

<Creative Academy>

<Access and Participation Policy>

Overview

An Access and Participation Plan (APP) is a mandatory strategic document for UK higher education providers, regulated by the Office for Students (OfS), outlining how they will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed, and progress in higher education, detailing ambitions, actions, targets, investment, and support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These plans cover the entire student lifecycle, from admissions to employment, focusing on improving outcomes for diverse students, including those from low socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic minorities, or with disabilities.

Key Components of an APP:

- Access: Steps to attract and admit more students from underrepresented groups.
- Success: Measures to support students during their studies, improving retention and attainment (getting good degrees).
- Progression: Strategies to help graduates move into highly skilled employment or further study.
- Financial Support: Details on bursaries, scholarships, and other financial aid.
- Targets & Investment: Specific goals for improvement and the funds allocated to achieve them.

Who Needs One?

- All higher education providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) in England that charge fees above a certain threshold.

Why They Matter:

- They ensure universities actively tackle barriers to equality, moving beyond just recruitment to focus on the whole student journey.
- They are reviewed and approved by the OfS and demonstrate a university's commitment to fair access and outcomes.

Whilst the Creative Academy do not officially require one, for good practice we still maintain a A&P plan to ensure the student experience is enhanced.

Context

Slough Borough Council (Creative Academy) publishes an access and participation policy/statement that is updated and republished on an annual basis. This document is to compliment the University of West London's access & participation policy. The Creative Academy access and participation policy has been developed in conjunction with the University of West London. The Creative Academy does not currently operate an access and participation agreement with any other bodies / organisations. The Creative Academy has an excellent track record of providing fair access to all of its programmes and is fully committed to ensure this continues to be underpinned with this policy. A copy of this policy will be made available for both prospective and current students on the website (Creative Academy). Students will be involved in updating this document to ensure we always represent their interests. We will always engage with the student body whether it's about fees or any potential changes that affects them.

Introduction

The Creative Academy is an initiative created in 2003 within Slough Borough Council as part of a 29 acre development project in the town centre called the 'Heart of Slough'. Since the Creative Academy opened its doors in 2003, more than 6000 people have taken part in some way. Between the years 2003 and 2007 the Creative Academy, with European Social Fund (ESF) funding, engaged with underrepresented people in the creative industries in dance, film, music, textiles and many other projects. Some of the access and participation targets that were met during this period include; increasing young white male participation in dance, Black Minority Ethnic participation in media and film and access for people with disabilities in the creative industries. It was the dissemination of this project that led to the Creative Academy choosing dance as its mainstreaming activity for its future.

In 2007 Slough Borough Council went through validation process through the Creative Academy for a Foundation Degree in Dance with the University of West London (formerly Thames Valley University) to meet local and national demand of a growing industry. In 2009, to complement the student journey and offer progression from level 5, the Creative Academy validated a level 6 qualification, BA (Hons) Top-Up Dance. In 2019 the programme was integrated into a 4 year programme BA (Hons) Dance with Foundation (level 3-6) and a new MA Dance (level 7). The reasoning behind the integration of the BA & foundation was to provide a new access entry point (level 3) to potential students who did not have the technical skills to be able to meet the entry criteria of level 4. The Creative Academy currently offers entry points at level 3, level 4, level 6 and level 7 to ensure we are accessible to as many potential students as possible.

The Creative Academy mission states the purpose of its programmes:

- Creative Academy aims to create confident, knowledgeable, technically proficient, versatile, strong, independent, passionate and talented performers/teachers, ready for the diverse dance industry by:
- Offering industry-relevant, affordable and innovative vocational dance training • Creating an inspirational and inclusive learning environment
- Ensuring students are treated as individuals
- Supporting students to reach their full potential

- Engaging high profile industry partners
- Being wholly committed to developing and maintaining the highest quality standards
- Creating employment and performance opportunities

The Creative Academy (with Slough Borough Council) has always placed access and participation to all of its programmes at the forefront of every decision made, whilst promoting opportunity for all by creating an inclusive environment. All programmes are underpinned with strong Slough Borough Council equal opportunities and equality policies and trained staff who understand the importance of these. The Creative Academy has today fostered all of its beliefs, objectives, outcomes and working methods for inclusion from the ESF funded programmes that made widening participation such a success into its current programme. The challenges facing the dance sector remain very real, such as attracting male students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds or recruiting those from Black Ethnic Minority (BME) backgrounds. This is mainly due to the fact that dance is generally considered a youthful career, female dominated and culturally stereotyped. For these reasons, the importance of having an all-inclusive environment, policies and procedures from applications, auditions, admissions, enrolment, registration, progression through to graduation is of the utmost importance to break these barriers.

Widening Participation

Widening Participation is a government-led initiative to increase the number of people from under-represented social groups who progress on to further and higher education (HE). At the Creative Academy, we provide opportunities and a specialist programme for people within these groups to experience Higher Education and access support that they may need to progress further.

By combining knowledge of higher education and career routes with insight into the industry gained from our network of employers, we aim to challenge preconceptions, raise attainment and help people develop the skills and knowledge needed to meet their aspirations.

The Creative Academy is fully committed to improving access, participation, success and progression for students of all backgrounds and is committed to regularly reviewing data to monitor progress, identifying areas for improvements and building on areas of success. Using this analysis, we are able to make clear decisions on how we can strengthen our position in the market as one of the top schools offering opportunity to study Higher Education in the Dance field to prospective students of all backgrounds regardless of disability, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality and other factors identified as barriers.

The Creative Academy will focus on three key themes;

- Access
- Success
- Progression

Promoting accessibility to all

Slough Borough Council's Creative Academy operates a fair and clear admissions policy with easy to understand entry criteria for its programme. Applications are welcomed from all prospective students from all backgrounds. The Creative Academy is committed to the promotion of equal opportunity, equality and inclusion to all aspects of the student lifecycle, from recruitment and admissions to achievement and graduation. We are able to do this by having clear guidelines, policies and regulations that are understood by all staff involved in the decision making process, whether it be assessing an application, being on a panel for an audition or teaching on a programme to ensure student progression. The Creative Academy will ensure that all staff promoting the programme do so in a fair, clear and inclusive way with a tailored approach for the specific audience. The Creative Academy will ensure all staff has the tools to deliver in an environment that is inclusive and supportive. The Creative Academy will ensure the sharing of good practices across all elements of all of its programmes.

Wider, fairer and transparent access into Higher Education

Slough Borough Council's Creative Academy will provide clear progression routes to Higher Education within all its programmes. To ensure the opportunity for participation and access from underrepresented groups remains open to all, the Creative Academy will diligently look at ways in which we can break barriers to promote inclusion. An example of this is to encourage participation and access with applicants from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds offering no fee auditions. We are committed to keeping our fees at the lowest entry point possible to keep Higher Education affordable for prospective students. The Creative Academy will ensure, through efficient financial management and working closely with Slough Borough Councils finance team, that programmes remain self sustaining and reinvestment into the programme is done within all procurement guidelines, enabling us to keep low course fees for entry and continuation. All monies are carried over each financial year and spent solely on the Higher Education programme; the Creative Academy has no shareholders so we are able to ensure a comprehensive programme with additional enhancements for the cycle of the student journey each academic year.

Increasing opportunity and access for underrepresented groups in Higher Education

Slough Borough Council's Creative Academy is committed to increasing student participation from all underrepresented groups into Higher Education, focusing particularly on those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, male students and those from Black Ethnic minority groups. These are considered the most underrepresented groups currently in the dance sector. To achieve this, the Creative Academy is working closely with schools, colleges and bodies such as Slough School Sports Network in promoting the opportunity to study at Higher Education level. The Creative Academy tutors are actively going into schools and colleges delivering speeches, workshops and promoting the advantages of studying Higher Education. To increase participation from underrepresented groups the Creative Academy developed a programme of activities (Creative Saturdays) including dance from ages 6 upwards in the local community, with the aspiration that these people will look to study at HE level. This is now a self sustaining programme run in partnership by 2 of our graduates called 'Prodigy' The make up of these participants range across males, BME, children and adults. Engaging with hard to reach groups remains a priority of Slough Borough Council and

by developing programmes at lower levels the hope is to open the gateway for people to study and work in the creative industries.

Providing information, support, advice and guidance to prospective students

The Creative Academy will continue to provide information, support, advice and guidance to prospective students whether they are offered a place at the institution or not. Through the admissions cycle, staff will ensure that students who meet the criteria are still informed about alternative options if it was felt that the individual's aspirations may be met better elsewhere. Prospective students who do not meet the criteria will receive help by identifying suitable alternative opportunities to access Higher Education. To ensure the participation and access for opportunity, entry with a relatively lower tariff point will remain; and the opportunity to a fair audition and interview. Where a prospective student may only just miss the criteria the Creative Academy will offer the individual a recall audition and interview with advice on what they need to work on. The Creative Academy is also looking at bursary schemes to offer to underrepresented students in the sector. The Creative Academy provides information and promotes the provision of its Higher Education opportunities to prospective students at open events, social media, exhibitions, meetings and the workplace, ensuring a wide audience.

Providing tools and support mechanisms to all students from all backgrounds

The Creative Academy is committed to improving the success rates of students by constantly monitoring and driving down the non-continuation rates and identifying trends and reasons why students do not complete. To do this, we are and will continue to work with students who are typically associated with higher levels of dropout and offer the right support. The Creative Academy have put a huge amount of emphasis on creating a wellbeing team after identifying a greater number of students are facing issues and challenges that affected their studies and, in the long run, could lead to non-continuation. The wellbeing team work with all students who are having issues, whether they are personal, academic or other.

The students that tend to engage in activity are; those who are from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, low achievers at F.E level due to dyslexia and all other types of student with disability / special educational needs. The wellbeing team provide information, advice, guidance and support on extra study skills, nutrition, counselling and all aspects to help a student become successful in their study. The Creative Academy has an extremely high ratio of tutors to students as commended by the Quality Assurance Agency. The students have tutors that will support them in several ways including individual tutorials, study skills sessions and extremely small size classes to ensure an excellent learning experience that is personalised and unique to each student.

Ensuring all students from all backgrounds achieve

The Creative Academy is committed to ensuring that all students from all backgrounds successfully complete their study to the highest level possible. In order to combat and bridge any attainment gaps from groups that are considered underrepresented (such as Black Minority ethnic and students with disabilities) the Creative Academy will continue to place a huge amount of emphasis on staff development to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to help students achieve. The staff with the right skill set will ensure that they are able to identify those with additional needs by mentoring and tutoring students and regularly

checking progress at personal tutor sessions. The academy will provide an inclusive environment to ensure that all students are treated equally without prejudice or discrimination. It is an expectation that every student has a Individual Learning Plan (ILP) which outlines their strengths and areas for development. Whilst the student should take ownership of these plans, staff will monitor, support and contribute suggestions to ensure the successful completion of studies.

Ensuring progression of our graduates and non-completion students

The Creative Academy will provide opportunities for progression for all students including those with barriers such as social, economic and emotional. The Creative Academy is fully committed to be engaged in ensuring its graduates' progress into graduate employment of a suitable level or enter further study at a suitable level such as level 7 for graduates of the BA (Hons) Dance with Foundation. The Creative Academy will monitor their graduates and ensure that all students from all backgrounds are achieving progression. To achieve this; the Creative Academy will continue to build on its existing networks with alumni through mechanisms such as closed groups in social media platforms. The Creative Academy will continue to develop relationships at both a local and regional scale with existing industry partners and engage with professionals in the dance sector, as well as look to developing new relationships to ensure exposure to employment opportunities, showcasing and networking opportunities are always available. The Creative Academy will ensure that it is fully aware of other Higher Education programmes at different institutes to ensure suitable opportunity for progression into further study for its graduates or non-completion students. One of the ways in which this will be achieved is to build relationships with other Higher Education providers.

What we can do with an increase in Student fees

The Creative Academy has always set student tuition fees at the lowest entry amount. All monies are either spent on the delivery of the course or re-invested back into the programme. There are no stakeholders or shareholders who take profits from any Creative Academy income. During the past few years we have identified gaps in the programme that need filling so we proposed an increase in tuition fees that we see as reasonable but more importantly necessary. By putting our output into a plan shows our commitment to deliver enhancements and give students peace of mind that they are getting best value for money, something that is key to the Creative Academy ethos.

The Creative Academy will charge an approved fee cap. There are no plans to ever apply for the maximum fee cap. To ensure compliance with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) any increases that the Creative Academy make will always be clear and visible with no hidden fees at research and application stage, the offer stage and enrolment stage. It's key to note that changes to any fees will never impact existing students.

An area of concern that has only increased during the pandemic is mental health and well being. There has been a steady increase over the years with more students being effected with issues that has placed a burden on the academy both financial and resources. The Creative Academy will develop a more tailored approach for well being and mental health to ensure students successfully complete. There is a plan to develop a full time post to reduce the risk of a student withdrawing. We will also develop a greater study skills offer (targeting

those students who need extra academic support) within the well being team to support the student journey. The Creative Academy will develop other aspects to include physical needs such as in house physio, barriers to learning physical injuries and mental health issues. A wider well being offer will also allow us to focus on Educational Individual Learning Plans for all students which especially helps those struggling to commit external issues.

The Creative Academy will build on its programme to enhance and compliment the current offer. There will be a widening of non modular classes to include some fitness, singing and acting for example. There will be the building of current partnership work with local schools offering workshops to give students the opportunity to work in a virtual learning environment.

The Creative Academy has identified some gaps in recruitment. There is a clear under representation in both male and male identifying people and those from BAME (Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic) backgrounds. There will be investment in programmes for people in the local area with particular emphasis on the underrepresented groups. A Saturday dance programme for boys, BAME and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds will be developed creating a hotbed of local learning for the underrepresented whether its socially or economically. Due to the nature of the career of a dancer older people are less likely to apply on a undergraduate programme however we hope to extend the post graduate offer to this underrepresented group. The Creative Academy extended offer will be created to open doors for people of all ages, gender and ethnicity. The current profile for Creative Academy is dominated by females and those from a white ethnicity group with an average entry profile of age 18 and exit 21/22 years of age.

The Creative Academy will develop a bursary scheme for male students as an incentive to study dance with a target to increase participation. This is not uncommon in other dance schools. We will also develop a 'Crisis loan emergency fund' for those who are from socio economically disadvantaged backgrounds to ease financial burdens in times of need.

The Creative Academy will focus on a tailored approach for pass and progression rates ensuring underachieving male students succeed in the same way females do. This will involve additional academic support. By developing a well being offer we will look to reduce risks on non submissions and withdrawals which are spread evenly based on ethnicity and gender proportion. Achievements for female students is higher than that of male students, however graduate outcome success is greater for the male graduates. Statistics for very small numbers is difficult, as a small number change will mean big changes in any percentage for any trends.

Summary

The Creative Academy has ambitions to work with more prospective students from underrepresented groups in higher education and the creative industries, specifically the dance sector. These include those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, Black Ethnic minority groups, male population, disabled students and those with learning difficulties. The Creative Academy commits to a fair policy that does not discriminate or exclude any groups that could be seen as being underrepresented, based on factors such as religion, beliefs, disability, gender, sexual orientation whether data exists or not for all groups. The Creative Academy aims to raise aspirations of students by offering opportunities in an inclusive and supported learning environment where the student voice is the focal point of

every decision. The Creative Academy will actively work and engage with students to ensure their views are input into any future changes in developing access and participation by operating in an open, honest and clear manner. The Creative Academy will provide students with educational opportunities that enable them to gain the technical ability, business skills and knowledge required for employment and/or further study through its innovative vocational programme, ensuring a professional delivery. The Creative Academy will provide students with the confidence in its provision of Higher Education. We will protect the interests of students studying on our programmes and continually make enhancements to meet the needs of employers.

Reviewing this statement or policy

This policy or statement will be annually reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose, up to date and effective. Student representation will be part of the process to ensure that it is fair and clear.

Any changes will be uploaded to the website, ensuring that it is accessible to prospective and current students. For general enquiries and/or complaints regarding this statement, please contact the Creative Academy using the information below:

- By phone - 01753 875400
- By email - info@creativeacademy.org
- By post - Creative Academy, 73a Stoke Poges Lane, Slough, Berkshire, SL1 3NY
- By website - using the contact us page on www.creativeacademy.ac.uk
- For complaints - please see the complaints process on the website