



University
of Exeter

Access and Participation Plan

2025/26 to 2028/29

University of Exeter: Access and Participation Plan 2025/6-28/9

1. Introduction and strategic aim

We believe that education is a fundamental enabler for social justice, improving life opportunities and outcomes for individuals, while benefiting wider society. This principle is at the forefront of the University's 2030 Strategy¹ which sets out our purpose to use the power of our education and research to create a greener, healthier, and socially just future.

To achieve this ambition, it is important that we embody the values we promote. Across our university community there is a strong call to action to be more diverse, more representative of wider society and more inclusive. In recent years we have spent considerable resources, energy and commitment to make this happen. We are becoming a more diverse educational community. Around a quarter of our 30,000 students are from overseas while typically 65% of home undergraduate students meet at least one criteria of under-representation in higher education². We have met or exceeded all our current access targets. We achieved Gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework 2023 with our support and outcomes for under-represented students cited as marks of quality in our submission. In the last five years we have won eight awards for social mobility and widening participation and have met national standards of excellence for the quality of our support for under-represented students³ and have achieved the Race Equality Charter Bronze.

Despite the distance travelled, we still have a long way to go in building a diverse and fully inclusive learning community. As a Russell Group institution ranked among the top 150 universities in the world, we require high academic standards. With just a fifth of A level students achieving AAB or above and academically able disadvantaged students likely to be under predicted, we are acutely aware that many of the students we seek to attract may not consider us an achievable option. Our proactive approach to contextual offers and extensive fair access provision are helping to remove some of these perceived barriers but we also need to tackle perceptions about fit and culture. The sector faces an ongoing challenge in improving access for those students who have experienced the biggest barriers to equal opportunity during their progress through the educational system, particularly linked to socio-economic disadvantage. The Education Policy Institute and Nuffield Foundation reported that of all the qualifications achieved between the end of secondary school and by the age of 19, the average disadvantaged student is the equivalent of three A level grades behind their non-disadvantaged peers. This gap increases to four grades for those experiencing prolonged disadvantage⁴. It is unsurprising the progression rate to high tariff universities of students eligible for free school meals is just 5.6% - this is a societal challenge which universities cannot address alone. We have embraced this challenge by working with partners across our region to support learners, address skills gaps, build qualification progression routes and stimulate commercial innovation to enable learners to build expertise and secure employment to address regional skills gaps.

Our rates of continuation, attainment and progression to graduate outcomes are high. We continue to work hard to eradicate gaps in outcomes between different student communities and are committed to make exciting and wholesale changes to the way in which we provide academic and student support and deliver our curriculum which we believe will improve outcomes further. There is one unifying theme which underpins all our strategic measures to support access, success and progression: inclusion. We will not attract students unless they feel welcome; we will not retain them unless they feel they belong; and they will not realise their potential, unless they are fully nurtured to do so. This Access and Participation Plan is situated within a broader institutional mission to achieve success for all our students and support equality, diversity and inclusion. We will continue to work in partnership with our students, particularly through our Student Unions to build an inclusive university community and to identify and co-create solutions to address barriers to equal opportunity. We are hugely grateful for the insights of our students and their engagement with this plan and

¹ [University of Exeter 2030 Strategy](#)

² Students meeting one or more of: TUNDRA quintile 1 or 2, IMD quintile 1 or 2, Bursary recipient, Mature, Disability, Ethnic minority, or 1st Generation to HE. Internal analysis 2024.

³ NEON University of the Year 2023; UK Social Mobility Awards University of the Year Silver 2023, Silver 2022, Highly Commended 2020; Leadership Silver 2023, Innovation Highly Commended 2020; Stand Alone Award 2022 and 2023; NNECL Quality Mark

⁴ [Tuckett S., Robinson, R., & Bunting, F. \(2021\). *Measuring the disadvantage gap in 16-19 education*. Education Policy Institute and Nuffield Foundation](#)

look forward to progressing this important work together to achieve success for all.

2. Risks to equal opportunity

A detailed analysis of available data [Annex A] has identified gaps in student outcomes between some groups of under-represented students and their peers at specific points in the student journey. Focusing on the largest and most sustained gaps indicates risks to equal opportunity as follows:

Access to university: compared to the sector average, Exeter has a smaller share of students who experience **socio-economic disadvantage**, are from an **ethnic minority**, are **mature** students or are from **areas of low participation in Higher Education**. We can see a strong correlation between representation and subject area with higher proportions of under-represented students in disciplines which are most strongly linked to vocational areas such as Law, Medicine, Nursing, Engineering and Computer Science or which provide paid alternative modes of study such as Degree Apprenticeships. Subjects offering transferrable skills, interdisciplinary subjects or those no longer taught at a compulsory level to GCSE in state schools such as Modern Languages, Classics, Art History and Liberal Arts are much less likely to receive applications from under-represented students. The two main reasons for failing to achieve an offer are: applying without the right subject requirements or with predicted grades which don't meet the required level. Lack of confidence in achieving our required grades is the main reason given by applicants across all courses for declining our offer. The proportion of students from ethnic minorities is steadily increasing and we work hard to encourage and support these students to apply. We are situated in a region however which only has an ethnic minority population of 9.3%, this affects both the make-up of our applicant pool and applicant decision-making. Many of these students also apply for highly competitive courses. Regional factors - particularly rurality and lack of school and course options - are also relevant, with the South West⁵ experiencing the highest attainment gaps for students on free school meals at primary and secondary level and the lowest progression rate to higher education in the country⁶.

Risks: Analysis indicates that students may not have equal opportunity to: develop the knowledge and skills required; receive information and guidance to make informed decisions; apply despite being qualified; or access sufficiently wide variety of course types. In addition, students may not have equal opportunity to access learning, extracurricular and employability opportunities because of the region in which they live and may not feel represented or included within the educational environment.

Continuing to study: generally our students experience high rates of continuation, with an average of 94% progressing into Year 2. Where gaps occur, they are most notable for students who are **socio-economically disadvantaged**, as well as those who are **mature**, or **care experienced** or **estranged**. These students, as well as those with a **mental health condition, social and communication or multiple disabilities** experience larger disparities in completing their studies in comparison with peers. We have seen gaps in continuation widen during the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis with students bearing the brunt of significant economic and societal pressures⁷. We can also see intersections between characteristics with many of our mature students likely to be from a low-income household and declaring a mental health condition. Meanwhile the largest completion gaps are experienced by young students with mental health conditions from areas of high deprivation which shows the strong correlation between financial pressures and wellbeing. The student loan and maintenance system has not kept pace with the rise in the cost of living over several years, contributing to stark choices for many students about whether they apply for higher education at all, let alone afford to continue.^{8,9} Feedback from our Student Unions and our annual survey of students with the lowest household incomes, show that many of our students need to undertake considerable part-time work to afford university affecting their ability to focus on their studies or engage with support. Meanwhile, the proportion of students declaring complex mental health issues and conditions such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder before registration, continues to steadily increase. We have also seen a steady increase in the number of students experiencing family breakdown and have been successful in supporting more care experienced students to join the

⁵ Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, and Dorset

⁶ [Sim, A-M. & Major, L. E. \(2022\) *Social Mobility in the South West: Levelling up through education*, Centre for Social Mobility, School of Education, University of Exeter](#)

⁷ ONS. (2024). [Coronavirus and the impact on students in higher education in England: September to December 2020](#)

⁸ ONS. (2023). [Student voices: experiences of the rising cost of living](#)

⁹ UCAS. (2023). [The influence of cost of living on student decision making](#)

university. Our growing number of students who have no family support are likely to face a range of financial and wellbeing challenges but also experience practical difficulties, for example, securing accommodation year-round without access to a guarantor¹⁰.

Risks: Analysis indicates that students may: experience increase in cost pressures affecting ability to continue; may not experience an environment which is conducive to good mental health; not receive sufficient personalised non-academic support or have sufficient access to extracurricular activities to achieve a positive outcome; not have equal opportunity to access limited resources related to higher education, such as suitable accommodation.

Awarding gaps: **Black and Asian students, mature students**, those with a **social or communication disability** and those who are **socio-economically disadvantaged** have the biggest gaps in the awarding of Good Honours degrees. The gap for mature students has declined slightly in the most recent years but is the largest Good Honours awarding gap. Our evidence shows that socio-economic circumstances, cost of living and parental/caring responsibilities are key factors. A lower proportion of Black, Asian and Other minority ethnic groups gain Good Honours in comparison with peers and a lower proportion of these groups and Mixed ethnic group students gain a First. These gaps have narrowed in recent years, and we perform better than the sector and comparably to similar institutions, however gaps are persistent particularly for Black ethnic groups who along with other ethnic minority groups are less likely to gain a First. We know from internal analysis that these gaps do not relate to incoming attainment levels. Sector studies such as the Closing the Gap¹¹ reports indicate a wide variety of factors may contribute, including lack of academic representation and sense of belonging.

Risks: Analysis indicates that there is cross-over between risks relevant to continuation and degree awards. Students may: experience increase in cost pressures affecting ability to get good grades; may not experience an environment which is conducive to good mental health; not receive sufficient personalised non-academic support or have sufficient access to extracurricular activities to achieve a positive outcome. In addition, students may not receive sufficient personalised academic support to achieve a positive outcome or may not feel represented or included within the educational environment.

Career progression: while progression to graduate level jobs or further study is generally high and broadly in line with similar institutions, where gaps do exist these are biggest for students with: a **social or communication or mental health disability or multiple disabilities**; those from areas with **low levels of higher participation**; or who are from **socio-economically disadvantaged** backgrounds. Sector research indicates a number of likely contributing factors including lack of opportunity to access paid work placements, CV-enhancing extra-curricular experiences such as study abroad, or career networks¹². Students with social or communication conditions may find traditional recruitment processes difficult to navigate. Meanwhile cost pressures and lack of access to advice and guidance may affect choices to progress to postgraduate study.

Risks: Analysis indicates that there is cross-over between risks relevant to progression, access and success. Students may: experience increase in cost pressures affecting ability to engage in extra-curricular activities to support employability and not experience an environment which is conducive to good mental health. In addition, students may not have equal opportunity to progress to an outcome they consider to be a positive reflection of their higher education experience or may not have equal opportunity to access learning, extracurricular and employability opportunities because of the region in which they live.

¹⁰ OfS Guidance. (2020). [Estranged students](#)

¹¹ UUK. (2023). [Closing the Gap: three years on](#)

¹² Divan, A., Pitts, C., Watkins, K., McBurney, S. J., Goodall, T., Koutsopoulou, Z. G., & Balfour, J. (2022). [Inequity in Work Placement Year opportunities and graduate employment outcomes: a data analytics approach. Journal of Further and Higher Education](#)

3. Objectives, targets and implementation framework

Objectives	Targets	Risks addressed
Implementation strategy 1: Taking a leadership role within the region and working in partnership to support attainment and access		
1: We will increase the proportion of under-represented students from the South West who progress to higher education by working in partnership within our region to improve the knowledge and skills required.	1: Provide knowledge and skills support to learners from at least 100 state schools and colleges within the South West each year to address risks to equal opportunity affecting progression to higher education 2: Increase the proportion of entrants from the South West who are from the areas of lowest progression to higher education [TUNDRA Q1] from 17.9% to 21% by 2028/29	Knowledge and skills; advice and guidance; regional factors.
Implementation strategy 2: Widening participation and inclusive recruitment activity to diversify our student body and support progression to HE		
2: We will increase the proportion of entrants to the University of Exeter who are currently least represented within our student population by addressing gaps in knowledge, skills, predicted grades and course choice.	3: Increase the proportion of entrants from the areas of highest deprivation [IMD Q1/2] from 18.8% to 22% by 28/29. 4: Increase the proportion of mature entrants from 8.3% to 11% by 28/29. 5: Increase the proportion of ethnic minority entrants from 14.3% to 18% by 28/29.	Knowledge and skills; advice and guidance; regional factors; propensity to apply despite qualified; course choice; feeling represented.
Implementation strategy 3: Alleviating non-academic barriers to learning, improving continuation and delivering positive student experience.		
3: We will improve the continuation rates for students experiencing gaps in outcomes, particularly those who are mature, from a low socio-economic background, are disabled or have a mental health condition by alleviating non-academic barriers to learning and providing positive student experience.	6: Improve the continuation rate for students from the areas of highest deprivation [IMD Q1/2] from 90.2% to 94% by 28/29 7: Improve the continuation rate for mature students from 84.6% to 89% by 28/29 8: Improve the continuation rate for students who are disabled or have a mental health condition from 91.2% to 94% by 28/29	Progress to positive outcomes; cost pressures; environment conducive to good mental health; personalised academic and non-academic support; limited resources.
Implementation strategy 4: Supporting students to fulfil their academic potential ensuring our portfolio is relevant to learners and adopts sector leading inclusive practice.		
4: We will narrow degree awarding gaps for students experiencing gaps in outcomes, particularly ethnic minority students and students who are mature or from a low socio-economic background, by providing personalised academic support and providing an inclusive educational environment.	9: Close the gap between Asian, Black and Other ethnic minority students, and white students awarded Good Honours to no more than 4ppt by 28/29. 10: Close the gap between mature and young students awarded Good Honours to no more than 7ppt by 28/29.	Progress to positive outcomes; cost pressures; environment conducive to good mental health; personalised academic non-academic and academic support; may not feel included.
Implementation strategy 5: Supporting students to fulfil their post-study ambitions to achieve social mobility.		
5: We will eliminate the graduate outcomes gaps where they occur, particularly for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and disabled students, so they achieve a graduate level job or further study at the same rate as their peers by 28/29.	11: Eliminate the gap between students from the most and least deprived areas [IMD Q1/2 v Q3-5] achieving a graduate-level job or further study within 18 months of graduation by 28/29 12: Eliminate the gap between disabled and non-disabled students achieving a graduate-level job or further study within 18 months of graduation by 28/29.	Progress to positive outcomes; cost pressures; environment conducive to good mental health; regional factors.

4. Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Scope and considerations

Our strategic measures have been developed in response to our analysis of our institutional and broader context and are informed by our own evaluation, academic research, identified best practice and sector guidance. A summary of the evidence base and rationale is included in Annex B. In addressing the very specific requirements laid out by the Office for Students, this plan does not cover all the measures we employ to close gaps in outcomes for students. The intervention strategies may include both meso and micro-level activities recognising that while sometimes the evidence suggests the need for targeted and specific actions, we are also seeking to embed long-lasting institutional change. Within this planning framework, the information we have provided is indicative, showing how the activities we are putting in place aim to achieve specific outcomes relating to our objectives. These may be subject to change as new evidence emerges affecting our approaches and priorities. If successful and affordable, we will aim to scale up impactful activities, while we may also seek to adapt or withdraw those where evaluation shows they are not effective. Not all interventions will be in place at the beginning of the plan period, as major programmes such as Curriculum for Change, still in development, will be phased in their delivery. We also acknowledge our ability to successfully implement the measures below are subject to external forces, such as policy changes affecting higher education, market conditions, central funding and external support for regional partnerships such as UniConnect. These variables affect the investment estimates provided, which should be regarded as indicative only.

Explanatory note on evaluation

As a minimum, all activities will be based on evidence and have a clear rationale, including a theory of change where this is practicable. Therefore, type 1 evaluation will be in place for all activities. Where we intend to collect empirical data (type 2) or causal data (type 3), this has been specified in the intervention strategy tables. There are multiple channels available for sharing evaluation findings with external audiences, including blogs, conferences, professional networks, formal publications and our website etc. We have created five categories of publication for the purpose of this plan to indicate our publishing intentions and where we see our findings adding a valuable contribution. Namely:

- **Impact reports:** refers to our institutional impact report that summarises regular activities and communicates high level evaluation findings. This will be published online.
- **Web publications:** Stand-alone reports to show the findings of research and evaluation that is not part of the routine reporting schedule.
- **Partner reports:** reports created externally by third parties who we work with to deliver interventions.
- **Sector engagement:** where there is likely to be interest for the sector in the topic or study. Engagement may include conference participation, blogs or professional networks etc.
- **Journal / policy paper:** where an evaluation is likely to contribute to the formal literature base either through peer reviewed journals or policy recommendations.

Implementation strategy 1: Taking a leadership role within the region and working in partnership to support attainment and access

Risks addressed: Knowledge and skills; advice and guidance; regional factors.

Rationale: Partnership working within our region is a key focus of our work to improve access by addressing risks related to educational attainment, opportunity to develop relevant knowledge and skills and access to advice and guidance. Importantly it recognises that there are specific geographical factors which affect equal opportunity within the South West.

Regional challenge

Access remains the biggest priority for the university in terms of closing gaps in disadvantage and under-representation. Sector research suggests most of the socio-economic gap in higher education participation in England can be explained by the fact that disadvantaged students have lower levels of attainment at GCSE

with learning gaps emerging from early years and continuing to widen across all stages. Family income is an important predictor of attainment with children in the top 10% richest families more than twice as likely as those in the seventh decile to earn at least one of the highest grades at GCSE¹³. Geographical context is particularly important. There is emerging evidence that there are patterns in attainment related specifically to rurality due to restrictions on educational and extra-curricular opportunities linked to physical inaccessibility and sparsity of resources. Recent work through the Centre for Social Mobility has confirmed that after individual differences are considered, unexplained differences in educational outcomes persist for learners in rural and coastal communities, with the South West in particular, identified as a cold spot for progression to higher education¹⁴. This risk to opportunity is indicated by persistent attainment gaps between poorer pupils and their peers which are the largest of all English regions at both primary and secondary level. The Social Mobility in the South West Report showed that 40% of disadvantaged pupils in the region attained a standard pass in GSCE English and Maths in 2019 compared with almost 60% in inner London and just 17% of disadvantaged pupils went on to university in 18/19 - the lowest rate of all English regions – compared with 45% in the capital¹⁵. Meanwhile even those students from the South West who achieve high GCSE grades are less likely to progress to higher education¹⁶. This plan has been finalised in the context of funding cuts to our Next Steps South West partnership, which is likely to increase the risk to equal opportunity for students in our region further through the reduction in advice and guidance to pupils in 11-16 schools.

Strategic partnerships

As the only Russell Group institution covering a largely rural peninsula¹⁷ of 6,321 square miles¹⁸ with campuses in both Devon and Cornwall, we take our civic responsibilities to improve outcomes for learners within our region extremely seriously. Working with local authorities and other public sector partners, we have forged Civic Agreements in Exeter, Devon and Cornwall and are seeking to extend this type of formalised partnership working to Torbay and Somerset to coordinate work in support of regional priorities. Supporting social justice and improving educational outcomes are strong threads across all of these partnerships and overlap with priorities within our Access and Participation Plan. Action planning is at an early stage with projects being developed to address the specific needs of marginalised young people. Emerging projects to support care experienced students and young refugees with Civic University partners are included in this plan, and other initiatives will be developed during the lifetime of the plan. These Civic Agreements also intersect with work to create a regional Education Alliance to facilitate holistic approaches across various parts of the regional educational system. This is at an initial stage with early priorities identified relating to supporting educational attainment for pupils in receipt of free school meals at KS3 and 4, and up-skilling teachers to support neurodiverse learners. We expect these plans to develop during 24/25 but they are too early to include here. The University is engaged with a variety of other collaborative work within the region which relates to our wider access and participation ambitions although only specific elements are included in the operational sections of this plan. These include the South West Social Mobility Commission which is led by the University and was set up in response to work led by our Centre for Social Mobility. This brings together partners from across the region to tackle systemic barriers to equal opportunity with a long-term vision to transform education and early career outcomes for all children and young people and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The University is also actively engaged with partners to develop educational provision, qualifications and progression routes to address skills gaps within the region and help stimulate the economy. This is exemplified by our partnership in the South West Institute of Technology¹⁹, which aims to build skills and regional expertise in digital, engineering and manufacturing technologies. A key strategic aim of the Institute has been to increase participation and achievement by under-represented and disadvantaged groups²⁰. This work and initiatives such as the skills escalator²¹ to increase capacity in data analytics across the region, are relevant to the broader social mobility agenda.

¹³ Farquharson, C., McNally, S., & Tahir, I. (2022). *Education inequalities*. IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities

¹⁴ www.exeter.ac.uk/research/socialmobility/projects/project/index.php?id=705

¹⁵ Sim, A-M. & Major, L. E. (2022) *Social Mobility in the South West: Levelling up through education*, Centre for Social Mobility, School of Education, University of Exeter

¹⁶ Education Policy Institute. (2024). [GCSE high attainers and progression to higher education](https://www.epi.ac.uk/gcse-high-attainers-and-progression-to-higher-education)

¹⁷ Comprising Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_districts_by_area

¹⁹ <https://www.swiot.ac.uk/>

²⁰ <https://www.swiot.ac.uk/the-vision/>

²¹ [https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/research/business/2018_IIB_024_-_Data_Analyst_Skills_Escalator_A4_V7_\(1\).pdf](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/research/business/2018_IIB_024_-_Data_Analyst_Skills_Escalator_A4_V7_(1).pdf)

Attainment support

The University has supported pupil attainment over recent years through its sponsorship arrangements with schools and partnership with IntoUniversity. We have been a sponsor of Exeter Mathematics School since 2014 and are actively involved in the curriculum and governance of the school²². Designed to help able mathematics students from the region realise their full potential, the state-funded school is Ofsted outstanding. We are also an active partner in the Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust, which began as a city-wide approach to support pupil attainment in Exeter and now includes schools outside of the city. It comprises 15 schools and is responsible for the education of 12,200 children aged two to 16 and has led sustained improvements in school performance. We will continue to work through school and college governance structures to support attainment although this work is not referenced within our intervention strategies. The University has long been a partner of IntoUniversity and we will be expanding our complementary activities to support students at our co-funded Centre in South Bristol. We have always worked actively within the South West with learners, schools and colleges to support fair access and have extended this work considerably over the period of the last Plan. In 22/23 in addition to our partnership with UniConnect, we supported around 100 schools and colleges in our region, providing fair access interventions for 2,500 learners. We provided information, advice and guidance for a further 24,000 and delivered new provision through strengthened further education partnerships. Our support for access within in our region can be evidenced in the make-up of the 16% of our entrants who come from the South West, of whom over 80% meet markers of widening participation²³. In recent years we have also developed provision in partnership with local schools to support attainment and motivation to study. Within this plan, we are planning to extend this work with a particular focus on tutoring in maths and literacy in addition to teaching enrichment activity and work to build study skills. We are focusing on maths and literacy as these are key building blocks to support wider educational attainment. Various studies support tutoring, particularly via peers closer in age, as an effective and scalable approach to providing academic support.

Addressing geographical and educational isolation

An additional strand of activity relates to working in partnership to support student communities who are hard to reach, either because of geographical, personal or educational contexts. In addition to individualised learner support, we plan to expand our school and partner-based information and advice to provide targeted support for students from low-socio economic backgrounds and areas of low progression to higher education. We will be piloting a new way of working within North Devon, which includes pockets of the highest deprivation in the UK. Working in partnership, we will be trialling a hub and spoke model to deliver support and guidance to a cohort of pupils from local schools in the area. If successful we will seek to extend this Access Hub model to other target areas of the South West. We are also collaborating with Holyrood Academy in Somerset in developing a cradle to career pipeline of support for local children and their families. This community-based Reach initiative is located in an area of low progression to higher education. We will deliver a new programme focusing on supporting boys from low socio-economic backgrounds in response to research commissioned through our Centre for Social Mobility. These students are least likely to progress to higher education and do not engage readily with existing fair access provision²⁴. We will pilot new approaches delivered in collaboration with community partners. We are working through our new Civic Agreements with Devon County Council to build more coordinated and structured support for young people in their care and developing new provision for a growing community young people seeking asylum within the county and hope in time to do the same in Cornwall. Current research by our Centre for Social Mobility has identified a significant gap in provision for students who are home educated, who experience inequality of opportunity due to a variety of factors. We consider these students - a growing proportion of whom are excluded from school - to be an under-represented student group requiring specific information and support to facilitate progression to higher education.

Note: The activities in this strategy contribute to Objective 2 and Intervention Strategy 2.

²² <https://exetermathematicsschool.ac.uk/>

²³ Students meeting one or more of: TUNDRA quintile 1 or 2, IMD quintile 1 or 2, Bursary recipient, Mature, Disability, Ethnic minority, or 1st Generation to HE. Internal analysis 2024

²⁴ Moore, J. (2022). *Literature review on engaging boys in higher education* (unpublished), Centre for Social Mobility, University of Exeter.

Implementation strategy 1: **Taking a leadership role within the region and working in partnership to support attainment and access**

1a) We will work with regional schools, colleges and other partners to extend our programme of information, advice and guidance to support students who are particularly hard to reach or underserved due geographical or educational isolation.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
<p>Higher education information, advice and guidance KS4/5: engagement with schools and colleges within our region to provide information, advice and guidance about higher education options, student finance, application process, and student life, to inform decision making in relation to progression to higher education. C. 24,000 students annually.</p>	<p>% Access, Participation and Outreach team (APO)²⁵ team; academic time; student wages; event costs; % online platform licence.</p>	<p>Students feel more informed about options through higher education and better prepared to apply to university.</p>	<p>Type 1 and monitoring. Publishing plan: Impact report, annually.</p>
<p>South West Access Hubs: series of information, advice and guidance workshops delivered in collaboration with a host school or college to multi-school KS4/5 cohorts. Beginning with the North Devon Access Hub [Pathway to Success], this partnership between the University, West Buckland School and University Centre for North Devon [Petroc] and schools located in regional cold spots will provide a hub and spoke model to enable the collaborative delivery of information, advice and guidance to target students. Working with a host school and college in the target area, the University will co-deliver information, workshops and development sessions aimed to support the progression of under-represented students. 80 KS4 and 40 KS5 students per hub cohort [new].</p>	<p>% APO team; student wages; travel.</p>	<p>Students from the areas of highest deprivation and lowest representation in our region can better access information, advice and guidance to support informed choices and progression to higher education.</p>	<p>Type 1 Publishing plan: impact report, annually.</p>
<p>Support for schools – Advancing Access: we will continue to work with our local schools to encourage take up of support offered through this Russell Group partnership which provides free Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to teachers and careers advisers, equipping them with the information needed to inform their learners about pathways into selective HEIs with the aim encouraging the progression of under-represented students. The CPD opportunities focus on contributing towards the achievement of careers strategies, such as the Gatsby Benchmarks. 12,400 unique website visitors; 8,000 users.</p>	<p>Annual partner contribution c.£6,250; % APO team; travel.</p>	<p>Teachers and advisers are equipped with information they need to better support their students apply and progress to Russell Group HEIs.</p>	<p>Type 2: Partnership evaluation framework and reporting. Publishing plan: Partner report.</p>
<p>Home educated students information, advice and guidance: bespoke programme of advice and support based on research by the Centre for Social Mobility and co-created in partnership with the Home Education Community including context-specific guidance and one-</p>	<p>% APO team.</p>	<p>Students feel more informed about options through higher education and better prepared to apply to university. Parents and carers</p>	<p>Type 2: Follow up qualitative research with Home Educated community (who informed this area of</p>

²⁵ The Access, Participation and Outreach (APO) Team leads on APP planning, project management, delivery and evaluation in collaboration with colleagues and partners and delivers all schools and colleges outreach; fair access programmes; widening participation interventions; and some aspects of success delivery relating to transition and under-represented groups; management of the Centre for Social Mobility and Success for All programme including project management support. As many of the activities listed involve a mixture of planning, management, delivery, administration, and evaluation conducted by the team, a percentage of time is indicated.

to-one admissions advice [new]. Estimated 200 students and family per annum plus 1,000 via online resources.		feel better informed to support students in decision making.	provision in the first instance). Publishing plan: Journal / Policy submission and sector engagement, 2025.
Care experience students' information, advice and guidance: bespoke programme of advice and support for care experienced students, their facilitators and supporters delivered in partnership with Local Authorities and Virtual Schools across the region and South West Universities Care - a collaboration of universities and HEI providers across the South West that form the NNECL South West Regional group. [extended]. Estimated 80 students per year.	% APO team; student wages; Travel, event costs and learner subsistence	Students feel more informed about options through higher education and better prepared to apply to university. Facilitators and supporters feel better informed to support students in decision making.	Type 1 and monitoring plus feedback from students and supporters. Publishing plan: Impact report, annually
Refugees and asylum seekers information, advice and guidance: bespoke programme of advice and support for young people seeking asylum, their facilitators and supporters delivered in collaboration with Devon County Council [new]. Estimated 100 students per year.	% APO team.	Students feel more informed about options through higher education and better prepared to apply to university. Parents and supporters feel better informed to support students in decision making.	Type 1 and monitoring plus feedback from students and supporters. Publishing plan: Impact report, annually.

1b) We will work with schools, colleges and other partners to increase the number of under-represented students receiving additional educational development opportunities within our region, particularly those who are eligible for free school meals and experience the biggest learning gaps. We will particularly focus on building literacy, maths and study skills

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Skills development KS4 boys: through University-led collaborative community partnership programme informed by research by our Centre for Social Mobility and run in collaboration with key partners such as Exeter Chiefs, Exeter City Football Club, Somerset Cricket Club and Northcott Theatre, using youth work approaches to offer a range of educational and enrichment opportunities within the themes of sport, technology and the arts. This initiative will particularly focus on boys from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds including those eligible for free school meals [new]. 100 students in pilot cohort.	% APO team; partner time; student wages; event costs; travel; learner subsidies; educational resources.	Participants will develop and practise skills and behaviours which positively affect their motivation to study; set and work towards personal goals; and acquire subject and careers-related knowledge.	Type 2: Pre-post intervention survey of attitudes and perceptions. Tracking of progression to HE via HESA track report assessing outcomes against a matched comparator group within HEAT. Publishing plan: Journal/ Policy publication and sector engagement, 2029.
Maths skills K4: Events with Yr9 students from multiple WP target schools, providing exposure to fun and engaging styles of learning maths to develop confidence, motivation to study and tackle the "fear of maths". 300 students per cohort [new].	% APO team; academic hours; student wages. Travel and event costs.	Participants will develop subject knowledge, confidence and motivation to study maths.	Type 2: changes in learner attitudes to Maths plus teacher feedback

			Publishing plan: impact report, annually.
Mathematics KS5: Student tutoring through Levelling Up: Maths. A national programme in which UoE is a partner with London Mathematical Society and other HEPs. Participants are matched with a Student Ambassador Tutor who will take them through content hosted on Moodle to raise attainment in A Level Maths via virtual sessions in Year 12 & 13. 18 learners in pilot cohort [new].	% APO team; x student wages; % online platform licence	Participants demonstrate improved skills and subject knowledge, which they can apply to their in school studies in Maths and STEM. Teachers observe positive impact.	Type 2: partnership evaluation framework and reporting Publishing plan: partner report.
Science KS5: Science Level 3 support via the Devon Healthcare Hub. A local programme of lab-based content run on campus for A Level Biology students. The content is led by an academic champion. 30 students per cohort [extension].	% APO team; academic time; student wages.	Increased self-efficacy of participants (confidence in their own ability and skills). Participants feel better prepared for Level 3 studies and exams	Type 2: changes in self-efficacy and HE expectations. Triangulate with teacher feedback. Publishing plan: impact report, annually.
Literacy KS4: A tutoring programme with Yr 8 pupils supporting development in literacy. Students undertaking the Learning for Teaching credit-bearing module run by the School of Education and delivered to students within the Ted Wragg Partnership MAT. 50 students per cohort.	% APO team & % SW Social Mobility Commission. Student wages; travel, course materials.	Participants demonstrate improved skills and attainment in literacy.	Type 2: Partnership evaluation via Impact Ed. Publication plan: Partner report.
Modern language skills KS4: programme to support achievement in GCSE Spanish. Collaborative programme with West Exe School, an Education Partner, focused on borderline pupils identified by their teacher as needing extra support to either pass or excel at GCSE level. Targeted support delivered in small groups by University students developing language skills and subject knowledge with teaching materials developed by the school will be supported by sessions with teachers, on-campus visits, and live links with our Study Abroad students. The small group intervention will be complemented by activities promoting the benefits of studying languages to larger groups of learners in the school. 100 students per cohort [pilot].	% APO team; student wages; travel	Participants will develop skills and subject knowledge which positively affect their attainment in Spanish and motivation to study. Teachers observe improved attitudes to studying languages.	Type 2: Teacher feedback and attainment tracking via HEAT KS4 report. Publishing plan: Impact report, annually.
Place-based academic and personal development KS2-5: community-based learner support via IntoUniversity partnership, Bristol South IntoUniversity Centre and related UoE activity strands providing academic and personal development support through multiple academic and mentoring interventions both at primary and secondary level. UoE-specific activity includes residential and on-campus experiences, mentoring and discipline-specific teaching enrichment. C. 1,400 students [existing partnership with enhanced UoE activity strand]	Annual c£45k partner contribution; % APO team; student wages; travel and event costs.	Participants acquire learning skills and knowledge which positively impacts their academic attainment and propensity to progress to higher education.	Type 2: Partnership evaluation framework and reporting. Publishing plan: Partner report.
Curriculum enrichment multiple subjects KS4/5: Series of educational events and workshops which provide participants with learning opportunities linked to specific areas of the school curriculum. A particular focus is growing knowledge about specific disciplines and providing exposure to different teaching and learning	% APO team. academic hours; student wages; event costs; % online platform licence.	Participants have increased subject knowledge which extends in school learning around core areas of the	Type 1 and monitoring. Publication plan: Impact report, annually.

<p>styles. Events may be in school, on campus or virtual. They can also be multi school events or delivered to individual schools with high proportions of students meeting WP criteria. 1,500 students per year [existing].</p>		<p>curriculum, as well as gaining insight into approaches to learning through higher education.</p>	
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Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: estimated £629,00 per annum [dedicated staffing and operational budget only].

Implementation strategy 2: Widening participation and inclusive recruitment activity to diversify our student body and support progression to HE

Risks addressed: Knowledge and skills; advice and guidance; regional factors; propensity to apply despite qualified; course choice; feeling represented.

Rationale: Our theory of change supports a multi-intervention approach to access through information, advice and guidance; fair access programmes; school and college collaborations; course provision and reducing barriers experienced through the admissions process.

Fair access programmes

The University has an extensive programme of information, advice and guidance to address barriers to equal opportunity presented by gaps in knowledge experienced by under-represented students. Sector research and our own evaluation shows that fair access programmes providing scaffolded interventions support students in developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to apply for higher education and achieve a university place²⁶. We extended provision significantly over the course of the last plan and now provide fair access places for around 1,000 Yr10-13 students annually, with an additional programme for mature learners. We will continue to improve and extend strands of this provision. In the case of Exeter Scholars, we will be undertaking new work to evaluate the outcomes of progressors to Exeter and adapt our support in response. We will seek to extend our provision for mature learners, continuing the roll out of our Mature Access Pathways in partnership with further education partners in the South West and extend the reach of our Further Education Bridging Programme. Both these programmes support access but also develop knowledge and skills to support transition to higher education.

Targeted engagement with schools, colleges and partners

In addition to individualised learner support, we will expand our school and partner-based information, advice and guidance to provide targeted support for students from low-socio economic backgrounds, areas of low progression to higher education and ethnic minority groups. This will include extending our work with SEREN²⁷ to support students from areas of low progression to higher education and high deprivation in Wales, and building on focused engagement in London and the Midlands with students from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds. We will also undertake work with the Black Leadership Group (BLG)²⁸ to provide a package of support for pupils in BLG affiliate colleges. Drawing on the expertise of BLG we will upskill staff involved in outreach and recruitment in antiracist practice to ensure our student engagement is inclusive and responds to the needs of ethnic minority students. We will also continue to respond to the demand from schools for subject-based knowledge and skills development to expand discipline knowledge to encourage learners to consider new subject areas and make informed choices when considering subject routes to avoid closing down options for study or careers.

Course provision and reducing barriers within the admissions process

We are working to reduce barriers to equal opportunity experienced by students who may be qualified to enter higher education but who may not feel confident in applying to a high tariff university like Exeter or may

²⁶ TASO. (2023). *Summary Report: Evaluating multi-intervention outreach and mentoring programmes*

²⁷ <https://www.gov.wales/seren-network-overview>

²⁸ <https://blackleadershipgroup.com/>

be restricted by the types of course we offer. An early adopter of Degree Apprenticeships, we have seen how the provision of affordable applied programmes directly linked to employment have benefited under-represented students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, ethnic minority communities and mature students. Expanded provision coupled with focused information, advice and guidance is a key plank of our access strategy. We will also continue to build on our STEM provision with foundation year, seeking to increase student numbers and explore portfolio extensions where possible and evaluate success outcomes for students progressing through this route. The availability of individual markers of under-representation will enable us to continue to develop our approach to contextualised offers. A variety of sector research shows how individual context and schooling can significantly affect predicted and actual grades and affect propensity to apply and progress to high tariff universities. Internal data confirms that students in receipt of contextual offers go on to good educational outcomes and that our policy is effective. We will extend the breadth and depth of contextual offer making to around 30% of applicants, with students on our fair access programmes and leaving care receiving up to a three grade reduction. We will remove unnecessary subject-related requirements and will develop a maths preparation module to enable us to soften the maths requirements for certain subjects, particularly those which require very specific maths skills which can be developed on course. We will also undertake a number of initiatives to provide targeted support through the admissions process including a focus on inclusive information provision and communications to better support informed decision making.

Note: All the activities in this strategy contribute to meeting Objective 1 and Intervention Strategy 1. Some also contribute to success objectives and related strategies as indicated [e.g. Objective 3 = Ob3].

Intervention strategy 2: Widening participation and inclusive recruitment activity to diversify our student body and support progression to HE.

2a) We will increase the number of students we support through the types of scaffolded and longitudinal programmes which our evaluation shows have the greatest impact on progression to HE and continue to improve them in collaboration with participants and stakeholders.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
<p>KS4/5 learner-focused scaffolded programmes: Exeter Scholars: Multiple activities providing scaffolded interventions with Yr10-13 pupils to grow student/parental knowledge of HE and subject knowledge. Mixed delivery methods including summer schools, on campus events and online learning across South West, National and Online pathways. Participants meet multiple widening participation criteria and our national programme has a particular focus on fair access for Black and minority ethnic students. Onward progression to Exeter is supported via contextual offer, scholarship opportunities, and a success package for course graduates. 850 students per cohort [existing].^{Ob3,4,5}</p>	<p>% APO team; academic hours; alumni input; student wages; event costs; learner travel and subsistence; educational resources; % online platform licence; % benefits package for progressors [scholarships, grocery vouchers, raid card, society contribution etc]. % Global Advancement team²⁹.</p>	<p>Students have the knowledge, skills and support they need to successfully achieve a place at university and a high tariff HEI in particular. Students progressing to the University of Exeter feel prepared and supported for university life and go on to achieve successful outcomes.</p>	<p>Type 3: Quasi-experimental design such as Propensity Score Matching to measure impact of programme on entry and success using HESA track report.</p> <p>Type 2: Progression to HE assessed against a matched comparator group using data purchased from the UCAS Outreach Evaluator service. Interim outcomes measured using TASO ASQ with qualitative research.</p> <p>Publication plan: Website publication, biennially.</p>
<p>KS5 learner-focused scaffolded programme: Realising Opportunities: Multiple activities providing scaffolded interventions to grow student/parental knowledge of HE and subject</p>	<p>% APO team. Partner input and contribution; academic hours;</p>	<p>Students have the knowledge, skills and support they need to successfully achieve a</p>	<p>Type 2: Partnership evaluation framework and reporting.</p>

²⁹ The Global Advancement [GA] team provide fundraising support which contributes to our fair access scholarships package.

knowledge delivered in collaboration with other HEIs as part of Realising Opportunities. Mixed delivery methods including summer schools, on campus events and online. Onward progression to Exeter supported via contextual offer, scholarship opportunities, and a success package for course graduates. C1,500 students per partnership cohort [existing]. ^{Ob3,4,5}	student wages; event costs; learner travel and subsistence; % benefits package for progressors.	place at university and a high tariff HEI in particular. Students progressing to the University of Exeter feel prepared and supported for university life and go on to achieve successful outcomes.	Publication plan: Partner report
KS5 learner-focused scaffolded programme: Pathways to Law and Pathways to Banking and Finance in partnership with the Sutton Trust. Multiple activities providing scaffolded interventions to grow participants knowledge of law and the legal profession, including access to work-based experiences. Onward progression to Exeter supported via contextual offer, scholarship opportunities, and a success package for course graduates. Around 300 students per cohort [existing]. ^{Ob3,4,5}	% APO team; academic hours; student wages; employer time; learner travel & subsistence; Partnership contribution; % benefits package.	Students have the information they need to make informed decisions about study and careers in law.	Type 2: Partnership evaluation framework and reporting. Publication plan: Partner report
Mature Access Pathway: providing scaffolded programme for mature learners in collaboration with Further Education Partners. In person pathway delivered in collaboration with FE partners including Exeter College and Truro and Penwith College as part of the Access to HE programme including familiarisation with HE, study skills development and peer mentoring. Online pathway delivered specifically to meet the needs of those returning to learning who are not taking an Access to HE qualification. Onward progression to Exeter supported via contextual offer, scholarship opportunities and a success package for course graduates. 120 students growing to 200 per year [extended]. ^{Ob3,4,5}	% APO team; x% Academic Skills team; academic time; student wages; learner subsidies; % online platform licence; % benefits package for progressors	Mature learners have the knowledge, skills and support they need to successfully achieve a university place. Students progressing to the University of Exeter feel prepared and supported for university life and go on to achieve successful outcomes.	Type 2: Pre/post survey and focus groups with programme participants. HE outcomes tracked in HEAT. Publication plan: Impact report, annually
Further Education Bridging Programme: delivered in collaboration with partners. Delivered to student cohorts identified by participating FE Colleges, providing mixed knowledge and skills development to support preparation and transition to HE. 240 students growing to 400 per cohort [extended]. ^{Ob4}	% APO team; partner input; academic time; student wages.	Students are better equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to successfully apply for higher education. Participants feel better prepared for university life and study.	Type 2: Pre/post survey and focus groups with programme participants. HE outcomes tracked in HEAT. Publication plan: Impact report, annually

2b) We will build and strengthen relationships with schools and partners with high proportions of students from under-represented backgrounds to provide advice and guidance, and address perceptions which may prevent students from progressing to certain courses or institutions despite being qualified to do so.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Targeted engagement with learners outside our region: Focused engagement with schools and partners outside our region, particularly in Wales, London and the Midlands, to support progression of learners from under-represented groups to higher education and the University of Exeter in particular. We will continue to build on and grow our	% APO team; academic time; student wages; event costs; % online platform licence.	Students feel more informed about options through higher education and better prepared to apply to university. Students feel that UoE is	Type 1 and monitoring. Publishing plan: Impact report, annually.

relationships with schools in key regions and work with partners such as The Elephant Group to support to higher education.		an achievable option, that they will be welcome	
Education Partnerships Programme: we will extend our Educational Partnership programme working in collaboration with the Black Leadership Group to engage affiliate FE Colleges and Schools, providing a package of outreach and progression support. We work with BLG to ensure outreach, recruitment and academic leads undertake training and CPD to better meet the needs of Black students. Overall we will provide support for c. 10,000 learners at Education Partner schools meeting WP targeting criteria annually [extended].	% APO team; Partner input; academic time; student wages; event costs; staff development fee.	Students are better equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to successfully apply for higher education. Participants feel better prepared for university life and study.	Type 1 and monitoring Publishing plan: Impact report, annually.
Subject knowledge development KS4/5: series of subject related activities hosted on campus, run in schools and held online to improve subject knowledge and related career/study opportunities to support decision-making related to educational progression. Includes activities run in partnership with Royal Economics Society and Widening Access to Medical School. 700 students per year [existing]	% APO team; academic time; student wages; event costs; % online platform licence.	Participants improve subject knowledge and related study and career options.	Type 1 and monitoring Publication plan: Impact report, annually.

2c) We will grow substantially our portfolio of non-traditional and flexible study options to make degree level study more affordable and accessible while addressing regional and sector skills gaps.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Degree Apprenticeships: significantly extending our portfolio of undergraduate degree apprenticeships to meet regional and national employer demand and bridge skills gaps in the labour market. Depending on outcome of funding bids, we hope to add at least an additional 1,000 degree apprenticeship places by the end of the plan period creating significant additional opportunities for flexible study particularly demanded by students meeting widening participation criteria as evidenced through our current DA student profile [extended]. ^{Ob5}	% Degree Apprenticeship team; academic time; employer wages. c. £1.2m over four years.	Increased volume of under-represented students able to secure places on high demand flexible routes to study at University of Exeter and securing graduate level employment.	Type 1 and monitoring. Publishing plan: Impact report, annually, and sector engagement. Ofsted Report
STEM degrees with foundation year: integrated foundation year enabling students who meet widening participation criteria but who do not have the required Maths Level 3 to undertake intensive high level maths training as part of a foundation year, supporting onward progression to a range of STEM programmes, supporting continuation and academic achievement. Depending on the outcome of our initial STEM programmes we may seek to extend further. Up to 30 students per cohort [extended]. ^{Ob3,4}	% senior lecturer; administrator; scholarships.	Students achieve high-level skills in mathematics required to progress to undergraduate level qualifications in STEM at University of Exeter	Type 2: Monitor Educational outcomes e.g. continuation, attainment etc. Attitudes and preparedness for undergraduate study evaluated at start and end of foundation programme via survey and focus group. Publishing plan: Website 2025.

2d) We will continue to work to identify and remove barriers to equal opportunity within our recruitment and admissions process. This will include increasing our engagement with under-represented students through the

recruitment process, providing relevant personalised information and support to inform decision making, and the proactive use of contextual offers.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
<p>Targeted and inclusive marketing and communications across the applicant journey: We will review our recruitment activity to ensure it is inclusive and that we have anticipated and met the information needs of a diverse range of stakeholders as they progress through the recruitment journey. This will include a review of our marketing, communications, messaging and visit experiences to address perceptions that UoE may not be an achievable option to encourage diversity of applicants and support conversion [enhanced]. 30,000 applicants per year.</p>	<p>% APO team; % contributions recruitment & marketing teams; staff development; student wages.</p>	<p>Students feel that UoE is an achievable option, that they will be welcome at UoE and have increased propensity to apply.</p>	<p>Type 2: Monitoring of reach (e.g. school type) and admissions data to show applications and entry to UoE from schools/region, plus stakeholder feedback.</p> <p>Publishing plan: Impact report, annually</p>
<p>Specialist admissions advice and support: personal point of contact, one to one advice, drop-in clinics, in-person and virtual support sessions to make the admissions process as easy to navigate as possible for students with non-traditional qualifications and alternative educational backgrounds to navigate. This support will be extended, particularly in relation to supporting home educated students [extended].⁰¹</p>	<p>Annual costs: 1 FTE dedicated role.</p>	<p>Students taking non-traditional study routes and qualifications are better equipped to make informed choices about their future and successful applications for HE study at the University of Exeter specifically.</p>	<p>Type 2: Process Tracing to show the ways in which this role has an impact.</p> <p>Publishing plan: Impact report, annually and sector engagement, 2027.</p>
<p>Contextual offers: optimising the use of contextual offers to take account of individual applicants' personal and educational circumstances affecting their grades informed by academic research and applicant profile. We will extend this policy from 25/26 to include an additional range of individualised measures; recognise the context of students from schools in the SW and Wales with high proportions of WP students; and support the progression of students on partnership schemes. We will review this policy annually and extend where supported by evidence. Minimum 30% of offer holders [extended].</p>	<p>% APO & Admissions teams</p>	<p>Students whose personal contextual is likely to affect negatively the grades they achieve at Level 3 are better able to access undergraduate study at University of Exeter.</p>	<p>Type 2: Monitor educational outcomes for students who received a contextual offer in relation to those who received a standard offer.</p> <p>Publishing plan: Website publication, 2027.</p>
<p>Mathematics preparation module: This programme will enable students who meet widening participation criteria but do not have the required Maths GCSE (either a Grade 4/B or 5/C) for their chosen course to complete a pre-arrival maths programme and then enter an embedded mathematics support programme in their first year of undergraduate study. In addition to widening access, this approach aims to enhance attainment and reduce non-continuation. The development of this programme will be carried out collaboratively with Study Zone, with input from academics and other support services. Estimated 24 students per cohort [new].^{Ob3,4}</p>	<p>% APO team; % Academic Skills Team; academic time; % Admissions.</p>	<p>Students achieve discipline-specific skills in maths required to progress to undergraduate level study at University of Exeter</p>	<p>Type 2: Monitor test scores, pass rates, as well as continuation and degree attainment. Measure confidence and motivation with regards to mathematics at the start and end of the module.</p> <p>Publishing plan: Website publication, 2029.</p>
<p>Offer holder visit bursary: reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs for students from lowest incomes to enable them to participate in an offer</p>	<p>c. £15k subsidies; % APO team</p>	<p>Offer holders with lowest household income feel visiting the university to</p>	<p>Type 1 and monitoring</p>

holder visit day experience to support progression and informed decision making. Circa 150 students per annum. [new].		help inform decision making is affordable.	Publishing plan: Impact report, annually.
Discover University student experience panel series: online signposting and student-led panels providing co-created content to enable pre application and offer-holder audiences with protected characteristics and those from underrepresented groups to obtain information from peers about experience at UoE and avenues for support [extended]. 150 students per cohort. ⁰⁴	% APO team; student wages; % online platform licence.	Students with protected characteristics and within specific groups underrepresented in HE feel better informed about whether UoE is right for them and how they can expect to be supported to help inform decision making and transition.	Type 1 and monitoring Publishing plan: Impact report, annually.

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: estimated £2.7m per annum [dedicated staff and operational budget only of which £300k relates to new Degree Apprenticeships provision]

Implementation strategy 3: Alleviating non-academic barriers to learning, improving continuation and delivering positive student experience.

Risks addressed: Cost pressures; environment not conducive to good mental health; insufficient personalised non-academic support; limited resources.

Rationale: While the focus of this implementation strategy is continuation all the interventions support academic attainment, either directly by making academic support more accessible or indirectly by removing time pressures and supporting wellbeing to enable students to better focus on their studies. This intervention strategy aims to strengthen or increase non-academic provision to address a range of factors affecting continuation including financial barriers, mental health and wellbeing and integration and belonging.

Engagement with support

The University provides a significant range of services and support which directly address barriers to equal opportunity but often those students who would most benefit are the least likely to engage or we simply do not have a sufficiently full or nuanced understanding of patterns of engagement to understand where barriers exist to inform the shaping of provision. Staff feedback shows more information is needed about what is available to students, so they can support engagement and referral. We also have campuses across two counties, with our main campus in Cornwall shared with University of Falmouth, with a range of shared services. This presents added complexity in communicating support for students and understanding patterns of engagement. Our Access to Success project will aim to identify engagement gaps and work with under-represented students to better understand the barriers to engagement with the aim of improving accessibility, service design, information and staff development. This work will also help inform and be supported by the roll out of a new student relationship management system to improve connectivity. We are aware of particular barriers faced by students with parental responsibilities and with commuter students and we will seek this opportunity to engage with these groups and improve provision.

Financial support and affordability

The pandemic and cost of living crisis coupled with a national student funding system which has not kept pace with inflation has exerted unprecedented financial pressures on all our students, but this is particularly felt by those from lower income households or with personal circumstances restricting their ability to draw down additional sources of income from family or part-time work. The University's Cost of Living task force has put in place considerable mitigation to provide direct financial support and help make university study more affordable but cost pressures are a continued concern and a priority for our students³⁰. We will aim to address this by increasing the financial support available to the lowest income students and strengthening provision for students trying to manage independently without family support. A new affordability initiative will improve financial information and advice while developing practical cost saving measures for students, while a new

³⁰ <https://www.exeterguild.com/student-priorities#4>

guarantor scheme will help address barriers to accessing accommodation particularly for students who are estranged.

Breakdown of bursary support and eligibility criteria

We will review our bursary and scholarship provision annually based on student feedback, evaluation, and the prevailing economic situation. The table below shows bursary provision only [excluding scholarships] for home undergraduate students starting their studies with us in 25/26. This is a minimum commitment, and we would strongly advise students to check our website for details of our provision which may exceed the values shown below. Scholarship opportunities are also available for students completing nominated fair access programmes, for refugees and asylum seekers and mature students.

Name of award	Eligibility	Description	Minimum award value from 2025-26
Access to Exeter Bursary	Household income less than £16,000 pa	Automatically awarded for all years of study subject to eligibility	£2,300
Access to Exeter Bursary	Household income between £16,001 and £25,000 pa	Automatically awarded for all years of study subject to eligibility	£1,340
Access to Exeter Bursary	Household income between £25,001 and £30,000 pa	Automatically awarded for all years of study subject to eligibility	£850
Access to Exeter Bursary	Household income between £30,001 and £35,000	Automatically awarded for all years of study subject to eligibility	£500
Care Leavers' Bursary	A young person (up to the age of 25) who has been looked after by a UK local authority for more than 13 weeks since they were 14, including some time at age 16 or 17.	Automatically awarded for all years of study subject to eligibility	£1,000
Estranged Students' Bursary	Student under the age of 25 and assessed by the relevant UK student funding body as having independent student status or in the process of applying for this status.	Automatically awarded for all years of study subject to eligibility	£1,000
Student Carers' Travel Bursary	Students with caring responsibilities	By application	Reimbursement of costs up to £400
Offer Holder Visit Day Bursary	Eligible for free school meals; care leavers	By application	Reimbursement of costs up to £150
Care Leavers' Tuition Fee Waiver	A young person (up to the age of 25) who has been looked after by a UK local authority for more than 13 weeks since they were 14, including some time at age 16 or 17.	Automatically awarded	£9,250

Disability, mental health and belonging

We continue to see escalating disability and mental health disclosures and related demand for services. Between 21/22 and 22/23 demand for disabled student support appointments increased by 45% and mental health appointments by 27%. More students disclosed pre-existing mental health conditions than ever before and the number of students with complex mental health needs continues to rise rapidly. Approximately 10% have disclosed neurodivergent disabilities including dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD or a social/communication condition. As a result, demand for services such as talking therapies, crisis support, and mental health mentoring have increased substantially. Extended investment in mental health support has included the development of our ongoing partnership with NHS Talkworks, a free confidential talking therapy services provided by Devon Partnership NHS Trust; a flagship jointly funded University-NHS University Community Mental Health Team partnership initiative; specialist counselling through Nilaari, a service specifically for Black

and minority ethnic students; and online self-help tools such as Silver Cloud, Togetherall and Living Life to the Full.

Our support for students with disabilities begins before they arrive to make sure they have plans and facilities in place to support them. Our Disability Advice and Support Team offers help to students with a disability, long term health condition or learning disability. This may include creating an individual learning plan and recommending adjustments, helping students apply for DSAs-funded non-medical helper support and equipment, and accessing support arrangements such as adapted accommodation. Our Education Welfare Team based within our Student Hubs provides readily accessible ‘first-step’ academic advice and support for students whose physical or mental health is affecting their studies. This may include signposting to support, advice on mitigation or help to overcome a particular issue relating to their studies. Our core services to support mental health and disability are not included within our intervention strategy although they are described here as they have most impact on supporting the continuation and academic achievement of students with disabilities and mental health conditions. Additional provision to address specific continuation gaps or to support an environment conducive to good mental health are included however such as achieving the Mental Health Charter and improving staff and student capacity to respond to increasing incidences of social/communication disabilities. We will also continue to improve our support for those students with most complex needs due to personal circumstances such as being in care or experiencing family breakdown through our Exeter Cares service.

Note: All the activities below also contribute to Objective 4 and Intervention Strategy 4. Some also contribute to other objectives and related strategies as indicated [e.g. Objective 5 = Ob5].

Intervention strategy 3: **Alleviating non-academic barriers to learning, improving continuation and delivering positive student experience.**

3a) Working with students we will redesign the way in which we communicate and provide support for under-represented students to improve accessibility, engagement and service quality.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Access to success working with under-represented student communities to co-create information, resources and improve service design based on needs identified across the student journey and supported through staff training and a new student relationship management system. A particular strand of this project will work to identify and address the particular barriers faced by students with parental responsibilities and commuting students. [new]. ^{Ob5}	% multi-team staff time; student wages; staff development costs; resources development.	Accessible services and support based on student need; early engagement with support; student and staff are confident in support available.	Type 1 and monitoring. Publishing plan: Impact report 2025.

3b) We will increase the funding support available for students on low incomes and introduce new measures to provide specialist funding advice, improve affordability and access to accommodation.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Student funding package: expand the eligibility criteria and award values within the Access to Exeter Bursary, providing a transparent and regular source of additional income for students from low-income households reducing finance-related stress, enabling them to focus on their studies and supporting continuation. This will be awarded to all eligible students without the requirement to apply. Additional financial help including tuition fee waivers and bursary support for students likely to experience gaps in	Access to Exeter Bursary; fee waivers; other bursaries. c£5.8m p.a. (excluding hardship and WP scholarships)	Students from the lowest income households and/or those without family support are financially more resilient, more likely to continue, better able to focus on their studies, and experienced reduced	Type 2: Analysis of student outcomes using the OfS financial support toolkit. In addition, annual survey to understand experience of bursary recipients and monitoring of hardship demand/spend. Publishing plan:

outcomes due to personal circumstances e.g. care experienced, student carers, estranged students, asylum seekers and refugees [extended]. C. 3,000 students per annum. ^{Ob1,2,5}		stress relating to their financial position.	Impact report, annually. Statistical analysis every three years.
Affordable study initiative: package of measures to reduce student costs and provide specialist funding advice and support for students on low incomes in collaboration with Student Unions. Multiple interventions pre and post enrolment will include one-to-one support with loan applications [particularly to support continuation following periods of interruption], signposting of funding, and budgetary management; development of cost saving schemes including discount packages with regional partners; re-use and recycle schemes; and related communications to complement existing cost of living measures [new]. ^{Ob1,2,5}	% APO & Finance teams; other resources tbc dependent on project outcomes.	Students can access expertise and practical support to build financial resilience, are more likely to continue, better able to focus on their studies, and feel better equipped to manage financially.	Type 1 and monitoring Publishing plan: Impact report, annually.
Access to accommodation: accommodation guarantee of 365-day contract for students without family support and a new subsidised guarantor scheme for care leavers through Housing Hand [extended]. ^{Ob1,2}	Fee subsidy up to £20k per annum; % APO team.	Students can access accommodation	Type 1 and monitoring Publishing plan: Impact report, annually.

3c We will extend and improve the support we provide to under-represented student communities to support mental health and wellbeing, belonging, continuation and academic success.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Transition and Induction Framework: supporting the delivery of the University's Induction and Transition Framework academic leads working across departments and subject groupings will create discipline-specific induction and transition courses, content and events, to proactively manage risks during induction and Yr1 resulting in discontinuation and impacting on attainment and mental health such as integration, sense of belonging, academic knowledge and skills, orientation etc. This will be extended to support other key transition periods including return from study abroad and industrial placement, supporting the Mental Health Charter [extended]. ^{Ob5}	Transition and Induction Working Group; % multiple Transition and Induction academic leads; % Study Abroad team	Students feel better prepared to undertake study in their host discipline; that they know how to access academic and related support if needed; and feel they have received positive opportunities to get to know academic staff and peers.	Type 2: Qualitative evaluation of components of the framework centred around a Theory of Change. Publication plan: Impact report, annually.
Enhanced transition and induction programme: beginning pre-Welcome Week with interventions throughout term 1, this programme for groups of students experiencing the largest continuation gaps provides information and signposting to key student support services including wellbeing, finance, academic skills and employability. Familiarisation with campus life and opportunity to build peer networks in advance of the beginning of term is also key. This is additional provision complementing our whole institutional approaches to transition and induction, which embed inclusivity principles, and are developed and reviewed on the basis of risk indicators [existing]. Around 150 students p.a. ^{Ob5}	% APO, Student Funding, Wellbeing, Academic Skills, Student Unions teams. Student wages and event costs.	Increased confidence and knowledge about how to access help, support and advice including self-help tools; increased sense of belonging and feeling part of the university community.	Type 2: Pre / post survey and focus groups measuring belonging, confidence and knowledge of support services. Publication plan: Impact report, annually

<p>Mental Health Charter: the University will be working towards the Mental Health Charter and seeking to achieve this during the plan. We will work to address the key strands of the Charter ensuring approaches to supporting mental health and promoting wellbeing are embedded in key processes such as induction and transition and are built in to our curriculum. We will also seek to encourage cocreation of wellness initiatives through our Wellness Creation Fund. All students [new].^{Ob5}</p>	<p>1 fte; % staff time multiple teams</p>		<p>Type 1</p> <p>Publication plan: Impact report.</p>
<p>Expanded wellbeing and student life support for Neurodivergent students: supporting outcomes across the lifecycle, we will increase support for this group of students including single point of contact, highly structured transition support focused on key areas of change e.g. induction, Yr1, preparation/return placement/study abroad and preparation for graduation/workplace. Specialist staff will also work with University teams and students to co-create service developments and policy to better support this group of students [new].^{Ob5}</p>	<p>% staff time multiple teams; student wages.</p>	<p>Increased confidence and reduced anxiety about managing university life and studies; increased knowledge of self-support strategies; increased confidence in accessing support.</p>	<p>Type 2: comparative case study to understand what impact this service has for individuals.</p> <p>Publication plan: Website publication and sector engagement, 2027.</p>
<p>Exeter Cares Community: wrap-around personalised support for students with complex support needs linked to personal context such as estrangement, caring responsibilities, seeking asylum, care experience, or social/communication disabilities. Single point of contact for advice, support and access to relevant services; availability of enhanced counselling provision; peer support; social programme; graduation and post-graduation transition support. Circa 1,240 eligible students p.a. [extended].^{Ob1,2,5}</p>	<p>Welfare Officer 1fte, % APO Team, Student Unions Advice Service & Wellbeing. Events, student subsidies</p>	<p>Students feel confident in coming forward to access support, help and advice including mental health services. Students feel sense of belonging and that they are supported.</p>	<p>Type 2: comparative case study to understand what impact this service has for individuals.</p> <p>Publication plan: Website publication and sector engagement, 2025.</p>

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: estimated £6.28m per annum [dedicated staff and operational budget only].

Implementation strategy 4: Supporting students to fulfil their academic potential ensuring our portfolio is relevant and adopting sector leading inclusive practice.

Risks addressed: Progress to positive outcomes; cost pressures; environment not conducive to good mental health; insufficient personalised non-academic and academic support; may not feel included.

Rationale: In addressing gaps in student outcomes by alleviating academic barriers to equal opportunity, we have considered key success factors including meaningful interaction between staff and students; knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners; an educational experience that is relevant to students' interests and future goals; and supportive peer relations. In addition to the specific projects within this intervention strategy, gaps in outcomes will be identified and analysed on an ongoing basis by our Student Outcomes Group to instigate action through our Teaching Excellence Action Plans at department level and via the relevant Success for All Working Group at institutional level.

Curriculum change and academic student support

While specific and tailored interventions can be effective, a key focus of our Education Strategy has been to embed inclusive educational practice and design out barriers to equal opportunity where possible. We have sought to do this through complementary strands. Our Transformative Education Framework aims to embed

inclusive education, racial and social justice and sustainability across our curriculum. The framework aims to make sure all students and staff feel welcomed and valued; the University collectively examines and where necessary challenges traditional norms to achieve greater equity including in the context of academic assessment and awards; that we adopt inclusive language and practice in all teaching and learning contexts and students are supported to achieve good mental health and wellbeing. A complementary project has reformed approaches to assessment with a particular focus on inclusion encouraging the development of alternative and personalised assessments. Meanwhile an Inclusive Education Project has reviewed our current use of Individualised Learning Plans, surveyed best practice in other HEIs, and explored the potential for Universal Design for Learning to improve outcomes for our disabled students, particularly those who do not come forward for formal support. This work will be taken forward via a new Inclusive Education Policy and related academic support.

Much of the foundational work above will be progressed and embedded through a major programme of curriculum reform during the new Access and Participation Plan. Curriculum for Change will involve systematic renewal of our curriculum and will seek to implement best practice frameworks for inclusive education while delivering a range of other improvements designed to better integrate skills development to meet student and employer needs. Given the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of this programme, we have sought to include the specific strand of this activity most linked with addressing awarding gaps through skills development and which can be evaluated during this plan. A further systemic change motivated by addressing gaps in student outcomes is the transformation of our academic student support model. This aims to provide proactive personalised, early interventions to support academic and personal development through a network of Pastoral Mentors whose work will be informed by student engagement and other relevant data to help flag individuals who may require additional support or referral to specialist services. These embedded roles complement the work of academic leads for transition and induction and for race equality and inclusion, providing accessible, proactive and personalised support at discipline-level with the aim of supporting both continuation and attainment.

Focused support for under-represented student communities

In addition to holistic measures we will provide focused support where needed in consultation with students. Our mature students experience the largest awarding gaps. We have carried out extensive consultation with our mature students to help identify and address barriers to equal opportunity. This and a literature review by our Centre for Social Mobility helped inform the creation of an action plan to address barriers across all stages of the student journey and this is at an advanced stage of implementation. This has included a variety of interventions to support access, transition, integration, and academic skills. Peer support is particularly valued by these students, and we will develop and extend our existing peer mentoring arrangements to help identify and address barriers to academic attainment in tandem with targeted academic skills support.

While we have seen welcome progress in narrowing the degree awarding gap for our Black students, we still have persistent gaps for Black, Asian and other ethnic minority students. The University has been extremely active in taking whole institution approaches to improve the outcomes and experience of our ethnic minority students. This has included a whole scale response to the Closing the Gap³¹ and follow-up reports³², work to achieve the Race Equality Charter and engagement with sector equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives such as 100 Black Women Professors Now³³. These interventions driven by open and constructive conversations with staff and students have encompassed leadership, culture, policy, curriculum, recruitment practice and training. Much of this work is being continued through our Race Equality Charter Action Plan. We will also seek to work with Falmouth University to join forces where appropriate to address shared priorities relating to building an inclusive environment for Black and minority ethnic students at our shared Penryn Campus in Cornwall. Within our intervention strategy, we are focusing on two specific student-focused initiatives. The first is developing and understanding the impact of new academic roles created to support students at discipline level and the second is a new partnership with GRIT to work with students directly to help them realise their potential.

³¹ UUK & NUS. (2019). [Black, Asian and minority ethnic attainment at UK universities: #closing the gap](#)

³² UUK. (2023). [Closing the Gap: three years on](#)

³³ www.whenequality.org/

Note: All the activities below also contribute to Objective 3 and Intervention Strategy 3. Some also contribute to other objectives and related strategies as indicated [e.g. Objective 5 = Ob5].

Intervention strategy 4: **Supporting students to fulfil their academic potential ensuring our portfolio is relevant to learners and adopting sector leading inclusive practice.**

4a) **We will introduce major changes to our academic support model and curriculum to embed support and skills development**

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Student academic support: we will introduce a new model of data-informed student support with the aim of providing proactive interventions to address gaps in student outcomes. Pastoral Mentors will be recruited across all academic departments and will work with Student Data Leads to identify students in need of support and requiring proactive early interventions including referrals to specialist services. This will be rolled out to all students [new].	% 26 Pastoral Mentors; 26 Student Data Leads; % communications, project management, evaluation resource; training resources.	Students feel confident in escalating requests for help with their studies; students can draw down the support they need at an early stage; increase in the number of early referrals for support	Type 3: Quasi experimental, difference in difference analysis to see if there is an impact on withdrawals, complaints and student experience within discipline areas that are included within the pilot. Survey and focus groups used to assess implementation and formative evaluation of the support. Publication plan: Website publication & sector engagement 2026.
Curriculum for Change - Skills Mapping students will receive directed support to address skills and knowledge development as part of an ongoing skills match process through the new Curriculum for Change programme to help address gaps in student outcomes. Students will be able to identify development gaps and tailor their module choice to build specific skills to enhance attainment and employability. The programme will also build institutional knowledge of skills and development needs and where patterns occur relating to personal context to inform future provision. This will be available to all students [new]. ⁰⁵	This is part of a wider institutional project involving a tendering process for related digital tools. Costs are not yet available, with a launch data anticipated for 26/27.	Students can identify skills gaps and can undertake and evidence linked development activities. The University has a better understanding of specific skills and competency gaps to inform curriculum development.	Type 1 Publication plan: Impact report, 2027 and annually thereafter.
Academic skills: we will provide discipline-relevant academic skills support proactively targeted at student groups likely to experience the largest gaps in outcomes, particularly relating to degree awarding. Online tools, one to one support and group work will also be provided proactively linking with the work of the Pastoral Mentors and Student Data Leads and supporting the core skill strands delivered through Curriculum for Change. C850 students p.a. [extended].	100% Academic Skills Team	Students have increased confidence and skills in specific areas of development. Students know how to access further support to help them with their studies and assessment.	Type 1 and monitoring Publication plan: Impact report, annually.

4b) **We will embed inclusive education practice through policy and training and progressively employ universal design principles to ensure the most common adaptations for disability are built in to our modules.**

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Inclusive education policy: we will guide, train and support our academic staff to deliver inclusive	%1 FTE; % Success and Inclusive	Academic staff feel confident in	Type 2: Survey feedback from staff and students.

educational practice. This includes setting clear expectations through policy, providing learning tools and resources, and recognising excellence through our approach to recognition and reward. A particular focus will be supporting academic colleagues to embed universal design principles and increase the knowledge and skills-base in respect of supporting students with learning disabilities and social and communication disabilities. All students [new].	Education Working Group; % module and programme convenors time; staff development and resources.	embedding inclusivity principles in their teaching. Most required adjustments are built in to module design supporting disabled students to succeed on course. Students feel confident their needs are being met.	Publication plan: Impact report, annually.
Inclusive curriculum - Transformative Education Framework Curriculum Enhancement: we will progressively review and improve the content of the curriculum through the implementation of the enhancement framework. This takes module and programme convenors through a step by step process to improve accessibility of content and teaching methods; approach content from a decolonial perspective; appropriately frame sensitive content and promote sustainability, racial and social justice and freedom of speech [new].	%1 FTE; % Success and Inclusive Education Working Group; % module and programme convenors time; staff development and resources.	Academic staff feel confident in embedding inclusivity principles in their teaching. Students find content accessible and reflecting a broad range of cultural perspectives.	Type 1 Publication plan: Impact report, annually.

4c) We will work with students from ethnic minorities to provide personalised support and interventions to remove barriers to realising their potential in addition to building on whole institutional approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Academic Leads for Race Equality and Inclusion: academic leads working across departments and subject groupings will provide highly visible and proactive point of contact and advocacy for students experiencing discrimination, harassment, or microaggressions related to 'race', ethnicity, background, gender, sexuality, or (dis)ability either within the University environment or on placement. Leads will also work collaboratively and across their subject areas to promote anti-racist and inclusive educational practice and support the University's Transformative Education Framework [existing]. ⁰⁵	% 26 academic roles; training & administration	Students with protected characteristics feel confident in escalating concerns, that action will be taken and they feel supported.	Type 2: Process Tracing to show the ways in which this role has an impact. Publication plan: Website publication and sector engagement, 2027.
GRIT Black Leaders Programme: we will work with cohorts of Black students to realise their leadership skills, identify learning goals and strategies for development working in partnership with GRIT [continued].15-20 students p.a. ⁰⁵	£13k partner contribution p.a.; % APO team; student costs.	Participants have increased confidence in identifying and achieving their goals.	Type 2: Partnership evaluation framework and reporting. Publication plan: Partner report.
Peer mentoring: we will extend our schemes specifically designed to support students from under-represented backgrounds who are likely to experience gaps in outcomes, include those for mature students, care experienced and estranged students, disabled students and asylum seekers [existing].c850 mentees and mentors per annum.	% Peer Mentoring Team; event costs; development resources.	Students feel better equipped to transition to university life.	Type 2: pre /post survey measuring outcomes related to mentoring, such as sense of belonging and confidence and associated outcomes. Publication plan:

			Website publication and sector engagement, 2026.
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Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: estimated £1.9m excluding Curriculum for Change [dedicated staff and operational budget only]

Implementation strategy 5: Supporting students to fulfil their post-study ambitions to achieve social mobility.

Risks addressed: Progress to positive outcomes; cost pressures; environment not conducive to good mental health; regional factors.

Rationale: A literature review on employability by Advance HE³⁴ identifies a number of barriers to equal opportunity for under-represented students including insufficient career knowledge, relevant work experience and access to internships and CV-enhancing extra-curricular activities. While we have several existing schemes aimed at supporting under-represented students develop this knowledge and experience, we are also aware that some of the knowledge, time and confidence challenges experienced by these students also affect their ability to fully access and benefit from the support available.

Targeted engagement and accessible support

We are planning major changes to make employability-enhancing experiences, work placements and skills development more readily accessible on course through our Curriculum for Change programme. In the meantime, a key focus in addressing barriers to equal opportunity will be in improving engagement with existing support amongst the students who can benefit the most.

We will continue to provide paid internships for students to help secure their first step onto the career ladder with the support of a dedicated Careers Consultant. Collaboration between the University and employers to remove barriers for under-represented students is the cornerstone of the scheme to grow future talent and support the demand for skills in the region. The scheme closes the gap between education and industry to enhance the employability of the students, who are from diverse academic areas with varying technical skills and interests. Responding to the recent joint evaluation of this programme with TASO (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes), we will take steps to improve targeted promotion of this scheme to support those groups experiencing the biggest gaps in graduate outcomes.

We have provided bespoke careers consultancy for students meeting widening participation criteria for many years. We will develop the support offered through this service in collaboration with our Wellbeing team to encourage engagement with students with disabilities and particularly those with social and communication conditions. Proactive and targeted support will be offered through our disability peer mentoring groups and student societies and linked to a broader package of help and advice through our Career Zone. We will continue to work with our Neurodivergence Working Group to further improve the accessibility and shape of our service provision. This has already resulted in improvements, such as clearly flagging Disability Confident employers when advertising internships and job opportunities to give our disabled students confidence to apply for these opportunities and disclose their disabilities. The University of Exeter has partnered with the social mobility charity upReach since 2012 with the shared aim of enabling any student to achieve their full potential, regardless of social background. Exeter is now upReach’s largest university partner. All students supported by upReach are from state schools and low-income backgrounds. The most disadvantaged students are prioritised with over 80% from the lowest income households. We will continue to work with upReach to provide support for these students while extending opportunities for those with social and communication disabilities.

Developing progression opportunities

We will respond to calls by our Student Unions to create more flexible and career-enhancing placements and employment opportunities across our campuses to opportunities for accessible and relevant paid work. We

³⁴ https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/advance-he/AdvHE_Employability_literature_review_%202016-2021_print_1632920504.pdf

will also develop a new programme to encourage to support fair access to further study and beyond to academia. This will involve information, advice and guidance, research experience, mentoring opportunities and access to financial support to support progression and encourage diversity within our academic pipeline.

Note: Some of the activities below contribute to other objectives and related strategies as indicated [e.g. Objective 4 = Ob4].

Intervention strategy 5: **Supporting students to fulfil their post-study ambitions to achieve social mobility.**

5a) We will establish a programme to support students from under-represented backgrounds to experience and progress to postgraduate study.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Pathway to Postgraduate Study: programme of outreach, mentoring, research skills development and bespoke careers support for under-represented students seeking to progress into academia [new]. ⁰⁴	% Diversity in Postgraduate Study Working Group; % APO, Doctoral College & Student Recruitment Operations team	Participants feel informed about the opportunities offered by postgraduate study and feel they have the information and support they need to apply.	Type 1 and monitoring. Publication plan: Impact report, annually

5b) Working with employers we will provide focused support for students with disabilities and mental health conditions to improve employability and graduate outcomes.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Careers consultancy: one to one support for under-represented students to provide bespoke advice and development. Targeted support for students with disabilities and particularly those with social and communication disabilities will be offered proactively through close working with the Wellbeing and disability societies to improve engagement [extended].	1 FTE; % Wellbeing Team	Students acquire skills, knowledge and confidence to support progression to graduate level employment.	Type 2: Process Tracing to show the ways in which this role has an impact. Publication plan: Impact report, annually and sector engagement, 2026.
Disability support: we will review all aspects of our careers provision to ensure it is inclusive and accessible. Working with our Neurodivergent Working Group, we will continue to enhance support for student with social and communication disabilities such as making careers fairs and other events more accessible through the provision of quiet spaces and structured access and encouraging engagement with opportunities offered by Disability Confident employers [new].	% Student Employability & Academic Success (SEAS)Team	Students feel better able to understand, access and benefit from employability support available.	Type 1 and monitoring. Publication plan: Impact report, annually.
UpReach partnership: one to one coaching for eligible students through our partnership with UpReach, helping students discover different career options, and develop the vital skills, networks and experiences needed to succeed in their chosen career. We will work with upReach to enhance support for students with social and communication disabilities [existing].	Annual partner contribution c£55k % SEAS Team	Students acquire skills, knowledge and confidence to support progression to graduate level employment.	Type 2: Partnership evaluation framework and reporting. Publication plan: Partner report.

5c) We will provide paid internships and work to extend relevant campus-based employment opportunities.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation
Paid internships: collaboration with employers to provide paid internship opportunities for students	Student internship wages £185k per	Students can evidence experience and skills	Type 2: Contribution Analysis with TASO

meeting widening participation criteria. The scheme closes the gap between education and industry to enhance the employability of the students, who are from diverse academic areas with varying technical skills and interests. We shall ensure these internships and other job opportunities, particularly flexible opportunities on campus, are clearly advertised in one place [existing].	annum; % Student Employability and Academic Success Team	development to benefit future job applications and career options.	recently conducted/published. Type 1 therefore for this APP period. Publication plan: Policy publication, 2024.
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Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: estimated £445,000 per annum [dedicated staff and operational budget only].

5. Whole provider approach

The University has progressively adopted a whole provider approach to addressing risks to equal opportunity across the student journey. Our Access and Participation Plan is implemented through our Success for All Programme and governance structures which work towards widening access and building an inclusive educational environment for all students regardless of fee status and level of study. The programme involves colleagues from faculties, professional services working with our student community to address barriers across various stages of the student journey and deliver the work packages identified within our plan. More widely, Success for All seeks to support colleague development and culture change via a wider Success for All Network, conference, seminar, awards and communications programme.

Success for All Strategy Group			
Access	Induction & Transition	Inclusive Education & Student Success	Progression
Under-represented students	Student Funding & Finance	Diversity in Postgraduate Study	International Student Experience
Success for All Network			

Our students play an important role in access and participation. Our Student Unions provide advocacy and oversight and we regularly collaborate in problem solving, service design and delivery. Students are also actively involved in research and co-creation of new initiatives through our Education Incubator; Centre for Social Mobility project work and Students as Change Agents. Student societies such as Widening Access and Medicine, PhDs and Student Ambassadors meanwhile play a critical role in delivery.

Success for All is part of our Education governance structure and focuses on equality, diversity and inclusion issues affecting our student community. The Strategy Group is co-chaired by academic and professional services leads and reports up to the University Executive Board via the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Education and Student Experience. Alignment with our wider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work is achieved through representation on the Wellbeing, Inclusion and Culture Committee. This leads on EDI (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) policy, staff-facing initiatives and institutional frameworks including the Race Equality Charter and Mental Health Charter.

Our access work and collaboration with educational partners across the South West is an important strand of our civic mission and regional skills agenda. In addition to our Access and Participation targets, we have specific key performance indicators and objectives relating to our locality aligned to our Regional Skills Strategy and related performance management. Integration with recruitment and admissions policy is assured via periodic joint Dual Assurance meetings and representation on the University's Recruitment and Admissions Group.

Data and evidence-led approaches are supported via access and participation dashboards and datasets through our management information hub. Our Degree and Student Outcomes Committee carries out regular analysis of student datasets to identify and analyse gaps in outcomes and then ensures these are being flagged for action via Success for All or at Faculty level. Within Faculties, student outcomes data helps inform Teaching Excellence Action Plans at Department level to drive discipline-related interventions, for example to address awarding gaps. Access work at discipline level is also data-informed and supported by the central Access, Participation and Outreach Team working with academic leads to develop and implement annual action plans, for example to support attainment-raising or teaching enrichment in schools.

6. Student consultation

Student representation at the University is led by the Exeter Students' Guild and Falmouth & Exeter Students' Union. The Students' Guild and Union are represented on Council, the University's governing body and Senate, its senior academic forum as well as several of the delegated committees of the University Executive Board including those responsible for education and student experience, and wellbeing, inclusion, and culture. This includes "Success for All" which is responsible for the design and implementation of the Access and Participation Plan. Through these mechanisms, the Students' Guild and Union helped to refine our priorities in the early stages of the preparation of the plan and informed the evolution of our implementation and evaluation strategies as they escalated our governance and management structures. We also facilitated several thematic sessions with academic and professional service colleagues responsible for directly supporting students on our Devon and Cornwall campuses, including discussions with student advisers funded specifically to support underrepresented students. Our Access and Participation Plan is informed by a significant "Student Priorities" research project undertaken by the Students' Guild during the 2023/24 autumn term. This curated more than 2,000 pieces of student feedback collected through surveys, workshops and Let's Talk sessions. Whilst designed specifically to shape the Guild's work in improving student experience the findings highlighted numerous recommendations that will be implemented in partnership with the Guild through our new Plan and were discussed in detail at student-led workshops with senior managers. Themes included: a) further help with cost of living pressures including better promotion of existing financial support, making it simpler to apply for support, and the provision of tailored financial guidance; b) better promotion and signposting to existing well-being services, more efficient approach to mitigation and better health and well-being provision on campus; c) better signposting to job opportunities, particularly on campus, through the Career zone.

We surveyed all students about the challenges they face, whether the priorities identified in our gap analysis aligned to their understanding of greatest need and what more could be done to support them. This was promoted on social media, student-facing digital communication platforms and we also contacted more than 100 Students' Guild societies inviting them to take-part. Engagement was lower than hoped but responses received highlighted concerns about the physical accessibility of buildings on Penryn campus, tackling unconscious social exclusion on campus on the grounds of lifestyle, language, wealth, and challenges balancing various aspects of student life especially for those working part time. We supported the Students' Guild and Union in their preparations for a student submission holding meetings early in the process, briefing them about what was needed and sharing the findings of our gap analysis. The Students' Guild subsequently discussed the APP at two Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Board meetings. Several of the Board's observations and recommendations have been incorporated into our plan, such as:

- The plan recognises the financial strain that many students are under and how this can negatively affect their ability to engage with university life. We acknowledge that paid employment – a necessity for many – can negatively affect their studies. In response, we are increasing eligibility and award values for our Access to Exeter Bursary, offering campus employment opportunities, introducing an affordability initiative including financial advice, help with budgeting etc. To help finances stretch to the end of term.
- Secondly, we are supporting increasing numbers of neurodivergent students and those struggling with poor mental health. We recognise, however, that not all students that need help are confident in asking for it, and that we must better communicate our offer, make it easier to differentiate between services, ensure that provision meets students' needs, and eliminates unnecessary form-filling. In response we are expanding our support for neurodivergent students especially during induction and transition; reviewing

and improving access to support services; working towards the Mental Health Charter; and embedding inclusive education policies and relating development for staff.

We will continue to involve students in the delivery and evaluation of APP activities through Success for all, co-creation of new projects where relevant, and ongoing feedback and consultation.

7. Evaluation of the plan

The OfS evaluation self-assessment tool was used to identify areas of strength and areas for development within evaluation practices. The assessment was last completed in 2021 and there have been clear improvements since then following the implementation of training, resources, new governance structures and embedding type 1 evaluation principles across access and participation initiatives. Areas for continued development relate to completing more robust programme evaluations as set out in the new evaluation plan and to continue training and capacity building within delivery teams.

Area	Score 2021	Score 2024	Improvements since 2021-2024	Commitments
Strategic context	20 - emerging	23 - advanced	Success for All governance structure. Established APP evaluation steering group. Training for delivery staff Expanded evidence and data team.	Ongoing training and embedding of evaluation culture among delivery teams.
Programme design	12 - emerging	17 - advanced	Evaluation toolkit Theories of change for majority of programmes.	Continue to embed type 1 evidence in all programme evaluations.
Evaluation design	Unscored	7 (/9) - emerging	System for tracking and coordinating programme evaluations	More type 2 and type 3 programme evaluations.
Evaluation implementation	13 - emerging	16 - emerging	Completed programme evaluations such as evaluation of A2i internships programme in collaboration with TASO. Review of ethics and data protection including introduction of new privacy notices.	Deliver APP 25-29 evaluation plan. Establish new Education and Student experience ethics committee.
Learning from evaluation	11 - emerging	15 - emerging	Established communications channels: Success for All conference, briefing series and impact report.	Training for staff on how to report evaluation. Increased externally facing publications.

Formal reporting structures exist within the Success for All governance and regular updates are provided to the Success for All strategy group. In addition, an Access and Participation Plan evaluation steering group has been established to coordinate and track evaluations across the plan portfolio. The core group brings together evaluation and data expertise as well as strategic oversight. It directs the evaluation plan and works with evaluation leads (i.e. the member of staff or team leading on a particular programme evaluation) as needed to set objectives and timelines and act as a critical friend on matters such as methodology, reporting requirements and dissemination.

The Evidence and Strategy team is based within the Access, Participation and Outreach team and play a core role in providing data and insights across the Success for All strategy. The team has expanded over the course of the current plan with the addition of a Data Assistant and an Insights and Evidence Manager in addition to the Data Analyst and Research and Evaluation Officer. The majority of programme evaluations are collaborations between the team and delivery leads. Advice, guidance, and resources have been created in the evaluation toolkit and ad hoc, in-house training is provided. We have further invested in bespoke training for evaluation leads which has been delivered by Professor Jacqueline Stevenson. Links with the Centre for Social Mobility have enabled new areas of research and piloting of innovative interventions. The Centre's grant scheme is used to seed-fund research teams within the University (which can include professional services, academics or students). The scheme is into its fourth cycle and has funded 15 projects including the

introduction of a Black British studies module for undergraduates, exploring the experiences of home educated students, and exploring employment transitions through serious play. Over the course of our existing plan, we have worked closely with the Information Governance and Research Ethics teams to observe good practice in relation to data protection and ethics. This led to the introduction of a success for all privacy notice which provides more detail about the use of data for research and evaluation purposes as well as the legal basis for doing so. With an increasing number of programme evaluations with publication intentions, ethical requirements will outgrow current structures. Added to this, there are parallels in data usage and ethical requirements between evaluation of the plan and evaluation of other regulatory exercises like the TEF as well as the broader education strategy. A new Education and Student Experience Research Ethics Committee will be set up to oversee the review, approval and oversight of ethics and information governance considerations in relation to research, projects and experiments relating to education and student experience. There are several channels to share evaluation findings internally, such as the Success for All conference, an online lunchtime briefing series, impact reports and Centre for Social Mobility events. Externally, we have membership to the HEAT research and steering groups and host the Russell Group Evaluators network. We are also active members of the South West evaluators group. The Centre for Social mobility blog, the University of Exeter webpage, published reports, event/conference attendance and academic journal articles are further channels to share work externally.

8. Provision of information for students

Information on fees and funding for prospective students is provided via a variety of channels and at different stages of the student journey. We provide face to face and online information sessions on general funding support and support at the University of Exeter via our online platform Discover University, in-school information, advice and guidance sessions and talks and information stands at open days. Details of our Access to Exeter Bursary and other available funding is posted on our [bursaries and scholarships](#) web pages. All offer-holders receive information about student funding and bursaries through direct email communications and are also directed to our [Cost-of-Living](#) web pages which provide lots of information about budgeting, debt management, affordable study and help through the University and student unions. More detailed guidance on the support available is also provided through our Enhanced Induction and Transition events. All Access to Bursary Students are automatically contacted based on their household income information and provided with information about the support they will receive throughout the year. We work with our Student Unions to promote affordable study and living initiatives and liaise regularly to ensure students are kept informed through university and student union communication channels. We carry out an annual survey of Access to Exeter Bursary students and hardship fund recipients and ask them for feedback on the quality of communications and application systems as part of a process of continual review and improvement. We also use video animations to support information about finance, both for pre-applicants and for current students, to make information more accessible. Information relating to course fees is available through our Undergraduate Study and individual programme web pages.

Annex A: Assessment of Performance

Further information and analysis relating to the identification and prioritisation of key risks to equality of opportunity

1. Assessment of Performance and Risk Assessment

In this annex we present our analysis of Office for Students (OfS) and internal data, identifying gaps for under-represented and disadvantaged groups in accessing and succeeding in at the University of Exeter. Reviewing our performance to date as well as regional and sector data we outline those areas which we will prioritise through our targets. Section 1 contains a detailed analysis by characteristic group through the lifecycle stages (access, continuation and completion, degree outcomes, and graduate outcomes), and the priority risk indicators are related to the national Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) in section 2. The key groups and lifecycle stages where risk indicators are evident are summarised below.

Key risk indicators

Building on our success in improving access³⁵, recruitment of students who experience socio-economic disadvantage (particularly in the South West³⁶ region), those from ethnic minorities, and those from areas of low higher education participation, and mature students remain a priority.

Coming out of the pandemic into the cost-of-living crisis represents a challenge across the sector and although we are broadly in line with our TEF benchmarks³⁷, we will address sustained continuation gaps for those who are the most socio-economically disadvantaged, as well as those who are mature, or care experienced or estranged. Those who have a mental health condition are also less likely than their peers to complete their degree.

In terms of awarding gaps we are pleased to see the overall gap for disability has closed, however there is a specific gap for those with a social or communication disability. Although we are encouraged to see them narrowing there are still persistent awarding gaps for Black students, as well as for Asian students, mature students, and those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. The gaps are also present at First awarding level.

Whilst a high proportion of our students progress to either graduate level jobs or further study, there are gaps for those with a social or communication or mental health disability or multiple disabilities, as well as for those least likely to go to university or who are from socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

1.1 Methodology

Data analysis used four and two-year aggregate data from the OfS datasets to identify sustained gaps and take account of some of the variation year-to-year as well as give an indication of travel. All data is for full-time students over the four-year aggregate unless stated. We have also integrated internal data to report on target progress and to be able to include Region, Household Income, and School type, as well as smaller under-represented student groups (Care leavers, Estranged, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, Degree Apprenticeships) which we have aggregated to allow for analysis. Internal data for degree outcomes has also been used to examine whether closing of Good Honours awarding gaps are reflected at First level.

1.2 Socio-economic disadvantage and Low HE participation

The strong association between socio-economic disadvantage and low participation in higher education is reflected in our intervention strategies. We have reviewed a variety of socio-economic measures in targeting our work on those that experience the greatest gaps in equality of opportunity. These include:

³⁵ University of Exeter. (2022). [Success for All Impact Report 2022](#)

³⁶ Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, and Dorset

³⁷ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/>

- area based measures of **participation in higher education** which identify those less likely to progress to Higher Education (HE) based on the postcode area they live in. These Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPN) are identified using POLAR or TUNDRA quintiles 1&2. TUNDRA is particularly relevant in the South West as there are a far higher proportion of these areas³⁸.
- student based measures of **low income** such as Residual Household Income (RHI) and eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM). While the former is the most direct measure of income, we are unable to access this information prior to entry, and Free School Meal data is not available consistently throughout the student lifecycle, limiting the effectiveness of these measures in understanding student progress.
- area based measure of **deprivation** the Index for Multiple Deprivation (IMD) identifies those areas based on postcode which are the most deprived (i.e. in quintiles 1&2). We use it in targeting our schools outreach activity and making contextual offers because it intersects with many of the other measures³⁹. However, the South West contains a lower than average proportion of areas in quintiles 1&2.
- using both IMD and TUNDRA as our target measures in this area ensures we are effective in both urban, and rural and coastal areas and within and beyond the region.

As well as seeking to increase the proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged students, we use these measures to identify risk indicators in continuation, degree outcomes and graduate outcomes.

1.2.1 Access

Low Participation in HE

Broadly, one in five home undergraduate entrants were from low participation neighbourhoods (Table 1) in 2022-23 with the TUNDRA measure (23%) generating a higher estimate than POLAR4 (19%), as more areas in the South West are counted in quintile 1&2 and we recruit around 16% of our students from the region. However, as a high tariff provider we recruit a smaller share of entrants from low participation neighbourhoods than the sector average (around 33% whether POLAR OR TUNDRA).

Research has linked students' propensity to progress to higher education with educational attainment (EORR Risk 1), availability of information, advice and guidance (EORR Risk 2) and perceptions of higher education and specific institutions (EORR risk 3), and these have been addressed in our intervention strategies. For example, our contextual offer includes POLAR and students from low participation areas are more likely to accept their offer than those from other areas. Our Fair Access programmes have seen higher than would be expected progression rates to HE and to Exeter.

Congruent with our policies, the proportion of students from low participation neighbourhood has increased steadily since 2016-17 rising by at least three percentage points on each measure and exceeding our targets in this area⁴⁰. We want to build on this progress and have set a new region-specific target.

Regional Focus

The South West has the lowest progression to higher education rate in England⁴¹ with more than half of MSOAs in the South West classified as low participation in higher education neighbourhoods according to TUNDRA (i.e. are in quintiles 1 or 2)⁴². Among England regions, only the North East has a higher proportion of low participation MSOAs. Low progression in South West can partly be explained by low attainment especially

³⁸ https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/5515/tundra-methodology_20210311.pdf

³⁹ Three times as many students in IMD quintile 1&2 are in from the lowest income households than in IMD quintile 3-5. Nearly 85% of those previously eligible for FSM are from low income households, and half of our FSM eligible entrants are also in IMD Q1&2.

⁴⁰ University of Exeter. (2022). [Success for All Impact Report 2022](#)

⁴¹ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education>

⁴² https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/5515/tundra-methodology_20210311.pdf

among disadvantaged students⁴³. As with national recruitment from these areas, the share of regional recruits from TUNDRA quintile 1&2 areas has increased, and in 2022-23, 45% of students recruited from the region lived in a low participation neighbourhood. Over the duration of the new Access and Participation Plan (APP) period, we will therefore focus on increasing the proportion from those who are least likely to progress to HE (quintile 1) and monitor the percentage of students on our outreach programmes who progress to higher education.

Risk Indicators identified:

- low percentage of entrants from TUNDRA Q1&2
- **low percentage of entrants from TUNDRA Q1 from the South West (APP Target)**
- **low percentage of students from the South West progressing to HE (APP Target)**

Table 1: Trends in the % of entrants by HE participation and socio-economic indicators

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Low participation (LPN)							
POLAR4 Q1&2	14.8	15.3	16.0	16.6	18.0	18.8	18.7
TUNDRA MSOA Q1&2	19.7	20.6	21.2	21.9	21.5	22.9	23.6
TUNDRA MSOA Q1	7.3	7.4	8.1	8.4	7.9	8.6	8.4
TUNDRA MSOA Q1&2 South West	39.1	41.8	44.3	43.7	46	46.4	50.5
TUNDRA MSOA Q1 South West	13.4	14.3	18.3	18.3	18.0	18.2	18.0
Socio-economic							
IMD Q1&2	14.5	14.2	13.8	14.8	15.0	16.0	17.7
IMD Q1	4.3	4.6	3.7	4.3	4.2	5.0	5.4
IMD Q1&2 South West	23.7	23.6	25.4	27.9	25.7	28.4	29.5
IMD Q1 South West	5.8	7.1	7.2	7.3	6.3	7.7	5.6
Lowest RHI <£25,000 (ATE eligible)	18.3	18.8	17.1	17	17	16.2	15.2
Low RHI £25,000-£42,875	10.1	9.5	9.0	9.8	9.7	10.1	9.0
FSM	6.8	6.9	7.1	7.6	7.3	6.9	NA

Full-time entrants only.

Student based income measures

Around one quarter of our home undergraduate entrants came from households with combined Residential Household Income (RHI) of £42,875 or less (Table 1). In 2022/23 this included 15% on the lowest household incomes, of less than £25,000, and as such are eligible for financial support through the Access to Exeter (ATE) bursary (Table 1). Students that were eligible for Free School Meals whilst they were at school accounted for 7% of our home undergraduate entrants during the same year. We continue to monitor the percentage of entrants eligible for our bursary, and target those in receipt of FSM through our contextual offer.

Regional Focus

Our proportion of entrants who are eligible for free school meals is low for our national intake (7.2%)* compared to pupils nationally (19.7%) and in the South West (16.5%)⁴⁴. Only 18.7% of those in receipt of FSM in the South West progressed into HE, which is the lowest of all English regions⁴⁵.

**FSM not currently split by region*

⁴³ [Sim, A.-M. & Major, L. E. \(2022\) Social Mobility in the South West: Levelling up through education. Centre for Social Mobility, School of Education, University of Exeter](#)

⁴⁴ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/63d52256-a07d-443b-28d3-08d8dfdb3be6>

⁴⁵ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education>

Area based deprivation measure

In 2020, more than two-fifths (42%) of HE students were from the 40% most deprived areas (IMD quintile 1&2). Students from these areas accounted for 15% of home undergraduate entrants to our institution in 2021-22 (Table 1) rising to around one-quarter of students studying degree apprenticeships. Although exceeding our target in this area⁴⁶ we continue to strive to increase this proportion. Our admissions data tells us that applicants from deprived areas are slightly less likely to receive an offer and more likely to accept, than those from other areas. This reflects different patterns in subject choice, applicants' home region and travel time.

Regional Focus

Around one-third of our South West students are from IMD quintile 1&2, which is higher than our national intake, but still lower than the sector (42%). This in part reflects the lower proportion of quintile 1&2 areas in the South West (unlike TUNDRA which has more quintile 1&2 areas in the South West) but is also reflective (like TUNDRA) of risks around attainment, information, advice and guidance and perception of HE in the region.

School type

Those from state schools are more likely to be from IMD Q1&2 (21% compared to 5% of those from independent schools). The proportion of students from low-income households is 28% from state schools compared to 7% from independent schools. The inclusion of State school as an internal KPI and integration into measures such as contextual offer making supports the effectiveness of our APP interventions.

Risk Indicators identified:

- low percentage FSM eligible
- low percentage low household income
- **low percentage of entrants from IMD Q1&2 (APP Target)**
- low percentage of entrants from IMD Q1 from the South West

1.2.2 Continuation and Completion

The previous section demonstrated our progress in diversifying our student cohort. We are proud of our exceptional, personalised and immersive student experience, the effectiveness of which is reflected in high levels of student satisfaction and crucially, high-continuation rates into students' second year of study.

We monitor:

- **Continuation rates** – the percentage of entrants that start their second year of study - and the difference in continuation rates between student characteristics: the '**continuation gap**'.
- **Completion rates** – the percentage of entrants that complete their programme of study. Since most students who start their second year of study complete their programme, completion rates tend to follow the same pattern as continuation rates and therefore is only briefly reported on here.

Those students with lower propensities to complete or start their second year of study (Table 2) are perhaps unsurprisingly those student groups facing the greatest barriers to learning including care experienced students, those with characteristics associated with being least likely to attend HE, mature students (aged 21+), those from the most deprived neighbourhoods (IMD), students previously eligible for Free School Meals and those on low income (eligible for the Access to Exeter bursary), students with mental health conditions, and those estranged from their parents or guardians.

⁴⁶ University of Exeter. (2022). [Success for All Impact Report 2022](#)

Of these we have set targets for IMD quintile 1&2 (see below), mature (see Section 1.4.3), and disability including mental health (see section 1.5.2).

Table 2: Continuation gaps at Exeter compared to the sector

Student Group Comparison	UoE Gap	Sector Median Gap	Russell Group Median Gap
No Care Experience Care Experienced	8.7	NA	NA
ABCS Quintile 5 ABCS Quintile 1	8.6	8.0	6.9
Young Mature (21+)	7.8	3.2	6.0
Deprivation Quintile 5 Deprivation Quintile 1	6.6	4.2	3.5
Not Free School Meal Eligible Free School Meal Eligible	4.8	3.9	2.3
High Income Low Income (Bursary Eligible)	4.7	NA	NA
No Known Disability Mental Health	3.9	3.3	4.0
Not Estranged Estranged	3.3	NA	NA
POLAR Quintile 5 POLAR Quintile 1	2.6	2.3	2.4
White Other Ethnicity	2.5	2.6	1.1
No Known Disability Multiple Impairments	2.3	1.7	2.3
TUNDRA Quintile 5 TUNDRA Quintile 1	2.2	1.9	1.8
No Known Disability Social And Communication	2.0	1.8	4.6
Independent State School	1.8	NA	NA
White Black	1.8	3.3	1.8
No Known Disability Sensory Medical And Physical	1.5	0.7	1.4
White Asian	1.0	0.7	-0.3
White Mixed Ethnicity	1.0	2.1	0.1
Female Male	0.9	3.6	0.8
No Known Disability Cognitive And Learning	0.0	-0.5	0.2

Source: Four-year aggregate OFS data for full-time only

Socio-economic

We have higher than average continuation rates and most entrants (around 97%) continue into their second year at Exeter⁴⁷. Continuation rates are around the TEF benchmark in relation to FSM and IMD quintile, however where comparable sector data is available, this shows wider continuation gaps at Exeter than the average for the sector. Gaps in this area are intersectional, with some of the lowest continuation rates including those from most deprived neighbourhoods and males from ethnic minority groups (Table 3).

Table 3: Continuation rates by IMD quintile, ethnicity and gender

		IMD					Total
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	
Female	Asian	97%	99%	97%	94%	100%	98%
	Black	89%	98%	100%	97%	SUPP	96%
	Mixed	SUPP	100%	96%	94%	98%	97%
	White	92%	95%	97%	98%	98%	97%
Male	Asian	90%	87%	97%	100%	96%	94%
	Black	90%	95%	95%	SUPP	SUPP	95%
	Mixed	87%	94%	94%	98%	94%	95%
	White	89%	95%	96%	97%	98%	97%
Total		91%	95%	96%	97%	98%	97%

Source: Four-year aggregate OFS data for full-time only

Regional Focus

⁴⁷ This compares to 90% continuation in the sector (<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/continuation-and-transfer-rates/>)

Students from the South West are almost as likely to continue their studies as other students, and similarly to the national pattern there are slightly lower rates for those from deprived neighbourhoods or lowest household income, although no difference for those from low participation areas.

The gaps highlighted in our analysis of continuation statistics are the product of several risks to equality of opportunity experienced by students. Our research suggests that:

- **Cost pressures** (EORR Risk 10) are likely to be a key factor influencing lower completion rates among students with characteristics associated with lower financial resources (i.e. from deprived neighbourhoods, low household income, Free School Meals eligibility etc.). Students from deprived neighbourhoods, for example, are over-represented in applications for our hardship funds.
- Some students may be at risk of receiving **insufficient personal support** (EORR risk 11), which may intersect with Mental Health (EORR risk 8). Further research is planned around retention for under-represented students.

Given the intersections between deprivation, gender and ethnic group we have set a target to increase the continuation rates for students from IMD Q1 and Q2 to stay at Exeter.

Risk Indicators identified:

- **continuation and completion gap IMD Q1&2 (APP target)**
- continuation and completion gap - ethnic minority and gender intersections
- continuation and completion gap FSM eligible and ATE Bursary eligible

1.2.3 Degree outcomes: Good honours (2:1 or higher)

Our students are well supported to fulfil their academic potential with a high proportion achieving a good honours classification: between 2018/19 and 2021/22, 93% of all graduates were awarded a 2:1 degree or higher. We monitor both Good Honours and First Awarding gaps (the difference in Good Honours awarding rates between student characteristics).

Table 4: Good honours awarding gaps at Exeter compared to the sector

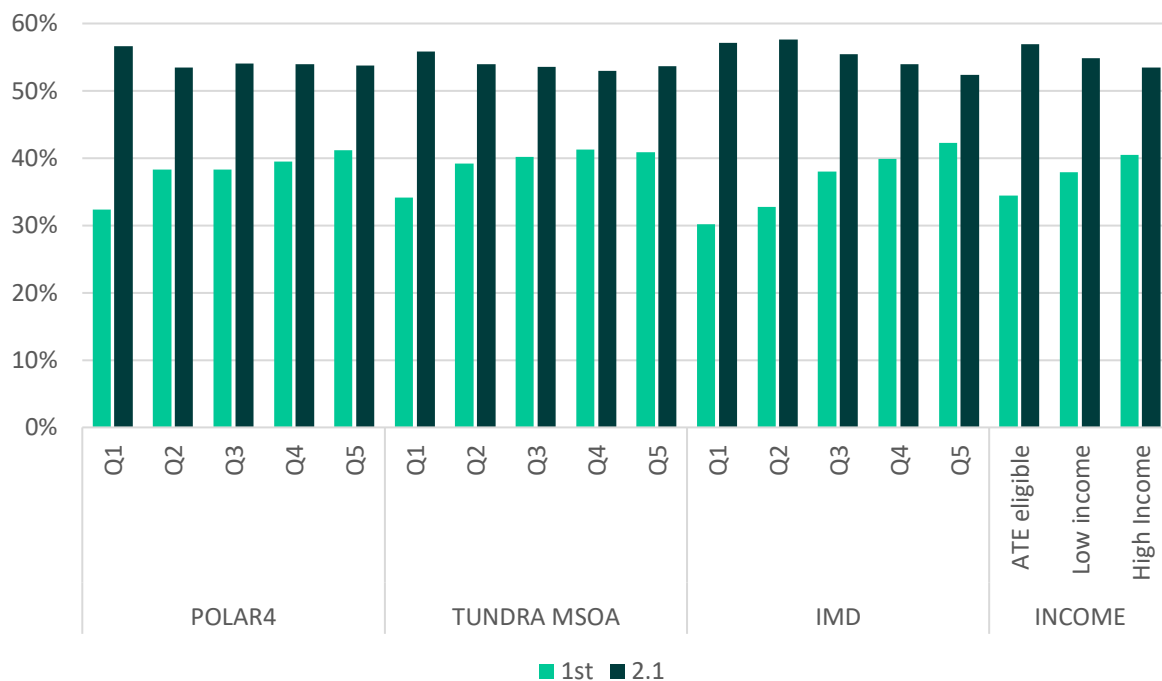
Student Group Comparison	UoE Gap	Sector Median Gap	Russell Group Median Gap
Young Mature (21+)	14.0	1.8	7.6
White Black	11.6	19.7	10.4
Deprivation Quintile 5 Deprivation Quintile 1	10.0	12.2	9.9
No Known Disability Social And Communication	9.7	2.9	8.2
White Other Ethnicity	8.8	11.8	6.7
Not Estranged Estranged	7.5		
Not Free School Meal Eligible Free School Meal Eligible	7.4	9.8	8.2
White Asian	7.3	10.5	7.6
POLAR Quintile 5 POLAR Quintile 1	5.9	4.3	4.5
No Care Experience Care Experienced	5.8	NA	NA
Female Male	5.0	5.3	4.2
TUNDRA Quintile 5 TUNDRA Quintile 1	4.7	1.8	3.1
HighIncome Low Income (Bursary Eligible)	3.7		
Independent State School	2.3	NA	NA
No Known Disability Mental Health	0.9	0.3	2.8
White Mixed Ethnicity	0.2	5.9	2.0
No Known Disability Cognitive And Learning	0.1	3.0	1.5
No Known Disability Multiple Impairments	-0.5	0.7	1.4
No Known Disability Sensory Medical And Physical	-1.8	0.2	0.3

Source: Four-year aggregate OFS data for full-time only

Those groups with the highest Awarding gaps are mature students, and Black, Asian and Other ethnic group students and we have set targets for these groups (see sections 1.4.4 and 1.3.3 for detail). However, as Chart 1 shows, attainment at this level is also positively associated with socio-economic advantage – a finding that holds across all measures.

The Good Honours awarding gap at our institution has narrowed over time and we have outperformed the sector and Russell Group universities in reducing the awarding gap on several socio-economic measures. The gaps based on socio-economic markers are gaps in the percentage of Firsts awarded, as for example a higher percentage of IMD quintile 1 than quintile 5 are awarded a 2.1. A slightly higher percentage of State school students get a First than independent school students.

Chart 1: Percentage of Firsts, 2.1 and other Honours by socio-economic group



Source: internal data to supply classification split, 4yr aggregate 2018/19 - 2021/22, excludes FSM

Regional focus

In the South West the IMD and TUNDRA Good Honours awarding gaps for quintile 1 are slightly lower than the average (by around 1 percentage point), and the First awarding gap is slightly higher (by around 1 percentage point). Students overall from the South West are as likely as other students to gain a First, and very slightly less likely to gain a 2.1, leading to an overall very small Good Honours Awarding gap.

Risk Indicators identified:

- Awarding gaps for FSM
- First awarding gaps for IMD Q1&2
- First awarding gaps for LPN (TUNDRA and POLAR) Q1&2

We have made our focus on entry and transition support to increase continuation for this group of students which should also support longer term improvement later in the lifecycle as internal research indicates that first year results are strongly correlated with degree outcomes. Whilst there is a gap for quintile 1&2 students (both male and female) within all ethnic groups, the ethnic group gaps overall are larger, and so our target is focussed there. See section 1.3.3.

1.2.4 Progression to employment or further study

Our students achieve good outcomes upon completing their study reflecting our commitment in our Education Strategy to prepare ‘graduates of distinction’. We gather evidence on student destinations from the Graduate Outcomes Survey and our internal Careers Destination Survey. We measure the difference in progression to graduate outcomes rates between student characteristics. The most recent Graduate Outcomes Survey suggests that 88% percent of students responding to the survey had progressed into graduate level employment or further study. Table 5 shows that the largest gaps in this area are for those with social and communication, mental health and multiple disabilities, those least likely to progress to HE and those from the most deprived areas. Our targets focus on achieving positive graduate outcomes for students with disabilities (see section 1.5.4), and those from areas of deprivation.

Table 5: Progression gaps at Exeter compared to the sector

Student Group Comparison		UoE Gap	Sector Median Gap	Russell Group Median Gap
No Known Disability	Social And Communication	8.4	10.3	11.1
ABCS Quintile 5	ABCS Quintile 1	7.1	16.5	11.5
Deprivation Quintile 5	Deprivation Quintile 1	6.6	6.1	3.8
No Known Disability	Mental Health	6.4	4.7	5.5
No Known Disability	Multiple Impairments	6.1	2.3	3.2
POLAR Quintile 5	POLAR Quintile 1	5.1	3.8	2.0
White	Other Ethnicity	4.4	2.3	0.4
TUNDRA Quintile 5	TUNDRA Quintile 1	4.0	2.2	1.3
Young	Mature (21+)	3.1	-6.9	-5.8
Male	Female	2.9	1.8	2.2
No Known Disability	Sensory Medical And Physical	1.6	-0.1	-0.8
Not Free School Meal Eligible	Free School Meal Eligible	0.9	4.0	3.7
No Known Disability	Cognitive And Learning	0.0	-1.5	0.0
White	Asian	-3.7	4.4	-1.8
White	Black	-3.8	1.8	-2.1
White	Mixed Ethnicity	-5.6	1.1	0.5

Source: Four-year aggregate OfS data for full-time only

Students from deprived areas (IMD quintiles 1&2) are less likely than those from other neighbourhoods to achieve a positive outcome (i.e. graduate employment or further study). The progression gap between the most (quintile 1) and least (quintile 5) deprived areas was almost 7 percentage points (Table 5), and the gap for IMD quintiles 1&2 is 3 percentage points. Our internal career destination survey for 2020/21 graduates adds to this picture, showing gaps of 8 percentage points for those from IMD quintiles 1&2.

Internal analysis of graduate outcomes data indicates that whilst similar proportions of the survey respondents progressed into full-time further study irrespective of quintile, the progression gap for IMD students is based on a lower percentage who had progressed into full-time graduate employment (a slightly higher percentage are in part-time employment or unemployed). There are also gaps for those from areas of low HE participation (Table 5), and our internal career destination survey for 2020/21 graduates confirms this, showing similar gaps for those from POLAR Q1&2.

Although data for this area is partial as based on surveys, both the Graduate Outcomes survey data and our internal Careers Destination Survey indicates that the ‘positive outcomes’ progression gap has reduced for ATE bursary recipients compared to all those not in receipt. We are pleased to see that based on Graduate Outcomes the gap has reduced to 2.1 percentage points and based on our ‘graduate level destinations’ is almost eliminated at 0.2 percentage points. OfS data shows only a 0.9 percentage point progression gap for those previously eligible for FSM, and we are performing above benchmark⁴⁸. These risk indicators are likely to reflect cost of living challenges (EORR risk 12) as we know that many of bursary students need work part-

⁴⁸ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard>

time for example which can affect engagement in extra curricula activities. We continue to deliver our targeted programmes in this area.

Regional focus

The proportion of South West students that entered a graduate level destination according to Graduate Outcomes survey is slightly lower than students from the rest of the UK (1.4 percentage point gap). There is a gap in the South West of 2 percentage points between IMD quintile 1&2 and quintile 3-5. However, this gap is lower than for the rest of the UK as the proportion of students entering a graduate level destination is the same for quintile 1 and 2 in the South West as elsewhere but lower in the South West for quintile 3-5 than their peers. Geographies of employment quintile (which measures the likelihood of gaining a highly skilled job based on home area) shows a progression gap of 16 percentage points for quintile 1⁴⁹, indicating that students who come to Exeter from areas where there are least graduate jobs are less likely to gain a graduate job than those from areas of high graduate jobs. We perform on or slightly below benchmark here. We will continue to work to address these gaps for local and national students, and monitor outcomes.

Risk Indicators identified:

- **Progression gaps for those from deprived areas (APP target)**
- Progression gaps for those from low participation areas
- Progression gaps for those from the South West

1.3 Students from ethnic minorities

1.3.1 Access

In 2022/23, one in seven (14%) of home undergraduate entrants were from an ethnic minority group with the largest proportions from Mixed (6%) and Asian (5%) ethnic groups, and smaller number of Black students (3%) and those from other ethnic minority groups (1%)⁵⁰. Partly reflecting the ethnic composition of the South West region⁵¹, our entrants are less ethnically diverse than the sector⁵² although the proportion of entrants from ethnic minority groups has increased year-on-year, more than doubling since 2013/14. The largest percentage increase have been in Other and Black ethnic groups.

As well as the regional effect, other underlying risks to recruitment include access to information, advice and guidance (EORR risk 1), perceptions of HE and the South West region (EORR risk 3), as well as region or mode of study limitations (EORR risk 5), and higher rates of application to specific and competitive subjects (EORR risk 4). Our application data⁵³ tells us that students from ethnic minorities are equally likely to gain an offer, but less likely to accept their offer or enrol at Exeter. This is somewhat reflective of subject choices, but also access to advice and guidance, perceptions of HE and the region. These inform the actions in the plan.

Risk Indicators identified:

- **Low percentage of students from ethnic minorities (APP target)**

1.3.2 Continuation

On average 96% of students from an ethnic minority background continued into their second year of study: 1.3 percentage points lower than that for White students. This is smaller than the sector gap of 2.5 percentage points over the same four-year period.

⁴⁹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard>

⁵⁰ This includes a small number of students from Gypsy, Roma or Traveller backgrounds

⁵¹ Nearly one in five entrants are from the South West region

⁵² In 2022-23 one-third of HE entrants were from an ethnic minority group

⁵³ UCAS PERS data, excluding Medicine

1.3.5 Progression

A slightly higher percentage of our Black, Asian and Mixed ethnic group students achieve better graduate outcomes than their White peers, and we perform on or above benchmark⁵⁶. There has been a sustained progression gap for those students from Other ethnic group (4.4 percentage points over the four-year aggregate), however this has become a reverse gap during the most recent years, with more students gaining positive graduate outcomes in work or study.

The reverse gap for Asian, Black and Mixed ethnic group graduates is accounted for by the proportion of those students entering graduate full-time employment and further study combined which has remained higher than for White students. The trend for higher positive graduate outcomes is not accounted for by the higher proportion of ethnic minority students choosing vocational course types, as the trend is cross-discipline, and positive outcomes are not always higher in vocational disciplines.

Intersectional analysis shows that ethnic minority groups have higher progression rates even when IMD is taken into account. There is a gap of 3.6 percentage points between ethnic minority students from IMD quintile 1&2 when compared to ethnic minority students from quintiles 3-5, which ties into socio-economic gaps in section 1.2.4. However, the progression rates for ethnic minority students from all IMD quintiles are still above those of their White peers.

1.4 Mature students

1.4.1 Access

Mature learners⁵⁷ account for a small and declining percentage of our full-time home undergraduate entrants (excluding Degree Apprenticeships), declining from 5.8% in 2016/17 to 3.5% in 2021/22. Our proportion of mature entrants is well below the sector median average (43%) and lower than that achieved in similar types of institution. Our Degree Apprenticeship programmes attract a much high proportion of mature learners indicating that this type of provision provides the flexibility and financial stability being sought by students returning to learning (addressing EORR Risk 5, limited course type). Degree Apprenticeships raised our overall percentage of mature entrants to 6.5% in 2021/22⁵⁸.

Our admissions data tells us that our mature applicants are less likely to receive an offer than their peers, although they are more likely to accept an offer if made. Mature applicants are concentrated in a narrower range of subjects than younger applicants. We have projects in place to address issues around types and age of qualifications as well as information, advice and guidance and initiatives which provide support and guidance on subjects, qualifications and issues such as financial support (more of our mature students are low income).

As well as risks around qualification type, advice and guidance, and perceptions of HE (EORR risks 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5), nearly one in five have caring responsibilities (including childcare) compared to 1% of young students, and half are eligible for the Access to Exeter bursary, so cost of living (EORR risk 10) is a risk for this group on entry as well as continuation. Some 16% have declared a mental health condition (EORR risk 8) compared to 10% of young students. Mature students are more likely to have any type of disability (42% compared to 26%); come from the South West region (45% v 16%) or be from an ethnic minority (16% v 11%).

Risk Indicators identified:

- **Low and declining percentage of mature students (APP target)**

⁵⁶ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard>

⁵⁷ those aged over 21 on commencement of their studies

⁵⁸ analysis here relates to non degree apprentices unless specified

1.4.2 Commuter students

Around 3% of our entrants indicate that they intend to live at home⁵⁹, with 7% leaving the question blank, potentially indicating that they have yet to make a decision on their accommodation. We have used this indicative data as internal analysis in this area suggests that an accurate term-time address is not always recorded, leading to potential over-reporting. Of those who indicate they intend to live at home a third of them are mature students, which in turn accounts for around one-quarter of our mature entrants. The high rate of intersectionality is not unexpected as nearly half of mature entrants are from the South West.

1.4.3 Continuation and Completion

Nearly nine in ten (89%) mature students continue into their second year, and 83% complete their studies. The overall gap between continuation rates for mature and young students is 8 percentage points (Table 2), with a larger completion gap (14 percentage points). A smaller continuation gap is also present for Degree Apprentices (5 percentage points). Students aged between 31 to 40 are most likely to drop out of their studies within the first year, but overall completion rates are lower for all mature age groups. Although we underperform compared to the sector (5 percentage point gap), we are performing above our benchmark of similar institutions⁶⁰.

Examining continuation rates by age, area of deprivation and disability (Table 5) shows that even non-disabled mature students from the more prosperous areas of IMD quintiles 3-5, (the intersection with the highest continuation rates for mature students) are *less* likely to continue into their second year than young disabled learners from deprived area (the intersection with the lowest continuation rates for young students): 91% compared to 93%. Indicating that age is the most influential indicator, although there are also notable intersectional gaps based on socio-economics, gender and ethnic group (see Section 1.2.2), and age and disability. Disability is aggregated in Table 5 due to some small numbers, however continuation and completion rates are particularly low for those mature students with mental health or multiple disabilities irrespective of IMD quintile (see Section 1.5.2).

Table 8: Continuation rates by IMD quintile, age and disability

		Young	Mature	Total		
IMD Q1&2	Disabled	93%	85%	91%	Most concern	
	Non-disabled	95%	89%	94%		
IMD Q3-5	Disabled	97%	88%	96%		
	Non-disabled	98%	91%	97%		
Total		97%	89%	97%		Least concern

Source: four-year aggregate OfS data for full-time only

Continuation and completion rates for mature students have increased slightly in recent years, narrowing the gap with young students on both measures: from 8 percentage points to 7 percentage points for continuation and from 14 percentage points to 13 percentage points for completion.

Risks to completion may include academic and pastoral support needs due to higher rates of non-traditional qualifications, cost of living as more students are from low-income households, and for some students Mental Health and wellbeing. The sustained gap and multiple types of risk mean this is a target area.

Risk Indicators identified:

⁵⁹ UCAS data

⁶⁰ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard>

- **Sustained continuation and completion gaps for mature students on full-time undergraduate courses (APP target)**

1.4.4 Degree outcomes and Awarding gaps

Mature students are much less likely than their younger peers to gain Good Honours - between 2018/19 and 2021/22, 83% of mature students achieved a Good Honours degree, compared to 97% of young students. This means a Good Honours awarding gap of 14 percentage points (Table 4), with the gap generally increasing with age band. Although there are some signs of a decrease in the gap over the last two years, it remains at 13 percentage points. This is higher than the sector gap of 2 percentage points, and the gap for similar institutions (8 percentage points). Further analysis of the interactions between age and other characteristics reveals:

- Younger (under 26 years) female students are more likely to achieve Good Honours than younger males, but older (over 30 years) males more likely to achieve a Good Honours than older female peers.
- Good Honours rates are lowest for mature students on the lowest household income band or with childcare responsibilities, which have already been identified as intersectional characteristics for this group.
- All groups and genders have a minimum 5 percentage point gap compared to young students.
- Disability has very limited impact on the awarding gap for mature students (the gap is 1 percentage point higher for those with a disability)

Between 2018/19 and 2021/22, 28% of mature students were awarded a First class degree, compared to 39% of young students, meaning an 11 percentage point First awarding gap. As with Good Honours overall this gap generally increased with age, and we see signs of decrease over the last 2 years of data.

There is no Good Honours awarding gap on Degree Apprenticeship programmes for mature students, as the same proportion gain Good Honours. However mature students are much less likely than their younger peers to gain a First (39 percentage point First awarding gap).

Regional Focus

The rate of Good Honours is lower for mature students irrespective of region, and both young and mature students from the South West have a lower-than-average rate of Good Honours meaning mature students from the South West have a particularly low rate of Good Honours. With both the regional and other risks for this group including across modes of study this is one of our target areas.

Risk Indicators identified:

- **Sustained Good Honours and First degree awarding gaps for mature students across all age groups (APP target)**

1.4.5 Progression

Between 2017/18 to 2020/21, 76% of mature students achieved a positive graduate outcome, a lower proportion than their younger peers (79%), meaning a 3 percentage point progression gap (Table 5). This gap has previously been in decline, becoming a reverse gap in 2019/20, however it increased again in 2020/21. The sector trend is for a reverse gap, where mature students are more likely to gain a positive graduate outcome.

Over the four-year period, there is a reverse gap for age band 26-30 (-0.2 percentage points), but the gap is present for those age 21-25 (3 percentage points) and highest for those age 31-40 (6.6 percentage points). This emerging gap reflects the higher proportion of mature students in non-graduate full-time employment in comparison to the higher proportion in graduate full-time employment previously. This may reflect the cost-

of-living challenges. We perform on or below our benchmark of similar institutions⁶¹, so will continue to monitor our performance.

Risk Indicators identified:

- Emerging gap in positive graduate outcomes for mature students, particularly for 21-25 and 31+ age band

1.5 Students with Disabilities

1.5.1 Access

One-fifth (20%) of students declare a disability upon registration but this rises to one-quarter (27%) declaring a disability by the final year of their course. A similar proportion of entrants at Exeter reported a disability on entry as the sector average (19%).

Disability declarations upon entry are mostly associated with cognitive and learning (8%) and mental health (6%) difficulties with smaller proportions of students reporting multiple disabilities (3%), physical and sensory disability (2%) and social and communication (1%) disability. Disability reported during their course is most frequently related to mental health or cognitive and learning difficulties. The largest rise in declarations on entry has been in Mental Health conditions (from 4% in 2016/17 to 6% in 2021/22), and Social and Communication (from 0.5% to 1.2%). We know that there may be overlaps between these conditions and have seen declarations of Multiple disability rise from 2.0% to 3.4%. Intersectional analysis of disability declarations⁶² reveals that:

- Students identifying as female (53% of students) or other gender (1.5% of students) are more likely to declare a disability than male students. 22% of students self-categorising gender as other and 8% of female students report difficulties with their mental health compared to 3% of male students. Other gender students are more likely than other students to declare a social and communication disability (7% compared to 1% of all students).
- Disability is more prevalent among mature learners (42%) than young students (26%), for all types except cognitive and learning. Mature learners are three times more likely to declare a mental health condition than students aged under 21: 16% of our mature students declared a Mental Health condition compared to 10% of those age under 21.
- Students from Asian or Black ethnic groups are less likely to report a disability than students from other ethnic minority backgrounds: 17% of Asian students and 22% of Black students compared to 27% of White students, and 28% of Mixed and Other ethnic groups. Asian students are less likely than all other ethnic groups to declare a mental health condition, and Asian, Black and Other ethnic group student are less likely to declare a cognitive or learning difficulty or social or communication disability.
- Degree Apprentices are considerably less likely (8%) to declare a disability than other students (20%), however this may reflect under-reporting among this cohort. Disabled people also account for a relatively small share of the workforce and Degree Apprentices are often employed before they start their apprenticeship. Disabled apprentices are more likely than other disabled students to have a physical or sensory disability but report other conditions in similar proportions to other students.

The rise in declaration through their time with us, and under-declaration of disability by male and ethnic minority students, suggests that some of the risks to be addressed in this area are around advice and guidance to let students know the pastoral and academic support on offer at university and encouraging engagement (EORR risks 3, 6 and 7).

Risk Indicators identified:

⁶¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard>

⁶² using internal data which shows a higher rate due to declaration during their course

- Higher rates of mental health declarations from female and other gender students
- Lower declaration of mental health disability from male students and Asian students
- Lower declaration of cognitive and learning or social or communication disability from Asian, Black and Other ethnic groups

1.5.2 Continuation and Completion

Continuation

Students with a disability are less likely to continue to their second year of study (95%) than students without a disability (97%) and are less likely to complete their course (93% compared to 97%). This means a 2 percentage point continuation gap overall. By disability type the continuation gaps are (Table 2):

- widest for students with mental health conditions (4 percentage points)
- around 2 percentage points for students with multiple, social and communication and physical and sensory disabilities
- there is no gap for those with cognitive and learning disabilities meaning they are equally likely to continue as their peers.

There is no difference between those students receiving or not receiving Disability Support Allowance.

Completion

The completion gap for disability is wider than the continuation gap overall and for each disability category. This suggests that disabled students are more likely than their peers to withdraw from their course during the second or subsequent year(s) of study but may also reflect on-course declarations of disability. The completion gap by disability type is:

- widest for students with mental health difficulty (8 percentage points)
- around 5 percentage points for students with multiple or social and community difficulties and 2 percentage points for students with physical and sensory disabilities.
- narrowest for students with cognitive and learning difficulties (1 percentage point)

Intersectional analysis, using internal data, reveals continuation and completion rates (Table 8, section 1.4.3) are particularly low for students who are mature or from a deprived area:

- there is a 7 percentage point gap between mature students with a mental health condition and those mature students without a disability and a 13 percentage point gap when compared to young students with mental health disability
- for IMD quintile 1 students with a Mental Health condition there is a 3 percentage point gap to IMD quintile 1 students without a disability and an 8 percentage point gap compared to quintile 3-5 students with a mental health disability

The intersection with deprivation quintile suggests that the cost-of-living needs to be taken into account (EORR risk 10) along with academic and pastoral support needs, and the ongoing impact of the pandemic (EORR risk 9).

Our target in this area is focussed on continuation for early intervention and is inclusive of all disability types but recognises the need for targeted action specifically around Mental Health (EORR risk 8).

Risk Indicators identified:

- **Continuation and Completion gaps for Mental Health and Multiple disability and Social and Communication (APP target), intersectional with mature and IMD**

1.5.3 Degree outcomes and awarding gaps

Between 2018/19 and 2021/22, a very similar proportion of students with and without a disability achieved a Good Honours degree (92.3% compared to 92.6%), and this gap has closed completely in the two most recent years. However social and communication disability is associated with lower degree outcomes – with 83% gaining Good Honours (a 10 percentage point gap). This is twice as wide as the degree awarding gap reporting for students declaring a social and communication disability sector-wide (3 percentage points). The gap has narrowed to 7 percentage points for the most recent 2 years.

While the Good Honours gap has closed for most disabilities, over the same period the proportion of students with a disability gaining a First class degree remains lower than their peers (35% compared to 39%). The widest gaps are for students disclosing cognitive and learning disabilities (8 percentage points), mental health (4 percentage points), and social and communication (4 percentage points).

The data for some disability groups involve small numbers of students even when aggregated. This can contribute to high levels of year-on-year variation, making trend analysis difficult. Underlying risks for this group relate not only to mental health, and academic and pastoral support as well as the ongoing effect of the pandemic. We will continue to monitor the outcomes for these students closely.

Risk Indicators identified:

- Good Honours awarding gap for Social and Communication disability
- First awarding gaps remain for Cognitive and Learning, and Mental Health disability types

1.5.4 Progression

According to the Graduate Outcomes Survey 76% of students disclosing a disability progressed into graduate-level employment during 2017/18 to 2020/21. This is marginally lower than for students without a disability (80%), with the gap between the two groups approaching 4 percentage points. This is broadly in line with benchmark⁶³ and is mirrored in our Career Destination survey (which shows a 2 percentage point gap for 2020/21). The widest gaps are for:

- Social communication (8 percentage points)
- Mental health (6 percentage points)
- Multiple disabilities (6 percentage points)

Our intersectional analysis suggests students with a mental health condition from deprived areas (IMD Q1) face particularly acute barriers to employment. The progression measure includes transition to employment and further study. Historically, students with a disability have higher rates of transition to further study than other students and lower rates of transition to employment. While the progression gap has narrowed for disabled students over the last two years within this broadly positive picture the following trends warrant further investigation:

- Reduction in the proportion of some disabled students (e.g. those with mental health conditions, social and communication and cognitive disabilities) entering graduate-level employment. It is unclear whether these trends reflect the preferences of students or a response to a challenging graduate labour market for disabled people.
- Slight widening of the overall progression gap over the last year.

We are keen to understand how the current economic situation is affecting the employment prospects of our disabled students and so are including it as a target area.

Risk Indicators identified:

- **Sustained progression gap for students with a disability, particularly those with Social and Communication, Mental Health and Multiple disabilities (APP target)**

⁶³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard>

1.6 Care leavers, Care experienced and Estranged students

1.6.1 Access

On average our home undergraduate entrants include 30-40 care experienced students, of whom a quarter are care leavers⁶⁴, and 60-70 students that were estranged⁶⁵. Due to sample size, volatility of the data and likelihood of suppression linked to data protection, we will prioritise this group through our interventions while continuing to review our internal data but will not set a numerical target within our Access and Participation Plan. As such, while these students represent a small proportion of all entrants, just 0.5% for care experienced and around 1% for estranged students⁶⁶, they are among the most at risk of experiencing inequality of opportunity in terms of accessing higher education. Our intersectional analysis reveals that:

- Nearly half of students who are care experienced, 90% of care leavers and nearly three-quarters of estranged students are from low-income households.
- Many of our care leavers also experience family estrangement, although the majority of our estranged students are not care experienced.
- Both care experience and estranged students are more likely to have a disability or be from an ethnic minority than their peers.
- Over one-third of our estranged students are mature.

We recruited a smaller share (0.6%) of care-experienced students than the sector average (1.2%) in 2021/22⁶⁷ but this proportion has risen marginally over time.

In terms of risk for this group as the intersections with other indicators show, and informal and regular feedback through our Exeter Cares community indicates, these students are more at risk from cost of living and accommodation costs, as well as having pastoral support needs (EORR risks 7, 10, 11).

Risk Indicators identified:

- Low percentage of care leavers and estranged

1.6.2 Continuation and Completion

Between 2017/18 and 2020/21 85% of care leaver and care-experienced students continued into their second year of study compared to 94% of students overall⁶⁸, meaning a 9 percentage point continuation gap. Within this group, care leavers were slightly less likely to continue (81%), leading to a 13 percentage points for this group. Internal data suggests that there is a 20 percentage point gap for completion. The continuation gap for estranged students (3 percentage points) is lower than for care leavers and care-experienced students. We have not set a numerical target for this area, as year on year numbers are small, and we plan to do more in depth investigation to understand specific risk points in the cycle, but this is a high priority area.

Risk Indicators identified:

- Continuation gaps for care leavers and care experienced students, and estranged students

1.6.3 Degree outcomes and awarding gaps

⁶⁴ Care leaver is defined here as a young person (up to the age of 25) who has been looked after by a UK local authority for more than 13 weeks since they were 14, including some time at age 16 or 17, and care experienced as any student who has been or is currently in care or from a looked after background at any stage of their life, no matter how short

⁶⁵ There are several possible data sources on estrangement, this is based on self-declaration on registration

⁶⁶ A further 3% indicate Prefer Not to Say

⁶⁷ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-characteristics-data/population-data-dashboard/>

⁶⁸ Based on internal data and not comparable with OfS datasets due to re-enrolments and transfers

Between 2018/19 and 2021/22, 87% of care leavers and care experienced students achieved Good Honours and 28% achieved a First class degree. This is lower than those for other students, resulting in an attainment gap of almost 6 percentage points for Good Honours and 11 percentage points for a First class degree. Notably, no verified care leavers gained a First class degree during this four-year period. Estranged students are less likely to achieve Good Honours (87%) or a First class (24%) degree than care leavers and care experience students. The awarding gap between estranged and other students for Good Honours is 6 percentage points and 15 percentage points for Firsts. Our acknowledgement of these gaps and ambition to narrow them is reflected in our work around success with these students.

Risk Indicators identified:

- Awarding gaps for care leavers and care experienced students, and estranged students

1.6.4 Progression

The data set is small and due to the response rate and data available it is not possible to draw any conclusions. The overlap with ethnic group, disability, low income and mature will lead to highly individualised outcomes. Care leavers and estranged students remain eligible for additional support in this area.

1.7 Intersections of disadvantage and ABCs (Association Between Characteristics)

The ABCs metric identifies those students who are least likely to be successful in accessing, continuing, completing and progressing from HE based on combination of characteristics. The statistics are reported as quintiles and in common with area-based measures of deprivation and low participation, we monitor the experience of the lowest two quintiles.

Our analysis confirms that student success is influenced by multiple factors, such as the intersections of deprivation with ethnicity and gender, and age and disability. Unsurprisingly, our students in the lowest ABCs quintiles are more likely to be eligible for Free School Meals (almost two-thirds compared to 7% of all students), or come from a low-income household or live in a deprived or low participation neighbourhood. They are also more likely than students in higher ABC quintiles to be male, White, live in the South West region and be the first in their family to attend university. Monitoring the performance of students in the lowest ABCs quintiles allows us to assess whether outcomes for disadvantaged students overall have improved.

1.7.1 Access

Almost one-fifth (19%) of our entrants between 2018/19 and 2021/22 were from low ABCS quintiles (i.e. quintile 1 or 2) of whom 5% were from the lowest quintile. We have a lower share of students from the lowest ABCS quintile than average for the sector (30% are quintile 1 or 2) - a finding that is consistent with our lower share of students in the most deprived areas and who are eligible for Free School Meals (see Section 1.2.1.). The share of entrants recruited with this ABCS descriptor has not changed substantially in recent years.

Risk Indicators identified:

- Low percentage of ABCs Q1 (least likely to participate in HE)

1.7.2 Continuation, Completion, and Progression

Students in the lowest ABCS quintile are less likely to continue into their second year and complete their studies than other students. Our gap analysis (Table 2) reveals that:

- the continuation gap for students in ABCS quintile 1 (9 percentage points), and quintile 2 (6 percentage points) and the completion gaps are larger: 21 percentage points for quintile 1 and 10 percentage points for quintile 2.

- this is slightly higher than the sector, although broadly in line with similar institutions⁶⁹.
- the gaps are comparable to the continuation and completion gap for care-experienced students but higher than those for students from deprived areas or previously eligible for Free School Meals alone, illustrating the impact of multiple dimensions of disadvantage on students' ability to complete their studies.

Risk Indicators identified:

- Continuation and completion gaps for ABCs Q1&2 (students with multiple indicators of disadvantage)

1.7.3 Degree outcomes and awarding gaps

ABCS data is not available for attainment but our analysis in Section 1.2.3 shows that deprivation (IMD Q1 and 2), low income (Free School Meals), ethnicity and region intersect to increase students' risk of poorer outcomes.

1.7.4 Progression

For graduates from 2017/18 to 2020/21, 75% of ABCS quintile 1 and 2 students achieved a positive graduate outcome, a lower proportion than their peers (82%), meaning a 7 percentage point progression gap (Table 5). We perform on or above benchmark⁷⁰ and this gap has reduced to less than 2 percentage points in the most recent year.

Risk Indicators identified:

- Declining progression gaps for ABCs Q1&2 (students with multiple indicators of disadvantage)

1.8 Other groups who experience barriers in higher education

We have also examined how well other under-represented or disadvantaged groups are represented in our student cohort and the extent to which they may experience inequality of opportunity whilst they are with us.

Our analysis shows:

- On average 20 of our home undergraduate entrants are asylum seekers and refugees during the application process, representing around 0.4% of our intake. These students have higher than average continuation on average but are less likely to gain Good Honours.
- Around 50 of our entrants each year have non parental caring responsibilities and a similar number have parental caring responsibilities. Combined this accounts for around 2% of our intake. Carers are more likely to be mature learners (around a quarter of non-parental carers, and nearly 90% of parental carers, are 21 or over).
- Carers, parental and non-parental, are less likely to continue into their second year (8 percentage point average gap). Non parental carers are slightly less likely to gain Good Honours than other students (3 percentage point gap), with the Good Honours gap largest for parental carers (25 percentage points). This intersects with mature as almost one in five mature students have having caring responsibilities (Section 1.4.4) but is high for all parental carers.

⁶⁹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard>

⁷⁰ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard>

- Around 3% of home undergraduates are from military families (which equates to 170 entrants on average). This compares to 0.7% in the sector⁷¹, and this reflects regional intake – over 5% of South West entrants are from military families. Slightly more are from commissioned than non-commissioned officer families.
- Both students from commissioned and non-commissioned military families are more likely to continue into their second year than their non-military family peers, however students from non-commissioned officer families are less likely to gain Good Honours than their commissioned officer and non-military peers (4 percentage point gap). Military families often move every few years, potentially disrupting children’s education but may be missed from support applying area-based eligibility criteria. Targeted support may be needed to reach these students.
- Around a quarter of our entrants (26%) were the first in their family to attend higher education, which is far lower than the sector average of 51%⁷². These students are slightly less likely than their peers to continue into their second year (3 percentage point gap) and gain Good Honours (2 percentage point gap).
- Around one-in-ten (9%) of entrants declared themselves to be Bisexual and a further 4% Lesbian, Gay or Other – this is similar to the sector (12% LGB or other⁷³). LGB students are more likely than Heterosexual students to continue into their second year, and the same proportion gain Good Honours and Firsts.
- The number of entrants who declare a different gender identity than that assigned at birth is typically around 1%. This compares to 1.5% in the sector⁷⁴. These students are more likely to continue and although overall a slightly lower percentage gain Good Honours (3 percentage point gap), a higher proportion gain a First.
- Whether an applicant was electively home-educated does not form part of the data collected on application, however our internal research⁷⁵ suggests that these students experience barriers to entering HE such as lack of information and guidance, being administratively invisible, as well as potential overlap with measures such as Low household income, and Cognitive and learning, Mental health, and Social and communication disabilities.

Risk Indicators identified:

- Good Honours gaps for asylum seekers and refugees
- Continuation gaps for carers
- Good Honours gaps for carers (particularly parental carers)
- Good Honours gap for military family (non-commissioned officers only)
- Continuation gaps for first generation to HE
- Good Honours gaps for first generation to HE
- Application rates from pupils who are Home Educated

2. Risk Indicators and Prioritisation

In response to our analysis, we have focused on 12 core risk indicators based on the largest gaps and taking into account our institutional and geographical context. These have mapped to the risks in the EORR and two

⁷¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-characteristics-data/population-data-dashboard/>

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-characteristics-data/population-data-dashboard/>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Funded by our Centre for Social Mobility

additional risks we have identified in response to research and internal consultation.

Access

Risk Indicators 1-3: Under-representation of students from Socio-economically disadvantaged areas and households.

Students from areas of deprivation (IMD quintiles 1&2) and those least likely to progress to HE (TUNDRA quintiles 1&2) and who meet individual criteria such as eligibility for Free School Meals are under-represented at UoE compared to the sector and similar selective institutions. This reflects risks identified in the EORR such as access to information, advice and guidance, perceptions of HE, and modes of study offered. In addition, students may not have equal opportunity to access learning, extracurricular and employability opportunities because of the region in which they live.

Risk Indicator 4: Low proportion of Mature entrants

Mature students are under-represented at UoE compared to the sector, despite a higher proportion of our students from the region being mature. This is underpinned by knowledge and skills, access to advice and guidance, perceptions of HE, mode of study limitations or subject choices/places available and prior attainment and qualification type, as well as intersections with parental and other caring responsibilities.

Risk Indicator 5: Low proportion of Ethnic minority entrants

Students from ethnic minorities are under-represented at UoE compared to the sector and similar profile institutions. This in part is reflective of regional demographics and the high proportion of students from the South West, but as the EORR indicates some ethnic groups may experience barriers such as lack of advice and guidance, perceptions of HE, region or mode of study limitations or subject choices/places available and exam attainment. Propensity of students to apply or accept a place at Exeter may also be influenced by feeling represented or included within the educational environment due to our regional context.

Success and Experience (Continuation and Completion)

Risk Indicator 6: Continuation and Completion for students from Socio-economically disadvantaged areas and households

Students from areas of deprivation (IMD quintiles 1&2), as well as other socio-economic measures are less likely to continue into their second year than their peers. This gap reflects risks around cost pressures and personal support, and there are specific intersections around deprivation, gender and ethnic group. Although we perform around TEF benchmark and most of our students progress into their second year this gap is larger than the sector.

Risk Indicator 7: Continuation and Completion for Mature students

Mature students are less likely to continue into their second year and less likely to complete their studies than young students. Although we perform on or above benchmark on continuation for this group in TEF, there is a sustained gap and we perform below sector and similar institutions for completion. This reflects some of the risks identified for access, but also include cost of living (they are more likely to be from a low-income household and are over-represented in hardship payments), declaration of a mental health condition, and academic and pastoral support needs.

Risk Indicator 8: Continuation and Completion for students with Mental Health, Social and Communication or Multiple disabilities

Despite closing the 'continuation gap' for those with Cognitive and Learning disabilities, a slightly lower proportion of students with other types of disability when compared to their peers continue into their second year of study. Our data shows that as disability declarations rise during the course of students' studies, larger completion gaps particularly for Mental Health, Social and Communication or Multiple disabilities identify this area as a risk. That the gap is largest for young students with Mental Health conditions from areas of deprivation suggests the impact of covid and cost of living as well as and academic and pastoral support.

Outcomes (Degree Outcomes and Graduate Outcomes)

Risk Indicator 9: Awarding gaps for ethnic minority groups

A lower proportion of Black, Asian and Other minority ethnic groups gain Good Honours, and a lower proportion of these groups and Mixed ethnic group students gain a First. These gaps have declined in recent years, and we perform above sector and comparably to similar institutions, however gaps remain high particularly for Black ethnic groups. We know from internal analysis that these gaps do not relate to incoming attainment levels. Underlying risks are likely to be academic and pastoral support, and potentially intersections with disabilities such as Mental Health or undeclared Cognitive and Learning disabilities. Research also indicates that feelings of belonging, academic and non-academic inclusion are important and we have reflected this within a specific institutional risk i.e. that students may not feel they are represented or belong.

Risk Indicator 10: Awarding gaps for Mature students

A lower proportion of Mature students, compared to young, gain Good Honours or a First, and we perform below sector and similar institutions in the Good Honours gap. The gap has declined slightly in the most recent years but is the largest Good Honours awarding gap. At UoE evidence shows this is affected by socio-economic position/cost of living, and parental/caring responsibilities, as well as those factors affecting continuation and identified in the EORR.

Risk Indicator 11: Lower rates of positive graduate outcomes for students from Socio-economically disadvantaged areas and households

Students from deprived areas (IMD quintiles 1&2) and those from areas of low HE participation are less likely than those from other neighbourhoods to progress to positive graduate outcome. Our internal analysis indicates that the risk is progression into full-time graduate employment. We are pleased to see the progression gap has reduced for ATE bursary recipients compared to all those not in receipt and a marginal gap for those previously eligible for FSM, and we are performing above benchmark. Nevertheless, we wish to address the identified risk around cost of living challenges which can affect engagement in extra curricula activities.

Risk Indicator 12: Lower rates of positive graduate outcomes for students with Mental Health, Social and Communication or Multiple disabilities

A lower proportion of graduates with Social and Communication, Mental Health or Multiple disabilities progress to graduate outcomes. Although we are broadly in line with similar institutions, and the gaps are in decline we are keen to address this as it is the highest risk in this stage of the student lifecycle. Further analysis indicates that it may reflect a decline in voluntary or unpaid opportunities as well as paid employment, which suggests this may be unpinned by factors identified in the EORR such as cost of living (as these students are more likely than their peers to be from low-income households) or limits on extra-curricula activities.

Apprenticeships are excluded from continuation and degree outcomes risks as the patterns differ for this mode of study. There is for example a continuation gap for mature, however it is substantially lower than those in traditional modes of study, and Good Honours rates for mature students are higher for alternative study modes, and there is only a gap at the level of Firsts awarded, hence these gaps will be monitored but not included in the core risks to equality of opportunity.

Table 9: Priority Risk Indicators mapped to Core Risks and Objectives

Lifecycle	Risk Indicator	Maps to Core Risks (potential causes)	Objective/Target
Access	Under-representation of students from Socio-economically disadvantaged areas and households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional progression to HE and attainment • Access to IAG, and Perceptions of HE • Application rates/success/course type • Modes of study limitations 	<p>1: Provide knowledge and skills support to learners from at least 100 state schools and colleges within the South West each year to address risks to equal opportunity affecting progression to higher education</p> <p>2: Increase the proportion of entrants from the South West who are from the areas of lowest progression to higher education [TUNDRA Q1] from 17.9% to 21% by 2028/29.</p> <p>3: Increase the proportion of entrants from the areas of highest deprivation [Q1/2] from 19% to 22% by 28/29.</p>
Access	Low proportion of Mature entrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and Skills • Access to IAG, and Perceptions of HE • Region or Modes of study limitations, and Subject Choices/Available places 	4: Increase the proportion of mature entrants from 8% to 11% by 28/29.
Access	Low proportion of Ethnic minority entrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional demographics and linked inclusion/representation • Access to IAG, and Perceptions of HE • Region or Modes of study limitations, and Subject Choices/Available places 	5: Increase the proportion of ethnic minority entrants from 14% to 18% by 28/29.
Continuation and Completion	Continuation and Completion for students from Socio-economically disadvantaged areas and households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of Living • Mental Health and wellbeing • Academic and Pastoral support needs • Covid impact • Accommodation needs 	6: Improve the continuation rate for students from the areas of highest deprivation (IMD Q1/2) from 90% to 94% by 28/29.
Continuation and Completion	Continuation and Completion for Mature students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of Living • Mental Health and wellbeing • Academic and Pastoral support needs 	7: Improve the continuation rate for mature students from 85% to 89% by 28/29.
Continuation and Completion	Continuation and Completion for students with Mental Health, Social and Communication or Multiple disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of Living • Mental Health and wellbeing • Academic and Pastoral support needs 	8: Improve the continuation rate for students who are disabled or have a mental health condition from 91% to 94% by 28/29.
Awarding	Awarding gaps for Minority ethnic groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health and wellbeing • Academic and Pastoral support needs • Feeling represented and included 	9: Close the gap between Asian, Black and other ethnic minority students and white students awarded Good Honours to no more than 4 percentage points by 28/29.

Awarding	Awarding gaps for Mature students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of Living • Mental Health and wellbeing • Academic and Pastoral support needs • Parental and caring responsibilities 	10: Close the gap between mature and young students awarded good honours to no more than 7 percentage points by 28/29.
Progression	Lower rates of positive graduate outcomes for students with from Socio-economically disadvantaged areas and households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of living and limits on extra-curricula activities 	11: Eliminate the gap between students from the most and least deprived areas (IMD Q1/2 v Q3-5) achieving a graduate-level job or further study within 18 months of graduation by 28/29.
Progression	Lower rates of positive graduate outcomes for students with Mental Health, Social and Communication or Multiple disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of living, and Limits on extra-curricula activities • Mental Health and wellbeing 	12: Eliminate the gap between disabled and non-disabled students achieving a graduate-level job or further study within 18 months of graduation by 28/29.

ANNEX B

University of Exeter: Access and Participation Plan 2025/6-28/9

Evidence base and rationale

Our detailed analysis of available data [Annex A] has identified gaps in student outcomes between some groups of under-represented students and their peers at specific points in the student journey. Five intervention strategies have been identified within our Access and Participation Plan to address the largest and most persistent gaps in student outcomes by mitigating related risks to equal opportunity. This annex provides a summary of the rationale for each of the interventions included.

Implementation strategy 1: Taking a leadership role within the region and working in partnership to support attainment and access

Risks addressed: Analysis indicates that students may not have equal opportunity to: develop the knowledge and skills required; receive information and guidance to make informed decisions; apply despite being qualified; or access sufficiently wide variety of course types. In addition, students may not have equal opportunity to access learning, extracurricular and employability opportunities because of the region in which they live and may not feel represented or included within the educational environment.

Rationale: Partnership working within our region is a key focus of our work to improve access by addressing risks related to educational attainment, opportunity to develop relevant knowledge and skills and access to advice and guidance. Importantly it recognises that there are specific geographical factors which affect equal opportunity within the South West.

1a) We will work with regional schools, colleges and other partners to extend our programme of information, advice and guidance to support students who are particularly hard to reach or underserved due geographical or educational isolation.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Regional higher education information, advice and guidance KS4/5: series of workshops delivered in schools and online providing information about higher education options, student finance, application process, and student life, to inform decision making in relation to progression to higher education.</p>	<p>We are the largest single institutional provider of information, advice and guidance to schools and colleges within our region and make a significant partnership contribution to our UniConnect, Next Steps South West. For many schools and colleges, we are the sole provider of this type of outreach which is shown to offer scalable opportunities to achieve impact¹. This very different to the situation faced by many schools in London and other urban areas supported by a variety of higher education providers². Our schools are also less able to access large HE fairs with UCAS withdrawing its annual event in Cornwall in recent years. Cornish pupils now face at least a five hour round trip to attend the nearest UCAS event. We support learners meeting widening participation criteria from around 100 regional schools and colleges each year and provide guidance to around 24,000 local pupils annually. It is important we continue with this commitment given that insufficient advice and guidance is one of the five risks to access identified on the National Equality of Opportunity Risk Register.</p>
<p>South West Access Hubs: series of information, advice and guidance workshops delivered in collaboration with a host school or college to multi-school KS4 cohorts.</p>	<p>We provide a variety of outreach interventions to schools within the South West and face a particular challenge in relation to distance and scale. A significant proportion of our access budget is spent on travel to deliver outreach and subsidising young people to come to campus. With a reduction in information, advice and guidance delivery through UniConnect due to refocus on attainment and reduction in funding, we face escalating demand to provide this support throughout our region and the persistent challenge of how to engage with those learners who require most help. The concept of the South West Access Hubs is a hub and spoke delivery model to provide more targeted support within remote locations in a way which is cost-effective but improves engagement with target student groups. We will pilot this model through the North Devon Access Hub, working in partnership with University Centre in North Devon (Petroc) and West Buckland School, who will act as a regional outreach centres, pulling in a cohort of target students from a wider catchment area of local state schools and colleges. We have focused on North Devon as it includes pockets of high deprivation, large numbers of rural coastal communities and meets a variety of low social mobility criteria³.</p>

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Support for schools – Advancing Access: free CPD opportunities to teachers and careers advisers, equipping them with the information needed to inform their learners about pathways into selective HEIs.</p>	<p>Evidence points to the influential role that teachers play in enabling or preventing young people from disadvantaged groups from progressing to higher education ⁴. It is further argued widening participation activities should be broadened to capitalise on the untapped potential of teachers via professional development⁵. Advancing Access offers CPD and resources to better equip teachers and advisers to support students’ progress to higher education. The Russell Group initiative was launched in 2017 after a successful pilot and has subsequently been reviewed and refocused following a theory of change exercise. Advancing Access has produced CPD resources, modules, and sessions along with a wide range of in-person and online events with its partner universities. The virtual nature of the project enables cold-spot schools and colleges, which may not be geographically serviced by Russell Group institutions, to access information about these competitive university choices. In 2021, an independent evaluation was undertaken by EDIT at King’s College London which found evidence that teachers scored higher across key areas of information, advice, and guidance following completion of CPD. As of August 2023, 58.6% of mainstream schools (with a sixth form) and colleges in England had engaged with Advancing Access with the engagement of schools targeted due to low progression levels at 76.1%.</p>
<p>Home educated students information, advice and guidance: bespoke programme of advice and support based on research by the Centre for Social Mobility.</p>	<p>As we seek to improve the effectiveness of our engagement with local schools, we are also increasingly aware that there are a growing number of students who are excluded from this type of support because they are home educated. The South West has a large home education community and research through our Centre for Social Mobility has shown that the make-up of these students is changing with growing numbers being home educated due to school exclusions and mental health issues. While there is a sparsity of data relating to these students nationally, work by the Centre indicates growing intersections between being home educated and indicators of disadvantage and under-representation with up to 50% of Home Educated young people with special educational needs and a significant number coming from single parent and/or low-income families. Qualitative research with members of the home education community shows that lack of access to relevant outreach is a barrier to progression to higher education. The support required by these students is very specific due to very different patterns of learning and qualification acquisition⁶. We will co-create a range of information and resources for the Home Education community including online Q&As, web-based information and drop-in sessions with a particular focus on supporting students and their families understand and negotiate the HE applications system. We will also provide specialist admissions support for this community [intervention strategy 2]</p>
<p>Refugees and asylum seekers: bespoke programme of advice and support in partnership through the Devon Civic Agreement.</p>	<p>Our work through the Devon Civic Agreement has identified young refugees and asylum seekers as another under-served and growing community within our local area. Council colleagues supporting these young people have identified specific information and support needs relating to lack of personal and family knowledge of the UK higher education system. Similar issues have highlighted by national research by UNICEF UK and Refugee Education UK⁷. We will be working with partners to develop information, resources and outreach for these students during the course of the plan. Many of these students have experience significant disruption to their education. As a University of Sanctuary, we have undertaken a commitment to support refugees and asylum seekers, and have range of support in place for those who undertake their studies here.</p>
<p>Looked after children: bespoke programme of advice and support in partnership with local authorities, virtual schools and other educational partners.</p>	<p>We have provided tailored access support over a number of years within local partnerships for looked after children. Care experienced young people are likely to experience learning gaps due to trauma and educational disruption and low progression rates to higher education⁸. Progression to higher education by care leavers from Devon is disproportionately low⁹ and we have been working through our Devon Civic Agreement to improve outcomes for these young people. Our package of support is good and recognised through the NNECL Quality Mark¹⁰, but there are opportunities to improve provision for students at an earlier stage and to improve visibility of support and partnership working between the University, social workers and other staff involved in supporting these students. We have expertise on the barriers facing young people in care within our Centre for Social Mobility, particularly through the work of Professor Neil Harrison, and are keen to see where this can add value to our existing provision.</p>

1b) We will work with schools, colleges and other partners to increase the number of under-represented students receiving additional educational development opportunities within our region, particularly those who are eligible for

free school meals and experience the biggest learning gaps. We will focus on building literacy, maths and subject knowledge.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
	<p>Geographical context is relevant when understanding barriers to equal opportunity. The Social Mobility in the South West Report showed that 40% of disadvantaged pupils in the region attained a standard pass in GCSE English and Maths in 2019 compared with almost 60% in inner London and just 17% of disadvantaged pupils went on to university in 18/19 - the lowest rate of all English regions – compared with 45% in the capital¹¹. These persistent attainment gaps between poorer pupils and their peers are amongst the largest of all English regions at both primary and secondary level. There is emerging evidence that there are patterns in attainment related specifically to rurality due to restrictions on educational and extra-curricular opportunities linked to physical inaccessibility and sparsity of resources. Recent work through the Centre for Social Mobility has confirmed that after individual differences are considered unexplained differences in educational outcomes persist for learners in rural and coastal communities - with the South West particularly identified as a cold spot for progression to higher education¹². There is also established research on the challenges faced by coastal communities – particularly relevant to the South West¹³.</p> <p>Sector research suggests most of the socio-economic gap in HE participation in England can be explained by the fact that disadvantaged students have lower levels of attainment at GCSE with learning gaps emerging from early years and continuing to widen across all stages¹⁴. In recent years we have developed provision in partnership with local schools to support attainment, subject knowledge and motivation to study. We are planning to extend this work with a particular focus on tutoring in maths and literacy in addition to discipline-specific knowledge and skills. We are focusing most on maths and literacy as these are key building blocks to support wider educational attainment. We must be realistic about the likely impact of attainment raising interventions as they will only support a fraction of learners within the South West for a small part of their educational journey. Small-scale pilots will be helpful to improve our understanding of what works, in varying circumstances, and the practicalities, or otherwise, of operationalising successful interventions at scale to achieve the type of impact required to reduce meaningfully risks to equal opportunity.</p>
<p>Skills development KS4 boys: through University-led collaborative community partnership programme informed by research by our Centre for Social Mobility and run in collaboration with key partners.</p>	<p>Research shows that white males from the lowest socioeconomic status backgrounds are less likely than any other group to access higher education¹⁵. The groups least likely to go to university have been identified as British young males who receive free school meals; white young males from the country’s most deprived areas and from the areas with the lowest progression to higher education¹⁶. We have robust type 2 evaluation which shows correlation between participating in our Exeter Scholars programme, the development of knowledge, skills and confidence, plus propensity to apply and achieve a university place and yet male learners are persistently under-represented, with females making up around two thirds of our Exeter Scholars. In response to sector research and persistent under-representation in our own schemes, we undertook a literature review to better understand the barriers to engagement and inform interventions. This work included a review of existing schemes to support boys and interviews with practitioners, to gain additional insights. The research highlighted barriers to engagement amongst boys, including perceptions of university as boring or irrelevant, perceptions of elitism, issues with targeting or lack of targeted support, difficulties in navigating access and perceptions of risks and rewards of studying against going straight into work¹⁷. Key recommendations from the review included establishing programmes which offer longitudinal support, ideally as part of a progressive programme of activities starting at an early age and which incorporate positive role models from the university environment, and which offer boys new experiences outside of the school environment and existing peer groups. Collaborative programmes offered in partnership with universities and local community groups, incorporating youth work approaches, were also recommended. Incorporating these insights, the University aims to pilot a more personalised approach to working with young male students from underrepresented backgrounds at Year 9 onwards. The research indicates that education is not a gender-neutral concept and a more tailored approach in the way we engage with boys is needed, incorporating new themes and “hooks” to get this group interested in the university environment. The focus of this programme is engaging with this hard-to-reach group through vehicles such as sport, music and technology to help develop goals, personal and transferrable skills, plus insights into related careers</p>

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
	and related educational progression routes. Allowing participants to engage in informal educational activities in a new environment based on areas of their own interest is a key approach of this programme and is based on the youth work methodology recommended within the research we have commissioned.
Maths skills KS4: Series of maths events delivered through multiple events with Yr9 cohort from multiple WP target schools	Addressing barriers to engagement in Maths and Science KS2/3: Fear of maths can be a significant barrier to engagement and performance ¹⁸ . Research by the University of Cambridge ¹⁹ indicates that the negative attitudes of teachers and parents towards maths can contribute to “maths anxiety” affecting performance. These findings suggest that pupil-focused interventions to help overcome negative perceptions of maths are likely to be more effective if reinforced positively via complementary activities with teachers, parents and carers. A new KS4 Maths Skills programme to encourage motivation to study maths and reduce maths anxiety will include strategies indicated by the literature as effective including promoting the relevance of maths, peer learning, activity-based learning and building self-awareness about maths anxiety to help reduce its effects. This will also include sessions with parents and teachers with the aim of facilitating maths learning.
Literacy KS4: A tutoring programme with Yr 8 pupils supporting development in literacy.	Peer tutoring has been shown to have a positive impact on learning with some evidence to show that low attaining students make the biggest gains according to the Education Endowment Foundation ²⁰ (EEF). The EEF Teaching and Learning toolkit which is based on a review of sector evidence further suggests that structured mentoring sessions in small groups with near-age peers to consolidate learning are likely to be most effective, with similar learning gains seen in both maths and literacy. The evidence strength and available pool of tutors through our student body offers a practical intervention although scalability presents a challenge. Evidence further suggests that collaborative learning in small groups to work through well-structured tasks lead to the greatest learning gains. The toolkit suggests that this approach may be particularly beneficial in supporting learning in science. A KS4 literacy tutoring pilot in partnership with the Ted Wragg Trust demonstrated positive results with pupils doubling their grades after nine weeks ²¹ . We will continue with this scheme and work with our UniConnect Partnership to support other schools in our area while external funding continues.
Mathematics KS5: Student tutoring through Levelling Up: Maths	We will also pilot KS5 maths tutoring at two partner schools through the Levelling Up: Maths programme with a view to extending the scale of this project depending on outcomes. Levelling Up: Maths is a sustained access and enrichment programme, created by the London Mathematical Society, for students from underrepresented backgrounds studying A-level Maths involving near peer tutoring. The goal is to help these students achieve a place, and succeed, at university in preparation for a career in STEM. Evaluation of the initial pilot using a contribution analysis framework indicated that it was reasonable to conclude from the evidence that the programme contributed to desired outcomes such as success at Level 3 and progression to HE. ²²
Modern language skills KS4: programme to support achievement in GCSE Spanish through conversation practice.	Modern language skills: We can see persistent variations by subject in the diversity of our student intake. Less than 20% of students taking modern languages meet widening participation criteria. The reduction of language teaching in schools is a factor with only two in three UK state schools teaching more than one foreign language ²³ and demand for A level qualifications in languages continuing to fall. Activities to encourage the study of languages through exposure in schools is part of our discipline-based outreach. A new intervention will aim to support attainment at Level 3 by providing additional opportunities for students to practice their language skills. The pilot with the Ted Wragg Trust will focus on Spanish and involve undergraduate language students engaging with younger peers in regular and structured conversation practice informed by research which suggest this type of activity helps to improve foreign language fluency and grammar and generally support second language acquisition ^{24 and 25} . Depending on evaluation, we may seek to expand this approach to other languages and schools.
Curriculum enrichment multiple subjects KS4/5: Series of educational events providing learning opportunities linked to the school curriculum.	Curriculum enrichment: Activity involves discipline-specific work with schools and groups of learners with a variety of objectives and learning outcomes. Many of these projects have been developed in response to school demand for sessions which add value to subjects in the curriculum while providing exposure to a higher education environment and teaching methods. These include a series of discipline-specific schools conferences on campus in STEM and HASS disciplines; on demand in-school workshops e.g. linked to the English curriculum; events linked to national events such as National Biomechanics Day; and classroom resources for teachers e.g. for Black History Month.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
Science KS5: Science Level 3 support via the Devon Healthcare Hub.	Projects also involve those involving multiple interventions with a single cohort including the Devon Healthcare Hub delivered via our College of Medicine and Health which was created to support the attainment of pupils meeting widening participation criteria in rural Devon schools. The Hub supports Year 12 students, studying Biology & Chemistry A level, with an interest in progressing to study Medicine, Medical Science and Nursing at university and aims to employ active learning to help consolidate learning and address knowledge gaps which may prevent them from achieving the necessary grades to follow this path ²⁶ .
Place-based academic and personal development KS2-5: community-based learner support via IntoUniversity partnership.	Place-based academic learning and development: Evidence shows that learning gaps for disadvantaged pupils begin in early years and continue to expand over time ²⁷ . Interventions are more likely to be impactful if involving multiple touchpoints ²⁸ and family engagement ²⁹ . In practice, it is difficult for universities to provide this type of sustained engagement from early years. We have therefore worked in partnership with IntoUniversity since 2015 to provide this type of support, co-founding the South Bristol Centre along with Bath and Bristol Universities. The Centre provides community-based support for learners and their families at primary and secondary level and is currently the nearest location within the South West region which meets the charity's targeting methodology. The Centre provides scaffolded support for learners over a period of years through structured academic interventions and wider parental/carer support. We are keen to continue this partnership and will be expanding our engagement with learners at the Centre by complementing partnership academic programmes with outreach and on campus activities designed to boost subject knowledge and familiarity with HE. We will also provide support and engagement opportunities to students attending IntoUniversity Partnership Centres more widely. Annual evaluation demonstrates the positive impact of the charity's interventions on progression to higher education and attainment ³⁰ .

Partnerships and collaborative arrangements relevant to this intervention strategy:

- **Regional:** South West Social Mobility Commission; Devon Civic Agreement; Cornwall Civic Agreement; Next Steps South West; South West Universities Care (collaboration between Arts University Bournemouth, AECC, Bath Spa University, Bournemouth University, Falmouth University, Plymouth Marjon University, Royal Agricultural University, University of Bath, University of Bristol, University of Exeter, University of Gloucestershire, University of Plymouth, and University of the West of England).
- **Third sector:** IntoUniversity; National Network for the Education of Care Leavers
- **Educational:** Ted Wragg Trust; Advancing Access; Levelling Up: Maths [London Mathematical Society, Institute of Mathematics and its Applications]

Implementation strategy 2: Widening participation and recruitment activity to diversify our student body and support progression to HE

Risks addressed: Knowledge and skills; advice and guidance; regional factors; propensity to apply despite qualified; course choice; feeling represented.

Rationale: Our theory of change supports a multi-faceted approach to supporting access through various strands of provision including information; advice and guidance, fair access programmes; school and college collaborations; course provision and reducing barriers experienced through the admissions process.

2a) We will increase the number of students we support through the types of scaffolded and longitudinal programmes which our evaluation shows have the greatest impact on progression to HE and continue to improve them in collaboration with participants and stakeholders

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
KS4/5 learner-focused scaffolded programmes:	Sector research and our own evaluation shows that fair access programmes providing scaffolded interventions support students in developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to apply for higher education and achieve a university place ³¹ . We extended provision significantly over the course of the last plan and now provide fair access places for around 1,000 Yr10-13 students annually. Data purchased from UCAS shows that our programme participants are significantly more likely to apply to HE

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
	and to research-led high tariff providers, than a comparator group matched on similar known demographic characteristics. In 2022/23 a total of 194 programme beneficiaries enrolled at the University of Exeter having taken part in Exeter Scholars, Realising Opportunities or Pathways to Law . Of those students 63% were first generation into higher education and 28% were from Black, Asian and minority ethnicity backgrounds, compared with 25% and 13% of their peers. Once at Exeter, they go on to succeed with 94% of our first graduating cohort achieving a 2:1 or first. ³² Participants who progress to University of Exeter are supported on an ongoing basis e.g. via access to scholarships, enhanced transition, paid internships, bespoke employability consultancy, and academic skills support.
Exeter Scholars providing scaffolded interventions for Yr10-13 students.	Our largest fair access programme is Exeter Scholars which provides places for more around 850 Yr10-13 students each year. Different pathways are focused on providing scaffolded support for different cohorts via appropriate delivery channels e.g. for South West students, largely delivered through multiple on campus interventions; for students outside our region, the majority of whom are from ethnic minorities, mainly delivered via an intensive residential programme; and a digital pathway for students who find an on-campus commitment challenging due to personal context. Students can begin at various stages from Yr 10 onwards depending on the pathway. We have continued to develop the programme based on annual evaluation, bringing in changes such as personal development plans for students with disabilities, mental health conditions or circumstances which mean they require adaptations or additional support or changes in our digital delivery to make it more engaging and impactful.
Realising Opportunities in partnership with research intensive HEIs for Yr 12/13 students.	Realising Opportunities was established in 2009 to support access to selective, research intensive universities through a range of evidence-based interventions, working collaboratively with partners sharing knowledge and expertise and having a robust evaluation strategy to monitor success. Whilst Realising Opportunities can demonstrate success in supporting those at risk of inequality of opportunity to access selective HEIs, the fact that disadvantaged young people continue to remain much less likely to get into the most 'prestigious, high-tariff universities' illustrates the scheme's continuing relevance ³³ . A single, national supported entry route targets the most able 16–18-year-olds at risk from inequalities of opportunity. The Institute for Employment Studies has worked with the scheme since 2012 as an external evaluator to provide the Partnership with a wealth of longitudinal data to inform and instruct the evolution of the programme to support its students' success. 91% of Cohort 12 students tracked by UCAS made an application to university. The application rate of RO students was very significantly higher than that of the UCAS benchmark group, of 78%. The offer rate for RO students was higher than for the benchmark group (91% compared with 87%). Three fifths (59%) of Cohort 12 tracked students who had applied to university accepted a place at a research intensive university.
Pathways to Law and Pathways to Banking and Finance in partnership with the Sutton Trust.	Despite improvements in recent years, the legal profession is still one of the least socio-economically diverse in the country with barristers, solicitors and judges, coming from the same few schools and universities ³⁴ . The Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission reported in 2019, that almost two thirds of senior judges attended private school, compared with 7% of the general population, with 71% graduating from Oxbridge institutions ³⁵ . The Sutton Trust Pathways to Law programme has been running for 15 years in partnership with leading universities and with over 100 employers with the aim of improving progression to higher education and representation in law. The scheme has a positive impact on the young people, for example, of students that go on to study at university, they are more likely to attend a research-intensive university (73%) and are more likely to study law (+7%), than those who applied for the scheme and did not get a place ³⁶ . We have renewed our tender for Pathways to Law and will continue to work in partnership with the Sutton Trust and legal firms and alumni within our region to support learners within this programme. We will also participate in online Pathways programmes for Law and Banking and Finance.
Mature Access Pathway: providing scaffolded programme for mature learners in collaboration with Further Education Partners. In person pathway delivered in collaboration with FE partners including familiarisation with HE,	The Mature Access Pathway works with Access to Higher Education students at Exeter College, supporting their journey to Higher Education. The programme was designed following a literature review and consultation with students to identify barriers for mature students across the student journey and inform intervention design ³⁷ . The literature showed similar interventions could help to build self-confidence - consistently highlighted as low in mature students. In addition to improving confidence in applying to higher education, the programme - timetabled within the Access to HE course - aims to build resilience and skills affecting retention and future success. Initial evaluation shows increased understanding of HE and increased confidence and propensity to apply. It particularly highlights the positive impact of involving mature student mentors to encourage and support their peers. Following a successful pilot, we will be extending this model with additional FE Colleges within our region and to

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
study skills development and peer mentoring.	independent learners online to support progression to higher education and the University of Exeter specifically.
<p>Further Education Bridging Programme: delivered in collaboration with FE partners and Next Steps South West providing mixed knowledge and skills development to support preparation and transition to HE.</p>	<p>We have been working hard in recent years to strengthen our relationships with the Further Education sector with the aim of supporting both mature student progression and fair access more widely. The development of our FE Strategy was partly informed by a survey commissioned through Youthsight with around 2, 500 pre-applicants showed students at FE Colleges had low propensity to apply for a course with entry levels above their predicted grades and low awareness of contextual offers when compared with peers from other school types in the state sector. This work, together with our review of the evidence base for successful transitions to higher education helped informed the development of a Further Education Bridging Programme designed to support access while developing the knowledge and skills to support transition to higher education. First iterations of this programme have been run collaboratively with Next Steps South West who offer generic information, advice and guidance to participants who receive study skills and more specific university-preparation support delivered by university staff. Based on learnings to date we will continue to extend this provision to additional colleges and include this scheme within our contextual offers policy. We will seek to continue this initiative irrespective of future contributions from Next Steps South West which may be subject to funding cuts.</p>

2b) We will build and strengthen relationships with schools and partners with high proportions of students from under-represented backgrounds to provide advice and guidance, and address perceptions which may prevent students from progressing to certain courses or institutions despite being qualified to do so.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Targeted engagement with schools and colleges</p>	<p>As a high tariff University with stretching entry requirements, we are aware that many of the students we seek to attract may not see us as an achievable option despite having the potential to excel at Exeter. This may be related to lack of confidence in applying based on predicted grades or lack of exposure to certain subject options and related career paths and transferable employability skills. It is important to ensure that our outreach and recruitment activity helps students make informed choices about their future and where appropriate encourages and supports applications from students under-represented at our University. A significant proportion of our advice and guidance is focused on encouraging students from under-represented groups through targeted work with schools and colleges with high proportions of students living in high areas of deprivation, low progression to higher education and free school meal eligibility. A key objective is to give pupils confidence in applying to a high tariff university like Exeter through the provision of good quality information, often delivered by student ambassadors. We work within a number of partnerships to support this work such as The Elephant Group and the Welsh Government SEREN programme. Both initiatives seek to support students, mainly from under-represented backgrounds, achieve their academic potential through attending a high tariff university. We have worked with SEREN in West Wales for several years and will extend our work in Wales to support additional SEREN hubs and build relationships with a wider group of schools and colleges in the principality. We also carry out focused regional work in the Midlands and London where we seek particularly to encourage applications from diverse ethnic student communities. This work carried out by regionally based officers is supported through our partnership with The Elephant Group which aims to improve the proportion of pupils from non-selective schools enter high tariff universities³⁸.</p>
<p>Education Partnerships Programme: we will extend our Educational Partnership programme working in collaboration with the Black Leadership Group to engage affiliate FE Colleges and Schools, providing a package of outreach and progression support.</p>	<p>In addition to providing learner support in target schools, we also provide broader provision, including teacher CPD, for schools and colleges in our Education Partnerships Programme which was set up to strengthen engagement via more formalised working relationships. Most of these schools have high proportions of students meeting widening participation criteria and teacher support - including our annual Education Partner Teacher Conference - includes guidance on supporting students from widening participation backgrounds. We will continue to grow this partnership programme and will undertake work with the Black Leadership Group (BLG)³⁹ to provide a package of support for pupils in BLG affiliate colleges. Drawing on the expertise of BLG we will also upskill staff involved in outreach and recruitment in antiracist practice to ensure our student engagement is inclusive and responds to the needs of ethnic minority students. We understand that as a university located in a geographical area with low ethnic diversity that this may pose particular challenges for students from diverse backgrounds. Support from</p>

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
	BLG and ongoing consultation with students will help to ensure that we are providing the best support and guidance available to help students make informed decisions.
<p>Subject and careers knowledge development KS4/5: series of subject and careers related activities hosted on campus, run in schools and held online to improve subject knowledge and related career/study opportunities to support decision-making related to educational progression.</p>	<p>We can see a strong correlation between representation and subject area with higher proportions of under-represented students in disciplines which are most strongly linked to vocational areas such as Law, Medicine, Nursing, Engineering and Computer Science. Many of our widening participation applicants apply for our most competitive courses. Meanwhile those subjects offering transferrable skills, cross interdisciplinary subjects or those no longer taught at a compulsory level to GCSE in state school such as Modern Languages, Classics, Art History and Liberal Arts are much less likely to receive applications from students meeting WP criteria although the graduate outcomes for those courses are excellent. Sector research also shows patterns between subject choice and HE participation, demonstrating the importance of providing students with good quality advice about post-16 study options to reduce the risk of narrowing opportunities prematurely through via subject choice⁴⁰. Supporting students to make informed choices about qualification routes linked to types of employment is a key part of our information, advice and guidance and support schools with achieving their Gatsby marks. This is particularly important when students are making decisions about Level 3 choices. We deliver subject and careers information mainly through our course discovery and careers insights activities, often involving employers and alumni. Delivery is varied including online panels, subject conferences and the creation of teacher resources.</p>

2c) We will grow substantially our portfolio of non-traditional and flexible study options to make degree level study more affordable and accessible while addressing regional and sector skills gaps.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Degree Apprenticeships: significantly extending our portfolio of undergraduate degree apprenticeships to meet regional and national employer demand and bridge skills gaps in the labour market.</p>	<p>We are working to reduce barriers to equal opportunity experienced by students who may be qualified to enter higher education who may not feel restricted by the types of course we offer. An early adopter of Degree Apprenticeships, we have seen how the provision of affordable applied programmes directly linked to employment have benefited under-represented students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, ethnic minority communities and mature students. Expanded provision coupled with focused information, advice and guidance is a key plank of our access strategy. The focus on widening participation through our Degree Apprenticeships was praised during the Ofsted review of our provision and is borne out through the data relating to the demographics of our Degree Apprentices⁴¹. We are aware of sector research however which has raised concerns about under-represented students being squeezed out of degree apprenticeships and fully understand that extending our portfolio by itself is not enough and needs to be accompanied by flexible approaches to admissions and strong information, advice and guidance⁴².</p>
<p>STEM degrees with foundation year: integrated foundation year enabling students who meet widening participation criteria but who do not have the required Maths Level 3 to undertake intensive high level maths training as part of a foundation year</p>	<p>Attainment in maths continues to be a barrier for many widening participation students wishing to undertake undergraduate study in STEM. Our range of BSc STEM programmes with foundation year were created to enable students without the necessary maths skills to build these to a sufficient standard to enable progression to courses within our STEM portfolio. The programmes were created following a review of sector literature and taking on board recommendations in the Sutton Trust Admissions in Context report⁴³. The literature indicated that foundation years not only supported access but help to build social capital contributing to retention and attainment⁴⁴. We continue to build evidence relating to the impact of these programmes and will seek to extend student numbers depending on evaluation and capacity. Initial qualitative research indicates the efficacy of the programmes in preparing students for undergraduate level student, fostering a sense of belonging and building a cohort identity.</p>
<p>Mathematics preparation module: will enable students who meet widening participation criteria but do not have the required Maths GCSE (either a Grade 4/B or 5/C) for their chosen</p>	<p>Achieving a B (5) or a C (4) in maths GCSE continues to be a significant barrier for students pursuing higher education. A good foundation in maths is often a prerequisite in admissions to many undergraduate courses, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Students without a GCSE in mathematics can face challenges in meeting entry requirements for their desired courses, limiting their opportunities to access higher education⁴⁵. In England, on average, 69% of pupils achieve a GCSE English and maths pass (C or 4) compared with 49% of students eligible for free school meals, falling to 45% in the South West⁴⁶. Mature students returning to education without attaining a passing grade in GCSE Maths</p>

course to complete a pre-arrival maths programme and receive embedded mathematics support in their first year of study.	may also face challenges even if studying maths within their Access to Higher Education course as the qualification is not recognised as superseding GCSE requirements. We want to address inequalities in maths GCSE attainment - ensuring access to an equivalent GCSE qualification and ongoing support throughout the undergraduate course for students looking to study at the University of Exeter. We are in the scoping stages of designing a maths preparation module with the help of maths specialists in our School of Education to enable us to soften our maths requirements in specific programmes to students with the potential to develop these skills. This would involve completion of a pre-entry course and undertake embedded maths support during their first year of undergraduate study.
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2d) We will continue to work to identify and remove barriers to equal opportunity within our recruitment and admissions process. This will include increasing our engagement with under-represented students through the recruitment process, providing relevant personalised information and support to inform decision making, and the proactive use of contextual offers.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Specialist admissions advice and support: personal point of contact, one to one advice, drop-in clinics, in-person and virtual support sessions to make the admissions process as easy to navigate as possible for students with non-traditional qualifications and alternative educational backgrounds to navigate.</p>	<p>Insufficient information about the admissions process can be a barrier for some students, particularly those who are first generation into higher education, have experienced disrupted education or are returning to learning. We established a specialist admissions advisor role to support access for mature learners, although in practice, the role provides advice for much wider group of students meeting widening participation criteria with non-traditional qualifications. Across the sector, mature students typically hold a wide variety of qualifications and are more likely to have followed a non-traditional route compared with younger students. They are more likely to present with limited or no prior Level 3 qualifications but even so, a reasonable proportion (around 15%) already hold a degree⁴⁷. Internal analysis bore out this trend. Analysis showed around 42% of mature applicants to Exeter held three A-levels compared with 87% of young applicants, and this difference was present even for young mature students (aged 21-25). The majority, 57%, held 'other' qualifications such as Access to HE, OU credits, Diplomas and BTECs etc. Qualitative feedback showed this presented significant difficulties for students trying to negotiate an admissions system primarily designed around those with A levels⁴⁸. This role has enabled us to provide improved and personalised advice, integrate admissions support within our Mature Access Pathway and to share good practice with colleagues. We will extend this support to Home Educated students, based on the needs identified through Centre for Social Mobility research⁴⁹. This identified barriers in the application process for home educated students including home education not being recognised on the UCAS form; atypical qualifications patterns; absence of predicted grades; and inability to produce teacher references. Our bespoke support will include acknowledgement of this group within our admissions process and related communications; tailored advice and guidance; online Q&As and drop-in clinics.</p>
<p>Contextual offers: optimising the use of contextual offers to take account of individual applicants' personal and educational circumstances affecting their grades informed by academic research and applicant profile.</p>	<p>There is a significant body of evidence which shows personal context including schooling affects qualification outcomes and that predicted grades can be unreliable in assessing academic potential⁵⁰. The use of contextual offers has been effective in facilitating access to higher education for under-represented students, particularly to selective universities⁵¹. Empirical research shows that entry requirements can be reduced substantially without setting up students to fail⁵² while it is also argued contextual admissions need to form part of a wider student lifecycle approach which facilitates student success to truly promote fairness⁵³. The use of transparent contextual offers combined with other interventions has been effective at Exeter to improve access, with students going on to achieve good educational outcomes. We will seek to extend the use of contextual offers with a greater availability of individual measures of disadvantage via the UCAS application process and to more closely align our offers policy with our fair access work.</p>
<p>Offer holder visit bursary: reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs for students from lowest incomes.</p>	<p>Regular surveys of applicants and offer-holders show us how important university visits are in making informed decisions about where to study⁵⁴. The costs involved however can be prohibitive especially for those students from low-income backgrounds. We are aware this may be a particular issue for students visiting our campuses in Devon and Cornwall due to the travel involved and relatively high cost of overnight accommodation. Inability to benefit from experiencing campus, speaking to academics and students, and finding out what support is available, could mean students decide to go elsewhere despite</p>

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
	being qualified to excel at Exeter. We have provided a Visit Bursary for students in care for several years and are now extending this support for offer-holders who are eligible for free school meals.
Discover University student experience panel series: online signposting and student-led panels providing co-created content to enable audiences with protected characteristics and those from underrepresented groups to obtain information from peers.	A variety of sector literature illustrates the importance of a sense of belonging to student academic success, motivation, retention and university choice ⁵⁵ . Students who are within a minority may find it particularly difficult to feel that they belong, particularly before they develop their own networks and communities. Websites and open days provide factual information, but this tends to be generic and may not provide specific insights into the experience of studying and being a student with particular life experience. Our student experience panels aim to provide students with peer-led “warts and all” information about studying at the University as part of a minority group. The aim is to provide students with authentic and transparent information which will help them make informed choices and build realistic expectations of studying with us. A secondary aim is to foster a sense of belonging, as students will be able to see they are welcomed and represented within our student community. Panels give insights into the experience of our students who are from a range of backgrounds. Content is created by Student Ambassadors with relevant lived experience and the sessions are student-led. Panels are wide ranging and include those for ethnic minority students, students with disabilities, who are care experienced, mature, practise a particular faith, or who are LGBT+.

Partnerships and collaborative arrangements relevant to this intervention strategy:

- **Educational:** Realising Opportunities; Sutton Trust; The Elephant Group; SEREN; Exeter College; Truro and Penwith College; Yeovil College; South Devon College; Bridgwater and Taunton; AIM; CAVA; University Centre for Northern Devon; West Buckland School; 70 Education Partner Schools.
- **Community:** Northcott Theatre; Exeter Chiefs; Exeter City Football Club
- **Third sector:** The Black Leadership Group

Implementation strategy 3: Alleviating non-academic barriers to learning, improving continuation and delivering positive student experience.

Risks addressed: increase in cost pressures affecting ability to continue; may not experience an environment which is conducive to good mental health; not receive sufficient personalised non-academic support or have sufficient access to extracurricular activities to achieve a positive outcome; not have equal opportunity to access limited resources related to higher education, such as suitable accommodation.

Rationale: While the focus of this implementation strategy is continuation many of the interventions support academic attainment, either directly by making academic support more accessible or indirectly by removing time pressures and supporting wellbeing to enable students to better focus on their studies. This intervention strategy aims to strengthen or increase non-academic provision to address a range of factors affecting continuation including financial barriers, mental health and wellbeing and integration and belonging.

3a) Working with students we will redesign the way in which we communicate and provide support for under-represented students to improve accessibility, engagement and service quality.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
Access to success working with under-represented student communities to co-create information, resources and improve service design based on needs identified across the student journey and supported through staff training and a new student relationship management system [new].	The University provides a significant range of services and support which directly address barriers to equal opportunity but sometimes those students who may benefit most may be least likely to engage or we simply do not have a sufficiently full or nuanced understanding of patterns of engagement to understand where barriers exist to inform the shaping of provision. As we continue to widen participation it is important to fully understand the varied journeys of our diverse students to ensure we anticipate their needs and facilitate support accordingly ⁵⁶ . Staff feedback also shows lack of awareness of what is on offer to enable facilitated engagement and referral. Our Access to Success project will aim to identify engagement gaps and work with under-represented students to better understand the barriers to engagement with the aim of improving accessibility,

	<p>service design, information and staff development. In response to data analysis and consultation with students, we will ensure this work addresses the needs of student parents and commuting students. Our Student Unions have highlighted the need to review the definition of a commuting student to incorporate those students who are not living at home but choose to live some distance from campus to find affordable rented accommodation. We will aim to find out more about the extent of this practice and work with students to better understand barriers and potential solutions.</p>
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3b) We will increase the funding support available for students on low incomes and introduce new measures to provide specialist funding advice, improve affordability and access to accommodation.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Student funding package: expand the eligibility criteria and award values within the Access to Exeter Bursary to provide support to a larger proportion of our students. Change of our current provision for students without family support, to remove the need for an application process and provide more structured up front support. 3,000 students.</p>	<p>The pandemic and cost of living crisis coupled with a national student funding system which has not kept pace with inflation⁵⁷ has exerted unprecedented financial pressures on all our students, but this is particularly felt by those from lower income households or with personal circumstances restricting their ability to draw down additional sources of income from family or part-time work⁵⁸. The University’s Cost of Living task force along with our Student Unions have put in place considerable mitigation to provide direct financial support and help make university study more affordable but cost pressures are a continued concern and a priority for our students⁵⁹. We seek to provide support through our Student Funding Package but cannot make up the shortfalls of the national student funding system or solve the cost-of-living crisis. We will help to mitigate some of this risk by increasing the financial support available to the lowest income students and strengthening provision for students trying to manage independently without family support. We will increase the eligibility threshold of our Access to Exeter Bursary to £35,000 p.a. in 25/26 and increase the value of awards, particularly in Year 1. Our evaluation of this scheme indicates it helps to level the playing field for low-income students with qualitative feedback confirming its impact on reducing financial stress and supporting continuation. We will also replace existing bursary support available through application for care experienced and estranged students, with an automatically awarded bursary to provide more transparent and upfront support to help decision-making and budgeting.</p>

<p>Affordable study initiative: specialist funding advice and support to help students access expertise and practical support to help alleviate financial pressures.</p>	<p>A new affordable study initiative will improve financial information and advice while developing practical cost saving measures for students. Informal feedback from students indicates a demand for high quality financial information pre-arrival, particularly for non-typical students such as those returning to learning or with caring responsibilities. Staff and students have also highlighted the importance of advice about support and budgeting for current students. This is particularly important for students who may interrupt their studies. A continued focus in partnership with our Student Unions on finding ways to improve affordability will be important, not just to support our lowest income students, but those in the 'squeezed middle' who face financial challenges while being ineligible for additional support⁶⁰.</p>
<p>Access to accommodation: accommodation guarantee of 365-day contract for students without family support and a new subsidised guarantor scheme for care leavers through Housing Hand.</p>	<p>The challenges faced by care experienced students entering the rented sector flagged up by organisations such as Barnardo's, are just as relevant to young people who have become estranged from their families and are unable to access a guarantor⁶¹. We will work in partnership, initially with Housing Hand, to set up a new guarantor scheme will help address barriers to accessing accommodation for those students without family support. We will pay for this service for our care leavers and estranged students so they can get free access to a guarantor.</p>

3c) We will extend and improve the support we provide to under-represented student communities to support mental health and wellbeing, belonging, continuation and academic success.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Transition and Induction Framework: delivery of good practice framework via academic induction and transition leads to proactively manage risks during induction and Yr1 resulting in discontinuation and impacting on attainment. Review and improve practice relevant to other transitions including return from study abroad and industrial placement. This also links to work to achieve the Mental Health Charter.</p>	<p>Periods of change, particularly as students enter higher education and progress through their first year, can be particularly unsettling with potential impacts on mental health, wellbeing, academic success and retention. Pre-Covid the University began to develop a coordinated institutional strategy to support effective transition, drawing on findings and good practice identified through sector literature and reports such as the Quality Enhancement Themes: First Year Experience⁶² and the HEA's Student Transitions in Higher Education⁶³. These focused on mainstream, coordinated activities starting pre-arrival and continuing throughout Year 1 to support peer and staff engagement, sense of belonging, academic success and wellbeing. The development of our Transition and Induction Framework also drew on learnings from a literature review and internal audit of best practice. We will seek to review and enhance this work, firstly by working through the Mental Health Charter to ensure we are embedding good practice to foster wellbeing across our transition activity; secondly through evaluation of current interventions; and thirdly by extending our focus on other key transition points such as year abroad and industrial placement.</p>

<p>Enhanced transition and induction programme: beginning pre-Freshers' Week with interventions throughout term 1, this programme for groups of students experiencing the largest continuation gaps provides information and signposting to key student support services including wellbeing, finance, academic skills and employability.</p>	<p>Student groups experiencing the largest gaps in continuation are invited to take part in our Enhanced Transition and Induction programme which begins with in person events in advance of Freshers' Week. The objectives which seek to support retention include helping students prepare for Freshers' Week and reduce associated anxieties; learn more about the support services available to them; and access peer networks. Around 160 students attend the in-person events, with more than two thirds declaring a disability. Staff running the programme have noted a loss of resilience amongst students since the pandemic and this has been observed by visible displays of anxiety and increasing number of attendees being accompanied by adults. Pre and post surveys show significant improvements in knowledge and confidence in accessing support; preparedness for Freshers' Week and university study⁶⁴. We will continue to refine and improve this programme based on student feedback and evaluation.</p>
<p>Mental Health Charter: the University will be working towards the Mental Health Charter and seeking to achieve this during the plan. We will work to address the key strands of the Charter ensuring approaches to supporting mental health are embedded in key processes such as induction and transition. We will also seek to encourage cocreation of wellness initiatives through our Wellness Creation Fund [new].</p>	<p>We continue to see escalating mental health disclosures and related demand for services. Between 21/22 and 22/23 demand mental health appointments increased by 27%⁶⁵. More students disclosed pre-existing mental health conditions than ever before and the number of students with complex mental health needs continues to rise rapidly. Approximately 10% have disclosed neurodivergent disabilities including dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD or a social/communication condition. As a result, demand for services such as talking therapies, crisis support, and mental health mentoring have increased substantially. Extended investment in mental health support has included the development of our ongoing partnership with NHS Talkworks, a free confidential talking therapy services provided by Devon Partnership NHS Trust; a flagship jointly funded University-NHS University Community Mental Health Team partnership initiative; specialist counselling through Nilaari, a service specifically for Black and minority ethnic students; and online self-help tools such as Silver Cloud, Togetherall and Living Life to the Full. In addition to providing effective wellbeing support, the University is working towards achieving the University Mental Health Charter with the aim of embedding policy and practice which supports good mental health both for our students and staff⁶⁶. Strands of this work will focus on key processes such as transition and induction, in addition to the wider learning environment. We hope to achieve the Charter during the period of the plan.</p>
<p>Expanded support for Neurodivergent students: supporting outcomes across the lifecycle, we will increase specialist support for this group of students, particular during induction and transition. We will also provide training and resources for staff to help better meet the needs of these students.</p>	<p>The rising number of students presenting as neurodivergent and requiring more structured support from the University was a common theme raised through our consultation process. We can see intersections with conditions such as ADHD and autism with mental health issues. Research has identified that transition into higher education can be particularly challenging for neurodivergent students who can experience information and sensory overload and anxiety about not 'fitting in'⁶⁷. Our staff also felt they needed more information and resources to better support these students' academic and non-academic needs. We will seek to learn more from our students, sector literature and good practice, about expanding our support for neurodivergent students, particularly during transition and induction. We will also expand our resources to support the development of our staff. This project is also linked to inclusive education projects focusing on academic responses to support this group [implementation strategy 4]</p>

<p>Exeter Cares Community: wrap-around personalised support for students with complex support needs linked to personal context such as estrangement, caring responsibilities, seeking asylum, care experience, or social/communication disabilities.</p>	<p>Our Exeter Cares Community provides a transparent and joined up approach to supporting care leavers, estranged students and other students who may require additional support due to their personal circumstances. The initiative is an important intervention in supporting the continuation and wellbeing of students such as care leavers and those without family support who experience higher rates of discontinuation than their peers. Featured as an OfS effective practice case study for care leavers support, Exeter Cares is run by staff in the widening participation and wellbeing teams working alongside the Student Unions⁶⁸. Exeter Cares offers support pre-arrival through to post graduation and includes practical help, opportunities for peer networking and socialising, and specialist welfare support. In addition to support such as structured transition, access to a dedicated welfare officer and availability of additional counselling, Exeter Cares also aims to offer a friendly community. We are aware that small acts of kindness are hugely appreciated by students with no family support such as celebrating birthdays, Christmas lunch, social events, and providing a familiar presence at graduation ceremonies. The initiative has been developed with the support of the NNECL Quality Mark and Standalone Pledge frameworks and incorporates learnings reports such as Moving on Up⁶⁹.</p>
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Partnerships and collaborative arrangements relevant to this intervention strategy:

- **Third sector:** National Network for the Education of Care Leavers; Housing Hand; StepChange; Student Minds.
- **Community:** NHS

Implementation strategy 4: Supporting students to fulfil their academic potential and adopting sector leading inclusive practice.

Risks addressed: Students may: experience increase in cost pressures affecting ability to get good grades; may not experience an environment which is conducive to good mental health; not receive sufficient personalised non-academic support or have sufficient access to extracurricular activities to achieve a positive outcome. In addition, students may not receive sufficient personalised academic support to achieve a positive outcome or may not feel represented or included within the educational environment.

Rationale: In addressing gaps in student outcomes by alleviating academic barriers to equal opportunity, we have considered key success factors including meaningful interaction between staff and students; knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners; an educational experience that is relevant to students' interests and future goals; and supportive peer relations. In addition to the specific projects within this implementation strategy, gaps in outcomes will be identified and analysed on an ongoing basis by our Student Outcomes Group to instigate action through our Teaching Excellence Action Plans at department level and via the relevant Success for All Working Group.

Implementation strategy 4: **Supporting students to fulfil their academic potential and adopting sector leading inclusive practice.**

4a) We will introduce major changes to our academic support model and curriculum to embed support and skills development.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Student academic support: we will introduce a new model of data-informed student support with the aim of providing proactive interventions to address gaps in student outcomes. Pastoral Mentors</p>	<p>The transformation of our academic student support model aims to address gaps in student outcomes by providing proactive personalised, early interventions to support academic and personal development. This will be delivered through a network of Pastoral Mentors whose work will be informed by student engagement and other relevant data to help flag individuals who may require additional support or referral to specialist services. Traditional models for academic support (including tutoring) have evolved with academic staff reporting that they are finding it increasingly challenging to support students</p>

<p>will be recruited across all academic departments and will work with Student Data Leads to identify students in need of support and requiring proactive early interventions including referrals to specialist services [new].</p>	<p>pastorally due to changing needs and expectations, particularly about mental health and wellbeing. Students also report dissatisfaction with the inconsistency of academic and pastoral support. In each of the last 4 years, our institutional academic support score (TEF) for full-time students has been below benchmark. Research shows a strong correlation between proactive academic support and improved student engagement, retention and outcomes⁷⁰ We will make changes to the current model for academic support at Exeter to make it more proactive, consistent, and data-informed to support students in their studies. In prioritising this support we have drawn upon evidence from TASO that suggests the existing body of evidence encourages the wider adoption of learning analytics systems, as most studies report some effect in improving students' outcomes⁷¹ The TASO evidence review on mentoring, counselling, coaching and role model reports "some evidence" that these programmes are associated with positive effects on students and in accord with their recommendation, will seek to identify the most effective features of this provision through programme evaluation⁷².</p>
<p>Curriculum for Change - Skills Mapping: students will receive directed support to address skills and knowledge development as part of an ongoing skills match process through the new Curriculum for Change programme to help address gaps in student outcomes. Students will be able to identify development gaps and tailor their module choice to build specific skills to enhance attainment and employability. The programme will also build institutional knowledge of skills and development needs and where patterns occur relating to personal context to inform future provision [new].</p>	<p>Research by the UPP Foundation identified a 'growing sense of apathy and a lack of agency among students over their university experience, leading to a reluctance to participate in both academic and extracurricular activities', a trend 'exacerbated by real financial strain'. Additionally, the research found that 72% believe their universities could do more to integrate workplace skills into the curriculum'⁷³. Our institution-wide Curriculum for Change initiative will allow students to curate an educational experience that is relevant to their interests and future goals and help them develop knowledge, and confidence and identify as successful HE learners. This initiative is integral to our Access and Participation Plan because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds to feel in control of their futures⁷⁴ • Student participation in activities outside their core academic work at university is lower among recent graduates from working-class backgrounds, than better-off students^{75,76,77} often due to paid work commitments. • Students from poorer backgrounds are less likely than those from better-off backgrounds to feel university has given them the skills they needed to get hired in the jobs they wanted after graduation⁷⁸. <p>Curriculum for Change will allow students to earn credits for flexibly and asynchronously delivered co-curricular, work-based and extracurricular activities, making it easier to combine this activity with academic study and paid employment. Integrating activity in this way overcomes the tension that can exist between extracurricular and academic endeavours⁷⁹. The research literature suggests that extracurricular activities have a positive, though indirect effect on academic performance such as improved time management, increased resilience and motivation to study⁸⁰. Our delivery plan for Curriculum for Change incorporates a KPI for increased recruitment to the University from widening participation backgrounds with the expectation that "immersion in real-work experiences and challenged-based interdisciplinary learning" and development of "the knowledge, skills and mindsets to succeed and thrive in the rapidly changing world of work" will attract more entrants from these groups, potentially into a wider range of subjects. The skills and mindset strand specifically will improve graduate outcomes by enabling students to assess, map and articulate their progress in acquiring the skills, knowledge and mindsets that employers seek, and to choose future-skills-focused activities irrespective of discipline. Inclusivity and student-centredness are embedded into Curriculum for Change design principles. The initiative is being co-created with our students, emphasising Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and "Success for All" as core to our offer.</p>
<p>Academic skills: we will provide discipline-relevant academic skills support proactively targeted at student groups</p>	<p>We will review the targeting and delivery of our academic skills support to ensure those students who may benefit most are also easily able to engage with right types of support. While we seek to embed scaffolded skills development within first year modules, students will be coming to their studies with widely differing educational backgrounds</p>

<p>likely to experience the largest gaps in outcomes, particularly relating to degree awarding. Online tools, one to one support and group work will also be provided proactively linking with the work of the Pastoral Mentors and Student Data Leads and supporting the core skill strands delivered through Curriculum for Change [extended].</p>	<p>and so the availability of personalised academic support to focus on individual development needs is also important. The need for this type of support was identified during the development of our mature student strategy. The literature review noted that the pedagogical approach that a HEI promotes and uses as part of its formal teaching practices can either empower or disempower mature students. The literature highlights that we need to recognise previous learning styles and preferences, but challenge these in a supportive way to support the requirements of academia. Mature students tend to prefer active and participatory forms of learning and holistic assessment⁸¹. Given a variety of progression routes and time away from learning, it is understandable mature learners find it difficult to understand lecture material, assignment writing and referencing and use of academic information technology⁸². Support in these key academic skills is beneficial and any provision needs to be accessible to optimise engagement amongst time poor students. In contrast to the current generation of ‘digital natives’ entering HE, mature students are likely to have extremely varied levels of digital expertise. IT skills development alongside study skills support is suggested in the literature as a good practice, especially for those out of education a long time, but these need to be ‘sold’ to students who need to see the value and its application to their course. We can also see differing levels of academic confidence on the basis of personal background and schooling through internal surveys but need more information to understand patterns of engagement and potential barriers and the opportunities for support offered by emerging technologies. This intervention is linked to other activities listed in this plan such as Curriculum for Change, Transition and Induction Framework, and the Academic Student Support Model.</p>
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4b) We will embed inclusive education practice through policy and training and progressively employ universal design principles to ensure the most common adaptations for disability are built into our modules.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Inclusive education project: we will guide, train and support our academic staff to deliver inclusive educational practice. This includes setting clear expectations through policy, providing learning tools and resources, and recognising excellence through our approach to recognition and reward. A particular focus will be supporting academic colleagues to embed universal design principles and increase the knowledge and skills-base in respect of supporting students with learning disabilities and social and communication disabilities [new].</p>	<p>Driven by key inclusion priorities in our current Education Strategy, Strategy 2030, and Transformative Education Framework, an Inclusive Education Project was established to review our current Individualised Learning Plan (ILP) provision, survey best practice in other HEIs, and explore the potential for Universal Design for Learning to improve provision for our disabled students, particularly those who do not come forward for formal support. The first phase of the project undertook a situational analysis involving review of relevant literature, analysis of internal data and consultation, including valuable contributions from members of the Neurodivergent and Disabled Students’ Society and the Disability Network⁸³. Feedback indicated that disability support could be inconsistent while Wellbeing Services, professional services, and teaching staff highlighted administration and implementation of ILPs as challenging. There are additional non-disability related barriers to equitable access to education, such as being a mature learner or having English as an additional language. This indicates a need for inclusive teaching and learning practice that is systemic and embedded in our ‘business as usual’. Given the inequities in disability diagnostic systems, government concern about rising Disabled Student Allowances cost, workload of administering large volumes of ILPs, and needs of an increasingly diverse student population, HEIs are increasingly moving towards incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in teaching and learning. Modelling UDL principles is considered good teaching and learning practice⁸⁴ with some studies suggesting its benefits for reducing awarding gaps for students both with and without disabilities⁸⁵. However, UDL principles will not address the more complex constellations of disabled student needs, and therefore ILPs will continue to be necessary for some. The implementation of the project will adopt a two-pronged approach – both to secure effective implementation of ILPs for students who declare a disability and to move towards a position where ILPs are no longer the only means of overcoming learning inequities faced by our students. This will be achieved through a range of actions including developing an inclusive education policy, staff training and the embedding of universal design principles.</p>

<p>Inclusive curriculum - Transformative Education Framework Curriculum Enhancement: we will progressively review and improve the content of the curriculum through the implementation of the enhancement framework. This takes module and programme convenors through a step by step process to improve accessibility of content and teaching methods.</p>	<p>Our Transformative Education Framework Curriculum Enhancement tool will support academic colleagues in embedding inclusive practice across the curriculum. A key strand of our work to address degree awarding gaps, the embedding of inclusive education practice aims to ensure students are able to access a curriculum which is relevant to them and creates an environment where all learners feel safe and respected. Inclusive education has been defined in a number of ways. These various definitions share an emphasis on encouraging a learning environment that is accessible to all students, fosters their continued engagement equally, facilitates openness to different ways of thinking and being, and overtly values individual differences⁸⁶. In such environments, teachers and students alike are aware of, and work to counteract assumptions and biases; they also strive for transparency and foster accountability. As a result, all learners feel respected and therefore supported in their intellectual and personal growth. Inclusive Education at the University of Exeter involves facilitating, and benefitting from, equality and diversity by pursuing language, behaviours and teaching practices that foster the inclusion and success of all learners, and work towards improving their experience, skills, and attainment⁸⁷. In aiming to include all learners, inclusivity simultaneously seeks to avoid the exclusion of any learner – for example, because of particular traits such as: protected characteristics, differences in prior attainment or socio-economic class . The tool which will be used in conjunction with our Inclusive Education Policy and Curriculum for Change, will support the progressive review and enhancement of our curriculum to embed best practice principles.</p>
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4c) We will work with students from ethnic minorities to provide personalised support and interventions to remove barriers to realising their potential in addition to building on whole institutional approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Academic Leads for Race Equality and Inclusion: academic leads working across departments and subject groupings will provide highly visible and proactive point of contact and advocacy for students experiencing discrimination, harassment, or microaggressions related to ‘race’, ethnicity, background, gender, sexuality, or (dis)ability either within the University environment or on placement. Leads will also work collaboratively and across their subject areas to promote anti-racist and inclusive educational practice and support the University's Transformative Education Framework [existing].</p>	<p>The EHRC report Tackling racial harassment: Universities challenged⁸⁸ reported that almost a quarter of students from minority ethnic backgrounds said they had experienced racial harassment and regular experience of microaggressions within a wide variety of settings and from multiple harassers. The impacts were severe, affecting mental health and educational outcomes. Negative mental health consequences such as depression and anxiety were widely reported, with 8% of students who had experienced racial harassment reporting that they had felt suicidal. Research indicates similar experiences amongst other socially marginalised groups.⁸⁹ The creation of a network of Academic Leads for Race Equality and Inclusion drew on learnings from roles within our medicine and education disciplines first created to support students experiencing harassment whilst on placement. The academic leads aim to provide students with a single point of contact in their departments for raising any concerns related to racism, microaggression, racial discrimination and discrimination against any protected characteristics that they might experience as students. This provides a safe space to get timely support from trained staff while providing a visible point of contact and advocacy. The roles also work across their departments to promote anti-racist and inclusive educational practice. The leads meet regularly with the Associate Academic Dean for students (Racial Equality and Inclusion) and the Academic Leads from other Colleges/Departments to share good practice, support and learn from each other. Reporting to the faculty senior team, they also liaise with colleagues within the Academic Personal Tutoring system, EDI teams, Exeter Speaks Out, Dignity and Respect Advisors and Student Cases teams, whenever required.</p>
<p>GRIT Black Leaders Programme: we will work with cohorts of Black students to realise their leadership skills, identify learning goals and strategies for development</p>	<p>Sector reports such as NUS/UUK Closing the Gap and HEFCE’s Causes in Differences in Student Outcomes⁹⁰ highlight that success in reducing differences in outcomes are linked to institutions’ willingness and capacity to be more inclusive. Positive interventions include creating a sense of belonging, building social capital, enhancing the student experience, and developing more wide-ranging learning and teaching initiatives. The most effective interventions reduce gaps in outcomes by making improvements to the</p>

working in partnership with GRIT [continued].	students' learning, boosting their engagement in HE, enhancing their wider student experience, and raising their confidence and resilience levels. The Grit Students of Colour and Black Leaders programme is designed to equip students from racialised groups with the confidence, the sense of belonging to become powerful contributors to university life. It supports and challenges students to develop a new sense of agency, empowering their leadership and advocacy skills which, in turn, creates a cohort more willing and able to push for the structural change required. Facilitated by Black trainers, it explores notions of community, identity and leadership from the perspective of those from racialised groups. Students investigate how to use their personal resources to develop their skills and qualities, generating supportive relationships that build belonging and community. Students look at who it is they want to be for themselves and others; about what it means to be a visible leader who can inspire the next generation. Evaluation has shown correlations in improved degree awards, progression and sense of belonging ⁹¹ .
Peer mentoring: we will extend our schemes specifically designed to support students from under-represented backgrounds who are likely to experience gaps in outcomes, include those for mature students, care experienced and estranged students, disabled students and asylum seekers [existing].	Evaluation of peer mentoring schemes in other institutions reveals that participation can boost a sense of community and belonging among students ⁹² and has revealed positive association between participation and student outcomes. Our peer-to-peer mentoring schemes provide pre-entry preparation and post-entry induction to help new students orientate to university life and make the most of the academic opportunities available to them. The schemes are currently available for various student communities covered by our Access and Participation Plan. We will put in place evaluation to better understand the impact of these type of initiatives, particularly in supporting mature students, to enable us to improve and extend where appropriate. Recognising that concepts such as a sense of belonging and learner identity are a process not a specific event, mentees traditionally transition to discipline-specific schemes during Term 2. The approach is cognisant with the What Works? model of retention which showed that engagement to promote belonging and a student identity should begin early and continue across the lifecycle ⁹³ .

Partnerships and collaborative arrangements relevant to this intervention strategy:

- **Third sector:** GRIT

Implementation strategy 5: Supporting students to fulfil their post-study ambitions to achieve social mobility.

Risks addressed: Students may: experience increase in cost pressures affecting ability to engage in extra-curricular activities to support employability and not experience an environment which is conducive to good mental health. In addition, students may not have equal opportunity to progress to an outcome they consider to be a positive reflection of their higher education experience or may not have equal opportunity to access learning, extracurricular and employability opportunities because of the region in which they live.

Rationale: A literature review on employability by Advance HE⁹⁴ identifies a number of barriers to equal opportunity for under-represented students including insufficient career knowledge, relevant work experience and access to internships and CV-enhancing extra-curricular activities. While we have several existing schemes aimed at supporting under-represented students develop this knowledge and experience, we are also aware that some of the knowledge, time and confidence challenges experienced by these students also affect their ability to fully access and benefit from the support available.

5a) We will establish a programme to support students from under-represented backgrounds to experience and progress to postgraduate study.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
Pathway to Postgraduate Study: programme of outreach, mentoring, research skills	Pathway to Postgraduate Study aims to improve transitions into postgraduate study for disadvantaged groups through improved information, advice and guidance and mentoring. Various studies ^{95,96,97} show how inequalities that exist at undergraduate level continue and in

<p>development and bespoke careers support for under-represented students seeking to progress into academia [new].</p>	<p>some instances are exacerbated at postgraduate level. Graduates from less privileged backgrounds still appear to be less likely to progress to postgraduate study than their better-off counterparts⁹⁸ with minority ethnic students underrepresented in Postgraduate research⁹⁹. Degree classification plays an important role, where those with the higher class of degree progress on at a higher rate than those with lower¹⁰⁰. We know at undergraduate level, degree classification and social background are very much linked. Therefore inequity at one stage of the HE journey seems to be affecting and playing out in another. The assumption that the transition to postgraduate study is easy and automatic (simply ‘more of the same’) is not representative of all students’ experience. Research into progression into postgraduate education has focused on the impact of financial concerns and uneven provision of information, advice and guidance about postgraduate opportunities^{101,102}. Similarly a lack of information available about how to apply to or fund postgraduate study may also be a barrier¹⁰³. Added to this, many postgraduate students are older and often returning to HE. So in considering, applying and joining postgraduate study, many are doing so from the general population. Students who return to postgraduate study rather than progress directly from undergraduate studies are more likely to have widening participation characteristics which had prevented their earlier progression to PGT¹⁰⁴. In creating the Pathway to Postgraduate Study programme we shall engage our own students in project design and draw on learnings elsewhere such as the HEFCE project ‘Increasing progression to and success in taught postgraduate study’¹⁰⁵.</p>
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5b) We will provide focused support for students with disabilities and mental health conditions to improve employability and graduate outcomes.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Careers consultancy: one to one support for under-represented students to provide bespoke advice and development. This will involve targeted support for students with disabilities [extended].</p>	<p>Our specialist widening participation careers consultant is able to support students with information about what is available within the careers service and advise on the opportunities students can take advantage of to enhance their employability. Within our own ‘Employability Monsters’ research¹⁰⁶– which investigated career transitions for widening participation students - participants mentioned that having a ‘named’ person (in the form of the Employability and Careers Consultant dedicated to WP students), really helped them feel supported and able to navigate the information available and support their career decision making. Evidence suggests that ‘that the provision of effective career guidance within higher education can contribute to social mobility, improved retention, attainment and progression to employment as well as to enhanced career management skills’¹⁰⁷. Local and national data show that there are gaps in graduate employment outcomes between disadvantaged and advantaged groups. This is in part because students will have different levels of social capital to draw upon when preparing for a career whilst at university, depending on their background^{108,109}. This could include being able to draw on family and friends for tacit knowledge and exposure to career pathways and extra-curricular opportunities to enhance employability. Research by upReach¹¹⁰ echoes this, suggesting that students from less privileged backgrounds will often have more limited access to careers advice at school, are less likely to have completed professional work experience and lack useful social networks. According to the Bridge Group¹¹¹, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds participate less in activities that have greatest currency amongst employers. This includes extracurricular activities (leadership roles in sports and societies, for example); work experience that contributes to career aspirations; internships amongst competitive employers; international opportunities to study and work; and access to postgraduate education. Purcell et al. (2012¹¹²), as part of the ‘Futuretrack’ series, conclude that the impact of disadvantage is clear in relation to access to careers advice, particularly when looking at the access of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to advice from their friends and family.</p>
<p>Disability employability support: we will review all aspects of our careers provision to ensure it is inclusive and accessible. Working with our Neurodivergent Working Group,</p>	<p>We will provide targeted employability advice for disabled students and work to ensure our careers support is fully accessible. We have provided bespoke careers consultancy for students meeting widening participation criteria for many years. We will develop the support offered through this service in collaboration with our Wellbeing team to encourage engagement with students with disabilities and particularly those with social and communication conditions. Proactive and targeted support will be offered through our disability peer mentoring groups</p>

<p>we will continue to enhance support for student with social and communication disabilities such as making careers fairs and other events more accessible through the provision of quiet spaces and structured access and encouraging engagement with opportunities offered by Disability Confident employers [new].</p>	<p>and student societies and linked to a broader package of help and advice through our Career Zone. We will particularly seek to support students with a social communication/autistic spectrum disorder. Graduates with these conditions are more likely to be in part-time work or full-time study than non-disabled graduates¹¹³. It has been reported that 33% of graduates with autism are in full-time employment in the UK, as compared to 71% of graduates without disabilities¹¹⁴. In order to support students with a disability, Advance HE recommends that HEI's improve outreach and communications, involve the input of disabled students when designing/reviewing services, develop join up between careers services and disability services at a local and national level. We will continue to work with our Neurodivergence Working Group to further improve the accessibility and shape of our service provision. This has already resulted in improvements, such as clearly flagging Disability Confident employers when advertising internships and job opportunities to give our disabled students confidence to apply for these opportunities and disclose their disabilities.</p>
<p>UpReach partnership: one to one coaching for eligible students through our partnership with UpReach, helping students discover different career options, and develop the vital skills, networks and experiences needed to succeed in their chosen career. We will work with upReach to enhance support for students with social and communication disabilities [existing].</p>	<p>The University of Exeter has partnered with the social mobility charity upReach since 2012 with the shared aim of enabling any student to achieve their full potential, regardless of social background. Exeter is now upReach's largest university partner. All students supported by upReach are from state schools and low-income backgrounds. The most disadvantaged students are prioritised with over 80% from the lowest income households. Our partnership with upReach increases access to career knowledge, professional networks, work experience and extra-curricular activities for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Data presented in the 2022 upReach impact report ¹¹⁵shows that 75% of upReach associates were in employment or highly skilled roles 15 months after graduating. upReach associates in full-time employment were 11% more likely to be in highly skilled roles than other graduates with a similar background. This suggests that engagement with upReach is having an impact on career outcomes.</p>

5c) We will provide paid internships and work to extend relevant campus-based employment opportunities.

Activity	Assumptions and rationale
<p>Paid internships: collaboration with employers to provide paid internship opportunities for students meeting widening participation criteria. The scheme closes the gap between education and industry to enhance the employability of the students, who are from diverse academic areas with varying technical skills and interests [existing].</p>	<p>We provide a number of paid internship opportunities to widening participation students at the University, in order to increase opportunities to accrue valuable work experience and enhance CVs. There is evidence in the literature to show that work placements and internships can have a positive impact on employability and employment outcomes. Of particular interest, Kerrigan (2018) ¹¹⁶showed the gap in professional employment rates between widening participation and non-widening participation at Nottingham Trent University disappeared if they undertook a sandwich placement. Other evaluations focus on the impact of work placements on career development rather than employment outcomes. A case study submitted to the Office for Students¹¹⁷ showed work placements increased confidence, resilience and career readiness. A series of studies and research overviews have confirmed that work experience (in the form of placements and internships) is an enabler of success in the graduate labour market^{118,119 & 120}. Financial disadvantage is likely to be important also as some students might already be working and cannot afford to give up paid work for unpaid internships or volunteering in order to get experience of the kind valued by employers. A recent evaluation of the University of Exeter's Access to Internships (A2i) scheme, done in collaboration with TASO, showed that A2i and other university internships were positively correlated with good graduate outcomes. Interns were statistically more likely to be in employment or further study at 6 and 15 months and more likely to receive a positive graduate outcome (as measured by the graduate outcomes survey) than a control group. Survey and interview data also showed that A2i internships provided increases in career related knowledge, confidence and skills whilst providing tangible experiences for students to draw from during the recruitment process. This provided evidence for the plausibility of the A2i theory of change.</p>

Partnerships and collaborative arrangements relevant to this intervention strategy:

- **Third sector:** UpReach

Annex B references

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