

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION STATEMENT 2024-2025

Introduction

The Birmingham Christian College (BCC) was founded as Birmingham Bible Institute until it re-branded itself as Birmingham Christian College when it became a formal member of the Selly Oak Colleges Federation. BCC moved to the Crowther Hall campus; a purpose-built missionary training centre previously used by the Church Mission Society (CMS).

Birmingham Newman University validates Birmingham Christian College's degree programmes. The University's mission is to make high quality education accessible to all who can 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.

Also, 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 and around the world. 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.

BCC remains an independent, interdenominational training college that aims to help students from all backgrounds to understand their lives as God's calling to Christian service in the world and since 1953 students have benefited from the theological education of the college. Whilst many past students still enter the full-time Christian ministry as pastors, or Lay leaders, others go on to a wide range of careers such as teaching, counselling, public service, business, and commerce and third sector charitable work.

BCC also partners with The Church of Pentecost (CoP), a global Pentecostal denomination, to offer ministerial training for its ministers in the UK and across the European and the middle East region. The CoP operates worldwide as a non-profit-making Christian organisation headquartered 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. As a church, CoP serves people of all ethnic backgrounds, gender, age, and socio-economic categories. Many of our churches have people from over 14 different nationalities in their congregation. BCC is a subsidiary of The Church of Pentecost-UK.

BCC 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 college has a strong track record in offering higher education pathways to a diverse range of people. BCC focuses particularly on helping those who may have struggled with education in the past or who did not have opportunity for higher education in the past or may not qualify to study at many other institutions. Mature students are attracted 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 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 wide 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”:

- Increase the provision of Further and higher education in theology, missions and Christian ministries for the general public
- Develop a Research Hub to undertake projects on religion and social integration, reverse mission, religion and health and new Christian expressions
- Ministerial formation and lay-leadership training for the CoP in Europe and the Middle-East
- Provide accommodation for small group conferences, retreats, meetings, worship services, long and short-term residential lettings

Increase student numbers

- Increase undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers
- Diversify our programmes
- 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 of majority ethnic intake.
- To increase Access for students with a known disability.
- To maintain Access rates for mature students.

Develop infrastructure

- To implement processes that will enable BCC to analyse Access, Success and Progression for underrepresented groups for 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 Birmingham Newman University to develop a collaborative PhD programme in both Theological studies and Christian value-based programme for both public and the private sector research.
- 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 within our community 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 based on 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 and wide ranging consultation exercise that 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 Admissions Committee.

As a higher education provider which embraces diversity, we want the student population of Birmingham Christian College to reflect the diversity we see across the society generally but specifically across the churches.

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

We have a bespoke programme to equip the next generation of young people with spiritual and intellectual resources for service in the world. We have also identified the need to develop relevant training approaches that is suitable for the postmodern secular societies in the West. We aim to develop training programmes for Ministers and laity to be equipped with the right values and principles for efficient and relevant service in a contemporary secular society. The College will continue to develop special inclusive programmes to equip ministers and leadership with relevant (diverse) skills and knowledge sets to face the current challenges of exclusive relativism, secularism and materialism that challenge the church and the world.

The particular groups of students we plan to work with

The college demographics do not necessarily reflect the ethnic diversity of the UK society and church network yet 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. The Church of Pentecost has several larger churches in UK cities, and the ethnic diversity of most of those churches is significant. In some congregations, an average of over 14 nationalities and ethnic backgrounds are represented.

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. Our doors are open 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.

In recent years, we have 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. We have recruited a professional counselling and psychotherapist to improve our care in this area of need and we are 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, most of our students are drawn from Christian communities. However, in most years, at least, 70% of our students come from our Partner organisation, The Church of Pentecost where we have strong connections. We therefore plan to liaise more closely with other leaders of inner-city churches, with the aim of increasing ethnic diversity.

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 university 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 also involves offering appropriate student support, 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 team leader and an 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 representatives.

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 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 support students in the early stages of their course by providing coaching on assessments and allowing a range of practice opportunities.

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 Birmingham [Newman University](#), our validating university partner.

English Language test – All students are required to hold a grade C pass at GCSE English or equivalent (or IELTS 5.5-6.5), 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 some 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 and passing English at GCSE level or equivalent access course in the interim.

Non accredited course pathway – The Church of Pentecost and BCC offers some courses that are non-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 try 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.

Director of studies & Academic Dean – Our Academic Dean heads up our pastoral support, as an extension to the personal tutor system. Students can 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 or to signpost them to relevant teammates.

Counselling provision – The Birmingham Christian College has a trained counsellor on our team, a member of BACP and BPS who provides sessions for students at the college's expense when referrals are made by the Dean. The Counsellor can help students with a wide range of issues including certain aspects of mental health and if required, would 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. Support is arranged depending on the student's individual needs. It is their support, and they will be involved in regular discussions to talk about their needs. 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 some of those students are often married and have children. We have six 2-bedroom family flats of various sizes on the campus for which married couples with children are prioritised. 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, housekeeping, 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 within our theological and pastoral training for those who are seeking to serve churches and communities. Second, we also 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 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 Placements in churches and relevant work settings.

Summer on site accommodation – BCC can 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) and thus, are unable to provide every type of learning support assistance. For instance, 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 and college worship. 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 heath 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 statement.

Access

- The BCC Administrative & Admissions Team provide dedicated support to students applying to study at 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 lay leadership.
- BCC recognises prior learning and not just for A level or International Baccalaureate outcomes.
- Each applicant can be interviewed by a faculty member, prior to admittance to BCC. This is an opportunity given to discuss the student's 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 levels.

Success

Study skills lectures are available for all level 4 students. This is to support mature students, particularly, those who are 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 for seeking to be a learning community that is Christ centred, bible based, spirit led, and mission focused, promotes an understanding and practice of the Christian faith and creates an environment in which both formal and informal accountability and support structures 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 neither provide Scholarship and bursaries to potential students nor current students. 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-UK 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 Admission Team).
- b. On BCC's website: <https://bccoll.ac.uk/>
- c. In the student prospectus published on the website.
- 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 statement 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 statement. 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 Board - the senior academic committee responsible to the Senior Leadership Team for matters relating to the delivery of BCC's academic mission reports to the Board of Trustees on the present state and future of the education mission of BCC.
- Finance & Remuneration 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 Leadership Team – provides leadership and management to BCC and is the collective decision-making body of the College.

Level 4:

- 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 males and females as well as resident, non-resident, disability and mature student representatives of the student body.

- 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 statement:

- This Access & Participation statement has been approved by the Academic Board and the Executive Team and has been put before the Board of Trustees.
- Regular monitoring of progress is undertaken by the Academic Registrar and Director of Trust Administration who reports the findings to the Academic Board, the Executive Team and the Trustees.
- An evaluation of the activities will be undertaken by the Registrar which findings will be reported to the Academic Board, the Executive Team and the Trustees.
- 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 Board of Trustees.
- The Academic Board reports to the Board of Trustees which body is independently able to engage with monitoring performance against the provisions of the Access & Participation statement.
- The Board of Trustees raises any issues of concern directly with the Senior Leadership Team which then reports back to the Academic Board and the Board of Trustees.