



University
of Exeter

Access and Participation Plan Executive Summary

2025/26 to 2028/29

University of Exeter

Summary of 2025/26-28/29 access and participation plan

What is an Access and Participation Plan?

An Access and Participation Plan sets out the meaningful and impactful steps an institution will take to promote equality of opportunity to enable everyone, irrespective of background, to enter and succeed in higher education if they have the potential and desire to do so. It is a regulatory requirement and is focused on priorities identified through research, analysis and consultation. You can see the full Access and Participation plan for University of Exeter at [Widening Participation Strategy](#) | [About us](#) | [University of Exeter](#).

Key points

Helping to make the world a fairer place through the power of education is one of the most important goals within our University strategy. We want everyone to feel welcome, valued and supported to realise their potential at the University of Exeter. This plan is part of a broader mission to build a diverse and inclusive educational community. We are hugely grateful for the insights of our students and their engagement with this plan and look forward to progressing this important work together.

The University of Exeter has around 30,000 students studying at campuses in Devon and Cornwall, as Degree Apprentices within industry and studying online. We are becoming a more diverse educational community but want to do better in attracting students from all backgrounds and particularly those from lower income households. Typically, 65% of our home undergraduate students meet at least one criteria of under-representation in higher education, rising to 80% of students from the South West¹. We achieved the highest rating for the quality of our education - Gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework 2023 - with support and outcomes for under-represented students highlighted as marks of quality. Our rates of retention, academic attainment and progression to graduate outcomes are high but we want to eliminate gaps in success where they occur between students with different backgrounds.

See page 2 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Fees we charge

We currently charge the maximum allowable fee for our undergraduate courses of £9,250. If the fee cap were to be lifted during the period covered by the plan we would review this fee, taking into consideration Government policy, inflation and other economic factors.

Financial help available

We review our bursary and scholarship provision annually based on student feedback, evaluation, and the economic situation. The table below shows bursaries only [excluding scholarships] for home undergraduate students starting their studies with us in 2025/26. 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.

Table 1 Bursaries available to students starting in 2025/2026

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

¹ 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

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

See page 18 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Information for students

Information on fees and funding for prospective students is provided via a variety of channels and at different stages of the application process. We provide face to face and online information sessions on general funding 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 Exeter 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.

See page 30 of the access and participation plan for more information.

What we are aiming to achieve

We are working to eliminate disparities between different student groups in accessing and participating successfully in higher education by addressing risks to equal opportunity. We have identified five priority objectives based on analysis and research and will measure progress via linked targets. These are as follows:

- 1. 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.**

Targets: PTA1) 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; PTA2) 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 2028/2.

- 2. 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.**

Targets: PTA3) Increase the proportion of entrants from the areas of highest deprivation [IMD Q1/2] from 18.8% to 22% by 28/29; PTA4) Increase the proportion of mature entrants from 8.3% to 11% by 28/29; PTA5) Increase the proportion of ethnic minority entrants from 14.3% to 18% by 28/29.

- 3. Improve the continuation rates for students experiencing gaps in outcomes, particularly for 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.**

Targets: PTS1) Improve the continuation rate for students from the areas of highest deprivation [IMD Q1/2] from 90.2% to 94% by 28/29; PTS2) Improve the continuation rate for mature students from 84.6% to 89% by 28/29; PTS3) Improve the continuation rate for students who are disabled or have a mental health condition from 91.2% to 94% by 28/29.

- 4. Narrow degree awarding gaps, particularly for those experiencing the biggest disparities in outcomes including 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.**

Targets: PTS4) 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; PTS5) Close the gap between mature and young students awarded Good Honours to no more than 7ppt by 28/29.

- 5. 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.**

Targets: PTP1) 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; PTP2) 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.

See page 5 of the access and participation plan.

What we are doing to address keys risks to equality of opportunity

We are delivering a range of interventions including improvements in institutional policy and practice; new course provision; collaboration with partners; increased financial support and a range of projects and individual activities aimed at mitigating specific risks to equal opportunity. These are included in five implementation plans linked to the priority objectives above as follows:

- 1. Taking a leadership role within the region and working in partnership to support attainment and access**

- 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.
- 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.

- 2. Widening participation and inclusive recruitment activity to diversify our student body and support progression to HE**

- 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
- 3. Alleviating non-academic barriers to learning, improving continuation and delivering positive student experience.**
- 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
- 4. Supporting students to fulfil their academic potential ensuring our portfolio is relevant and adopting sector leading inclusive practice.**
- We will introduce major changes to our academic support model and curriculum to embed support and skills development.
 - 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.
 - 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.
- 5. Supporting students to fulfil their post-study ambitions to achieve social mobility.**
- We will establish a programme to support students from under-represented backgrounds to experience and progress to postgraduate study.
 - Working with employers we will provide focused support for students with disabilities and mental health conditions to improve employability and graduate outcomes.

See pages 6 to 27 of the access and participation plan for more information on each of the activities within our intervention strategies.

How students can get involved

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

See page 28 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved

Good quality evaluation is vitally important in our efforts to improve continuously our strategies and interventions to widen access to higher education and support students to succeed. We use the insights we gain from evaluation to shape the provision we offer by: a) designing activities informed by existing knowledge and evidence; b) continuously improving programmes to meet the needs of prospective and current students; c) understanding the impact of our interventions on students and their outcomes; d) informing investment decisions based on an understanding of what works.

We aim to have a robust evaluation strategy in place for each activity that we do which focuses not only on a single outcome (such as whether a participant in an activity went on to higher education or not) but also short to medium outcomes (such as whether a participant in an activity increased their knowledge, confidence or academic skills, for example). This helps us to understand not only what works, but how and why. As a minimum, all activities within our Access and Participation Plan will be based on evidence and have a clear rationale, including a theory of change where this is practicable. Where we intend to collect empirical data or causal data, this has been specified for relevant projects within each of our five implementation strategies.

See pages 29 and 30 of the access and participation plan.

Contact details for further information

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