

## Widening Participation Statement

This statement applies to students enrolling on all programmes at the University of Essex Online.

### Vision and aims

Our strategic focus is on widening participation as the nature of our student demographic is mature, employed and seeking a flexible, vocational course to develop and enhance their careers. We provide the opportunity for students who have not been able to access higher education previously to re-enter education.

Our continuing vision is 'to become a world leader in online learning, making higher education accessible to anyone with the potential and drive to succeed.'

The pursuit of this vision is underpinned by our core values:

- Integrity - we hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards in everything we do.
- Knowledge - we offer expert resources to help you achieve your academic and career best.
- Support - we give you the tools you need to succeed.
- Opportunity - we open doors and broaden access to education.
- Results - we're dedicated to helping you achieve your goals – we succeed when you succeed.

In pursuit of our vision, our aims have always been to provide educational opportunities for those who may not have been able to access higher education (HE) at the traditional time or in a traditional way. We believe that the traditional academic calendar and course start dates act as a barrier to access for our target student group who mainly comprise of mature adults, balancing work and domestic commitments.

We are a reflective and learning organisation which, coupled with our core values, has guided our approach to higher education design, delivery and assessment. This value-led, reflective approach is evident in the innovative, student-centred features of our delivery, which allow us to better recognise and meet the needs of our target student group.

### Flexible, part-time provision

The majority of our students are mature adults, balancing work and domestic responsibilities. As a result, we have developed our academic delivery to be flexible and reflect the additional demands of employment, domestic and family commitments.

We ensure that all our provision is offered on a part-time modular basis incorporating support arrangements, including a Leave of Absence policy in addition to the traditional Intermission arrangements; this allows our students to take time out of their studies if needed to deal with life events that may affect their ability to engage with their studies.

An intuitive, easy to use Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) provides a user experience which makes it easy for students and academic staff to access course materials anywhere, anytime on a wide range of devices. The platform is tailored to each student profile allowing for the application of adaptive learning strategies and a personalised student experience.

Recent developments in learning and communications technology have also created opportunities to widen students' access to educational materials to students. The application of 'learning science' has led us to develop content delivery tools such as integrated lecturecasts which incorporate learning materials, formative assessment activities and link to electronic resources such as eBooks and asynchronous and synchronous communication activities.

This flexibility provides greater accessibility to higher education to those students who are in full time employment, have family or other dependents and therefore cannot take time out to attend a traditional face to face provision on campus.

We also offer regular start dates, meaning that students have the choice of when to commence their studies and can schedule their start date in line with employment or other commitments and time-frames.

## **Access and admissions**

We are committed to fair access and we encourage applications from all those who demonstrate the potential to succeed on our programmes.

We offer an open entry route for those applicants who may be entering HE for the first time or returning to education after a significant break and who may not have traditional entry qualifications. An assessment of work experience is undertaken by our academic team which informs a holistic assessment of each individual application.

All of our applicants are considered on their merits and experience regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, socio-economic background, family circumstances, religious or political beliefs, affiliations or other irrelevant distinctions.

## **21-Day Money Back Guarantee**

Applicants who are entering/re-entering education are often unsure about making a significant commitment in both time and finances. We therefore offer a unique 21-day money back guarantee. This allows applicants to experience the first three weeks of the programme and if they decide that they don't wish to continue they can withdraw and receive a full refund.

## **Tuition fees and financial support**

We recognise that the cost of HE is a prohibiting factor for many people. We offer multiple payment options to help students spread the cost of their course and manage their finances.

Our Admissions Advisers are also trained to assist applicants with their government-backed student loan applications for undergraduate or postgraduate programmes, if applicable.

We also offer a range of financial support including scholarships, bursaries and a hardship fund.

## **Student support**

We are mindful that students experience many challenges when studying online and we have invested heavily in our Student Support team and resources to provide a range of services to help students overcome any difficulties that they may face.

Students enrolling on our programmes are assigned a dedicated Student Adviser who will, wherever possible remain with them throughout their studies. The Student Adviser is able to get to know the student and become familiar with their situation so that they can offer the most relevant and effective advice and guidance to help them gain the most from their studies.

We believe that building one-to-one relationships with students in order to gain a good understanding of their individual challenges and study patterns is essential for retention and student success. This enables us to initiate early interventions should grades or attendance decline.

## **Learning and Development**

We offer learning and development support to all students, and in particular, to those who are entering HE for the first time or returning after a significant break, examples include:

- Access to a VLE which is user friendly.
- Access to a Welcome Week and Induction led by the Student Adviser
- Access to study skills resources and materials in the form of the Student and Tutor
- Academic Resources (Study Skills Hub) page of the VLE, supporting the transition to studying higher education.
- Access to a Study Skills Manager/Coordinator to provide formative feedback on study skills.

## Partnership

We are an affiliate college of the University of Essex, and as such our curriculum is informed by their research-intensive and research-led approach to education.

All of our programmes are designed to challenge and stretch our students. KOL has a robust system of programme validation and review overseen by the University of Essex which ensures that they stretch students and utilise relevant external reference points including QAA subject benchmarks, PSRB and industry competency indicators as well as input from our own academic and subject matter experts to ensure students develop the skills and knowledge required for success in their chosen field.

To suit our target market of mature working adults, we have made it a strategic objective for students to be taught by well prepared and motivated tutors who are experts in their academic or professional/vocational field. Our tutors are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds, but all possess a unique mix of academic expertise blended with practical industrial or professional experience. As a result, tutors are able to provide students with concrete, practical applications and examples to contextualise and illuminate their teaching.

The demographic profile of our learners is atypical in the Higher Education sector and presents significant challenges particularly around retention and progression into highly skilled employment. Despite these challenges, we are committed to providing an outstanding student experience underpinned by highly motivated subject experts and the application of cutting-edge instructional design and learning technology.

We recognise the challenges faced by our students and engage with them to customise and enhance their learning. We believe our approach to and support for teaching excellence in its widest sense enables us to provide a truly transformational learning experience for our students.