

Writtle University College

Access and participation plan

2022-23 to 2026-27

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Introduction

Established in 1893, Writtle University College (the University College) has been producing leaders in the land-based industries and organisations for more than 120 years. The University College is one of the oldest specialist institutions in the UK and offers a range of land-based, design and sport courses at various levels of academic study including Postgraduate, Undergraduate, Further Education, Short Courses and Apprenticeships. We also provide students with the options of being able to study certain courses on a part-time basis.

Our facilities and resources, based on our picturesque campus of approximately 110 hectares, are used to enhance the student learning experience, enabling them to gain both theory and practical skills whilst studying with us. We have a history of achieving excellence and being recognised as a market leader and we have produced award-winning alumni that have gone on to become leaders in their industry.

Diversity at Writtle University College means recognising that everyone is different, respecting and encouraging these differences and valuing the benefits diversity brings. Equality at Writtle University College means that everyone is treated fairly. We believe that Equality and Diversity is central to achieving our goals, whilst enhancing our cultural profile and labour demographic. We are committed to maintaining our excellent record in teaching and learning by ensuring there is equality of opportunity for all, fostered in an environment of mutual respect and dignity.

1. Assessment of performance

Context

Writtle University College campus is situated in Chelmsford, Essex. The urban area of the city has a population of approximately 112,000, while the district has a dispersed population of approximately 168,300. The University College is located in the London commuter belt, approximately 30 miles northeast of London, in a predominantly rural area. Approximately 43% of the University College's intake comes from the local area, within a 20-mile radius; this increases to approximately 66% recruited from within a 40-mile radius which is mainly north, east and west of Writtle (rather than extending into London).

Essex has lower levels of deprivation than two-thirds of English local authorities and when compared to England as a whole. However, in 2019 approximately 8.6% of Essex's residents live in areas which are among England's most deprived 20%, compared to only 4.5% in 2007.

In the University College's immediate locality around Chelmsford, the majority of young people live in POLAR4 Quintiles 3, 4 and 5 areas. POLAR4 Quintile 1 and 2 areas are found along the Essex coastline, particularly around Burnham and Southend-on-Sea. In terms of adults, the same pattern is evident, however there are very limited Adult HE Quintile 5 areas in the local vicinity, which is made up predominantly of Adult HE Quintiles 3 and 4.

The local areas are generally very homogenous, having low levels of ethnic diversity. The challenge of diversifying the ethnic profile of the University College's student body therefore relates to our traditional catchment areas of Essex and the East of England, where overall the minority ethnic population accounts for only 5.2% of the total population¹. This is notably lower than regional and national figures, for example 14.5% for England.

¹ Research undertaken by Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester and Tendring local authorities (December 2015), using Census 2011 data.

Notes on the data

We have used the OfS Access and Participation dataset to conduct our performance assessment, coupled with internal and HESA data where required (to fill gaps in OfS data for care leavers).

The small size of our undergraduate student body (typical intake to first degree courses is around 200 students) poses significant challenges with respect to our performance assessment, evaluation, and target setting. For some underrepresented groups there is insufficient data to inform statistical analysis at the disaggregated level, which means we must rely on appropriate groupings of data. Intersectional analysis is also very difficult as cohort sizes become very small in this context. The OfS Access and Participation dataset confirms that there are a limited number of measures in which we have statistically significant results available to inform year-on-year analysis. These are limited to access measures and concern comparisons between the proportions of students at the University College provider compared to the general population. The value of these comparisons is also limited since we recruit the majority of our students from the Essex region.

We have seen large fluctuations in the performance outcomes of certain target groups owing to the small numbers involved, which makes it difficult for us to correlate institutional activity with student outcomes. Our assessment is in some cases therefore based on data aggregated across multiple years and this has informed our approach to target-setting.

To help mitigate the issue of small datasets, in our Evaluation Strategy (Section 3.3), we remain committed to using qualitative approaches to enhance our evaluative capabilities both to address the limitations of our small datasets in understanding our performance and impact over time, and to better understand the trends and correlations we observe, building a body of evaluated type 1 evidence.

Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) and Graduate Outcomes (GO) data

Until 2016-17, higher education providers have used the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) data to determine performance against this measure. The very small cohorts at the University College result in significant fluctuations in data, and percentage differences that are not valid enough to warrant statistical significance. This has made it very challenging to draw meaningful conclusions. Compounding this issue is the recent change in measure from DLHE to the new Graduate Outcomes (GO) data. From 2017-18, GO data has replaced DLHE (which is no longer available); with the two datasets being incomparable due to the different treatment and calculation methods relating to each dataset. This means that older DLHE data cannot be relied upon to assess performance in the new GO context nor to set targets as part of this Plan.

The University College's Access and Participation Group have agreed a measure using GO data to monitor the proportion of UK domiciled, full time, degree/Integrated Masters graduates in professional work, professional study or postgraduate study. The methodology aims to maintain as broad base population as possible, by including partially complete as well as complete survey responses, to enable monitoring at overall provider level, and by underrepresented group where possible. The measure applied to this base population is based on the derived graduate activity, and where necessary, the graduates most important activity (for instances where graduate activity has been derived as employment and study). Only employment activities where respondents provided enough detail for a Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code to be derived are included in the calculation. This enables the University College to specifically monitor the type of employment (by SOC code) our graduates pursue following their studies, in addition to those following professional study or postgraduate study pathways.

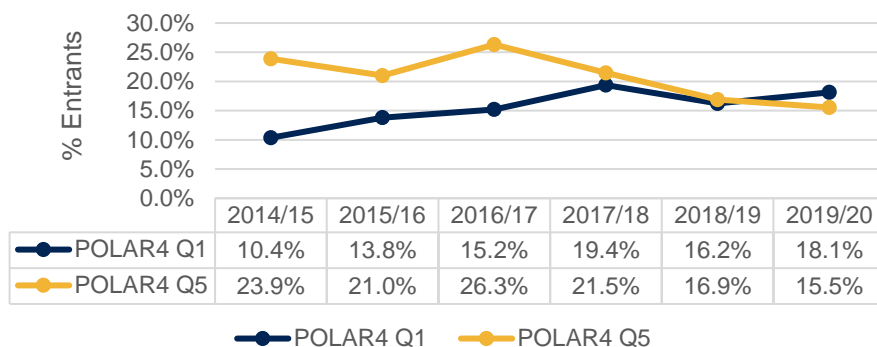
1.1 Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

Access – POLAR4

The University College have a strong performance record in recruiting learners from POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 areas, and we are pleased to observe a closing of the gap in participation between POLAR4 Q1 and Q5 by 2018-19, which continues to a positive gap for recruitment of POLAR4 Q1 learners in 2019-20. The University College make a good contribution to the sector and OfS KPMs 1 and 2² in performance

² WUC internal monitoring re enrolments/continuation is UK/UG/FT/Young/POLAR4 quintile 1 for 2019/20 entry.

outcomes for this measure, achieving significantly better than sector average where a 17.8% gap in participation between POLAR4 Q1 and Q5 young (under 21) learners is observed.

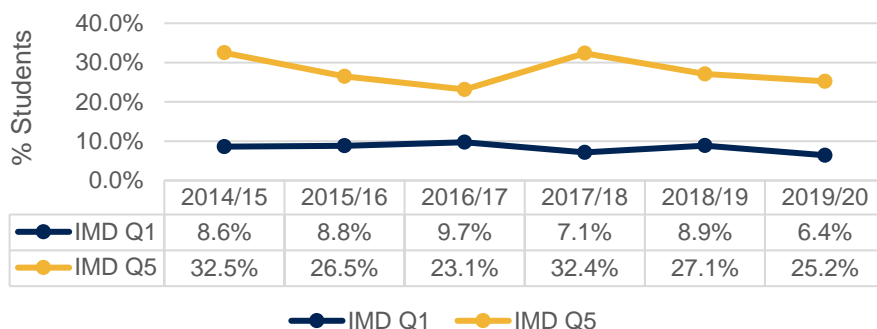


OfS A&P data dashboard

In our local catchment, Southend-on-Sea has a particularly low rate of HE participation and we are pleased to have maintained the number of students recruited annually from this part of the East of England. Among the 2019-20 cohort of students recruited from Southend-on-Sea, 37.8%³ were from low participation neighbourhoods.

Access – IMD (2019)

The University College have consistently attracted lower proportions of learners from the most deprived socio-economic backgrounds (IMD Quintiles 1 and 2), with trends remaining relatively steady since 2013-14.



OfS A&P data dashboard

Perhaps not surprisingly given our local authority deprivation data and localised recruitment patterns, in comparison to the sector the University College recruits lower percentages of learners from IMD Q1 backgrounds, at 6.4% in 2019-20 compared to the sector performance at 21.7%. However, when compared with other relevant providers (small, specialist land-based institutions), the University College's performance is better⁴. The gap in participation between IMD Q1 and Q5 learners at the University College is a concern, at 18.8% (2019-20) compared to a positive sector gap of -1.5%.

Success

Non-continuation

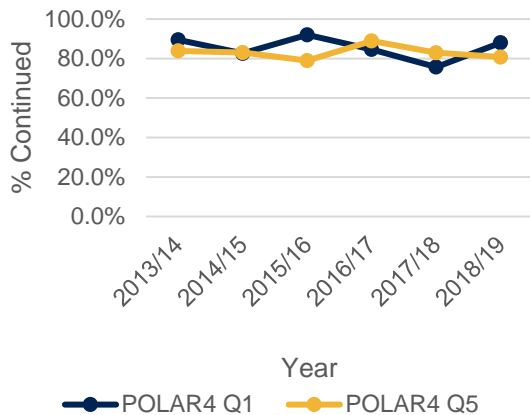
In the context of small cohorts which result in a lack of statistical significance in the data, the University College observe no statistically significant differences between continuation outcomes for learners from POLAR4 Q1 areas compared to POLAR4 Q5 learners. While outcomes for IMD Q1 compared to IMD Q5

³ UK Domiciled/UG/FT/Young

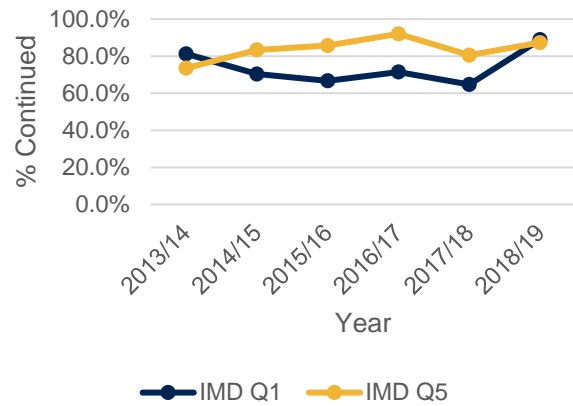
⁴ Royal Agricultural University and Harper Adams University IMD Q1 intake = 4% (2019-20)

learners have historically been slightly worse (2014-15 to 2017-18), 2018-19 has recovered to a positive gap of -1.6%. Trends over time are subject to fluctuations, likely caused by the small cohorts.

Continuation POLAR4 Q1 v. Q5



Continuation IMD Q1 v. Q5



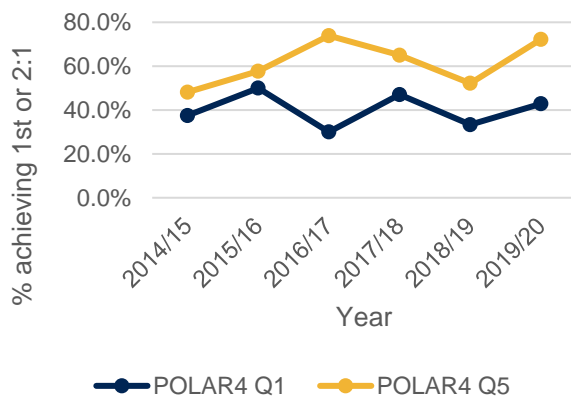
OfS A&P data dashboard

In 2018-19 (latest data available), the gap in continuation between POLAR4 Q1 and Q5 students was positive at -7.2%; and between IMD Q1 and Q5 learners it was also positive at -1.6%.

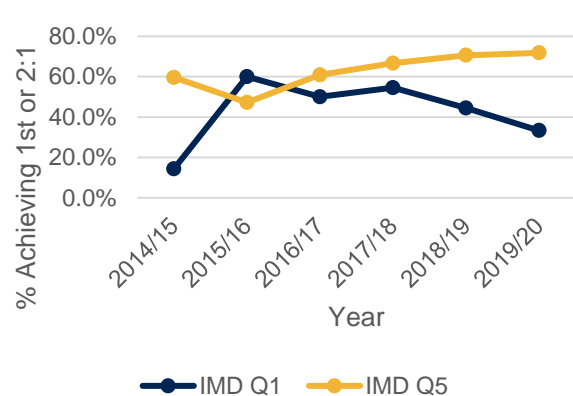
Attainment

Although in the context of very small cohorts, the University College notes a consistent trend in differences in attainment outcomes between POLAR4 Q1 and Q5, and between IMD Q1 and Q5 learners.

Attainment POLAR4 Q1 v. Q5



Attainment IMD Q1 v. Q5



OfS A&P data dashboard

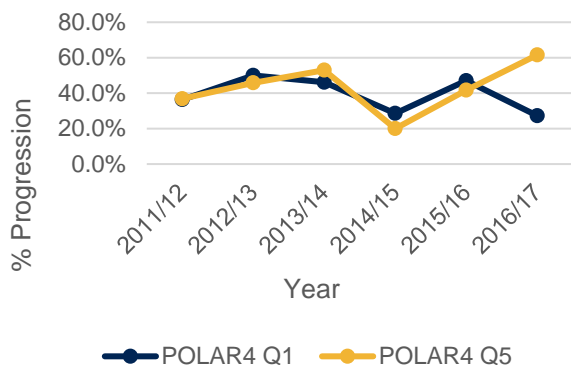
The differences in outcomes are more pronounced in this data and show consistently worse results for students from POLAR4 Q1 and IMD Q1 backgrounds in terms of them achieving a 1st or 2:1 degree outcome. The extent of the gap in performance reflects the very small cohorts, which make percentage data extremely volatile; however, this is nevertheless a concern for the University College.

Progression to employment or further study

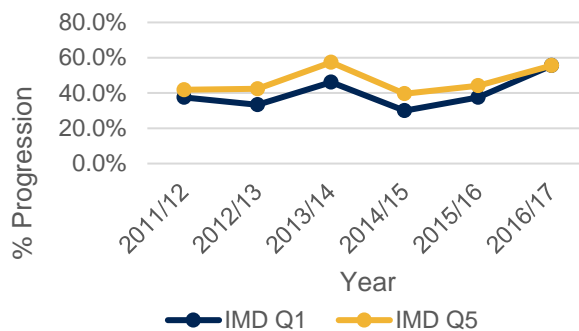
From previous DLHE data (available until 2016-17), in the context of very small cohorts, the University College observes no statistically significant differences in outcomes between POLAR4 Q1 and Q5, or between IMD Q1 and Q5 students, although there are data fluctuations and some difference between the groups (and there appears a particular anomaly in 2016-17 for the POLAR4 group). However, the DLHE

data is now largely redundant, and conclusions cannot be drawn from it going forwards, for reasons provided earlier.

Progression POLAR4 Q1 v. Q5



Progression IMD Q1 v. Q



OfS A&P data dashboard

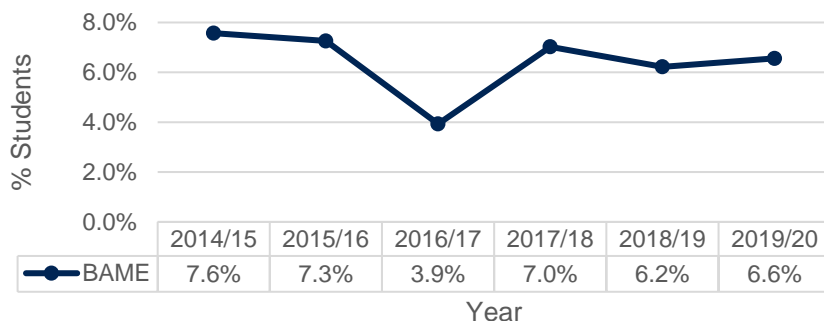
Data from the latest 2017-18 Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey shows that overall, 43.5% of the University College's 2017-18 graduates⁵ were in professional employment, professional study or postgraduate study at the census point. . The proportion of (young) graduates from POLAR4 Quintiles 1 and 2 in professional employment/study or PG study is higher than those from Quintiles 3-5, at 48.1% and 37.5% respectively.

Due to only one year of GO data currently being available and small population sizes, it is too early to observe this as a robust trend. The University College will therefore continue to monitor GO activity across underrepresented groups as part of wider equality monitoring. We expect to be able to make more assessment in this area once additional years of data become available and we can aggregate data (necessary due to our small cohorts) over the next 3 years (by 2023).

1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students ('minority ethnic students')

Access

The University College has consistently recruited a low proportion minority ethnic students. With the exception of a dip in 2016-17, the percentage intake has remained relatively consistent and in 2019-20 is 6.6%. This represents very low numbers and performance assessment by ethnicity at the disaggregated level is not possible and would not be statistically significant. However, we do note that the majority of our very small cohort of minority ethnic students over the last three years are mixed background, although these numbers are still very low.



OfS A&P data dashboard

As detailed earlier, the University College faces significant challenges in recruitment of minority ethnic students given our local catchment of Essex and the East of England, which has a largely white population, with minority ethnic population accounting for just 5.2%⁶. While in the context of the English

⁵ UK domiciled/full time/degree and integrated masters

⁶ Research undertaken by Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester and Tendring local authorities (December 2015), using Census 2011 data.

higher education sector our intake is lower than the sector average (31.1% in 2019-20), the University College does perform well in respect of achieving above local population parity. Over the five-year period of this Plan, we will continue to develop initiatives and target partnerships to help diversify the ethnicity of our student population and to encourage the access of minority ethnic students into land-based sectors traditionally dominated by white graduates.

Success

Non-continuation and Attainment

The very small number of minority ethnic students in our student body makes it challenging to conduct meaningful quantitative analysis of retention or degree outcomes by ethnicity. When aggregated, the data is still particularly susceptible to very small cohorts and, while some differences in the data are apparent, continuation and attainment rates for minority ethnic students when compared to white students show no statistically significant gaps. Data is also subject to significant fluctuation due to the very small cohorts, even when averaged across multiple years, which makes analysis difficult.

We will continue to monitor these areas closely as more data becomes available over time.

Progression to employment or further study

Again, data for minority ethnic students is too small to report and cohort sizes make meaningful analysis impossible in this area. However, the University College note that from previous DLHE data (2011-12 to 2016-17) that progression outcomes for this target group are generally above or inline with those of white students, although this is not statistically significant.

Due to the minority ethnic population size being five or less for the University College's GO 2017/18 professional work graduates, professional study or PG study measure, it's not possible to provide a percentage value at this stage. As the GO survey continues to be undertaken, opportunities for aggregation should enable more robust monitoring of progression into employment/study for our minority ethnic graduates. As per our previous note, we expect to be able to make more assessment in this area by 2023.

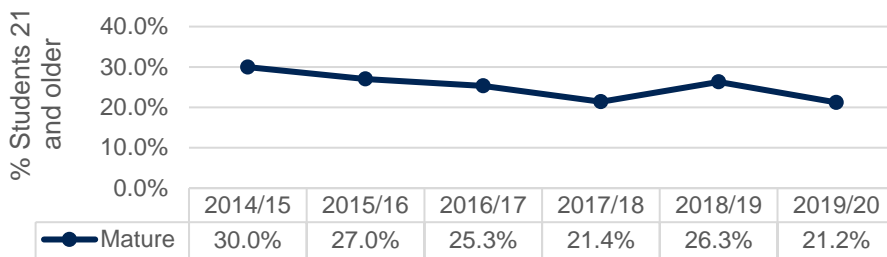
Given the particularly small cohorts, we do not expect meaningful analysis by minority ethnic background at the disaggregated level to be possible until our intake increases, over the next 3-5 years. However, we will ensure internal analysis maintains a focus on this area across the lifecycle, including disaggregated analysis across access, success and progression measures over the next 3-5 years (contingent on the numbers of minority ethnic students recruited) and ensure that once analysis is possible, it is reported accordingly.

1.3 Mature students

Access

The University College has historically attracted a high proportion of mature learners, but (in common with the sector) has observed a steady decline in intake over the last 7 years, with 21.2% intake of students 21 or older in 2019-20. This is in comparison to the sector average, which remains at 30.2% in 2019-20. This reflects the sector decline in the number of mature students entering higher education over this time, which has driven by a decrease in part-time study where entrant numbers have decreased by 52 per cent between 2010-11 and 2018-19⁷.

⁷ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/mature-students/>



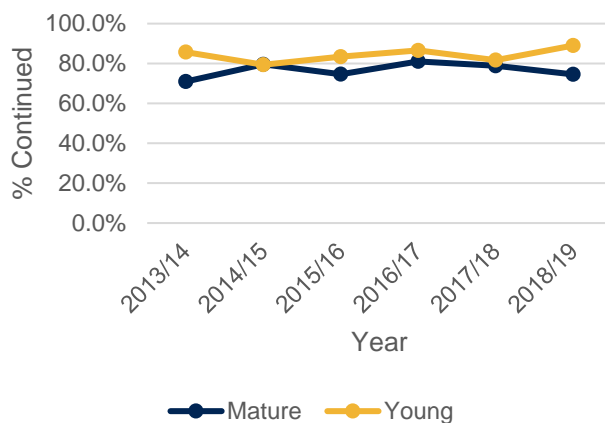
OfS A&P data dashboard

While we have seen drops in the number of mature students entering both fulltime and part-time courses, the overall decline in part-time enrolments has undoubtedly undermined our efforts to sustain mature student numbers, given that a large majority (over 90%⁸) of our part-time learners are mature. However this has not been at the same rate as the sector drop (at 52%). While we commit to retaining part-time degree pathways, given our location and subject mix we do not propose setting a target to increase mature enrolments at this time. We will continue to monitor the data and should a gap emerge we will seek to set a target.

Success

Non-continuation

In common with the sector, continuation for mature (21 and older) students at the University College is slightly lower than that of their young (under 21) counterparts.



OfS A&P data dashboard

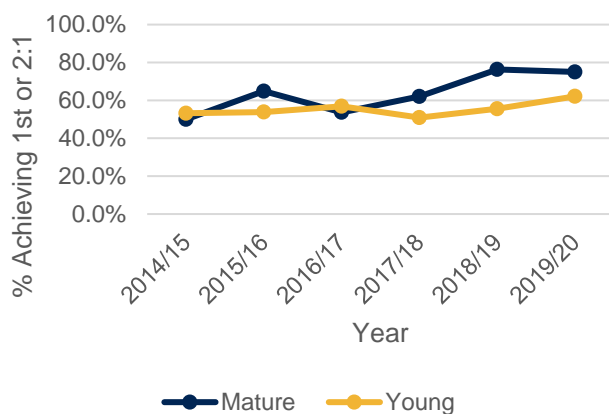
However, more detailed analysis has shown that this difference is concentrated in our other undergraduate pathways, where an average of 22.6%⁹ (across the most recent six-year period 2013/14 to 2018/19) of mature students failed to complete the first year of study, as well as one-year Certificate of HE courses, where 18.3% of mature students failed to complete the first year of study.

Attainment

Again, in common with the sector, the percentage of mature (21 and over) students achieving a good degree outcome (1st or 2:1), is generally higher than outcomes for young (under 21) students.

⁸ The proportion of (UK domiciled/UG) part time starters that are mature ranges between 75.0% to 100.0% across AY's 2014/15 to 2019/20. Numbers are very small (ranging from n=2 to n=15). Overall the proportion of (UK domiciled/UG) part time starters across the six year period (2014/15 to 2019/20) that were mature is 92.9%

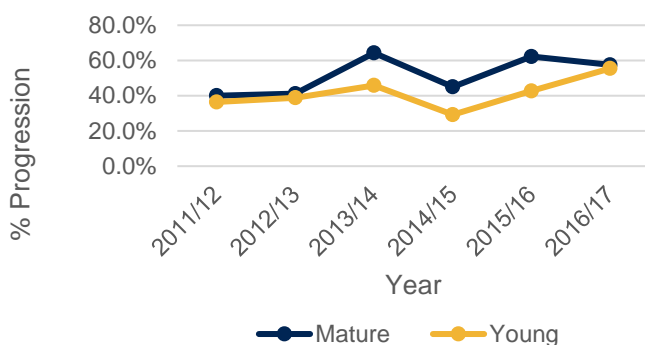
⁹ Dip HE numbers are very small with number of starts per year ranging from n=2 to n=8. The 23% is based on aggregated values for 2013/14 to 2018/19: n=24/31 starts completing the first year.



OfS A&P data dashboard

Progression to employment or further study

Based on previous DLHE data (2011-12 to 2016-17), the University College observe that progression outcomes for mature learners are generally above or in line with those of young students.



OfS A&P data dashboard

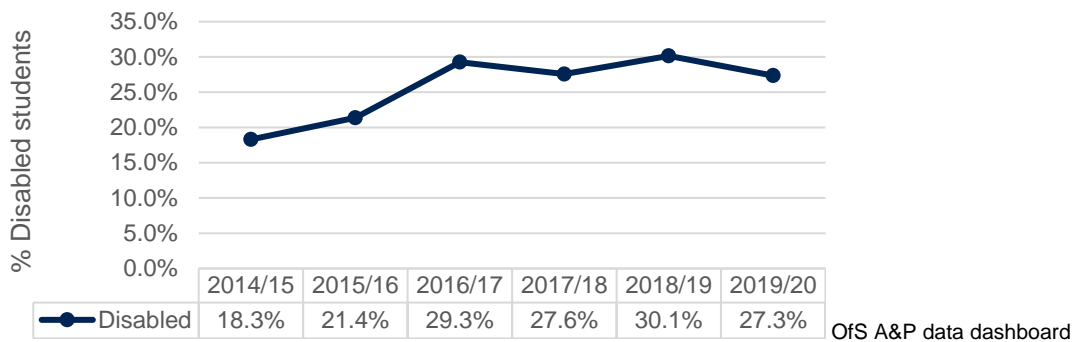
Data from the 2017/18 GO survey show overall, 43.5% of the University College's 2017/18 graduates¹⁰ were in professional employment, professional study or postgraduate study at the census point. Whilst a single year of data and small population sizes mean it is not possible to establish a robust trend at this stage, our analysis has identified a higher proportion of mature graduates are in professional employment, professional study or PG study (50.0%) compared to young graduates (41.8%). Again, we expect to be able to make more assessment in this area once additional years of data become available and we can aggregate data (necessary due to our small cohorts) over the next 3 years (by 2023).

1.4 Disabled students

Access

The University College has consistently attracted high proportions of disabled students, with a general upwards trend over the last 8 years. In 2019-20 the University College had 27.3% disabled learners, which is well above the sector average at 16.6%.

¹⁰ UK domiciled/full time/degree and integrated masters.

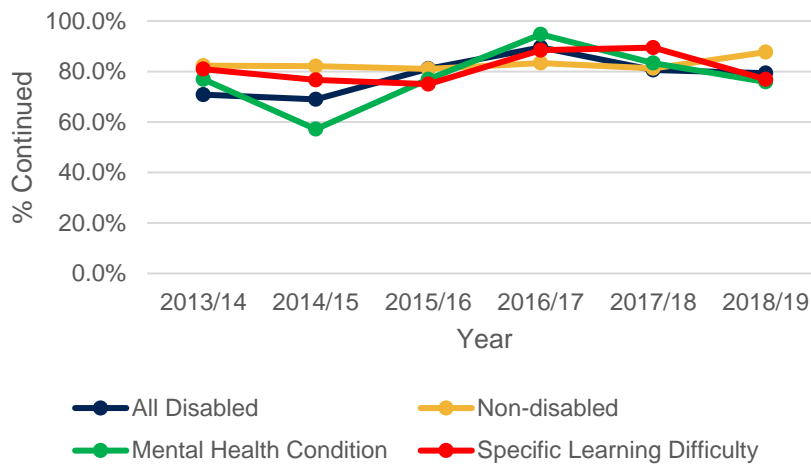


While the full set of disaggregated data by disability type is too small to report due to data protection, the University College notes that a significant proportion of our disabled students are students who either declare a mental health condition (13.5% of our student population, 2019-20) or have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D (9% of our student population, 2019-20). These are significantly higher figures than the sector average.

Success

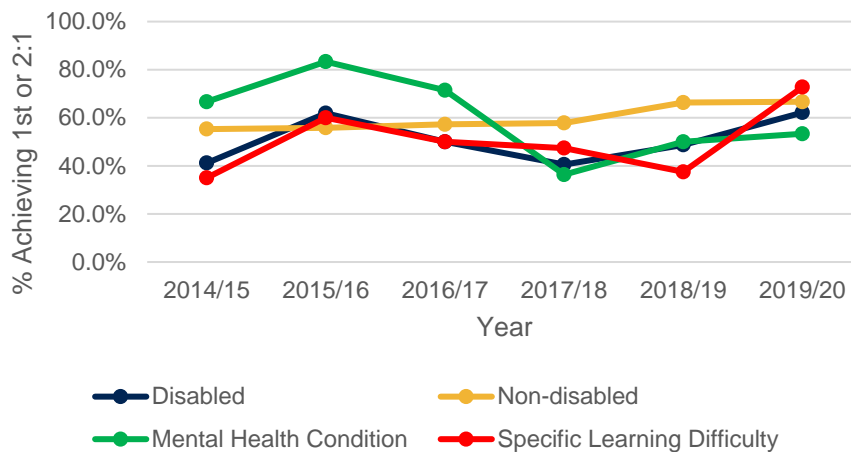
Non-continuation

The continuation rate for disabled students has steadily improved over the last 6 years, to outperform and then fall in line with continuation rates for non-disabled learners. Despite a small gap in the 2019-20 data, the difference is not statistically significant. When exploring our two largest categories of disabled students, there are no additional anomalies, with data for each group being relatively consistent with the general trend.



Attainment

Attainment rates for disabled students are generally and consistently lower than outcomes for non-disabled students, although the gap has closed in 2019-20 to 5% (from an average 14.2% gap over the previous 3-years). This is still above the average sector gap, which is 1.3% in 2019-20. When exploring disaggregated outcomes for our two main groups, significant fluctuation in outcomes over time is observed, which makes analysis difficult. Therefore, the University College's concern in this area will remain at the aggregated level in this Plan, although we will seek to better understand our internal data and performance at disaggregated levels, building on the progress we have already made in improving our data, evaluation and research into experiences of target groups.

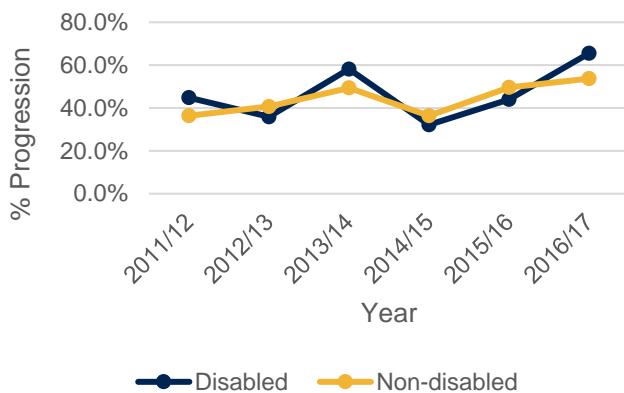


OfS A&P data dashboard

We are also cognisant of the OfS KPM in this area, to close the gap in attainment outcomes for this target group by 2024-25. While we acknowledge this target, we have set a contextually-framed target under this Plan, which considers our small datasets which are particularly subject to volatility; Our use of 3-year averages for our milestones which means that historic data is pulled through; and, the as yet still emerging understanding of the true and ongoing impact of Covid-19 as a disrupted year, particularly on disabled learners. We have therefore set a target that we consider ambitious in our context.

Progression to employment or further study

Based on previous DLHE data (2011-12 to 2016-17), the University College observe that progression outcomes for disabled students are generally above or in line with those of non-disabled students.



OfS A&P data dashboard

As noted, in the Graduate Outcomes data, 43.5% of the University College’s 2017/18 graduates¹¹ overall were in professional employment, professional study or postgraduate study at the census point. Again, whilst a single year of data and small population sizes mean it is not possible to establish a robust trend at this stage, our analysis has identified a gap between the proportion of disabled graduates in professional employment, professional study or PG study (35.0%) and graduates with no declared disability (46.2%). We will continue to monitor performance in this area overall, and across underrepresented groups. If robust trends begin to emerge as we gain greater depth in the base data, the University College will seek to set additional targets agreed with OfS. Again, we expect to be able to make more assessment in this area over the next 3 years (by 2023).

¹¹ UK domiciled/full time/degree and integrated masters.

1.5 Care leavers

Access

There have been 14 (UK domiciled/UG full time (young and mature)) starters identified as care leavers across the six-year period 2014/15 to 2019/20. These data are too small to conduct meaningful analysis or set targets. We have a generous bursary scheme in place to support these learners during their studies. The number of care leavers does not allow us to assess our performance with retaining and supporting these individuals, relative to the rest of the student body. However, we always seek to identify and address the support needs of individuals and we are committed to gathering more qualitative evidence about the experiences of these students. This work is anticipated to take place from 2021-22 and into this Plan.

Success

Non-continuation and attainment

The very small number of care leaver students makes it impossible to conduct meaningful quantitative analysis of retention or degree outcomes for this group. When averaged over time, the data is still particularly susceptible to very small cohorts. However, the University College notes 72.7% of starters identified as care leavers across the period 2013/14 to 2018/19 (which is the most recent year for continuation data) completed the first year of their study, with more than five of these students either having achieved the intended award or still on course.

The University College will continue to monitor these areas closely as more data becomes available over time.

Progression to employment or further study

Again, data for care leaver students is too small to report and cohort sizes make meaningful analysis impossible in this area. The University College will continue to monitor data closely as more data becomes available over time. Extremely small cohorts mean that this data is not likely to be reportable due to data protection, or show trends for some years beyond this Plan.

1.6 Intersections of disadvantage

Cohort sizes are too small in many areas to enable any meaningful analysis of intersectional disadvantage. We will explore and monitor intersections in line with emerging sector concerns over the life of this Plan and will consider target setting in future years should significant gaps emerge.

White, disadvantaged males: Access and Attainment

In our previous Plan, the University College explored outcomes for white, disadvantaged males, in line with the national concern regarding access for this group. When aggregating data across the last five years, the University College's average proportion of white, male student starters from IMD Q1 is 1.1%¹². The rate of applications and enrolments has remained fairly consistent over this period.

Overall the University College has seen a decrease in male applicants, from 24.8% in 2016-17 to 21.3%¹³ in 2019-20. However, in the most recent three-year period (2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20), the proportion of male starters¹⁴ from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2 has shown a positive direction of travel, from 37.3% in 2017/18 to 38.5% in 2019/20, and more closely aligns to observations seen for female starters.

The University College understands that some subjects attract students unevenly in terms of gender. The growth in courses that have a track record of being dominated by females, including our successful

¹² 2015/16 to 2019/20 UK domicile/FT & PT/UG/all ages

¹³ Data run as at 06/2021 for UK/UG/FT applicants (excluding instances where applications were withdrawn or rejected) shows 24.8% male applicants for AY 2016/17 entry. This has reduced to 21.3% for AY 2019/20 entry).

¹⁴ UK /UG/FT/young

Veterinary Physiotherapy, Equine and Animal Science /Management courses, has skewed the gender balance of the student body as a whole. Additionally, some of our specialist courses that typically prove more attractive to male applicants, such as agriculture and horticulture, tend to recruit from higher socio-economic groups – a pattern reflected in the land-based HE sector. To help mitigate this challenge, the University College will continue to leverage and develop its Sport course offering to increase access for this target group (detailed later under Section 3), as well as continue efforts to address gender skew in other course areas.

However, given the University College's performance in relation to the recruitment of minority ethnic students, we do not propose to focus solely on white students. Given this, and a general need to improve access for the most disadvantaged students, we propose to keep the target to broad groups of minority ethnic and disadvantaged students.

In our analysis of attainment outcomes for POLAR4 and IMD students (Section 1.1), the University College has noted gaps in degree outcomes between POLAR4 Q1 and POLAR4 Q5 students, and between IMD Q1 and Q5 students. Further analysis to include the intersections of gender and ethnicity do not reveal any statistically significant gaps in attainment, with data for these specific cohorts being very small and therefore subject to significant fluctuation.

Mature learners from under-represented areas (Adult HE): Access

In Section 1.3, the University College has noted a decline in the proportion of mature (21 and older) students recruited over the last few years. Further analysis of our mature learner intake however shows that the percentage of mature students recruited from areas of low Adult HE qualifications has increased in recent years, now at 17.3%¹⁵ in 2019-20. This is pleasing within the context of a decline in mature learners overall.

Mature learners who are disabled: Attainment

Internal research and evaluation has pointed to the area of attainment for mature learners and disability as an intersection to explore. Again, further analysis to include the intersections of age and disability do not reveal any statistically significant gaps in attainment, with data for these specific cohorts being very small and therefore subject to significant fluctuation. Over the next 3-5 years, as additional years data become available, more meaningful analysis can be conducted.

1.7 Other groups who experience barriers in higher education

The University College does not currently collect systematic data on other groups most likely to experience disadvantage. However, we will explore opportunities to collect and analyse a range of additional data over the next 5 years, aligned to our emerging observations and/or national priorities or sector best practice.

By way of example, in 2020-21 the University College has considered the broader target group of Care Experienced learners, expanding the 'Care Leaver' target group. This consideration was made in relation to remodelling of our student bursaries and financial support and considering 'wrap around support' that could be provided for particular target groups in receipt of financial support. While we do not currently have the necessary data to determine performance outcomes for this expanded group, our new financial support model reflects this broader definition, and the University College has committed to developing its understanding and exploring monitoring of this group over time.

The University College would also like to recognise its local military community, having a large garrison in Colchester. While we do not propose setting targets in relation to students from military families, over the life of this Plan the University College will explore and develop its relationship with the garrison and develop relevant opportunities to increase access for this target group. Similarly, we recognise our local gypsy/ traveller community and commit to explore ways to engage this target group to offer opportunities and routes into our courses and HE.

¹⁵ UK/UG/FT and PT/Mature/QAHE Quintile 1 for AY 2019/20 starters

2. Strategic aims and objectives

As has been detailed in our Introduction and Performance Assessment, our context and the issue of small cohorts play significant roles in the University College's performance in access and participation. Therefore, contextual factors and the impact of small cohorts on percentage data and have been considered in the formulation of strategic aims, objectives and targets. Overarching strategic aims and objectives have also been set in the spirit of our University College's Strategic Intent (see Section 3, under 'Alignment to other Strategies').

The University College aspires to deliver a range of specialist and practical subjects to a diverse cohort of FE and HE students, enabling them to contribute to the challenges facing the UK's land-based industries. Our vision is to combine specialist facilities and professional working environments with an inclusive, safe and welcoming environment for our learners. Our small size, while providing challenges in performance assessment and targeting access and student success activities, allows us to provide a highly personal and supportive learning environment, contributing to the fulfilment of our mission to be a proactive partner in the success of every one of our students.

In view of our small student numbers and limited resources, we will continue to focus improvements in a limited number of areas to concentrate effort and investment where it can be most effective. The balance of our investment and institutional focus is weighted towards supporting student success, which reflects the areas for improvement identified through our assessment of performance. Our access measures will centre around a long-term programme of activity to reach our disadvantaged and minority ethnic target groups.

We are committed to a whole-provider strategic approach, in which access and participation targets and projects are fully aligned with equality and diversity priorities and with quality enhancement activity to support student outcomes. Access and participation is a core activity for the institution and is embedded in our overall approach to learning and teaching and student support. It is also embedded within our continuous monitoring, evaluation and enhancement process; which provides an opportunity for scrutiny, reflection and action from scheme level. The process links scheme level activity to key institutional level targets, including those specifically set out in the Access and Participation Plan. An annual Self-Evaluation Report (SER) captures the progress made against targets and sets out the overarching action plan for the HE provision for the following academic year. The SER and FE Self-Assessment Report (SAR) inform the overall Institutional Report on performance generally. Our priorities for access and participation will also steer our development of external partnerships, including sector collaboration, fundraising and sponsorship opportunities. We will seek out organisations with shared missions and values to support our long-term objectives.

2.2 Target groups

Based on the most significant gaps in our Performance Assessment, the University College will focus on work that will build momentum through significant visible impact. We will consequently focus our investment on the following target groups and lifecycle stages across the five-year period of this Plan:

Target Group	Access	Continuation	Attainment	Progression
IMD Quintile 1	✓		✓	
POLAR4 Quintile 1			✓	
BAME	✓			
Mature (21 and over)		✓		
Disabled			✓	

2.2 Aims and objectives

Access Targets

1. **Aim:** To close the gap in participation between the proportion of undergraduate students¹⁶ who are from the most deprived neighbourhoods, compared to those from the least. **Objective:** decrease the gap in participation between IMD Quintile 1 and IMD Quintile 5 entrants, from 18.8% in 2019-20, to 10.0% by 2026-27.

Baseline (2019-20)	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
18.8%	17.0%	16.0%	14.5%	12.5%	10.0%

Given our performance in this group overall, we do not propose splitting this target using an intersection of gender (see performance assessment on white, disadvantaged males); however, the University College will remain cognisant of our gender imbalance and seek to address this generally through targeted activity measures (see strategic measures section).

2. **Aim:** To increase the proportion of undergraduate students¹⁷ who are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. **Objective:** increase the proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic entrants, from 3-year average 6.6% (2017-18 to 2019-20) to 12.7% by 2026-27 (3-year average 2024-25 to 2026-27).

Baseline (Average 2017-18 to 2019-20)	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
6.6%	7.2%	8.2%	9.7%	11.2%	12.7%

Success Targets

3. **Aim:** To eliminate the gap in non-continuation between mature and young students by 2030-31. **Objective:** for undergraduate students¹⁸, reduce the gap between mature (21 and over) and young (under 21) learners to 5% by 2026-27 from baseline of 14.5% in 2018-19, and thereafter eliminate the unexplained gap by 2030-31.

Baseline (2018/19)	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
14.5%	14.0%	13.0%	11.0%	7.5%	5.0%

4. **Aim:** To reduce the gap in attainment outcomes between the most and least deprived groups (IMD Quintiles 5 and 1, respectively). **Objective:** for undergraduate students¹⁹, reduce the gap between IMD Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 attainment outcomes (1st or 2:1s) from a 3-year average baseline of 25.6% (2017-18 to 2019-20), to 14.5% by 2026-27 (3-year average 2024-25 to 2026-27). This would mean performance is better than the current steady sector gap (c.18% between and 2014-15 and 2018-19; 15.2% in 2019-20).

Baseline (Average 2017-18 to 2019-20)	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
25.6%	25.0%	24.0%	22.0%	19.0%	14.5%

¹⁶ Population defined as UK domiciled/UG (OUG/Degree/Integrated Masters)/Full time/all ages (young and mature) starters

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Population defined as UK domiciled/OUG, Degree and Integrated Masters/Full time starters

¹⁹ Population defined as UK domiciled/Full time/all ages*/ where a degree was awarded (i.e. HESA C37 = qualification obtained as opposed to HESA C37-C38 = qualification aim)

5. **Aim:** To reduce the gap in attainment outcomes between the most and least represented groups (POLAR4 Quintiles 5 and 1, respectively). **Objective:** for undergraduate students²⁰, reduce the gap between POLAR4 Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 attainment outcomes (1st or 2:1s) from a 3-year average baseline of 22% (2017-18 to 2019-20), to 10.9% by 2026-27 (3-year average 2024-25 to 2026-27). This would bring performance to a level that much more closely aligns to the current steady sector gap (c. 10% between and 2014-15 and 2018-19; 8.8% in 2019-20).

Baseline (Average 2017-18 to 2019-20)	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
22.0%	21.4%	20.4%	18.4%	15.4%	10.9%

6. **Aim:** To reduce the gap in attainment outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between disabled students and non-disabled students, eliminating the gap completely by 2030-31. **Objective:** for undergraduate students²¹, reduce the gap in attainment outcomes (1st or 2:1s) between disabled and non-disabled students from a 3-year average baseline of 13.1% (2017-18 to 2019-20), to 5% by 2026-27 (3-year average 2024-25 to 2026-27).

Baseline (2017-18 to 2019-20)	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
13.1%	12%	11%	9.5%	7.5%	5%

Progression Targets

The University College is not setting targets in the area of progression at this time, given the very limited data available from the new Graduate Outcomes (GO) measure, very small cohorts, and given our historical performance based on the DLHE data, which revealed no statistically significant gaps. As detailed earlier in the report, the University College's Access and Participation Group have agreed a measure based on GO data, to monitor the proportion of UK domiciled, full time, degree/integrated masters graduates in professional work, professional study or postgraduate study activities. The overall outturn of this measure for our 2017/18 graduates was 43.5%. The University College intends to further support students into highly skilled outcomes and will continue to monitor performance in this area throughout the life of this plan. As noted, should robust trends and gaps emerge as depth and integrity of the base data increases, the University College will seek to set additional targets agreed with OfS.

3. Strategic measures

3.1 Whole provider strategic approach

Overview

The University College is implementing its new Strategic Intent (2021), presenting an ambitious plan which includes our core values and a focus on inclusion and partnerships to enable industry experience and applied innovation opportunities for students.

The University College continues to adopt an embedded, whole-institution approach to ensuring inclusivity and equality of opportunity for prospective and current students and graduates. Our small size means that this approach is critical as our resources are more limited than those of larger providers; however, we consider that it is also a best practice approach that both supports and draws from our broader institutional commitment to inclusion, equality and diversity. This requires the engagement of all

²⁰ Ibid. POLAR measure is young only.

²¹ Population defined as UK domiciled/Full time/all ages*/ where a degree was awarded (i.e. HESA C37 = qualification obtained as opposed to HESA C37-C38 = qualification aim)

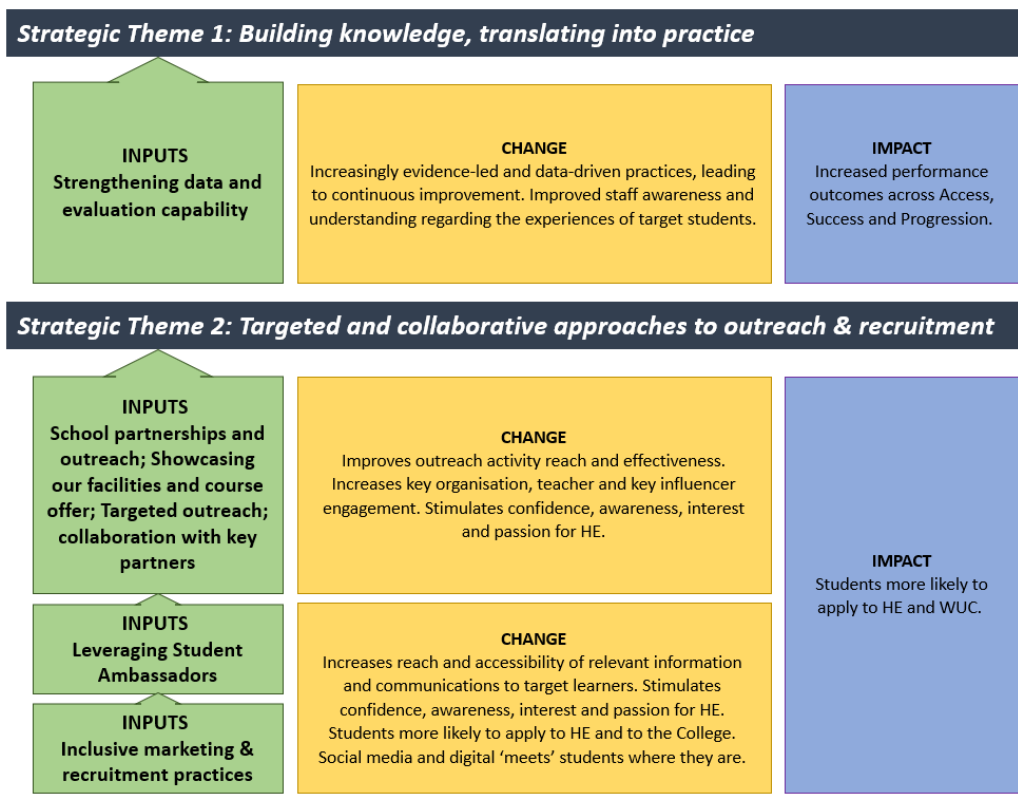
staff across the University College, and considered development of our strategies, systems, capabilities and service offer (academic and non-academic).

Specifically, our work will concentrate on opportunities and access for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and minority ethnic students. Engagement with these target groups will be through the continued development of targeted school, community and other key stakeholder relationships and partnerships, which we will continue to expand and nurture.

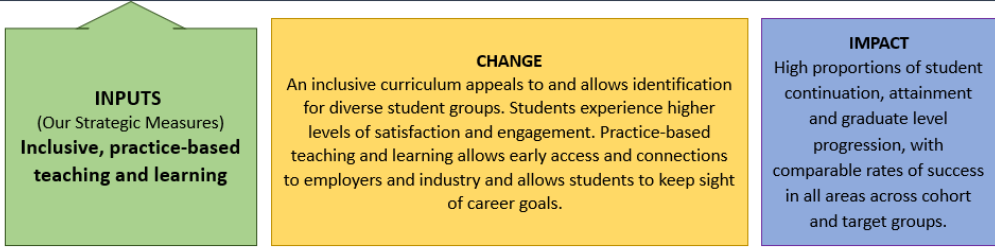
In relation to student success, and particularly attainment outcomes, the University College places critical importance on its continued development of inclusive practices in teaching, learning and assessment; embedded employability measures; and the provision of wrap-around student support both integrated and additional to our curricula.

Whole-College Theory of Change

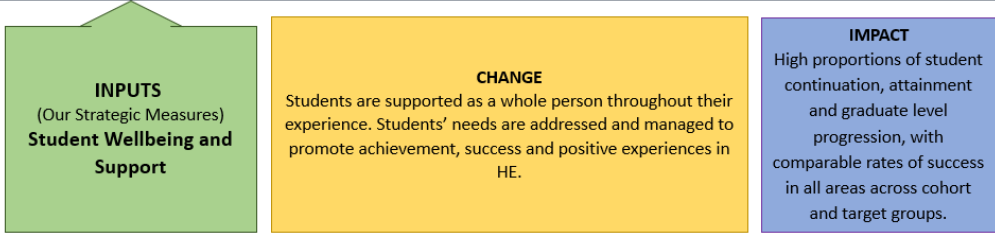
Our high-level Theory of Change model sets a whole-institution framework for achieving our stated aims, objectives and targets for access and participation.



Strategic Theme 3: Practical employer-linked, inclusive curriculum



Strategic Theme 4: Early, targeted, inclusive and student-focused wrap-around support & development.



Alignment with other strategies

Strategic Intent (2021)

Access and Participation is embedded in the University College's core values as part of the Strategic Intent. Values include partnership, community, inclusion, and well-being, each of which informs the activities discussed elsewhere in this document.

Our strategic approach sets out how we will grow partnerships to enable industry experience and applied innovation opportunities for students, and especially those from access and participation target groups, who might otherwise have challenges in accessing these opportunities and the academic and employability advantages that result. The longer-term aim is to be able to offer placements and industry opportunities with co-located partner businesses. Ultimately, we aim to be able to offer all HE students placement opportunities. This is reflected in the measures relating to progression in this Plan, which are an ongoing commitment despite not setting specific targets in this area. This is in the recognition that these career and employability-related activities contribute positively to continuation and attainment measures; and, that as we diversify our cohort further, we must be prepared to support progression outcomes for all groups and particularly those target groups who are less likely to have access to professional networks and experiences.

We intend to broaden our provision of courses, to include additional sport courses and those centred around human health. We aim to increase options for all students, but in particular socio-economically disadvantaged students who may be drawn to the vocational and applied nature of our offer. In this way, we hope to make faster progress in access for our target disadvantage and minority ethnic groups.

From 2023 we will begin to refurbish our student halls and explore (in partnership with developments for the Student Union) a new student social hub and classrooms designed to increase the positive experience for students and further improve our retention rates. This ambition is reflective of measures under the student support area as part of this Plan.

Equality Policy

Our Equality Policy sets out how important equality and diversity is to the University College. The Governing body has responsibility for upholding equality and diversity. Within the Governance structure, the Senior Leadership Team is responsible for institutional work to widen participation in education and employment and to ensure that we meet the diverse needs of all our students.

Our equality and diversity approach is directed by an action plan. Our work is governed by five equality directives of which three are specifically student focused:

- To better use Equality and Diversity data to ensure all groups achieve equally.
- To improve participation across all groups.
- To embed Equality and Diversity fully into teaching, learning and assessment.

We consolidate our access and participation work with our equality and diversity work to ensure that target groups under this Plan are accessing and participating in the University College and that we accurately and effectively monitor both access and outcomes data for these groups. We are committed to developing a more inclusive and accessible approach into the academic experience and outcomes of all students, but particularly those from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds and those with protected characteristics.

As a small institution, many of the representatives on the Access and Participation Group are also members of Equality and Diversity Group. Therefore, we have an institution-wide overview of progress and the inter-relationships of both agendas, identifying where concerns exist across different groups, and where successes can be shared.

Teaching and Learning Strategy (launch 2022)

A new Learning and Teaching strategy for 2022 onwards has been developed to address requirements for progress for all learning and teaching objectives, but with a firm focus on improving inclusivity as determined by our core values and the commitments made in this Plan. The broad aims of the new Learning and Teaching Strategy are to:

- Effect the transformation of learning and teaching at the University College over the next 5 years.
- Make us think more radically about the “how” and “why” of our learning and teaching activities, prioritising inclusive learning approaches wherever possible.
- Ensure all programmes have a strong applied dimension that “puts science into practice”.
- Expand placement and/or meaningful experiential learning opportunities for all students, including input to running on site businesses as part of their programmes of study.
- Support innovation in pedagogy through which we can disseminate our innovations in learning and teaching to the wider FE and HE sectors.

We will be ambitious and think about how we teach, aligned to the sectors we work with and the preferences of modern students. This speaks to a need for more personalised learning, attuned to the needs of students as individuals, whilst providing stretch and challenge to help them achieve their very best. A personalised approach enables the attainment of the ‘guiding principles’ of our Learning and Teaching Strategy in its shaping of future curriculum design (see ‘Strategic Area 3’ below), whilst simultaneously seeking to address the targets outlined in this Plan.

Strategic measures

The University College has identified four strategic themes which provide a framework for our measures to meet targets and ensure our broader ambitions are progressed. Our measures consider our performance assessment as well as our context as a smaller, specialist provider in Essex. They build from the good work the University College has already undertaken in access and participation over the last two years²², and they are fully embedded in our broader institutional priorities. Our strategic measures are set in our whole-College Theory of Change framework, detailed above. Our four strategic themes are:

1. Building knowledge, translating into practice
2. Targeted and collaborative approaches to outreach and recruitment
3. Practical employer-linked, inclusive curriculum; and
4. Early, targeted, inclusive and student-focused wrap-around support & development.

²² The development of our 2019/20 Access and Participation Plan marked a shift in our approach to fair access and participation activities, following the appointment of the University College’s new Vice-Chancellor and self-evaluation guided by the new regulatory framework.

Strategic Area 1: Building knowledge, translating into practice

In developing and setting out our high-level Theory of Change model and Strategic Measures, the University College recognises the continued importance of further developing our capabilities in data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings into practice (OfS 2018; CFE 2020²³) as well as the continued development in evaluation and research across the lifecycle to further our understanding of the performance of specific student groups. These areas have therefore been set as key founding features that will continue to develop, building the evidence-base for practice improvement and change, and ultimately driving continuous progress towards our targets and ambitions across and beyond the life of this Plan.

This Strategic Area is important to the progression and achievement of all our targets, aims and objectives, given data and evidence will help to drive improved practices and aide understanding of what works; and, in monitoring our progress to ensure targets and milestones are on-track, or to point to the need for further intervention or resourcing if sufficient progress is not being made (OfS 2019; CFE 2020; Thomas 2020²⁴).

This commitment to improving our data and evaluative capability to increase our understanding of target group experiences and performance is not new, and this Plan leverages from the work the University College has already undertaken in these areas since 2019-20. As in previous Plans, as well as continued and expanded monitoring and analysis of our data, we are particularly focused on ensuring good practices in qualitative evaluation given our small cohorts and need to provide deeper-dive insights in smaller target areas. We consider that this approach relies on strong practices in student engagement and collaboration, which are further detailed in Section 3.2.

Such evaluative and research practices will be continuously implemented and developed over and beyond the life of this Plan, as key mechanisms for driving the achievement of our aims, objectives and targets.

As part of the Office for Students (OfS) Access and Participation Plan ‘variations’ requirements in Spring/Summer 2022, we note the strong focus on evaluation, and the requirement that providers should, ‘significantly increase the volume and quality of evaluation across their access and participation activity’, as well as considering how findings are recorded, published and shared to grow sector understanding of what works. We consider this strategic area already explicitly in our Plan will keep us focused on this requirement as a core component of our development over the next few years. We also note OfS’s intention to require independent evaluation in the future, and we are already a member of the ‘SEER’ (Specialist Evidence, Evaluation and Research) service to support our evaluation and research efforts. Membership means that much of our evaluation is already being carried out by an independent body, who support us in strengthening our own practices and provide a range of evaluation tools, processes and training, as well as conduct a range of evaluation and research into key areas on our behalf, providing recommendations into improving practices.

Strategic Area 2: Targeted and collaborative approaches to outreach and recruitment

The University College’s outreach and access activity and efforts are set in a broader context of structural challenges that impact on the achievement of our ambitions pertaining to diversifying our intake. These relate specifically to our specialist offer in the land-based sector, and the lack of land-based education and routes in the school curriculum. Resourcing for school farms and land- and animal-based activities on school campuses (even at primary level) is extremely limited and often not prioritised or has been deprioritised in favour of mainstream core subject resourcing. Unfortunately, even within the STEM agenda which remains a key focus for school curricula, land-based education is not particularly highlighted. Instead, where land and animal-based activity is present, it tends to be positioned as the extra- or alternative-curricular, remedial solution for student behavioural and wellbeing. The positioning

²³ Office for Students (2018) *Securing Success: Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England*, Bristol: OfS; CFE Research (2020) *Data use for Access & Participation in higher education Review and recommendations by CFE Research for the Office for Students*, Bristol: OfS.

²⁴ Office for Students (2019) *Regulatory Notice 1. Access and Participation Plan Guidance*, Bristol: OfS; Thomas, L. (2020) *Excellent Outcomes for All Students: A Whole System Approach to Widening Participation and Student Success in England. Student Success*, 11(1), 1-12.

as such often results in a lack of understanding about the broader value of these subjects and the professional routes into future education and careers.

Interest and awareness in the land-based sector amongst young people is often therefore dependent on family, social and community input and facilitation. Some activities, such as horse sports, are also very expensive to participate in and therefore access for more disadvantaged target groups is challenging. Compounding these issues, the equine industry is traditionally largely white and privileged, although this is changing. This legacy has left an impression of elitism in some areas, and a lack of diversity and diverse role models in the sector. In agriculture, the industry is also challenged by an aging population, which further adds to the issue of relevant role models for young people.

Through its outreach activity, the University College aims to help address some of these critical challenges for our specialist sector, while acknowledging that this will be a long journey of change and development that is beyond our influence alone. The access targets set in this Plan are aligned to these challenges, and our response and level of ambition must be similarly cognisant of them. The University College will also continue to leverage our Sports provision to progress our ambitions for diversifying our intake. The expansion of our course offer into Sport allows circumnavigation of structural issues related to the land-based sector, although there are different challenges relating to our rural location and competition from well-established sports specialist higher education providers located in metropolitan areas that more readily provide desirable urban experiences. Differentiated outreach and marketing strategies are therefore required to respond to these contexts.

As part of the Office for Students (OfS) Access and Participation Plan 'variations' requirements in Spring/Summer 2022 (Priority B)²⁵, we have added a commitment to explore developing some activities with partner schools that specifically focus on supporting attainment raising in schools. As a small institution, our resources are limited, however, over 2022-23 we will seek to collaborate with a small number of schools to understand how we might positively impact attainment, particularly in key curriculum areas linked to our specialist provision.

Our priorities for access and outreach across this Plan are focussed upon increasing the participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, as well as minority ethnic students. This measure is strategically aligned to supporting our targets, aims objectives to increase the proportion of students from IMD Quintile 1 and from minority ethnic backgrounds. In the context of the structural issues detailed above, as well as the University College's limited outreach and marketing resources, we have set stretching targets in these areas. We expect evidencable progress to be concentrated towards the end of the period given our distance to travel in this area, and since outreach and access activity can take many years to realise benefits and result in outcomes.

This is a direction particularly supported by the students who consulted in the development of this Plan, who are similarly concerned with the lack of diversity at the University College, but also acknowledged the contextual challenges. Students have noted support for doing more to attract minority ethnic students, and further noted the University College's position to contribute to this similar ambition in the industries we serve.

Practice and outcomes

The University College has a long history of delivering a range of outreach activity. In this Plan, we commit to further targeting, collaboration and development of our outreach programme to make faster progress in closing gaps in access for our target under-represented groups. We have identified opportunities to leverage our existing work and alternative activity undertaken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as opportunities to develop additional activity. From September 2022, this will include exploring where we might contribute to raising attainment in schools. Our outreach programme includes a range of collaborative activity with key partners; experiential, discipline-focused activity which leverages our specialist facilities; early, personalised experiences and support for target learners; and increased use of our student ambassadors to ensure role modelling and building sense of belonging. The University College also continues its pathway provision via our foundation courses and through provision of further education as a college campus. Activity in this area includes:

²⁵ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/advice-on-requests-to-vary-access-and-participation-plans-2023-24/>

- **Targeted school partnerships and outreach activity.** We will continue to build sustained partnerships with a selected number of schools which have high proportions of pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds and are located in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and low participation neighbourhoods. The University College consider these partnerships as critical in our ability to deliver effective, early, sustained outreach programmes (Harrison, et al., 2018, OfS, 2018; Bowes, 2013).

From 2022-23, we will seek to meaningfully engage with 2-3 target schools, consulting on how we might best support attainment raising particularly for students from Year 8 onwards. It is envisaged that we will leverage existing work that is discipline-specific and/or our specialist facilities, developing these foundations into activities that focus specifically on key learning outcomes of the national curriculum and supporting student achievement of these. Activity may focus on students or teachers. We consider that a collaborative, consultative approach is required to determine school needs and best practices, rather than a pre-designed offer from the university college. Consultations will occur in 2022-23, with a view to developing a small pilot programme by the end of the year for roll out in 2023-24.

We will also explore working on a larger regional area promoting specialist virtual events at targeted groups. We will seek ways to broaden our reach and relationships with other schools outside our locality to better reach our target groups across a wider field. Students who collaborated in the development of this Plan noted that a wider reach on marketing and recruitment activity, particularly drawing on London, would support increased minority ethnic recruitment as it would help to mitigate the issue of the local population demographic (largely white).

Scoping work will be undertaken prior to the start of this Plan and activity will be further developed over the life of this Plan. It is envisaged that our online and collaborative approaches developed as a response to Covid-19 will continue and have particular significance in broadening our reach.

- **Showcasing and providing access to our specialist facilities.** We will continue using our expertise and facilities to promote engagement among our target groups by increasing visits to our dedicated campus facilities and by deploying our staff and specialist equipment directly to outreach events and opportunities (Fleming and Grace 2015; Kitchen et al 2020²⁶). In our consultation with students in the development of this Plan, students noted the attraction of the University College's campus and facilities and agreed these to be an excellent feature of the University College. We believe this kind of activity is effective in emphasising the accessibility and attractiveness of our options for these groups.
- **Collaboration with other targeted key stakeholders.** The University College acknowledges the key role of other providers and third sector organisations in contributing to the access agenda, through partnerships that maximise use of resources (Moore et al, 2013). Over the life of this Plan, and beyond, the University College will build on existing relationships and target and engage with a range of additional stakeholders including HE providers and networks, third sector organisations, UniConnect hubs, and employers.
- **Targeted activity with minority ethnic students.** We are committed to diversifying the ethnic profile of our home student population through increased recruitment of minority ethnic students, notwithstanding the challenges this presents due to our geography and specialist subject focus. We will actively promote the achievements of minority ethnic students (and staff) and we will pursue direct and co-funded sponsorship opportunities to encourage minority ethnic applicants to envisage themselves achieving success through our courses, for example, by partnering with charities that have a shared mission to enable diverse talent into the equine industry (Allen and Collisson 2020; Ihemi et al 2016²⁷).

²⁶ Fleming, M. J. and Grace, D. M. (2015) 'Eyes on the future : The impact of a university campus experience day on students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds', *The Australian journal of education*, 59(1), pp. 82–96; Kitchen, J. A., Sonnert, G. and Sadler, P. (2020) 'Campus Visits: Impact of a College Outreach Strategy on Student STEM Aspirations', *Journal of student affairs research and practice*, 57(3), pp. 266–281

²⁷ Evelyn C. Allen & Brian Collisson (2020) Do aspirational role models inspire or backfire? Perceived similarity mediates the effect of role models on minority students' college choices, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 30:2, 221-238; Ihme, T. A. et al. (2016)

- **Targeted activity using Sport.** Following the successful launch of the pilot series of 'Taste of Sport' programme²⁸ to 15 schools in 2021 during the Covid-19 lockdown, the University College will continue to launch further online programmes to engage targeted schools with resources aligned to core curriculum areas, for example an ongoing series of 15-minute bite size videos as taster sessions to inspire students studying GCSE PE. We will specifically target schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 areas and located in areas where there is a higher minority ethnic population. Our student ambassadors from target backgrounds support curriculum-based activity with IAG on progressing to university.

As part of a renewed focus on raising attainment, as noted above, we will explore developing this work with a view to strengthening its impact on student attainment in school. Consultation with teachers will be undertaken in 2022-23 to understand how best this might be done. We will also seek to implement a robust evaluation process which allows us to determine impact in terms of raising attainment.

- **Student Ambassador diversity.** We will continue to recruit a wider pool of student ambassadors and focus on those from minority ethnic and disadvantaged backgrounds. The issue of inclusivity and role models was also raised by our students in providing input to the Plan. Studies such as Gartland (2015) and Hume (2018) have established that student ambassadors have a greater rapport by virtue of their lived experiences, contributing to the effectiveness of outreach activities.
- **Inclusivity in our broader recruitment and marketing practices.** We have focused on the digital accessibility of our website to improve usability of the site and ensure that all potential users, including people with disabilities, have a positive user experience and are easily able to access information. This will be continually reviewed and improved over the life of this Plan. In student consultations as part of the development of this Plan, students also noted that the small, specialist feature of the University College is a particular attraction as students felt they did not get 'lost in numbers', which promotes a 'friendly, open environment'. Students noted that this can support belonging and mitigate the feeling of being overwhelmed, which may more likely occur for target students. These aspects will be further highlighted and used in our development of inclusive marketing and recruitment activity.

As part of the Office for Students (OfS) Access and Participation Plan 'variations' requirements in Spring/Summer 2022 (Priority D)²⁹, the sector is required to consider developing more diverse pathways into and through higher education via Level 4 and 5 courses and degree apprenticeships. The University College continues its pathway provision via our foundation courses and through provision of further education as a college campus. We do not have any current expansion of this provision at this time; however, we consider the integration of our further education (FE) provision and our foundation pathway offer provides accessible options to our target groups. We ensure that our higher education provision is actively promoted to our FE students and they are supported to access it should they choose. In 2022-23, WUC is also developing its HE curriculum framework in line with work on our new Learning and Teaching Strategy. The new framework will encompass traditional degree-level provision and build on our current Level 4/5 offer of certificates and diplomas, enabling the use of micro-credentials. Micro-credentials will provide students with the opportunity to build credit towards a qualification, or simply enable choice by facilitating access higher education in smaller credit-bearing elements. Students will then choose to target qualification completion, or access only those clusters of credit/modules relevant to their current or future employment. We are aiming to create distinctiveness in the curriculum via the inclusion of live project briefs. We carefully track demand from employers and are in discussion about graduate apprentice needs in landscape technologies and controlled environment agriculture.

Strategic Area 3: Practical, employer-linked and inclusive curriculum

In 2021, the University College started to embark on a significant development agenda for teaching and learning, responding to the need to: continually improve outcomes particularly for identified target groups;

²⁸ 'How University Websites' Emphasis on Age Diversity Influences Prospective Students' Perception of Person-Organization Fit and Student Recruitment', *Research in higher education*, 57(8), pp. 1010–1030

²⁸ <http://makehappen.hughesandco.com/get-a-taste-of-sport-from-writtle-university-college/>

²⁹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/advice-on-requests-to-vary-access-and-participation-plans-2023-24/>

drive curriculum inclusivity; ensure curriculum pathways to full degree programmes; improve and drive student engagement with learning holistically; and remain relevant and responsive to industry. Guiding principles of development include:

- Integrated working (a partnership approach, with the student developing increasing levels of autonomy in a fully supportive and nurturing environment).
- Engaging learning and innovative learning, with industry-credible staff.
- Personalised learning (where differentiated learning and assessment allows individuals to tailor their own curriculum).
- Digital fluency.
- Practice-led and industry relevant delivery (working with organisations to support innovation, including work experience opportunities built into programmes of study).
- Transformed learning spaces and learning infrastructure.
- Always inclusive (a personalised learning approach).
- Building learning communities (supporting students to apply their knowledge to real world challenges and to design, develop and implement practical solutions).

This work is connected to our success targets, as these approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum can help to foster interest, inclusion and achievement particularly for our under-represented target groups and therefore support continuation of study and good attainment outcomes. In particular, linkage to employability and practice-led curriculum will support attainment outcomes students from IMD and POLAR Quintile 1, and continuation for mature learners, as employability is a key concern for these target groups (Busher and James 2020; Gordard et al 2006; Baker 2020; Bates et al 2009³⁰) or because of aversion to debt (Callendar and Mason 2017³¹). Despite having high aspirations these groups may also have a less detailed knowledge of potential career options than more advantaged counterparts (Harrison and Waller 2018³²). Inclusive curriculum and learning spaces, and individualised learning, will particularly ensure outcomes for our disabled learner target group (Taylor et al 2017; Bunbury 2020³³).

Integrated employment, industry and workplace experiences and learning remain a core component of teaching and learning. This helps to address a key concern for target groups, particularly those from disadvantaged and under-represented areas, regarding the value of a degree in respect of career outcomes (Behle 2020; Gorard et al 2016; Bates et al 2009³⁴). It ensures a scaffolded, early approach to supporting and developing student career and employability development and management to in turn support outcomes in progression. Access to industry, employers and professionals through the curriculum (as well as extracurricular activity) provides critical exposure and connections for target groups who are less likely to have existing professional networks (Thompson 2017; Crebert et al 2004; Clarke 2018³⁵).

In consultations with our students in the development of this Plan, students noted and agreed that inclusive curriculum (McDuff et al 2020; Bunbury 2020; Hocking et al 2012³⁶) is a key aspect of the

³⁰ Busher, H. and James, N. (2020) 'Mature students' socio-economic backgrounds and their choices of Access to Higher Education courses', *Journal of further and higher education*, 44(5), pp. 640–652; Gorard, S., Smith, E., May, H., Thomas, L., Adnett, N., & Slack, K. (2006). *Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education*; Baker, Z. (2020) 'The vocational/academic divide in widening participation: the higher education decision making of further education students', *Journal of further and higher education*, 44(6), pp. 766–780; Bates, P., E. Pollard, T. Usher, and J. Oakley. (2009). *Who Is Heading for HE?: Young People's Perceptions Of, and Decisions About, Higher Education*. Brighton: BIS: Institute for Employment Studies

³¹ Callender, C. and Mason, G. (2017) 'Does Student Loan Debt Deter Higher Education Participation? New Evidence from England', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 671(1), pp. 20–48

³² Harrison, N. and Waller, R. (2018) 'Challenging discourses of aspiration: The role of expectations and attainment in access to higher education', *British educational research journal*, 44(5), pp. 914–938

³³ Taylor, M. et al. (2016) 'Transforming support for students with disabilities in UK Higher Education', *Support for learning*, 31(4), pp. 367–384; Bunbury, S. (2020) 'Disability in higher education - do reasonable adjustments contribute to an inclusive curriculum?', *International journal of inclusive education*, 24(9), pp. 964–979

³⁴ Behle, H. (2020) 'Students' and graduates' employability. A framework to classify and measure employability gain', *Policy reviews in higher education*, 4(1), pp. 105–130

³⁵ Thompson, D. W. (2017) 'How valuable is 'short project' placement experience to higher education students?', *Journal of further and higher education*, 41(3), pp. 413–424; Crebert, G., Bates, B., Bell, B., Patrick, C., and Cragnolini, V.. (2004). "Developing Generic Skills at University, during Work Placement and in Employment: Graduates' Perceptions." *Higher Education Research & Development*. 23 (2): 147–165; Clarke, M. (2018) 'Rethinking graduate employability: the role of capital, individual attributes and context', *Studies in higher education* (Dorchester-on-Thames), 43(11), pp. 1923–1937

³⁶ McDuff, N. et al. (2020) 'Improving equality of opportunity in higher education through the adoption of an Inclusive Curriculum Framework', *Widening participation and lifelong learning*, 22(2), pp. 83–121; Hockings, C., Brett, P. and Terentjevs, M. (2012) 'Making a difference-inclusive learning and teaching in higher education through open educational resources', *Distance education*, 33(2), pp. 237–25

development for the University College. Students highlighted that some areas could be improved by continuing use of blended approaches, which can facilitate more inclusive practices, particularly for disabled learners but also for our wider cohort of learners who may face additional barriers, e.g. those with caring responsibilities, commuter students and mature learners (Dziuban et al 2018; Serrano et al 2019³⁷). They noted that the University College could further leverage technology to support inclusivity of curriculum, teaching and learning. However, they also strongly noted that this is not a 'one-size-fits-all' strategy and face-to-face as well as digital delivery for teaching and learning should be practiced. Students encouraged the University College and senior leaders to 'think outside the box' to provide an inclusive, diverse learning experience, and noted that the activities to do so in this Plan were welcome.

As a small, specialist institution we take an integrated approach that benefits our whole population, as well as targeting specific activity for under-represented groups. This provides a safe, inclusive environment where target students aren't 'singled out'. It also allows us to allocate resources efficiently. A whole-community approach raises general awareness of support services available and builds a positive culture in respect of inclusion, equality and diversity; enriching the institution and the student experience, as well as providing necessary support for target learners. Therefore while our activities are designed and implemented with target students at the forefront, we promote an inclusive approach into our small community.

Key practices in this area are as follows:

Practice and outcomes

- **Entry routes to HE and flexible provision.** The University College will continue to offer a part-time mode of study across most of our undergraduate course to support entry routes to HE particularly for mature learners (but more broadly for other target groups who may need to work and study), an approach advocated by Universities UK (2013).
- **Inclusive and Student-centred Teaching, Learning and Assessment.** The University College will continue to anticipate and meet the needs of our underrepresented students by building inclusive learning approaches into all our undergraduate courses, utilising the recommendations of contributions to sector best practice such as Thomas (2016) and through consulting with students and ongoing evaluation, which will enable us to further tailor activity for our target groups. This will better support our distinctive population of learners, thereby improving retention and attainment by developing and encouraging varied forms of learning and assessment from day one of the course. We will draw on further involvement from students, including our students' offer to provide student-led training and advice to teaching staff to help them understand the issues they face. Consultation with underrepresented groups such as disabled students and minority ethnic students as part of the development of this Plan noted that improvements could be made in assessments, online learning and the ensuring of consistent and standardised best practice approaches across all subjects.

Inclusive practice in Teaching and Learning & the Student Experience will be further developed in collaboration with key stakeholders. This includes working more collaboratively with academic teams and students to develop a more inclusive curriculum. The University College will explore ways to diversify and decolonise library and curriculum resources utilising the key principles outlined above. This activity focuses on our disabled and minority ethnic target groups.

Integrated Programme Assessment (IPA) promotes a more holistic engagement with learning by assessing knowledge and skills at course (programme) level, rather than at a module level. IPA has been developed at a small number of other HE providers, yielding evidence that it can help address over-assessment, reduce student and staff workload, and encourage the creation of a community with shared responsibility for student learning (Harvey, Tree, & Rand-Weaver, 2018). This is particularly relevant for under-represented and disadvantaged groups, who may be more

³⁷ Dziuban, C. et al. (2018) 'Blended learning: the new normal and emerging technologies', *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 15(1), pp. 1–16; Serrano, D. R. et al. (2019) 'Technology-enhanced learning in higher education: How to enhance student engagement through blended learning', *European journal of education*, 54(2), pp. 273–286

likely to need support in building a sense of belonging and community, and balance assessments with other priorities such as part-time work. We aim to roll-out the initiative into schemes where appropriate during planned quinquennial reviews.

Students consulting on this Plan also noted the lack of diversity in the staff base, which needs positive action to address. The University College's People Strategy includes a specific focus on increasing staff diversity as a key priority, with associated KPIs being developed. This will be monitored through the Equality and Diversity Group.

- **Peer supported learning.** The success of our 'Near-Peer Assisted Learning' project (2020-21) demonstrates the attainment gain achieved by near-peer interaction and evidence shows that this is considered an effective way of transferring knowledge and skills across a 'knowledge gap'. In consultations with students as part of the development of this Plan, students noted the benefits of peer support (Longfellow et al 2009; Hodgson et al 2015³⁸) and advocated for more work in this area, particularly in challenging times such as the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Embedding employability skills into curriculum.** Our focus from 2021-22 and over the life of this Plan is on embedding essential employability skills training into the academic timetable, informed by the 'Framework for embedding employability in higher education' (Higher Education Academy, 2016). Subject-specific content and delivery will help develop students' occupational-specific social and cultural capital as well as supply extra sector knowledge needed to enter and thrive in their chosen profession. This responds to student consultations and input as part of the development of this Plan, where students noted that the University College could do more in some subjects to meet modern industry challenges and reflect the industry in curriculum. This work supports the continuation and attainment of key target groups as providing facilitating curriculum-linked activity to support the development and achievement of employability goals and encourages ongoing engagement with learning; and employability focused design allows an alternative and complementary lens through which learning outcomes can be achieved.

The introduction of new work-based learning modules will be phased in, with 2022 entrants being able to access at least some work-based learning credit as optional modules. The introduction of a year in industry will also start for a select group of subjects from the 2022 intake year, with the remainder following suit within the 2022-27 period.

- **Improving Support for our target students (disabled, disadvantaged and under-represented) to help to narrow the attainment gap.** A range of targeted activities will be considered from a set of clear recommendations drawn up from research and best practice, survey and focus group data. These include considering how the University College can:
 - Develop a whole provider approach.
 - Improve how we promote support and access to Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).
 - Develop more inclusive policies.
 - Improve digital accessibility.
 - Improve staff awareness and understanding.
 - Develop and evaluate several targeted initiatives.
 - Raise the baseline of inclusive and accessible practice to improve all aspects of the student experience and the environment.
 - Improve student engagement and involvement in identification of the issues, design, planning, implementation, testing and evaluation.

The College will explore initial commitments and pilot activities during 2022-23, and will deliver future activity based on pilots and evaluation, from 2023-24. Activity will be considered in terms of priorities, with a timeline for phased implementation over the full 5 years of this Plan.

In relation to disabled students, continued efforts will be made to improve how we better share information about disabled students' needs to avoid the need for students to have to declare on

³⁸ Longfellow, E. et al. (2008) "They had a way of helping that actually helped": a case study of a peer-assisted learning scheme', *Teaching in higher education*, 13(1), pp. 93–105; Hodgson, Y., Benson, R. and Brack, C. (2015) 'Student conceptions of peer-assisted learning', *Journal of further and higher education*, 39(4), pp. 579–597

multiple occasions. Consideration has also been given to the digital accessibility of our online platforms and resources (Edyburn 2015; Lowenthal et al 2020³⁹).

- **Improving transition support for mature learners to help narrow the continuation gap.** The Flying Start initiative is key to providing pre-arrival targeted support to ease the transition to academic study (Kahu et al 2015; Thomas 2013⁴⁰) for our mature learners and those on other undergraduate pathways (addressing the continuation gap).

Strategic Area 4: Early, targeted, inclusive student-focused wrap-around support & student development.

This Strategic Area comprises two elements: student support; and student development particularly in respect of career development and progression outcomes. The University College provides a range of student support, specifically responding to the needs of target learners under this Plan. Over the life of the Plan, we will continually improve practice, driven by emerging data and the evidence base from internal and sector evaluation and research, to positively impact outcomes for target groups.

This measure supports our targets, aims and objectives for continuation and attainment via the provision of curriculum-linked and extra student support to provide for the academic and personal needs of our students and to enable their success. Provision of financial and pastoral support, along with additional academic and curriculum-linked support, is important to positive, engaged experiences for our target students. Student development activities also support these targets, given that linkage between career outcomes and study promotes sustained engagement.

Student support

The University College's strategy for student success is founded upon a whole-institutional approach by ensuring the support available is transparent and accessible (Thomas 2017; Roberts 2018⁴¹), so that personal growth and success can be achieved. We will continue to develop our core service of embedded, whole-institutional activities, supplemented by a small number of targeted data-informed projects to address specific needs to improve the attainment and continuation rates for targeted groups. While we will target support where it is needed, we expect these initiatives and projects to benefit the whole institution. This approach reflects our small size and our high proportion of under-represented students enrolled at the University College.

Following the launch of the Student Success team in January 2019, throughout the life of this Plan the University College will continue building on the positive direction of travel, and further supporting our students to fully engage with their studies, unlock opportunities and maximise their potential. Targeted initiatives such as Flying Start and the peer mentor Buddy scheme receive positive approval feedback from participants as they help ease the transition to university life and help develop a strong sense of belonging (Thomas 2013; Mehan and Howells 2019⁴²). These initiatives are expected to improve and strengthen year-on-year over the period of the Plan in response to feedback captured and a longitudinal study taking place at the time of writing. The University College specifically notes input from students as part of consultations on the development of this Plan, which highlighted that 'belonging' and campus community for minority ethnic students needs to be addressed given the low enrolment rate of this target group. Students suggested that more opportunity to make friends and integrate with different cultures both socially (e.g. through food-related social events) and academically should be a priority.

The University College has already made a significant investment in student support services (2018/19), including the creation of new Student Success Team, additional resources to support student mental health and reorganisation of spend on scholarships and bursaries. Increased resourcing in this area has

³⁹ Edyburn, D. L. (2015) *Accessible instructional design*. First edition. Bingley, England: Emerald; Lowenthal, P. R. et al. (2020) 'Creating Accessible and Inclusive Online learning: Moving Beyond Compliance and Broadening the Discussion', *Quarterly review of distance education*, 21(2), pp. 1–82

⁴⁰ Kahu, E. et al. (2015) 'Linking academic emotions and student engagement: mature-aged distance students' transition to university', *Journal of further and higher education*, 39(4), pp. 481–497; Thomas, L. (2013) 'What works? Facilitating an effective transition into higher education', *Widening participation and lifelong learning*, 14(1), pp. 4–24

⁴¹ Thomas, L. (2017). Understanding a whole institution approach to widening participation; Roberts, J. (2018) 'Professional staff contributions to student retention and success in higher education', *Journal of higher education policy and management*, 40(2), pp. 140–153

⁴² Meahan, C. and Howells, K. (2019) 'In search of the feeling of 'belonging' in higher education: undergraduate students transition into higher education', *Journal of further and higher education*, 43(10), pp. 1376–1390

been strongly supported by students with whom we consulted in the development of this Plan. Under this Plan, a new scholarships and bursaries model that will 'enable and empower' successful outcomes aligned to our access and participation target groups is provided (see later). We have set ambitious targets focussed on increasing degree completion among mature learners, and degree attainment levels for students from low-participation neighbourhoods, disadvantaged students and disabled students. Our activities are targeted at supporting these specific groups, including by proactively reaching out to individual students, even where initiatives and schemes are still available for all students to benefit from.

Over the life of this Plan, the University College is increasingly using student focus group insight to inform action plans to ensure we prioritise what is meaningful and of importance to our students. This will strengthen our Theory of Change practice across the whole institution to ensure the wider staff population can get involved and drive change projects. This collaborative approach with students was welcomed in our student consultations in the development of this Plan, where students advocated that the University College better use their student communities and representative students to help solve challenges. Students particularly felt this was critical for minority ethnic groups given the lack of staff diversity, and students were very keen to offer their collaboration in the development of effective approaches to support inclusivity across the whole student experience.

Student development

As a specialist and vocationally-oriented HE provider, student employability is core to our mission and long-term strategic objectives. However, we recognise that graduate outcomes, in particular progression to professional employment or further study, represents an area for improvement across the institution. Overall, the proportion of our students across all groups going into employment or further study was around 92% from the 2017/18 cohort⁴³. When looking specifically at professional employment, professional study or postgraduate study, this reduces to 43.5%⁴⁴. We are pleased that the majority of our graduates choose to enter the land-based and outdoor industries. However, it is often difficult for graduates in these industries to secure high paying and/or professional-level starting positions, which we see reflected in both our GO and LEO datasets.

The size of our DLHE and Graduate Outcomes datasets means that we are not able to conduct meaningful analysis of graduate destinations for each under-represented group. The University College will focus efforts to improve progression outcomes on all undergraduate leavers. We consider whole-provider, embedded approaches to supporting student employability to be the most effective way we can support better progression outcomes for under-represented groups.

Practice and outcomes – Student Support

- **The Wellbeing Team.** Wellbeing continue to provide core wellbeing services, including counselling, wellbeing support, residential student support, mental health support, safeguarding services and chaplaincy. .
- **Learning Mentors.** Our Learning Mentor team support course teams with retention, attainment and progression (Terrion and Leonard 2007; Dutton 2003; Gunn et al 2017⁴⁵). The role of the Learning Mentor includes responding fast to referrals and reaching out to students by offering one-to-one sessions aimed at supporting both academic and personal achievement, and offering a combination of activities (Pitstop workshops and bespoke sessions) that helps creates effective action. This approach is informed by the good practice expressed in the 'Framework for student access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education' (HEA, 2018).

43 Cohort defined as UK domicile/Degree incl. Integrated Masters/FT and based on XACTIVITY of partially complete and complete survey responses.

44 Professional employment, professional study or PG study 43.5% is as above but excludes XACTIVITY = Other, and only includes respondents in work where a SOC code has been derived.

45 Terrion, J. L. and Leonard, D. (2007) 'A taxonomy of the characteristics of student peer mentors in higher education: findings from a literature review', *Mentoring & tutoring for partnership in learning*, 15(2), pp. 149–164; Dutton, C. (2003) 'Mentoring: the contextualisation of learning - mentor, protégé and organisational gain in higher education', *Education & training* (London), 45(1), pp. 22–29; Gunn, F., Lee, S. H. and Steed, M. (2017) 'Student Perceptions of Benefits and Challenges of Peer Mentoring Programs: Divergent Perspectives From Mentors and Mentees', *Marketing education review*, 27(1), pp. 15–26

- **Monthly Study Skills Newsletters and promotion of support services.** Our Student Success team publish a Study Skills monthly e-Newsletter to showcase the support sessions offered both online or on-campus dependant on the students need (study support sessions and attainment boosting workshops). We proactively encourage disabled students and those from under-represented and disadvantaged to engage with support throughout the year. Students also noted the importance of the timeliness of these communications so that access is proactive.
- **Study support and attainment raising workshops.** Our Student Success team delivers monthly open study support sessions and attainment boosting workshops. This helps to reduce attainment gaps by offering interventions that reports such as 'Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change' (Thomas, et al., 2017) have recommended as effective.
- **Flying Start and Buddy scheme.** Our Flying Start initiative, trialled in 2019/20, will continue to focus on students enrolling onto other undergraduate pathways (particularly attractive to mature learners). Our ToC asserts that a substantial improvement of the offer to these students will have a significant focused impact on the access and participation of underrepresented groups, owing to the status which shorter courses appear to have in serving as an entry to higher education for students from these backgrounds. This initiative is key to our efforts to improve continuation for mature learners returning to study or adopting a change in career. Flying Start includes frontloaded academic, co-curricular and support services involvement with a peer mentoring 'Buddy Scheme'. This will allow students to make the most of their studies and the campus as quickly as possible through developing a sense of belonging and enabling student success. The benefits of a peer mentoring scheme, and our understanding of 'belonging', have been described in Thomas (2012), and Thomas, et al. (2017).
- **Targeted support for students with disabilities.** We will aim to better take account of the needs of students with disabilities by tailoring and developing our offer with them in mind and involving them as much as possible at all stages of planning, designing, testing and implementation. We are looking to continue to commission a Student Assistance Programme that supplements our core services with a free 24/7 helpline and associated app. We believe these measures will improve retention and attainment outcomes for both the students whose specific needs are anticipated, but also their peers as a result of a better supported learning community. This approach has been underpinned and evidenced by evaluation and research undertaken with our disabled students, in a series of focus groups run independent evaluators at SEER (Specialist Evidence, Evaluation and Research). Students highlighted the importance of providing a range of support measures and felt a whom community of good practice was preferred.

The disabled students Society was created in January 2021 by students with the support of the Wellbeing and Inclusion Service. The society provides a space for disabled students to meet and support each other. Collaboration with this society will be encouraged in the development of plans and proposal recommendations for required improvements to inclusive practice and culture at the University College.

- **Financial Support.** Over the last two years, the University College has undertaken various evaluation and research on our financial support provision for students. This has included both quantitative and qualitative analysis, utilising the OfS *Impact of Financial Support* evaluation toolkit and internal evaluation. Findings have informed our development of a new financial support model, which is better targeted and aligned with identified priorities for student success; informed by deeper dive evaluation into student needs and experiences with their financial support provision; and considerate of broader factors such as internal course costs and sector best practice. The new 'Empower and Enable' model has also provided considerations for the embedding of financial support with a range of 'wrap around' support of the types detailed in Strategic Area 4, to increase its impact and address the additional support needs of students accessing financial support. Our financial support offer is as follows:

Award	Eligibility	Amount	Frequency
WUC Bursary	Students with Household Income of £25,000 or less	£400 (minimum)	Annual payment

	Students with Household Income of £25,000 or less and who are from low participation areas (measured by POLAR4 Q1 and Q2)	£650 (maximum)	Annual payment
Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) Diagnostic Assessment Bursary	Funding to pay for the cost of a SpLD assessment, allowing eligible students to have a formal diagnosis/ evidence of their learning difficulty, which can be used to develop a WUC individual Inclusive Learning Plan and/or to support an application for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). Eligibility criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive indicator of SpLD using WUC screening tool (as appropriate) An enrolled WUC Higher Education student, with a minimum of one full semester left on their course <p><i>NB. If inadequate notice to cancel is given and/or there is nonattendance at a booked session, the student should expect to be charged the full cost of the assessment.</i></p>	Full cost of assessment through a preferred/ approved WUC assessor	One-off payment made directly to the supplier per eligible student
Care Experienced Student Bursary*	Students who are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under 25 at enrolment Assessed as a home fee payer Have lived in public care or as a looked-after child, including with foster carers under local authority are, in a residential children's home, or that have been adopted after being in care. 	£1,000	Annual payment
Mature Student Bursary*	Mature students (21 years or over on enrolment) who are from the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas (measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation, IMD Quintiles 1 and 2)	£1,000	Annual payment
Post-graduate Study Award	Current undergraduate students who have achieved a 1 st or 2:1 degree outcome who are progressing to a taught or research masters programme at the University College	£1,000	One-off payment
	Current undergraduate students who have achieved a 1 st or 2:1 degree outcome who are progressing to a taught or research masters programme at the University College and who are from under-represented areas (measured by POLAR4 Quintile 1 and 2)	£1,500	One-off payment

A Hardship Fund is also available to support students experiencing financial disadvantage.. The University College have already implemented a new approach to allocation of funds to provide a swift response to need, where panel of relevant senior staff assess hardship cases and provide a compassionate but consistent approach to hardship support. Wrap-around support for students accessing Hardship Funds includes money management and budgeting guidance.

Practice and outcomes – Student Development (careers & employability)

- **WUC Ambassador Intern Scheme.** In 2021 the University College launched the WUC Ambassador Intern Scheme, targeted at students from underrepresented groups. The scheme will continue into this Plan, providing students with the opportunity to engage with paid work

(Gannon et al 2018; Fleming and Grace 2016; Gartland 2015⁴⁶) alongside taking part in personal development coaching aimed at supporting the role, and developing social capital ahead of entering the workforce, along with opportunities to build volunteering and fundraising experience. The package will help develop peer support for all our students, but particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled students, disadvantaged learners and those from low participation neighbourhoods who will benefit from priority places on the scheme. Experience of the world of work can help address inequalities between groups, as social mobility can be a barrier to success, as noted in guidance such as 'Social Mobility' by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (2018).

- **Employer-linked events.** The professional practice elements of our courses provide a powerful base from which to build our employability skills offer, which we will enhance through an institution-wide business development programme to be implemented across the life of the Plan, piloted in 2019/20.
- **Support for business start-ups.** Given the nature of our subjects, we expect and encourage a significant number of our graduates to set up their own small business or to enter family-run businesses, either straight after graduation or later in their careers. To ensure greater benefit for our under-represented groups, core sessions will be embedded into module teaching, bringing equality of opportunity to learn about the business world, understand the steps and processes of starting a business, as well as gaining transferable skills and personal development insights.

From 2023/24, this is expected to expand to include a dedicated start-up business hub to support student enterprise, innovation and partnership working. The objectives are to support new business start-up ideas and support students in setting up or entering family-run businesses.

- **Work-based Learning (WBL).** Work-based learning opportunities are a highly effective approach to improving graduate outcomes, and equal access to these helps to reduce inequality (Higher Education Academy, 2016). The University College already offer placement learning in some courses and, as part of our new strategy to enhance graduate outcomes, we will offer all students entering from 2022/23 the opportunity to undertake a professional work placement.
- **Alumni Engagement.** We believe alumni relations can be harnessed to provide high value to our access and participation work by opening opportunities to grow our students' knowledge and networks (Dollinger et al 2019⁴⁷). In the past we have built strong, long-lasting relationships with our alumni, many of whom remain in the local area after graduation. Our long-term strategy involves engaging our alumni community, with the intention that a core pool will provide several benefits to improve social mobility of our students, particularly for underrepresented groups.
- **Employer relationships.** Informed by good practice in employer engagement (QAA, 2014), the University College will continue to build on the relationships we have with key employers and work collaboratively to provide more opportunities for our students, such as hosting interviews on campus by providing the facilities for companies who wish to offer graduate opportunities to our students, along with continuing to advertise reputable job opportunities. We believe developing closer and stronger relationships with industry will mean employers will value the diversity of our learning community, fostering good relationships and helping to equalise graduate outcomes for our students from under-represented backgrounds.
- **Targeted support for students with disabilities.** The student initiative "Kindness approach: steps to success" sessions are designed as small informal sessions discussing topics on careers and employability tailored to disabled students and students with low confidence. The idea was created by a student and co-created with the Student Success team and the Wellbeing and Inclusion Service. Decisions made about the content and delivery of the sessions are made in partnership.

⁴⁶ Gannon, S., Tracey, D. and Ullman, J. (2018) 'Bolstering graduates' success through working as student ambassadors in university widening participation programs', *Higher education research and development*, 37(4), pp. 715–729; Fleming, M. J. and Grace, D. M. (2016) 'Agents of aspiration: the (often unintended) benefits to university students working in outreach programmes', *Educational research* (Windsor), 58(3), pp. 300–318

⁴⁷ Dollinger, M., Arkoudis, S. and Marangell, S. (2019) 'University alumni mentoring programs: a win-win?', *Journal of higher education policy and management*, 41(4), pp. 375–389.

3.2 Student consultation

The University College recognises the value of the student voice in informing our practices. We engage and consult with our students through a range of formal and informal mechanisms. Given our small size, we benefit from ongoing, regular student engagement and direct feedback and input. Over the life of this Plan, we will develop our existing student engagement practices further and continue to ensure that the mechanisms for student consultation in the planning, monitoring, evaluation, and delivery of activities in this Plan are in place. A diverse range of students have been, and will continue to be, involved in the Plan. Our students have been provided with opportunities to contribute to and comment on the content of this Plan and associated targets through a variety of mechanisms. Our Access and Participation Group (APG), which includes students' union representation, has overseen the development of the Plan. Drafts of the plan have also been considered by our Academic Board and Board of Governors, both of which include representation from students. We have also worked with a focus group via the Student Success Advisory Board, with its student members, and the student union. These groups have student representatives from the access and participation target student groups. Ongoing involvement will be achieved through continued attention to issues relating to this Plan in committee / group meetings, and via specific student focus groups, surveys and via student representatives. We are encouraging more students to join the Student Success Advisory Board (SAAB), the HE student Council will sit monthly, and societies that represent target groups are being established, as an avenue to link in with a diverse group of students. Formal feedback collected from focus groups or surveys is translated into an action plan to inform the relevant workstreams, and is monitored by relevant groups.

More broadly, a range of students continue to support development of initiatives in this Plan, co-designing projects and initiatives from day one to ensure that student input is gathered and acted upon. In our continued endeavour to work in partnership with students, the frequency of HE Student Council meetings has been increased for Academic Year 2021-22 and for the life of this Plan to ensure awareness, engagement and monitoring of the APP targeted initiatives are consulted on regularly and feedback used to inform delivery.

In addition to the formal structures, the Student Success Advisory Board (SSAB) provides a forum to share insight regarding students' needs, communities' particular needs, to inform the planning and evaluation of the Student Success teams work. Board membership is students and alumni, with plans to engage industry to strengthen insight. During 2020/21 the working scope of the SSAB has expanded to encompass an additional role of facilitating discussions and exchanges between student representatives leading to co-creation projects and collaborations to improve the experience of groups of students.

In 2019/20 the University College's working relationship with the Students' Union increasingly focused on consultation and evaluation, in particular regularly reviewing the institution's ToC and subjecting it to scrutiny of the student body. Focus groups and surveys conducted by the SU alongside the Student Success team as part of a collaborative approach to consultation will maximise our channels to reach underrepresented groups, thus helping achieve our shared access and participation objectives. In addition to collaborative consultation, the SU will partner with staff in the design and delivery of its APP projects.

Informal, small-group 'chat' sessions are organised by the Students' Union to help the University College access diverse and nuanced minority views. Student opinion was raised in these sessions that individuals with underrepresented perspectives would feel most comfortable talking to staff about their experience in dedicated meetings focused on their needs. In response to this appetite, a question allowing students to opt into profiling of their data for the purposes of targeting invitations to focus groups and surveys was added during the enrolment process from 2019/20 onwards. This will allow us to discover views within underrepresented groups regarding both the evaluation of current and past APP activities. The Students' Union have restructured the officer roles and constitution to align with the discussions had with our minority groups, providing a more focused representation for students from our Black Asian and minority ethnic and international heritages. Our continued work towards increased accessibility, in line with learning from the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift to blended delivery has led to the creation of a new website; allowing students access to Society information, contact details and support from the Students' Union team whether on or off campus. For residential students we run wellbeing walks, to encourage activity and open discussions around mental health, as well as 'Tea and Chat' service for a more personable approach. These were then adapted to an online format, creating 'Team-up' to provide

students with a virtual wellbeing space to continue and encourage staff and peer support. Throughout the academic year we continued our guidance and financial support to our societies, which led to the creation of new, and increased the diversity of our existing, societies.

Our increased integration with student societies (for example, the Mature students society, disabled student Society, and at the time of writing the Plan there were plans in place for a Cultural or Global society) means we are increasing our ability to foster dynamic relationships with groups to meet their specific needs rather than just on a one-to-one basis with individuals, encouraging positive change within the institution.

In the development of this Plan and its measures, student consultations led to a range of outcomes for inclusion which have been appropriately referenced through the Plan. In summary, students noted:

- the lack of diversity at the University College, but also acknowledged the contextual challenges. Students have noted support for doing more to attract minority ethnic students, and further noted the University College's position to contribute to this similar ambition in the industry. Action: committed to an APP access target for minority ethnic students as part of this 5-year Plan.
- the attraction of the University College's campus and facilities and agreed these to be an excellent feature of the University College. In particular, the small, specialist feature of the University College is attractive as students felt they did not get 'lost in numbers', which promotes a 'friendly, open environment'. Students noted that this can support belonging and mitigate the feeling of being overwhelmed, which may more likely occur for underrepresented students. Action: over the summer 2021 we have extended the footprint of our wellbeing and inclusion support area, creating a dedicated space that can accommodate more people and provide direct access to the support service.
- their agreement that inclusive curriculum is a key aspect of the development for the University College. Students highlighted that some areas could be improved by continuing use of blended approaches, which can facilitate more inclusive practices, particularly for disabled students. They noted that the University College could further leverage technology to support inclusivity of curriculum. However, they also strongly noted that this is not a 'one-size-fits-all' strategy and face-to-face as well as digital delivery for teaching and learning should be the mode. Action: we have agreed to establish two accessibility task and finish groups – one with a focus on digital resources and the other on campus and built environment. These will report in March 2022 with proposals that can be built into budgets from 2022/23. We will be using this work to feed into Trust and Charity applications to support our inclusion work. Students who face accessibility challenges will be part of these working groups.
- encouragement for the University College to 'think outside the box' to provide an inclusive, diverse learning experience, and noted that the activities to do so in this Plan were welcome.
- the suggestion that the University College could do more in some subjects to meet modern industry challenges and reflect the industry in curriculum. Action: as part of the work on Learning and Teaching strategy, and people strategy we will be further developing our work with industry over the life of this Plan. We will be extending placement opportunities to more students. We are planning to develop a network of industry fellows, building on our work with industry advisory panels, and will seek placements and secondment opportunities for staff as part of their ongoing professional development.
- the critical importance and attraction of the University College's 'small class sizes' promise, which they impressed needs to be upheld and considered in inclusive approaches for disabled students. Action: this will be addressed as part of the work on learning and teaching strategy implementation plans that will complete in March 2022 where we plan an emphasis on inclusive and personalised learning approaches.
- that curriculum content is especially geared towards UK and EU learning and references, where a wider global scope would be more welcome. Action: this will be addressed as part of the work on Learning and Teaching strategy implementation plans that will complete in March 2022.
- the lack of diversity in the staff base, which needs positive action to address. Action: this will be addressed as part of the work on People strategy implementation plans that will complete in March 2022.
- that in respect of inclusive provision for disabled students, most of the time teaching and learning is 'good', however, that access to specialist equipment for students who need it could be improved and exam time and assessment extensions could be more easily provided. Action: this will be

addressed as part of the work on Learning and Teaching strategy implementation plans that will complete in March 2022.

- their offer to provide student-led training and advice to teaching staff to help them understand the issues they face. Action: this will be dealt with as part of the work on Learning and Teaching strategy and People strategy implementation plans that will complete in March 2022.
- the benefits of peer support and advocated for more work in this area. Action: this will be dealt with as part of the work on Learning and Teaching strategy implementation plans that will complete in March 2022.
- that work in relation to 'belonging' and campus community for minority ethnic students needs to be addressed. Action: this is being addressed as part of the wider commitment on increase minority ethnic student enrolments. A refreshed induction programme has been agreed for 2021/22 with student input to ensure a more supportive and welcoming orientation.
- that the hybrid nature of the University College can mean the 'university' experience is sometimes lost and HE students can experience it as 'an extended version of the University College'. Students have urged the University College to consider what more can be facilitated to mitigate this, perhaps by way of social events and organised activity out-of-hours. Action: this forms part of work with our SU as they develop a 5-year plan, which will be ratified in March 2022.
- the University College needs to further improve communications around its services and the remit of the Students' Union. Action: this forms part of work with our SU as they develop a 5-year plan, which will be ratified in March 2022. The Students' Union secured an increased level of satisfaction in the 2021 National Student Survey (NSS) [Increase of 12.8 percentage points from 52.6% to 65.5%]
- a strong support to increase resourcing for student support and wellbeing. Action: as noted we have responded for 2021-22 by increasing the footprint of space available for well-being and inclusion services and additional posts for Residential Student Support Officers (RSSO) is being recruited to.
- a keenness to offer their collaboration in the development of effective approaches to support inclusivity across the whole student experience.
- that whilst student support services are 'really good' and the team are 'fantastic', the University College should be mindful of the lack of staff diversity in provision of support and should take steps to address this or bring in external support where appropriate. Action: this will be addressed as part of the work on the People strategy implementation plans that will complete in March 2022.

Students also commented that further opportunities could be provided to enhance and broaden student engagement and consultation generally, such as:

- Setting up quarterly meetings with senior leaders with all students who run societies, student groups and/or ambassadors so that students have a senior audience to directly feed into.
- Widening the net of 'representatives' to a broader student population and provide further opportunities for participation.
- Using the Students' Union as strength to work on issues, which would mean a change and step up in the action of the Students' Union.
- Ensure closing the loop once consultation and input has been provided, explicitly showing and providing communications that the University College is listening and acting on the advice and input of its students, e.g. a 'you said, we listened...' methodology.

As a result of this feedback, a new student-only HE Forum meets monthly with a wider pool of Representatives from the student body to discuss topics that impact on students. Greater frequency of Students' Union (SU) facilitated forums provide a regular platform to raise concerns and suggestions to be addressed in partnership with WUC. Representation covers all HE courses and levels, with membership invitation extended to other Representatives of student groups.

The established HE Council provides a platform for nominated Representatives to escalate any key agenda items they have to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and managers. The HE Council meets every semester and is by a senior member of staff and a member of the SU Officer team. The HE Council may hold extraordinary meetings when student consultation is required in relation to key institutional

decisions that impact the student experience (an example of this, is a change to semester dates due to the Covid-19 pandemic).

The HE Council unconfirmed minutes are sent out to student representatives following the meetings. Any remaining actions not concluded are followed up by the Chair and reported back to students. A new 'You Said, We Listened' mechanism will allow for changes to be reported back in a consistent format at the HE Councils from feedback received at HE Forums, Focus Groups and surveys.

The HE Council is an addition to the continuing opportunities for students to engage in the governance and decision-making processes of the University College. Student representation is built-in to the terms of reference for key governance committees i.e. Academic Board and the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC).

The University College Continuous Monitoring Evaluation and Enhancement (CMEE) process also captures student views and feedback through a 'living' Journal at Scheme level; which prompts course teams to review student experience and respond in-year where possible. The Journals will incorporate data in relation to the whole student journey as well as feedback and views captured through module and course review mechanisms. The Journals will be monitored and audited regularly by the Quality Office and reported to ASQEC. The Journals will also inform the HE Self-Evaluation Report which will be an annual report submitted to ASQEC and Academic Board.

3.3 Evaluation strategy

Strategic context

The University College has used the OfS evaluation self-assessment tool to consider current approaches and to build in robust evaluation methods for future interventions. In terms of the OfS 'Standards of Evidence', the majority of our evaluations are currently type 1 (narrative) and 2 (empirical enquiry) approaches. We consider we have further to go on developing our evaluation approaches, and this has been, and will continue to be, a key focus over the life of this Plan. For example, given our small cohorts, we have already progressed our efforts to include more and regular qualitative evaluation and research work to deepen our understanding of the experiences of students from different target groups (2021). We continue to engage in work to build our capacity through relevant networks, and sector specialists.

The University College will look to the sector and the Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) centre for best practice and use sector research, evidence and evaluation approaches, applied to its specific context. We have also become a member of the Specialist Evidence, Evaluation and Research (SEER)⁴⁸ service to add expertise and capacity and drive outcomes in evaluation and research. We will share learning and outcomes through the sector where appropriate, contributing to network and sector discussion.

We regularly discuss how evaluative data collection can be built into access and participation projects and staff have a common understanding of the importance of robust evaluation methods. Investment in access and participation activity, including resources to support evaluation and monitoring, are also discussed through our annual Integrated Planning Exercise (IPE) to ensure that it is appropriately factored into our strategic and financial planning.

The University College will continually develop new, or seek to improve, evaluation tools and approaches that are rooted in our activity-level theory of change models. We take a self-reflective approach to delivery and will review evaluation data and outcomes regularly, ensuring findings feed back into practice. As we work with young people from primary school onwards in our access and outreach agenda, we consider it useful to take a small steps approach to breaking the impact of our interventions into smaller milestones⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ <https://collaborativehe.com/>

⁴⁹ Harrison, N., & Waller, R. (2017). Evaluating outreach activities: overcoming challenges through a realist 'small steps' approach. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 21(2-3), 81-87.

Evaluation design and implementation

Evaluation approaches are built into our projects at the design phase, which covers the type of data we plan to gather and how this will be used to determine the impact of the intervention. We expect to rely upon type 1 and type 2 evidence for our access, success and progression projects owing to our small cohort sizes and the ethical implications of establishing control groups excluded from a service or activity. We will make use of questionnaires and focus groups, constructed according to sound research principles, to establish the impact of an intervention on those who participated. Where numbers permit, this will be combined with quantitative analysis of student data to try and understand how those participating have performed academically and with respect to graduate outcomes. In some cases, we have been able to identify benchmarks to inform our evaluation, for example in the case of our peer-assisted learning project and our Student Success Buddy scheme. We will apply these same programme design principles to our outreach projects as we continue to develop these over the course of the Plan.

In the access area, evaluation development consists of pre-/post- questionnaire designs, qualitative data collection via participant interviews and focus groups, and stakeholder interviews (e.g. teachers, parents) and student ambassador reflections. The University College already collects a range of engagement metrics and qualitative feedback from pupils and teachers, upon which improvements are made. Measures of success in this area are enquiries, applications, and enrolments from target cohorts from partner schools and partner organisations / communities. Evaluation measures include activity-level engagement levels, and evaluation with students, teachers, partner organisation staff, and parents/carers. Tracking of individual students may also be implemented where possible and mechanisms for this will be explored in the first two years of this Plan. Some in depth research and case studies, to help further our understanding of target learners and their experiences, ambitions and potential barriers are also envisaged. In respect of digital learning and outreach, engagement with and enrolment onto online courses by target learners will be considered, along with web and social media output measures. Over the life of this Plan, we will consider sector good practice approaches as they develop to monitor the impact of our outreach activities with pupils of all ages.

For student success and progression activities, continuation, attainment and progression outcomes for target groups will be key measures. End-of-module surveys from students and feedback from module leaders, and NSS results will also be considered. The University College can respond quickly to module evaluation and feedback and can create quick and tangible changes based on findings. For example, this evaluation has resulted in changes to the weightings of assessment, changes to assessment types and changes to timetables to better support student success.

Development will include increased data capture and focus on qualitative data to increase and broaden our understanding of experiences of target groups. The University College have already initiated this work and will continue to strengthen it over the life of this Plan. In relation to employability aspects, evaluation will include feedback from students and industry professionals and companies, including satisfaction measures. Data analysis relating to engagement with support and progression for target groups will be conducted. Students provide feedback on and input into the development of these activities.

We will explore levels of student engagement with services and student satisfaction and feedback (via surveys and focus groups). End-of-module surveys from students and feedback from module leaders, and NSS results will also be considered. In relation to employability aspects, evaluation will include feedback from students and industry professionals and companies, including satisfaction measures. Again, we will focus on qualitative data to increase and broaden our understanding of experiences of target groups. We will put in place a consistent monitoring framework for our new bursaries and scholarships involving qualitative feedback from students and, wherever possible, quantitative analysis of student outcomes, using relevant parts of the OfS *Impact of Financial Support* toolkit. This will allow us to monitor impact over time and to determine whether our ToC assumptions are proven. We will reflect on student evaluation data with a focus on flagging areas that have implications for disparities in outcomes, experience or attainment and reviewing the impact of success measures.

We are growing our evidence base to inform and drive future developments, utilising research commissioned through SEER designed to increase WUC understanding of the experiences of target students. For example, we are exploring a combined collation and analysis of existing evaluation and literature with qualitative data collection in the form of surveys and semi-structured focus groups held with

our disabled students. The research was developed in collaboration with the HE Disability Manager, the Head of Wellbeing and Inclusion, the Head of Student Success and Applied Inspiration's SEER service to inform a baseline picture of how staff are supporting disabled students across campus.

We will concentrate resources for evaluation and monitoring in those areas where we are investing most heavily. In these areas, evaluation will include, for example: observation of student sessions to understand engagement patterns; gathering of anonymous session approval and feedback during sessions; focus-group discussions to gather narrative feedback and test approval for components of the programme; collation of findings from all these methods to form statements and counterfactual statements (where appropriate). Final reports will provide a summary of the learnings from each part of this evaluation process, which will supply narrative explanations that can be considered alongside the performance statistics. The findings of this report will be widely communicated to students and staff and will inform continuous improvement of the programme in subsequent years.

Implementation of our approaches to monitoring will be based upon reliable quantitative data, largely drawn from our student records systems and cross-checked where necessary with external data sources such as OfS-supplied data files and HESA statistics. We have a small but expert Management Information Systems (MIS) team who are experienced at analysing student data and re-building performance indicators, using knowledge of HE statutory data returns and our own internal performance measures. Wherever possible we have mirrored sector-standard approaches to measuring outcomes, so that we optimise our ability to benchmark our performance and retain consistency of measurements over time. Where we are using questionnaires to assess the impact of our interventions, these are designed using input from a range of staff and students and are cognitively pre-tested using best practice survey guidelines. The estimated time and resources needed to effectively evaluate our access and participation interventions are built into projects at the design phase. Our Student Success Adviser has been appointed to help with this work, having responsibility for supporting research and evaluation of access and participation projects across the institution.

Our SEER membership enables us to work collaboratively with external experts and other related small specialist providers to develop effective, robust and calibrated evaluation approaches that will enable us to investigate the specific impacts of what we do. We are focused on ensuring good practices in qualitative evaluation given our small cohorts and need to provide deeper insights in smaller target areas.

We have already noted plans to closely monitor progress in increasing the diversity and inclusiveness of our student body, and to work closely with target groups to understand more about their experiences and barriers. We will continue to adopt a mixed methods approach, drawing on our own quantitative evaluation tools, those developed with partners and through the SEER service. We will continue to conduct qualitative evaluation through surveys, interviews, focus groups and deeper-dive evaluation projects by drawing on the experience of advisory groups made up of students we are aiming to support.

Learning to shape improvements

We will apply learnings from our evaluation to continuously improve our access and participation activity. The open and transparent culture within the University College means that we can critically reflect and recognise when an initiative is not yielding expected outcomes, and will be agile in re-profiling our investment to ensure that resource is directed to the most effective activity. We also know that it may take some time, in some cases years, before we are able to reliably assess the outcome of a project and apply the relevant learnings. We will establish evaluation check points and reflection opportunities to support continuous improvement and refinement of our initiatives prior to end-point evaluation.

Being a smaller organisation, we can avoid the risk of knowledge and learning becoming siloed, by continuously considering and improving dissemination and replication of good practices. As such, evaluation and findings will increasingly form a cross-College community of practice focused on developing our institutional expertise and experience.

At the leadership level, outcomes of evaluation are formally considered and reviewed at our relevant committees and group meetings, where decisions about practice continuity, improvement and development are made. Evaluation often provides recommendations in relation to strengthening practice, which are signed off or considered. Decisions regarding practice changes are relayed and implemented

via the group representatives in their respective areas. For example, we recently undertook an extensive evaluation of our financial support packages, which included a report on internal practices, insight into sector best practice and research, and ultimately recommendations to improving our financial support package. This was considered and further worked by a range of leadership staff, including the finance team given the impact on budget. Recommendations from the outcomes of this evaluation formed a new model, which is now part of this Plan.

At the operational level, practitioners use reflective practice informed by emerging evaluation and research (internal and external), to continuously try to improve practices. Smaller operational changes (not requiring management sign off) are implemented as matter of course, following review and discussions about evaluation outcomes by staff (and student representatives where appropriate).

3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

In 2018/19, the University College established an Access and Participation Group (APG), chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and comprising of academics, professional service staff and students. This permanent Group continues to meet monthly to steer our institution-wide access and participation work and to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of all associated activity and projects. The APG can determine whether to redeploy its resources to targeted improvement in specific areas, accelerating action as per the strategic measures in this Plan; or can allocate additional expertise or resource if required.

Responsibility for monitoring access and outreach activity lies with our Head of Student Recruitment and Marketing, while responsibility for monitoring student success and progression activity sits with our Head of Student Success (to whom the Student Success Adviser reports directly). Both areas are overseen by the Registrar and University College Secretary, and ultimately the Vice-Chancellor. However, monitoring is embedded at project level: each of the key interventions described in this plan is managed as a project and each project is owned by a member of the team and involves an academic and a student lead. Students are represented on all the groups and committees involved with the design, delivery and monitoring of our Plan. We also use our HE Student Council to update and consult with students on our access and participation activities. Our Student Success team frequently meets with students to keep them informed of the work of the team and delivery of access and participation initiatives. Our student ambassadors are also involved with the design and delivery of access and outreach activities, and they will be briefed on, and involved with, monitoring and evaluation of our Plan.

Progress with each project is regularly reported to the monthly Access and Participation Group, with outcomes linked to student outcome targets that have been agreed by the Academic Board and Board of Governors and communicated to wider staff. Governors receive regular updates through standing reports, and we will also produce an annual progress report for consideration by the Academic Board and the Board of Governors. Our Equality and Diversity Committee also regularly considers progress against access and participation objectives as part of our wider Equality Policy.

If our regular monitoring demonstrates that we are falling behind our targets, or that progress is worsening in a particular area, we will of course seek to understand why this is, for example through further data analysis and student feedback. Where evidence shows us that an intervention has not been successful, we will re-profile our investment so that demonstrably beneficial activities can be expanded and so that new or altered initiative can be delivered. We will not wait until the end of an academic year to act if there is clear evidence that a project is not producing the outcomes we planned; however, in most cases we expect that it will take two full academic 'cycles' before we can conduct a comprehensive evaluation of our key access and student success projects, particularly as this is new activity for the University College.

4. Provision of information to students

We commit to publishing clear, accessible and timely information for applicants and students on the fees that we charge and the support that we offer, including our range of bursaries and scholarships.

We will publish this information through a range of media including via UCAS and the Student Loans Company, our webpages, and through our publications and social media channels. This information will be available in advance of the admissions cycle, consistent with consumer law requirements.

We will continue to run a series of communications to offer holders to inform and guide applicants preparing for university. This includes informative videos and leaflets on understanding student finance and the application process/timings, what to expect from university life, how to prepare for living away from home. This is supported by a webinar programme, supported by student ambassadors to share personal experiences.

5. Appendix

1. Targets (tables 2a, 2b and 2c in the targets and investment plan)
2. Investment summary (tables 4a and 4b in the targets and investment plan)
3. Fee summary (table 4a and 4b in the fee information document)

**Access and participation plan
Fee information 2022-23**

Provider name: Writtle University College

Provider UKPRN: 10007657

Summary of 2022-23 entrant course fees

*Course type not listed by the provider as available to new entrants in 2022-23. This means that any such course delivered to new entrants in 2022-23 would be subject to fees capped at the basic fee amount.

Inflationary statement:

Subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations we will increase fees each year using RPI-X

Table 4a - Full-time course fee levels for 2022-23 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	£9,250
Foundation degree	*	£9,250
Foundation year/Year 0	*	£9,250
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	£9,250
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2022-23 students

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	Unified Seevic Palmer's College 10005736	£9,250
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4c - Part-time course fee levels for 2022-23 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	£6,935
Foundation degree	*	£6,935
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	£6,935
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2022-23

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

Targets and investment plan 2022-23 to 2026-27

Provider name: Writtle University College

Provider UKPRN: 10007657

Investment summary

The OfS requires providers to report on their planned investment in access, financial support and research and evaluation in their access and participation plan. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in student success and progression in the access and participation plans and therefore investment in these areas is not recorded here.

Note about the data:

The figures in Table 4a relate to all expenditure on activities and measures that support the ambitions set out in an access and participation plan, where they relate to access to higher education. The figures in Table 4b only relate to the expenditure on activities and measures that support the ambitions set out in an access and participation plan, where they relate to access to higher education which is funded by higher fee income. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

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.

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Total access activity investment (£)	£78,173.28	£109,452.34	£119,767.32	£125,493.29	£129,199.15
Access (pre-16)	£39,269.31	£43,780.94	£47,906.93	£50,731.33	£51,946.05
Access (post-16)	£29,086.64	£54,726.17	£59,883.66	£61,411.61	£62,601.65
Access (adults and the community)	£9,817.33	£10,945.23	£11,976.73	£13,350.35	£14,651.45
Access (other)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Financial support (£)	£125,180.00	£138,890.00	£148,013.00	£152,393.00	£156,078.00
Research and evaluation (£)	£86,985.04	£95,132.24	£106,185.80	£106,802.80	£107,221.98

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Higher fee income (£HFI)	£2,289,080.00	£2,503,480.00	£2,654,645.00	£2,670,070.00	£2,663,900.00
Access investment	3.4%	4.4%	4.5%	4.7%	4.9%
Financial support	5.5%	5.5%	5.6%	5.7%	5.9%
Research and evaluation	3.8%	3.8%	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%
Total investment (as %HFI)	12.7%	13.7%	14.1%	14.4%	14.7%

Targets and investment plan 2022-23 to 2026-27

Provider name: Writtle University College

Provider UKPRN: 10007657

Targets

Table 4a - Access

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Underrepresented group (optional)	Comparator group (optional)	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this target collaborative ?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2022-23 milestones	2023-24 milestones	2024-25 milestones	2025-26 milestones	2026-27 milestones	Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
To close the gap in the proportion of undergraduate entrants who are from the most deprived neighbourhoods, compared to those from the least.	PTA_1	Socioeconomic	IMD quintile 1	IMD quintile 5	Decrease the gap in participation between IMD Quintile 1 and IMD Quintile 5 entrants, from 18.8% in 2019-20, to 10% by 2026-27.	No	The access and participation dataset	2019-20	Percentage points	18.8	17%	16%	14.5%	12.5%	10%	
To increase the proportion of undergraduate entrants who are from BAME backgrounds.	PTA_2	Ethnicity			Increase the proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic entrants, from 3-year average 6.6% (2017-18 to 2019-20) to 12.7% by 2026-27 (3-yr average 2024-25 to 2026-27).	No	The access and participation dataset	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	6.6%	7.2%	8.2%	9.7%	11.2%	12.7%	Baseline data is 3-year average 2017-18 to 2019-20

Table 4b - Success

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Underrepresented group (optional)	Comparator group (optional)	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this target collaborative ?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2022-23 milestones	2023-24 milestones	2024-25 milestones	2025-26 milestones	2026-27 milestones	Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
To eliminate the unexplained gap in non-continuation between mature and young students by 2030-31.	PTS_1	Mature	Mature (over 21)	Young (under 21)	For undergraduate students, reduce the non-continuation gap between mature (21 and over) and young (under 21) learners to 5% by 2026-27 from baseline of 14.5% in 2018-19, and thereafter eliminate the unexplained gap by 2030-31.	No	The access and participation dataset	2018-19	Percentage points	14.5%	14%	13%	11%	7.5%	5%	
To reduce the gap in attainment outcomes between the most and least deprived groups (IMD Quintiles 5 and 1, respectively).	PTS_2	Socioeconomic	IMD quintile 1	IMD quintile 5	For undergraduate students, reduce the attainment gap between IMD Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 attainment outcomes (1st or 2:1s) from a 3-year average baseline of 25.6% (2017-18 to 2019-20), to 14.5% by 2026-27 (3-yr average 2024-25 to 2026-27).	No	The access and participation dataset	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	25.6%	25%	24%	22%	19%	14.5%	Baseline data is 3-year average 2017-18 to 2019-20
To reduce the gap in attainment outcomes between the most and least represented groups (POLAR4 Quintiles 5 and 1, respectively).	PTS_3	Low participation neighbourhood (LPN)	POLAR quintile 1	POLAR quintile 5	For undergraduate students, reduce the attainment gap between POLAR4 Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 attainment outcomes (1st or 2:1s) from a 3-year average baseline of 22% (2017-18 to 2019-20), to 10.9% by 2026-27 (3-yr average 2024-25 to 2026-27).	No	The access and participation dataset	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	22%	21.4%	20.4%	18.4%	15.4%	10.9%	Baseline data is 3-year average 2017-18 to 2019-20
To reduce the gap in attainment outcomes (1st or 2:1s) between disabled students and non-disabled students, eliminating the gap completely by 2030-31.	PTS_4	Disabled	Students with disability	Students with no known disability	For undergraduate students, reduce the attainment gap in attainment outcomes (1st or 2:1s) between disabled and non-disabled students from a 3-year average baseline of 13.1% (2017-18 to 2019-20), to 5% by 2026-27 (3-yr average 2024-25 to 2026-27).	No	The access and participation dataset	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	13.1%	12%	11%	9.5%	7.5%	5%	Baseline data is 3-year average 2017-18 to 2019-20

Table 4c - Progression

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Underrepresented group (optional)	Comparator group (optional)	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this target collaborative ?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2022-23 milestones	2023-24 milestones	2024-25 milestones	2025-26 milestones	2026-27 milestones	Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
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