Glasgow Caledonian University Widening Participation Policy

Rationale

The University’s commitment and achievements
Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has a long history of commitment to widening participation, and one of its strategic goals for 2015 is to ‘deepen access through community engagement’. The University has also had a long established commitment to providing lifelong learning opportunities for students within the west of Scotland and beyond. Reflecting these commitments the University has had considerable success in recruiting a very heterogeneous student group:

- 35% of young full-time first degree entrants for NS-SEC classes 4, 5, 6 & 7
- over 30% of students enter with HNC/D as highest qualification
- around 70% of entrants are first generation students
- around 35% are aged 21 or over.

As a result the University is widely recognized as a leading institution in this field in Scotland and in the UK.

However, despite this evidence of success, significant challenges remain for the University. These include the following:

- the numbers of entrants from many of the most economically and socially deprived areas of Glasgow and the West of Scotland continues to be very limited (eg areas such as Blackhill, Bridgeton, Drumchapel, Easterhouse);
- retention and progression rates in certain subject areas and among some student groups are relatively low;
- we continue to lose a significant number of our HN entrants during their first year in GCU;
- men are significantly under-represented among undergraduate entrants (around 40%).

The national policy context
The University must also continue to take note of national policy in which the need to widen participation has continued to be an important theme. This has been reflected in a number of Government policy statement over recent years. Thus the Framework for Higher Education in Scotland referred to the need “…to see real improvement in the proportions of students from the most economically disadvantaged groups benefiting from provision in our HEIs…” , while more recently ‘Skills for Scotland – A Lifelong Learning Skills Strategy’ states that ‘This strategy sets out what our objectives need to be to develop a cohesive lifelong learning system centred upon the individual but responsive to employer needs’. The Scottish Government has also recently placed an increased emphasis on a ‘cradle to grave’ approach to lifelong learning , leads to greater recognition of the importance of collaboration between schools, colleges and universities.

The Scottish Funding Council has also continued to see widening access as one of its key priorities. Thus Aim 1 in its Corporate Plan refers to the need for ‘Scotland’s colleges and universities to offer … fair access to a diverse range of learning programmes suited to individual learners’. The Funding Council’s strategy has been outlined in Learning for All.

---

1 N-S SEC: National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification – figures in this document refer to 2006-07 entrants. Data derived from HESA Performance Indicators and the GCU Student Experience Project (SEP).
Recently there has been a greater emphasis on issues associated with retention and progression within the widening participation strategy, and this has been reflected in the redesignation of the widening access premium as a Wider Access and Retention Premium (WARP). The importance of enhancing articulation arrangements between colleges and universities has been reflected in the Articulation for all initiative, and the funding which now supports this. An Access & Inclusion Committee has also recently been established to oversee this aspect of the Council’s work.

It is clear therefore that widening participation continues to be a key issue in national policies, however there are a number of challenges which the University must address if it is to maintain and enhance its position as a leading institution in this field. This points to the need for a clearly stated widening participation policy, and an effective strategy through which this policy can be implemented.

It will be important to ensure that the implementation of the Widening Participation strategy is also clearly linked to the implementation of the University’s Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS) and the Equality & Diversity strategy.

Policy aim

- The University will ensure that measures are in place to provide opportunities for access to GCU for all who can benefit from a university education, including those groups traditionally under-represented in higher education by reasons of socio-economic background, age, gender, prior educational background, ethnicity, nationality, disability, religion or sexual orientation.. We will be aware of inequalities and will work in partnership with other institutions, organisations and agencies to ensure that GCU provides an accessible and inclusive learning environment.
- The University will provide appropriate support to ensure that all students who enter the University have every opportunity to complete their studies successfully.

Implementing the policy

Implementation of this policy will require action at a number of levels. This will include the following.

- Action within the University. Key area of activity can be identified as follows:
  - Flexible entry to GCU, including Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL);
  - Greater flexibility in provision, including more part-time and work based learning provision;
  - Enhanced student support processes to ensure higher rates of progression and retention;
  - Integration of support for transition, engagement and progression within learning, teaching and assessment strategies.

- Action undertaken with partner institutions and organisations. Key area of activity can be identified as follows:
  - More focused work with schools in areas where relatively few pupils progress to higher education;
- Development of community based initiatives in partnership with appropriate organizations, such as colleges;
- Development of more work based initiatives, this could involve selected employer partners, eg Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board and the STUC and trade unions (union learning reps);
- Work with our partner colleges to strengthen articulation links, particularly in areas where opportunities are limited, and there could be demand, and to improve arrangements for transition.

Activity being undertaken both internally and with external partners can be at two levels:
- Institutional initiatives;
- School initiatives.

These two levels may also be interdependent, in that, in many cases, institutional initiatives will only be successful if there is co-operation at the School level.

These activities can build on initiatives which are already underway within GCU, eg Caledonian Club, College Articulation Project, and Moving Forward.

**Strategies and Action Plans**

Strategies and action plans will be required at an institutional level, and at the level of Schools and appropriate support departments. Stage 1 of this process will require the development of an institutional level strategy which should be approved by the Academic Policy Committee (APC). GCU Schools will then be required to develop strategies, action plans, and targets for continuous improvement through the annual planning process. Implementation will be monitored on an annual basis through the APC, advised by the Learning and Teaching Sub-committee and the Equalities and Diversity Committee. This will include providing data on measures such as:

- entrants from non-traditional routes with RPL
- entrants via college articulation routes
- entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds
- numbers who are part-time and on work based courses
- progression rates at the end of each year and completion rates
- performance against standards required under the Equalities Act.