Degree with each stage resulting in an award (Foundation Cert, HNC, HND or Honours Degree). This enables students to join and leave the College at a variety of points and to manage the pace of their learning and their ability to earn money for subsistence and further study. The majority of courses have been designed around professional body qualifications thus providing a complementary mix of employability skills and academic knowledge. CUC provides a high level of personal and academic support which has enabled it to accept students with lower entry qualifications, on a staged entry programme whilst not sacrificing levels of student retention or success. Recruitment has exceeded expectations with full time numbers ahead of target by 50% in the first year. Currently over 300 students study for their degrees on a part time basis. Whilst many Foundation Level (Year 0) students elect to continue with CUC, 40% progressed to degree programmes at Coventry University and a further 40% received offers from other Universities. It is unlikely that these students, having only gained low entry points aged 18, would have been able to continue with their higher education had they not attended CUC.
- d) Through the Higher Level Apprenticeship model, **Manchester Metropolitan University** has offered a long-distance work-based learning route for chemical scientists since 2012. Trainee scientists gain a foundation degree at the end of three years while developing specialist and generic skills of work in the chemical related industries. Partnerships between MMU and industry include work with pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline. Students undertake work-based learning and complete their academic learning online with a residential week at MMU in each of the three years of study. The success of the scheme is down to the strong working relationship between staff in industry and higher education and the support in development and recruitment by Cogent, the Sector Skills

Council for the chemical, pharmaceutical, nuclear, life science, petroleum  
and polymer industries.