

Pioneering Access to University Education

Heriot-Watt University has been pioneering in access to education for 200 years. Today our commitment to opening up educational opportunity extends globally, as we offer students from under-represented and disadvantaged backgrounds access to our programmes of study.

This high-level strategy document sits firmly within the context of Strategy 2025's "Building Flourishing Communities" theme

"We will build flourishing communities by developing the wellbeing of our staff and students, promoting equality and diversity in all its forms across our locations, and embedding a culture of listening and engagement. Encouraging life-long learning and personal development will support our communities to achieve their ambitions and experience greater fulfilment."

It incorporates and supersedes our existing Widening Participation Strategy, and sets out strategic ambitions for access and inclusion across the following areas:

- Fostering student aspirations;
- Inclusive recruitment and admissions;
- Supporting student success.

The proposed Vision and Strategic Ambitions are intended to encompass access, inclusivity and participation in the widest possible sense, not being constrained by governmental definitions. This will allow the University to implement and deliver the strategy according to our ethos of "One Heriot-Watt" and focus, not merely on numbers, but on the success of all of our students, whatever pathway they choose to follow.

The development of our widening participation strategy was informed by Heriot-Watt's ethos to serve society by providing educational opportunities for students to develop their talents. This ethos provided the inspiration for the foundation of our institution in 1821, and remains a guiding principle for Heriot-Watt today in the Building Flourishing Communities theme in Strategy 2025. It is in this context that the enhanced Access and Inclusion Strategy now sits.

Our Vision and Approach

Our vision is to be an institution where students are inspired to enter university education, supported to succeed and are able to progress to fruitful destinations and positions of leadership; in essence helping our students to flourish and bring about change.

Our approach is to provide support across the whole student journey, from entry all the way through to graduation, and beyond into employment, enabling students to thrive, fulfil their potential and be truly transformative. Effective access and inclusion requires more than getting

students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups into the University; we need to provide support that ensures these students are able to progress through their studies and realise their career aspirations. We are working to provide a holistic, global, integrated approach tailored to fit the needs of the different countries in which we operate. This has to take into account, well-being and be mindful of the challenges our students are facing, making sure that our students get the most out of this experience.

Through our strategy we will strive to be a positive influence on the communities where we are based, shaping tomorrow together to deliver benefits for all of society.

The strategy has also been shaped by and is aligned with our institutional values to:

- Inspire curiosity to learn and find solutions that transform lives;
- Collaborate by working in partnership to shape the future whilst taking responsibility for our own actions;
- Belong to a diverse, inclusive and international community working together across boundaries and cultures;
- Celebrate excellence and take pride in the achievements of our students, staff and alumni.

This strategy represents Heriot-Watt's commitment to build on the successes of our current widening participation initiatives, and our ambition to work together with our students and staff and to collaborate with partners outside the university to identify and remove barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education. While this is an overarching strategy, it is important to recognise that in order to realise our ambitions and have impact, specific areas and initiatives will require specific and distinct action.

Our Global Ambitions

We have a distinctive global offering. We are able to provide opportunities for a truly global educational experience in a variety of ways. Our ambitions in this area therefore encompasses access, inclusivity and participation in the widest possible sense, unconstrained by governmental and regulatory definitions of student under-representation and disadvantage at any of our locations.

Our Aim

We aim to recruit talented students from all sections of society and to support each one to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations regardless of their social or educational background.

Our Three Global Access Ambitions

1. Fostering Student Aspirations

Our ambition: To foster the aspirations of under-represented groups and to promote higher education as a place where they can belong and succeed.

We will:

- Collaborate with regional schools, colleges, and industrial partners to deliver embedded and sustainable initiatives that inspire aspirations to higher education.
- Work together to develop and support flexible and accessible pathways into HE for under-represented groups, finding creative pathways into and through our curriculum that support and recognise the diversity of learner journeys.
- Coordinate the deployment of Heriot-Watt resources, including our staff and students, to maximise the impact and effectiveness of our initiatives to foster aspirations to higher education.
- Draw on evidence and research to understand barriers to higher education for specific under-represented groups and take institutional action, which is informed by successful practice across the sector, to remove these obstacles at Heriot-Watt. We will also work with other HE institutions to advocate for research-informed sector-wide initiatives to dismantle barriers to higher education.

2. Inclusive Recruitment and Admissions

Our ambition: To operate a system of recruitment and admissions that recognises student potential to succeed in HE in a fair, transparent and inclusive way.

We will:

- Assess applicants' talent and potential in the context of any social and educational disadvantages they may have experienced via a transparent, research-informed, and unbiased contextual admission process.
- Provide clear, accurate, and responsive advice and information to support applicants' decision making.
- Provide a range of personal and financial support measures to reduce the impact of external circumstances on a student with the potential to succeed at Heriot-Watt.
- Ensure that our recruitment and admissions processes support and enable under-represented groups to access HE through a variety of flexible educational pathways.

3. Supporting Student Success

Our ambition: To provide an inspiring learning experience and well co-ordinated, and easily accessible academic and personal support for all our students in order to enable each student to thrive and to fulfil their potential.

We will:

- Create, in partnership with our students and staff, an inclusive student experience and culture that inspires learning and fosters belonging and engagement in ways that encompass the diverse needs and backgrounds of our students.
- Provide effective and timely support so that all students can make a successful transition to higher education and can continue to develop the skills and attributes which will provide them with a personal framework for life-long learning and future employability.
- Work across the University to provide responsive and well-coordinated support for students who face personal crises and hardship during their studies.
- Continue to work to understand specific needs of our students and to respond to those needs by developing, with reference to research and successful practice in the sector, tailored academic and personal support which facilitates each student to realise their potential.

A New Programme

We wish to introduce a new Global Access and Inclusion Initiative programme (GAIN), where we will identify, and break down, barriers to access, participation and inclusion across all our campuses, moving beyond categories and additionally looking at the individuals.

We will aim to build community, emotional and academic resilience and belief in personal potential. This will link directly to our Pioneering Education strand of Strategy 2025, evidencing value through a series of milestones allowing us to demonstrate a sense of progression.

Next steps

Once the strategy has been endorsed, the following actions to develop the implementation and operational plans will be taken:

- Develop a clear suite of projects as part of the programme designed to deliver the ambitions and aims set out in the strategy. Project proposals should build on our current activities (see attached) and the development of new initiatives, incorporating methods for rigorous measurement and evaluation of outcomes.
- Ensure the projects align with Strategy 2025, and are developed through the planning process, to provide adequate structure/resource levels. Oversight and reporting for the project will sit within the annual Planning Round to provide sustainable support.
- Work together with our students and staff and collaborate with partners outside the university to provide sector-wide perspective.

- Secure more significant, strategic and longer-term philanthropic support through a range of fundraising activity that includes business as usual, as well as campaigns and appeals (1821 Appeal; Bicentennial Fundraising Campaign).
- Ensure publicity and an external profile.
- Use data more effectively to understand the progress of groups of students, as well as the individual, to support the decision-making process. This will also involve a quantitative assessment of past performance across all campuses for under-represented and disadvantaged groups, and evaluation of current initiatives with regards to impact as well as the evaluation of student assessment against benchmarks to ensure appropriate intervention if required.
- Undertake a quantitative assessment of past performance across all campuses for current initiatives, and with respect to sector positioning, to allow measurement and evaluation of success and provide a robust platform for future initiatives.