



# Access and Participation Statement 2023-24

MLA College Access and Participation Statement 2023-24  
Sponsor: Vice-Rector (Professional Services)  
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MLA College is committed to helping achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Whilst consideration has been given to the design of this document to reduce the use of printer ink and paper, please consider the environment before printing and only do so if absolutely necessary.

# 1. Introduction

1.1 MLA College Ltd (trading as MLA College) is an ambitious organisation with a commitment to the highest-quality education and professional development. Putting students first, MLA College has a particular focus on distance and blended learning and strives to continue to develop its expertise in the use of technology to enhance student learning. It secured its status as a registered Higher Education Provider with the Office for Students in 2020.

1.2 MLA College is part of the Global Education (GEDU) group network, one of the largest providers of education in Europe. With a vision to become a globally respected provider of education that promotes changing life through education, Global Education group today operates in 12 countries worldwide with 40K students and 3,000 team members.

1.3 The unique portfolio of GEDU's educational institutions has widened to target a range of markets and cohorts and provides learners with opportunities at every stage of their education journey. GEDU has a mission to enable people to access quality education, promote the development of talent, and support them throughout their education journey with practical and inspiring programs, based on cutting-edge educational methodology, technology, and expertise. It aspires to achieve global education for a sustainable future and the following statement sets out its aspirations for an accessible, inclusive, and quality experience for students from across the world.

1.4 MLA College sees equality and diversity for its students as a college wide strategic objective, with our primary purpose to create educational opportunities and social mobility for all who seek to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. The current student population comprises total live registrations of 490 (of which 210 are studying at undergraduate level with 130 UK students. MLA College also has increased the number of female students from 5 to 85 since 2020).

1.5 MLA College recognises that the majority of the higher education sector's Access and Participation strategies and statements are focussed on widening access and participation to the larger undergraduate community, including national and local programmes for under 16s. MLA College's provision is delivered at Level 6 and 7 and is specifically aimed at those in employment, wishing to undertake Professional development. The importance of widening access and participation for the under-represented target groups is well understood by MLA and as provision develops it will seek to collaborate with external partners, as appropriate, to increase its intake from those groups.

1.6 MLA College's established culture and ethos is focussed on ensuring all individuals, regardless of background, ethnicity, global location and educational attainment, have the opportunity to successfully access and participate in higher education and continuing professional development. The entire student journey is focussed, fit for purpose, regularly reviewed and with targeted interventions to support and develop individual learners as appropriate.

1.7 Applicants to MLA College also experience financial barriers to study. In recognition of those barriers MLA College has continued to offer bursaries and fee waivers which now includes Women in Maritime Scholarships and Women in STEM Scholarships, as well as Scholarships provided by a partner company in support of Sustainability. Information is made available on the website and in correspondence with students. This information is available in the [MLA College Bursary Policy](#).

1.8 Student success and progression is promoted through prompt and detailed formative and summative feedback on module tasks, assessed assignments, and through peer review. Academic performance is supported through our academic tutorial support and is monitored via both formal and informal feedback from programme participants alongside peer review, with necessary support and guidance offered when required. Employability skills and 'transferable skills' demonstrate how

undergraduate programmes (and postgraduate) enable students to acquire skills and knowledge that will assist them in their employment and career progression.

## 2. Data Analysis

2.1 Data is currently collected at application and enrolment stages. This data is stored on MLA College’s system, but basic data is currently shared with the University of Plymouth and migrated to its student record system and populated with progression and attainment information. The validating partner does not have any regulatory requirement to report on MLA College’s data.

2.2 MLA College’s focus, since registration, has been on the embedding of processes associated with its statutory requirements (e.g. HESA returns). It has now successfully embedded a Student Record System which will ensure the College is able to readily report on the profile, access, success, non-continuation and attainment of its student body. MLA College has continued to focus on growing its student numbers, which remain mature in profile as well as supporting mature, female learners, as can be seen in Table 1, to engage in programmes of study that will facilitate career progression particularly in the maritime sector.

Table 1. Mature Learners at MLA College<sup>1</sup>

All Programmes	2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
	UG	PG	UG	PG	UG	PG	UG	PG	UG	PG
Mature M	123	198	96	166	162	192	170	220	197	239
Mature F	27	23	39	21	58	29	74	37	60	45
Total Live Registrations	150	221	135	187	220	221	244	257	257	284

## 3. Access, success, and progression of under-represented groups at MLA College

### Mature learners

3.1 The majority of our students are mature (as defined by the Office for Students), mainly employed and seeking to study part time by distance learning. Our intake is also made up of UK and international students, reflecting the extensive diversity of the sectors we support. Employability measures are less critical for MLA College students than for the majority of undergraduates studying elsewhere in higher education. Location of employment ranges from local, national and international so our ability to impact at a regional level is limited, but nevertheless we are mindful of ensuring we collaborate with support mechanisms for the local economy. Our mature entrants’ figures (i.e. 100%) are above the sector average for mature students in the areas of access, success, non-continuation and attainment. Access to all of our programmes is based on qualifications and/or recognition of prior learning alongside work experience. This approach supports career progression opportunities for individuals and provides the sectors we work with access to training and development for their workforce. Student success is achieved through use of the Total Learning Package which has been developed by MLA to provide an inclusive, easy to navigate package, which provides all the teaching and learning materials necessary to participate in termly degree level study. This is complemented by the strong personal tutorial system in place for all the programmes.

3.2 MLA College is able to provide flexibility for students to ‘interrupt’ their studies, usually for reasons related to work commitments, with a return to the relevant programme at a future date within the agreed

<sup>1</sup> Total physical registrations for UG and PG modules within an academic year (inc any multiple enrolments by the same student in the same AY). Numbers do not show live students in an AY snapshot, and preceding AY’s do not include students who straddle AY’s.

registration period. MLA College's students' success rates are considered high and are normally in the region of 96% in the achievement of stated aims with very low non continuation rates of about 4%. The numbers undertaking undergraduate study are also mature learners already in the workplace. MLA College's overall figures for success outlined above include the undergraduate provision.

## **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups**

3.3 Due to the large international intake, and the nature of marine and maritime occupations, there tends to be a culturally diverse workforce which is reflected in our student population. MLA College continues to recognise that more needs to be done to support diversity in the workplace, and this can be supported through a more focussed approach to ensuring individuals are encouraged to apply for, and successfully complete, relevant higher education qualifications. MLA College has adopted a robust follow up process for all enquiries which allows for a more personalised approach to its admissions systems.

## **Disabled students Access, success and progression**

3.4 The working environment in the marine and maritime sectors tends to make it more challenging for physically disabled individuals and there are lower than average numbers of physically disabled individuals entering those professions. Students are asked to disclose any disability on registering with MLA College. Additional learning needs are dealt with through the tutorial system. For on-site residential practical sessions, undertaken as part of the blended learning programmes, all reasonable adjustments are made to ensure participation can be achieved by those with physical disabilities. There are currently a very small number of students with declared disabilities. However, the strong tutorial system, along with the student experience team, and appropriate interventions, advice and guidance, ensures assistance is available for all students requiring additional learning support.

## **Care leavers Access, success, non-continuation and attainment**

3.5 Due to its provision, it is extremely rare for MLA College to attract students under 21 years old, and so has not previously had care leavers commence its programmes.

## **Intersections of disadvantage**

3.6 Our mature learners do not reflect the more typical mature students evidenced, for example, across our validating partner, the University of Plymouth. Our focus continues to be on increasing the number of mature, female learners as articulated in 3.7.

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

3.7 Gender disparity has been a feature of the marine and maritime sectors' occupations. This is reflected in the historically low uptake of marine and maritime provision by women across the higher education sector. This has now begun to shift, and in partnership with external bodies MLA College is seeking to redress the balance to ensure fairness, equality and inclusion. MLA College is a member of The Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA) and the Maritime 2050's People Route Map makes specific reference to "expanding the talent pool" to address diversity.

3.8 Financial factors continue to be an additional barrier based on our experiences with women early in the application stage who request information on financial support. To address any financial barriers to study, MLA College offers a bursary scheme to all qualifying undergraduate and postgraduate applicants and introduced a Women in Maritime Scholarship in 2020/21 academic year.

## 4. Ambition and Strategy for 2024

4.1 The focus for MLA has recently been on its application for Degree Awarding Powers. MLA College aims to continue developing strategies and policies that mean our courses are accessible to all, and that students are supported to have the best chance of success in achieving their desired career goals. MLA College seeks to ensure that all of our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 are aligned in addition to addressing access and participation activities. This will apply equally to our students and to the development of our people.

4.2 We have reviewed and identified those benchmarks and targets against which to assess our performance in the area of access and participation. MLA College is committed, as undergraduate provision grows, to contributing to OfS's aims to improve accessibility for all under-represented groups in higher education. Our target groups for 2024 (and beyond) are based on our current assessment of performance across the under-represented groups that have been identified in our student population.

### 4.3 Strategic objectives for MLA College in 2024:

- **Maintain our high percentage of recruitment of mature learners onto our programmes**
- **Maintain/increase the percentage of applicants from female mature learners returning to education in line with the national objective for Women in Stem (i.e. 30% participation by 2024)**

We aim to increase the level of participation to 30% over the next 5 years (in line with the Women in STEM target). This will continue to be a challenging target given the nature of the marine and maritime sectors. We will work, through relevant Professional Bodies, collaboratively with the Women in Maritime Taskforce and other partners to increase the level of female both in the maritime workforce and onto our programmes to support career progression. The programme creates long term back to work opportunities to candidates after any length career break, bringing back much needed and lost skills to the maritime industry.

- **Review and improve our internal progression from undergraduate to postgraduate study to increase the number of students progressing into postgraduate programmes**

Students are able to progress from our undergraduate provision to postgraduate study on the successful achievement of the former. We aim to gain understanding from our alumni about potential barriers to progression to postgraduate study. Progress to date includes financial support for graduates into postgraduate study.

- **Maintain/increase the bursaries and scholarships available to learners**

To address financial barriers to study, MLA College offers a bursary scheme for undergraduate (and postgraduate applicants) as well as fee waivers in some cases.

## 5. Collaboration

5.1 MLA College's provision is focussed on learners wishing to secure careers and career progression within the sustainability, maritime and marine sectors. MLA College works collaboratively with other higher education providers who deliver maritime provision as well as specific bodies with responsibility for ensuring education and training is developed as a direct response to sector requirements. MLA College has now developed provision in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (at undergraduate and postgraduate levels) and is now a strategic partner of UNITAR and the academic partner of UNITAR's CICAL City of London.

5.2 Future programme developments may provide opportunities for MLA College to focus on different target groups and engage in other initiatives with a focus on access and participation. MLA College is committed to equality of opportunity for all.

## 6. Investment

6.1 MLA College will continue to invest in access, success and progression, for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as provide financial support through bursaries which are provided on criteria approved by the Academic Board and Senior Management Team. The criteria applied will be reviewed annually alongside the monitoring of uptake against the stated investment. The research and evaluation project (identifying barriers to progression from undergraduate to postgraduate provision for our mature learners) will provide insights into our current and past students' barriers to further learning and facilitate increased progression into postgraduate study.

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

7.1 MLA College's commitment to equality and diversity, alongside access and participation for under-represented groups, will be monitored at the programme and MLA College level by Programme Managers, the Vice-Rector (Academic Affairs), and the Vice-Rector (Professional Services), who carry responsibility for admissions strategies, teaching and learning strategies and the oversight of the tutorial system provided to students. Led by the Rector, the most senior executive academic of MLA College, our commitment and progress on access and participation will be reviewed and evaluated on a six-monthly basis by Academic Board with an annual report provided to the Board of Directors.

## 8. Provision of Information to Students

8.1 MLA College publishes information for students on its website, including its corporate documents, to make them more readily available to prospective students and enrolled students as well as external stakeholders. Information on fees and bursaries is made available online and during the application/re-enrolment. Further information is outlined for all students in the student handbook provided on enrolment.

8.2 In line with the Competition and Markets Authority guidance and our obligations as an OfS Registered HE Provider, MLA College is committed to publishing clear and accessible information about its fees and financial support for prospective and existing students. We provide this information in a range of formats, through recruitment publications and on the [MLA College website](#). MLA College also has a [Student Protection Plan](#) in place.

8.3 As part of the commitment to giving clarity to fees and funding information, we include a statement both in publications and on the website:

*"Please note that fees are reviewed on an annual basis. Fees and the conditions that apply to them shown on our website and other publications are correct at the time of going to print. Fees shown on the website are the most up to date. Continuing students may receive an annual increase in line with an appropriate inflationary measure (within the appropriate maximum fee cap)."*

8.4 Information regarding fees is also detailed in MLA College's offer letters for admissions, with applicants also being directed to MLA's website for the most up to date information.

## **9. Student Consultation and Student Representation**

9.1 Consultation with the students, in terms of securing feedback on strategy and policy development, is challenging as students are not physically present in a campus environment. Communication is reliant on other methods such as the on-line discussion forum. On occasions 'all student' on-line interaction is not always possible due to connectivity issues for individuals working offshore. MLA College has strengthened its mechanisms for securing student consultation through the setting up of an on-line 'student voice' via the discussion forum and is now developing a feedback mechanism for students from the various surveys that are being carried out at module and programme level. MLA College's on-line discussion forum is in place for all its students. MLA has student representation in place, supported by the Student Experience Team, with responsibility to communicate MLA College developments with the wider student body. This statement has been posted on the student forum and on the MLA College website.