



University of  
Chester

# ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN

2024-25 to 2027-28





The University of Chester is a broad-based institution of more than 14,000 students, with provision delivered across nine distinctive sites in Chester, Warrington, Shrewsbury and Birkenhead. Since 1839 we have been transforming lives through education. Our foundational values emphasise the importance we place on developing the knowledge and skills of each of our students, so that they are empowered to shape their own education and to make full contributions within their careers and communities beyond graduation.

These values are encapsulated in our institutional ***Citizen Student Strategy*** and associated Student Engagement Plan, which set out our intentions to work in partnership with our students to build a strong sense of agency and belonging; to identify and remove barriers so that students from all backgrounds are supported to succeed; and to provide our students with the skills, experience and connections to contribute to a dynamic University community.



## Access and participation plan 2024-25 to 2027-28

### 1. Introduction and strategic aim

- 1.1. The University of Chester is a broad-based institution of more than 14,000 students, with provision delivered across nine distinctive sites in Chester, Warrington, Shrewsbury and Birkenhead. Since 1839 we have been transforming lives through education. Our foundational values emphasise the importance we place on developing the knowledge and skills of each of our students, so that they are empowered to shape their own education and to make full contributions within their careers and communities beyond graduation. These values are encapsulated in our institutional **Citizen Student Strategy** and associated **Student Engagement Plan**, which set out our intentions to work in partnership with our students to build a strong sense of agency and belonging; to identify and remove barriers so that students from all backgrounds are supported to succeed; and to provide our students with the skills, experience and connections to contribute to a dynamic University community<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.2. Our overarching aim with respect to equality of opportunity is to foster a diverse and inclusive student community, whereby students from all identities, ethnicities, faith and backgrounds, both disabled and non-disabled, are supported to access and participate fully in University life. We aim to ensure that inclusive and intersectional approaches are balanced with targeted support for individuals, recognising that some students face additional barriers to engagement. We want the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of our students to enrich our whole University community. We aim to work collaboratively with our students to understand their needs and lived experiences, to build their social capital, and to design and deliver support across all of our University sites and centres.

### 2. Risks to equality of opportunity

- 2.1. Following the Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory notice 1, we set out to conduct a full assessment of our performance to identify the most pressing or significant indications of risk to equality of opportunity for our own students, for which, we will seek to address through our commitments outlined in this plan<sup>2</sup>. This included:
  - i. Using a number of datasets to identify the potential indications of risks, namely national datasets from the Office for Students (OfS) access and participation data dashboards<sup>3</sup>, and where data was unavailable on the access and participation data dashboards, we used our internal data.
  - ii. Disaggregating data for student groups as much as possible. For example, data by ethnicity is being displayed by students from the Asian ethnic groups, black ethnic groups, mixed ethnic groups, any other ethnic group and white ethnic groups, as well as aggregating the data by the ethnic minority groups (excluding the white ethnic groups)<sup>4</sup>.
  - iii. Exploring students with multiple diverse characteristics meaning they have more than one characteristic which may not experience equality of opportunity.
  - iv. Looking at an aggregation of years or followed the suppression rules outlined by the OfS<sup>5</sup> where data has small populations (for example part-time and degree apprenticeship students).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/citizen-student-strategy>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/>

<sup>3</sup> [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/)

<sup>4</sup> [Writing about ethnicity - GOV.UK \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/writing-about-ethnicity)

<sup>5</sup> For full data criteria and suppression rules, please visit: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/about-the-data-dashboard/>



- 2.2. You can find a summary of our assessment of performance in this plan in [Annex A: Assessment of performance](#). We have complied with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the presentation of our data<sup>6</sup>.
- 2.3. Through this exercise we have identified a number of indications of risks. These are:
- i. Relatively low proportions of full-time male undergraduate students from the most deprived areas and an on-course continuation gap between these students and their male peers from the least deprived areas.
  - ii. An on-course completion and awarding gap between full-time undergraduate students from the most deprived areas and those from the least deprived areas.
  - iii. An on-course continuation, completion and awarding gap between students who enter our university with non-A Level and vocational qualifications and all other full-time undergraduate students.
  - iv. An on-course completion and awarding gap between students who were eligible for free school meals and all other full-time undergraduate students.
  - v. An on-course awarding gap between students from the ethnic minority groups (excluding the white ethnic groups) and the white ethnic group full-time undergraduate students.
- 2.4. To understand how our indications of risks from our datasets link to potential risks to equality of opportunity, we have used the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)<sup>7</sup>. The EORR identifies 12 sector-wide risks that may affect certain student groups experiencing equality of opportunity to access and succeed in higher education. The EORR has been developed through an analysis of national datasets, relevant research papers, and a literature review.
- 2.5. Using the EORR, we have found the following risks may be impacting on our indications of risk:
- i. Our low proportion of male students from the most deprived areas may be related to five potential risks in the EORR: prior knowledge and skills; lack of information and guidance; perceptions of higher education; limited choice of course type and delivery mode; and the unknown ongoing impacts of coronavirus on prior academic results.
  - ii. Our students from the most deprived areas, particularly males, and those who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) who are experiencing less on-course success than their peers may be related to five potential risks in the EORR: insufficient academic support; insufficient personal support; mental health; cost pressures; and the unknown ongoing impacts of coronavirus on their university experience or success.
  - iii. Our students who enter our university with non-A Level and vocational qualifications or are from the ethnic minority groups (excluding the white ethnic groups) who are experiencing less on-course success than their peers may be related to three potential risks in the EORR: insufficient academic support; insufficient personal support; and the unknown ongoing impacts of coronavirus on their university experience or success.
  - iv. For all our indications of risks where certain student groups are experiencing less on-course success than their peers, this may also relate, indirectly, to three other potential risks in the EORR. The three potential risks may have had an impact on prior academic results before arriving in higher education: prior knowledge and skills; lack of information and guidance; perceptions of higher education.
- 2.6. We have considered the extent to which these risks may be contributing to our own indications of risks and have used this information to inform our intervention strategies – see the [Intervention strategies and expected outcomes](#) section for full details.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/>

### 3. Objectives

- 3.1. Our assessment of performance ([Annex A](#)) shows that, compared to their peers at the University of Chester, our data on accessing higher education (HE) and success outcomes are lower for certain groups of students.
- 3.2. We have identified a number of indications of risks, and we will address five of these across the student lifecycle by putting in place intervention strategies – see the [Intervention strategies and expected outcomes](#) section for full details. To commit to reducing these risks, we are setting the following ten objectives:
- i. **Indication of risk:** Relatively low proportion of full-time male undergraduate students from the most deprived areas, and an on-course continuation gap between these students and their female peers.
    - **Objective:** To increase the proportion of male undergraduate students from the most deprived areas.
    - **Objective:** To eliminate the continuation gap between males from the most deprived areas and their male peers from the least deprived areas by 2030.
  - ii. **Indication of risk:** An on-course continuation, completion and awarding gap between students who enter our university with non-A Level and vocational qualifications and all other full-time undergraduate students.
    - **Objective:** To eliminate the continuation gap between students who enter our university with non-A Level and vocational qualifications and all other students by 2030.
    - **Objective:** To reduce the completion gap by 50% between students who enter our university with non-A Level and vocational qualifications and all other students by 2028.
    - **Objective:** To eliminate the awarding gap between students who enter our university with non-A Level and vocational qualifications and all other students by 2030.
  - iii. **Indication of risk:** An on-course completion and awarding gap between full-time undergraduate students from the most deprived areas and students from the least deprived areas.
    - **Objective:** To reduce the completion gap by 50% between students from the most deprived areas and students from the least deprived areas by 2028.
    - **Objective:** To eliminate the awarding gap between students from the most deprived areas and students from the least deprived areas by 2030.
  - iv. **Indication of risk:** An on-course completion and awarding gap between students who were eligible for free school meals and all other full-time undergraduate students.
    - **Objective:** To reduce the completion gap by 50% between students who were eligible for free school meals and all other students by 2028.
    - **Objective:** To eliminate the awarding gap between students who were eligible for free school meals and all other students by 2030.
  - v. **Indication of risk:** An on-course awarding gap between the ethnic minority groups (excluding the white ethnic groups) and the white ethnic groups full-time undergraduate students.
    - **Objective:** To eliminate the awarding gap between the ethnic minority groups (excluding the white ethnic groups) and the white ethnic groups by 2030.

### 4. Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

- 4.1. To help us achieve our objectives and address our indications of risks across the student lifecycle, we are putting in place intervention strategies (IS) based on the extent to which the risks from the EORR may be contributing to our indications of risks. We have five intervention strategies, and these five

intervention strategies are referred to as IS1 to IS5 when an intervention overlaps/crosses over into another intervention.

## Intervention Strategy 1: Collaborative partnership with schools to raise academic results

**Intervention Strategy 1 objectives and targets:** This intervention strategy aims to raise academic results in schools and contribute, indirectly, towards increasing our population of male students from the most deprived areas (index of multiple deprivation quintiles 1 and 2) (target PTA\_1).

**Risk to equality of opportunity:** This intervention strategy addresses the risks that male students from the most deprived areas may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to **knowledge and skills; ongoing impacts of coronavirus.**

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention
Redesigned collaborative design and development of <b>primary and secondary schools' lesson and assessment content</b> , including <b>pedagogy and teacher development</b> to raise academic results in targeted schools with low academic results and low progression to higher education within the Cheshire region.	Academic staffing of 1FTE and general travel expenses	Improved understanding of subject; decreased anxiety; increased confidence and self-efficacy; improved curriculum content and classroom practices for teachers; improved academic results or progression at primary and GCSE levels.	IS2, IS4, IS5
New <b>Crewe Scholars</b> – co-funded collaborative pilot project with Higher Horizons, Keele University and Staffordshire University to <b>raise English and Maths GCSE results</b> for schools within the Crewe area by providing <b>study skills, revision skills</b> and <b>subject specific revision sessions</b> .	Outreach and academic staffing of 0.2FTE and general expenses	Increased academic self-efficacy; increased knowledge of study strategies and confidence in their use; increased confidence in ability to achieve grades to progress.	IS2, IS4, IS5
Redesigned <b>subject specific A Level raising academic results</b> – more subject specific revision sessions for A Level students delivered at University of Chester and online.	Outreach and academic staffing of 0.8FTE and general travel expenses for pupils	Improved understanding of subject; decreased anxiety; increased confidence and self-efficacy.	IS2, IS4, IS5
New <b>Creative and Performing Arts Saturday School</b> – 10-week programme for pre-16 school pupils (free for those eligible for free school meals) covering aspects of arts, dance, drama, and music to inspire and gain skills.	Paid student positions and general project expenses	Increased confidence and self-efficacy, increased engagement and motivation to learn.	IS2, IS3
Total cost of activities per year	£160,000 (£640,000 over 4-year plan)		
<b>Evidence base and rationale:</b> We have conducted a literature review on which we have based the design of our interventions; interventions should be designed to encourage educational engagement which raises academic results and begin as early as possible in a student's education cycle. Please refer to <a href="#">Annex B on page 44</a> for full rationale.			

**Evaluation:** We intend to evaluate each activity within this intervention strategy separately to Type 2 standards of evidence to establish whether or not the interventions lead to the intended outcomes. We will start the strategy in the 2023/24 academic year, except for the Higher Horizon (HiHo) activity which will start in 2024/25. We will disseminate interim findings annually through networks such as Northwest Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Group, National Education Opportunities Network (NEON)<sup>8</sup>, etc. We will also aim to publish our findings on our website and to Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO)<sup>9</sup>. Note: HiHo collaborative activity will be evaluated and published by our external HiHo partners. Due to the age groups of participants for some of these interventions, tracking how these interventions contribute to our overall objective may not be possible. More detailed information on how we will evaluate each activity can be found in the table below.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Collaborative design and development of lesson and assessment content, including teacher development	Improved understanding of subject; decreased anxiety; increased confidence and self-efficacy; improved curriculum content and classroom practices for teachers; improved academic results or progression at primary and GCSE levels.	Pre and post intervention pupil survey and teacher observation survey (Type 2). Comparison of pre and post intervention subject outcomes (Type 2)	Interim findings by 2026 (networks and TASO). Full findings by 2028 for website, networks and TASO.
Subject specific A Level raising academic results	Improved understanding of subject; decreased anxiety; increased confidence and self-efficacy	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2026 (networks). Full findings by 2027 for website and networks.
Creative and Performing Arts Saturday School	Increased confidence and self-efficacy, increased engagement and motivation to learn.	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2026 (networks). Full findings by 2028 for website and networks.

## Intervention Strategy 2: Widening participation in higher education

**Intervention Strategy 2 objectives and targets:** This intervention strategy will contribute towards widening participation in higher education and increase our population of male students from the most deprived areas (index of multiple deprivation quintiles 1 and 2) (target PTA\_1).

**Risk to equality of opportunity:** This intervention strategy addresses the risks that male students from the most deprived areas may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to **knowledge and skills; information and guidance; perception of higher education (HE); limited choice of course type and delivery mode.**

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention
Redesigned <b>Pathfinder</b> – sustained programme of interventions for <b>KS3, KS4 and KS5 pupils from low attaining and low progression to higher education</b> schools and colleges within Chester West and Chester, providing activities specific to their age category and include	Outreach of 2FTE and general expenses	Broaden aspirations; reduce barriers to accessing and progressing to HE; increased confidence and self-efficacy; improved engagement and motivation to learn;	IS1, IS4, IS5

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://taso.org.uk/>

opportunities to extend learning to improve or enhance skills, knowledge, and well-being.		improved knowledge of future education and career pathways.	
Redesigned <b>Taste of University</b> – three-night residential event for school and college pupils <b>in years 10 and years 12 (or equivalent)</b> to have the opportunity to access and experience university to inspire, gain information and guidance, and improve their knowledge and understanding of higher education.	Outreach staffing of 1.5FTE and accommodation, catering, and other expenses	Broaden aspirations; increased knowledge of benefits of HE and academic life; reduce barriers to accessing and progressing to HE; increased confidence and independence; informed decision making.	IS1
New <b>Access to Higher Education: Nursing and Allied Health Professions</b> – collaborative activity between Wirral Met FE College and our University Centre Birkenhead (UCB) offering short courses and sustained taster days with activities related to health and wellbeing, social prescribing, and virtual reality and simulation experiences in our simulation suite <sup>10</sup> .	Outreach and academic staffing hours of 0.2FTE	Increased knowledge of subject area; reduce barriers to accessing and progressing to HE; increased confidence and self-efficacy; improved knowledge of future education and career pathways.	IS1
Redesigned <b>Degree Apprenticeship awareness raising and guidance</b> to pupils and teachers via collaborative outreach work; school and college visits as well as external events.	External funding from Office for Students (OfS)	Broaden aspirations, increased knowledge of benefits of HE and academic life; reduce barriers to accessing and progressing to HE; improved knowledge of future education and career pathways.	IS1
Total cost of activities per year		£210,000 (£840,000 over 4-year plan)	
<b>Evidence base and rationale:</b> We conducted a literature review on which we have based the design of our interventions; outreach activities found to have the most impact focus on developing pupils’ ability to make informed decisions about their futures by working to increase knowledge and remove barriers. Please refer to <a href="#">Annex B on page 45</a> for full rationale.			
<b>Evaluation:</b> We intend to evaluate each activity within this intervention strategy separately to Type 2 standards of evidence to establish whether or not the interventions lead to the intended outcomes. For consenting participants, we will track how these interventions contribute to our overall objective via the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) <sup>11</sup> . We will start the strategy in the 2023/24 academic year and will disseminate interim findings annually through networks such as Northwest Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Group and NEON. We will also aim to publish our findings on our website and to TASO. More detailed information on how we will evaluate each activity can be found in the table below.			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Method(s) of evaluation</b>	<b>Summary of publication plan</b>
Pathfinder	Broaden aspirations, reduce barriers to accessing and progressing to HE; increased	Pre and post intervention pupil survey and teacher	Interim findings by 2026 (networks and TASO). Full findings

<sup>10</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/philip-barker-centre-creative-learning/projects/nursing-simulation>

<sup>11</sup> <https://heat.ac.uk/>



	confidence and self-efficacy; improved engagement and motivation to learn; improved knowledge of future education and career pathways.	observation survey (Type 2).	by 2027 for website, networks and TASO.
Taste of University	Broaden aspirations, increased knowledge of benefits of HE and academic life; reduce barriers to accessing and progressing to HE; increased confidence and independence; informed decision making.	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2025 (networks and TASO). Full findings by 2026 for website, networks and TASO.
Access to Higher Education: Nursing and Allied Health Professions	Increased knowledge of subject area; reduce barriers to accessing and progressing to HE; increased confidence and self-efficacy; improved knowledge of future education and career pathways.	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2027 (networks). Full findings by 2028 for website and networks.
Degree Apprenticeship awareness raising outreach	Broaden aspirations, increased knowledge of benefits of HE and academic life; reduce barriers to accessing and progressing to HE; improved knowledge of future education and career pathways.	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2025 (networks). Full findings by 2026 for website and networks.

### Intervention Strategy 3: Providing a sense of belonging, enabling connections and supporting cost pressures

**Intervention Strategy 3 objectives and targets:** This intervention strategy aims to provide students with a sense of belonging and community, enable connections and financially support students to continue and complete their studies. It will contribute towards our target of reducing the continuation gap of male students from the most deprived areas (index of multiple deprivation quintiles 1 and 2) (Target PTS\_1). It may also contribute towards reducing the completion gap of the most deprived students (index of multiple deprivation quintile 1) and students who received free school meals (Targets PTS\_3 and PTS\_5).

**Risk to equality of opportunity:** This intervention strategy addresses the risks that the student groups named above may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to **insufficient academic support; insufficient personal support; mental health; cost pressures.**

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention
New <b>Online Mentoring System</b> to match suitable mentors with mentees, increase engagement and communication, build and maintain positive mentoring relationships prior to arrival, during students' time at university and beyond, and report effectively on the success of the mentoring programme.	Staffing of 1FTE, platform licence costs and other expenses	Increased sense of belonging and community; increased confidence; reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation; improved transition; increased continuation rates.	IS4
New <b>Social Capital building events and embedded curricula</b>	Professional service (support) and	Increased confidence and resilience; improved	IS4, IS5

<b>activity</b> , plus a platform of resources to easily access content, podcasts, and vlogs on how to build social capital, including options to create connections with peers, virtually and face to face.		academic staffing hours of 0.8FTE and other expenses	emotional intelligence; increase sense of belonging and community; improved knowledge and skills; increased continuation, completion, awarding, and progression rates.
New <b>funding to enable subject-related connections</b> , for example, conference costs, memberships to societies and accredited networks, etc.		Available funds for students and staff administration time	Remove financial barriers; develop networks and relationships.
Redesigned Your Money team of additional <b>Student Money Advisors</b> providing one-to-one appointments, as well as a suite of online resources and activities so students receive budgeting advice and develop positive money management skills.		Staffing of 3FTE and other expenses	Improved money management skills; remove financial barriers; reduced anxiety; increased continuation and completion rates. IS4
Redesigned <b>Student Support Fund – increased funding</b> , using <b>actual household bills</b> to calculate expenditure for major household bills and awarding students <b>100% of need</b> (i.e., the deficit between income and expenditure) or 100% of capped amount of £2,500 per student, per year (whichever is the maximum).		Available funds for students and administration time of Student Money Advisors	Remove financial barriers; reduced anxiety; increased continuation and completion rates. IS4
Total cost of activities per year		£840,000 (£3,380,000 over 4-year plan)	
<b>Evidence base and rationale:</b> We conducted a literature review on which we have based the design of our interventions; students’ sense of belonging, ability to build networks, improve skills, increased confidence and resilience is linked to increased engagement and motivation improving continuation and completion rates. Please refer to <a href="#">Annex B on page 45-46</a> for full rationale.			
<b>Evaluation:</b> Where possible, we intend to evaluate each activity within this intervention strategy separately to Type 2 standards of evidence to establish whether or not the interventions lead to the intended outcomes. We will also track how these interventions contribute to our overall objectives. We will start the strategy in the 2023/24 academic year, with a full team of Student Money Advisors in position by 2024/25 and we will disseminate interim findings annually through networks such as Northwest Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Group, TASO and Purpose Universities Coalition <sup>12</sup> . We will also aim to publish our findings on our website. More detailed information on how we will evaluate each activity can be found in the table below.			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Method(s) of evaluation</b>	<b>Summary of publication plan</b>
Online Peer Mentoring Programme	Increased sense of belonging; increased confidence; reduced feelings of loneliness and	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2). Comparison of participant outcomes	Interim findings by 2026 (networks. Full findings by 2027 for

<sup>12</sup> <https://purposeuniversitiescoalition.org/>

	isolation; improved transition; increased continuation rates.	against students who do not participate (Type 2).	website, networks and TASO.
Social Capital building events and embedded curricula activity	Increased confidence and resilience; improved emotional intelligence; increase sense of belonging and community; improved knowledge and skills; increased continuation, completion, awarding, and progression rates.	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2). Comparison of participant outcomes against students who do not participate (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2025 (networks). Full findings by 2026 for website and networks.
Funding to enable subject-related connections	Remove financial barriers; develop networks and relationships.	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2).	Full findings by 2026 for website and networks.
Student Money Advisors	Improved money management skills; remove financial barriers; reduced anxiety; increased continuation and completion rates.	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2026 (networks). Full findings by 2028 for website and networks.
Student Support Fund	Remove financial barriers; reduced anxiety; increased continuation and completion rates.	Post intervention survey. Comparison of participant outcomes against students who do not participate (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2026 (networks). Full findings by 2028 for website and networks.

#### Intervention Strategy 4: Enabling academic skills and providing personalised support

**Intervention Strategy 4 objectives and targets:** This intervention strategy supports students' success by enabling academic skills and providing personalised support. It will contribute towards our targets of reducing the continuation and completion gap of students who enter with non-A Level and vocational qualifications (targets PTS\_2 and PTS\_5). It will also contribute towards eliminating the awarding gap of students who enter with non-A Level and vocational qualifications (target PTS\_9).

It may also contribute towards our remaining on-course targets as these student groups are also more likely to enter our university with non-A Level and vocational qualifications:

- reducing the continuation gap of male students from the most deprived areas (index of multiple deprivation quintiles 1 and 2) (target PTS\_1)
- reducing the completion gap and eliminating the awarding gap of the most deprived students (index of multiple deprivation quintile 1) (targets PTS\_3 and PTS\_6)
- reducing the completion gap and eliminating the awarding gap of students who received free school meals (targets PTS\_4 and PTS\_8)
- eliminating the ethnic minority groups (excluding white ethnic groups) awarding gap (target PTS\_7)

**Risk to equality of opportunity:** This intervention strategy addresses the risks that students who enter with non-A Level and vocational qualifications may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to **insufficient academic support; insufficient personalised support; ongoing impacts of coronavirus.**

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention
New <b>transition / success programme</b> for non-A Level and vocational qualification students providing pre-induction support, followed by ongoing tailored support throughout their studies.	Paid student positions and academic skills/outreach staffing of 2FTE	Improved academic literacy skills; improved study skills; reduced anxiety; increased confidence and self-efficacy; improved continuation and completion rates;	IS3, IS5



		improved module grades and degree awarding rates.	
Redesigned <b>Enabling Academic Skills within the curriculum</b> by ensuring courses are designed to include appropriate academic literacy skills, including maths and statistics, being delivered at the necessary point in the student's life cycle. Plus, new <b>Academic Skills support software</b> that provides similarity checks and assists students with academic writing conduct.	Professional service (support) and academic staffing hours of 3FTE and software subscription costs	Improved academic literacy skills; improved maths and statistic skills; improved continuation and completion rates; improved module grades and degree awarding rates.	IS5
New Academic Department-led <b>mid-term reviews (MTRs)</b> – working with a range of real time data sources, at key points in the student's life cycle, to initiate interventions and support with academic progress or engagement concerns from our network of <b>personal academic tutors (PATs)</b> .	Professional service (support) and academic staffing hours of 1FTE	Reduced anxiety; increased confidence and self-efficacy; improved continuation and completion rates.	IS3
New <b>online training modules, resources and materials</b> for teaching, admissions and support staff on the different experiences of students with non-A Level and vocational qualifications, including all other student groups who may not experience equality of opportunity.	Professional service (support) staffing of 0.2FTE	Improved knowledge of students with non-A Level and vocational qualifications; increased confidence in supporting students with non-A Level and vocational qualifications.	IS3, IS5
A <b>whole provider community-led approach</b> through the new <b>Strategic Innovation Forum (SIF)</b> engaging staff to review and innovate practice to improve student outcomes, student wellbeing and staff wellbeing, for example 'better assessment' (design and pedagogy, processes and administration, stakeholder experience).	Professional service (support) and academic staffing hours of 5.5FTE and other expenses	Improved continuation and completion rates; improved module grades and degree awarding rates.	IS5
Total cost of activities per year	£700,000 (£2,800,000 over 4-year plan)		
<p><b>Evidence base and rationale:</b> We conducted a literature review on which we have based the design of our interventions; research highlights the complex relationship between prior qualifications and its impact on continuation through university and its impact on being awarded a first or upper second-class degree. Please refer to <a href="#">Annex B on page 47</a> for full rationale.</p> <p><b>Evaluation:</b> Where possible, we intend to evaluate each activity within this intervention strategy separately to Type 2 standards of evidence to establish whether or not the interventions lead to the intended outcomes. We will also track how these interventions contribute to our overall objectives. We will start the strategy in the 2023/24 academic year, with the transition/success programme starting in 2024/25, and will</p>			

disseminate interim findings annually through networks. Note: the online training modules, resources and materials will be evaluated for internal use for the Strategic Innovation Forum (SIF). We will also aim to publish our findings on our website and to TASO where possible. More detailed information on how we will evaluate each activity can be found in the table below.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Transition / success programme	Improved academic literacy skills; improved study skills; reduced anxiety; increased confidence and self-efficacy; improved continuation and completion rates; improved module grades and degree awarding rates.	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2). Comparison of participant outcomes against students who do not participate (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2026 (networks). Full findings by 2027 for website, networks and TASO.
Enabling Academic Skills within the curriculum	Improved academic literacy skills; improved maths and statistic skills; improved continuation and completion rates; improved module grades and degree awarding rates.	Pre and post intervention survey (Type 2). Pre and post comparison of programme outcomes (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2027 (networks). Full findings by 2028 for website and networks.
Academic Department-led mid-term reviews (MTRs)	Reduced anxiety; increased confidence and self-efficacy; improved continuation and completion rates.	Post intervention qualitative measure (case studies). Pre and post comparison of programme outcomes (Type 2).	Full findings by 2027 for website and networks.
Strategic Innovation Forum (SIF)	Improved continuation and completion rates; improved module grades and degree awarding rates.	Post intervention qualitative measure (case studies). Pre and post comparison of programme outcomes (Type 2).	Full findings by 2028 for website and networks.

### Intervention Strategy 5: Enhance and deliver inclusive and flexible, digitally-enhanced high quality courses

**Intervention Strategy 5 objectives and targets:** This intervention strategy will enhance the quality of our provision to deliver high quality, inclusive and skills-based courses and will contribute towards all our on-course completion and awarding targets of:

- reducing the completion gap and eliminating the awarding gap of the most deprived students (index of multiple deprivation quintile 1) (targets PTS\_3 and PTS\_6)
- reducing the completion gap and eliminating the awarding gap of students who received free school meals (targets PTS\_4 and PTS\_8)
- reducing the completion gap and eliminating the awarding gap of students who enter with non-A Level and vocational qualifications (Targets PTS\_5 and PTS\_9)
- eliminating the ethnic minority groups (excluding white ethnic groups) awarding gap (target PTS\_7)

**Risk to equality of opportunity:** This intervention strategy addresses the risks that the student groups named above may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to **insufficient academic support; insufficient personal support; ongoing impacts of coronavirus**. This intervention strategy also addresses the risk that these student groups may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to **progression from higher education**.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention
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<p><b>IDEAS Model</b> – an inclusive curriculum model and design tool developed by Oxford Brookes University <b>to support programme teams with inclusive, digitally enabled curriculum development</b><sup>13</sup>. We are working in collaboration with Oxford Brookes to embed the five elements of IDEAS into what and how we teach. The five key elements of the IDEAS Model have been outlined on the Oxford Brookes website as:</p>	<p>Paid student positions, professional service (support) and academic staffing hours of 5FTE</p>	<p>Improved accessibility and inclusivity of the curriculum; reduced inequality; enhanced curricula; improved continuation and completion rates; improved module grades and awarding rates.</p>	<p>IS3, IS4</p>
<p><b>I = Inclusive learning</b> Inclusive learning is the design and delivery of teaching, learning and assessment that celebrates diversity and enabling students to achieve their full potential by drawing on the strengths afforded by their individual backgrounds and experiences.</p>		<p>Increased sense of belonging; improved sense of inclusion and diversified representation; improved engagement and motivation to learn.</p>	<p>IS3, IS4</p>
<p><b>D = Digital inclusion</b> A digitally inclusive learning experience is designed to support students to develop the digital skills they need to study and work in an evolving digital world.</p>		<p>Increased confidence in digital skills and abilities; reduced barriers caused by digital poverty, specific disabilities, or impairments.</p>	<p>IS3, IS4</p>
<p><b>E = Employability learning</b> Employability learning is the systematic embedding within the curriculum of the skills, attributes and achievements that make graduates more likely to be successful in the graduate destination they aspire to.</p>		<p>Increased employability skills; increased confidence; improved networks and connections; improved preparedness for transition from education to work.</p>	<p>IS3, IS4</p>
<p><b>A = Assessment for, as and of learning</b> All assessment supports student learning and success through authentic formative and summative assessment tasks that are rich in formal and informal feedback.</p>		<p>Improved engagement and motivation to learn; improved metacognitive capabilities, such as confidence and self-efficacy.</p>	<p>IS3, IS4</p>
<p><b>S = Sustainability mindset</b> Through engagement with critical global issues in the curriculum, students develop the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes required to contribute to a more sustainable future.</p>		<p>Increased awareness and understanding of sustainability; improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills; increased self and social awareness; increased resilience.</p>	<p>IS3, IS4</p>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/staff/student-support/ideas-model/>



Total cost of activities per year £250,000  
(£1,000,000 over 4-year plan)

**Evidence base and rationale:** We conducted a literature review on which we based the design of this intervention; universities across the UK have an increasingly diverse student body and curricula and course content needs to reflect equality of opportunity for all. Please refer to [Annex B on page 48-49](#) for full rationale.

**Evaluation:** Where possible, we intend to evaluate each activity within this intervention strategy separately to Type 2 standards of evidence to establish whether or not the interventions lead to the intended outcomes. We will also track how these interventions contribute to our overall objectives. We will start the strategy in the 2023/24 academic year and will disseminate interim findings through networks. We will also aim to publish our findings on our website and to TASO. More detailed information on how we will evaluate each activity can be found in the table below.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
IDEAS Model	Improved accessibility and inclusivity of the curriculum; reduced inequality; enhanced curricula; improved continuation and completion rates; improved module grades and awarding rates.	Pre and post self-assessment tool (Type 2). Pre and post comparison of programme outcomes (Type 2).	Interim findings by 2027 (networks). Full findings by 2028 for website, networks and TASO.
<i>Inclusive learning</i>	<i>Increased sense of belonging; improved sense of inclusion and diversified representation; improved engagement and motivation to learn.</i>	<i>Pre and post intervention survey underdevelopment (Type 2).</i>	
<i>Digital inclusion</i>	<i>Increased confidence in digital skills and abilities; reduced barriers caused by digital poverty, specific disabilities, or impairments.</i>	<i>Pre and post intervention survey underdevelopment (Type 2).</i>	
<i>Employability learning</i>	<i>Increased employability skills; increased confidence; improved networks and connections; improved preparedness for transition from education to work.</i>	<i>Pre and post intervention survey underdevelopment (Type 2).</i>	
<i>Assessment for, as and of learning</i>	<i>Improved engagement and motivation to learn; improved metacognitive capabilities, such as confidence and self-efficacy.</i>	<i>Pre and post intervention survey underdevelopment (Type 2).</i>	
<i>Sustainability mindset</i>	<i>Increased awareness and understanding of sustainability; improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills; increased self and social awareness; improved resilience.</i>	<i>Pre and post intervention survey underdevelopment (Type 2).</i>	

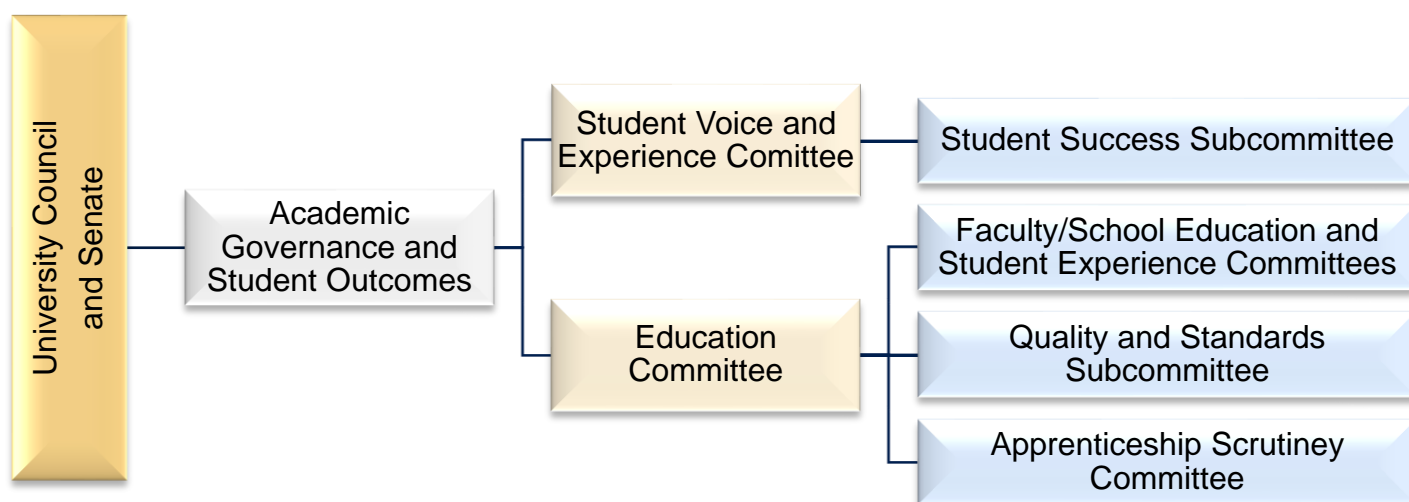
## 5. Whole provider approach

- 5.1. Delivery of our Access and Participation Plan sits within our Directorate of Access, Skills and Apprenticeships (DASA), which is overseen at an executive level by the Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer to ensure close alignment with student access, success and progression activity across the University. The Access and Participation Team within DASA is responsible for coordinating delivery of our intervention strategies, monitoring data of our student groups and financial investments, and associated research and evaluation activities.
- 5.2. Within the University's academic governance structure, delivery of our Access and Participation Plan is overseen by the Student Success Subcommittee, chaired by the Director of DASA, and includes academic and professional representatives from across the University. This subcommittee reports to the Student Voice and Experience Committee (SVEC) and then onto Senate. The University Council is able to assure progress and delivery of our Access and Participation Plan from the regular reporting by the Access and Participation Team to its Academic Governance and Student Outcomes Committee (AGSOC), as well as by direct reporting from Senate and then onto Council (*see figure 1*)<sup>14</sup>. All these committees include student representation.
- 5.3. Our Access and Participation Plan is also integrated into the University's strategic planning framework; our overarching Citizen Student Strategy includes sub-strategies for **Education** and for **Student Engagement**, both of which refer to our Access and Participation Plan and support its delivery. Our annual strategic planning process for all faculties and professional services includes a requirement for all areas to review their student group data, to review progress against their relevant access and participation activities and to outline plans for future access and participation project delivery.
- 5.4. Within the University's quality assurance and enhancement structures, the Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement (CME) process ensures that all taught programmes are subject to annual review. The CME process provides a range of data to support an evidence-based approach, including a range of data by student groups at programme and subject level. Programme reports arising from this process outline action plans to address any risks to equality of opportunity in their data which are considered at the relevant Faculty/School Education and Student Experience Committees. The University's Quality and Standards Subcommittee then exercises institutional oversight of the CME process, reporting onto our Education Committee and again, onto Senate. Faculty leaders then ensure that recommendations and feedback from this quality enhancement work is fed into faculty annual strategic plans. Again, all these committees include student representation.
- 5.5. Through these management and governance mechanisms, the University is able to ensure a whole institution approach to access and participation development and delivery.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/about-university/university-council>

Figure 1: Access and participation within University of Chester's academic governance structure



- 5.6. The Chester Students' Union (CSU) also play a role in our annual strategic planning process in addition to regular operational and planning meetings between University senior staff, the Students' Union Chief Executive, and elected student officers<sup>15</sup>. The University has encouraged and supported the CSU to establish a **Student Council** to ensure diverse student representation and a strong student voice<sup>16</sup>: the Student Council was consulted and provided valuable input into the development of this Access and Participation Plan and the associated student submission – see the [Student Consultation](#) section of this plan for more details.

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

- 5.7. The University is committed to its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010<sup>17</sup> and Public Sector Equality Duty 2012<sup>18</sup>. **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)** is a key part of our Citizen Student Strategy, and the University produces an annual Equality and Diversity report that provides assurance on the due regard paid to equality of opportunity across all relevant institutional activities<sup>19</sup>. This report is scrutinised by the University Council and relevant Council committees. The report is reviewed by our Equality Forum which is chaired by a member of our Senior Executive Team (SET) and includes members of our Access and Participation Team as well as wider staff representatives, students, and representation from CSU. Any equality issues arising from our students and academic faculties and professional service departments can be raised and discussed at the Equality Forum. The Equality Forum also considers our Access and Participation Plan along with the University's Equality Act objectives.
- 5.8. Our mandatory training framework for staff includes training on equality, diversity and inclusion. All staff must complete our **Equality and Diversity training** covering all aspects of the Equality Act 2010 every 3 years, and all Chairs of Recruitment and Selection panels must complete relevant recruitment and selection training focusing on equality and diversity issues. The **Managing Equality and Diversity training** enables managers to be mindful of all equality and diversity issues and analyse decisions etc. for equality impact.
- 5.9. Our recruitment and selection policy includes a compulsory equality and diversity interview question, along with a mandatory equality and diversity objective in all staff Performance and Development

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.chestersu.com/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.chestersu.com/student-voice/student-council>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-equality-duty>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/equality-and-diversity>



Planning (PDP) reviews. We also offer funded placements for staff to undertake the Advance HE's Aurora programme<sup>20</sup> and Advance HE's Diversifying Leadership programme<sup>21</sup>.

- 5.10. The University-wide **Race Equality Challenge Group**, led by our Vice Chancellor, was established to promote and coordinate positive change in relation to race equality and diversity across all sites, academic faculties and professional services of the University<sup>22</sup>. In addition, we recruit **Student Race Advocates** to make a positive change within the University<sup>23</sup>. The Race Advocates actively support and promote the needs of students from the ethnic minority groups through contributing to many aspects of the University's work, ensuring excellent service delivery across our University.
- 5.11. The University delivers an annual Diversity Festival, hosting events across all equality strands to increase awareness and actively promote equality, diversity and inclusion at Chester. We also host networks for staff and students aligned to Equality Act 2010 characteristics, including a Disabled Staff Group; Parents' Network; Carers' Network; Women's Networking Forum; Menopause Network; LGBTQ+ Staff group; Race, Equality and Cultural Heritage (REACH) Network; Men's Network. Our EDI calendar of events also aligns with national and local community initiatives and events, e.g., Black History Month, LGBT History Month, Chester Pride, International Women's Day, Literature festivals, Interfaith week, memorial days, etc.
- 5.12. We are also proud holders of the following Charters and Pledges:
- Disability Confident employer<sup>24</sup>
  - Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Working Forward Charter<sup>25</sup>
  - Bronze Athena Swan Charter mark<sup>26</sup>
  - The Navajo Merseyside and Cheshire LGBTIQA Charter Mark<sup>27</sup>
  - Care Leaver Covenant<sup>28</sup>
  - Stand Alone Covenant<sup>29</sup>
  - Wellbeing of Women Menopause Pledge<sup>30</sup>
  - Recovery Friendly University Pledge<sup>31</sup>

The University is working towards Race Equality Charter (REC) accreditation<sup>32</sup>, the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) Quality Mark<sup>33</sup>, and to sign the Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boaters' (GRTSB) into Higher Education Pledge<sup>34</sup> within the next 12 months.

## Learning and Teaching Strategy

- 5.13. A significant proportion of the outcomes outlined in the Citizen Student Strategy will be delivered through the **Citizen Student Education Plan**. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the existing operating models for universities to develop and deliver high-quality education were under increasing pressure and so our Citizen Student Education Plan aims to set targets, optimise staff development and move forward with the transformation that is required for post-covid higher education.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/programmes-events/aurora/about-aurora>

<sup>21</sup> <https://advance-he.ac.uk/programmes-events/development-programmes/new-to-leading/diversifying-leadership>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/news/university-chester%E2%80%99s-race-equality-challenge-group>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/news/introducing-our-student-race-advocates>

<sup>24</sup> <https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/blogs/welcome-working-forward>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter>

<sup>27</sup> <https://merseysideintrust.org/navajo-information/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://mycovenant.org.uk/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk/menopause-workplace-pledge/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.recoveryconnections.org.uk/recovery-friendly-pledge>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.nnecl.org/pages/195-nnecl-quality-mark>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/our-vision-for-change/education/>

- 5.14. Within the University's academic governance structure, delivery of our Citizen Student Education Plan is overseen by the Education Committee, chaired by our Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and includes student representation and academic and professional representatives from across the University. This committee reports onwards to the AGSOC as well as by direct reporting from Senate to Council – see *figure 1*.
- 5.15. Our whole provider approach to education is to deliver inclusive and flexible, digitally-enhanced courses. We want our students to feel part of a learning community where their unique perspectives and experiences demonstrably enrich the learning environments, and learning experiences of others, and are accommodated within assessment practices. We provide a blended approach of in-person teaching supported by a high-quality online experience where students have access to learning resources and guided activities to enrich and consolidate their learning as they develop mastery of their chosen subject. In these ways we endeavour to help all students discover their gifts and talents and grow to their full potential.
- 5.16. The three fundamental and guiding principles that underpin our approach:
- i. **Research informed teaching:** Programmes, modules and learning activities are informed by relevant research and practice. Students develop as researchers and engage in research. Learning design and delivery methods are informed by pedagogic research.
  - ii. **Social learning:** Social learning is learning that fosters a sense of community, engagement and belonging for students and staff. It encompasses all of the active learning strategies that are well known to contribute towards this sense of community such as active learning, project-based learning, problem-based learning, case-based learning, collaborative and team-based learning, students as partners and co-producers, and civic, public and employer engagement.
  - iii. **Authentic assessment:** Assesses students using tasks that mirror those they might undertake as professionals or citizens through choice of purpose, format, intended audience, resources, and collaborative or student-designed elements.
- 5.17. A range of education initiatives are being delivered by our Centre for Academic Innovation and Development (CAID) to achieve our fundamental and guiding principles. These are:
- i. Structured and deliberative, **evidence-informed programme and module design processes** for course teams to create new programmes of study and to update existing ones.
  - ii. **Threshold expectations** and support for staff to develop coherent and engaging online learning environments, resources, and activities.
  - iii. Academic development programmes aligned to the 2023 Professional Standards Framework that contribute to our sector-leading figures for teaching staff with a professional recognition award<sup>35</sup>.
  - iv. **TLInnovate** – a vibrant and thriving community of '**practice for practice**' exchange and the development of teaching and scholarship expertise for those that teach and support learners. This will be a series of events, conferences, and special interest groups on topics such as use of virtual reality (VR) / augmented reality (AR) in higher education learning.
  - v. A community-led approach through the new **Strategic Innovation Forum (SIF)** engaging staff to **review and innovate practice** to improve student outcomes, for example 'better assessment' (design and pedagogy, processes and administration, stakeholder experience) improving student outcomes, student wellbeing and staff wellbeing.
  - vi. Leadership of a whole-institutional response to the widespread availability of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools and the challenges and potential that provides for learning and teaching, assessment and the future employability of our graduates.
  - vii. Academic Department-led **mid-term reviews (MTRs)** working with a range of real time data sources, at key points in the student's life cycle, to initiate interventions and support with academic progress or engagement concerns from our network of personal academic tutors (PATs).

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/psf>

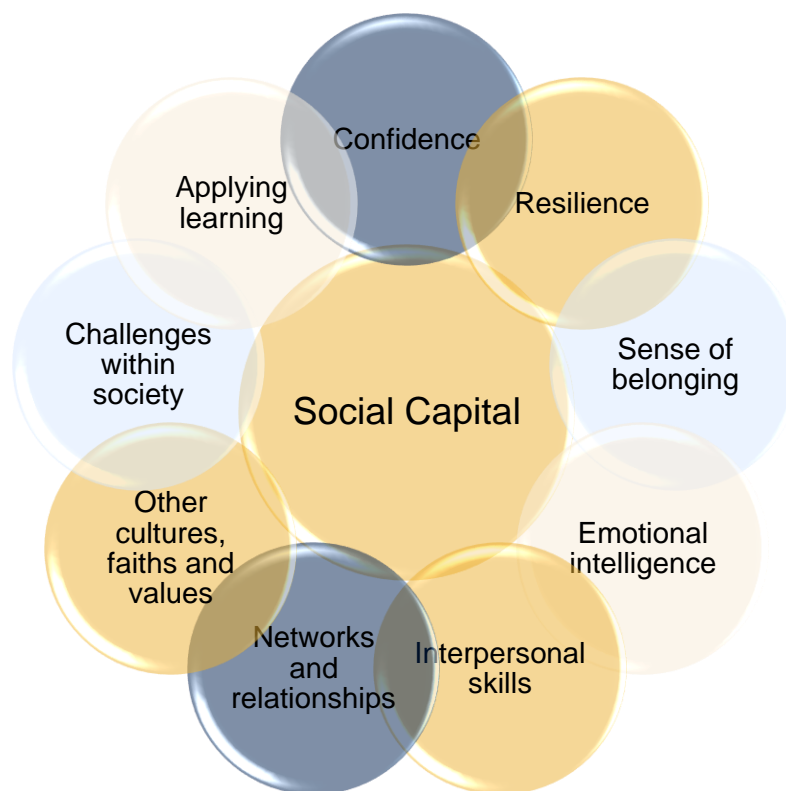
- viii. Across our faculties and programmes, piloting an established **inclusive curriculum framework** (from Oxford Brookes University) that encourages the adoption of key areas of digital, employability and sustainability skills within curriculum. We are assessing the value and potential for the **IDEAS model** to complement our existing course design processes and quality oversight infrastructure to deliver excellent outcomes for students.

5.18. Supporting our teaching and learning strategy we also aim to make opportunities available to every student and to our graduate community to help build their **social capital**. Social capital is a set of skills and attributes linked to improving students access to, success whilst at university, and progression beyond higher education – see *figure 2*. It also brings in important aspects of our **chaplaincy work** which enhances students social and cultural capital.

5.19. We provide extra-curricular activities, but we are also working to embed social capital skills within the curricula, so students can develop networks and relationships, confidence and other purposeful skills, learn about other cultures and challenges within society and link academic learning to the real world to progress to successful futures.

5.20. This whole provider approach to enhancing and delivering inclusive and flexible, digitally-enhanced, high-quality courses, including enhancing skills within the curriculum, is the foundation to our Access and Participation Plan, and can be seen in our [Intervention Strategy 4](#) and [Intervention Strategy 5](#). This approach will work to address risks to equality of opportunity by tackling **insufficient academic support**, **insufficient personal support** and the **ongoing impacts of coronavirus**.

*Figure 2: Social capital skills and attributes*



## Our approach to supporting students' mental health

- 5.21. Supporting students' mental health and wellbeing is a well-established institution-wide priority. The core elements of our approach are:
- i. The provision of **specialist mental health and wellbeing services for students**, as part of our Directorate of Student Services and through cognate services including the University Chaplaincy.
  - ii. A focus on **early and proactive intervention** and a **comprehensive student induction**, to encourage and support students to look after their own wellbeing right from the outset of their university experience.
  - iii. A programme of **mental health training and support for staff** to safeguarding their own wellbeing and enable them to support students effectively. This includes an ongoing commitment to Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) accredited training by Mental Health First Aid England<sup>36</sup> for all student-facing staff.

<sup>36</sup> <https://mhfaengland.org/>



- iv. A **Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) system** that provides all students with a named tutor to support with induction, progression and signposting to other services and support.
- v. The fostering of a **culture of positive mental health and wellbeing** for both students and staff, through championing at a senior level; through the establishment of an institutional Wellbeing Steering Group; through promotional initiatives and regular staff and student feedback surveys; and through community-building initiatives (e.g. sports and interest-based societies, faith and community events, community gardening projects) such as those delivered by our University Chaplaincy, our Student Volunteering Team, and CSU.

5.22. All students can access practical information, advice and guidance regarding mental health and wellbeing across all University campuses. This includes the provision of information during the induction process via the University's "PASS" website (the subject of a Whatuni Digital Innovation Award received in 2021<sup>37</sup>); the ability to make 1-to-1 appointments with Student Services specialist staff, including Counselling services; a 24-7 student assistance programme; access to online self-service resources including a regular Student Support podcast; and dedicated support for specific student groups including a Male Mental Health Group.

5.23. An annual Student Mental Health Report is considered by SVEC to ensure that service enhancements and interventions are evaluated and scrutinised. A recent internal student survey conducted in April 2023 and completed by over 2000 students, showed that **95% of respondents agree mental health and wellbeing is important to the University**. The survey also saw strong responses to questions regarding knowing where to go to get support and being comfortable in asking for support.

95% feel  
mental health  
and wellbeing  
is important to  
the university

5.24. The University signed up in 2022 to the **University Mental Health Charter Framework** developed by the charity Student Minds<sup>38</sup>. This allows us to self-assess our provision against a set of evidence-informed principles and themes; to access peer support and best practice; and to further our whole-University approach to mental health and wellbeing by working towards a Charter Award. This work is led by the University's Wellbeing Steering Group, co-chaired by the Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer and the Strategic Director of Human Resources.

82.8% feel  
comfortable  
approaching a  
member of staff  
about their  
mental health

5.25. The University's PAT system was subject to a review led by the Dean of Lifelong Learning during 2022, complemented by a Students' Union campaign to evaluate the system and its effectiveness from a student perspective. Several recommendations have been implemented following this review to further strengthen the support provided. This includes the provision of additional training and resources for PATs; the introduction of a **Personal Tutor Advisory Group** for sharing of good practice, the introduction of group PAT sessions as part of new students' induction; early allocation of PATs for disabled students; improvements to data recording to facilitate early follow-up with students who are struggling; and additional student communications to highlight the benefits and importance of PAT interaction.

5.26. This whole provider approach addresses the risks that certain student groups may not experience equality of opportunity in being able to continue or complete their studies, as well as achieve the best grades possible on their course, due to **mental health, insufficient academic support, and insufficient personal support**.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.whatuni.com/advice/news/student-choice-awards-winners-2021/104552/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://universitymentalhealthcharter.org.uk/>

## Our approach to the cost-of-living crisis and providing financial support

- 5.27. We recognise the impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on our student community, and we are already offering a substantial package of support<sup>39</sup>. Whilst the cost-of living crisis continues, we will continue to review our support and regularly communicate this to all students via our **Student Shout Out** with our latest offers and top tips for student budgeting.
- 5.28. To ensure we can support those most in need of financial support and assistance, our **Your Money Team** is expanding to provide **Student Money Advisers** to be on hand to help with financial concerns. The Student Money Advisors will deliver a supportive service through more one-to-one appointments and a suite of online resources and activities, so students receive budgeting advice and develop positive money management skills. Our redesigned **Student Support Fund** offers a much simpler **one application process** to assess students' financial situation and we have **increased the amount of financial support** we provide to students who are most in need or get into financial difficulties during their time at university<sup>40</sup>. Our Student Support Fund is open to all UK and international students studying a full-time or part-time undergraduate or postgraduate course at the University of Chester and includes a digital inclusion element providing digital hardware and/or software. Students must have at least 6 weeks (42 days) remaining before the end of their final term and be up to date with their fee payments or any fee payment arrangements to apply.
- 5.29. Our redesigned Student Support Fund moves away from the National Association of Student Money Advisors (NASMA)<sup>41</sup> financial support award and living cost calculations to provide students with **100% of a deficit** to the maximum of £2,500 per student per annum, rather than a proportion of a deficit, and use **actual household bill** costs for a selection of key household bills, rather than set living costs. For example, if the difference between your income and expenditure is £1,000, we will award 100% of this rather than the previous 55% to 65%, and we will use actual mortgage/rent, gas and electricity, water, and childcare bills to calculate your expenditure rather than the set living costs advised by NASMA. Therefore, the amount a student receives is dependent on their own financial situation and circumstances. Where a student does not have a deficit but is experiencing unexpected financial difficulties, they may still be entitled to the Student Support Fund to the maximum of £2,500 per student per annum. These are assessed on a case-by-case basis. The Student Support Fund is designed to help ease unexpected financial pressures by providing non-repayable, short-term financial support and as the cost-of-living crisis continues, and key household bills continue to rise/be high, this redesigned Student Support Fund will support students to continue and complete their studies without the burden of financial worries.
- 5.30. The Your Money Team also offer delayed funding loans and we will continue to support the most at-risk student groups through enhanced and sustained financial support packages to ensure higher education is accessible to these student groups. These are:
- A **travel bursary** of up to **£100 cash** per application to attend our Outreach events, open days, applicant days, campus tours and interviews/auditions for those in receipt of free school meals/pupil premium, are Looked after Children/have been in local authority care, are Estranged, are a Carer, or are in receipt of benefits due to low-income or disability<sup>42</sup>. Open to UK residents interested in any of our full-time or part-time undergraduate or postgraduate courses. We will pay for up to 2 people to attend – the prospective student and one guest. If travelling by car, only one claim per vehicle can be made and we pay 36 pence per mile up to a maximum of £100 per vehicle. If travelling by public transport, we pay public transport costs of 2nd class standard fare up to a maximum of £100.
  - An annual **Carer Support bursary** of **£1,500 cash** for UK undergraduate students paying tuition fees of at least £6,000 and have a means-tested household income of £40,000 or less who:

<sup>39</sup> <https://shoutout.chester.ac.uk/tag/cost-of-living/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/student-support-fund-policy-and-guidance>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.nasma.org.uk/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/undergraduate/visit-us/support/travel-bursary>

- a. are registered with a recognised carer organisation.
    - b. regularly care for a sick, elderly, or disabled family member.
    - c. were previously in receipt of Carer's Benefits, have a notification letter or their application form completed by a healthcare professional, teacher, social worker, or staff member from a carer network.
  - iii. An annual **Care Experienced bursary of £1,500 cash, £1,000 fee waiver and 50% discounted university owned accommodation fees** for UK undergraduate students paying tuition fees of at least £6,000 who have been in local authority care for at least three months before the age of 18 or have been subject to a Special Guardianship Order and are aged 25 years old or under on 1st September at the start of their course.
  - iv. An annual **Estranged student bursary of £1,500 cash and 50% discounted university owned accommodation fees** for UK undergraduate students paying tuition fees of at least £6,000 who have been assessed as independent due to estrangement by Student Finance Company and are aged 25 years old or under on 1st September at the start of their course.
  - v. An annual **Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman and Boater community bursary of £1,500 cash** for UK undergraduate students paying tuition fees of at least £6,000 who have identified as Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman, Boater on their UCAS / enrolment application.
- 5.31. This enhanced and sustained financial support packages have led to a significant increase in numbers of these student groups (for example, Care Experienced and Estranged students) and, in most cases, have higher success rates than their peers – see [Annex A](#) for highlights on the student groups performance.
- 5.32. The above student groups also receive linked members of staff to provide dedicated support in services spanning Academic Skills, Library Services and Careers and Employability.
- 5.33. Our whole provider approach to tackling the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and financial needs of our students aim to address the risks that certain student groups may not experience equality of opportunity in being able to access, continue or complete their studies due to **insufficient personal support**, the impact of **cost pressures**, including how cost pressures can impact on students' **mental health**.

### Our approach to collaborative activity for access

- 5.34. As a funded partner within the **Higher Horizons**<sup>43</sup> (part of the Uni Connect Programme<sup>44</sup>), collaboration is central to our pre-entry widening access provision. Higher Horizons was formed in 2006 and we have been part of the collaborative group since the beginning. In 2017, when the Office for Students (OfS) Uni Connect programme was rolled out, we agreed to be funded partners. This includes:
- i. Free of charge hosting of five higher horizons members of staff at our institution.
  - ii. Free of charge access to all our facilities for Higher Horizons activities with young people.
  - iii. Free of charge access to our wider pool of staff, including academics, who produce and deliver sessions for Higher Horizons young people, both on site and in schools.
  - iv. The line management of the Higher Horizons Hub manager and all associated human resources processes overseen by the institution.
- 5.35. Since the introduction of the 'strategic outreach' element of the Uni Connect Programme, we have pledged a minimum of £6,500 per annum to support collaborative activity with Higher Horizons. These collaboratively funded programmes have been delivered to specific groups such as care experienced young people, those from low higher education represented areas, and service children via the West Midlands Hub<sup>45</sup>. In addition to these programmes, we are co-funding a new project in 2024-25 with Higher Horizons called **Crewe Scholars**.

<sup>43</sup> <https://higherhorizons.co.uk/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.scipalliance.org/hubs/west-midlands-hub>

- 5.36. All collaborative activity is evaluated by Higher Horizons and the participants are tracked via the East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership (EMWPREP) system<sup>46</sup>. The results of which shows that 50.9% of those who have engaged with the Higher Horizons Programme have gone on to higher education. The baseline in our region for that demographic of young people is 26%.
- 5.37. We also work in collaboration as a non-funded partner with **Shaping Futures**<sup>47</sup> (part of the Uni Connect Programme) aiming to boost higher education participation rates in the most disadvantaged areas in England. Shaping Futures is the Merseyside partnership and has adopted an **information and guidance** model, and we provide impartial higher education-related activities and progression advice to target learners in our priority secondary schools and across partner further education (FE)/sixth form colleges, i.e., regional schools and FE colleges with low academic results. We also provide all this information and guidance, as well as activities, online for school and college pupils, parents, and teaching staff and advisors within schools and colleges<sup>48</sup>.
- 5.38. Alongside our School of Education collaborative activity to **raise academic results in schools**, we also have an existing sustained 8-week programme of **Students in Schools** where our own students volunteer in local primary and secondary schools across Cheshire and the Wirral<sup>49</sup>. Our students work with pupils on a one-to-one level, in groups, or within the classroom to provide support for reading, study skills, help with homework and general literacy skills, all of which address risks to equality of opportunity to improve school pupils' **knowledge and skills** and the **ongoing impacts of coronavirus**.

### Our approach to delivering diverse pathways and flexible provision

- 5.39. The University of Chester promotes lifelong learning as part of our whole provider approach (seen in our Citizen Student Strategy) by offering a range of diverse pathways and flexible provision to support students from all backgrounds, including those seeking a return to formal education, to access and succeed in higher education. Our diverse pathways and flexible provision ranges from:
- i. **Foundation years** – four-year degrees that include a foundation year to widen access to a large portion of our undergraduate provision for students who may have experienced barriers to their learning and achievement throughout their formal schooling years<sup>50</sup>. Our Centre for Foundation Studies will also be delivering Functional Skills in Level 2 English and Maths for those who do not hold GCSEs in these subjects for our apprenticeship provision and foundation years whereby these qualifications are a mandatory requirement.
  - ii. **Apprenticeships** – designed by employers for employers, our **Higher and Degree Apprenticeships** are an opportunity for businesses to train and support next generation staff<sup>51</sup>. We intend to expand our apprenticeship provision across our sites and include new subject pathways following consultations with employers.
  - iii. **Work Based and Integrative Studies (WBIS)** offers **part-time, personalised learning** that recognises your expertise and rewards you for prior experiential learning<sup>52</sup>. We offer these at undergraduate and postgraduate level pathways. Our Centre for Professional and Economic Development (CPED) also offers accreditation for Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which are studied at a distance for free<sup>53</sup>.
  - iv. We also offer **part-time language courses**<sup>54</sup> through:
    - o Evening classes in different languages at various levels.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.emwprep.ac.uk/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://shaping-futures.org.uk/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/departments/outreach>

<sup>49</sup> <https://volunteering.chester.ac.uk/lookingtovolunteer/schoolvolunteering/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/subject/51/720/all>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/study/apprenticeships>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/centre-professional-economic-development/work-based-and-integrative-studies>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.mooc.org/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/languages-and-cultures/part-time-language-classes>



- Bespoke language courses for businesses throughout the region.
- 6-week taster courses giving you an introduction to the language and culture of a specific country.

5.40. Our diverse pathways and flexible provision work to address risks to equality of opportunity by providing appropriate **information and guidance**, tackle **perceptions of higher education** and ensure we are not **limiting the choice of course type and delivery mode**.

### **Our approach to collaborative activity with employers**

5.41. As part of delivering diverse pathways and flexible provision, we work in **collaboration with local authorities and employees**. Firstly, we have an established Employer Liaison Group with local and regional employers, and secondly, we are part of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) partnership with the local authority and employers<sup>55</sup>. Both of which work to:

- Articulate employers' skills needs:** By identifying and prioritising the skills and training needs of employers, shapes our flexible pathways and the content design for our diverse provision, including extra-curricular activities, to local economic needs and drivers.
- Translate employer demands into provision:** For our diverse provision of Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, this allows for closer alignment to the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfATE) occupational routes and pathways when reviewing existing provision and designing new diverse provision with employers for employers<sup>56</sup>. It's also a chance for employers to be fully aware of the diverse provision and flexible pathways we offer.
- Address learner demand and employer engagement:** Developing diverse provision and flexible pathways opportunities for the demand of the learner, as well as developing opportunities for employers to offer on-the-job learning opportunities and work placements for our students.

5.42. This also drives our whole provider approach by providing students with credit-bearing placement options, and an international placement opportunity, through their **Work-Based Learning (WBL)** module<sup>57</sup>. WBL embeds a 5-week employer-led project within the undergraduate curriculum, across all disciplines within the University. In 2021-22, 307 organisations across 68 industries and sectors hosted 514 students.


5.43. In addition, our Careers and Employability team have partnerships with employers who offer **workplace experience, placement scholarships and graduate internships**. Those who take part in this are more likely to progress to highly skilled employment; 89.5% were in highly skilled employment or further study (aggregated figure of 3-years Graduate Outcome survey results) compared to 75.7% of their peers who do not participate.

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-skills-improvement-plans>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/occupational-maps/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/work-based-learning>

5.44. We have developed an anonymous recruitment process for students applying for a workplace experience with an employer. We saw engagement and applications increase from certain student groups (i.e., Care Experienced, Estranged, Carers, disabled students, students from the ethnic minority groups, low-income households, etc.), and saw an increase in these student groups appointed to workplace experiences **from under 20% to almost 60%**. 90% of respondents to an evaluation survey agreed that unconscious bias still exists in society, and 100% of respondents agreed that anonymised applications was a way to help eradicate unconscious bias from employers within the recruitment process. Our Careers and Employability team continue to work with employers to advocate and promote anonymous recruitment processes and raise awareness of diversity, inclusion and social mobility in employers' own recruitment strategies and policies.



**100% agree**  
anonymised  
applications was a way  
to help eradicate  
unconscious bias from  
employers within the  
recruitment process

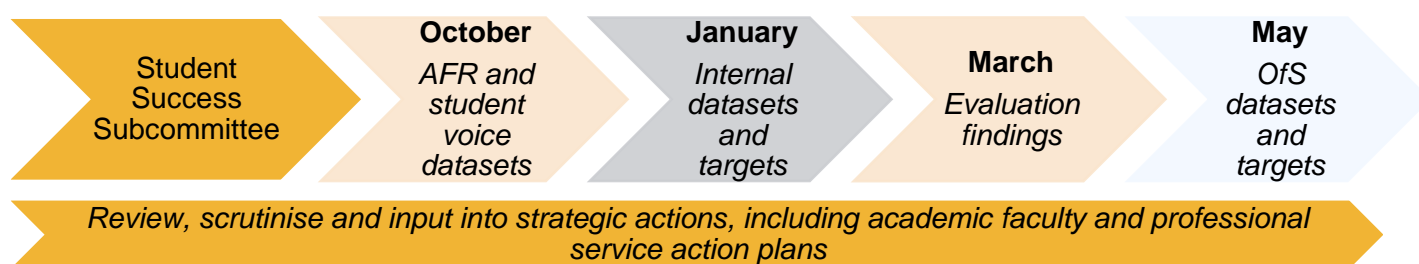
5.45. Collaboration with employers allows us to address risks to equality of opportunity by ensuring we are not **limiting the choice of course type and delivery mode** mentioned in our [diverse pathways and flexible provision](#) section, and alleviate **cost pressures** by offering paid job and scholarship opportunities, whilst supporting **progression from higher education**.

## 6. Student consultation

- 6.1. We routinely engage and consult with student representatives in the development and monitoring of our Access and Participation Plan, as well as including students in the operational delivery of access and participation related activities. The Chester Students' Union (CSU) are the primary mechanism for this, through their elected student officers and CSU senior staff.
- 6.2. The elected officers are represented on our key University committees in which access and participation related issues reports into (previously mentioned in the [Whole Provider Approach](#) section of our plan). Representation on the Student Success Subcommittee gives CSU direct insight and involvement on the strategic direction of access and participation activities, and the monitoring and evaluation of the Access and Participation Plan. We use an annual timeline of engagement for this – see *figure 3* – which allows for CSU to review and scrutinise:
- our access and participation expenditure for the University's Annual Financial Return (AFR)<sup>58</sup>,
  - student voice, access, success and progression datasets,
  - progress towards targets and,
  - evaluation findings of our interventions and activities.
- 6.3. In addition, throughout the Student Success Subcommittee process, CSU can input and direct any new strategic actions (new developments and initiatives) the University develops to address risks to equality of opportunity.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-14-guidance-for-annual-financial-returns/>

Figure 3: Student engagement with access and participation via the Student Success Subcommittee



- 6.4. During the 2022-23 academic year, our Student Success Subcommittee, with CSU representation present, also focused on the development of this Access and Participation Plan. Committee members and CSU officers were part of the consultation process for directing potential objectives and targets to explore based on our assessment of performance, including how these aligned to the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR), and what interventions we need to address our risks to equality of opportunity.
- 6.5. The Access and Participation Team supported CSU officers and senior CSU staff to develop and conduct student focus groups for CSU to obtain student views on equality of opportunity, what this looks like at our University and what interventions we need to address risks to equality of opportunity, all of which formed part of their Student Submission. The Access and Participation Team also supported CSU officers in the presentation of our objectives and targets, initial intervention strategies and CSU involvement and consultation timeline to Student Council, followed by presenting the draft Access and Participation Plan for Student Council to engage and be involved in the final design of the plan. This process helped us to enhance our plan and ensured diverse student representation and a strong student voice in the development of our plan and the Student Submission.
- 6.6. For example, Student Council representatives made recommendations for better communication about access and participation for students surrounding the work the University is currently doing and need for consistent support from personal academic tutors (PATs). Amendments to the plan were made with additional activities added to [intervention strategy 4](#). The new Academic Department-led mid-term reviews (MTRs) will ensure a consistent approach to offering interventions and support at key points in the student's life cycle, and although we are providing new online training modules, resources and materials for teaching, admissions and support staff on the different experiences of student groups who may not experience equality of opportunity, a student-friendly version will also be available and communicated via our **Student Shout Out**. This will include the work we are doing to support our LGBTQIA+ student community, something which was not included in the plan. Student Council representatives also brought to our attention the need for regular audits of the accessibility of our sites which we will take forward.
- 6.7. Our students play an active role in the design stage of many of our access and participation related activities. CSU officers are members of our Financial Support Working Group and Social Capital Steering and Operational Group guiding the design of these activities to the needs of our students. This direct involvement and engagement in these groups allowed for CSU officers to assist with the development of three activities within our [intervention strategy 3](#); our new Social Capital building events and embedded curricula activity, our redesigned Your Money team of additional Student Money Advisors and our redesigned Student Support Fund. We also recruit Student Race Advocates (noted in the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#) section of our plan) and Students as Partners for students to collaboratively co-design, co-deliver, or co-research our pedagogy research-based curriculum design or learning, teaching and assessment practices, and extra-curricular activities. These opportunities ensure diverse student representation, and a strong student voice is part of the design stage of activities and is an example of being a **citizen student** (seen in our Citizen Student Strategy), in which students

work in partnership with us to build a strong sense of agency and belonging to contribute to a dynamic University community.

## 7. Evaluation of the plan

- 7.1. Led and coordinated by the Access and Participation Team, monitoring of all access, success and progression activities from development through to implementation, financial investment and final evaluation stage, go through an annual monitoring process. All activity leads submit interim progress reports and end of year reports, alongside annual meetings to discuss progress, evaluation results and new developments and financial investment updates, as well as ad-hoc meetings as and when required. These updates and progress reviews help to identify early within the year any areas which may potentially impact progress against the plan and provides an opportunity to influence and support the success of an activity as they are being designed, implemented, and delivered.
- 7.2. A summary of the progress and financial commitments of each intervention strategy and the activities, including progress towards their evaluation plans/timeline, are presented to our Student Success Subcommittee, alongside progress towards our overall objectives and targets using internal and external data (see figure 3). As mentioned earlier in the plan, these reports go to the SVEC and onward to Senate, as well as University Council being able to assure progress and delivery of our Access and Participation Plan through regular reporting to its AGSOC (see figure 1).
- 7.3. All our intervention strategies and activities follow a **‘theory of change’ approach**, a core component to designing evaluation, to enable all those involved with the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of activities understand the rationale and reasoning behind the activity, can set clear measurable objectives, understand the data sources used to measure the objectives, and to articulate the desired outcomes for the activity<sup>59</sup>. This encourages a better understanding of our evaluation process and produce clearly defined **standards of evidence** which will allow for high quality evaluation of impact evidence<sup>60</sup>. Since our last Access and Participation Plan, we have progressed well in developing our **whole provider evaluation strategy** and will continue to develop this further – figure 4 shows our progress.

Figure 4: University of Chester’s evaluation strategy self-assessment results using OfS standards of evidence self-assessment tool

	Pre 2019/20		Post 2020/21		Present day 2023/24	
	Score	Category	Score	Category	Score	Category
Strategic context (max. 24)	15	Emerging	16	Emerging	19	Emerging
Activity design (max. 18)	9	Emerging	12	Emerging	16	Emerging
Evaluation design (max. 9)	4	Emerging	6	Emerging	8	Advanced
Evaluation implementation (max. 20)	10	Emerging	13	Emerging	17	Emerging
Learning from evaluation (max. 22)	9	Emerging	13	Emerging	19	Emerging

- 7.4. To enhance our evaluation practices, we are members of the **Northwest Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Group**. The group is open to Northwest institutions and Uni Connect colleagues who have an active role in ensuring that access, success and progression related activities are research and evidence-based informed, and effectively evaluated. The group meet at least three times a year, where evaluation approaches and findings from Northwest institutions are presented to provide **external and independent advice**, and **constructive feedback** and guidance in an **informal peer review** manner.

<sup>59</sup> <https://taso.org.uk/evidence/evaluation-guidance-resources/toc/>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/>



- 7.5. The Group are keen to develop this work further by:
- Sharing evidence-based initiatives** with Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO)
  - Strengthening the **Peer-to-Peer review** process outside of the meetings
  - And potentially develop **collaborative evaluation** processes and research
- 7.6. To assist the evaluation of our intervention strategies and activities, we have recruited an **Evaluation Officer** to develop the evaluation methods and research-informed outcomes, and to ensure we achieve our summary of publication plans for the interim and full impact results; all of which can be found in the **evaluation tables** after each [intervention strategy](#). Unless stated otherwise (namely [intervention strategy 5](#)), we intend to evaluate each activity separately within the intervention strategies, rather than the intervention strategies as a whole. These will be to Type 2 standards of evidence using pre and post intervention quantitative and qualitative methods and, where possible, track outcomes (access, continuation, completion and/or degree awarding rates) of participants against non-participants. As seen in the evaluation tables after each intervention strategy, we will disseminate interim findings and full impact results throughout the four years of the plan. Our collaborative activity with Higher Horizons (HiHo) will be evaluated and published by our external HiHo partners.

## 8. Provision of information to students

- 8.1. If you are a prospective student, we will send information on fees and financial support at in-person events, such as outreach events with schools and colleges, our open days and interviews/auditions, and by email communications directing you to our finance webpages and external student finance information. We also provide this information in our prospectus with accessible and alternative formats being available<sup>61</sup>. Our outreach events offer an array of workshops and activities providing money advice and guidance on what you should do before, during and after completing your course. This information is also provided online via our website with helpful video blogs, activities, and top tips for student budgeting<sup>62</sup>.
- 8.2. As soon as you have applied to our university, we send timely communications on how to **Get Ahead with Student Finance** outlining how to apply for student finance. Further communications will provide all the information needed on tuition fees, maintenance loans, accommodation options, our bursary and scholarship opportunities, and details of further financial support we offer during your course and beyond. In addition, we provide video blogs and activities on top tips for student budgeting and free things to do in Chester, along with full details of our **Cost-of-Living Support** previously mentioned in the plan.
- 8.3. Current students receive information about fees and the financial support available through our student portal, email communications, social media updates and via our **University App**. We also have a weekly **Student Shout Out**, previously mentioned in the plan – a dedicated student communications channel which provides current students with the latest news, updates, and events.
- 8.4. In addition, our Student Shout Out provides useful information on what support is available to you as a student, which includes financial support, our Cost-of-Living Support, top tips for student budgeting, free things to do in Chester, and opportunities to **Earn While You Learn**<sup>63</sup>.
- 8.5. For the most up-to-date information on fees and financial support, see our university website <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/undergraduate/finance>.

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/request-prospectus>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/outreach/online-resources-schools-and-colleges/student-money-matters>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/careers-and-employability/students/earn-while-you-learn>

## Annex A: Assessment of performance

Where possible, we have used the national datasets from the Office for Students (OfS) access and participation data dashboards to monitor and evaluate our performance<sup>64</sup>. The OfS access and participation data dashboards shows data for our UK domiciled full-time undergraduate, part-time undergraduate and degree apprenticeship students, along with data for all other registered providers in England. Where data is unavailable on the access and participation data dashboards, we have used our internal data<sup>65</sup>. Brief descriptions of the lifecycle and years of data presented in each graph within our assessment of performance are as follows:

Access	New students entering higher education	Year by Entrants
Continuation	New students continuing or completed (gained qualification) in higher education one year and 15 days after they started their course	Year by Entrants
Completion	Students gaining a higher education qualification, or continuing, four years and 15 days after they started their course	Year by Entrants
Awarding	Final year undergraduate students (level 6+) being awarded a first or upper second-class degree at the end of study of higher education qualifications	Year by Graduates
Progression	Students progressing to managerial or professional employment, further study, or other positive outcomes 15 months after leaving higher education	Year by Graduates

Where performance gaps are shown, these are the differences between the comparison student groups for that given cohort and lifecycle, for example an 'at risk' student group outcome compared to a non-risk student group outcome. Due to the small populations of part-time and apprenticeship students at our provider, unless stated, we have used aggregated data or may not include this data in this Annex as we have followed the suppression rules outlined by the OfS<sup>66</sup>. However, all our students, whether you are a full-time, part-time or degree apprenticeship student, are entitled to the interventions and support we offer.

### 1. ACCESS

We do well attracting students from a diverse background, and in some cases, we attract proportionally more of these student groups than other English higher education providers. For example, our data shows:

- We attract more students from the most deprived small areas or neighbourhoods in England (Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile one) than students from the least deprived small areas or neighbourhoods in England (Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile five)<sup>67</sup>.
- Between 15.7% and 16.7% of our students were eligible for free school meals which is close to the wider English higher education providers of 18.4% to 19.8%. We have interventions specifically targeted at free school meal pupils to develop **knowledge and skills** and provide **information and guidance** on accessing higher education and this will contribute towards increasing our population of students who were eligible for free school meals.
- We have a large and growing population of mature students.
- We have a large and growing population of disabled students.

<sup>64</sup> [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/).

<sup>65</sup> Our internal data is for UK domiciled full-time undergraduate and degree apprenticeship students. It excludes our partner providers.

<sup>66</sup> For full data criteria and suppression rules, please visit: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/about-the-data-dashboard/>

<sup>67</sup> The English indices of deprivation measure relative levels of deprivation in small areas or neighbourhoods in England. Based on seven distinct domains of deprivation, students from quintile one come from the most deprived small areas or neighbourhoods, whilst students from quintile five come from the least deprived small areas or neighbourhoods. Even though the University of Chester sits close to the border of North Wales, a large proportion of our students come from England. Therefore, the English indices of deprivation measure is most appropriate for our assessment of performance for our student population. Full details can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

- We have a large and growing population of 18- or 19-year-old students from the least represented areas across England (TUNDRA quintile one)<sup>68</sup>.

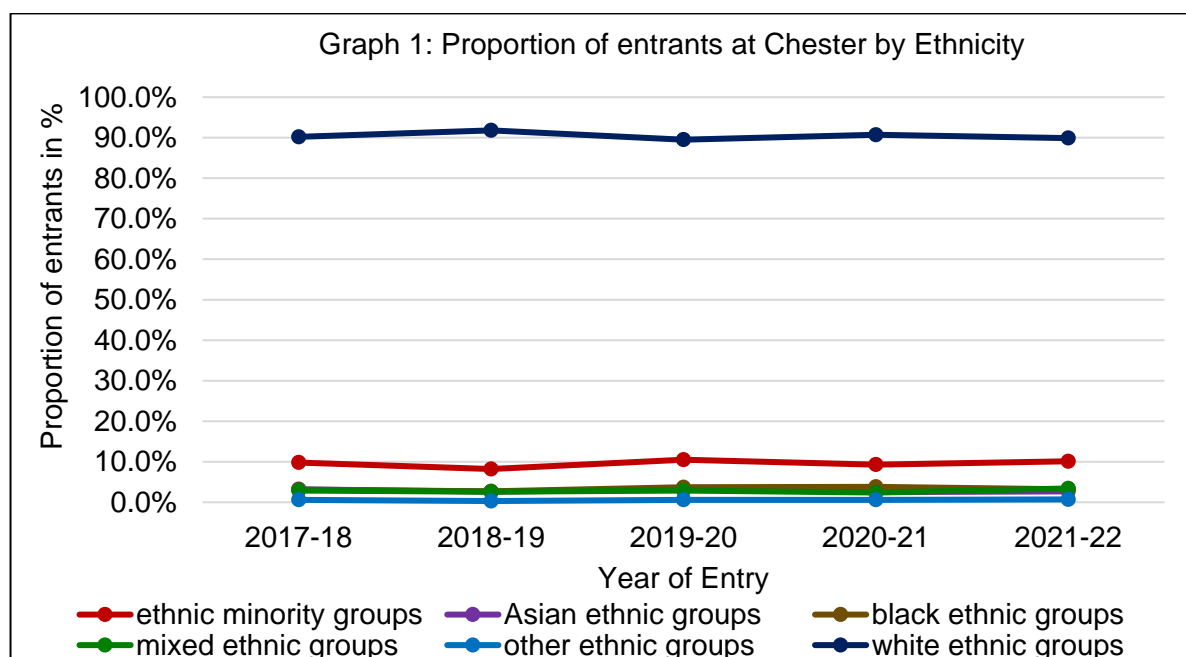
Internal data<sup>69</sup>:

- The number of students who have had care experience or are estranged from their family continue to increase, with over double the population since 2019/20.
- The number of students at our University who have caring responsibilities has doubled since 2019/20.
- Student from the Gypsy Roma Traveller Showman and Boater community are very small (single numbers) but our new Gypsy Roma Traveller Showman and Boater financial support package for 2022/23 will contribute towards increasing the population.
- A large proportion of our student's commute (from 6+ miles) to our University.
- Over 50% of our students are first generation<sup>70</sup>
- On average, 12.7% of our student population identify as bisexual, gay man, gay woman/lesbian, or other sexuality, and these proportions have been increasing over the last 2-years.

From our data, student groups which are low in numbers or proportions at our University are those from the ethnic minority groups (excluding white ethnic groups) or are students with multiple diverse characteristics meaning they have more than one characteristic which may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to accessing higher education.

### 1.1. Ethnicity

Data by ethnicity is being displayed in **Graph 1** by students from the Asian ethnic groups, black ethnic groups, mixed ethnic groups, any other ethnic group and white ethnic groups, and by aggregating the ethnic minority groups (excluding the white ethnic groups).



Our data shows we have a small population of students from the ethnic minority groups (excluding the white ethnic groups), but this has been increasing over the last two-years. To understand why the ethnic minority group population is small, we have looked at where our students from the ethnic minority groups come from, i.e., whether regionally or nationally. A large proportion of our student population come from the Northwest

<sup>68</sup> TUNDRA (tracking underrepresentation by area) is an area-based measure that uses tracking of state-funded mainstream school pupils in England to calculate young participation in higher education. TUNDRA classifies local areas across England into five equal groups – or quintiles – based on the proportion of 16-year-old state-funded mainstream school pupils who participate in higher education aged 18 or 19 years of age. Quintile one shows the lowest rate of participation, whilst quintile five shows the highest rate of participation in higher education. Full details can be found here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-tundra/>

<sup>69</sup> Internal access data includes readmitted students and new students entering at Level 3 and Level 4.

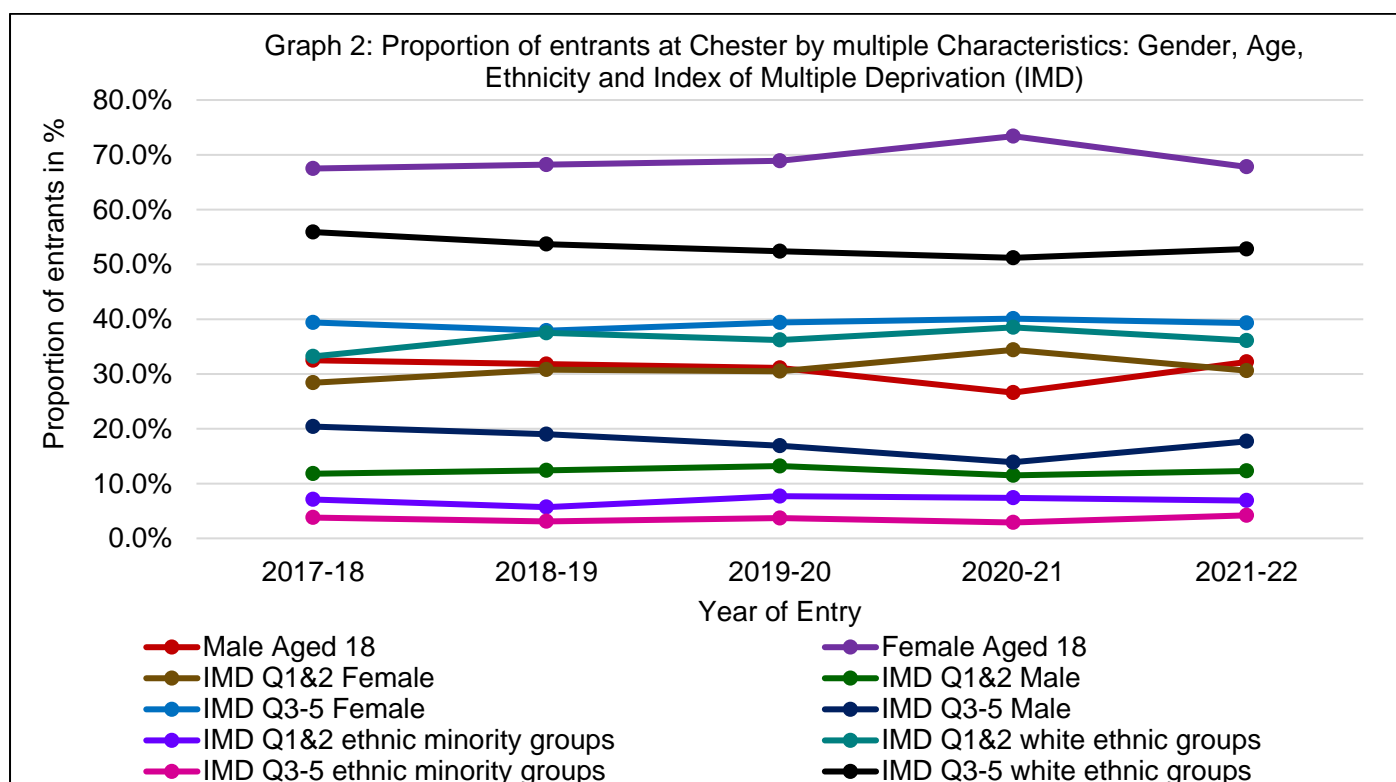
<sup>70</sup> First generation students are first in their immediate family to attend a higher education provider, where their mother or father has never studied or gained a higher education qualification at a higher education provider.

region (53.5% in 2021/22), of which 26% were from the Cheshire area. From this data, 61.6% of students from the ethnic minority groups were from the Northwest region, of which 20.2% were from Cheshire. Having such a large recruitment of students from the local region appears to impact our ethnic minority group population size as the Cheshire area is known to have low proportions of residents from the ethnic minority groups. For example, the Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East last Census data in 2021 showed that only 5.2% of respondents reported being from an ethnic minority group<sup>71</sup>. The Department for Education (DfE) schools, pupils and their characteristics data for 2021/22 showed that 13.6% of school pupils in Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East identified as being from the ethnic minority groups compared to the national England schools, pupils and their characteristics data of 26% identifying as being from the ethnic minority groups<sup>72</sup>.

Therefore, **no objective or targets** will be set for this student group due to the influence of our recruitment from the local region, however our [intervention strategy 1](#) and [intervention strategy 2](#) will contribute towards improving academic results in the local area and provide widening participation opportunities for those from the ethnic minority groups, which will have the wider benefit of increasing our ethnic minority group population in the longer term.

## 1.2. Students with multiple characteristics

After our extensive assessment of performance, **Graph 2** shows students with a combination of characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)) may not experience equality of opportunity in accessing higher education. Although our data shows a low population of students from the ethnic minority groups from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two), this is predominantly due to our overall ethnic minority group population being low, and as a large proportion of our students from the ethnic minority groups come from the local area, this is impacting this student group population size.



Our data shows we have a small population of male students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two). As we generally attract more students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one) compared to the least deprived areas (IMD quintile five), this does not appear to be influencing the number of male students coming to our provider from these most deprived areas. To understand why our male

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021>

<sup>72</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/90c98805-4761-43da-908c-11256c67e193>



population from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two) is small, we have looked at application rates to offer rates for males from the different IMD quintiles.

Data from our UCAS end of cycle reports shows that we offer proportionally less to males from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two) than males from the least deprived areas (IMD quintiles three to five) – see *figure 5*<sup>73</sup>. This indicates that less males from the most deprived areas who apply to us receive an offer due to lower numbers attaining the grades to study their chosen course than their peers.

*Figure 5: Proportion of male applicants who receive an offer to Chester by IMD quintile*

	2018 Applicants who receive an offer	2019 Applicants who receive an offer	2020 Applicants who receive an offer	2021 Applicants who receive an offer	2022 Applicants who receive an offer
IMD Q1&2 Males	82.2%	81.8%	81.2%	79.3%	80.2%
IMD Q3-5 Males	89.4%	89.0%	88.7%	90.4%	90.6%
% gap between IMD Q3-5 and IMD Q1&2 males	7.2%	7.2%	7.5%	11.0%	10.4%

To further understand why our male population from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two) is small, we have also looked at which of our courses attract more males or females, particularly from the most deprived areas. Our internal data shows that over a quarter of our female undergraduate and degree apprenticeship population are on courses such as teaching courses, Midwifery courses, all Nursing courses, Health and Social Care, and Social Work courses (see *figure 6*). Nationally, these are known courses and occupations with extremely high female population sizes. For example, School Workforce in England reported 76% of the teaching workforce in 2022/23 were female<sup>74</sup>. Nursing and Midwifery Council reported as of 2022/23 that 89% of all registered nurses identify as female<sup>75</sup>, and Social Work in England reported as of 30 November 2021, 82.6% of social workers identify as female<sup>76</sup>.

*Figure 6: Proportion of female and male entrants at Chester on particular courses*

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Female population on Teaching, Midwifery, Nursing, Health and Social Care, Social Work courses (if from IMD Q1&2)	21.7% (9%)	23.2% (10.8%)	25.2% (10.6%)	33.1% (14.1%)	30.2% (12.6%)
Male population on Computer Science, Physics, Mathematical and Engineering Science courses (if from IMD Q1&2)	5.1% (1.2%)	5.2% (2%)	4.1% (1.8%)	3.1% (1.3%)	4.5% (1.6%)

Compared to 4% of our male undergraduate and degree apprenticeship population on courses such as Computer Science, Physics, Mathematical and Engineering Science courses (see *figure 6*), having such a large recruitment on courses linked to occupations known to attract more females appears to impact on our male population size in general. Therefore, any objective or target set for this student group will take this context into consideration.

This is a student group – males from IMD quintiles one and two – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards increasing the population.

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/>

<sup>74</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-accounts/registration-statistics/>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/news/social-work-in-england-emerging-themes-report-launched/>

## 2. CONTINUATION

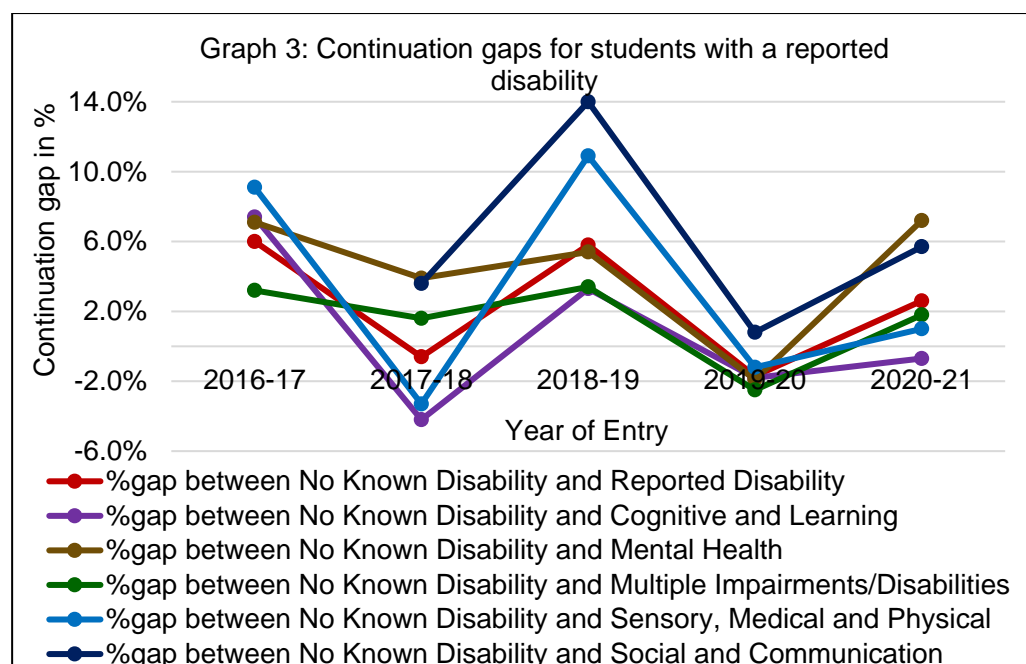
Our data shows there are continuation gaps for nearly all students from a diverse background, but most the continuation gaps are small, beginning to close or can fluctuate due to small population sizes. Our data does show however, that there are student groups who outperform their comparison group, such as:

- In previous years, more students from the ethnic minority groups continue in higher education than students from the white ethnic groups. Only the last data year (2020-21) shows a 0.9% continuation gap for students from the ethnic minority groups.
- In the most recent year data (2020-21), more 18- or 19-year-old students from the least represented areas across England (TUNDRA quintile one) continue in higher education than the 18- or 19-year-old students from the most represented areas across England (TUNDRA quintile five).

Internal data<sup>77</sup>:

- More estranged students continue compared to non-estranged students.
- More student carers continue compared to students with no known caring responsibilities.
- 100% of students from the Gypsy Roma Traveller Showman or Boater community continue.
- Local students who live within a 5-mile radius of our sites are more likely to continue than students who lived in residential accommodation.
- Students who identify as bisexual, gay man, gay woman/lesbian or other sexuality generally have higher continuation rates than heterosexual students.

Although we have large continuation gaps in the most recent year of data between students with no known disability and those with a reported mental health disability or social and communication disability, our data shows the continuation gaps fluctuate year-on-year (**Graph 3**).



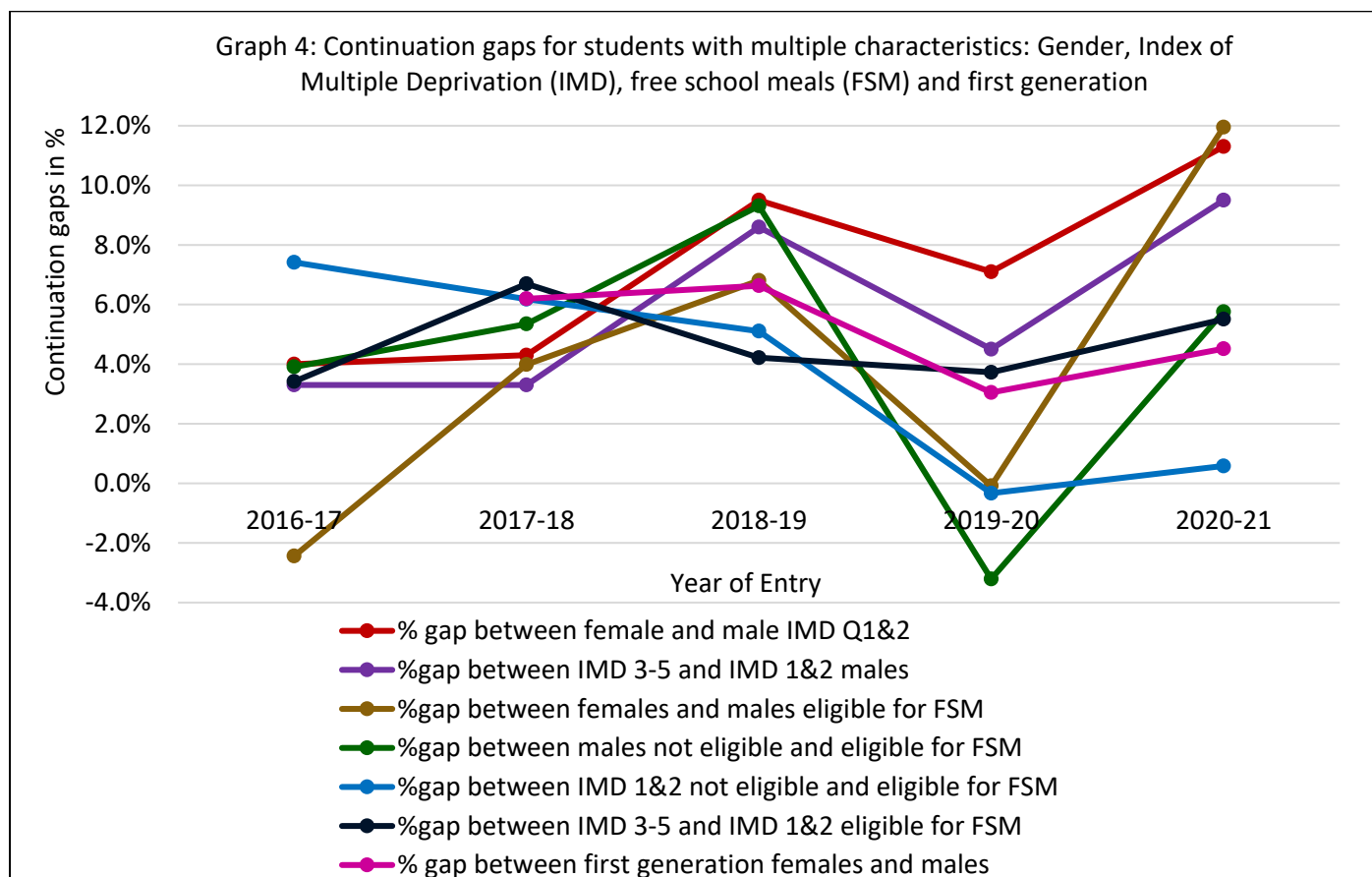
Due to such fluctuation in continuation gaps for students with a mental health disability or social and communication disability, we will struggle to set objectives and targets. However, we will continue to enhance our existing interventions, particularly in accessibility and mental health support (noted in [our approach to supporting students' mental health](#)), to reduce the fluctuation to sustain previous years of smaller or no continuation gaps.

From our data, the student groups where there are large and persistent continuation gaps are students with multiple diverse characteristics meaning they have more than one characteristic which may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to continuing in their higher education studies.

<sup>77</sup> Internal continuation data is for Level 3 and Level 4 students, including readmitted students, who continue at the University of Chester, or complete their course, one year and 14 days after they started their course.

## 2.1. Students with multiple characteristics

After our extensive assessment of performance, **Graph 4** shows students with a combination of characteristics (gender, Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), free school meals (FSM) and first generation) may not experience equality of opportunity in continuing in higher education. Although our data shows we have large continuation gaps in the most recent year of data (2020/21) between female and male students who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) and between males who were not eligible for FSM and those eligible for FSM, the continuation gaps fluctuate. The continuation gap between first-generation female and male students was beginning to close, however, the continuation gap is small (*internal data*).



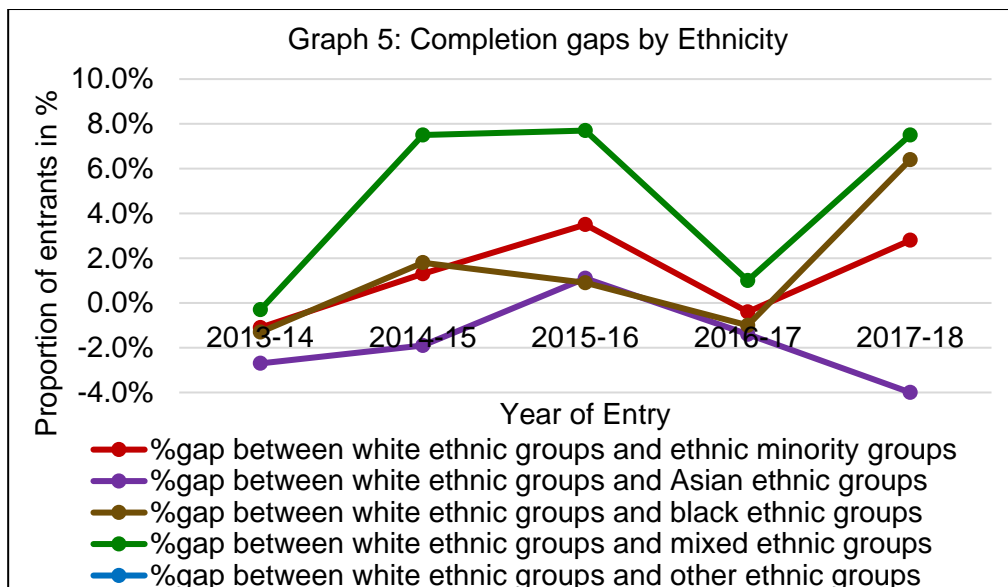
Our data shows that our most large and persistent continuation gaps are between males from the least deprived areas (IMD quintiles three to five) and most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two), and female and male students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two), and this continuation gap is increasing.

This is a student group – males from IMD quintiles one and two – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the continuation gap.

This objective and target will also, indirectly, contribute towards reducing the continuation gaps our males who were eligible for FSM are experiencing.

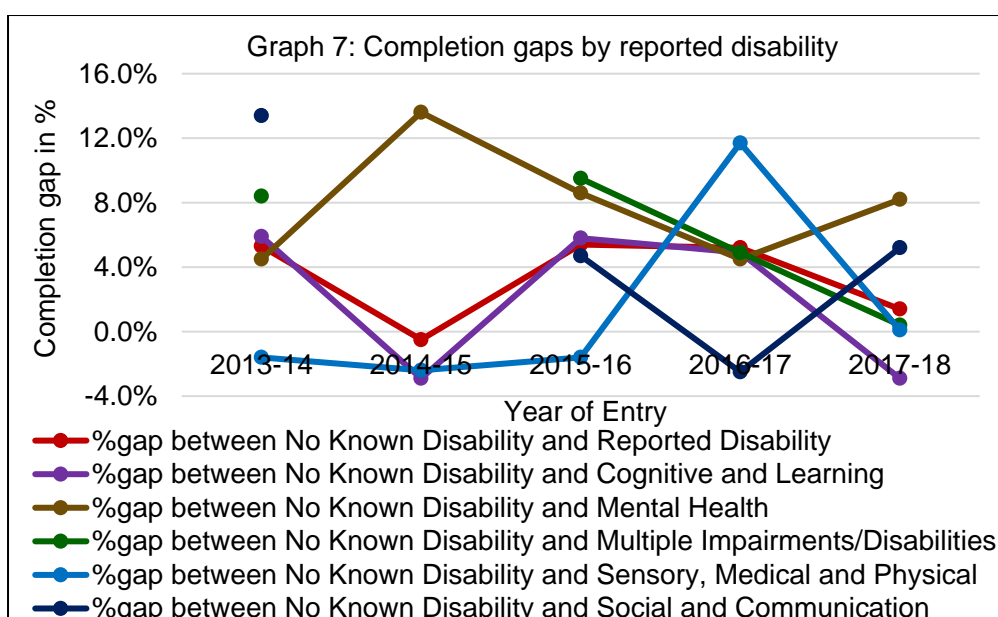
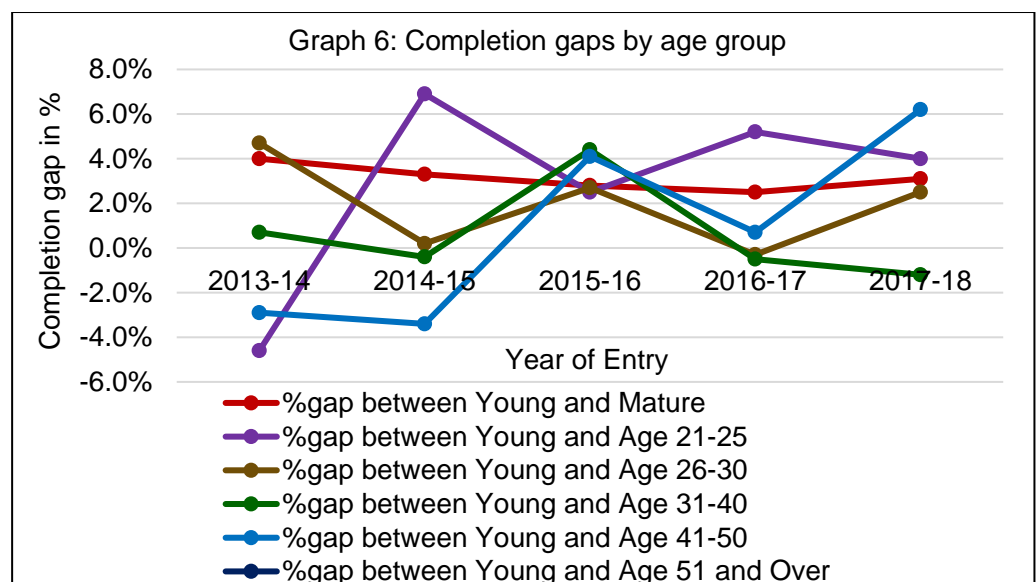
## 3. COMPLETION

Our data shows we have completion gaps for all students from a diverse background, but some of the completion gaps are small or fluctuate due to small population sizes.



For example, our data shows there is a fluctuating completion gap between the white ethnic groups and the black and mixed ethnic groups due to small populations. Overall, the completion gap between the white ethnic groups and the ethnic minority groups remains small with less fluctuation (**Graph 5**).

Our data shows there is a fluctuating completion gap between young students and students aged 21-25 and aged 41-50 due to small populations but overall, the completion gap between young and mature students remains small and, over the years, has begun to close (**Graph 6**).



This fluctuation in completion gaps can also be seen between students with no known disability and students with a mental health disability but overall, the completion gap between students with no known disability and students with a reported disability remains small with less fluctuation (**Graph 7**).

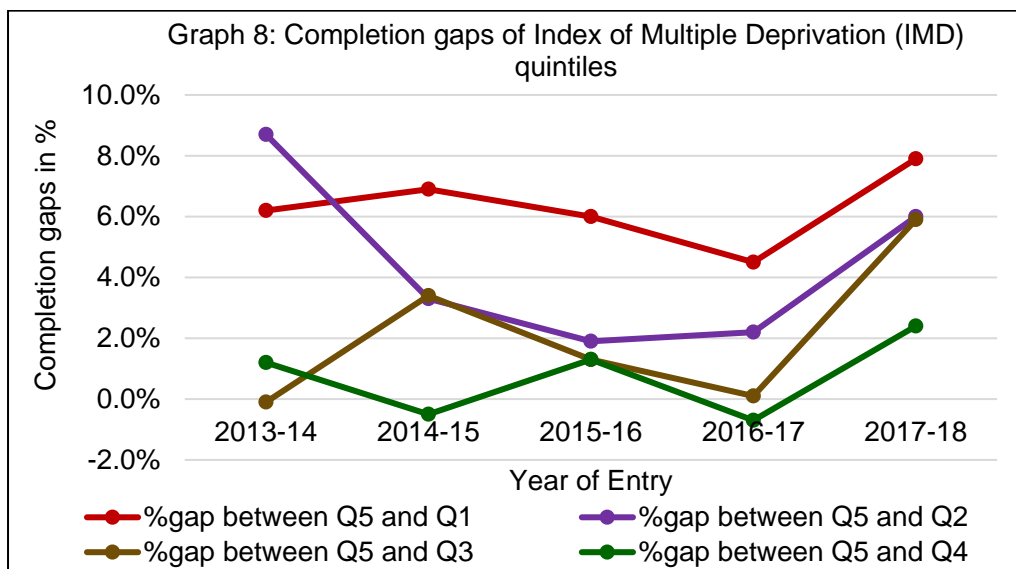
Due to such fluctuation in completion gaps for the black and mixed ethnic groups, students aged 21-25 and aged 41-50, and for students with a mental health disability, we will struggle to set objectives and targets.



However, our [intervention strategy 5](#) will contribute towards reducing the fluctuation and contribute towards reducing the completion gaps.

Our data shows the student groups where there are large and persistent completion gaps are students from the most deprived backgrounds small areas or neighbourhoods in England (IMD quintile one), students who were eligible for free school meals, and students with multiple diverse characteristics meaning they have more than one characteristic which may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to completing their higher education studies.

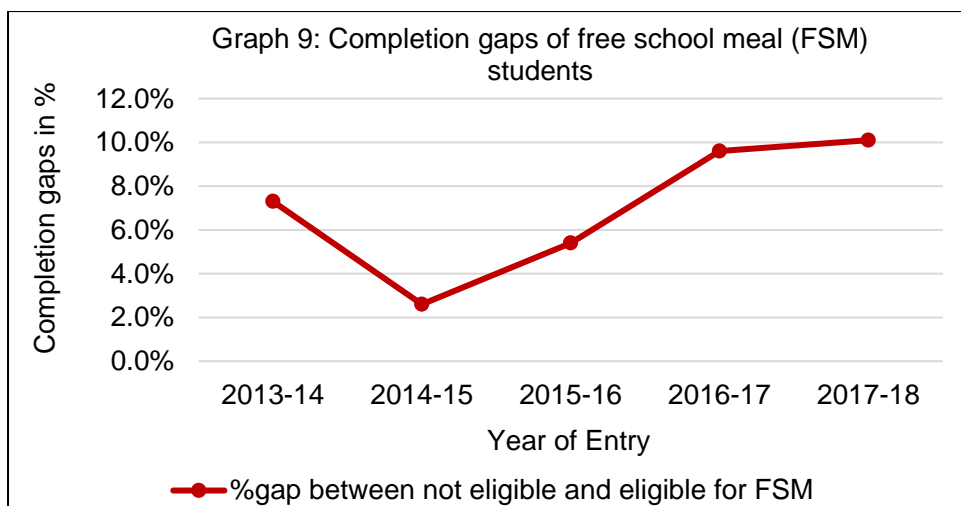
### 3.1. English Index of Deprivation – Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)



Our data shows we have large and persistent completion gaps between students from the least deprived areas (IMD quintile five) and the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one), and this is beginning to increase (**Graph 8**).

This is a student group – IMD quintile one – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the completion gap.

### 3.2. Free school meals (FSM)



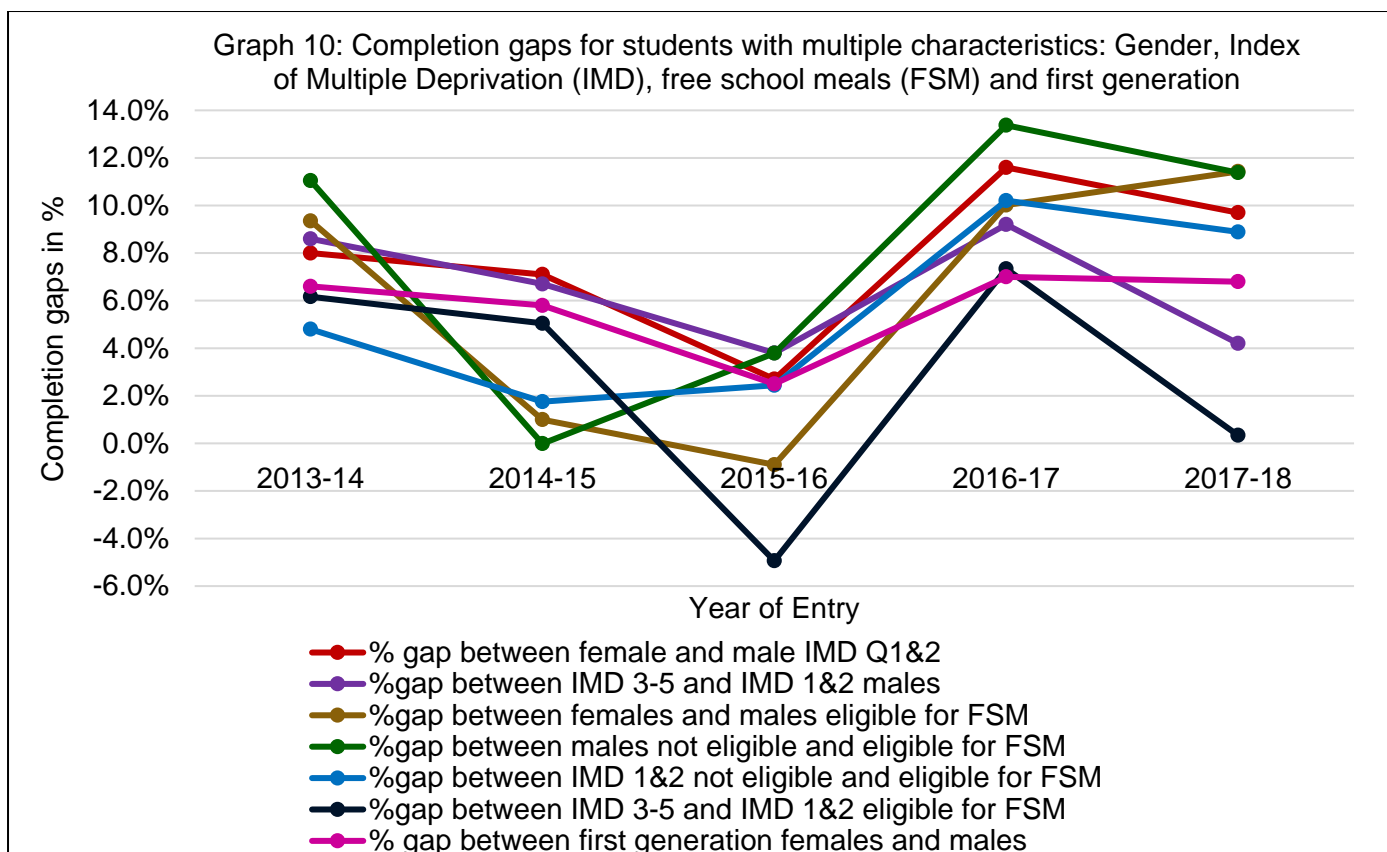
Our data shows we have large completion gaps, which are increasing, between students who were not eligible for free school meals (FSM) and students who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) (**Graph 9**).

This is the first-year free school meal (FSM) data has been available to us and so we will be monitoring this student group closely going forward.

This is a student group – free school meals – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the completion gap.

### 3.3. Students with multiple characteristics

After our extensive assessment of performance, **Graph 10** shows students with a combination of characteristics (gender, Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), free school meals (FSM) and first generation) may not experience equality of opportunity in completing their course.



Although our data shows that we have large completion gaps in the most recent years of data between female and male students who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) and between males who were not eligible for FSM and those eligible for FSM, the completion gaps fluctuate<sup>78</sup>. This pattern is also true between female and male students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two) and between males from the least deprived areas (IMD quintiles three to five) and most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two). The completion gap between first-generation female and male students was beginning to close but is now increasing (*internal data*).

As we are setting objectives and targets and putting interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the completion gaps of students from the least deprived areas (IMD quintile one) and students who were eligible for FSM, these will also contribute towards reducing the completion gaps that males are experiencing if they are from the least deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two) or were eligible for FSM. Therefore, **no further objectives and targets** will be set for students with multiple characteristics.

#### 4. AWARDING

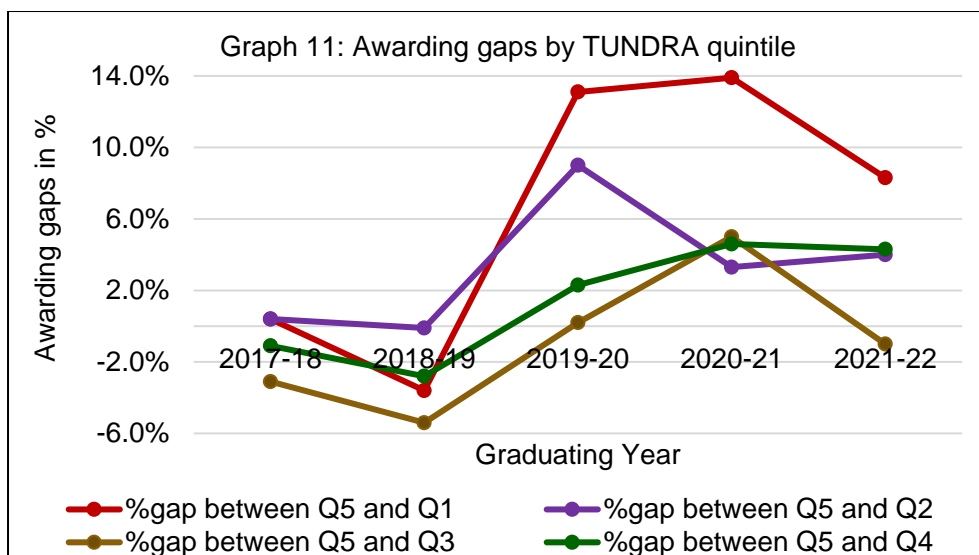
Our data shows there are awarding gaps for nearly all students from a diverse background, but there are student groups who outperform their comparison group, such as:

- More mature students are awarded a first or upper second-class degree compared to their younger counterparts.

Internal data:

- More estranged students are awarded a first or upper second-class degree compared to non-estranged students.
- More carers are awarded a first or upper second-class degree compared to students with no known caring responsibilities.
- Local students who live within a 5-mile radius of our sites are more likely to be awarded a first or upper second-class degree than students who lived in residential accommodation.

<sup>78</sup> Internal completion data is for students gaining a higher education qualification, or continuing at Chester, four years and 14 days after they started their course (six years and 14 days for part-time students).



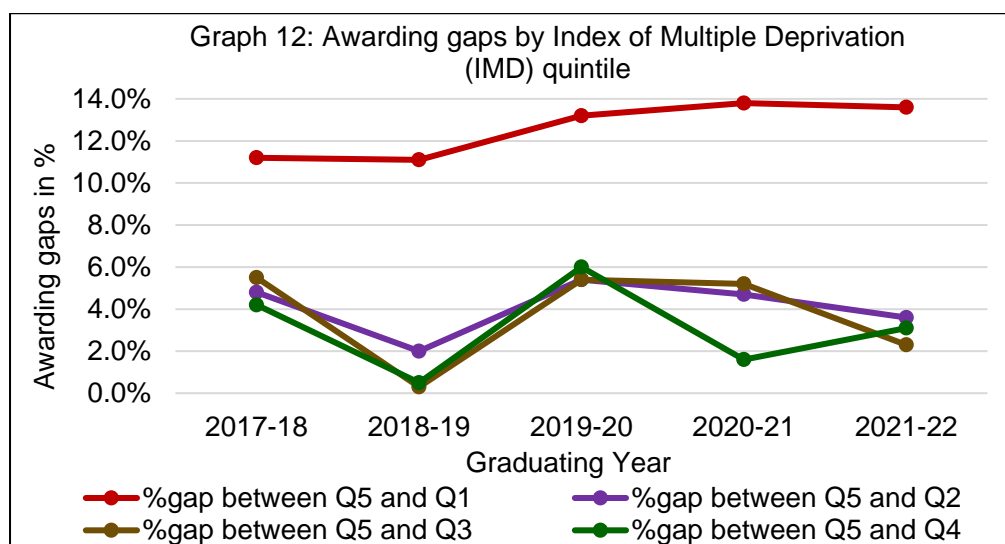
Although our data shows we have an awarding gap for students from the least represented areas in England (TUNDRA quintile one), this appeared to spike during the pandemic years and is beginning to decrease (**Graph 11**).

Due to the sudden fluctuation in awarding gaps during the pandemic years for students from the least represented areas in England (TUNDRA quintile one), we will struggle to set objectives and targets. However, our [intervention strategy 5](#) will contribute towards reducing the fluctuation and contribute towards reducing the awarding gaps.

From our data, the student groups where there are large and persistent awarding gaps are for:

- students from the most deprived backgrounds small areas or neighbourhoods in England (IMD quintile one),
- students from the ethnic minority groups (excluding white ethnic groups),
- students who were eligible for free school meals,
- and students with multiple diverse characteristics meaning they have more than one characteristic which may not experience equality of opportunity in relation to being awarded a higher degree qualification.

#### 4.1. English Index of Deprivation – Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

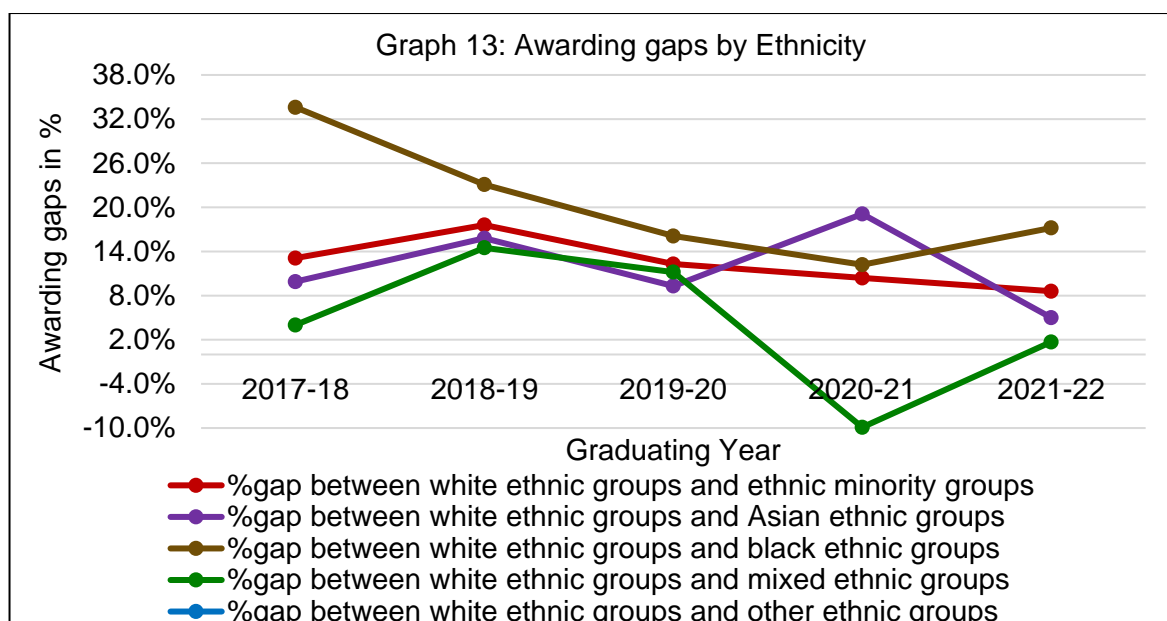


Our data shows we have large and persistent awarding gaps between students from the least deprived areas (IMD quintile five) and the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one), and this is beginning to increase (**Graph 12**).

This is a student group – IMD quintile one – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the awarding gap.

## 4.2. Ethnicity

Since our last access and participation plan 2020 whereby we set objectives and targets to reduce the black ethnic group and the ethnic minority group awarding gap, we have done well to reduce the awarding gaps in line with the yearly milestone targets we set. Our data shows the awarding gaps are beginning to reduce (**Graph 13**), but there is more work to be done to further reduce the awarding gaps.

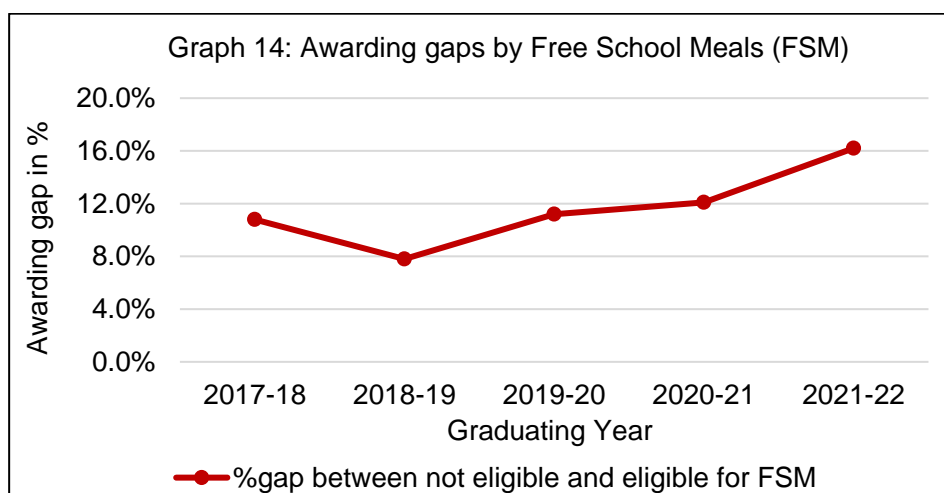


This is a student group – students from the ethnic minority groups – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the awarding gap.

This objective and target will also contribute towards reducing the awarding gap our students from the black ethnic groups are experiencing.

## 4.3. Free School Meals (FSM)

Our data shows we have large awarding gaps, which are increasing, between students who were not eligible for free school meals (FSM) and students who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) (**Graph 14**).

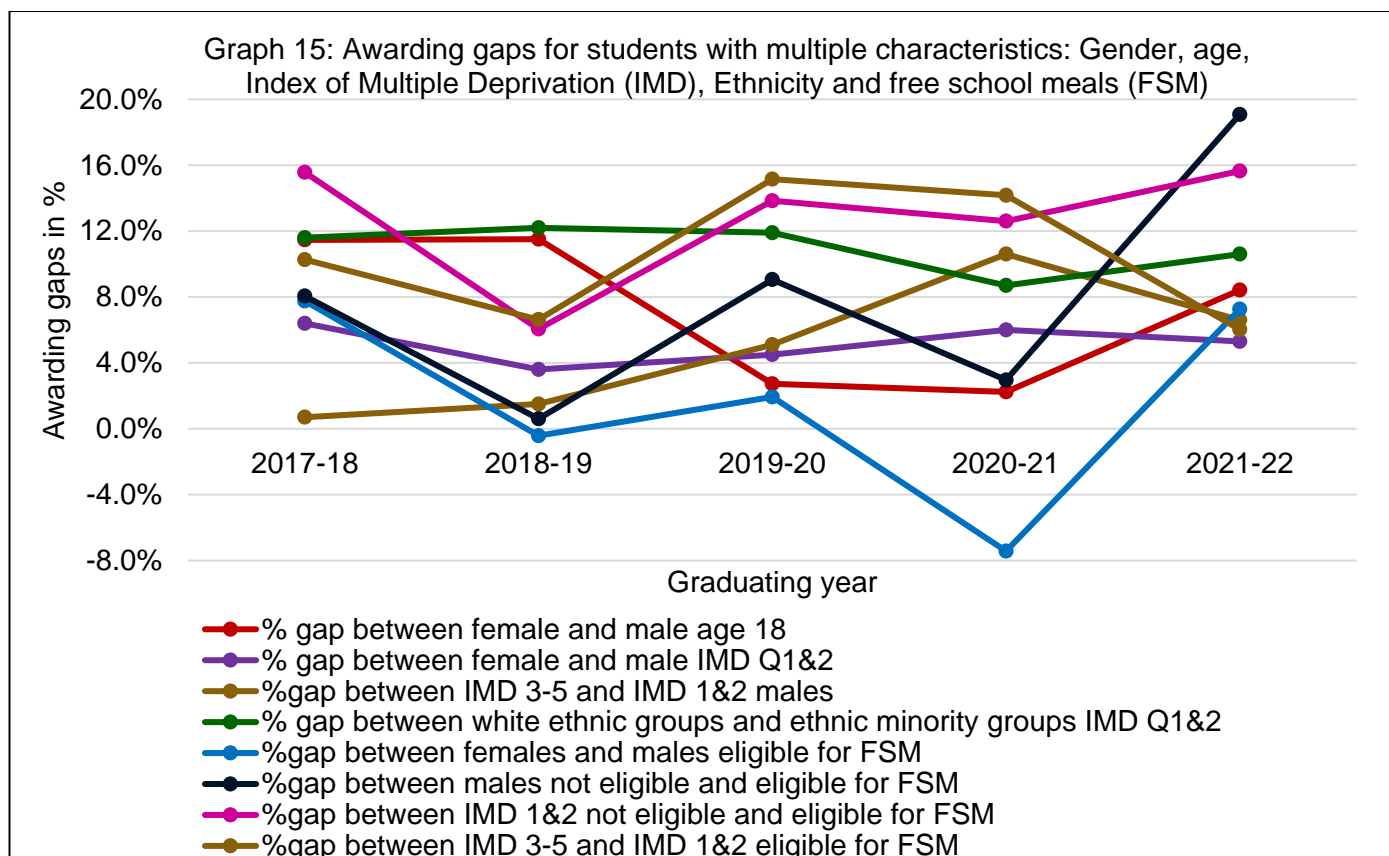


This is a student group – free school meals – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the awarding gap.

## 4.4. Students with multiple characteristics

After our extensive assessment of performance, **Graph 15** shows students with a combination of characteristics (gender, age, Index of Multiple Deprivation, ethnicity and free school meals) may not experience equality of opportunity in being awarded a first or upper-second class degree.





Although our internal data shows we have large awarding gaps between female and male students who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) and between males who were not eligible for FSM and those eligible for FSM, the awarding gaps fluctuate. This pattern is also true for students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two) who were eligible for FSM compared to students from the least deprived (IMD quintiles three to five) who were also eligible for FSM. However, the awarding gap between students who were not eligible for FSM and who were eligible for FSM from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two) is beginning to increase.

Our data shows the awarding gaps between females and males aged 18 fluctuates, whilst the awarding gaps between females and males from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two) remains steady but small in comparison to the awarding gaps between the white ethnic groups and the ethnic minority groups from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two). Our data also show the awarding gaps between males from the least deprived areas (IMD quintiles three to five) and most deprived areas (IMD quintiles one and two) has been increasing.

As we are setting objectives and targets and putting interventions ([intervention strategy 5](#)) in place to contribute towards reducing the awarding gaps of students from the least deprived areas (IMD quintile one), the ethnic minority groups, and for students who were eligible for FSM, these will also contribute towards reducing the awarding gaps that:

- males are experiencing if they are from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two) or were eligible for FSM, or our general student population from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two) if they were eligible for FSM,
- the ethnic minority groups are experiencing if they are from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two).

Therefore, **no further objectives and targets** will be set for students with multiple characteristics.

## 5. PROGRESSION

Our data shows that our students from a diverse background do extremely well progressing into highly skilled employment or further study 15 months after graduating, with only a few student groups showing small progression gaps. Our data shows that many student groups outperform their comparison groups. For example:

- In the most recent year of data (2019/20), more students from the most deprived small areas or neighbourhoods in England (IMD quintile one) progress into highly skilled employment or further study than students from the least deprived small areas or neighbourhoods in England (IMD quintile five).
- More mature students' progress into highly skilled employment or further study compared to their younger counterparts.
- More students with a reported disability progress into highly skilled employment or further study compared to students with no known disability.

Internal data<sup>79</sup>:

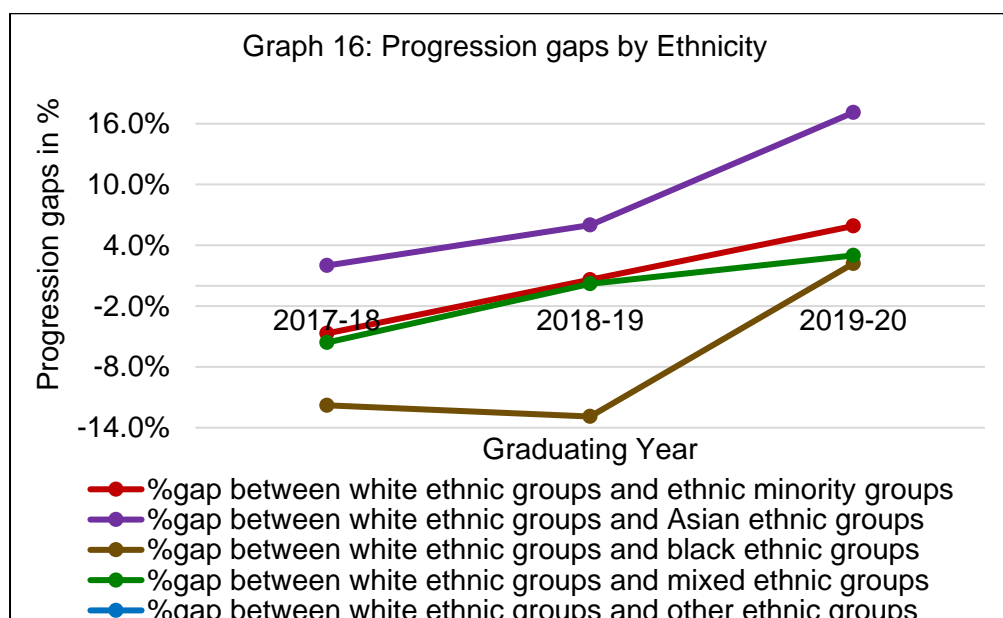
- 100% of care experienced students and students with caring responsibilities are in highly skilled employment or further study.
- More first-generation students' progress into highly skilled employment or further study than students who are not first-generation.
- More local or commuting students' progress into highly skilled employment or further study than students who lived in residential accommodation.

Our data also shows that students who have multiple diverse characteristics also do extremely well progressing into highly skilled employment or further study with only a few student groups showing small progression gaps, whilst other student groups outperform their comparison groups. For example:

- In previous years, more of the ethnic minority group students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two) progressed into highly skilled employment or further study than the white ethnic group of students from the same deprived areas. Only the last data year (2019-20) shows a 0.8% progression gap for the ethnic minority group students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two).
- The progression gap between males from the least deprived (IMD quintiles three to five) and males from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two) is beginning to close.

Internal data:

- More first-generation males progress into highly skilled employment or further study than males who are not first-generation.



Only students from the ethnic minority groups, particularly the Asian ethnic groups, show large progression gaps. Our data shows we have an increasing progression gap between the white ethnic groups and Asian ethnic groups (**Graph 16**). However, this is primarily due to the small population size.

Due to such a small population size of our students from the Asian ethnic groups responding to the Graduate Outcome survey<sup>80</sup>, we will struggle to set objectives and targets as we suspect this progression gap will

<sup>79</sup> Internal progression data uses the Guardian Good University guide criteria for the student population and for calculating highly skilled employment or further study rates. Full details can be found here:

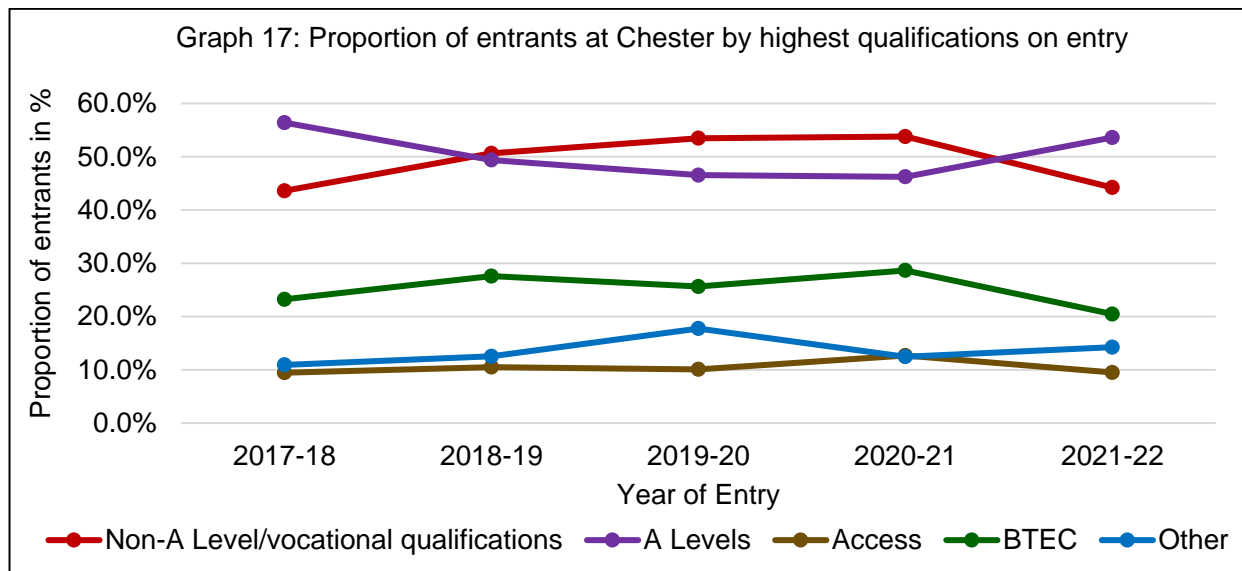
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/sep/11/methodology-behind-the-guardian-university-guide-2022>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk/>

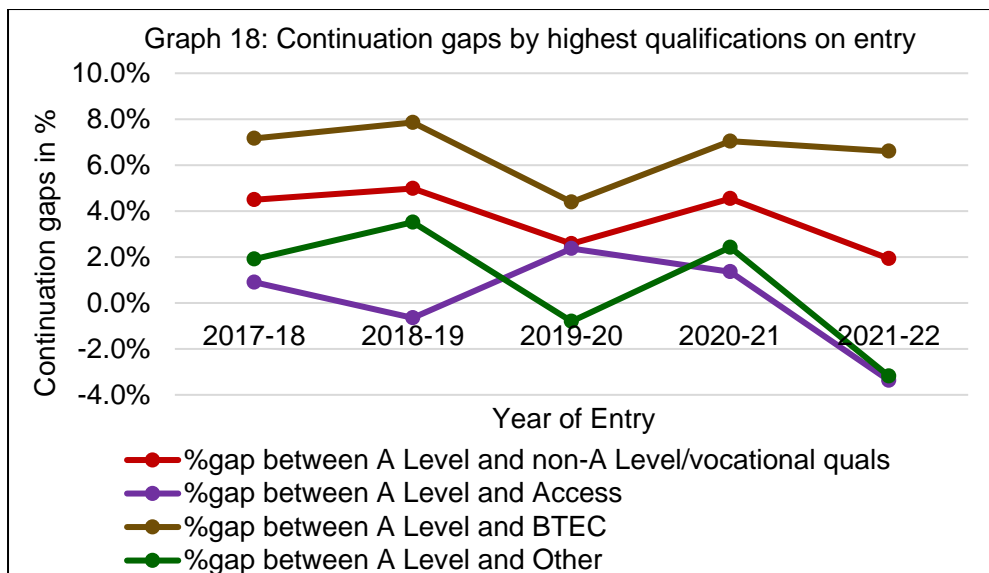
continue to fluctuate. However, we will continue to enhance our existing progression interventions which will contribute towards reducing the progression gap.

## 6. Other factors affecting access, success and progression in higher education

**Graph 17** shows our internal data by the highest qualifications a student has on entering our University, either by A Level or non-A Level and vocational qualifications, and by disaggregating non-A Level and vocational qualifications data by the type of qualification such as Access, BTEC or other qualification.



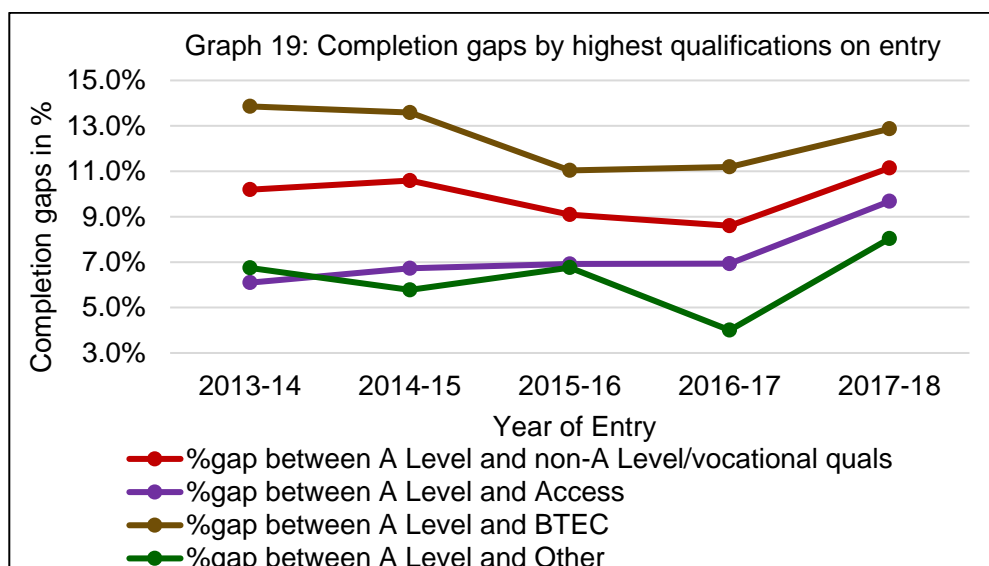
Our internal data shows we have an ever-growing population of students entering with qualifications other than A Levels, with a large population of student's highest qualifications on entry being BTEC qualifications. Our data also shows that, compared to their peers, students whose highest qualification on entry is a non-A Level or vocational qualification also have lower continuation, completion, and awarding rates.



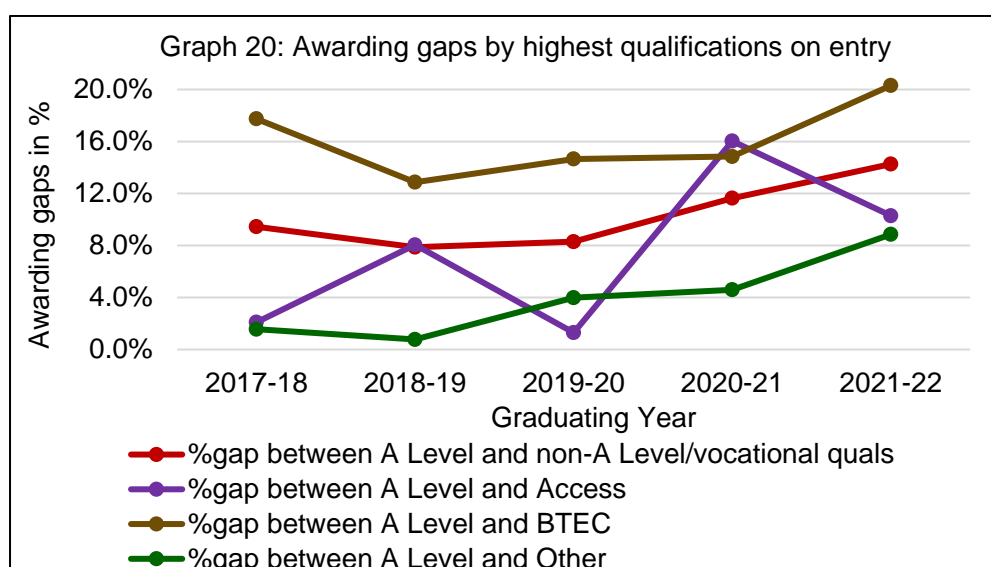
Our data shows we have large and persistent continuation gap between students entering with A Level qualifications and students entering with BTEC qualifications as their highest qualification on entry (**Graph 18**).

This is a student group – non-A Level and vocational qualifications on entry – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the continuation gap.

Our data shows we have large and persistent completion gaps between students entering with A Level qualifications and students entering with non-A Level and vocational qualifications as their highest qualification, with the largest completion gap being for students entering with a BTEC qualification (**Graph 19**).



This is a student group – non-A Level and vocational qualifications on entry – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the completion gap.

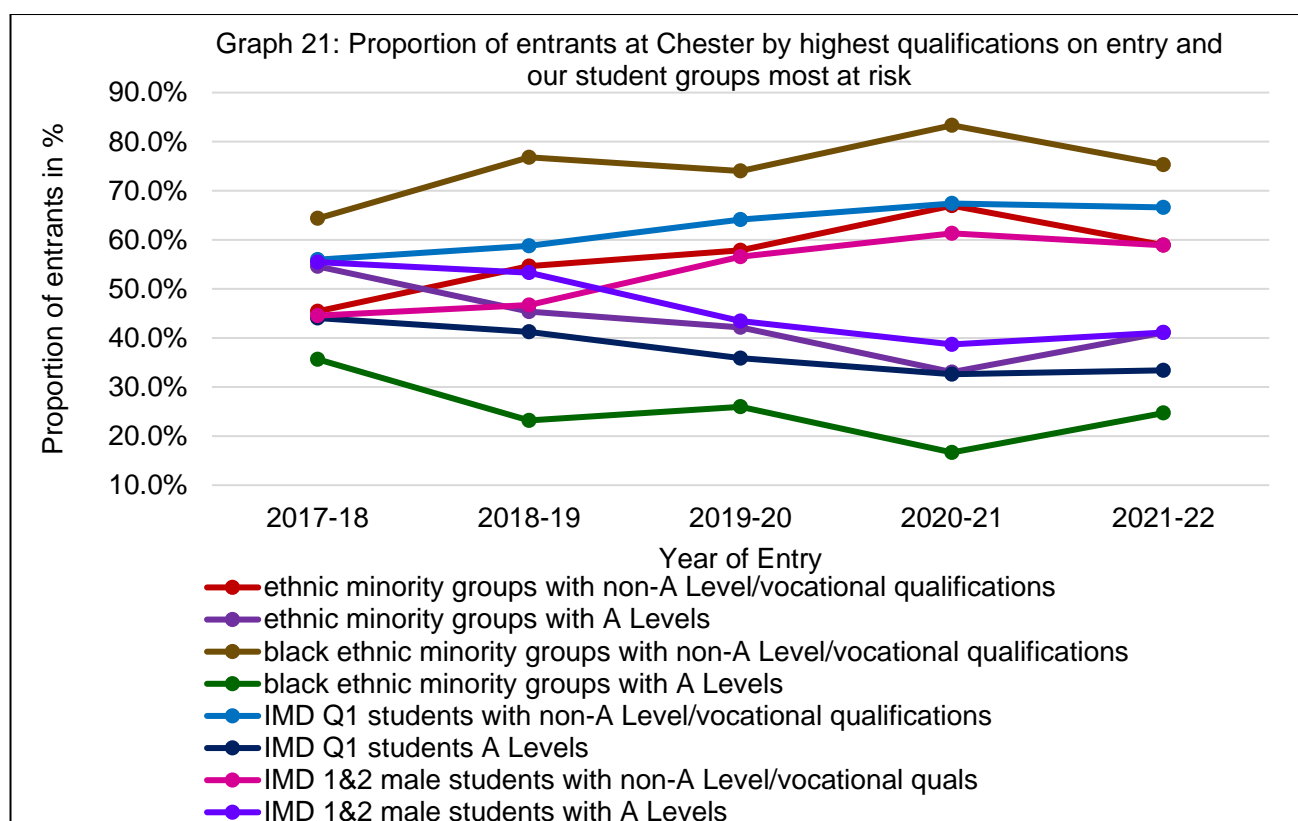


Our data shows we have large and persistent awarding gaps between students entering with A Level qualifications and students entering non-A Level and vocational qualifications as their highest qualification, with the largest awarding gap being for students entering with a BTEC qualification (**Graph 20**).

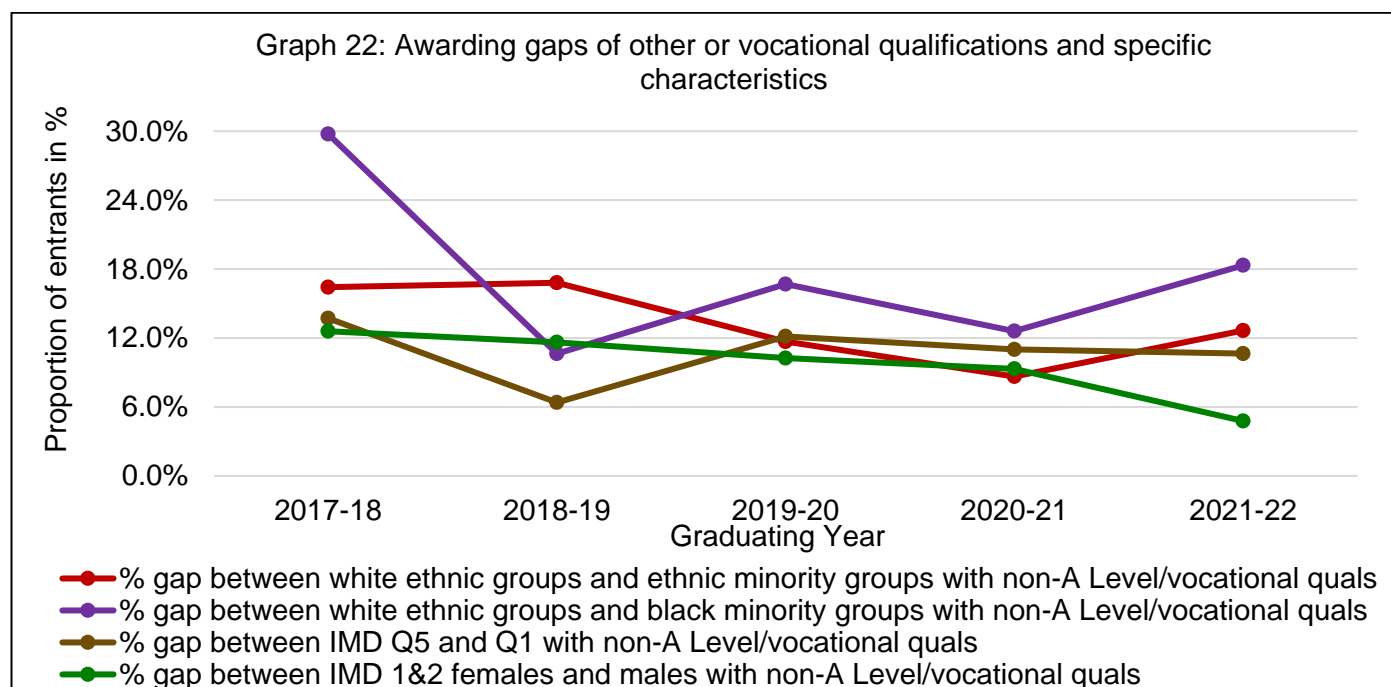
This is a student group – non-A Level and vocational qualifications on entry – for which we will set an objective and target and put interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the awarding gap.

When looking at the student groups where we have continuation, completion, or awarding gaps, our data shows that a high proportion of students from the ethnic minority groups, students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one) and males from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two) also enter with non-A Level or vocational qualifications (**Graph 21**).





This may be an underlying factor that impacts these student groups overall continuation, completion, and awarding rates. For example, awarding gaps are worse for students from the black ethnic groups and the ethnic minority groups, students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one) and males from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile one and two) who enter with non-A Level or vocational qualification as their highest qualification (**Graph 22**).



As we are setting objectives and targets and putting interventions in place to contribute towards reducing the continuation, completion and awarding gaps of students entering non-A Level and vocational qualifications as their highest qualification, these will also contribute toward reducing the continuation, completion, and awarding gaps of our other student groups. Therefore, **no further objectives and targets** will be set for students entering with non-A Level and vocational qualifications as their highest qualification who also have other/combination of characteristics linked to risk to equality of opportunity.

## Annex B: Evidence base and rationale for intervention strategies (further detail)

### Intervention Strategy 1: Collaborative partnership with schools to raise academic results

The activities within this intervention strategy have been designed to address prior academic results which impacts on school or further education (FE) college pupils' equality of opportunity to have the **knowledge and skills to access higher education (HE)** (i.e., factors that may affect being awarded the grades needed to enter HE.) Education is a key driver of social mobility (The Sutton Trust, 2021)<sup>81</sup>, and so it is important that interventions are designed to encourage educational engagement and raise academic results and begin as early as possible in a student's education life cycle (Abbott-Chapman, 2011)<sup>82</sup>. Gaps in academic results between student groups who are underrepresented in HE and their peers emerge as early as primary school and persist through their later education and employment (Office for Students, 2022)<sup>83</sup>.

There is much national research surrounding the low academic performance of boys compared to girls in primary and secondary education, and between the most deprived and disadvantaged primary and secondary pupils, which supports our intervention strategy to raise the academic results of males from the most deprived areas (UK Parliament, 2021)<sup>84</sup>. Research also suggests that performance at GCSE levels contribute to successful futures (Ofsted, 2013)<sup>85</sup>. Our internal data shows that less males from the most deprived areas are offered a place compared to their peers (see [Annex A – figure 5](#)) due to not attaining the appropriate grades for their chosen course. Some schools in our region are known to have low academic results at GCSE level, particularly in English and maths, compared to others in the region or nationally<sup>86</sup>. Therefore, working to improve disparities in early educational experiences is a key driver for our intervention. Prior school results not only contributes to the likelihood of students accessing HE, but also to succeeding whilst at university (Department for Education, 2014)<sup>87</sup>. This early intervention strategy may also, indirectly, contribute to our on-course objectives and targets.

Early interventions should also promote understanding of subject concepts which increases student overall knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, their subject (Tuah et al., 2009)<sup>88</sup>. Therefore, our activities have been designed to address disparities in early education in two ways:

- i. Improving **curriculum content and classroom practices for teachers** to contribute towards improved academic results or progression at primary and GCSE levels.
- ii. Improving **learners** subject understanding, increasing their knowledge and use of study strategies, decreasing their anxiety by increasing confidence and self-efficacy in terms of knowledge and skills

<sup>81</sup> The Sutton Trust. (2021). *Universities and Social Mobility: Summary Report*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Universities-and-social-mobility-final-summary.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> Abbott-Chapman, J. (2011). Making the most of the mosaic: Facilitating post-school transitions to higher education of disadvantaged students. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 38(1), 57-71.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-010-0001-9>

<sup>83</sup> Office for Students. (2022, April). *Insight brief 13: Schools, attainment and the role of higher education*. Retrieved from: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/cd782ede-93d9-4de0-9f50-3c95a49aafb3/ofs-insight-brief-13-updated-10-may-2022.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> UK Parliament. (2021, June). *The forgotten: How White working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it*. Retrieved from: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmeduc/85/8502.htm>

<sup>85</sup> Ofsted. (2013). *Unseen children: Access and achievement 20 years on*. Retrieved from:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/379157/Unseen\\_20children\\_20-20access\\_20and\\_20achievement\\_2020\\_20years\\_20on.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/379157/Unseen_20children_20-20access_20and_20achievement_2020_20years_20on.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.find-school-performance-data.service.gov.uk/?searchtype=search-by-la&keywords=Cheshire%20West%20and%20Chester&page=1&radius=3&schoollevel=IsSecondary>

<sup>87</sup> Department for Education. (2014). *The link between secondary school characteristics and university participation and outcomes: CAYT Research Report*. Retrieved from:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/317276/RR353\\_-\\_The\\_link\\_between\\_secondary\\_school\\_characteristics\\_and\\_university\\_participation\\_and\\_outcomes\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/317276/RR353_-_The_link_between_secondary_school_characteristics_and_university_participation_and_outcomes_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>88</sup> Tuah, J., Harrison, T. G., & Shallcross, D. E. (2009). The Advantages Perceived by School Teachers in Engaging Their Students in University-Based Chemistry Outreach Activities. *Acta Didactica Napocensia*, 2(3), 31-44. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/83929667.pdf>

and ability to apply this knowledge and skills, which may lead to increased engagement and motivation to learn.

Note that the evaluation design of our collaborative design and development of **primary and secondary schools' lesson and assessment content**, including **pedagogy and teacher development** to raise academic results with targeted schools (low attaining and low progression to higher education schools) within the Cheshire region, was recently reviewed as part of a TASO project. New for 2023/24 will be the redesign of the evaluation methods to measure impact of this activity based on the recommendations in the full report<sup>89</sup>.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Intervention Strategy 2: Widening participation in higher education**

Research highlights the importance of targeting interventions at secondary aged pupils and younger as the effects of deprivation on the equality of opportunity in education experiences are evident by this point (Harrison et al., 2018)<sup>90</sup>. The activities within this intervention strategy have been designed to address these disparities by increasing **knowledge and skills**, providing **information and guidance**, and work on changing **perceptions of higher education (HE)**, including **limited choice of course type and delivery mode**, to encourage certain student groups to **access HE**.

There is a disparity between student who are disadvantaged or from the most deprived areas, progressing into HE when compared to their peers (TASO, 2022a)<sup>91</sup>. Research notes that this may be due to students from more disadvantaged backgrounds being uncertain about their post-school pathways and choices (Abbott-Chapman, 2011)<sup>92</sup>. Following the impact of Covid-19, pupils were less likely to access information and guidance of post-school pathways, and so felt less confident and more uncertain of their options and choices towards a career pathway (Huband-Thompson et al., 2021)<sup>92</sup>. Although our target focuses on males from the most deprived areas, recommendations for interventions comes from research on disadvantaged school pupils (most deprived areas or free school meals) or white British working-class males. Recommendations are to ensure disadvantaged students, regardless of gender, gain information and advice, and the knowledge and skills, to understand career pathways, including subject choices leading to HE (Sammons et al., 2015)<sup>93</sup>. Interventions should also focus on helping pupils to make well-informed decisions about their futures by working to remove barriers, such as low aspirations and low confidence, which may prevent them from aspiring to and accessing HE (Aimhigher Plus, 2019)<sup>94</sup>.

Therefore, our activities have been designed to address these disparities in post-school pathways and choices in three ways:

- i. Our Pathfinder initiative and collaborative activity with Wirral Met further education (FE) college aim to address this by **raising pupil awareness of career and work-related opportunities**; developing pupil **confidence and self-efficacy**; and **broadening career aspirations** (Department for Education, 2011)<sup>95</sup>, which may also lead to increased **engagement and motivation to learn**.

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<sup>89</sup> <https://taso.org.uk/evidence/evaluation-guidance-resources/toc/theories-of-change-attainment-raising/>

<sup>90</sup> Harrison, N., Vigurs, K., Crockford, J., McCaig, C., Squire, R., & Clark, L. (2018). *Understanding the evaluation of access and participation outreach interventions for under 16 year olds*. Retrieved from: [https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/a8ad5c94-7a33-4b53-8f09-824d0705f073/ofs2018\\_aevaluation.pdf](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/a8ad5c94-7a33-4b53-8f09-824d0705f073/ofs2018_aevaluation.pdf)

<sup>91</sup> TASO. (2022a). *Report: Summer schools in the time of COVID-19 Interim findings on the impact on widening participation*. Retrieved from: [https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO-Report\\_Summer-schools-in-the-time-of-Covid-19.pdf](https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO-Report_Summer-schools-in-the-time-of-Covid-19.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> Huband-Thompson, B., Joshua, V., & Mulcahy, E. (2021). *COVID's impact on young people's post-18 plans and access to higher education outreach*. Retrieved from [https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO-Report\\_Summer-schools-in-the-time-of-Covid-19.pdf](https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO-Report_Summer-schools-in-the-time-of-Covid-19.pdf)

<sup>93</sup> Sammons, P., Toth, K., & Sylva, K. (2015). *Subject to background: What promotes better achievement for bright but disadvantaged students?* London: Sutton Trust. Retrieved from [https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/SUBJECT-TO-BACKGROUND\\_FULL-REPORT.pdf](https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/SUBJECT-TO-BACKGROUND_FULL-REPORT.pdf)

<sup>94</sup> Aimhigher Plus. (2019). *Evaluation Plan NCOP Phase II*. Retrieved from: <https://aimhigherwm.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Aimhigher-Plus-NCOP-Phase-Two-Evaluation-Plan.pdf>

<sup>95</sup> Department for Education. (2011). *Key Stage 2 career-related learning pathfinder evaluation* (Research Report DFE-RR116). Retrieved from:

- ii. Ensure school and further education college pupils are aware of all **diverse and flexible pathways to HE** and that there are **more choice of courses and delivery modes available** to them.
- iii. Taste of University and our collaborative activity with Wirral Met further education (FE) college provide opportunities to experience university, prior to application, to increase **their knowledge and skills** and provide **information and guidance** so they can make more informed decisions about their post-18 options.

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### **Intervention Strategy 3: Providing a sense of belonging, enabling connections and supporting cost pressures**

The activities within this intervention strategy have been designed to address how student groups may not experience equality of opportunity through **insufficient academic support** and **insufficient personal support**, and the impact of these on **students' mental health**. The activities within this intervention strategy have also been designed to address how the **cost pressures** some of our students are experiencing may impact on the above. Student groups that are least represented in higher education (HE) have higher withdrawal rates than their peers and so it is crucial that activities are designed specifically to address retention and continuation of their studies (Collings et al., 2014)<sup>96</sup>. In particular, those who were eligible for free school meals and those from the most deprived areas are more likely to drop-out of university or less likely to achieve a first or upper second-class degree (House of Commons Library, 2023)<sup>97</sup>.

The House of Commons Library (2023) research briefing also noted a number of disparities in equality of opportunity that students from the most deprived areas are experiencing which may be impacting their success whilst at university. Prior academic results is one and this is being addressed in our [Intervention Strategy 1](#). Having insufficient advice and guidance prior to attending university is another and this is being addressed in our [Intervention Strategy 2](#). To ensure we continue providing information and guidance whilst at university to students who are experiencing the most deprivation, the activities in this intervention strategy also focus on how the influence of fellow students play a role in supporting the most deprived students' transition. Research suggests that the early transition into university, whether students make friends, and how quickly they feel settled is an important factor to student success (Andrews & Clark, 2011)<sup>98</sup>. Student's risk feeling lonely and isolated during the transition phase so need opportunities to connect and make friends (Diehl et al., 2018)<sup>99</sup>. There is also a large body of research which explores the importance of student sense of belonging; a greater sense of belonging is linked to increased engagement, motivation, and confidence – factors which all contribute to more successful outcomes for students (Pedler et al., 2022)<sup>100</sup>.

Research found that students who lack possession of social capital are limited in their educational outcomes (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015)<sup>101</sup>. Student groups experiencing a lack of equality of opportunity due to being from backgrounds with socio-economic barriers, as well as structural inequalities, are less likely to possess

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/182663/DF-E-RR116.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182663/DF-E-RR116.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> Collings, R., Swanson, V., & Watkins, R. (2014). The impact of peer mentoring on levels of student wellbeing, integration and retention: A controlled comparative evaluation of residential students in UK higher education. *Higher Education*, 68(6), 927-942. DOI 10.1007/s10734-014-9752-y

<sup>97</sup> House of Commons Library. (2023). *Research Briefing: Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England*. Retrieved from <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9195/CBP-9195.pdf>

<sup>98</sup> Andrews, J., & Clark, R. (2011). *Peer mentoring works! How peer mentoring enhances student success in Higher Education: Evaluation toolkit*. Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from: [https://publications.aston.ac.uk/id/eprint/17969/1/ASTON\\_PEER\\_MENTORING\\_EVALUATION\\_TOOL\\_KIT.COPY.pdf](https://publications.aston.ac.uk/id/eprint/17969/1/ASTON_PEER_MENTORING_EVALUATION_TOOL_KIT.COPY.pdf)

<sup>99</sup> Diehl, K., Jansen, C., Ishchanova, K., & Hilger-Kolb, J. (2018). Loneliness at universities: determinants of emotional and social loneliness among students. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 15(9), 1865. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15091865>

<sup>100</sup> Pedler, M. L., Willis, R., & Nieuwoudt, J. E. (2022). A sense of belonging at university: student retention, motivation and enjoyment. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(3), 397-408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1955844>

<sup>101</sup> Mountford-Zimdars, A., Sabri, D., Moore, J., Sanders, J., Jones, S. & Higham, L. (2015). *Causes of differences in student outcomes*. HEFCE. Retrieved from: [https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/23653/1/HEFCE2015\\_diffout.pdf](https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/23653/1/HEFCE2015_diffout.pdf)



such attributes (TASO, 2022b)<sup>102</sup>. Another factor the House of Commons Library (2023) research briefing found affecting the most deprived students' continuation and completion of studies is the current cost of living crisis. Almost one in five students saying they had considered dropping out due to this crisis (Office for Students, 2023)<sup>103</sup> and nine in ten students reported this was impacting on their mental health (NUS, 2022)<sup>104</sup>.

Therefore, our activities have been designed to address these disparities the most deprived students are experiencing in three ways:

- i. Provide new online mentoring to combat feelings of **isolation and loneliness** and develop a **sense of belonging** as students who participate in mentoring schemes tend to have more successful outcomes on their course, with mentees appearing more engaged and integrated into university life.
- ii. Provide opportunities to build **social capital** skills and attributes to ensure equality of opportunity for students to achieve and continue with their studies and prepare them for skilled employment post-university.
- iii. Implement the recommendations from the Office for Students (2023) to tackle the impact of **financial worries and cost of living crisis** by:
  - a) Increasing our budget for financial support, widening our eligibility criteria, and streamlining the application process.
  - b) Provide funds to meet different needs (for example, a digital fund, a travel fund, etc.), including equipment loans.
  - c) Create a new-look Your Money team and online resources, with the assistance of student representatives, to ensure communications are clear and transparent.
  - d) Financial support based on **actual** household bill costs to meet actual expenditure and awarding 100% of their needs (or maximum of £2,500 per student whichever is highest).
  - e) Providing additional **Student Money Advisors** to provide information, guidance and advice on money management and budgeting skills.

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#### **Intervention Strategy 4: Enabling academic skills and providing personalised support**

The activities within this intervention strategy have been designed to address how students who enter with non-A Level and vocational qualifications may not experience equality of opportunity through **insufficient academic support** and **insufficient personal support**, as well as the **ongoing impacts of coronavirus**, by enabling academic skills and providing personalised support. Given the diversity of our student population, and the ever-growing population of students entering our University with non-A Level and vocational qualifications, we should not assume that all students share our understanding of what learning is or the terms we use in relation to learning.

Research shows that students entering with non-A Level and vocational qualifications, are also known to be students with characteristics that may not experience equality of opportunity (for example, those from the most deprived areas, students from the ethnic minority groups, Care Experienced or Estranged students, etc.) (Nuffield Foundation, 2022)<sup>105</sup>. Students entering with non-A Level and vocational qualifications are also less likely to continue in their studies or be awarded a good honours degree (first or upper-second class degree) if they complete their studies (Banerjee, 2018)<sup>106</sup>. Universities should increase support during the first year of study for these students, and embedding learning development into course content, and therefore

<sup>102</sup> TASO. (2022b). *Rapid Review: Intermediate outcomes for higher education access and success*. Retrieved from: [https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO-Report-%E2%80%93-Intermediate-outcomes-for-higher-education-access-and-success\\_stg4.pdf](https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO-Report-%E2%80%93-Intermediate-outcomes-for-higher-education-access-and-success_stg4.pdf)

<sup>103</sup> Office for Students. (2023, March). *Insight brief 17: Studying during rises in the cost of living*. Retrieved from: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/6981/insight-brief-17-studying-during-rises-in-the-cost-of-living.pdf>

<sup>104</sup> National Union of Students. (2022, November). *Cost of living crisis: HE students*. Retrieved from: [https://www.nus.org.uk/42\\_of\\_uk\\_university\\_students\\_living\\_off\\_100\\_or\\_less\\_a\\_month](https://www.nus.org.uk/42_of_uk_university_students_living_off_100_or_less_a_month)

<sup>105</sup> Nuffield Foundation. (2022, January). *Students with BTECs are successful across a range of university outcomes*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/students-with-btecs-university-success>

<sup>106</sup> Banerjee, P. A. (2018, May). *How successful are BTEC students at university?* WonkHE. Retrieved from: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/how-successful-are-btec-students-at-university/>

good programme design, should include actively planning where and when the opportunities for developing and practising key academic literacy skills are situated in the curriculum (Thomas et al., 2022)<sup>107</sup>.

To assist academic staff further, particularly Personal Academic Tutors (PATs), the 'What Works Phase 2' final report on supporting student retention and success notes the need for proactive and personalised interventions that are evidence-informed, ongoing, monitored, and followed up, whilst understanding the needs of a diverse student population (Thomas et al., 2017)<sup>108</sup>. PATs need to be aware of the different experience and needs of students entering with non-A Level and vocational qualifications. For example, the differences between the ways in which A Level and non-A Level curriculum, the different learning styles, identify, timetabling and learning environment (NEON, 2020)<sup>109</sup>.

Therefore, our activities have been designed to address these disparities students entering with non-A Level and vocational qualifications may be experiencing in four ways:

- i. To proactively assist these students with the development of **academic skills** students need to succeed at university prior to arrival and during their studies.
- ii. Provide a redesigned Enabling Academic Skills Strategy for academic teams to use an academic skills toolkit to reflect on where and when the opportunities for developing and practising key **academic literacy skills** are situated in the course design.
- iii. Academic Department-led mid-term reviews (MTRs) by providing our PATs with a range of real time data sources, at key points in the student's life cycle, to initiate interventions and support with **academic progress or engagement concerns** tailored to the student.
- iv. Provide new online training modules, resources and materials for teaching, admissions and support staff on the **different experiences of our diverse student population** and host community-led Strategic Innovation Forum (SIF) engaging staff to **review and innovate practice** to improve student outcomes, student wellbeing and staff wellbeing.

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### **Intervention Strategy 5: Enhance and deliver inclusive and flexible, digitally-enhanced high quality courses**

Students entering with non-A Level and vocational qualifications are less likely to be awarded a good honours degree (first or upper-second class degree) if they complete their studies (Banerjee, 2018)<sup>106</sup>, and students from the ethnic minority groups, students who were eligible for free school meals and students from the most deprived areas are also more likely to drop-out of university or less likely to achieve a first or upper second-class degree (House of Commons Library, 2023)<sup>97</sup>. Most research on closing the degree awarding gap centres around closing the ethnicity degree awarding gap (Universities UK, 2022)<sup>110</sup>. At Chester, we intend not only to work towards closing the ethnicity degree awarding gap, but to also include closing the awarding gap for all our other student groups.

Our whole provider approach to education is to deliver inclusive and flexible, digitally-enhanced courses. We want our students to feel part of a learning community where their unique perspectives and experiences demonstrably enrich the learning environments, and learning experiences of others, and are accommodated within assessment practices. Therefore, our final intervention strategy is based on Oxford Brookes Inclusive Curriculum Model – **IDEAS**. This model is based on five elements: **Inclusive learning (I); Digital inclusivity**

<sup>107</sup> Thomas, P., Khanom, N., Lambe, S., Adelaja, B. and Mehbali, M. (2022). Constructing an academic skills toolkit for embedding academic practices. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 24.  
<https://journal.alinhe.ac.uk/index.php/jldhe/article/view/832/605>

<sup>108</sup> Thomas, L., Hill, M., O'Mahony, J., & Yorke, M. (2017, April). *Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change*. What Works? Student Retention & Success programme. Retrieved from:  
[file:///C:/Users/slawn/Downloads/What%20Works\\_%20Student%20Retention%20and%20Success%20\(full\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/slawn/Downloads/What%20Works_%20Student%20Retention%20and%20Success%20(full).pdf)

<sup>109</sup> NEON (2020). *Guiding principles to inform the successful progression of BTEC students into higher education*. Retrieved from <https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/A2300-Pearson-BTEC-Neon-22PG-PRF5-1.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> Universities UK. (2022). *Closing ethnicity degree awarding gaps: three years on*. Retrieved from <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Reports/closing-the-gap-three-years-on.pdf>

**(D); Employability learning (E); Assessment for, as and of learning (A); and Sustainability mindset (S).** The five elements of IDEAS represent current sector-wide best practice in inclusive learning design and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and incorporates existing inclusive curriculum models and a wide body of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning covering sustainability, equality, student belonging, and the reduction of awarding gaps. Full details of the model and bibliography of the literature can be found on the Oxford Brookes website<sup>111</sup>.

This whole provider approach is the foundation to our Access and Participation Plan. It brings access and participation related issues to the core of curriculum design and this approach will work to address risks to equality of opportunity by tackling **insufficient academic support, insufficient personal support** and the **ongoing impacts of coronavirus**.

To understand why each element is important for supporting students' success on their course and beyond, we are providing a brief overview of some of the literature below:

- **I = Inclusive Learning:** Research shows that experiences of university differ significantly between the ethnic minority groups and the white ethnic groups due to issues with the curriculum, assessment practices and support, and the academic environment (Smith, 2017)<sup>112</sup>. Links between decolonisation, awarding rates, and belonging have also been drawn (Winter et al., 2023)<sup>113</sup>.
- **D = Digital Learning:** Digital learning should be accessible and free from the digital barriers experienced by the poorest of students, intensifying pre-existing inequalities (Butcher & Curry, 2022)<sup>114</sup>. Digital learning should also promote independence and inclusion (accessible tools and techniques), which can lead to more successful outcomes (Ari & Inan, 2010)<sup>115</sup>, and the acquisition of digital skills has been linked to increased social inclusion and integration into the labour market (Monteiro & Leite, 2021)<sup>116</sup>.
- **E = Employability Learning:** Supporting and encouraging students to develop necessary employability skills enables them to learn more about themselves, including where their strengths and weaknesses lie, which is an important skill in and of itself (Maher, 2010)<sup>117</sup>. The possession of key employability skills is considered essential for success in both securing and retaining employment (TASO, 2022c)<sup>118</sup>.
- **A = Assessment for, as and of Learning:** Given the diversity of our student population, no one assessment is equally inclusive for all students, and so a range of assessments should be provided

<sup>111</sup> <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/staff/student-support/ideas-model/what-is-ideas>

<sup>112</sup> Smith, S. (2017). Exploring the black and minority ethnic (BME) student attainment gap: What did it tell us? Actions to address Home BME undergraduate students' degree attainment. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 5(1), 48–57. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Susan-Smith-78/publication/312925246\\_Exploring\\_the\\_Black\\_and\\_Minority\\_Ethnic\\_BME\\_Student\\_Attainment\\_Gap\\_What\\_Did\\_It\\_Tell\\_Us\\_Actions\\_to\\_Address\\_Home\\_BME\\_Undergraduate\\_Students'\\_Degree\\_Attainment/links/5ed74bee45851529452a6713/Exploring-the-Black-and-Minority-Ethnic-BME-Student-Attainment-Gap-What-Did-It-Tell-Us-Actions-to-Address-Home-BME-Undergraduate-Students-Degree-Attainment.pdf?\\_sg%5B0%5D=started\\_experiment\\_milestone&origin=journalDetail](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Susan-Smith-78/publication/312925246_Exploring_the_Black_and_Minority_Ethnic_BME_Student_Attainment_Gap_What_Did_It_Tell_Us_Actions_to_Address_Home_BME_Undergraduate_Students'_Degree_Attainment/links/5ed74bee45851529452a6713/Exploring-the-Black-and-Minority-Ethnic-BME-Student-Attainment-Gap-What-Did-It-Tell-Us-Actions-to-Address-Home-BME-Undergraduate-Students-Degree-Attainment.pdf?_sg%5B0%5D=started_experiment_milestone&origin=journalDetail)

<sup>113</sup> Winter, J., Turner, R., & Webb, O. (2023, January). Reflecting on the contribution educational developers can make to decolonising curricular. *The SEDA Blog*. <https://thesedablog.wordpress.com/2023/01/18/1615/>

<sup>114</sup> Butcher, J., & Curry, G. (2022). Digital poverty as a barrier to access. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 24(2), 180-194. <https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.24.2.180>

<sup>115</sup> Ari, I. A., & Inan, F. A. (2010). Assistive Technologies for Students with Disabilities: A Survey of Access and Use in Turkish Universities. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 9(2), 40-45. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ898001.pdf>

<sup>116</sup> Monteiro, A., & Leite, C. (2021). Digital literacies in higher education: Skills, uses, opportunities and obstacles to digital transformation. *RED: Revista De Educación a Distancia*, 21(65). <https://doi.org/10.6018/red.438721>

<sup>117</sup> Maher, A. (2010). Embedding employability in the curriculum: enhancing students' career-planning skills. In N, Becket., & P. Kemp (Online ed.), *Enhancing Graduate Employability in Business and Management, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, Tourism*. Threshold Press. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237421697\\_EMPLOYABILITY\\_CASE\\_STUDY\\_Embedding\\_employability\\_in\\_the\\_curriculum\\_enhancing\\_students\\_career\\_planning\\_skills](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237421697_EMPLOYABILITY_CASE_STUDY_Embedding_employability_in_the_curriculum_enhancing_students_career_planning_skills)

<sup>118</sup> TASO. (2022c). *Summary Report: What works to reduce equality gaps in employment and employability*. Retrieved from: <https://taso.org.uk/news-item/what-works-to-reduce-equality-gaps-in-employment-and-employability/>

to reduce inequality of opportunity to succeed (Macrae & Shipman, n.d.)<sup>119</sup>. During the COVID-19 pandemic, universities were forced to quickly adapt their course content and modes of assessment – such changes coincided with a narrowing of all forms of awarding gaps including deprivation, ethnicity, disability, and gender. Therefore, long-term changes in assessment practices should continue to be made, so that awarding gaps may continue to close (Sambell & Brown, 2021)<sup>120</sup>.

- **S = Sustainability Mindset:** Education for sustainable development is not just about teaching environmental issues but includes considerations for various social and economic concerns such as poverty and equity, which encourage students to look critically at the world (Advance HE & QAA, 2021)<sup>121</sup>. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within the curriculum empowers learners (UNESCO, 2017)<sup>122</sup>. Promoting a sustainability mindset in higher education increases student awareness of global issues and understanding of how to think forward, take action, and inspire change (O’Flaherty & Liddy, 2018)<sup>123</sup>.

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<sup>119</sup> Macrae, A., & Shipman, S. (n.d.). *HSS Assessment Toolkit*. Oxford Brookes University. Retrieved from: <https://sites.google.com/brookes.ac.uk/hssassessmentsandskills/home>

<sup>120</sup> Sambell, K., & Brown, S. (2021). Changing assessment for good: building on the emergency switch to promote future-oriented assessment and feedback designs. In P. Baughan (Online ed.), *Assessment and Feedback in a Post-Pandemic Era: A Time for Learning and Inclusion* (pp. 11-21). Advance HE. [https://kar.kent.ac.uk/90382/1/AdvHE\\_Assessment\\_Feedback\\_postpandemic\\_1625736998.pdf](https://kar.kent.ac.uk/90382/1/AdvHE_Assessment_Feedback_postpandemic_1625736998.pdf)

<sup>121</sup> Advance HE and QAA. (2021). *Education for Sustainable Development Guidance*. Retrieved from: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development>

<sup>122</sup> UNESCO. (2017). *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: learning objectives*. Retrieved from: <https://sites.google.com/brookes.ac.uk/future-pathways/esd-key-docs/esd-los-document>

<sup>123</sup> O’Flaherty, J., & Liddy, M. (2018). The impact of development education and education for sustainable development interventions: a synthesis of the research. *Environmental education research*, 24(7), 1031-1049. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2017.1392484>



# Fees, investments and targets 2024-25 to 2027-28

Provider name: University of Chester

Provider UKPRN: 10007848

## Summary of 2024-25 entrant course fees

\*course type not listed

### Inflation statement:

We will not raise fees annually for 2024-25 new entrants

Table 3b - Full-time course fee levels for 2024-25 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	9250
Foundation degree		N/A	7850
Foundation year/Year 0		N/A	9250
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT		N/A	9250
Accelerated degree		N/A	11100
Sandwich year		N/A	1850
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years		N/A	1385
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 3b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2024-25

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	Hammond School Limited (The)	10002869	9250
First degree	The Light Project	10032260	6900
First degree	The Light Project	10032260	7500
Foundation degree	The Light Project	10032260	6900
Foundation degree	The Light Project	10032260	7500
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 4b - Part-time course fee levels for 2024-25 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	6935
First degree	Work Based and Integrative Studies	N/A	6935
First degree	Work Based and Integrative Studies co-delivered	N/A	6935
Foundation degree		N/A	5887
Foundation degree	Work Based and Integrative Studies	N/A	5887
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	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2024-25

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	The Light Project	10032260	5625
Foundation degree	The Light Project	10032260	5625
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

# Fees, investments and targets

## 2024-25 to 2027-28

Provider name: University of Chester

Provider UKPRN: 10007848

### 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 OfS 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	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£710,000	£730,000	£745,000	£765,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£1,687,000	£1,442,000	£1,239,000	£1,145,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£420,000	£430,000	£440,000	£450,000

**Table 6d - Investment estimates**

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£280,000	£290,000	£295,000	£305,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£335,000	£345,000	£350,000	£360,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£95,000	£95,000	£100,000	£100,000
<b>Access activity investment</b>	<b>Total access investment (£)</b>	<b>£710,000</b>	<b>£730,000</b>	<b>£745,000</b>	<b>£765,000</b>
<b>Access activity investment</b>	<b>Total access investment (as % of HFI)</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>
<b>Access activity investment</b>	<b>Total access investment funded from HFI (£)</b>	<b>£701,000</b>	<b>£716,000</b>	<b>£736,000</b>	<b>£756,000</b>
<b>Access activity investment</b>	<b>Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)</b>	<b>£9,000</b>	<b>£9,000</b>	<b>£9,000</b>	<b>£9,000</b>
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£1,083,000	£812,000	£584,000	£490,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£54,000	£55,000	£55,000	£55,000
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£550,000	£575,000	£600,000	£600,000
<b>Financial support investment</b>	<b>Total financial support investment (£)</b>	<b>£1,687,000</b>	<b>£1,442,000</b>	<b>£1,239,000</b>	<b>£1,145,000</b>
<b>Financial support investment</b>	<b>Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)</b>	<b>8.9%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>5.2%</b>
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£420,000	£430,000	£440,000	£450,000
<b>Research and evaluation investment</b>	<b>Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>

# Fees, investments and targets

## 2024-25 to 2027-28

Provider name: University of Chester

Provider UKPRN: 10007848

### 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	2024-25 milestone	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone
Increase our population of males from the most deprived areas	PTA_1	Access	Intersection of characteristics	Other (please specify in description)		Increase in the proportion of male students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintile 1 and 2)	No	The access and participation dataset	2021-22	Percentage	12.3%	12.5%	13%	13.5%	14%
	PTA_2														
	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	2024-25 milestone	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone
Reduce the continuation gap for the most disadvantaged males	PTS_1	Continuation	Intersection of characteristics	Other (please specify in description)	N/A	Reduce the percentage difference in continuation rates between male students from the least deprived areas (IMS quintile three to five) and most deprived areas (IMD quintile 1 and 2)	No	The access and participation dataset	2020-21	Percentage points	9.5	6	5	4	3
Reduce the continuation gap for the students entering with non-traditional qualifications	PTS_2	Continuation	Other	Other (please specify in description)	N/A	Reduce the percentage difference in continuation rates between A Level and non-A Level/vocational qualification students - internal data of full-time level 3 and 4 undergraduate and apprenticeship students continuing at Chester, or completed, one year and 14 days after starting course	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2021-22	Percentage points	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5
Reduce the completion gap for students from the most disadvantaged areas	PTS_3	Completion	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations (IMD))	IMD quintile 1	IMD quintile 5	Reduce the percentage difference in completion rates between IMD quintile 5 and 1 students	No	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	Percentage points	7.9	5.5	5	4.5	4
Reduce the completion gap for students who were eligible for free school meals	PTS_4	Completion	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible	Not eligible	Reduce the percentage difference in completion rates between students not eligible for free school meals and students eligible for free school meals	No	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	Percentage points	10.1	8	7	6	5
Reduce the completion gap for the students entering with non-traditional qualifications	PTS_5	Completion	Other	Other (please specify in description)	N/A	Reduce the percentage difference in completion rates between A Level and non-A Level/vocational qualification students - internal data of full-time undergraduate and apprenticeship students completing, or continuing at Chester, four years and 14 days after starting course	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2017-18	Percentage points	11.1	8	7	6	5

[illegible]