

Bournemouth University

Access and Participation Plan 2025-26 to 2028-29

Introduction and strategic aim

Bournemouth University (BU) is dedicated to inspiring learning, advancing knowledge, and enriching society by blending education, research and practice. With a focus on employability, BU offers diverse undergraduate programmes across various fields, including media, business, science, health and social sciences. The university is recognised for its strong industry connections and has held Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Silver status since 2017.

The university's current strategic framework, BU2025, emphasises innovation, engagement, and collaboration, with a strong focus on local and global impact. BU actively contributes to the cultural and economic vitality of the region through partnerships with local communities, businesses, and schools. We have always had a strong focus on employability, with strong outcomes and this is now reflected in a successful and growing apprenticeship provision. Indeed, following our 2024 Ofsted inspection for apprenticeship provision, we were awarded Outstanding in all inspection elements. We will further grow our apprenticeship portfolio, both in-house and through partners.

We will, for our future planning period, (to 2035), have an even greater emphasis on equipping students with the digital and data skills required to support their future employability, with key components of our provision being excellence in technology-embedded education. Similarly, we have a strong history of research and practice within education and a strong impact, and we will further our efforts to ensure impactful research and education.

In terms of scale, BU serves approximately 17,000 students and over 2,000 staff, fostering an inclusive and supportive community where all students can reach their full potential. The university is committed to enhancing social mobility by widening participation in Higher Education (HE), particularly for students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds. Our Access and Participation Plan (APP) reflects this commitment, which aims to close gaps in access, success and progression.

BU's commitment to inclusivity is demonstrated through initiatives like its University of Sanctuary status and participation in the Athena SWAN, Mental Health, and Race Equality charters. Furthermore, as will be articulated within our new 2035 framework, we will have an even stronger emphasis on our supportive approach, ensuring a compassionate and humanistic approach to education, with a greater emphasis on growing and highlighting student competencies.

BU's efforts to create an equitable learning environment are coordinated across the university, reporting to the Education Committee with representation from across the institution. These efforts are guided by data-driven insights and best practices, ensuring a comprehensive approach to enhancing the student experience. BU is also a member of the APP Special Interest Group within the Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE) network and the National Educational Opportunities Network (NEON), contributing to national efforts to support students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Risks, Objectives and Targets

Risks to Equality of Opportunity

To assess our performance, a detailed analysis of internal and external data was conducted as explained in Annex A. This identified 13 indications of risk (RI) at BU for particular student groups, which we will address through the APP, as shown in Figure 1.

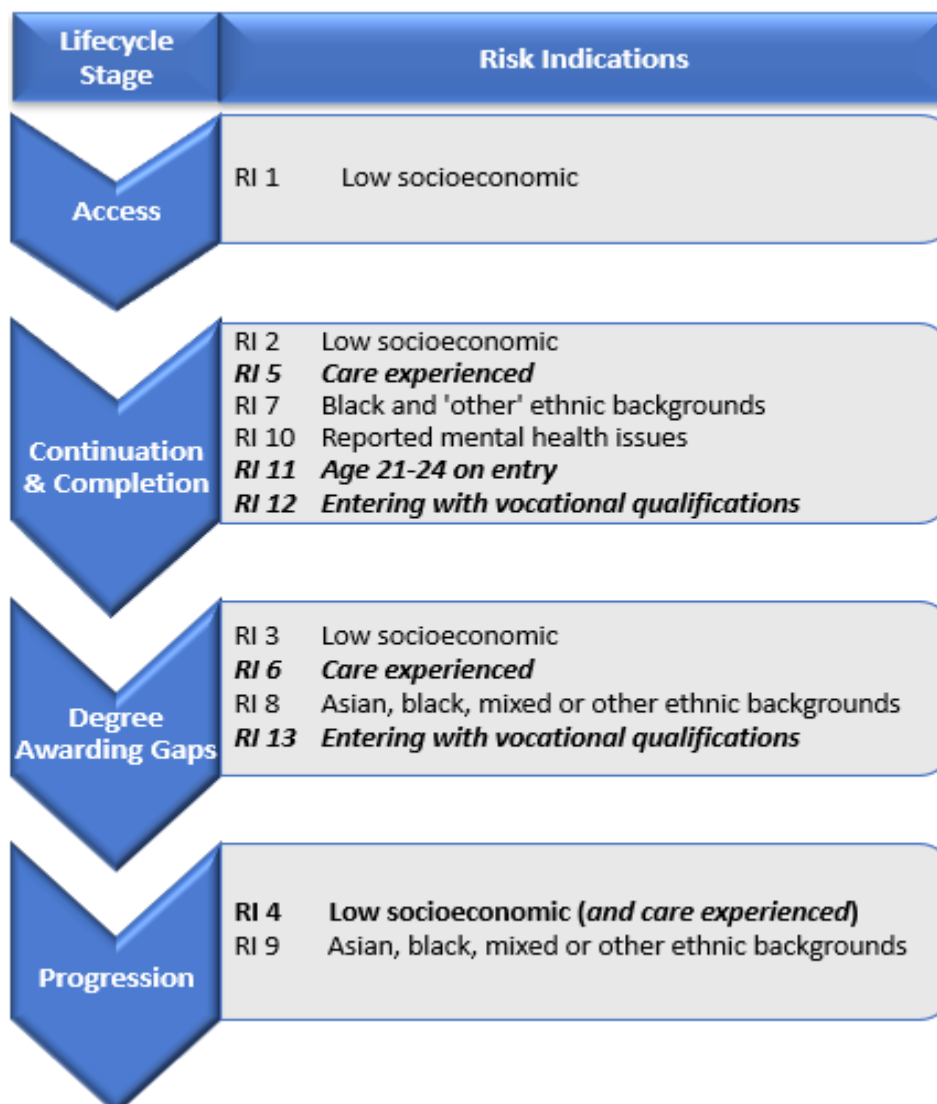


Figure 1. Risk indicators at BU (*Risk indications in bold italics will be addressed in the APP but due to small numbers or evolving internal data targets are inappropriate*)

Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with care experience, those entering with vocational qualifications, entering aged between 21 and 24, or from Asian, black or 'other' ethnic backgrounds were found to be most at risk with lower outcomes across multiple stages of the student lifecycle.

Mapping these risk indications to the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) and internal evidence helped us to understand which equality of opportunity risks affect different student groups and how, at each stage of the student lifecycle. From this, we identified that 9 EORR risks contribute strongly at BU, as set out in Table 1.

Table 1. EORR risks, student groups and lifecycle stages.

EORR risk	Primary characteristic of BU students most affected	Lifecycle stages
1. Knowledge and skills	Care experienced, low socioeconomic background, mature, vocational qualifications.	Access, continuation, completion, attainment
2. Information and guidance	Care experienced, low socioeconomic background, mature, vocational qualifications.	Access, continuation, completion
3. Perception of HE	Care experienced, low socioeconomic, Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds.	Access, continuation, completion
5. Choice of course and delivery	Mature, carer, mental health condition.	Continuation, completion
6. Academic Support	Low socioeconomic, Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds, vocational qualifications.	Continuation, completion, attainment, progression
7. Personal support	Low socioeconomic, care experienced, Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds, mental health condition.	Continuation, completion, attainment
8. Mental health	Mental health condition, low socioeconomic, care experienced, Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds.	Continuation, completion, attainment
10. Cost pressures	Low socioeconomic background, estranged, mature.	Continuation, completion, attainment
12. Progression	Low socioeconomic, Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds.	Progression

Through our evaluation, we found that many equality of opportunity risks are interrelated, and so we have grouped them into themes which align with how we will address them through our intervention strategies and whole provider approach:

Theme 1: Sense of Belonging and Community (EORR 1,2,3,5)

Theme 2: Skills, engagement and academic support (EORR 1,2,6)

Theme 3: Curriculum: inclusivity, teaching, assessment portfolio (EORR 1,2,5,6,8,12)

Theme 4: Supportive environment: welfare, finance, mental health, communication (EORR 2,7,8,10)

Theme 5: Deepening our understanding of the evolving student experience. (Underpinning theme, linked to multiple EORR risks, runs through all APP activity).

Objectives

The themes and main equality of opportunity risks relating to each of our broadly defined objectives are shown in Figure 2.

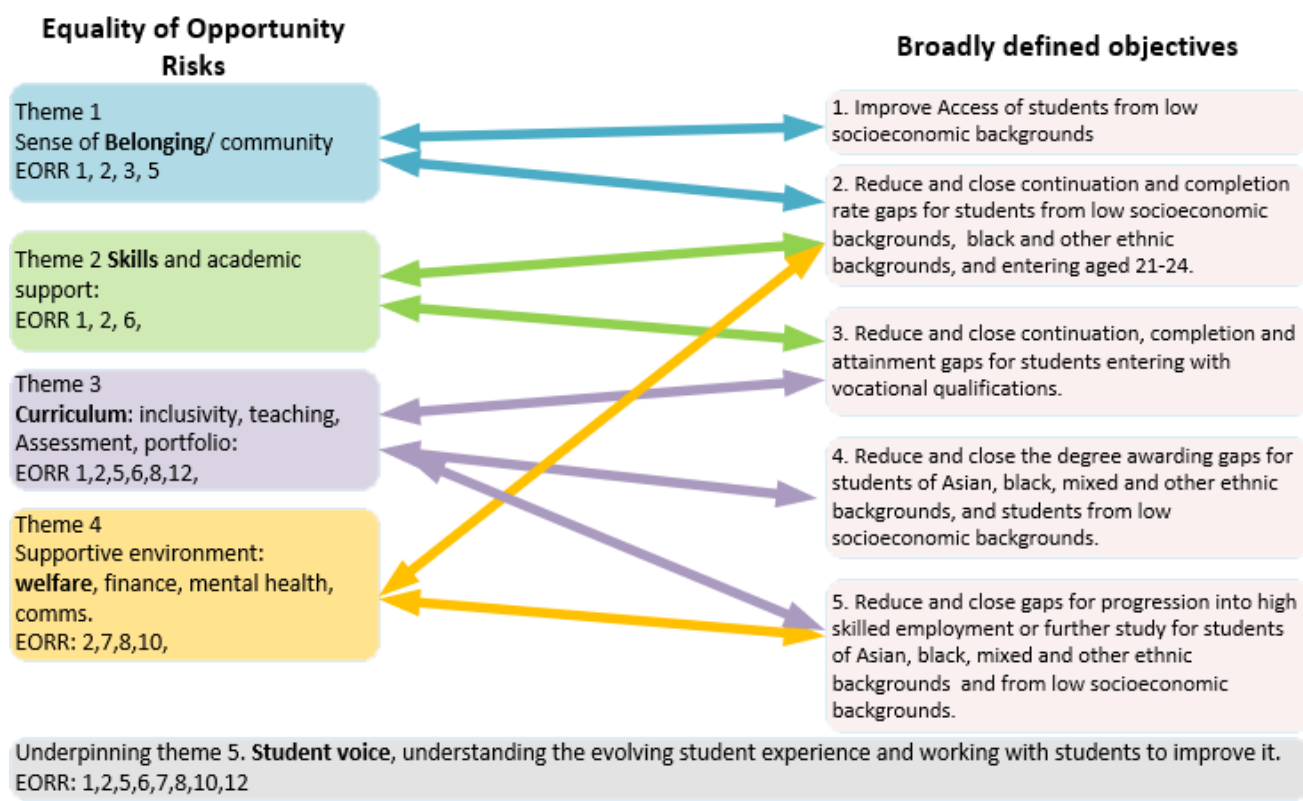


Figure 2. Equality of Opportunity Risks and broadly defined objectives

Objective 1: To improve access of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Targets:

- PTA_1: To increase the proportion of new entrants to BU from low socioeconomic backgrounds so that it matches the proportion in the Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch council area by 2040.
- PTA_2: To increase the proportion of new entrants who have been eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) to over 15% by the end of the plan period, halving the difference between BU and the HE sector.

Objective 2: To reduce and close continuation and completion rate gaps over the period of the plan for:

- Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (including care experienced students)
- Students from black and other ethnic backgrounds
- Students with mental health conditions
- Students aged 21-24 on entry (subject-specific)

Targets:

- PTS_1: To eliminate the gap in continuation for students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 compared to quintiles 3-5.
- PTS_2: To eliminate the gap in continuation for black students compared to white students.
- PTS_3: To reduce the gap in continuation for students who have reported mental health conditions to a level that reflects safeguarding their best interest.

Objective 3: To reduce and close continuation, completion and degree awarding gaps for students entering with vocational qualifications by 2030-31.

Objective 4: To reduce degree awarding gaps by half during the lifetime of the plan for:

- Students of Asian, black, mixed or 'other' ethnic backgrounds.
- Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Targets:

- PTS_4 To halve the degree awarding gap for students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 compared to quintiles 3-5 over the course of the plan.
- PTS_4 To halve the degree awarding gap for students of Asian, black mixed or other ethnic backgrounds compared to white students over the course of the plan.

Objective 5: To reduce and close gaps for progression into high-skilled employment or further study over the period of the plan for:

- Students from Asian, black, mixed and 'other' ethnic backgrounds
- Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Targets:

- PTP_1: To eliminate the gap in progression into high-skilled employment for students from IMD quintiles 1 & 2 compared to students from quintiles 3-5 over the course of the plan.
- PTP_2: To eliminate the fluctuating gap in progression into high-skilled employment for students of black, Asian, Mixed or Other ethnic backgrounds by the end of the plan period.

Intervention strategies

Intervention strategy 1: Access and Attainment Raising

Objectives and targets

Our multi-intervention programme aims to boost the number of Bournemouth University students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, including those eligible for FSM and from IMD Quintile 1 and 2 postcodes, by 2028-29.

Objective 1: To improve access of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. **Targets:** PTA_1, PTA_2

Related objectives and targets

Objective 2: To reduce and eliminate continuation and completion rate gaps (for students from low socioeconomic, care experienced, Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds, reporting mental health conditions and age 21-24 on entry). **Targets:** PTS_1, PTS_2, PTS_3

Risks to equality of opportunity

1: Knowledge and skills, 2: Information and guidance, 3: Perception of HE, 5: Choice of course and delivery mode

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy
1.1 Maths Mates	Maths Mates aims to boost Year 2 pupils' maths skills, self-esteem, and attitudes towards maths, and ease their transition into KS2.	School partnerships, admin support, ambassadors, resources, and travel.	Students will enhance numeracy skills and confidence, fostering a positive learning attitude for future success.	N/A
1.2 Books & Stories	Books and Stories aims to boost Year 6 pupils' reading skills, confidence and attitudes towards reading.	School partnerships, admin support, staff and ambassadors, resources, and travel.	Students will improve literacy, foster a love for reading, and boost academic resilience, preparing them for future success.	N/A
1.3 Empower Project	The Empower Project raises awareness of business and entrepreneurship careers for females, with future expansions into more subjects and a residential experience.	Business-school partnerships, admin support, ambassadors, resources, and travel.	Students will cultivate a growth mindset, build resilience, and develop leadership and business acumen, improving KS4 and HE opportunities.	IS2, IS6
1.4 Care Leavers	NNECL membership, leading the Southwest Uni Care Consortium, working	Relationships with schools, local authorities, HEIs,	Care leavers will gain confidence in HE, foster carers will better	IS2, IS5, IS6

	with virtual schools, hosting 3 'Foster Family Fun Days' per year, guaranteeing min 20 summer school places, and direct support for care leavers.	partners, ambassadors, and resources.	support them, and increased access activities will boost HE progression and UCAS applications.	
1.5 Outreach Programme	Full programme including campus visits, interactive workshops, theatre options tour, student life presentations, application support, study assistance, residential summer school, and partnerships with UniConnect, Jon Egging Trust, and MYTIME Young Carers.	School and partner relationships, admin support, ambassadors, resources, travel, and budget for high-spend activities.	Students will develop a positive learning attitude, resilience, and communication skills, gain a sense of belonging in HE, and make informed decisions, boosting applications to BU from target groups.	IS2, IS6
1.6 CPD for school staff	Annual Careers Leaders and Teachers Conference, ENABLED Conference for SEN staff, Dorset Boys Hub membership funding, and subject-specific CPD opportunities.	Staff and ambassadors, resources, relationships with schools and collaborating HEIs.	Support staff will better understand HE, improving student guidance and engagement, which will boost student success and BU's community impact.	IS2, IS6

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £2,788,000, split 59% staff time, 41% non-salary costs. Staff time cost for all activities in this intervention strategy has been calculated as 9.2 FTE split across multiple grades (8.2 FTE for delivery, 1 FTE for evaluation).

Summary of evidence base and rationale

The intervention strategy was designed using a comprehensive literature review and TASO's measures, alongside our evaluation framework. Detailed evidence and rationale are in Annex B.

Evaluation

We will focus evaluation on new initiatives, those with developing evidence, and high-resource activities. Evaluation will use TASO tools, including ASQ and MOAT, and track contributions via HEAT for consenting participants. The Books & Stories programme aims for OfS standards Type 3 evaluation by 2027-28. Academic self-efficacy and resilience as indicators of impact will be evaluated across our broader widening participation efforts. An annual report will be published on our website by Spring 2027, and findings presented at relevant conferences.

Intervention strategy 2: Transitions and sense of belonging

Objectives and targets

Objective 2: To reduce and close continuation and completion rate gaps for: students from low socioeconomic or care experienced backgrounds, black or other ethnic backgrounds, mental health conditions and age 21-24 on entry. **Targets:** PTS_1, PTS_2, PTS_3.

Related objectives and targets

Objective 3: To reduce and close continuation and completion rate gaps for students entering with vocational qualifications.

Risks to equality of opportunity

1: Knowledge and skills, 2: Information and guidance, 3: Perception of HE, 5: Choice of course and delivery mode.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes for target student groups	Cross intervention strategy
2.1 Admissions activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Revised contextual admissions approach Improved scrutiny of applications to identify and personalise support. Targeted enhancements to existing activity.	Staff time (0.15 FTE split across roles and grades) Systems support	Improved match with chosen programme. Improved sense of belonging. Early access to and engagement with support.	IS1, IS3, IS4, IS5, & IS6.
2.2 Transition activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-arrival and induction activities including Get Ready for University and 'Join the Dots' Course-level group induction activity for new and returning students Targeted enhancements to existing activity	Staff time (0.9 FTE split across roles and grades), admin & delivery costs	More successful transition and induction Early engagement with support, Improved sense of belonging Improved engagement Reduction in early withdrawal.	IS1, IS3 & IS4.
2.3 Long Induction activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A revised approach to induction with a staged approach developed in partnership with students and the Students Union '10 Bites of learning' timetabled skills activities over the long induction period. Induction engagement tracking to develop 	Staff time (0.22 FTE split across roles and grades) IT systems support, promotion. (2.3.4 excluded from costings)	Improved induction to HE and back to HE. Improved connection to the programme. Improved sense of belonging	IS3, IS4 & IS6.

	<p>strategies to increase engagement.</p> <p>4. Diagnostic activity to identify early intervention and support</p> <p>Enhancements to existing and some new activity</p>	and FTE as costed in IS3)	Reduced early failure and withdrawal	
2.4 First year activities (non-academic)	<p>1. Student engagement activity: drop-ins and events, to increase student engagement</p> <p>2. Settling in activities (social, wellbeing and skills) in student accommodation.</p> <p>Expansion and enhancement of existing activity</p>	<p>1. Staff time 0.3FTE (split across grades)</p> <p>2. Staff time 2.4 FTE (split across grades and roles), admin and delivery costs.</p>	<p>Regular point of contact, building relationship of trust opportunity for students to raise concerns.</p> <p>Improved signposting to sources of support. Building life skills and easing the transition to university.</p> <p>Improved sense of belonging</p>	IS1, IS3, IS4, IS5

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £764,000 Please note activities 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 are not restricted to target student groups, so apportioning has been applied to all costs at 24% (target student groups for this IS as a percentage of all new entrant students). Similarly, FTE estimates represent the amount of staff time on the element of each activity delivering the objective of this IS to target groups of students. The following items are excluded from the estimate: Item 2.3.4 - costed in IS5; admin and delivery costs except where otherwise stated.

Summary of evidence base and rationale

This IS aims to support target student groups to make a successful transition to BU and then to feel confident in knowing how to operate in the HE environment. Making it easier for them to access/ask for relevant support earlier on will build a strong sense of belonging at BU. A strong sense of belonging will have a positive impact on continuation and achievement through their first year and beyond. Going to University is a big change for all applicants, but for marginalised groups, they may not have developed the self-efficacy or have access to support from family or school to help navigate that change. They may find it difficult to settle in at university, to build relationships and to feel they belong. See Annex B for further evidence.

Evaluation

We will focus our evaluation on the induction and transition activities. All our activities are evidence-based, and we will develop enhanced theories of change and utilise implementation and process evaluation (IPE) to underpin and strengthen and achievement of APP objectives. See Annex B for further information.

Intervention strategy 3: Engagement, Skills and Academic Support

Objectives and targets

Objective 2: To reduce and close continuation and completion rate gaps for: students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, care experienced students, those from black and other ethnic backgrounds, with mental health conditions and those aged 21-24 on entry. **Targets:** PTS_1, PTS_2, PTS_3.

Related objective and targets

Objective 3: To reduce and close continuation and completion gaps for students entering with vocational qualifications.

Risks to equality of opportunity

1: Knowledge and skills; 6. Academic Support.

Related risk to equality of opportunity

2: Information and guidance

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes for target student groups	Cross intervention strategy
3.1 Academic Engagement Framework activity	Developing and continuously improving the Academic Engagement Framework (AEF) to refine and personalise the way students are identified as needing support and how they are offered and provided support so that BU better meets the particular needs of identified target student groups. Ongoing expansion of new initiative in 2024-25 to the whole university	Staff time (% of wider activity estimated to deliver APP objective): 0.34 FTE split across multiple grades and posts.	Improved attendance and wider engagement of target student groups. Improved continuation and completion rates, and reduced rates of resubmission/ resit for target groups. Reporting on factors affecting engagement is used in University decision-making.	IS2, IS4, IS5
3.2 Targeted Peer Assisted Learning	Delivering Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) targeting programmes that data analysis shows have poor continuation rates and aligning with other markers including non-	Administrative and delivery costs, Student PAL leaders; training; staff time 1FTE (split across	Improved continuation rates for targeted programmes; increased confidence and	IS2, IS4

	traditional qualifications. Includes all Foundation year and targeted level 4 programmes. Enhancement to existing activity.	roles at different grades).	engagement for targeted students.	
3.3 Academic Skills services	Maths and Academic Writing support to improve core functional maths and writing skills. Available to all but focused on programmes with poor continuation rates, and high numbers of students from target groups. Enhancement to existing activity.	Administrative and delivery costs, promotional costs, Licences (diagnostics), maths and academic writing resources. Staff time: 1.8FTE (split across roles at different grades)	Improved confidence in maths and academic writing; Improved student engagement and student experience; improved continuation rates	IS2
3.4 Curriculum Delivery Review	Investigate the impact of different delivery modes and models of curriculum delivery on the academic engagement and progress of students in target groups, through analysis and pilot activity delivery.	Staff time (0.2 FTE split across multiple roles and grades)	Improvement in attendance and other forms of academic engagement/ reduction in engagement interventions for the relevant cohorts.	IS2 IS4, IS5

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £756,000. NB: On the basis that activities 3.1 and 3.4 are integrated into wider activity across BU and the cost to administer and deliver these activities is absorbed in the wider work, delivery costs for these strands are excluded from the total cost provided.

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Students from low socioeconomic groups, from black or other ethnic backgrounds and entering with vocational qualifications are more likely to disengage early in their first year leading to non-submission or failure of early assessments and heightened rates of withdrawal and non-continuation. Students in these groups may find it difficult to access support on offer and become increasingly isolated. We will use attendance and engagement data to identify individuals at risk of disengagement early so that we can help them access appropriate support; and also, to build evidence and deepen our understanding of the support required by different student groups and how different models or patterns of communication and delivery may be more accessible to different student groups. See Annex B for further information.

Evaluation

Interventions in this intervention strategy are designed to achieve specific outcomes for our target students but are integrated into our standard delivery. All activities are evidence-based, and our immediate focus is to develop enhanced theories of change to underpin and strengthen our understanding of how they will achieve the specific APP objectives for targeted students. This will be followed by implementation and process evaluation (IPE), to provide a secure basis for evaluation of impact where possible. As a new initiative at BU, with significant investment in the larger piece of work, we will focus evaluation expertise and resource on the Student Engagement Framework. See Annex B for further information.

Intervention strategy 4: Curriculum

Objectives and targets

Objectives 2, 3 and 4: To reduce and close continuation, completion and degree awarding gaps for students entering with vocational qualifications, from low socioeconomic backgrounds and of Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds. **Targets:** PTS_1, PTS_2, PTS_3, PTS_4

Related objectives and targets

Objective 5: To reduce and close gaps for progression into high-skilled employment or further study for students from Asian, black mixed or other ethnic backgrounds and from low socioeconomic backgrounds. **Targets:** PTP_1, PTP_2

Risks to equality of opportunity

1: Knowledge and skills, 2: Information and Guidance 6. Academic support.

Related risks to equality of opportunity

5. Choice of course and delivery, 8: Mental Health, 12: Progression.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes for target student groups	Cross intervention strategy
4.1 Assessment and feedback development	Assessment and feedback which builds on previous educational experience and focuses on recognition of achievement. Improving inclusivity by building in flexibility, personalisation and choice into assessment and feedback. Enhancement to existing activity	IS Team time 1.4 FTE (split across multiple grades) IT systems support	Improved take up of in year retrieval opportunities and reduction in failure. Improved student experience Improved student confidence and resilience in the face of setbacks Enhanced graduate competencies Improved continuation and completion	IS2, IS3
4.2 Inclusive curriculum enhancement	Expansion of the Inclusive Curriculum Evaluation (ICE) project to include qualification type, socioeconomic background, and disability. Mapping of student competencies across programmes to build a more competency-based curriculum, improving clarity	Staff time (ICE Team 2.7 FTE; IS Team 0.5 FTE; split across multiple grades); employment of student reviewers; systems support	Students will have improved engagement with their course, enhancing their learning gain and overall student experience.	IS2, IS3

	and aligning with PSRB requirements. Enhancement to existing activity			
4.3 Teaching quality development	Development of teaching staff to acknowledge prior educational experience of students to effectively support them and build upon their existing skills and knowledge. Enhancement to strengthen impact of existing activity on target groups	Staff time: 0.4 FTE	Students will have improved engagement with their course, enhancing their learning gain, student experience and confidence for graduate employment.	IS2, IS3
4.4 Curriculum content and mode of delivery	Variety in modes of delivery reflecting the nature of the discipline in curriculum and pedagogic approach.	Staff time: IS team 0.5FTE split across multiple grades; IT and timetabling systems support;	Improved student engagement and experience, reduction in course withdrawal.	IS2, IS3

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £429,000. Activities in this IS are not restricted to the target groups of students but are delivered for the benefit of all students. For items 4.1 and 4.4, staff time (FTE) and salary costs are estimated based on membership of the IS 4 team, responsible for assuring the delivery of the APP objectives through this IS. Costs to deliver these activities are not included.

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Students from low socioeconomic, Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds and those entering with vocational qualifications persistently have worse on-course outcomes than other students in the sector and at BU. Previous educational experience means that the curriculum, pedagogies and assessment in HE may be less accessible for these students. More inclusive and accessible curriculum, teaching and assessment will reduce the barriers this creates. The intervention strategy was designed using a comprehensive literature review. Detailed evidence and rationale are in Annex B.

Evaluation

The primary evaluation of IS4 will centre on the ICE project due to its innovative nature and the current lack of solid evidence supporting the effectiveness of student review and feedback models in enhancing curriculum inclusivity. We will assess the influence of in-year retrieval on immediate and intermediate outcomes. For other activities, our evaluation efforts will aim to refine our theories of change, track outcomes, and conduct implementation and process evaluation to ensure successful execution. For further information see Annex B.

Intervention strategy 5: Welfare and Finance

Objectives and targets

Objectives 2 and 3: To reduce and close continuation and completion rate gaps for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, of black and other ethnicities, those with mental health conditions and those aged 21-24 on entry. **Targets:** PTS_1, PTS_2, PTS_3,

Related objectives and targets

Objective 5: To reduce and close gaps for progression into high-skilled employment or further study for students of Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds and from low socioeconomic backgrounds. **Targets:** PTP_1, PTP_2

Risks to equality of opportunity

7: Personal Support, 8: Mental health, 10: Cost pressures

Related risks to equality of opportunity

2: Information and guidance

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes for target student groups	Cross intervention strategy
5.1 Financial Support	1: Bursary for low-income, care leavers and estranged students. 2: Targeting of financial support at the point of need to address emerging needs for target groups. 3: Practical assistance to make successful applications for financial support (e.g., SLC, NHS). Enhancement to existing activity	Bursary provision. Staff time (Approximately 2.7 FTE split across various grades); administrative support.	Low-income students are able to engage better with their studies, feel part of the community and feel less anxious. Improved take-up of placement opportunities and access to financial support. Improved student confidence and student experience.	IS2, IS3
5.2 Wellbeing support: enhanced referral and diagnosis	1: Academic Engagement Framework (AEF) ensures prompt referral to support and identifies emerging risks and challenges for particular student groups. 2: Enhanced comms to students to encourage early diagnosis and sharing of information. 3: Needs assessment centre at BU facilitates and	Staff time: (Approximately 2.5 FTE split across various grades; after apportionment at 30%), admin and IT support.	Students access and engage with appropriate support promptly. Students develop skills and resilience. Improved continuation, and enhanced graduate attributes.	IS2, IS3

	speeds up assessment of needs. Enhancements to existing activity			
5.3 Recognition of lived experience	Staff development recognises prior experience of students and its impact on HE, and identification of at-risk student groups likely to need financial and welfare support. Enhancements to existing activity	Staff time; approximately 0,05 FTE.	Personal tutor relationships are stronger; student access appropriate support promptly improving the student experience and reducing anxiety. Improved continuation rates.	IS2, IS3
5.4 Skills building for health and wellbeing	Financial awareness, wellbeing events, and awareness campaigns/initiatives responding to emerging needs. Skills-building and buddying initiatives delivered in partnership with the SU to support health and wellbeing. Enhancements to existing activity	Staff time; administrative support, employment of students, creation of resources	Students develop life skills, so that they can thrive in HE and successfully navigate transitions within and after HE. Leading to improved student experience, sense of belonging and continuation rates.	IS2, IS3, IS6

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £10,633,000. Please note activity 5.3 is delivered to all students. The cost and staff FTE identified above represent the proportion of resources dedicated to the target groups for this activity. The apportionment has been calculated based on historic data on the proportion of students with reported mental health issues from target groups accessing BU and NHS counselling services at 30%. It is likely to underestimate the FTE and cost of this activity.

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Low-income students and students with disabilities and mental health conditions face additional barriers to participation and success in HE. This affects their ability to concentrate on their studies, engage with the available support and to feel part of the community. This intervention strategy focuses on mitigating and where possible removing these additional barriers to success in and after HE. Extensive research using internal data and sector evidence has been conducted to inform this intervention strategy. See annex B for further information

Evaluation

Evaluation of this IS will focus on financial support, assessed annually with the OfS Toolkit for Type 2 evidence. We will continue using statistical and survey tools, with occasional interviews for deeper insights.

Wellbeing initiatives will be evaluated through the Student Engagement Framework (IS2), using Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) to refine our theory of change and test our assumptions. By the end of the plan, we aim to produce Type 2 evidence using validated tools like the TASO Access and Success Questionnaire (ASQ), and student outcomes data. Qualitative student feedback will help triangulate these findings.

Intervention strategy 6: Employability

Objectives and targets

Objective 5: To reduce and close gaps for progression into high skilled employment for students of Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds and from low socioeconomic groups.

Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds are supported to achieve progression into high skilled employment meeting with their goals and aspirations. **Targets:** PTP1, PTP2.

Related objectives

Some additional internal objectives related to specific areas of study and intersectional groups such as care leavers, carers and students with a disability. See Annex B for further information.

Risks to equality of opportunity

12. Progression.

Related risks to equality of opportunity

1. Knowledge and skills, 6. Academic Support, 7. Personal Support.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes for target student groups	Cross intervention strategy
6.1 Increase placement participation	Increase rates of placement participation for students from low socioeconomic, or Asian, black mixed or other ethnic backgrounds and other priority groups to be determined through data analysis (see 6.4). Activities to increase placement participation outlined in Annex B.	Staff time 1.6 FTE in total split across various roles and grades) Placement Opportunity Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased rate of placement participation Increased student satisfaction Increased confidence in employability skills Improved levels of graduate skills higher rates of high-skill employment 	IS3, IS4, IS5
6.2 Embedding Graduate Competencies	Increase support for students from our identified target groups to develop understand and articulate the skills, abilities, mindsets and attitudes required for the world of work. We will do this by embedding the	2 FTE (split across various roles and grades)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students feel better prepared for the world of work Greater sense of confidence in own skills and understanding of the needs of the labour market. Reduction in anxiety about the future. 	IS2, IS4

	university's new Graduate Competencies in a variety of ways as outlined in Annex B.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved graduate competencies • Higher rates of high-skill employment 	
6.3 Targeted careers support	Deliver tailored and targeted career support to identified target groups. See Annex B for specific interventions.	1.6 FTE in total (split across various roles and grades) Cost of partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in progression gaps in specific subject areas • Increased confidence, networks and social capital 	IS3, IS4, IS5
6.4 Data Analysis	To inform the above activities, we will undertake a thorough review and analysis of placement take-up rates and Graduate Outcomes Survey data - see Annex B for further details.	Staff time 1.4 FTE in total (split across various roles, departments and grades)	Supports student outcomes from activities identified above.	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £1,442,000.

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds and Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds face additional barriers in developing and recognising their employability and progressing to further study and/or employment. These include lack of social capital, lack of knowledge of career/progression opportunities, lack of confidence and lower financial resources affecting their ability to undertake placements or relocate. Extensive research using internal data and sector evidence has been conducted to inform this intervention strategy. See Annex B for further information.

Evaluation

We do not plan to evaluate every activity in this intervention strategy; instead, we will concentrate on new initiatives, those with a developing evidence base, and those requiring significant resources. Activities within this intervention strategy will be evaluated by both Type 1 and Type 2 evaluation using tools supplied by TASO, including ASQ and MOAT where appropriate. The effectiveness of the activities will be measured through placement take-up rates among targeted WP groups and the following Graduate Outcomes Survey measures for targeted WP groups: rates of high-skill employment, rates of employment/further study, median salary, and graduate voice measures.

Whole provider approach

Our APP is embedded within BU's broader strategic framework and will continue to be as we transition from the BU 2025 strategy to our new BU 2035 strategy. This ensures that our APP aligns with and enhances our institutional goals, ensuring coherence between our strategic vision and operational priorities. Our compassionate and humanistic approach to education, our increasing emphasis on competencies, both building and as a vehicle for assessment, and our embedding of technology will be key themes across the institution.

The APP is intricately linked with our priority operating workstreams, creating a cohesive strategy that addresses key areas of access and participation. Each workstream – ranging from outreach initiatives to student support services – feeds into our overarching APP objectives, ensuring that efforts are not siloed but rather contribute to a unified goal of improving access and success for all students.

To elevate the visibility of our APP and its initiatives across BU, we are committed to several internal profile-raising strategies:

- Creating a central information hub where colleagues can access information, resources, and updates related to the APP.
- Incorporating APP objectives and initiatives into the induction process for new staff to encourage early engagement.
- Compiling and disseminating an annual report that highlights progress, successes, and future plans related to the APP.
- Hosting an annual conference to showcase APP achievements, share best practices, and provide opportunities for staff to engage with and contribute to APP activities.
- Clearly linking APP objectives and initiatives, as relevant, into workstreams and other activities of the University, as well as communicating widely to staff and students.

Our APP leverages a broad range of partnerships to enhance access and participation:

- Collaborating with key target schools and colleges to improve student pathways and prepare students for HE
- Working with schools and colleges to better understand current teaching methods and how they impact student success, integrating these insights into our intervention strategies
- Engaging with external organisations, including local authorities and charities to support a more inclusive and effective educational environment
- Engaging with employers including placement providers and partners supporting our work-based learning efforts to support students' progression into employment.

In response to the OfS priorities, our APP incorporates alternative routes and flexible provision to enhance pathways into HE:

- Expanding access through apprenticeships and partners to provide diverse entry points into education
- Exploring a range of curriculum delivery approaches and part-time study options and qualifications at Levels 4 and 5 to cater to a broader range of student needs and backgrounds
- Analysing barriers related to our curriculum and portfolio to ensure they meet the needs of a diverse student population and facilitate smoother transitions into HE.

At BU we humanise HE by creating nurturing environments that foster individual growth and pro-social behaviour. Anchored in our vision to inspire learning and enrich society, our university-wide approach incorporates this humanising philosophy across all practices. Specifically, we prioritise inclusivity, social justice, and community, ensuring students feel a sense of belonging. This is achieved through exceptional teaching and a personalised educational journey, allowing students to develop comprehensively and acquire skills for professional success.

Our compassionate communications strategy emphasises the importance of humanising our approach to student engagement and support and underpins all of our intervention strategies. This ensures clear, empathetic, and effective communication about APP initiatives, creating a supportive and inclusive environment across the institution. The emphasis on compassionate communication is reflected in formal and informal communication with students.

Central to our approach is the focus on student perspective and the co-creation of activities with students, underpinned by data to design and evaluate our interventions:

- Developing detailed student personas, informed by data about our student population, to better understand and address diverse student needs
- Engaging in ongoing, meaningful dialogue with students to gather feedback and incorporate their perspectives into the implementation of our interventions and a continuous improvement approach to the student experience
- Collaborating with students in the design, execution and evaluation of APP activities to ensure that our strategies are responsive to their needs and experiences.

We are committed to advancing mental health support as part of our whole provider approach. Our initiatives include:

- Working towards the University Mental Health Charter standards to enhance mental health support for students
- Ensuring that mental health considerations are embedded throughout our APP and are reflected in all relevant intervention strategies.

Our APP aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by integrating sustainability principles into our access and participation strategies. This involves:

- Incorporating environmental and social sustainability into our institutional practices and interventions
- Ensuring that our strategies contribute to broader sustainability goals, supporting both our students and the wider community.

Student consultation

Student consultation, representation and feedback are fundamental to developing, delivering and evaluating this Access and Participation Plan. The transition to a new leadership structure, and the integrated model for Access and Participation oversight explained in the whole provider approach has strengthened mechanisms for student consultation and feedback on the APP. Students' Union (SUBU) sabbatical officers are members of all deliberative and decision-making groups at the Faculty and University levels. More diverse representation is achieved in the Education Committee, which has oversight of monitoring and delivering the APP through the inclusion of student representatives from each faculty as well as the SU Vice President (Education). SUBU sabbatical

officers are also members of each intervention strategy team, ensuring that we build student feedback and insights into the interventions as they are delivered.

We are fully committed to working with students to improve the student experience and during 2023-24 have examined existing student feedback mechanisms across BU. As a result, we have prioritised a workstream starting in 2024-25 to improve how we collect, combine and use the rich student feedback already provided across the university through existing mechanisms, rather than add more feedback routes. We intend that this work will also support the evaluation of our APP interventions, through more effective use of student feedback, with the additional benefit of linking student feedback and the impact it has more transparent at the university level.

SUBU APP Consultants monitor and provide feedback on delivery of our existing APP acting as a critical friend to BU. This same group has considered and provided specific feedback on the proposed intervention strategies in the new plan. Students agreed with the priorities addressed through the intervention strategies, and the proposed approach, and insights about how to improve the efficacy and reach of proposed activities have been built into the detail of the delivery plan where possible. Students also felt that more consistency in communication with a common approach from teaching staff across all faculties was needed. Compassionate communication in all contexts and media, initially included as part of several intervention strategies, was seen by students as critical to achieving all our APP objectives. In response, compassionate communication has been moved into our whole provider approach, ensuring its importance is recognised and that it will be prioritised and delivered consistently across BU.

Evaluation of the plan

Overarching approach

Our overarching aim for evaluation over the period of this plan is to build on existing good practices and apply this more consistently to all our interventions across all areas of BU. This means widening the reach of our evaluation expertise and increasing our capacity to perform high-quality evaluations of all our interventions across all areas of BU. We also aim to disseminate our findings better both internally and externally. This will be supported by increasing the use of student feedback and insights and aligned with the underpinning theme of student voice and understanding the evolving student experience.

Summary of self-assessment of evaluation

In Spring 2024, colleagues from various roles across the institution completed the OfS Self-assessment of Evaluation tool. The findings revealed that, on average, BU was rated as 'emerging' in all five dimensions, though scores varied widely among different departments and faculties. Scores were generally higher in the strategic context, programme, and evaluation design dimensions, while the learning from the evaluation dimension received lower scores. The strategic context and learning dimensions also showed greater variation in responses. These results suggest a need to improve internal information sharing about evaluation and provide more resources and support for evaluation efforts across the institution.

Teams deeply engaged with Access and Participation interventions and projects scored higher in all dimensions, clearly linked to our strong practices in outreach, attainment raising, financial support, and funded projects where evaluation is already rooted in a theory of change approach and aligns with the OfS standards of evidence.

Building on this, we will enhance our evaluation efforts over the plan period by:

- Anchoring interventions in clear Theories of Change using TASO's resources
- Incorporating these theories and OfS evidence criteria into our evaluation protocols
- Embedding evaluation plans into interventions from the outset.
- Increasing the use of implementation and process evaluation (IPE) in the initial stages of interventions to support stronger impact evaluation later.
- Considering how economic evaluation could enable us to direct resource where it has most impact on student outcomes and experience
- Providing mechanisms for incorporating student feedback and student voice data to strengthen evaluations.
- Improving and promoting the internal dissemination of findings.
- Identifying and expanding dedicated resources for evaluating APP interventions.

We are committed to enhancing our outreach and attainment activities by learning from our established best practices. We plan to bolster the evaluation of in-course interventions through a robust suite of internal resources and protocols, drawing from TASO materials and adhering to OfS evidence standards. To further support this, we will appoint a dedicated coordinator for ongoing APP projects and introduce additional dedicated resources to assess the effectiveness of APP initiatives with a focus on evaluating impact.

Following the 2023-2024 restructuring, the Education Committee now oversees Access and Participation. Comprising BU academics, service staff, and students, it serves as a platform for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. These evaluations are presented to the committee biannually or as required, facilitating timely discussions and potential recommendations to the Senate or University Executive Team. Our commitment is to maintain only beneficial interventions, discontinuing any that fail to serve our students and communicating the results within BU and across the sector, adjusting our APP accordingly.

All proposed evaluations intended for publication require ethical approval and this is built into our approval processes. We will continue working closely with our Research Governance Officer to ensure timely approval from the relevant ethics committee, safeguarding participants and maintaining ethical standards.

We will use the HE Access Tracker (HEAT) to enhance our evaluation of outreach activities for underrepresented student groups. HEAT data will support evidence-based decisions and, when integrated with the Monitoring Outcomes and Achievements Tool (MOAT), will help monitor long-term outcomes. Linking HEAT data with TASO's Access and Success Questionnaires (ASQ) will provide deeper insights, enabling us to refine our strategies further.

Disseminating research, sharing best practices, and learning from professionals are crucial for our continuous improvement. Engaging with the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON), the HE Liaison Officers Association (HELOA), and the Forum for Access & Continuing Education (FACE) will help us exchange insights and stay updated on trends. By participating and presenting research in these networks, we will foster collaboration and contribute to the knowledge base. We commit to funding staff development for continuous upskilling and attendance at relevant events to enhance our expertise in access and participation.

In addition to working with the networks above, we will continue to attend TASO events and use TASO resources to strengthen our staff development in evaluation practice. We will also continue to submit bids to join TASO research activity where this fits the aims of our interventions, as we believe that working with external evaluators can provide an objective overview which would be beneficial for all interventions and especially helpful for evaluation of on course interventions such as those in intervention strategies 3 and 4.

We will continue to collaborate with the Southern Universities Network (SUN) to share data, identify target groups, and assess intervention impacts. SUN provides a platform for best practice sharing, research dissemination, and staff training in evaluation methodologies, enhancing our ability to implement successful access and participation strategies.

Provision of information to students

Publication of this plan

This Access and Participation Plan 2025-26 to 2028-29 will be published online on our website, on the transparency webpage linking to our dedicated Access and Participation area when that is fully developed. We will also post the following alongside the plan:

- An accessible summary of the plan for current and prospective students, parents, carers or guardians, teachers, or other school staff.
- Fee information documents from the Office for Students for the period of this plan.
- An archive of our historical Access and Participation Plans can be found at the same location on the university website.

Fees and financial support information

Information on fees, financial support (including hardship) and bursary packages is published on our website at [Fees and funding | Bournemouth University](#). It is provided to potential students at open days and taster days, included in our pre-arrival information for all students and each course information page on the website carries the tuition fee for that course with a link to further information. Information about fees, accommodation costs, scholarships and bursaries available is also published in our prospectus, at external recruitment events (e.g. recruitment fairs and school events) and through various other channels, e.g. email communications and third-party portals. All offer letters to students include a fees sheet, which contains information on tuition fees due according to the student's fee status, together with any other costs the student may incur related to their course.

BU Bursaries are automatically allocated based on information from Student Finance England (SFE). If a student is eligible to receive a BU bursary, they will receive confirmation of eligibility automatically before enrolment. Following a comprehensive evaluation of its impact, our bursary provision has been updated and extended. For 2025-26 onwards we offer three bursaries targeting new and continuing students with low household income, and this now includes support for verified estranged students on the same basis as care experienced students.

Our new bursaries are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Bursaries at Bournemouth University

Bursary	Value per year of full-time academic study at BU	Eligibility summary (automatically allocated)
BU Maintenance Bursary	£800 total Paid to a pre-paid card in 9 monthly instalments from October to June	Household income of £25,000 or less. Full eligibility details
BU Care Leavers Bursary (with accommodation guarantee)	£3000 total Paid to a pre-paid card, in 9 monthly instalments from October to June	Verified care leaver; household income of £25,000 or less. Full eligibility details
BU Estrangement Bursary (with accommodation guarantee)	£3000 total Paid to a pre-paid card, in 9 monthly instalments from October to June	Verified estranged student, household income of £25,000 or less. Full eligibility details

All of our bursaries are paid, while the student remains eligible, for 3 years of full-time study at BU (4 years for courses with an integrated higher-fee foundation year). They are not paid during a placement year, or for repeat years of study. Full information on all of our bursaries (including eligibility criteria) can be found at [Bursaries | Bournemouth University](#)

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of our communications to students to ensure appropriate information is easily accessible to all at the point of need.

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

Assessment of Performance

1. Overview and approach

1.1 BU Student population

98% of new entrants to BU in the APP countable population are studying full-time on first-degree programmes, and so our analysis has been based on this cohort. We currently have a very small number of students studying Degree Apprenticeship courses which were introduced in 2022-23, with expansion planned for 2024-25 onwards, but at this stage, we do not intend to include outcomes for these students in our APP. BU has 4 Faculties which have distinct student profiles. This is particularly the case for the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, which has large cohorts of students studying Nursing and associated healthcare programmes. These programmes have a much more diverse cohort of students than other courses at BU, in terms of socioeconomic background, age on entry, disability and ethnic background.

1.2 Approach

Our assessment of performance started from the OfS A&P dataset (2023 update) to identify statistically significant gaps and trajectories for outcomes at a high level. Intersections of characteristics available in that dataset were included in this first level of analysis. Associations Between Characteristics of Students (ABCS) were considered at this stage, to provide an understanding of the lifecycle stages where there are the greatest differences between student outcomes, the size of the gap between the most and least disadvantaged students, and where multiple markers of disadvantage increase the risks to equality of opportunity.

Deeper analysis then used internal data from multiple sources to add additional characteristics which are not in the OfS A&P dataset but are strongly associated with differential outcomes at BU or in the sector for example care experience, qualification type, carer, refugee/asylum seeker. Integrating internal and external data sources over multiple years facilitated a detailed intersectional analysis of the characteristics of the BU student population as a whole and risk indications for different student groups and their intersections. Internal data was also scrutinised to explore differences related to the subjects of study and to update our analysis with the latest available outcomes.

Having established the risk indications, secondary datasets were used to look deeper into the risk indications and to understand the underlying equality of opportunity risks. This included UCAS data, NSS and internal data including 'APP overlays' of quality data (exceptional circumstances, appeals and complaints and academic offences) welfare referrals and student feedback data. This provided evidence to map to equality of opportunity risks in the OfS EORR establishing what EORR risks exist at BU, for which students and at which stages. It also informed the development of our intervention strategies.

1.3 Data and metrics

Primary data sources: OfS A&P data set, internal performance monitoring data, UCAS end-of-cycle data, GO and LEO data.

Additional data sources: Financial Support Evaluation using the OfS Toolkit, welfare data, student feedback data, NSS, SU data, evaluations of quality data (AOs, ECs, A&Cs), timetabling, and assessment data.

Metrics: POLAR4, TUNDRA, IMD 2019, FSM, Ethnic group, declared disability, age, care experienced, live at home, carer, refugee, (ABCS) and intersections. Gender was considered for intersections.

Lifecycle stages: Access (applicants and entrants), Continuation, Completion, Attainment of 1st or 2:1, Progression.

2. High-level Summary

2.1 Size of gaps: Associations Between Characteristics (ABCS)

We used ABCS Quintile 5:1 gap as a broad indicator of the size of gaps and to indicate the trajectory of those gaps for our most disadvantaged students at each stage of the student lifecycle. Annual gaps fluctuate, but the most recent 2-year aggregates indicate that some progress is being made in closing gaps.

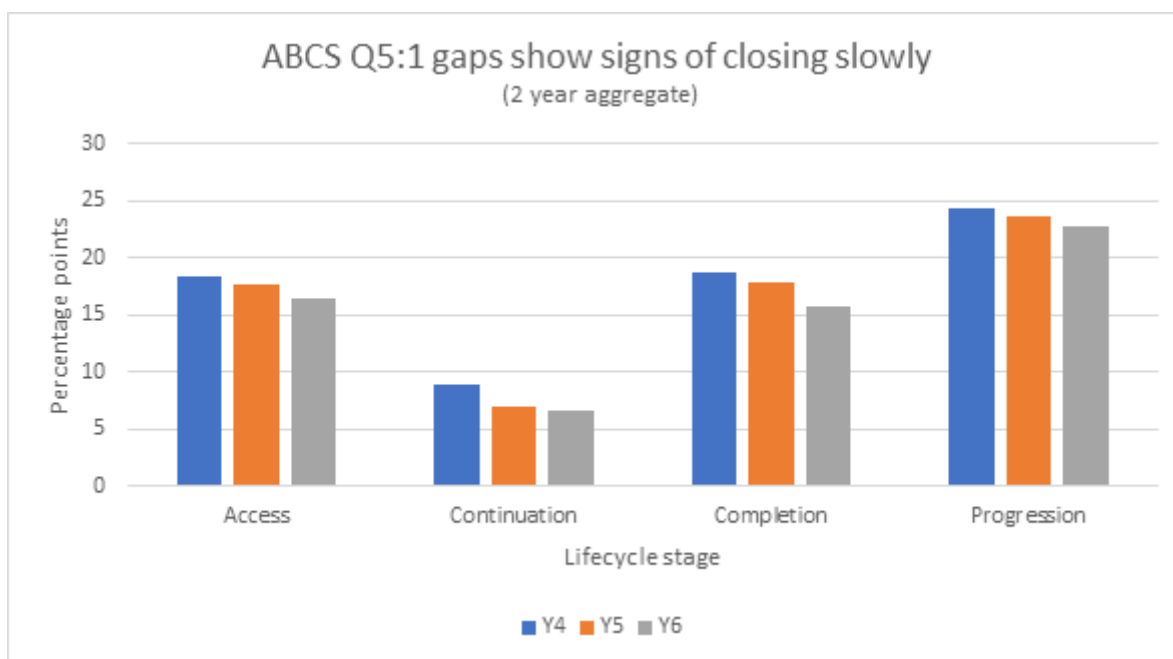


Figure 3. Size of gaps: Association between characteristics

From this, it is evident that while progress is being made, there are still significant gaps between the outcomes of the most and least disadvantaged students at each stage of the student lifecycle.

2.2 Outcomes of assessment of performance:

Figure 4 summarises persistent risk indications at BU by lifecycle stage

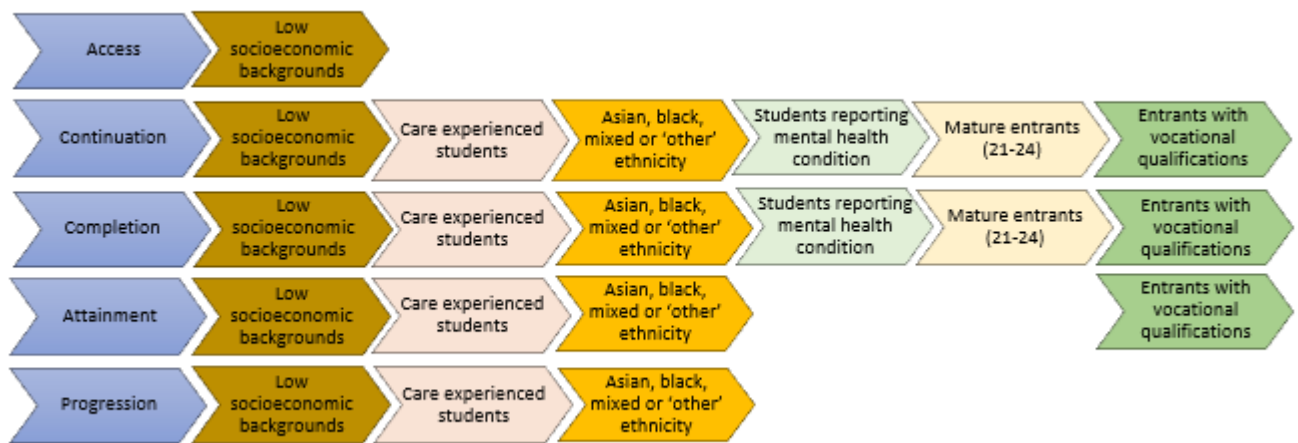


Figure 4. Risk indications at BU by lifecycle stage

When considered by student group risks were evident for students from low socioeconomic and from Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds at all stages of the student lifecycle.

Wider characteristics (including protected characteristics and those outlined above) were also explored. This served to deepen understanding of underlying equality of opportunity risks but did not identify additional risk indications.

Intersections of student characteristics were examined in detail, to identify compounding factors that heighten disadvantage for some students. The strongest intersection for all student characteristics with risk indications and by far the most powerful determinant of student outcomes at BU is entry qualification type. How and who these impacts most is explained in more detail below.

Whilst gender is not a 'WP' characteristic, on course outcomes (continuation, completion and attainment) at BU, males are consistently significantly worse than females, with gaps which are in some cases larger than those identified as significant. By contrast, progression outcomes are better for males than females. Intersections of gender with other identified risk indicators such as socioeconomic background, qualification type or ethnicity (including white males from low socioeconomic backgrounds) were examined but did not reveal additional risk indications.

From the assessment of performance, 13 risk indications were identified and prioritised as the primary focus for objectives and intervention strategies in the APP.

3. Risk indications by student characteristics

3.1 Low socioeconomic background (IMD quintile; FSM; household income)

To identify low socioeconomic background, we focused on eligibility for FSM (FSM), or coming from IMD quintiles 1 and 2, using TUNDRA quintile to triangulate. For on-course and progression outcomes, we use the OfS Toolkit for evaluation of Financial Support which allows us to explore the relationship between household income, other characteristics and outcomes in more depth.

FSM eligibility is strongly associated with IMD quintile at BU; declining steadily across the quintiles from 18% of IMD quintile 1 students being FSM eligible, to under 4% of IMD quintile 5 students.

14% of our IMD flagged students (from IMD quintiles 1 or 2) were eligible for FSM, compared to 5% from IMD quintiles 3-5.

We are confident that using FSM in combination with IMD (and for students, mapping to SFE information) will ensure we can effectively identify socioeconomic disadvantage.

Access: BUs proportion of new entrants from low socioeconomic groups is below the sector. BU has approximately 12.5% FSM eligible entrants (sector is 18.4%) and 26% of entrants from IMD quintiles 1 and 2, (sector approx. 44%) (Q1:5 static gap of around 24-25%). Our low rates of IMD flagged and FSM eligible entrants are exacerbated by the low proportion of entrants from Asian, black, mixed or 'other' ethnic backgrounds who are twice as likely to come from IMD Q1-2.

Notably, the IMD quintiles of our new entrant profile mirror our local area where 23.7% of postcodes fall within IMD quintiles 1 and 2. This is split between Dorset Council (18.1%) and Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Council (31.4%).

Applicants from low socioeconomic backgrounds had lower offer rates overall, however on a course-by-course basis there is little evidence of offer rate gaps, rather these students were more likely to apply for courses such as Nursing and associated programmes which have much lower offer rates due to additional (essential) selection measures.

Risk indication 1: Access of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds

On course and progression outcomes

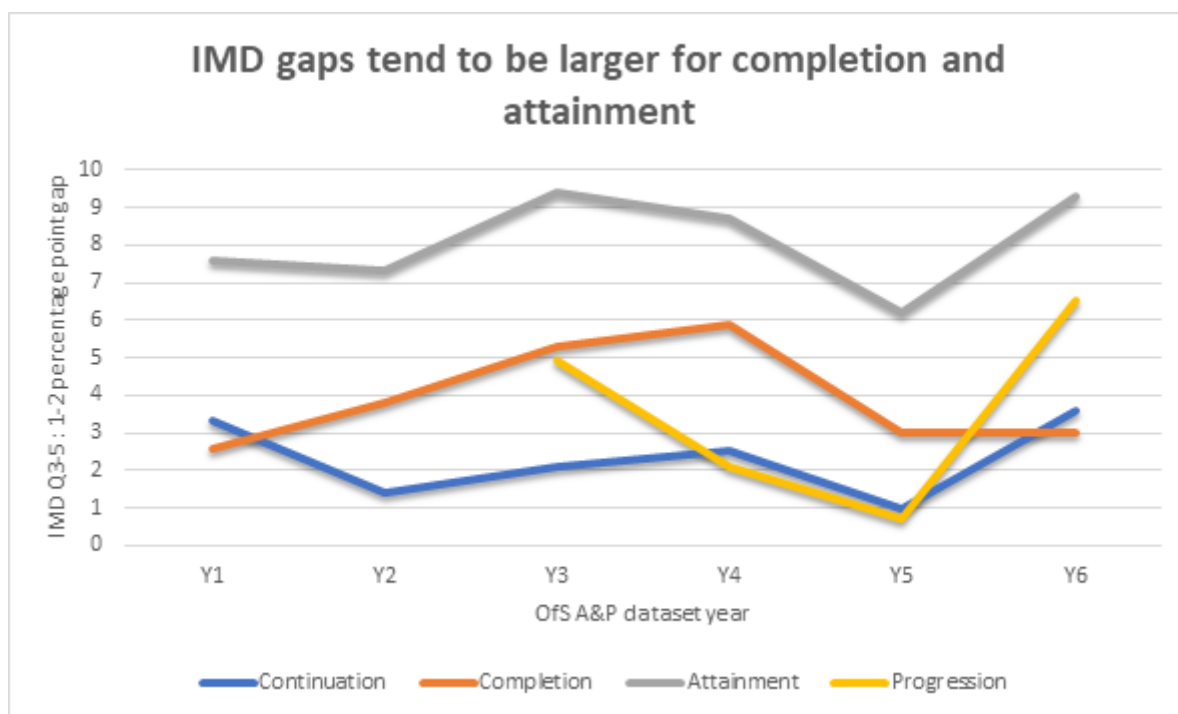


Figure 5. Low socioeconomic background on course and progression outcomes

Continuation rate gaps exist of 1-4 pp for IMD Q1-2 and FSM flagged students, with IMD being statistically significant in most years.

Completion gaps were 2.7 to 5.9pp for IMD Q1-2 compared to 3-5 over the last 6 years of data in the OfS dataset. FSM gaps of 7.2-13pp were found to be statistically significant. Internal completion rate gaps look wider due to different classifications of 'completion'.

Risk indicator 2: Continuation and completion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds

Statistically significant **degree awarding gaps** for IMD Q1-2 students have fluctuated between 6.2 and 9.4 pp, with a 4-year aggregate of 8.5 pp. Gaps of a similar size exist for FSM students which are also statistically significant.

Risk indication 3: Attainment of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds

Gaps for progression into highly skilled employment have fluctuated, especially during the pandemic-affected years. They are only significant on aggregates with gaps of approximately 3.5pp for IMD Q1-2 and similar for FSM but have been identified as a risk to be addressed.

Risk indication 4: Progression of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds

Intersections: Strong intersections which impact outcomes for students from low socio-economic backgrounds are:

- **Qualification on entry:** not A level (37% of IMD quintile 1-2 students enter BU with A levels, compared to 50% of students from IMD quintile 3-5)
- **Ethnic group:** Black, Asian Mixed and other ethnicity students are twice as likely to come from IMD quintile 1-2 than white students
- **Subject of study and level of entry:** students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are overrepresented in Nursing and associated programmes; and on 'with foundation year' programmes across all subjects of study. This particularly affects access to BU.

3.2 Care Experienced Students

Access: Between 34 and 73 care experienced students (under 26 on entry) have entered BU each year over the past 5 academic years making up between 0.8 and 1.6% of our under 26-year-old entrants.

Continuation and completion: Continuation rates of care experienced students fluctuate between 60 and 79%, with gaps compared to under 26-year-old entrants of between 4 and 24 percentage points. The 5-year aggregate rate is 73% with a gap of 12pp to under 26-year-olds with no care experience. Gaps are smaller in the most recent two academic years. Completion rates also fluctuate from a positive gap of 2pp to a negative gap of 29pp. the 5-year aggregate rate is 59% with a gap of 16pp.

Risk indication 5 continuation and completion of care experienced students

Attainment: Attainment of a 1st or 2:1 for care experienced students is 71% on a 5-year aggregate, a gap of 8pp to under 26-year-olds who have not experienced care.

Risk indication 6: Attainment of care experienced students

Progression: Small numbers of care experienced students graduating and then responding to graduate outcomes surveys mean it is not possible to identify risks for progression, however, based on intersections with other student characteristics where there is clear evidence of risk, we have identified this as a likely risk, and included within Risk indicator 4 (progression for students with low socioeconomic backgrounds).

Intersections: Based on 5-year aggregate data, strong intersections exist for care experienced students (under 26 on entry) at BU with:

- **Low socioeconomic backgrounds:** 28% of care experienced students were eligible for FSM, compared to 9% of non-care experienced students. 30% of care experienced came from IMD q1-2 compared to 20% of non-care experienced students.
- **Ethnicity:** 34% of care experienced students come from Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds (12% of black ethnicity) compared to 25% of non-care experienced (5% of black ethnicity).
- **Disability:** 39% of care experienced students had reported a disability compared to 19% of non-care experienced students.

Due to the small number of care experienced students and the strong intersections with other student characteristics for which we have identified risks at the same lifecycle stage, we will include care experienced students as a sub-group within intervention strategies and objectives for those related larger groups. Whilst numerical targets would not be appropriate for outcomes of care experienced students, we will continue to monitor our progress towards reducing gaps using internal aggregated data.

3.3 Ethnicity

Context: BU has a small proportion of students (16-17%) from Asian, black, mixed or 'other' ethnic backgrounds compared to almost 34% in the HE Sector. However, BU is much more diverse than the local area, Bournemouth and Poole conurbation, where 96% of the population is of white British origin.

Access: Approximately 180 or 5% of BU entrants are Asian (sector:17.4%), 170 or 4% are black (sector 8.2%), 220 or 5.6% are of mixed ethnicity (sector 5.8%) and 50 or 1.6% 'other' ethnicity (sector 2.4%). The most marked and significant difference is in the proportion of Asian students for which we have a written commitment in our current APP.

Applications and offer rates

We have looked in detail at applications as the pipeline for entrants and offer rates as an indicator of EORR risk 4, application success rate. The number of applications from Asian individuals has been static despite increased outreach targeting schools with high proportions of Asian learners studying subjects appropriate to our portfolio. Asian applicants are equally likely to be made an offer by BU, but more likely to choose BU as their insurance choice rather than their first choice, preferring Universities in big cities and more diverse areas of the UK. There is no evidence to suggest an equality of opportunity risk for Asian entrants in terms of access to BU, or to HE at other institutions. We understand the low number of Asian applications to be related to the portfolio of courses we offer and our location – in a very monocultural area of the UK. Put simply, young Asians would prefer to study in big multicultural cities, and many choose to study courses we do

not offer. **This is not therefore an equality of opportunity risk which we intend to address through our APP.**

For Black applicants, there is a historic offer rate gap which we have been attempting to address during the period of our current APP. Internal analysis shows this gap is due to higher proportions of black applicants applying for programmes which have low offer rates due to (essential) additional selection measures, typically Nursing and associated programmes. There is also a link to qualification type, in that Black applicants are more likely to enter with vocational qualifications which often do not meet specific subject requirements. We have taken action to address the gap by removing all non-essential additional selection measures and ensuring all those processing admissions have had unconscious bias training. This has led to a slight closing of the gap, which we continue to monitor along with offer rates for all target groups. **While we will continue to monitor and make every effort to close this gap, we have not prioritised this as an equality of opportunity risk which should be addressed through our APP.**

On course and progression outcomes:

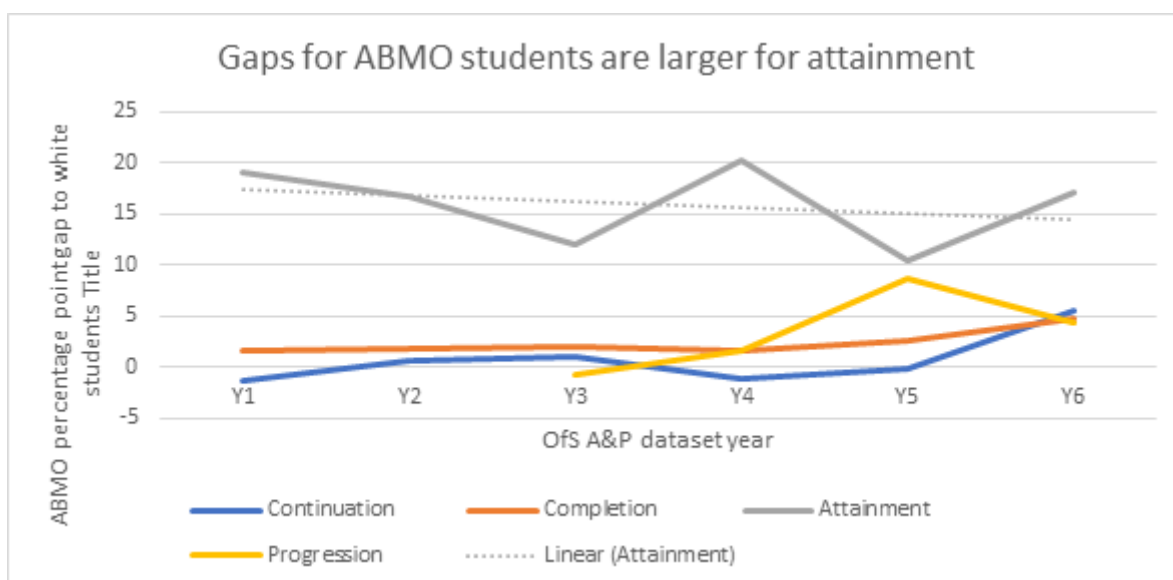


Figure 6. On course and progression outcomes for ABMO students

Like students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, gaps to white students for black, Asian, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds students are larger and more persistent for attainment. With very small numbers (especially of ‘other ethnic background’ students) gaps are often not statistically significant except on aggregates.

Continuation and completion: Continuation rates have fluctuated, and were especially affected by pandemic turbulence, with relatively small numbers in each ethnic group adding to the volatility of the data. More resilient gaps exist for Black students (4-5pp on 2–4-year aggregates) compared to White students. Completion follows the same pattern, with small fluctuating gaps for Asian mixed or ‘other’ ethnicity students, but larger, more resilient gaps for black students (4-6pp on 2–4-year aggregates) compared to white students. Our 2020-21 to 2024-25 APP has a target to close the continuation rate gap for black compared to white students which we have made progress towards, and have achieved in some years, but not consistently.

Risk indication 7 Continuation and completion of students of black ethnicity.

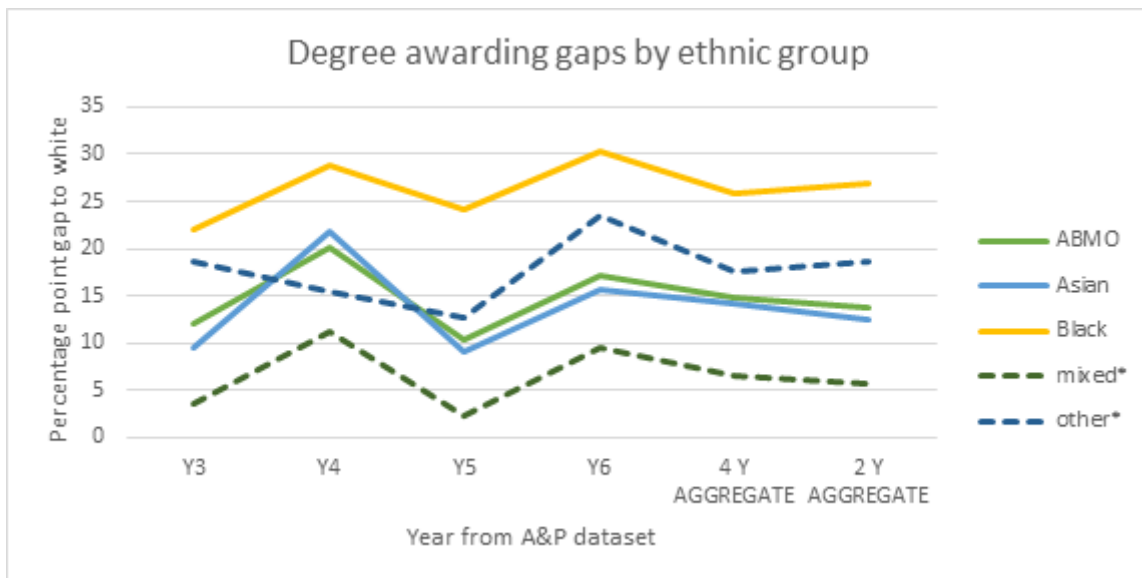


Figure 7. Degree awarding gaps by ethnic group

* dotted line indicates gaps which are not statistically significant

Attainment: The Ethnicity Degree Awarding Gap (EDAG) at BU has fluctuated between 10 and 20 pp and was very much affected by the pandemic. In 2023 it was 18pp (based on internal data). It is our largest, most persistent and most concerning gap, in common with the sector. The gap is largest for black and 'other' ethnicity students (20-30pp) followed by Asian students (10-24pp) with mixed ethnicity students having a smaller gap, typically between 4 and 14pp. Our EDAG is very volatile, partly due to the relatively small number of Asian, black, mixed or other ethnicity students at BU. Underlying our EDAG is a much smaller gap in average final award marks of 3-4pp with average award mark for Asian, black, mixed or other ethnicity students just below the lower/upper second-class boundary, and that of white students above it. This proximity to the boundary mark adds to the volatility and magnifies the size of the EDAG. Additional analysis has found that average marks for Asian, black, mixed or other ethnicity students, along with students entering with a BTEC qualification tend to plateau in level 5, unlike other student groups where there is a clear increase in mark from Level 5 to level 6 or 'exit velocity'. This means that Asian, black, mixed or other ethnicity students (and those entering with a vocational qualification) are less likely to benefit from an uplift to a higher classification available under our degree algorithm, which rewards higher marks in level 6.

Risk indication 8: Attainment of students from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds.

Progression: There is a fluctuating gap in progression into high-skilled employment or further study of Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicity students, currently 3.5pp on the 4-year aggregate. The gap was at its highest in 2019-20, likely due to the pandemic. This was a target in our existing APP and one where progress had been made before the pandemic, and on the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data. It is very closely linked to the progression gap for students from low socioeconomic status and so will be addressed through our progression objective in the APP.

Risk indication 9: Progression of students from Asian, Black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds

Intersections:

- **Low socioeconomic:** 41% of Asian, black, mixed and ‘other ethnicity students come from IMD quintile 1 or 2, compared to 19% of white students
- **Qualification on entry** This previously strong intersection has weakened in the last 2 years of entry: in 2023, 34% of non-white students entered BU with A levels, compared to 38% of white students
- **Subject of study and level of entry:** students from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds are overrepresented in Nursing and associated programmes; and on ‘with foundation year’ programmes across other disciplines.

3.4 Disability including mental health

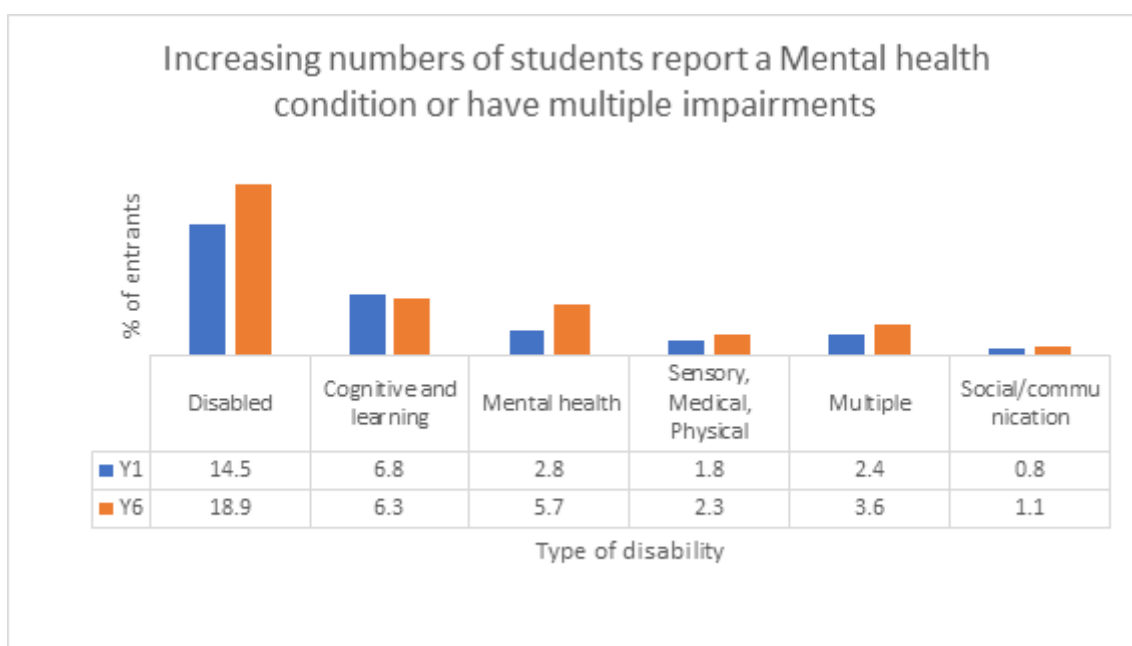


Figure 8. Entrants declaring a disability

BU has a relatively high proportion of new entrants (18-20%) who have reported a disability and aligned with the sector, we have seen a rapid increase in the number of students reporting a mental health condition both before and after entry to BU. The number of entrants reporting a mental health condition doubled between 2016-17 and 2021-22, to make up approximately 6% of all new entrants, and has increased further to approximately 9% in 2023-24. There is no evidence of consistent statistically significant gaps in on course outcomes for students who have declared a disability when considered as a group.

For students who have reported a mental health condition, however, we are aware of continuation gaps of between 2 and 5 percentage points which are statistically significant on 2- and 4-year aggregates. Internal data suggests a gap of up to 9pp is emerging for completion, which has not yet been reflected in the A&P dataset. Even after accounting for different internal definitions of completion, this indicates an emerging risk. Attainment of students with mental health conditions shows no risk indication.

Analysis of welfare referrals at BU found that students were often referred to or sought mental health support despite having not reported a mental health condition or had one diagnosed.

Overall, only 7.6% of all students referred to welfare support for issues related to mental health had declared a mental health condition on entry. Some student groups were more likely to be referred or seek support, including Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicity students and those from IMD quintiles 1&2, also care experienced students. Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicity students who sought or were referred for mental health support, were even less likely to have reported a mental health condition with rates of 2.3% for mixed ethnicity and 5.7 % for all non-white ethnic groups. This evidence has led us to identify that at BU students from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, with care experience and from IMD quintiles 1&2 are more likely to experience mental health issues, and that students of Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicities these are less likely to have been reported. These student groups therefore should be considered at additional risk in respect to mental health (EORR risk 8).

Risk indication 10: Continuation and completion for students with a declared mental health disability.

3.5 Age: 21-24 on entry

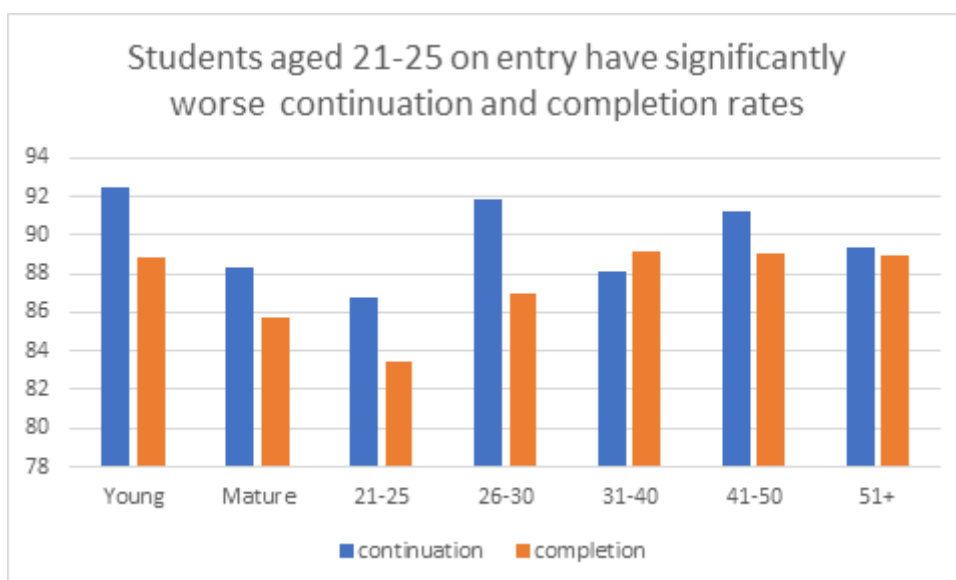


Figure 9. Age on entry

Mature students (21 and over on entry) have relatively small gaps of 2-4 pp compared to young students for continuation and completion, and better outcomes for attainment and progression into high-skilled employment. However, disaggregation into age groups shows marked differences for students aged 21-25 on entry (who make up the largest number of our mature entrants) for continuation and completion. This is in line with findings in the sector.

The subject of study is very relevant here as internal analysis has found that for Nursing and associated programmes, 21–25-year-old entrants continue and complete as well or better than young entrants. Conversely in other subject areas, there are larger continuation and completion gaps for 21–25-year-old entrants.

Risk indicator 11: Continuation and completion for students entering aged 21-25 (subject specific)

3.6 Qualification on entry type



Figure 10. Qualification on entry type

As a medium tariff University with many vocational courses, BU accepts and welcomes students with vocational qualifications. Consistently just under half of entrants to BU undergraduate programmes have an A-level educational background, as demonstrated in the charts above. The level 3 qualification landscape continues to change, with multiple 'other level 3' qualifications including T levels and the planned closure of BTEC. In 2018-19 the most prevalent non-A-level qualification was BTEC, but in 2022-23, more students entered with 'other level 3' qualifications and we expect this trend to continue.

Qualification type has consistently been and remains a very strong determinant of on-course student outcomes at BU, often dwarfing other student characteristics. The annual Financial Support statistical evaluation using the OfS toolkit shows that the effect size of qualification type on continuation and completion outcomes is larger than any other factor. The size of the effect varies across disciplines but is larger in Science and Technology. Entering with vocational qualifications rather than with A levels is, for BU possibly the most powerful equality of opportunity risk. We interpret this as part of EORR risk 1 Knowledge and skills.

Evidence over a 5-year period shows gaps for BTEC (and 'other level 3 qualification) entrants of 4-10 pp for continuation, 13-25pp for completion and 12-15pp for attainment. Adjustment for tariff points achieved makes little difference to the size of gaps. The most recent statistical analysis conducted using the OfS toolkit for Financial Support evaluation found that compared to entrants with A levels grade (CCC-BBB) BTEC entrants were 3% less likely to continue, 13% less likely to complete and 15% less likely to achieve a 1st or Upper Second-class degree.

Previously concern has focused on BTEC but with changes to the qualification profile of students entering, a focus on 'vocational' qualifications is now more appropriate.

Risk indications 12 (continuation and completion) and 13 (attainment) of students entering with vocational qualifications.

Intersections

- **Socioeconomic background:** IMD Q1&2 (37% on 3-year average) entrants are much less likely to have A levels compared to Q3-5 (50%) evidencing strong intersections between

socioeconomic markers and entry qualifications. When considered by qualification type, gaps for IMD Q1-2 students are larger for non-A level qualifications, especially 'other level 3 qualifications.' The IMD Q1-2 continuation rate gap for A level entrants was 1.81pp compared to 4.22pp for those entering with non- A level qualifications. The same is true for completion with larger gaps of 6 pp for A level entrants and 9pp for 'other level 3 qualifications.

- **Ethnicity:** Historically black, Asian, mixed and other ethnicity students have been much more likely than white students to enter BU with non-traditional qualifications, especially BTEC. Recent entrants, however, have had a similar entry qualification profile to students from white backgrounds, and any intersection is now more likely due to socioeconomic disadvantage than to ethnicity.

4. Identifying underlying risks and mapping to the OfS EORR

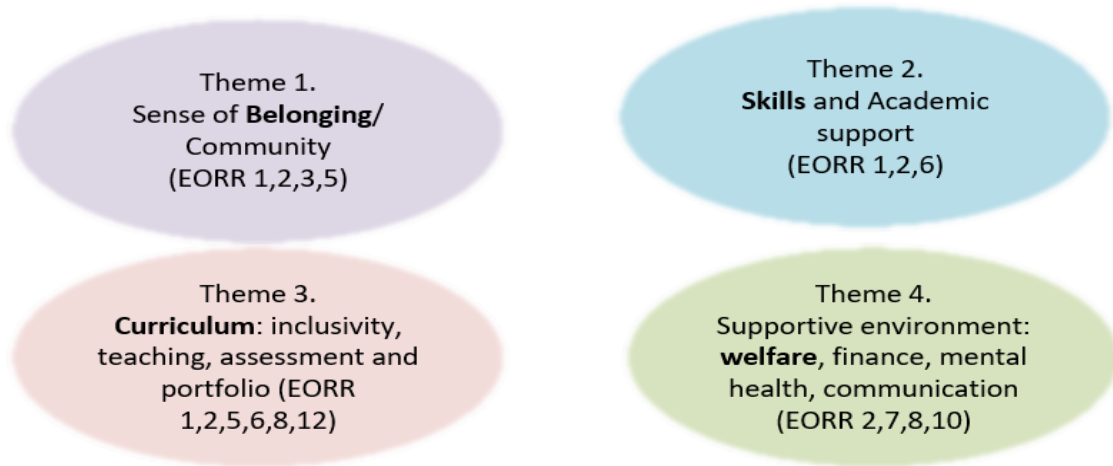
Of the 12 OfS EORR risks, our analysis and stakeholder engagement indicates that 9 contribute strongly to our BU equality of opportunity risks as outlined below:

1. **Knowledge and skills:** a strong contributor to all lifecycle stages for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, care experienced students, mature entrants, some students from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds and particularly students entering with vocational qualifications.
2. **Information and guidance:** mainly affects access and continuation for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, care experienced students, mature entrants, some students who have reported a disability and those with parenting or caring responsibilities. May also impact Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicity students.
3. **Perception of HE:** mainly affects access and continuation for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, care-experienced students and Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicity students at BU.
5. **Choice of course and delivery:** contributes to access, continuation and completion for mature entrants, parents, carers and increasingly low-income students.
6. **Academic support:** contributes to continuation, completion and attainment for students from low socio-economic, Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds and students entering with vocational students.
7. **Personal support:** contributes to course outcomes and progression for students from low socioeconomic, care-experienced, Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, disabled students and students experiencing mental health issues, whether declared or not.
8. **Mental health:** contributes to continuation and completion outcomes for students who have reported a mental health issue, and also those from low socioeconomic, care-experienced, Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds and carers.
10. **Cost pressures:** on course and progression outcomes for low socioeconomic, care-experienced and some disabled students.

12. Progression: low socioeconomic, care-experienced, students from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds.

For a high-level view, enabling consideration of interventions to address these risks, and to acknowledge their intersectional nature, we grouped these risks into four themes as shown in Figure 11 below.

BU Equality of Opportunity Risk Themes



Underpinning theme 5. Student voice, deepening understanding of the evolving student experience (EORR 1,2,5,6,7,8,10,12)

Figure 11. BU Equality of Opportunity Risk Themes

Annex B: Further information that sets out the rationale, assumptions and evidence base for each intervention strategy that is included in the access and participation plan.

Evidence base and rationale for Intervention Strategy 1: Access and Attainment Raising

Our mission is to improve access to HE, particularly for students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds, by addressing key barriers at critical stages of their educational journey.

Our work is grounded in a strong evidence base, highlighting the persistent attainment gaps and barriers faced by disadvantaged students, especially in core subjects like English and maths. Research has shown that early academic challenges, as well as limited career awareness and confidence, particularly affect students from underrepresented groups. These issues can lead to lower educational outcomes and reduced progression to HE.

By offering tailored interventions that focus on early academic support, career empowerment, and information & guidance, we aim to close the attainment gap and ensure that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to access HE.

Books & Stories and Maths Mates

Research identifies early reading and maths difficulties in primary school as strong predictors of later low achievement (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007). Disadvantaged students typically fall behind their peers by age three and continue to lag through primary school (The Sutton Trust, 2008). Persistent attainment gaps in English and math are projected to last until 2155 for disadvantaged pupils (Hutchinson et al., 2019). This underscores the importance of our initiatives with primary schools to address these early challenges.

Empower Programme

The Empower Programme aims to enhance career awareness and confidence, particularly in business and management. Gender disparities in entrepreneurship are notable, with only 1 in 3 UK entrepreneurs being female and fewer women in executive roles (HM Treasury, 2019; Kollewe, 2021). At BU, fewer female students enrol in business courses but achieve higher outcomes compared to males. Our programme focuses on increasing women's confidence and awareness of business careers to encourage more women to pursue HE in business. We will seek to broaden this programme into other subject areas where there are gaps by specific gender or characteristic, for example, we will pilot a programme for young men in collaboration with the Southern Universities Network (SUN) in 2024-2025.

Care Leavers

Care leavers face significant barriers to HE, including lower attainment, financial concerns, and limited application knowledge (Department for Education, 2020; Unite Students, 2024; Ellis & Johnson, 2019). With only 13% progressing to HE by age 19, our outreach programme aims to support care leavers in accessing and succeeding in university by engaging with key influencers such as schools and social workers (Williams et al., 2020).

Outreach Programme

Our broader outreach programme targets improving knowledge of HE and careers, boosting confidence and self-belief among students. Research by Bowes et al. (2015) highlights that removing barriers alone isn't sufficient; support networks are crucial for HE progression. We aim to provide information and guidance throughout students' educational journeys to help them make informed decisions (The Sutton Trust, 2008).

Key Literature and Evidence:

Career Awareness	Primary pupils' career aspirations are often limited by family and media influences (Chambers et al., 2018). Local graduate job opportunities and role models affect perceptions of HE (Wiseman et al., 2017). Outreach benefits include raising awareness and opening long-term career opportunities (ICM Unlimited, 2019).
Post-18 Options	Awareness of alternatives like apprenticeships is low, particularly among disadvantaged youth (Kashefpakdel & Rehill, 2018).
University Applications	Students in non-selective schools often receive less advice on HE applications, and disadvantaged students are less likely to make informed choices (The Sutton Trust, 2008; Teach First, 2017).
Student Finance	Financial concerns about university costs are significant, with many students and parents feeling uninformed (Universities UK & NEON, 2018; Mulcahy & Baars, 2018).
Wellbeing and Development	Increasing evidence of mental health issues among students and the importance of development opportunities like extra-curricular activities for job market success (Office for Students, 2019; Purcell et al., 2013).

Professional Development for Careers Leaders & Teachers:

Teacher support significantly impacts HE decisions (Wanti et al., 2022). We offer a well-established careers conference, and a new conference focused on neurodivergent and disabled learners, aiming to build tailored support and improve student outcomes. Engaging in CPD helps us understand student challenges better and refine our access and participation strategies (Tuomi et al., 2015; Office for Students, 2022).

Evidence base and rationale for Intervention Strategy 2: Transitions and sense of belonging

This covers the interventions that we will deliver to address a successful transition into HE and support new students to develop a sense of belonging. This intervention has direct links to interventions in IS1 Access and Attainment raising, IS3 Engagement, Skills and Academic support, IS4 Curriculum and, IS5 Welfare and Finance as they will all impact how successfully students develop a sense of belonging.

Student groups targeted: Students from low socioeconomic, care-experienced, or global majority backgrounds, with mental health conditions or age 21-24 on entry.

Further evidence and rationale

The prime driver for this intervention strategy is student voice. Multiple student feedback mechanisms have told us that students entering BU, at whatever level, report struggling with transitions. As a result of this, we are adopting a strategic approach to transition into, through and beyond HE at BU, as we work to improve continuation, completion and progression.

Our SUBU APP consultants told us that:

- A combination of supporting social interactions and learning something/ covering something relevant would be best. There were already some great examples of a mix of appropriate social-based activities alongside an introduction to how being a student works; these seemed to work best where they were deliberately planned to fit together.
- For some students, parental, caring or work responsibilities can make participation in activities before 'formal learning' takes place, and that this can have a detrimental effect on building a sense of being at home at BU.
- Suggestion of a regular catch-up induction every 1-2 weeks to catch the students who missed the initial activity, or to provide ongoing support to those who need it.
- the change from Level 4 to 5 can feel like a real 'step up', and specific support that recognises this would have been useful for them.
- Targeted get ready for Uni events for specific groups is a good idea and makes a big difference for students.

Key Literature and Evidence

The transition to university can be a difficult time where students may experience feelings of isolation, anxiety or lack of self-belief, and this can be exacerbated for those who already have other barriers to education (Devis-Rozental, 2023). Considering support with "adulting" activities and recognising the need for specific study skills support as students learn to navigate their new way of learning can be positive in reducing withdrawals and building a sense of belonging (McVitty 2024; Devis-Rozental & Farquharson, 2020; Devis-Rozental, 2023).

Considering contextual admissions, such as adjusted or reduced entry requirements for socio-economically disadvantaged students, is key to meeting the sector and BU's targets for widening access, with the OfS Director of Fair Access and Participation stating that 'A-level grades can only be considered to be a robust measure of potential if they are considered alongside the context in which they are achieved (Office for Students, 2020). It is recommended that universities set "separate minimum entry requirements for contextually disadvantaged learners," and "do more to support contextually disadvantaged learners to fulfil their potential" (Boliver et al., 2021, p.12). Boliver et al. (2021) recognise that there are potential risks in reducing entry requirements which may include a small reduction in rates of completion and higher degrees awarded. However, these can be mitigated by providing stronger levels of support for these contextually disadvantaged students.

A welcoming and inclusive environment as well as specific activities that support students in achieving their potential can lead to successful access and progression into HE (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2017). Strategies such as peer support, student networks and groups can be useful. Additionally, ensuring the programme of study is well organised and students are supported to navigate their environment have an impact on their sense of belonging, as students feel safe and confident in their choices (Devis-Rozental 2018; Devis-Rozental & Farquharson 2020).

A study by Wonkhe and Pearson (2022), surveyed over 5,000 students on their experiences and perspectives on belonging and inclusion at university. The study found that, among other elements, “respondents’ overall sense of belonging interacts with multiple aspects of the university experience,” including how settled they felt; how confident they were in their academic abilities; how accessible their course was; the sense of connection on the course and to the rest of the university; and how safe, respected and empowered they felt (Wonkhe & Pearson, 2022, p.3).

Activity 2.1: Admissions activities

Student groups targeted: Care experienced and low socioeconomic backgrounds

We have revised the contextual admissions approach and metrics to encourage high aspiration and confidence in disadvantaged applicants, whilst acknowledging the challenges they may face in achieving level 3 qualifications that reflect their potential and providing a safety net if needed. Applicants whose context matches the target areas within our metrics will receive a standard offer, with a commitment to apply a pre-agreed tariff reduction at confirmation if required.

Revised and improved activity to go live for 2025-2028 admission cycles. A revised approach based on an evidence-based evaluation of our contextual admissions from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

Improved scrutiny of applications to identify personalised support. Leverage: leverage new technologies to improve functionality and enhanced reporting to learn from applicants' references and responses to widening participation questions to facilitate more effective support through ALS and other internal services.

Student groups targeted: Students with mental health conditions, non-traditional qualifications, mature students, disabled students

Change mechanisms: From our underpinning theory of change for this intervention we have identified 4 key change mechanisms. Planned activity to be implemented in stages from 2025.

1. Prospective students understand the expectations and are well-matched to their chosen programme.
2. Increase our acceptance rates of students from targeted disadvantaged groups.
3. Enable earlier and broader identification of applicants with ALS needs which in turn will enable us to prepare for their arrival and to ensure we can provide the type of support they may need.
4. Students will develop a sense of belonging as they are supported and able to engage early.

Activity 2.2: Transition activities

2.2.1 Pre-arrival induction activities

Get Ready for University: The "Get Ready for University" events at Bournemouth University are designed to support offer holders from underrepresented groups as they prepare to transition into university life. These pre-arrival events invite students to campus, providing them with an opportunity to become familiar with their new environment, meet key support services such as Additional Learning Support (ALS), and get set up with essential IT and the virtual learning

environment. Students also have the chance to connect with peers from their faculty, which helps to build a sense of community and belonging even before the academic year begins.

These events are particularly effective in boosting students' confidence and resilience, easing the transition into HE. By reducing anxiety about the unknown and providing early access to support networks, the "Get Ready for University" programme has been shown to enhance students' readiness and engagement, we hope to ultimately contribute to higher retention and success rates among these students. The programme's impact is supported by evidence that early exposure to the campus environment and support systems is crucial in fostering a positive start to university life.

Join the Dots: Brilliant Club: The "Join the Dots" programme, run by The Brilliant Club, is designed to support students transitioning into HE, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. The programme connects incoming university students with trained PhD researchers who provide academic mentoring and guidance. This initiative not only helps students navigate the challenges of university life, boosting their confidence and academic skills, but also enhances the employability of the participating PhD researchers by developing their teaching and mentoring capabilities.

Evidence supporting the effectiveness of the "Join the Dots" programme includes improved retention and success rates among students who participate, particularly those who may face additional barriers to accessing HE. The programme's impact is further validated by research showing that mentoring and early academic support significantly enhance students' likelihood of persisting and thriving in their studies. Additionally, the involvement of PhD researchers benefits their professional development, equipping them with skills that are highly valued in both academic and non-academic career paths.

We plan to expand and extend our existing pre-arrival and induction activities for target student groups. These include coffee mornings during the induction period for students with specific learning needs to connect and to highlight specific support available to them. These and similar events will be extended to include care experienced students, carers, and other disabilities including mental health conditions.

Course-level group induction: Activities at programme level to enhance a sense of belonging with a focus on engagement and the support available with tailored information, guidance and embedded support that is aligned to programme delivery. For example:

- Meeting their personal tutor on the first week
- Small group activities during induction to support students in getting to know each other

From our underpinning theory of change for this strand of IS3 we have identified five key change mechanisms:

1. Students from disadvantaged groups are supported to make a successful transition into BU and through their time at BU
2. Reducing cognitive overload, enables a more effective induction into the university learning environment and expectations
3. Students access and engage with appropriate wellbeing support.
4. Students access support early, at the point of need when it is most effective.
5. Students have the time to get to know their peers and develop a sense of belonging

Additional Research Evidence

- Standardised, and well-developed transition activities (Breeze et al., 2018)

Activity 2.3: Long induction activities

Student groups targeted: Students from low socioeconomic groups, Entrants with vocational qualifications, and students from global majority backgrounds.

A revised approach to induction: Long induction to include returning from placement with a staged approach to develop a sense of belonging (New activity based on student feedback and sector insights)

10 Bites of learning: Timetabled activities over the long induction period. These activities will be tailored to each programme for all level 4, FY and L6 returning from placement to introduce/refresh and promote the academic and personal skills information available to students. It includes activities on time management, academic writing, critical thinking, academic integrity, healthy study habits and other skills. We will track the engagement of students and expand to develop Strategies to increase engagement.

Diagnostic activity to identify early intervention and support: Maths and English diagnostic tools to support students in their transition and development of their academic skills.

From our underpinning theory of change for this intervention we have identified 3 key change mechanisms:

1. New entrants from disadvantaged groups are supported to navigate the social and academic landscape in HE.
2. Improved transition to HE
3. Create opportunities for students to develop connections within their programme and a sense of belonging

Further evidence and rationale

- A staggered approach to induction across the early stages of study promotes a successful transition and the development of belonging (Naughton et al., 2024)
- Offering early academic support and opportunities to practice essential skills, combined with activities that help students used to university life, has a positive impact. (Younger et al., 2018)
- When creating an immersive student induction program, it is important to integrate both academic and social activities, as they contribute to the overall student experience.” (Turner et al., 2017).
- Early access to basic skills and academic skills development “enhanced student understanding of how to use tutor support; improvement in the skills and confidence of students in relation to maths, as a result of an embedded interdisciplinary curriculum; and an uplift in student study skills.” (Butcher et al., 2019).

Activity 2.4: First-year activities (non-academic)

Student groups targeted: Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with mental health conditions, Care-experienced students and Students from global majority backgrounds.

Student engagement activity: Visiting students in halls of residence to answer questions about attendance and engagement. Exploring how to reach those students not in halls and clarifying information about mitigating circumstances and other policies and procedures with the aim to reduce lack of attendance and increase student engagement.

Activities by 'Reslife': Settling in support for students in student accommodation developing a sense of belonging. It includes social, wellbeing and skills activities such as trips to the area, cooking, kayaking, open mic, CV writing, shopping on a budget and other activities.

From our underpinning theory of change for this intervention we have identified three key change mechanisms:

1. Students have a regular point of contact, build relationship of trust and have the opportunity to raise concerns.
2. Students build life skills and have a more effective transition to university.
3. Students develop a sense of belonging through activities where they can make friends and combat isolation and homesickness.

Additional detail of evaluation plan

Activities within this IS are currently evidence-based (Type 1 narrative) and so evaluation will focus on identifying which strands of activity are most strongly associated with improved student outcomes for particular target groups, strengthening our theory of change. We will use quantitative data including UCAS end-of-cycle data, internal data on in-year withdrawals and continuation, and engagement analytics triangulating this with qualitative data generated from arrivals questionnaires (where possible using the TASO ASQ), internal surveys and the UK engagement survey aiming for Type 2 evaluation of impact. We aim to share outcomes from evaluation through sector networks and events, publishing on our website towards the end of the plan period.

Evidence base and rationale for Intervention Strategy 3: Engagement, Skills and Academic Support

IS3 sets out a range of interventions which we will deliver to address continuation, completion and attainment gaps for our target student groups through ensuring that students in those groups are appropriately supported with their academic skills and overall academic engagement. There are strong connections with IS2 transitions and belonging, and IS4, Curriculum with all three of these intervention strategies working together to deliver the desired outcomes.

Student groups targeted: Students entering with vocational qualifications, from low socioeconomic backgrounds and of black or other ethnic backgrounds.

Relevant risk indications (See Annex A for details):

RI 2, 5, 7, and 12: Continuation and Completion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds; care experienced students, students from black or other ethnic backgrounds, and those entering with vocational qualifications.

Evidence base and rationale

Students from low socioeconomic and Asian, black, mixed or 'other' ethnic backgrounds, care experienced- students and those entering with non-A-Level (historically BTEC) qualifications persistently have worse on-course outcomes than other students across the sector and at BU. There are strong intersections between groups, and gaps in student outcomes grow across the student lifecycle. See Annex A pages 29 and 33.

We understand these risk indications to be strongly associated with prior educational experience in that the curriculum, pedagogies and assessment in HE and at BU can be less accessible and inclusive for students from these backgrounds, especially for those entering with non-A level qualifications. While IS4 addresses these risks in terms of curriculum, IS3 looks to address them in terms of factors surrounding the curriculum which can significantly impact the ability of students in the target groups to engage with their studies. These factors include delivery models and methods, the general academic skills which students bring with them to HE studies and how staff identify and respond to students' needs for support with academic work and engagement.

Our core rationale for the interventions in IS3 is that increasing the speed, pro-activity, inclusivity and personalisation of the action taken to offer and deliver academic support and the models of educational delivery will reduce the barriers for the target groups of students, increasing their ability to engage early in their studies and maintain engagement and achievement through their course.

Key literature for all strands: see the table below.

Activity 3.1: Student Engagement Framework activity

This strand focuses on how we can quickly identify individual students' challenges with academic engagement and skills and respond in a personalised way that will be effective in connecting them to effective support. It builds on an initiative which is being implemented from academic year 2024-25: the Academic Engagement Framework which provides for regular reviews of individual student engagement leading to communications with individual students to offer support with engagement or personal circumstances affecting engagement, with clear opportunities to talk to academic staff. The Framework has been developed on humanisation principles and uses a compassionate communications approach. The Framework bases interventions on engagement data (including attendance levels). Through implementation of the Framework, we will develop our approach to use of learning analytics to identify students in need of support.

We expect to gather substantial data on the impact of the Framework interventions and different communication approaches on the engagement and success of different student groups, and about the factors which impact engagement of different student groups. This information will be used to further develop our approach within the Framework in terms of timing, scope and type of interventions, communication methods and styles, and support options, building in greater personalisation where possible. It will also be used to identify wider organisational actions which may be effective in supporting increased engagement by students in target groups, for example changes to timetable structure, delivery methods or curriculum.

This activity will be further developed on a rolling (annual) basis across the period of the APP.

The primary change mechanisms identified for this activity are:

- Receipt of appropriate, compassionate individual communications about their engagement demonstrates personalisation and care by the University for the student and will make them more likely to reach out for/accept offers of support. Similarly, for offers of support which are relevant and personalised to the student and their circumstances.
- The Framework approach will demonstrate to students that difficulties with engagement and needs for support are common/normal: reducing impact of difficulties on student confidence and making them more likely to reach out for/accept support.
- Achieving a better understanding of the barriers to engagement for students in the target groups will enable and support effective action to reduce or remove those barriers, including through personalisation/targeting of communications approaches and the type and structure of support services, and through changes to factors such as timetabling and curriculum (this links to activity 3.4 below and to IS4).

This activity has also been developed with reference to our own data. While acknowledging that our attendance data and other engagement analytics are currently still in an early stage of development, our data appears to confirm sector data in showing a correlation between attendance and successful completion of studies by the original expected course end date. This indicates that supporting attendance and engagement has a key part to play in closing attainment gaps.

TASO theory of change approaches have been used in the development and scoping of this activity.

Additional detail of evaluation

Evaluation of this strand will focus on (a) analysis of the impact of communications and interventions from within the Framework on engagement and attendance levels of relevant students; (b) analysis of numbers of students receiving intervention at different stages of the Framework process and how this changes over time; (c) continuation and completion data; (d) evidence of reporting on Framework activity and findings impacting decision-making in the University to address factors relevant to engagement of the target student groups.

Activity 3.2: Targeted Peer Assisted Learning

In this strand we will develop and enhance existing peer assisted learning (PAL) activity, to target this support specifically on students on programmes that data analysis shows have poor continuation rates and aligning with other markers including non-traditional qualifications – this includes all Foundation year and targeted level 4 programmes.

This approach targets the support at the crucial initial stages of study. The intention is to reduce the likelihood of students disengaging early when first encountering challenge and to then equip them with the skills that will underpin their studies throughout their time at BU. The development of this intervention activity has been informed by an evaluation of previous PAL activities at BU. The primary change mechanisms identified for this activity are:

- Students acquire the skills needed for academic engagement and success
- Support provided by peers feels more accessible and relevant, being based on recent personal experience, making students more likely to engage and benefit.

- Students maintain/develop confidence in their ability to engage and succeed in their studies, and in the willingness of the University to support their individual needs.
- Intervention takes place early enough to prevent or minimise loss of confidence and reduction in engagement

Evaluation of this activity will look at continuation rates for students on targeted programmes generally and for target student groups and will also assess whether targeted students receiving the support feel increased confidence and have increased engagement.

Activity 3.3: Academic Skills services

This activity is an enhancement to existing activity to support students to improve core academic skills which are required in order to engage fully with their course content and develop subject-specific knowledge and skills on their course. The activity will deliver specific maths and academic writing skills support to improve students' core functional maths and writing skills. This support will be made available to all but offers of support will be particularly focused on programmes with poor continuation rates, and high numbers of students from target groups. In addition, staff working within the Academic Engagement Framework (activity 3.1) will be able to refer students to these academic skills services when the Framework interventions establish that lack of core skills is impacting an individual student's engagement.

This activity reflects our understanding that students' prior educational experience has a substantial impact on their experience of HE, including that variations in the type of skills taught and the methods by which skills have been taught (including between A-Levels and other Level 3 qualifications) may significantly impact the accessibility of course content and delivery approaches to students from the target groups. Lack of skills or confidence in skills needs to be addressed at an early stage to avoid significant impact on engagement and then on continuation and success.

The primary change mechanisms identified for this activity are:

- Students acquire the skills needed for academic engagement and success
- Support with skills is provided in a personalised and supportive way
- Students maintain/develop confidence in their ability to engage and succeed in their studies, and in the willingness of the University to support their individual needs.
- Intervention takes place early enough to prevent or minimise loss of confidence and reduction in engagement

Evaluation of this activity will look for improved confidence in maths and academic writing in students in the target groups, improved levels of academic engagement by those students in their core timetabled course activities and improved levels of student experience (from student feedback). It will also look for improved continuation rates

Activity 3.4: Using course delivery models and arrangements to support academic engagement

This activity will involve investigation of how different delivery models and arrangements can impact the academic engagement of students in target groups. It reflects our understanding that students' prior educational experience may also impact the accessibility of course delivery approaches to students from target groups.

This activity will draw on information and data coming out of intervention activity 3.1 to identify factors which may impact engagement in specific teaching and learning sessions by students in target groups. These factors could include timetabling (timing and spacing of sessions), types and proportions of teaching sessions or learning activities (e.g. balance of lectures, seminars and practical sessions, or balance/types of delivery mode), types of activity within sessions and communication or delivery styles. Along with relevant information from IS5, this will help us select factors to address through pilot activities.

We will establish a number of pilots to test out propositions as to the impact of changing approaches to these factors on student engagement. These pilots will be co-created with teaching staff and will be scoped and evaluated alongside relevant IS4 activity relating to delivery modes.

The activity is supported by:

- Early-stage analysis of our own attendance data which appears to show impact on attendance from the timing of sessions
- Extensive student feedback about:
 - The impact of timetabling on students' ability to attend and engage with course activities. This feedback references both financial/socioeconomic elements to this impact (travel costs and the need to be able to schedule paid work around teaching sessions in a planned and consistent way) and broader impact on learning from the spacing and sequencing of teaching sessions (these impacts may be more intense for students with disabilities or learning differences and for those students already feeling challenged academically or in terms of learning skills/styles).
 - The value and accessibility of different types of teaching and learning activity and how this impacts attendance and wider engagement.
 - The impact of the style and tone of staff communication and delivery on student engagement.

The primary change mechanisms identified for this activity are:

- Delivery of our programmes is designed and managed such that it is financially sustainable for students to achieve a reasonable level of attendance and engagement.
- Programme delivery models and arrangements are accessible to students from target groups and support an effective transition from previous educational experience.
- Students experience an inclusive, supportive learning environment which encourages and facilitates students to ask for the support and information they need.

Additional detail of evaluation

Evaluation of this activity will look for improvements in % attendance and other forms of academic engagement for students in the target groups, along with reduction in the requirement for engagement interventions and improvements in student feedback on relevant factors.

Key Literature and Evidence:

Reference	Relevance to IS3	Strand(s)
Lewis et al., (2021)	HE institutions are increasingly moving towards blended, hybrid and online learning As HE institutions develop their delivery approaches in this way, “without support [...] it can be challenging for students who are new to the HE environment to know how to engage effectively for success.”	3.1, 3.4
Lewis et al., (2021), p 31	Students tended to appreciate regular personalised feedback about their progress and being informed about the university’s support services, with personalised, individualised feedback having the biggest impact on students’ online engagement. The authors argue that “the perception of personalisation led to “an increase in likelihood of students to reach out if they needed help.”	3.1, 3.2, 3.3
Lewis et al., (2021)	Swift, proactive action on engagement is important, as the first year of university is when students are most likely to withdraw or disengage with their studies, and that “the first year of university is a critical period for establishing student engagement.”	3.1, 3.2, 3.3
Andrews et al., (2023)	The ethnicity achievement gap could be addressed by a number of activities including effective use of learning analytics to inform practice, personalised support, peer learning activities, specific sessions to support students (workshops or tutorials) and the embedding of a university-wide inclusive culture.	3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4
Sa (2023)	A study found that of all the activities offered to students by a HE institution those of an academic nature were the most sought after by students.	3.2, 3.3, 3.4

Evidence base and rationale for Intervention Strategy 4: Curriculum

IS 4 brings together the curriculum-based interventions we will deliver to address continuation, completion and attainment gaps for our target student groups. There are strong connections with IS2 transitions and belonging, and IS3 Engagement, skills and academic support, with all three of these intervention strategies working together to deliver the desired outcomes.

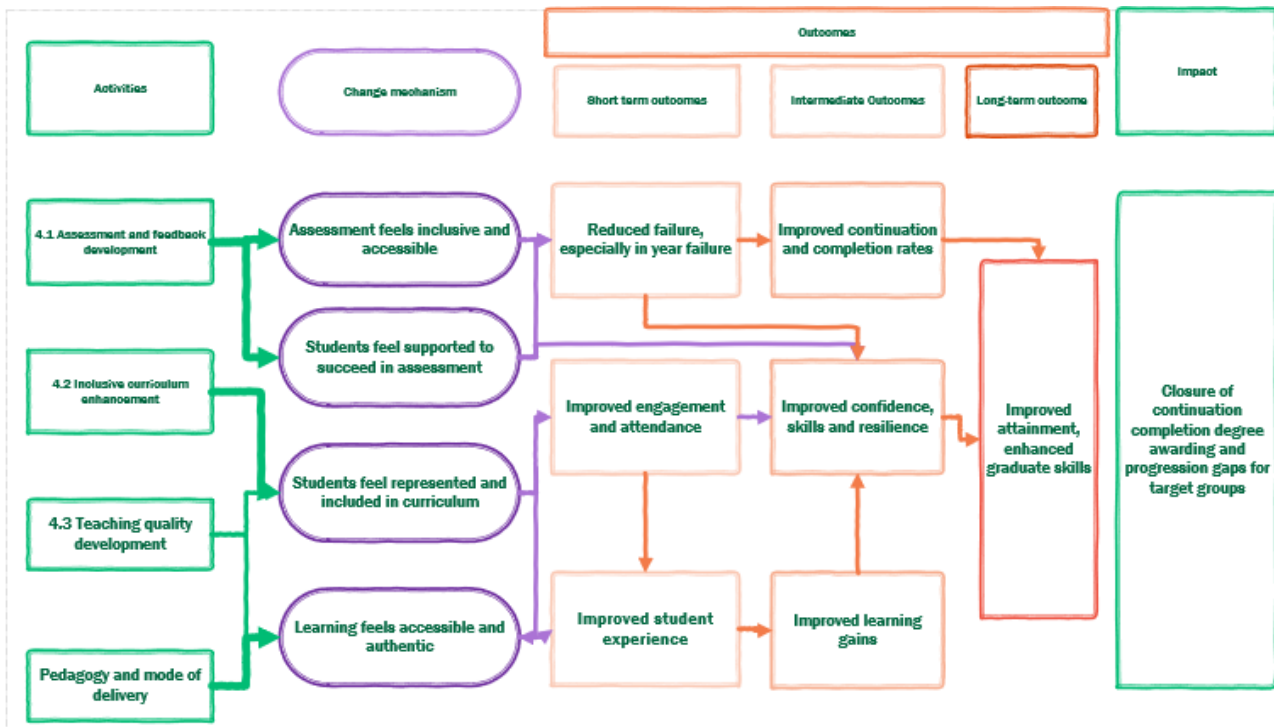


Figure 12. Theory of Change for Intervention Strategy 4

Relevant risk indications (See Annex A for detail):

RI 2, 5,7,11, 12 Continuation and completion for students from: low socioeconomic, care experienced backgrounds and those entering with vocational qualifications

RI 3,6, 8, 13 Attainment (degree awarding gaps) for students from low socioeconomic, care experienced backgrounds and those entering with vocational qualifications.

Target student groups

Students from low socioeconomic and Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, care experienced students and those entering with non-A-Level (historically BTEC) qualifications persistently have worse on-course outcomes than other students across the sector and at BU. There are strong intersections between groups and gaps in student outcomes grow across the student lifecycle. (see Annex A, pages 29 and 33).

We understand these risk indications to be strongly associated with prior educational experience in that the curriculum, pedagogies and assessment in HE and at BU can present barriers and be less accessible and inclusive for students from these backgrounds, especially for those entering with non-A level qualifications.

Rationale

Our rationale for the interventions in IS 4 is that increasing the inclusivity and accessibility of curriculum, teaching and assessment will reduce the barriers for the target groups of students. Teaching and assessment which understands and builds on their prior experience will support students to become successful learners in HE.

Activity 4.1: Assessment and feedback development

This strand focuses on recognition of achievement, building in flexibility personalisation and choice with feedback, assessment and reassessment while still maintaining rigour. Also developing and promoting opportunities to make good on and, importantly to learn from failure. It will draw on student personas activity and understanding of student characteristics to find new ways to recognise and for students to demonstrate their achievement. This strand will involve consideration of:

- Expansion of in year retrieval and ways to make good on and learn from early failure
- More personalised assignments
- Choice/variety of assessment method
- Assessment based on core competencies and universal marking guidelines

From our theory of change we have identified two primary change mechanisms for this activity:

1. Students feel that assessment is inclusive and accessible
2. students feel supported to succeed in assessment.

This activity is necessarily long term and will continue to develop throughout the course of the plan.

Key Literature and Evidence

Research by Campbell et al., (2021) found that students from minoritised backgrounds were likely to perceive and experience certain types of assessment as less accessible for them. A further finding was that fully understanding marking criteria and what is required to succeed was key to building up positive perceptions of assessment and countering negative perceptions students might have. Students called for more standardisation in assessment and guidance or support prior to assessment, which the report noted links clearly to their prior experience and to how assessment has developed in schools since the mid-2000s.

Andrews et al. (2023) also found that adapting assessment formats and processes can be useful strategies to narrow the attainment gap.

Evaluation of this strand will focus on In Year Retrieval (IYR). Following implementation and process evaluation of the first cycles in 2021-22 and 2022-23, our ongoing evaluation aims to identify impact on short and then medium-term outcomes for students from target groups. This evaluation will inform our planned expansion in ways to make good on and learn from failure at later stages of the student lifecycle.

4.2 Inclusive curriculum enhancement

Improving the inclusivity of the curriculum remains a priority and is long-term ongoing activity at BU. In this strand, we intend to:

- Develop and expand the ICE project (see below) to evaluate and improve inclusivity of curriculum with respect to other characteristics with known impact such as qualification type, socioeconomic background or disability.
- Build a more competency -based curriculum, mapping competencies across units/modules to improve clarity, align with developments in Level 3 education, build on students prior educational experience and embed good practice and consistency across BU.

For this strand of activity we have identified the following change mechanisms:

- Primary: students feel represented and included in curriculum
- Secondary: learning feels accessible and authentic

Key Literature and Evidence

McVitty (2024) state that “inclusive pedagogy, curriculum, and academic support that engages students’ interests and is flexible and empathic in response to students’ challenges” make a difference. These as well as compassionate assessment and feedback align to the Humanising Framework (Devis-Rozental, 2018) referenced in our whole provider approach and present an opportunity to personalise processes and procedures for the benefit of students, especially those from marginalised communities (QAA, 2023).

Andrews et al. (2023) found that [adapting assessment formats and processes as well as] decolonising the curricula can be useful strategies to narrow the attainment gap.

TASO (2022;2023;) analysis and evaluation of inclusive curriculum interventions has been used extensively to inform our approach.

The ICE project: In our Inclusive Curriculum Evaluation (ICE) project we employ students to review curriculum for inclusivity, feeding this information back to staff, so that they have the information needed to improve the inclusivity of their unit or programme. ICE followed and then ran concurrently with two years of staff review of the curriculum for inclusivity. Each iteration of the project has incorporated learning from the previous year building and continually improving the model for student review of curriculum. Our outline theory of change for the 2023-24 project is shown in Figure 13.

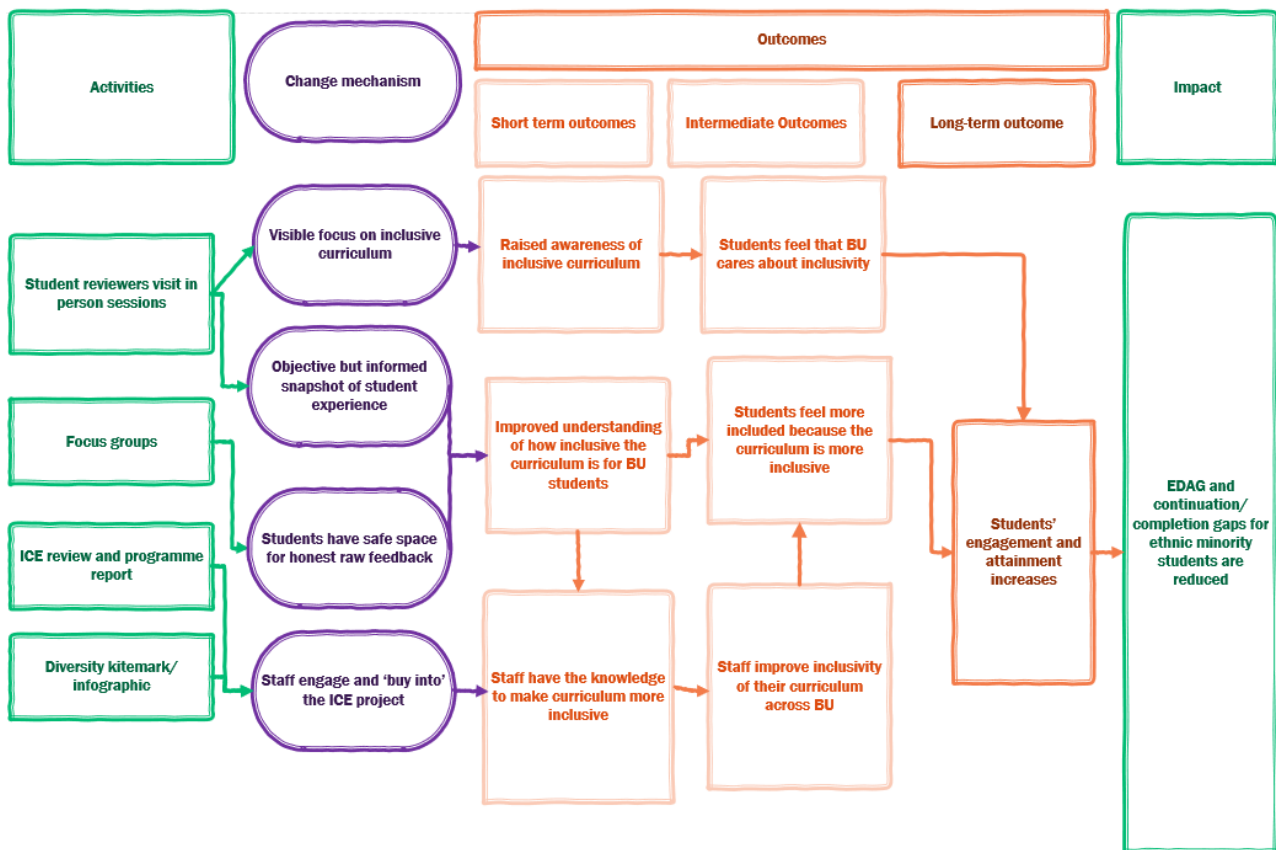


Figure 13. Theory of Change for ICE Project

Evaluation so far has shown that the power of this project is in providing academic staff with very specific feedback on the student experience of their unit or programme, which is just not available through any other means. Though common themes emerge, the student feedback provided by ICE is specific to the unit being reviewed and focused only on its inclusivity (currently with respect to ethnicity). It is also relatively objective as students review units outside their own programme but in a similar discipline.

We now see this model of student review as a powerful tool which we plan to use in a similar way to understand and improve the inclusivity of our curriculum with respect to other dimensions, potentially qualification on entry, socioeconomic disadvantage and disability.

Building a more competency-based curriculum is also important within this strand, as it further improves the inclusivity of the curriculum, aligning it with their previous educational experience and making it more accessible for target student groups. It is a development of ongoing long-term activity which though not targeted, will particularly benefit target student groups.

Evaluation

Evaluation of this strand will focus on the ICE project. The ICE project in its evolving form has been evaluated each year, using qualitative data. Common findings were shaped into a simple infographic in 2023 and have been integrated into staff development delivered through the Centre for Fusion Learning Innovation and Excellence (FLIE). We continue to expand and promote awareness of the project internally through podcasts and strengthening connections with groups addressing similar aims, such as the Sustainability Academic Network. As we expand and develop

the project, we will publish an evaluation on the ICE page of the BU website by the end of 2026 and aim to contribute to the OfS repository in the following year.

4.3 Teaching quality development

By improving our understanding of the prior experience of our students, and its impact on their learning in HE, we can ensure that our teaching staff are equipped to support students from all backgrounds to succeed. This is long-term activity which builds on the level 3/HE partnerships and student personas work explained in the whole provider approach. In this strand we intend to embed in our teaching:

- Understanding of prior educational and lived experience, how this impacts students and how to support them effectively
- Consideration of the impact of digital poverty, media and subject literacy gaps on target groups of students
- Ongoing support for academic staff to develop the skills to support target groups of students.

The primary change mechanisms identified for this activity are:

- Students feel represented and included in curriculum
- Learning feels accessible and authentic.

Key Literature and Evidence

Zagallo et al. (2019), concluded that fictionalised personas based on large data sets can be valuable tools for encouraging empathy and seeing students as individuals with varied and complex needs. According to O'Brien and Chawke (2022, p. 14), the development of personas should be continuous to represent the "wider diversity of students" and could be used in different activities such as: incorporating them for curriculum design and teacher training activities.

4.4 Curriculum content and mode of delivery

Increasing the variety of modes of delivery in our curriculum, where possible and appropriate, will provide a more accessible learning environment and a more authentic learning experience. This in turn will promote achievement for target student groups. This is a long-term activity, which is unlikely to achieve substantial change during the period of the plan but is included in IS4 due to its connection with making the student experience of the curriculum more inclusive.

The primary change mechanism for this activity is:

- Learning feels accessible and authentic.

Additional detail of evaluation

As outlined above the primary focus for the evaluation of IS4 is on the ICE project, as it is a new and developing approach with less concrete evidence in the sector for the efficacy of student review and feedback models in improving the inclusivity of curriculum. We will also evaluate the impact of IYR on short- and medium-term outcomes. For the remaining activities, our evaluation will concentrate on strengthening our theories of change, monitoring outcomes and conducting IPE to secure effective implementation.

Evidence base and rationale for Intervention Strategy 5: Welfare and Finance

IS 5 combines interventions that aim to reduce the financial and welfare barriers, which impact engagement with and success in HE. Students experiencing financial difficulties are also very likely to have other welfare needs. We have built welfare and finance into the same intervention strategy acknowledging these links and strengthening our joined-up approach to the delivery of support.

Student groups targeted: students from low-income backgrounds, those with disabilities and with mental health challenges, estranged students, carers, parents, and care experienced students and those who are first-generation HE.

5.1 Financial Support

Through our underpinning theory of change for this intervention we have identified 4 key change mechanisms for our Financial Support interventions:

1. Students feel mentally, physically and emotionally able to engage fully with their studies (reduced anxiety, fewer PT work hours, improved mental & physical health)
2. Students have confidence that they are supported by BU.
3. Students feel able to consider more ambitious placements and by extension career opportunities.
4. Students have confidence and feel equipped to navigate financial barriers and manage their affairs financially. They are able to exercise control over their situation.

This strand of the intervention strategy primarily targets low-income students, estranged students, care experienced students and those who are first generation HE. It is not restricted to these groups, and we also aim to support young carers and student parents through these measures.

Key Literature and Evidence

Sector evidence has established that low-income students face additional financial barriers to participation and success in HE and are disproportionately impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, as reflected in OfS EORR risk 10. The Sutton Trust (2023) found that students from low-income backgrounds were more likely to skip meals and move home to save on rent and essential bills where possible. These same students were less likely to receive additional financial support from parents or family (The Sutton Trust 2023).

Hordósy et al. (2018) found that low-income students with stable incomes (including financial support such as bursaries and scholarships) were

“better able to balance their financial budgets, make the most of their degree programme, and shape the wider employment opportunities they engaged with.” (Hordósy et al., 2018, p. 361).

Financial support schemes and bursaries allowed these students to avoid needing to take on part-time jobs, allowed them to focus on their studies, and resulted in increased engagement. On the other hand, students who “found themselves subject to an increase in an assumed household contribution were particularly likely to suffer negative consequences of trying to cover the reduction of income with part-time work,” and thus were less likely to engage with their studies (Hordósy et al., 2018, p. 361).

They found three issues that low-income students may face. Firstly, for many low-income students, part-time work is often the only option for them to supplement their income. Secondly, this need for further work can negatively impact their studies and ability to engage and participate fully. Finally, a low-income student's need to find part-time work often means they have to prioritize income over career progression, and so these students are less likely to be in a position to take steps towards post-university career development opportunities than their peers.

The cost of travel to campus is a key factor for students attending classes. According to Wonkhe and Pearson (2023), keeping up with study due to practical challenges especially for those who are experiencing financial hardship is getting harder and may have an impact on these students' academic performance and their ability to access wider student experience activities. This in turn can have an impact on their sense of belonging.

5.1.1 Bursaries

Evidence from the annual evaluation of our Bursary provision conducted using the OfS Toolkit confirms that the sector issues outlined above are reflected at BU. Over 6 years of surveys show consistently that low-income students in receipt of a BU bursary spend their bursary on essential living costs, and 71% of respondents said that without their bursary this area of expenditure would be impacted.

In free text responses to 'other items you may not be able to do without the Bursary' the most common themes were 'food/grocery shopping; more nutritious food (40%); travel to Uni and to placement (25%), essential bills/rent (14%) and items for study (laptops/software licences) (10%). Responses to the question 'Receiving financial support helped me to... from the most recent two surveys, with comparison to the previous year's survey are summarised in the table below:

Receiving financial support helped me to..	Agree or strongly agree 2022-23 survey	Agree or strongly agree 2023-24 survey	Change in last 2 years
Afford to participate along with my fellow students	67% (-8pp)	68% (+1pp)	-7pp
Concentrate on my studies without worrying about finances	67% (-7pp)	62% (-5pp)	-12pp
Balance commitments such as work study and family relationships	65% (-7pp)	61% (-4pp)	-11pp
Feel part of the university community	47% (no change)	42% (-5pp)	-5pp
Feel less anxious than I would have felt otherwise	73% (-7pp)	70% (-3pp)	-10pp
Be included on social and study trips	47% (-7pp)	40% (-7pp)	-14pp

Feel more satisfied with my life as a student	75% (-5pp)	73% (-2pp)	-7pp
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Supporting this, student feedback collected through wider internal surveys, through the Students Union and student voice work across BU indicates increasing numbers of students working significant hours in paid work and difficulty of fitting this round university timetables.

This analysis, along with evidence from the annual statistical evaluation also conducted using the OfS toolkit was used to inform our revised BU Maintenance, Care leavers and now Estrangement bursaries. Our new provision (for entrants from 2025-26 onwards) is outlined in the provision of information to the students' section of the APP.

5.1.2 Financial support at the point of need

Our hardship funding provision offers non-repayable support to help students at the point of need. It is mainly delivered through the [BU Financial Support Fund](#). In addition to the BU Financial Support Fund, we work collaboratively across departments to ensure that funds generated from charitable donations or external organisations are channelled specifically to address our APP objectives. Through close cooperation, these additional funds are used to target additional support more precisely to address very specific issues and risks for disadvantaged groups. This adds flexibility and agility to the support we provide and is effective in addressing the emerging needs of our target groups of students in a timely way.

5.1.3. Support to access placement and professional development opportunities

As part of the statistical evaluation of financial support, analysis of other factors and their impact on student outcomes has consistently shown that take up of placement year is very strongly associated with improved student outcomes both for progression into high-skilled employment and for attainment of a 1st or Upper Second-class award. In the last 6 years of HESA data released for this analysis (entrants in 2012-13 to 2017-18 inclusive), the effect size of placement year on degree attainment has varied between +10% and +23% and on progression into high-skilled employment between +21% and +37%. Further analysis of these datasets has shown that the average income of students who take up a placement year is 11-12% higher than the income of those who do not.

Our Placement Opportunity Fund was originally conceived to remove or reduce the financial barriers of taking up a placement experienced by target groups of students, especially where the placement had significant initial costs. It is targeted at students from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds, known to be less likely to take up a placement. The remit of the fund is continually reviewed and in 2024-25 we are piloting expanding the type of activity supported by the fund to include professional development opportunities such as conferences and events, having identified this demand. During the lifetime of the plan, we will continue to explore how the fund can best support our target groups of students to undertake and gain the benefits of high-quality placements.

5.1.4 Practical assistance with applications

Increasingly, students need practical support to navigate the often complex and demanding processes of applying for financial assistance from any source. This is especially the case for students without support from families such as care-experienced or estranged students and first-generation HE students. Digital literacy and digital poverty create further barriers for some student groups. Students in target groups are often also applying for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and navigating National Health Services (NHS) processes for financial entitlements relating to Nursing and associated programmes.

We aim to provide one-to-one support, facilitating successful applications, building skills and relieving the anxiety and stress experienced by these students. Where possible we try to operate a 'one-stop shop' approach, bringing teams together to provide support. This is an approach we intend to strengthen over the period of the plan.

5.2 Wellbeing Support: enhanced referral and diagnosis

From our theory of change we have identified three primary change mechanisms for this intervention:

1. Students feel supported and secure (through accessing support promptly).
2. Students feel better equipped and less overwhelmed
3. Building skills and resilience gives students confidence in their ability to engage with and continue their studies now and manage later transitions

This strand of IS5 primarily targets students who report a mental health condition on entry, or who develop mental health challenges whilst at university. However internal data indicates that, as in the sector, other student groups are more likely to experience mental ill health. At BU our analysis summarised in Annex A page 35 shows this includes low-income students, those from Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds, estranged students, care experienced students and potentially carers, who are additional target students for this intervention.

All three activities within this strand are practical interventions, designed to facilitate prompt referral to appropriate support. While mental health support is a fundamental part of our wider BU provision, and available to all students, evidence both from the sector and at BU indicates that for the target student groups, there are additional barriers to accessing the available support. The basis for the inclusion of the three strands of this intervention within our APP and in IS5 is the removal of these additional barriers, speeding up access and encouraging students to engage with the support available to them.

Key Literature and Evidence

Baker et al. (2021) concluded that early disclosure of a disability combined with a learning plan for the student ensured that reasonable adjustments could be put in place in good time, leading to improved student outcomes. Additionally, the study recommended that HEPs should be proactive, facilitating access to student wellbeing and self-help information.

TASO's summary of what works to reduce equality gaps for disabled students (TASO, 2023) found that students with mental health-related non-apparent disabilities are more likely to be uncomfortable with disclosing and sharing information about their disability. This is especially strongly felt by students with neurodiverse conditions. (Clouder et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021)

Building on this, TASO (2024) outlines eight effective interventions to support disabled students, which have shaped our approach. For example, Intervention 4: Needs Assessment emphasises the importance of early diagnosis and the involvement of parents or supporters. Similarly, Intervention 7: Establishing an Integrated Referral Process between HE Support Services focuses on increasing students' confidence, awareness, and use of support throughout their time in higher education.

Additional research highlights 12 key Disability Inclusion Principles. Among them is principle VII: An anticipatory and intentional approach to disability inclusion, which stresses that teams across the institution should work together to embed disability inclusion into all structures and processes (Evans & Zhu, 2022).

5.3 Recognition of lived experience staff development

This strand of IS 5 acknowledges that the prior lived experience of our student population is constantly changing and impacts students in HE. Understanding the impact of lived experience will enable staff to support students more effectively and to identify at risk student groups. However, keeping up with and understanding the changing new entrant population is challenging, particularly for academic staff who may have little contact with potential students' pre-entry. This intervention aims to address this issue, using insights gained from linked level 3/HE partnerships work referenced in the whole provider approach.

From our theory of change, we have identified two change mechanisms for this intervention:

1. Academic and programme staff become confident and feel equipped to identify and support students struggling with issues related to lived experience and signpost them to the most appropriate support.
2. Safeguarding and awareness of the impact of lived experience becomes part of the culture in faculties and (not just the responsibility of) professional services.

Key Literature and Evidence

Intervention 8 from TASO (2024) 'Supporting disabled students, a blueprint for transition support' emphasises the importance of targeted staff training in increasing staff confidence in supporting disabled students, also in improving student access and use of support services.

Zagallo et al. (2019), concluded that fictionalised personas based on large data sets can be valuable tools for encouraging empathy and seeing students as individuals with varied and complex needs. According to O'Brien and Chawke (2022, p. 14), the development of personas should be continuous to represent the "wider diversity of students" and could be used in different activities such as: incorporating them for curriculum design and for teacher training activities. (also referenced in IS4)

5.4 Student life initiatives and events

This strand of activity runs across IS2 and IS5 due to its importance in transition to enhance belonging and the impact on student wellbeing throughout the student lifecycle. It is costed in IS5. This strand includes:

- Awareness campaigns and initiatives informed by early identification of emerging needs (links to strands 5.2 and 5.3)

- Financial awareness and wellbeing events and online support to build skills and resilience.
- Skills-building initiatives co-created and delivered in partnership with students and the SU. (existing activity)

From our theory of change we have identified two change mechanisms for this intervention:

1. Students feel equipped and able to cope with change at each stage of the student journey.
2. Students feel supported by BU and part of the BU community.

Additional detail of evaluation

Evaluation for this IS will focus primarily on Financial Support, which will continue to be evaluated annually using the OfS Toolkit, providing type 2 evidence. The statistical and survey tools will continue to be used annually with occasional use of the interview tool where appropriate, to provide additional insight.

For the wellbeing initiatives in this Intervention Strategy (IS), the link to the Student Engagement Framework activity, referenced in IS2, is crucial. We will apply the Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) framework from the Student Engagement Framework to these wellbeing initiatives. This approach will help us refine our theory of change and test our mechanisms and assumptions. By the end of the plan period, we aim to produce Type 2 evidence, potentially using validated tools like the TASO Access and Success Questionnaire (ASQ) or student outcomes data to assess effectiveness. Student feedback, collected through the student voice strand, will allow us to triangulate the findings and ensure a comprehensive evaluation.

Intervention Strategy 6 (Employability)

BU students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds tend to be less likely to progress into high-skilled employment or further study than other students, as is the case across the HE sector (see Annex A). Our analysis suggests this relates to additional barriers in developing and recognising their employability including lack of social capital, lack of knowledge of career/progression opportunities, lack of confidence and lower financial resources affecting their ability to undertake placements or relocate. Activities in IS6 are designed to reduce and where possible remove barriers for target groups of students and support them to develop employability skills.

Equality of Opportunity Risks

- **Primary:** 1. Skills and Knowledge, 7. Personal support, 12. Progression.
- **Additional:** 2. Information and guidance, 5. Choice of course and delivery; 6. Academic Support, 7. Mental health.

Target groups

- **Primary:** students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds,
- **Additional:** intersections especially with care experience, some types of disability, carers and specific subjects of study.

6.1: Increase placement participation

Evidence base

Take up of placement year is strongly associated at BU with better outcomes for attainment and for progression into high-skilled employment or further study. Analysis using the OfS toolkit for evaluation of Financial Support finds that at BU students who take a placement year are on average 10% more likely to achieve a 1st or Upper Second-Class award and 21% more likely to progress into high-skilled employment or further study. However, take-up of placement is uneven, varying by subject of study but also by income, socioeconomic status, and to a lesser extent by ethnicity. The average household income of students taking a placement year is consistently approximately 11% higher than that of students who do not. Removing barriers and increasing placement participation by students in target groups is a powerful way to improve progression (and attainment) outcomes for those students.

Specific activities

Increase rates of placement participation for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds groups and other priority groups to be determined through data analysis (Activity 4). Specific activities to increase placement participation to include:

- Review of and adjustments to the university's placement model to make it more flexible in terms of both the type of activity which can count towards placement requirements and the timing/ways activity this can be completed
- Targeted employer engagement work to generate paid placements in areas that are currently lacking
- Introduce more intensive and earlier placement and wider employability support at Level 4
- Review and enhance our placement offer for neuro-diverse students
- Review of the Placement Opportunity Fund and other possible sources of funding to support placement participation including those linked to accommodation.

Intended Outcomes (evidenced in)

- Increased rate of placement participation in both long (sandwich) and short placements for identified priority groups.
- Consequently higher rates of high-skill employment for those groups (Graduate Outcomes Survey)
- Higher rates of graduates reporting that the skills gained at university have prepared them for their job (Graduate Outcomes Survey)
- Higher rates of satisfaction with BU placement support (NSS)
- Improved confidence and employability skills – both in terms of skills developed and ability to articulate those skills (internally measured)
- Improved knowledge and understanding of the workplace (internally measured).

6.2. Embedding Graduate Competencies

Rationale: to ensure that students from our identified target groups are developing and are able to understand and articulate the skills, abilities, mindsets and attitudes required for the world of work. We will do this by:

- embedding the university's new Graduate Competencies into core activity which will enable target groups to benefit (as opposed to optional activity which is more difficult to access/tends to have lower take-up among target groups); embedding could take the form of integration with assessment, learning outcomes, programme validation, programme/unit specs, ILOs, reflective practice, personal tutoring
- mapping competencies against academic delivery, with a particular focus on programmes with less defined career paths and diverse graduate employment destinations (links to IS4)
- targeted promotion/embedding of the university's Graduate Skills Programme in programme areas with identified lower graduate outcomes for target groups
- developing workshops or other support with a focus on understanding and articulation of the way students' experiences have developed their attributes and employability e.g. skills gained from managing/living with disabilities or health conditions or overcoming barriers of different kinds.

6.3 Targeted careers support

Rationale: to deliver tailored and targeted careers support to identified target groups. This may include:

- Mentorship with both mentors/mentees from identified target groups
- Explore the option of forming partnerships with specialist recruitment agencies and external organisations who support target groups.
- Evaluate existing UpReach partnership: if successful, continue or consider which elements can be delivered in-house
- Using internal data – supplemented by further research as per Activity 6.4) to understand the specific challenges for each target group by department/course
- Improving and widening our enterprise and entrepreneurship support, addressing barriers to entry such as lack of funding and networks

Key Literature References (All intervention strategies)

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Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Bournemouth University

Provider UKPRN: 10000824

Summary of 2025-26 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflation statement:

We will not raise fees annually for new entrants

Table 3b - Full-time course fee levels for 2025-26 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	Level 4-6 and L7 of Integrated Masters programmes	N/A	9250
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0	Programmes exempt from fee cap reduction	N/A	9250
Foundation year/Year 0	Programmes not exempt from fee cap reduction (classroom based)	N/A	5760
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	1850
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 3b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2025-26

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	Wiltshire College and University Centre	10007527	9250
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	Wiltshire College and University Centre - Programmes exempt from fee cap reduction	10007527	9250
Foundation year/Year 0	Wiltshire College and University Centre - Programmes not exempt from fee cap reduction (classroom based)	10007527	5760
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 4b - Part-time course fee levels for 2025-26 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	4625
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	Integrated masters Level 7	N/A	4625

Table 4b - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2025-26

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Bournemouth University

Provider UKPRN: 1000824

Investment summary

A provider is expected to submit information about its forecasted investment to achieve the objectives of its access and participation plan in respect of the following areas: access, financial support and research and evaluation. Note that this does not necessarily represent the total amount spent by a provider in these areas. Table 6b provides a summary of the forecasted investment, across the four academic years covered by the plan, and Table 6d gives a more detailed breakdown.

Notes about the data:

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Yellow shading indicates data that was calculated rather than input directly by the provider.

In Table 6d (under 'Breakdown'):

"Total access investment funded from HFI" refers to income from charging fees above the basic fee limit.

"Total access investment from other funding (as specified)" refers to other funding, including OIS funding (but excluding Uni Connect), other public funding and funding from other sources such as philanthropic giving and private sector sources and/or partners.

Table 6b - Investment summary

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£866,000	£890,000	£916,000	£941,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£3,227,000	£3,256,000	£3,258,000	£3,258,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£415,000	£427,000	£440,000	£453,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£547,000	£563,000	£580,000	£597,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£269,000	£277,000	£286,000	£294,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment (£)	£866,000	£890,000	£916,000	£941,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment (as % of HFI)	2.7%	2.7%	2.8%	2.8%
Access activity investment	Total access investment funded from HFI (£)	£866,000	£890,000	£916,000	£941,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£2,527,000	£2,556,000	£2,558,000	£2,558,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£700,000	£700,000	£700,000	£700,000
Financial support investment	Total financial support investment (£)	£3,227,000	£3,256,000	£3,258,000	£3,258,000
Financial support investment	Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)	10.0%	10.0%	9.8%	9.6%
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£415,000	£427,000	£440,000	£453,000
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Bournemouth University

Provider UKPRN: 10000824

Targets

Table 5b: Access and/or raising attainment targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
To increase the proportion of new entrants from low socioeconomic backgrounds.	PTA_1	Access	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations (IMD))	IMD quintile 1 and 2	N/A	To increase the proportion of new entrants from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 to 26% over the lifetime of the plan, and to 31.4% matching the IMD profile of Bournemouth Poole and Christchurch council by 2040.	No	The access and participation dashboard	2022-23	Percentage	22.5	23.9	24.6	25.3	26
To increase the proportion of new entrants who have been eligible for Free School Meals.	PTA_2	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		To increase the proportion of new entrants who have been eligible for free school meals to 15.4% in 2028-29, halving the gap to the sector by the end of the plan period.	No	The access and participation dashboard	2022-23	Percentage	12.7	13.6	14.1	14.5	15.0
	PTA_3														
	PTA_4														
	PTA_5														
	PTA_6														
	PTA_7														
	PTA_8														
	PTA_9														
	PTA_10														
	PTA_11														
	PTA_12														

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
To eliminate the gap in continuation for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds	PTS_1	Continuation	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations (IMD))	IMD quintile 1 and 2	IMD quintile 3, 4 and 5	To eliminate the small but resilient gap in continuation rates for students from IMD quintiles 1 & 2 compared to those from quintiles 3-5 during the lifetime of the plan. This target uses 4 year aggregate data. Baseline years entrants in 2018-19 to 2021-22. Due to larger gaps for entrants in 2020-21 and 2021-22, annual milestones increase initially before falling.	No	The access and participation dashboard		Percentage points	2.6	3	2.6	2	1.4
To eliminate the gap in continuation for Black students.	PTS_2	Continuation	Ethnicity	Black	White	To eliminate the small but volatile gap in continuation rates for black students compared to white students during the lifetime of the plan. This target uses 4 year aggregate data, with base line years entrants in 2018-19 to 2021-22. Due to a 10.4 percentage point gap for entrants in 2020-21, annual milestones are static initially before falling.	No	The access and participation dashboard		Percentage points	3.2	3.2	1.1	1.9	1.3

