



**MLA  
COLLEGE**

## **ACCESS & PARTICIPATION STATEMENT 2020-21**

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Registered address: 1 Birdcage Walk, London, SW1H 9JJ, UK.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

MLA College is a young, ambitious organisation with a commitment to the highest-quality education and professional development. Putting students first, MLA College has a particular focus on distance learning and blended learning, and strives to continue to develop its expertise in the use of technology to enhance learning. MLA College has a significant advantage in its educational reach in marine and maritime, as the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST), the international professional body and learned society for all marine professionals, is one of its shareholders. Founded in 1889, IMarEST is the largest marine organisation of its kind with a worldwide membership based in over 120 countries. It is a registered charity and provides a route to professional registration for Chartered Marine Engineers, Chartered Marine Scientists and Chartered Marine Educators. Additionally, the strong links with the IMarEST enable MLA College to inform and be informed by national and international developments and initiatives in the marine sector, and engage directly in UK Government strategies relating to the marine sector, such as “Maritime 2050”<sup>1</sup>.

MLA College is also part of the BAU Global network, one of the largest providers of education in Europe. The BAU Global network has 6 universities, 3 language schools and 16 liaison offices worldwide. It aspires to achieve global education for a sustainable future and the following statement sets out its aspirations for an accessible, inclusive and quality experience for students from across the world. “Global education involves the establishment and implementation of an accessible, inclusive and quality education system for all citizens of the world. At the heart of global education lies empowering young people and assisting them to take responsibility to participate in shaping a better future for the world through the promotion and internalization of positive values. Global education emphasizes the unity and interdependence of human society, developing a sense of self and appreciation of cultural diversity, affirmation of social justice and human rights, and inspiring actions for peace and partnership for a sustainable future across the globe”<sup>2</sup>.

The College sees equality and diversity for its students as a college wide strategic objective with our primary purpose to create educational opportunities and social mobility for all who seek to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. The current student population comprises 256 live students of which 85 students are studying at undergraduate level with 45 UK students (of whom only 5 are female). This Statement has therefore been developed proportionately in recognition that the undergraduate population is currently low (although expected to grow) whilst simultaneously illustrating MLA’s existing and growing commitment to widening access and participation across its undergraduate and postgraduate provision.

Whilst MLA College recognises that the majority of the higher education sector’s Access and Participation strategies and statements are focussed on widening access and participation to the larger undergraduate community, including national and local programmes for under 16s, MLA College’s provision is mainly postgraduate with a small number of students undertaking undergraduate provision and its access statement reflects that balance. The importance of widening access and participation for the under-represented target groups is well understood

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maritime-2050-navigating-the-future>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bauglobal.com/global-education-for-a-sustainable-future>

by the College and as provision develops it will seek to collaborate with external partners, as appropriate, to increase its intake from those groups.

MLA College's culture and ethos is focussed on ensuring all individuals, regardless of background, ethnicity and educational attainment, have the opportunity to access and participate in higher education and continuing professional development and benefit from that opportunity. The entire student journey is focussed, fit for purpose, regularly reviewed and with targeted interventions for individual learners as appropriate.

MLA College offers bursaries and fee waivers. Information is made available on the website and in correspondence with students. This information is now being included in a document entitled MLA College Bursaries which sets out the criteria for bursaries, the amount of a bursary and the period for which it will apply.

Student Success and progression is promoted through prompt and detailed formative and summative feedback on module tasks, assessed assignments, and through peer review. Academic performance is supported through our academic tutorial support and is monitored via both formal and informal feedback from programme participants alongside peer review, with necessary support and guidance be offered when required. Employability skills and 'transferable skills' demonstrate how undergraduate programmes (and postgraduate) enable students to acquire skills and knowledge that will assist them in their employment and career progression.

## **2. DATA ANALYSIS**

Data is currently collected at application and enrolment stages. This data is shared with the University of Plymouth and migrated to its student record system. This is populated with progression and attainment information. However, neither MLA College or the University of Plymouth have had had reporting requirements for the MLA College provision that mirror those required to identify specific target groups for widening access and participation. The limited data available to MLA from University of Plymouth sources is restricted in terms of recent data as illustrated in the figures below. MLA College is now actively working with colleagues from the University of Plymouth to ensure data capture and data reporting is given a higher priority. MLA College will be developing its own reporting capability through the introduction of a student record system during 2020/2021 academic year. This will ensure the College is able to report on the profile, access, success, non-continuation and attainment of its student body. The numbers studying on the undergraduate provision are small (80 in 2019/20 with 45 Home undergraduate students). However, we are able to provide some data (Figure 1) on student success and non-completions, mature learners and learners from low participation neighbourhoods which shows under-performance in our recruitment from POLAR4 quartiles 1 to 2 (Figure 2).

	2014/15		2015/16	
<b>Completed</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>93.9%</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>97.3%</b>
<b>Withdrawn</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.7%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Figure 1: Student success and non-completions**

POLAR Quintile	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17	
<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5.9%</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21.2%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24.2%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17.6%</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14.7%</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24.2%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>29.4%</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>36.4%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>36.4%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>32.4%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>		<b>33</b>		<b>34</b>	

**Figure 2: Recruitment from POLAR4**

### **3. ACCESS, SUCCESS AND PROGRESSION UNDER REPRESENTED GROUPS IN MLA COLLEGE'S STUDENT POPULATION**

#### **3.1 Mature learners**

Our knowledge of our existing student profile, with some support from data (as evidenced above) shows that our students are all mature (as defined by the Office for Students), mainly employed and seeking to study part time by distance and blended learning. Our intake is also made up of UK and international students reflecting the diversity of the maritime sector generally. The UK students are currently evidenced as being from POLAR4 quartiles 3 to 5 with some UK students in quartiles 1 and 2 which is an underrepresented group. Whilst qualifications on entry cannot be determined according to household income or socioeconomic status entrants' qualifications on entry range from none through to postgraduate. Employability measures are less critical for MLA College students than for the majority of undergraduate students studying in higher education. Location of employment also ranges from local, national and international so our ability to impact at a regional level is limited but nevertheless we are mindful of ensuring we collaborate in the future with support mechanisms for the local economy. Our mature entrants' figures (i.e. 100%) are above the sector average for mature students in the areas of access, success, non-continuation and attainment. Access to our undergraduate programmes is based on qualifications and/or recognition of prior learning alongside work experience. This approach supports career progression opportunities for individuals and provides the two sectors with access to training and development for their workforce. Student success is achieved through use of The Total Learning Package which has been developed by Marine Learning Alliance to provide an inclusive, easy to navigate package, which provides all the teaching and learning materials necessary to participate in up to 13 weeks of degree level study at a time. This is

complemented by the strong tutorial system in place for all the programmes. Non continuation rates are relatively low although interruption of study by students is a common feature of the undergraduate (and postgraduate) cohorts usually as a result of work commitments. Students are supported on returning to their studies and the attainment rates are relatively high at 96% in 2016/17. The provision currently, and going forward, is aimed at ensuring transferable skills are embedded in the curriculum.

MLA College is able to provide flexibility for students to 'interrupt' their studies usually for reasons related to work commitments and then return to the relevant programme at a future date within the agreed registration period. MLA College's students' success rates are considered high and are normally in the region of 96% in the achievement of stated aims with very low non continuation rates of about 4%. The numbers undertaking undergraduate study are also mature learners already in the work place. MLA College's overall figures for success outlined above include the undergraduate provision.

### **3.2 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups**

Due to the large international intake and the nature of marine and maritime occupations there tends to be a culturally diverse workforce which is reflected in our student population. It is recognised (through the Maritime 2050 strategy) that more needs to be done to support diversity in the workplace and this can be supported through a more focussed approach to ensuring individuals are encouraged to apply for and successfully complete relevant higher education qualifications.

### **3.3 Disabled students Access, success and progression**

The working environment in the Marine and Maritime Sectors tends to make it more challenging for physically disabled individuals and there are lower than average numbers of physically disabled individuals entering those professions. Students are asked to disclose any disability on registering with MLA College. Learning disabilities are dealt with through the tutorial system, for on-site residential practical sessions, undertaken as part of the blended learning programmes, all reasonable adjustments are made to ensure participation can be achieved by those with physical disabilities. There are currently no students with declared disabilities. However, the strong tutorial system, along with a student support officer and appropriate interventions, advice and guidance support all students requiring additional learning support.

### **3.4 Care leavers Access, success, non-continuation and attainment**

MLA College's undergraduate provision does not recruit from under 21 years old applicants to higher education as it mainly attracts working, mature students.

### **3.5 Intersections of disadvantage**

Our mature learners do not reflect the more typical mature students evidenced across our validating partner, the University of Plymouth. Our small undergraduate numbers identify learners from POLAR4 quartiles 1 to 2 who are mature as a group that requires further focus from us as a higher education provider.

### **3.6 Other groups who experience barriers in higher education**

Gender disparity has been a feature of the marine and maritime sectors' occupations. This is reflected in the historically low uptake of marine and maritime provision by women across

the higher education sector. This is beginning to shift and in partnership with external bodies MLA College is seeking to redress the balance to ensure fairness, equality and inclusion. For example, MLA College is a participant in the Women in STEM project for women returners and is involved in the Women in Maritime Taskforce through the representation of IMarEST on the taskforce. Maritime 2050's People Route Map makes specific reference to "expanding the talent pool" to address diversity and whilst MLA College's student population tends to be self-funded, with very little sponsorship from employers the limited data available indicates the already low participation rate of women in the sector and taking up education includes a small number are recruited from low participation neighbourhoods. Financial factors appear to be an additional barrier based on our experiences with women early in the application stage who request information on financial support. To address any financial barriers to study, MLA College offers a bursary scheme to all qualifying undergraduate and postgraduate applicants.

#### **4. MLA COLLEGE AMBITION AND STRATEGY FOR 2020**

MLA College aims to ensure and continue to develop strategies and policies that mean our courses are accessible to all and that students are supported to have the best chance of success in achieving their desired career goals. MLA College seeks to ensure that all of our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 are aligned in addition to addressing access and participation activities. This will apply equally to our students and to the development of our people.

we will seek to develop an informed set of benchmarks and targets against which to assess our performance. MLA College is committed, as undergraduate provision grows, to contributing to OfS's aims to improve accessibility for all under-represented groups in higher education. Our target groups for 2020 (and beyond) are based on our current assessment of performance across the under-represented groups that have been identified in our student population.

##### **4.1 Strategic objectives for MLA College in 2020:**

- **Maintain our 100% recruitment of mature learners onto our programmes**
- **Increase access to Higher Education from low participation neighbourhoods in POLAR4 Quintiles 1 to 2**

We will build on our current recruitment from the POLAR quintiles 2 and 3 through collaborative activity with other higher education partners and industry representatives.

- **Maintain/increase the percentage of applicants from low participation neighbourhoods and female mature learners returning to education in line with the national objective for Women in Stem (i.e. 30% participation by 2024)**

For 2018/19 the number of female mature learners from low participation neighbourhoods stood at 14% of our total student population. We aim to increase the level of

participation to 30% over the next 5 years (in line with the Women in STEM target)<sup>3</sup>. This will be a challenging target given the nature of the marine and maritime sectors with low levels of females in occupations associated with the marine and maritime sectors. We will work, through IMarEST, collaboratively with the Women in Maritime Taskforce to increase the level of female participation from low participation neighbourhoods, both in the workforce and on our programmes to support career progression. We will also engage with STEM Returners, a trading name of Marine People, who work directly with employers to welcome back career break engineers to education or employment. The programme creates long term back to work opportunities to candidates after any length career break, bringing back much needed and lost skills to the maritime industry. MLA College will also seek to develop and/or engage in STEM and Maritime specific interventions aimed at under 16-year olds (for example 'getkidsintosurvey'<sup>4</sup>)<sup>5</sup>.

- **Review and improve our internal progression from undergraduate to postgraduate study to increase the number of students progressing into postgraduate programmes**

Students are able to progress from our undergraduate provision to postgraduate study on the successful achievement of the former. We aiming to gain understanding from our alumni about potential barriers to progression to postgraduate study.

- **Maintain/increase the bursaries and scholarships available to learners**

To address financial barriers to study, MLA College offers a bursary scheme for undergraduate (and postgraduate applicants) as well as fee waivers in some cases.

## 5. COLLABORATION

MLA College's provision is focussed on learners wishing to secure careers and career progression within the maritime and marine sectors. The College works collaboratively with other higher education providers who deliver maritime provision as well as specific bodies with responsibility for ensuring education and training is developed as a direct response to sector requirements. The College is currently looking to develop undergraduate provision in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. MLA College is particularly interested in the establishment of the Maritime Skills Commission and will seek to actively engage with its developments going forward. The normal range of activities that focus on young undergraduates, to ensure equality of opportunity, widen access and participation, are not at this stage appropriate for the College but it is now researching how best to collaborate with initiatives that support young people's career choices including education routes. MLA has a strong relationship with its validating partner and with partners from specific initiatives (for example the STEM returners project and Women in Maritime) and will continue to strengthen and develop collaborations during 2020-2024 as part of its strategic development. Future programme developments may provide opportunities for MLA College to focus on different

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<sup>3</sup> In response to feedback from our student consultation

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.getkidsintosurvey.com>

<sup>5</sup> In response to feedback from our student consultation

target groups and engage in other initiatives with a focus on access and participation. MLA College is committed to equality of opportunity for all.

## **6. INVESTMENT**

MLA College will continue to invest in access, success and progression, for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. as well as provide financial support through bursaries which are provided on criteria approved by the Academic Board and Senior Management team. The criteria applied will be reviewed in 2020-21 academic year alongside the monitoring of uptake against the stated investment. The research and evaluation project (identifying barriers to progression from undergraduate to postgraduate provision for our mature learners) will provide insights into our current and past students' barriers to further learning and facilitate increased progression into postgraduate study.

## **7. MONITORING & EVALUATION**

MLA College's commitment to equality and diversity alongside access and participation for under-represented groups will be monitored at the programme and College level by Programme Managers, the Head of Academic Operations and the Head of Academic Quality and Standards who carry responsibility for admissions strategies, teaching and learning strategies and the oversight of the tutorial system provided to students. Led by the Rector, the most senior executive academic of MLA College, our commitment and progress on access and participation will be reviewed and evaluated on a six-monthly basis by Academic Board with an annual report provided to the Board of Directors.

## **8. PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO STUDENTS**

MLA College publishes information for students on its website and is in the process of including its corporate documents to make them more readily available to prospective students and enrolled students as well as external stakeholders. Information on fees and bursaries is made available on line and during the application/re-enrolment. Further information is outlined for all students in the student handbook provided on enrolment.

In line with the Competition and Markets Authority guidance and our obligations under the QAA Code of Practice, the College is committed to publishing clear and accessible information about its fees and financial support for prospective and existing students. We provide this information in a range of formats, through recruitment publications and on the website <https://www.mla-uk.com/course-prices-payments/tuition-fees>. MLA College has a Student Protection Plan in place which can be found at [https://www.mla-uk.com/images/PDF/MLA\\_Student\\_Protection\\_Plan.pdf](https://www.mla-uk.com/images/PDF/MLA_Student_Protection_Plan.pdf). As part of the commitment to giving clarity to fees and funding information, we will include a statement both in publications and on the website: 'Please note that fees are reviewed on an annual basis. Fees and the conditions that apply to them shown on our website and other publications are correct at the time of going to print. Fees shown on the website are the most up to date. Continuing students may receive an annual increase in line with an appropriate inflationary measure (within the appropriate maximum fee cap).' Information regarding fees is also detailed in the College's offer letters for admissions, with applicants also being directed to the College's website for the most up to date information. Our Bursaries Scheme is in draft form, subject to approval by Academic Board, the Senior Management Team and our Board of Directors. It

will be made available on the website and other publication including offer letters to students. Bursaries will be made available to: Students with incomes below £25,000 per annum in the following categories: Home students over 25 (7 bursaries) International students over 25 (3 bursaries) set at £500 per full time equivalent studying our undergraduate programmes. In addition, we will be offering bursaries of £500 (5 bursaries) to women over 25 whose home address is in an area of low participation or in an area identified as an area of deprivation (under the Index of Multiple Deprivation) or with an income under £25,000.

## **9. STUDENT CONSULTATION**

Consultation with the students in terms of securing feedback on strategy and policy development is challenging as students are not physically present in a campus environment. Communication is reliant on other methods such as the on line discussion forum. On occasions 'all student' on-line interaction is not always possible due to connectivity issues for individuals working off shore. MLA College has strengthened its mechanisms for securing student consultation through the setting up of an on line 'student voice' via the discussion forum and is now developing a feedback mechanism for students from the various surveys that are being carried out at module and programme level. MLA College's on line discussion forum is in place for all its students. MLA has a named student representative in place who has taken responsibility to communicate MLA College developments with the wider student body. This statement has been shared with the student representative and then posted on the student forum. The initial feedback via email and a telephone conversation has been very informative and where possible has been incorporated into this statement. The statement will be made available to all students via the website.

## Appendix 1: MLA College Higher Education Programmes 2018/2019

Programme Title	Level	Validating Partner	Mode of Study	Total No. of Students	
				2018	2019
<b>DipHE Hydrography for Professionals</b>	UG	University of Plymouth	PT	5	1
<b>BSc Maritime Operations</b>	UG	University of Plymouth	PT	8	5
<b>BSc (Hons) Sustainable Maritime Operations</b>	UG	University of Plymouth	PT	34	38
<b>MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations</b>	PG	University of Plymouth	PT	41	71
<b>PGCert Advanced Hydrography for Professionals</b>	PG	University of Plymouth	PT	14	10
<b>PG Dip Advanced Hydrography for Professionals</b>	PG	University of Plymouth	PT	20	6
<b>MSc Advanced Hydrography for Professionals (top-up)</b>	PG	University of Plymouth	PT	4	3
<b>MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations (top-up)</b>	PG	University of Plymouth	PT	1	8
<b>MSc Meteorology for Professionals</b>	PG	University of Plymouth	PT	-	-
<b>MSc Advanced Oceanography for Professionals</b>	PG	University of Plymouth	PT	1	-
<b>MSc Advanced Navigation for Professionals</b>	PG	University of Plymouth	PT	1	2
<b>MSc Engineering for Marine Professionals</b>	PG	University of Plymouth	PT	11	25