

Opening-up Access to North West Universities and Colleges

Universities and colleges in the North West are at the forefront of the campaign to widen access to Higher Education, according to a new report from the North West Universities Association and Higher Education North West.

All of the region's 15 universities and HE colleges are running special projects and initiatives to increase the take-up of higher education places from under-represented groups, such as pupils from less well off neighbourhoods and those with special needs.

Collectively, the region's Higher Education Institutions outperform all other regions bar one in their efforts at widening participation. As a result, a growing number of the region's 450,000 HE students represent the first generation from their families to study at university or college.

The wide range of imaginative "access" schemes are detailed in the report "Reaching out to the Region" that is published today. The University of Central Lancashire features in several sections of the report, having made significant impact on the region in terms of its size – 25,000 students and 3,000 staff with consequent spending power employed on its campuses at Preston, and Cumbria, and the purchasing power for resources to service the needs of a dynamic University.

In addition to this the University of Central Lancashire has several major projects that have impacted on the region:

- The Harris Knowledge Park in Fulwood has the backing of Preston Borough Council and private sector sponsors that include BT, HSBC, BNFL and the Prince's Trust, to provide opportunities not only for students and staff but for SMEs by encouraging start-up companies and business incubation units. Support for new companies comes through the University and BNFL Enterprise Ltd as The Harris Knowledge Fund designed to support companies needing £15,000 to £25,000. The Harris Knowledge Park also houses the Lancashire Centre for Excellence for hi-tech skills training. This is a partnership between the University, 12 further education colleges, and British Aerospace, BNFL Enterprise plc, Lancashire County Council and the Engineering Partnership of Lancashire.
- The University of Central Lancashire has made a major contribution to the participation of students with disabilities in higher education with a dedicated support officer and the Specialised Learning Resource Centre which provides transcription services, readers, note-takers, language tutors for deaf and dyslexic students, educational psychologists and specialized library equipment.

- The University has also developed a one-stop-shop for business to streamline business enquiries by using a dedicated call-service.
- The Preston Sports Arena is a £12 million development part-funded by the National Lottery. One of the largest complexes in the region and is available to students, staff and the local community.
- The Ethnicity and Health Unit have played an important role in the provision of drug education programmes to minority ethnic communities. The Unit also focuses on urban regeneration and social exclusion specially in relation to the minority communities that are affected by urban decay.

Copies of the report and further details about the various Widening Participation projects at the region's colleges and universities are available from: **North West Universities Association**, East Annexe, Warrington Town Hall WA1 1UH
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