Access and Participation Statement

St Hild College

St Hild College is a growing (113 FTE, 185 headcount) theological college that trains Anglicans, Baptists and independent students for ordained and non-ordained ministries. It has a particular emphasis on innovation and widening access to theological education. This is in line with our belief that if the UK church is to flourish then it needs to diversify its pool of talent. This is especially the case in terms of students from economically deprived backgrounds and students with disabilities.

We are clear in our overall objective that we seek to be an institution which welcomes all, and which works hard to ensure the success of all our students. Our Equality and Diversity policy indicates the following as its primary aim:

> *SHC believes that Equality and Diversity permeates every aspect of its life. It actively promotes equality of opportunity regardless of such characteristics as age, disability, caring responsibilities, gender, gender identity, employment status, marital status, nationality, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief,[1] sexual orientation and socio-economic background.*

The policy goes on to note that 'SHC has an absolute commitment to the success and general welfare of all its students,' and we detail in that policy a series of procedures and practices to accomplish this.

Access:

Among our current students (2025-26) 57% identify as female, 41% identify as male and 2% prefer not to say. 1% identify as transgender. 85% of students identify as heterosexual, 3% as bisexual, 2% as Gay or Lesbian and 10% prefer not to say.

Compared to a typical large university, we have a distinctly older student population. We currently have one student aged 21 or under, 19% of students are aged 24-39, 63% of students are aged 40-65 and 18% are aged 66 or older.

We have a lower proportion of ethnic minority students, 4% of students are black African or British African, 2% are of mixed heritage, less than 1% are of Asian heritage. 80% of our students are of White British background, less than 2% of White Irish and 3% of other white backgrounds. 6% of students did not state their ethnic background. This is less ethnic diversity than would be expected given our region but does reflect the sponsorship patterns of the Church of England dioceses from whom St Hild draws a significant majority of its students.

[1] It further notes that 'In some instances, where a Genuine Occupational Requirement exists, SHC may seek to appoint teaching or other senior staff on the basis of their Christian affiliation.'

41% of our students have a Specific Learning Difficulty, Social/Communication condition, long term health issue or other disability. Less than 3% of our students have experience of being in care. 51% of our students had parents (or adoptive parents, carers etc) with a higher education qualification, 38% did not and 11% preferred not to say.

Our students have an unusually wide range of educational backgrounds prior to studying with us. 5% have GCSE equivalent levels as their highest level study prior to beginning study with us (for these students, as mentioned below, taster modules help make level 4 study accessible). 8% have A-level or equivalent. 15% have level 4 or 5 qualifications and 37% Bachelors or other level 6 qualification. 27% of students come to us with a Masters or other level 7 qualification and 5% with a doctoral level previous qualification. For the remaining 3% of students previous qualification levels are unknown. This reflects the vocational nature of our awards, with a very wide-ranging background wishing to enter into a variety of ministries in the church. The vocational and reflective nature of our modules helps to make the content relevant to students with very different educational backgrounds.

In light of the well-known challenges associated with measuring deprivation for mature students, we have not to date looked at POLAR or TUNDRA data for our student body.[2] In 2025-2026, St Hild had 185 students (headcount), the vast majority of whom were studying part-time (over 85%) with many undertaking graduate certificates or graduate diplomas alongside part-time training in a ministry context. We are also aware, anecdotally, that a relatively high proportion of our students are carers. In summary, the typical student at St Hild is a mature, part-time student with many other pressures upon them.

In light of this, the college has put in a range of measures to help support students who might otherwise not feel able to participate in higher education. For instance, we have intentionally constructed a timetable that enables students to study alongside caring and / or work responsibilities. For part-time students, much of our teaching takes place online, or on a single day of the week, or on evenings or weekends. We also have four centres (Sheffield, Mirfield, Lincoln and Online), each of which has a different pattern of teaching times, thus allowing students to choose a centre with a pattern which works around their caring and working responsibilities. For this reason, much of our teaching is also available digitally or in a hybrid format, and our library is largely digital which has proved a huge help for those students who cannot travel easily.

We have intentionally set our fees at a very low level (currently less than £5,000 per annum for FTE undergraduate), and we have been generous in awarding bursaries to students who require them. All of this is designed to support those students who either fear taking out a student loan and / or for whom financial burdens are currently preventing their participation in higher education.

In addition, we frequently offer prospective students ‘taster modules’ to further ease the transition to higher education. Many of our students have not been in a formal education setting for some years (often decades) and we have found the provision of taster modules to be a helpful stepping stone in giving confidence to such students. Such modules also enable us to provide places for students who for various reasons may not have achieved the standard entry criteria when they were at school. All students receive additional support from personal tutors and / or module tutors and particular attention is paid to those for whom English is a second language. Aware of the number of pressures our students are facing, we have also provided a chaplain at in-person study days so that

[2] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/19b24842-52a0-41d1-9be2-3286339f8fde/ofs-insight-brief-9-updated-10-may-2022.pdf

students have a source of support outside the official structures of the tutor system, as a person they can talk to.

In light of the above, our priorities for access are as follows:

- Improve our data collection, especially in respect to caring responsibilities
- A wider age range of full-time students especially those with disabilities and from socio-economically deprived areas. We expect that registration with the OfS and the provision of student loans will continue to help with this
- Aim to improve our recruitment of students from a wider variety of ethnic backgrounds. Projects seeking to serve the ministry needs of Pentecostal and black-majority churches which are underway may help with this, as well as serving our current GMH and UKME students well
- Continue with our successful recruitment of part-time, mature students and ensure we understand their more complex needs as we do so

Success

The College has an excellent continuation rate with just five students having to withdraw or suspend on personal grounds, and no student failing to continue on academic grounds during 25/26. This has, in part, been achieved by the additional support that we have offered to various students as their needs required.

For instance, alongside being able to access support from the DSA, we have also sourced funding from the Church of England to provide additional support for a number of students with disabilities. We have a disability lead staff member within the College, and an established, comprehensive policy for assisting students with disabilities. That policy signposts students to a range of support that is on offer, including financial support. We have seen that, with OfS registration and access to DSA funding, the level of support we can offer students with disabilities has begun to increase even further.

Our continuing priority is clearly to address more robustly the attainment gap for students with disabilities and SpLD. St Hild actively wants to attract more students who are disadvantaged in this way, and therefore eliminating (or near eliminating) the attainment gap for this cohort will no doubt help in that recruitment goal.

Progression

Our most recent graduate outcomes survey revealed the following:

1. 70% were in paid work or stipendiary ministry; 22% in voluntary work or in self-supporting ministry; 4% studying; 7% unpaid carers, 7% retired (these add up to more than 100% as more than one answer allowed). Crucially, no graduates indicated that they were unemployed and looking for work.
2. 61% had permanent contracts; 22% had fixed term contracts of more than 12 months;
3. 73% indicated that their St Hild qualification was formally required for their role;
4. And the following responses were given to these statements:
    a. My current role is what I hoped to do when I embarked on study (69% agree or strongly agree)
    b. I am using what I learned at St Hild in my current role (92% agree or strongly agree)
    c. St Hild prepared me adequately for my current role (76% agree or strongly agree)
    d. My current role is meaningful (100% agree or strongly agree)

Due to a low response rate, it was not possible to analyse these results in any meaningful way by ethnicity or disability. However, we were able to analyse them by gender. This revealed no significant patterns with the same proportion entering employment and showing satisfaction irrespective of gender.

Overall, we are satisfied with these results. The vast majority of graduates have gone on to become clergy or lay ministers of one kind or another throughout the UK, and for this reason we did not ask about salary levels as this is not relevant in that particular professional calling.

In the previous three years, graduates stating that they were adequately prepared for their current role risen from 70% in 2022, to 82% in 2023, and to 87% in 2024. This dropped slightly in 2025 to 76%. The proportion indicating that they are using what they learned at St Hild slightly decreased from 94% to 92%, so this will need attention to improve again.

As an institution, we recognise that we still have some way to go in both collecting and analysing in more detail the student data that will be relevant as we seek to widen and deepen our higher education provision. We believe we have continued to make a good start in this regard, and we are certainly committed to both attracting and supporting students from a wide range of backgrounds. It remains our ambition to be a place of higher education where all feel welcomed, and all can succeed.

Student Involvement

The draft access and participation plan was shared with five lead student representatives, and slight changes made as a result.

Adopted August 2026

To be reviewed August 2027