

## **ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION STATEMENT 2021-2022**

### **Introduction**

The Birmingham Christian College was founded as the Birmingham Bible Institute, by Presbyterian minister Henry Brash Bonsall, at premises in Pakenham Road, Edgbaston in 1953 where staff and students from different Bible believing backgrounds lived together as part of an extended Christian family.

The College moved into the Selly Oak area of Birmingham in 2000. It re-branded itself as Birmingham Christian College and became a formal member of the Selly Oak Federation, poised to engage with a changing world and changing missions context in Europe. In 2006, it moved to the Crowther Hall campus, a purpose built missionary training centre previously used by the Church Mission Society (CMS) until 2004.

Newman University validates Birmingham Christian College's degree programme. Their mission is to make high quality education accessible to all who are able to benefit from it and to deliver research and scholarship that has a positive impact on society. Their students become independent thinkers with ambition, empathy, and a lifelong love for learning.

Birmingham Christian College is an approved NCFE Investing in Quality (IIQ) centre. NCFE is an awarding organisation recognised by the qualification regulators for England (Ofqual), Wales (Qualification Wales) and Northern Ireland (CCEA Regulation).

The College is also accredited by Accreditation Service for International Colleges (ASIC) an independent body providing accreditation services for independent, further, and higher education colleges in the UK. ASIC accreditation helps students and parents make a more informed choice and will also help a school, college, university, training provider or distance education provider, demonstrate to the international student body that they are a high-quality institution.

Enrolment for undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses validated by the University of Wales ceased in 2010 due to the University of Wales no longer offering validation services. However, the establishment of a strong missional partnership with The Church of Pentecost in 2012 allowed BCC to revamp, upgrade and modernise its buildings and facilities to recreate the Christian environment that it has been noted for over many years. BCC is currently undergoing validation process for its MA programmes and hopes to offer accredited postgraduate courses again in the near future.

BCC was and remains an independent, interdenominational evangelical training college that aims to help students from all backgrounds respond effectively to the call of God in a Christian environment that students since the beginning in 1953 have noted as one of the main benefits of college life. It also offers ministerial training for pastors and lay leaders of The Church of Pentecost across the whole of Europe and the middle East.

Today, the focus has widened considerably, and whilst many students still enter the Church of Pentecost as full time ministers, or Layleaders, others go on to a wide range of careers following

graduation. Such careers include teaching, counselling, public service, business, and commerce and third sector charitable work.

As a church denomination which operates throughout the whole of the UK and globally, the Church of Pentecost engages with people of all ethnic backgrounds, gender, age and socio-economic categories. Many of our churches have people from over 40 different nationalities in their congregation.

The Church of Pentecost is a worldwide, non-profit-making Pentecostal church with its headquarters in Accra, Ghana. It exists to bring all people everywhere to the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the gospel, the planting of churches and the equipping of believers for every God-glorifying service. It demonstrates the love of God through the provision of social services in partnership with governments, communities, and other like-minded organisations. The Birmingham Christian College is currently a subsidiary of The Church of Pentecost. The College provides training for their leaders and lay leaders in their European and the Middle East Churches.

The Birmingham Christian College also seeks to influence society, culture and the local community through its programmes and activities, with particular focus on serving young people, disadvantaged people, and people who have suffered life controlling problems such as drug addiction and alcoholism.

As a result, The Birmingham Christian College has a strong track record in offering higher education pathways to a diverse range of people, with a particular focus on helping those who may have struggled with education in the past or who may not qualify to study at many other institutions. This is particularly relevant to mature students who we successfully attract to study at BCC, often based on their desire to serve in Christian ministry and mission.

### **The areas we are seeking to address**

The Birmingham Christian College does not offer what could be described as “high tariff” higher education provision, and already draws its students from a wide range of backgrounds. For example, analysis of data from the official government statistics indicates that the 21st Century Western world has become a new mission field. 39% of the population in Britain claim to have ‘no religion’. Most European nations are multi-faith and Christian minority. World religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism are growing rapidly in the West. UK Christian membership dropped from 71% of the population in 2001 to 59% of the population in 2011 (YouGov UK Stats 2011). Of the 59% only 7% claim to attend church every week.

We believe that as a provider of higher education we are strong in providing such education to the following groups of students:

- Students from family backgrounds with lower average incomes.
- Mature students who have had limited benefit from educational opportunities in the past.
- Students who have previously suffered from addictions and other lifestyle challenges
- Female students, who regularly make up 50% or more of our student intake

Currently, we have several students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. We provide additional support where required to such students with the aim of helping them thrive in the BAME

community. We wish to welcome students from a wide variety of backgrounds and our data indicates that we currently have a lower ratio of students from the majority ethnic backgrounds, and a lower ratio of students with physical disabilities, than might be expected, and we would like in particular to address these areas.

Our goal is to make the training that we offer, which has the degree programme at its centre, available and accessible to a widening range of students. A significant proportion of our students come to us without formal academic qualifications, and many are unlikely, otherwise, to access HE. Given the range of backgrounds from which our students are drawn, and the high proportion of successful outcomes, we believe that our goal is largely being fulfilled. We will, nevertheless, continue to work hard to increase access and improve our provision.

## **Our ambitions and strategy**

### **Our overall ambition**

The college's overall ambition is in its "Quadrilaterals of Four pillars":

- Ministerial formation and lay-leadership training for the CoP in Europe and the Middle-East
- Further and higher education in theology, missions and Christian ministries for the general public
- Research Hub and facilities for projects on reverse mission, new Christian expressions
- Accommodation for small group conferences, retreats, meetings, worship services, long and short-term residential lettings

### Increase students numbers

- Increase undergraduate student numbers
- Start Postgraduate programme
- To increase overall student numbers in line with BCC Strategic Plan 2022-2027, particularly students who are eligible for student finance.
- To continue to attract a high rate of students from ethnic minorities and, if possible, to increase the rate.
- To increase Access for students with a known disability.
- To maintain Access rates for mature students.

### Develop infrastructure

- To procure / implement a new Student Information System that will record Access, Success and Progression
- data for all students including those from under-represented groups.
- To implement processes that will enable BCC to analyse Access, Success and Progression data and to respond accordingly to the findings; this, for all students but particularly those from under-represented groups including care leavers, students from low participation neighbourhoods and low-income households.
- To implement processes that will enable BCC to analyse Access, Success and Progression for underrepresented groups; this, in the context of analysing intersectional characteristics.

- To develop an Equality & Diversity Strategy that provides the framework for an inclusive and open institution that is accessible to all students and particularly those from under-represented groups; this will include the development of a policy to facilitate equality impact assessments.
- To create a suite of initiatives that will specifically address the needs of students from under-represented groups and support them through the Access, Success and Progression stages of the student life cycle.

#### Partner for success

- To partner with Newman University to develop a collaborative MA programme in both Theological studies and Christian value-based programme for both public and the private sector leaderships that will equip students to lead business organisations with integrity.
- To develop a stakeholder engagement strategy which incorporates BCC's ambitions for church partnership, facilitates the provision of Access, Success and Progression opportunities for students (particularly work placements) and provides a framework for BCC to raise attainment in schools and colleges through the development, delivery and achievement of outcomes-based targets to support Access, Success and Progression.

#### Consult, review, evaluate and revise

- To revise this Access and Participation statement considering an evaluation of the activities undertaken and the new data available through the Student Information System. The revision of this Access & Participation statement will include a comprehensive consultation exercise that will be broad ranging and will include representations from faculty, administrative staff, stakeholders, partners, The Church of Pentecost and the BCC Student representative Council as well as formal BCC Committees including the Academic Board and Academic Affairs Committee.

As a higher education provider of an international Christian church which embraces diversity, we very much want the student population of Birmingham Christian College to reflect the diversity we see across the church network.

The college has a relatively small intake, and so small changes in numbers to particular groups of students can alter percentage figures disproportionately.

We have a bespoke programme to equip the next generation spiritually and intellectually. We have also identified the need to develop relevant training approaches that is suitable for the postmodern secular societies in the West. We also aim to develop training programmes for Ministers and laity to be equipped to teach the same old truth (the gospel) efficiently and relevantly in a contemporary secular society.

The College will develop a special programme to equip ministers and leadership with relevant (diverse) skills and knowledge sets to face the current challenges of Relativism, secularism, materialism and African propheticism that challenge the church's future in the West.

### **The particular groups of students we plan to work with**

The Church of Pentecost has several larger churches in UK cities, and the ethnic diversity of most of those churches is significant, often with over 40 nationalities and ethnic backgrounds represented in each church.

The college demographics do not necessarily reflect the ethnic diversity of our church network as we believe it should, so it is a target for us to increase the ethnic diversity of students studying at BCC, especially from inner city areas.

Secondly, whilst BCC has many students who study with us have not associated disabilities with academic learning, we have however put in place facilities and action to address physically disabled students who may be joining us in the future as we open our doors to students with diverse kind of disabilities. Whilst this may reflect difficulties caused by our geographic location, we would nevertheless like to increase our numbers of physically disabled students and are prepared to make the appropriate adjustments as necessary to accommodate this.

We have in recent years seen an increase in students with mental health issues and have increased our support for those students through our pastoral care and support system including counselling service. Whilst we cannot actively target such a group as they do not present in the manner of other health issues, we are nevertheless keen to develop our capability in supporting mental health as part of our disability strategy.

### **Who else we will work with to improve access and participation**

As a relatively niche provider of higher education, the majority of our students are drawn from the world of evangelical Christianity. However at least 70% of our students, in most years, are drawn from our own Partner organisation, The Church of Pentecost where we have strong connections. We therefore plan to liaise more closely with the leaders of our inner-city churches in particular, with the aim of increasing ethnic diversity by attracting a greater number of students from their churches with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

We plan to adapt the delivery of our Level 4 modules and make them available to the wider public as short-courses', in which visitors sit in lectures alongside our undergraduate students. These short courses are not validated, but they introduce a wider audience to the possibility of engaging in academic learning, and so, again help to widen access and participation.

Widening access involves, too, offering appropriate student support, in order to secure progression and successful completion of their programme of study. Students receive pastoral support from the Pastoral Team (headed up by the College Dean), through mentoring groups led by members of staff, and through the general availability of members of faculty and staff. Academic support takes the form of study skills sessions, substantial help from the Research hub lead and open-door access to the academic team. We will seek to work with students to resolve issues that may arise with their course and offer a range of options, which may include changing the mode of learning, to enable them to complete their academic programme.

### **How we are involving students in developing our approach to access and participation**

Existing students are actively involved in the college decision making processes through the Student Representative Council, and the range of committees on which student council representatives sit. In this area, we encourage students to become involved in the process of improving access and participation through the staff-student liaison committee and through student community reps.

We also plan to operate a student introduction reward system whereby existing students are invited to recommend friends and contacts to study at BCC. Students receive a financial incentive through a fees discount if they make such introductions, and this helps students engage in the process of student recruitment.

### **Our activities and support for students**

The Birmingham Christian College has a passion to see every student thrive – academically, socially, spiritually and emotionally. It takes great care to provide the individual level of support which each student needs, and as a small college we are able to get to know each student personally. This means that arrangements can be put in place to support students in a variety of ways as follows:

#### **Academic Support**

**Formative assessments** – Some students, especially those who are mature and/or have not studied for some time are naturally nervous of undertaking the academic rigours of a BA (Hons) or Masters degree. We are able to support students in the early stages of their course by providing coaching on assessments and allowing a range of practice opportunities including study skills.

**Study skills** – Academic processes such as referencing and footnoting amongst others, are new to many students and we offer help through additional non assessed workshops in how to study at degree level. Combined with the formative assessments above, this helps prepare students for success on the course, particularly those who have previously had limited academic opportunities. This is supported by a range of study aids on our student virtual learning environment platform, which students can self-select as required, and which includes links to the support available from the [Newman University](#), our validating university partner.

**English Language test** – All students are required to hold a grade C (now G4) pass at GCSE English or equivalent, in order to enter a course. This academic requirement is designed to ensure that students possess sufficient writing skills to be able to communicate their points in degree level submissions. However, many mature applicants, particularly those who have come from African background who do not have such a qualification. We are currently putting arrangement in place a support system to help students with their English Language at the college, and if they are unable to pass, we are often able to offer a deferred place for the following year subject to them sitting passing English GCSE or equivalent access course in the interim.

**NCFE accredited course pathway** – The Church of Pentecost and BCC offer the [Certificate in Biblical Studies](#), an NCFE accredited course of 6 modules which sits alongside the degree programme. Many people take this course who already have a degree and are seeking to enter Christian ministry. However the course is available on a modular basis for students who wish to study without academic pressures, and it can be a helpful pathway for students who have not studied for some time, prior to applying for a full degree programme.

## **Pastoral Support**

**Personal tutor** – All students are allocated a tutor who they meet with on a regular basis. As a small college, we are able to get to know every student individually. As a result, we are able to identify a student's individual needs, and look to put in place a care plan to provide appropriate support if necessary. Different students have different needs ranging from physical health issues, mental health issues, and disabilities (either educational or physical) through to financial challenges, difficulties with studies, and family problems. Our aim is to help each student thrive and overcome their challenges, and so help them with both their studies and overall lifestyle.

**Dean of Academic Studies** – Our Dean heads up our pastoral support, as an extension to the personal tutor system. Students are able to book appointments with the Dean to discuss particularly challenging matters and, the Dean has a range of tools at his disposal to support students with particular concerns or issues.

**Counselling provision** – The Birmingham Christian College also has access to a trained counsellor who provides sessions for students at the college's expense when referrals are made by the Dean. The Counsellor is able to help students with a wide range of issues including certain aspects of mental health, and will if required make referrals to other healthcare professionals.

## **Community & Lifestyle Support**

**Disabled facilities** – Birmingham Christian College welcomes people with disabilities, learning difficulties and/or learning support needs. Our Policy for Equal Opportunities makes sure that all learners have the same rights. The Management is responsible for supporting disabled learners. We have a range of ramps and lifts to help students with mobility issues access the site. Our current accommodation is not suitable for those with mobility problems, however we would help to arrange accommodation elsewhere and to provide transportation to the college for any of our students with mobility problems. It is their support and they will be involved in regular discussions to talk about their needed support. Students can ask for changes to be made to their support at any time. At the beginning of the year they will be asked to agree a Support Plan. This explains the types of support we will give them, the levels of that support and over what period.

Additional Support could include:

- Adjustments by their subject tutors
- In or out of class support by a member of the staff
- Provision of assistive equipment and technology (subject to availability)
- Help in carrying equipment/material they need for study
- Communication support
- Note-taking support
- Reader support

**Family accommodation** – Birmingham Christian College welcomes mature students, and we recognise that such students are often married and have children. We have six 2 bedroom family flats on site of

various sizes which are prioritised for married couples and families; these facilities are offered on a self-catering basis.

We also offer our context based mode of study which allows students to continue to live at home and travel to BCC for lectures five or six times a year. This option allows spouses and children to remain in situ and prevents family disruption whilst still allowing students to study on a full time basis.

**Employment opportunities** – BCC offers a range of part time employment to students in areas such as catering, house-keeping, estates and retail. Whilst employment is not guaranteed, it can provide useful extra income for students requiring additional finance.

First, we offer an Undergraduate programme, together with key formational elements, in order to provide theological and pastoral training for those who are seeking to serve churches and communities. Second, we also aim to offer post-graduate programmes that offer continuing professional development to those already in pastoral ministry or serving in related professions. Our Programme Specifications, in accordance with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, include benchmarks relating to careers and employability, and we take our commitment to deliver on those benchmarks very seriously.

We also aim to prepare our students for future employment by including key formational elements, which are built into our provision, and enrich the academic programmes. So, for example, all of the teaching staff are involved, practically, in local churches, and they ensure that, while the degree programme is marked by academic excellence, it is also grounded in practical relevance and application. Classroom discussions, as well as assignments, will frequently include how particular topics may be related to contemporary life. Students are also given experience of potential employment through weekend Church Placements.

**Summer on site accommodation** – BCC is able to offer continued on site accommodation (subject to availability) for students who require it as an added support in their student journey.

**DSA student support** – As a small institution with limited financial resources (as a private college we are not in receipt of any Government funding to support students requiring learning support assistance) we are not able to provide every type of learning support assistance e.g. we do not have wet room facilities or support workers, signers etc. on site. However, if a student has funding through a Disabled Students' Allowance it may be possible for such assistance to be provided and we will discuss this with them.

**Extracurricular activities** – the activities provided by BCC are wide ranging. These include individual tutor time, Christian devotions, student away days, a lecturer open door policy and Student Union organised events such as barbecues, quiz nights, film nights, and college parties. This is in addition to the University of Birmingham's sports facilities as "community" members that BCC students may sign up for. There is a charge for membership, but it is competitive compared to other health and sports clubs in Birmingham.

### **Access, success and progression**

The following is an overview of current initiatives / arrangements that support BCC's diverse student body and enable them to achieve their goals. We believe that these initiatives contribute to the



priorities OfS has identified for access and participation and evidence that BCC has paid due regard to equality and diversity in designing this Access & Participation Plan.

### **Access**

- The BCC Administrative & Admissions Team provide dedicated support to students applying to study in the college.
- Facilitating communications with all students, the Administrative & Admissions Team provide information, advice and guidance through accessible channels (face-to-face, telephone, email and online) to particularly meet the needs of disadvantaged and hard-to-reach students and especially those transitioning to higher education for the first time or entering higher education following a significant break.
- BCC has extremely flexible tariff requirements that enable mature students to access higher education provision.
- Academic credit is available to acknowledge prior learning and experience in the absence of formal
- Qualifications, especially those already in full time ministry or laydership.
- BCC recognises prior learning and not just for A level or International Baccalaureate outcomes.
- Each applicant has the opportunity to be interviewed by a faculty member, prior to admittance to BCC; this, to facilitate a discussion regarding the intended programme of study but also to discuss study support needs as well as capacity and affordability for study.
- Students who are not able to attend full-time and on-campus are offered accessible learning through parttime, distance learning, blended and on-line provision at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

### **Success**

Study skills lectures are available for all level 4 students; this, to particularly support mature students returning to study after a long break.

Tutor Groups provide academic and pastoral support and encouragement to BCC students.

Tutor Groups are facilitated by faculty members and other stakeholders with the purpose of achieving the following:

- Increased confidence within students to fulfil BCC's academic standards.
- An early warning, in terms of student engagement, to support student retention rates.
- A decrease in the number of extension requests and failed assessments.
- Better integration between theological study and life formation and development.
- Better prepared and equipped students, for life beyond BCC, through vocational formation input.
- Deeper relational connectedness both during study at BCC and post-BCC.
- 1:1 student support (emotional, pastoral and spiritual) is delivered by the Pastoral Support Team whose aim is to help and support students through their time at BCC. In addition to offering caring, listening and prayerful ears, the Pastoral Support Team is able to sign-post students to other support offered by other institutions.
- An open-door policy offered by each faculty member is a valuable support mechanism for all students.
- Opportunities for prayer, worship and fellowship offer spiritual nurture and support.

- BCC prides itself on its ability to deliver small class sizes that are particularly beneficial for students with additional needs.
- Community life within a small College provides natural networks of support, where lifelong friendships are formed; these form the basis for peer to peer learning and support.
- The College's ethos of seeking to be a learning community that is Christ centred, bible based, spirit led and mission focused to promote the understanding and practice of the Christian faith creates an environment in which both formal and informal accountability and support structures can flourish.

### **Progression**

- A range of initiatives are delivered by BCC academic Team which equip students to integrate their academic learning and faith journey into meaningful preparation for life, work and Christian service beyond BCC. Initiatives include Church placement and formation opportunities through practical placements at levels 4, 5 and 6 and participation in BCC's 'Personal & Professional development (PPD) programme which is rolled out in levels 4, 5 and 6. The 'PPD' programme comprises:
  - Stage 1 – Envision / Get Involved – Level 4: A self-evaluation to enable students to understand their calling and articulate their expectations; the opportunity to develop a Personal Development Portfolio of evidence is also made available (to inform and enhance a CV).
  - Stage 2 – Engage / Get Planning – Level 5: This includes an opportunity to revisit the self-evaluation developed in Level 4 (with a Tutor) and to attend vocational workshops including 'know yourself', 'employer expectations and how your theology degree meets them', 'CV building and resources', 'interview techniques' and 'social media presence'. Also offered in this stage is an opportunity to assess 'gifts and skills', attend vocational development sessions, engage with Alumnus mentors and access online employability support provided by BCC's validating partner Newman University.
  - Stage 3 – Equip / Get Employed – Level 6: Again, this includes an opportunity to revisit the self-evaluation developed in Level 5 (with a Tutor) and to access live job advertisements through the final semester. In addition, students are offered employability workshops as well as 1:1 vocational development sessions and online employability support as described above.
- Opportunities to take part in community outreach teams are made available; these, for the purpose of developing knowledge, experience, skills and attributes as well as to work in partnership with local organisations.

### **Financial support**

As a private college we do not provide Scholarship and bursaries to potential students (scholarships) and current students (bursaries). There is currently no hardship fund for the purpose of supporting students with emergency payments for unexpected costs. However, BCC is fortunate to be supported by The Church of Pentecost that offer financial support to most of its students. Complementing this funding are BCC resources, generated from training and programmes fees.

### **Provision of information to students**

Information will be provided to prospective students, on the financial support available and on the fees for the duration of their course, as follows:

- a. By email, as part of the application and admissions process (by the Engagement Team).
- b. On BCC's website: <https://bccoll.uk/>
- c. In the student prospectus for 2020-2021 (the prospectus for 2019-2020 having already been published).
- d. At Open Days and other face-to-face recruitment events.
- e. During a 1:1 meeting between a member of the Admissions Team and a prospective student.

Information will be provided to current students, on the financial support available and on the fees for the duration of their course, as follows:

- a. By email, to all students, at the beginning of the next academic year.
- b. On BCC's website (as above).
- c. On the BCC intranet for students.
- d. In the next version of BCC's publication which provides key information to students.
- e. During a 1:1 meeting between a member of the Admission Team and a prospective student.

BCC's Access and Participation Plan will be published on BCC's website (as above).

### **Monitoring**

BCC is required to ensure that it is taking reasonable steps to comply with the provisions of this Access & Participation Plan. In general terms monitoring of BCC's performance is achieved through a hierarchical committee structure which comprises:

Level 1: Board of Trustees.

Level 2:

- Academic Affairs Committee - reports to the Board of Trustees on the present state and future of the education mission of BCC.
- Finance & Business Operations Committee - has delegated authority from the Board of Trustees to make decisions on matters relating to the finance and operations of BCC.

Level 3:

- Senior Management Team – provides leadership and management to BCC and is the collective decision-making body of the College.

Level 4:

- Academic Board – the senior academic committee responsible to the Senior Management Team for matters relating to the delivery of BCC's academic mission.
- Organisational Management Group – a joint faculty and staff committee which facilitates problem solving, decision making and communications across the institution.
- Student Committee – whose members are elected (by students) to be responsible for championing issues relating to the welfare of students. To encourage diversity, the Student Committee comprises a male Vice-President and female Vice-President as well as resident, non-resident, disability and mature student representatives of the student body.

- Estates Committee.
- Pastoral Care Committee - organises, monitors and delivers pastoral care to BCC students.

Level 5:

- Scholarships & Bursaries Committee.
- Library Committee.
- Programme Boards.
- Research Committee.
- Research Ethics Committee.
- Accreditation of Prior Learning Committee.

Specific monitoring and evaluation processes are in place to ensure that students deliver the objectives and targets in this Access & Participation Plan:

- This Access & Participation Plan has been approved by the Academic Board and the Executive Team and has been put before the Academic Affairs Committee.
- Regular monitoring of progress is undertaken by the Academic Secretary and Director of Trust Administration who reports the findings to the Academic Board, the Executive Team and the Academic Affairs Committee.
- An evaluation of the activities will be undertaken by the Director of Trust Administration which findings will be reported to the Academic Board, the Executive Team and the Academic Affairs Committee.
- The Academic Board and Executive Team collaborate to identify actions necessary to respond to the issues identified through the monitoring activities (including non-achievement of the targets set); these actions are notified to the Academic Affairs Committee.
- The Academic Affairs Committee reports to the Board of Trustees which body is independently able to engage with monitoring performance against the provisions of the Access & Participation Plan.
- The Board of Trustees raises any issues of concern directly with the Senior Management Team which then reports back to the Academic Board and the Academic Affairs Committee.