

University of Sussex

Summary of 2025/26 to 2028/29 Access and Participation Plan

What is an Access and Participation Plan?

An Access and Participation Plan (APP) sets out measures to promote equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups. You can see the full University of Sussex plan [here](#).

Key points

The University of Sussex is a diverse and globally minded community of staff, students and alumni working together, with our partners, to make the world a better place through the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge and understanding. The Sussex 2035 Strategy, 'Creating Progressive Futures – flourishing, sustainability, and progress for the whole world', is about harnessing our collective effort to create progressive futures, for the world, for our university and its people. Our aim is to enable all students to flourish. All students who could benefit from higher education should have the opportunity to do so and we are committed to supporting their success. We take a whole institution approach and a commitment to our Sussex 2035 university strategy theme of human flourishing runs throughout our work.

From its beginnings in 1961, Sussex was intended to be a new kind of university: challenging convention and fostering critical thinking. As a dual-intensive, comprehensive university we have continued this mission through our teaching and research. We have a global reputation and outlook, with 18,000 students from around 150 countries. Our region has areas of significant socioeconomic disadvantage, and includes the major city of Brighton and Hove, smaller towns, and coastal and rural areas, with our Home undergraduate student population primarily drawn from London and South-East England. Serving as a positive force for the creation of social justice and social change is at the heart of our history, mission, and identity as a university. In 2023 we were awarded Silver in the Teaching Excellence Framework and were named University of the Year for retention in the *Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2022*.

Our APP identifies those student groups within our university and region that are most at risk of experiencing barriers to opportunity, and how we plan to address these. It focuses on three key areas, including the intersections between them:

- tackling socioeconomic barriers
- challenging structural racism
- ensuring an inclusive environment for mental wellbeing.

Our APP focuses on key areas that represent the greatest risks to opportunity for students, and our objectives reflect these. Our work to address these risks includes both focused activities to support particular student groups and ambitious whole institution initiatives. Our APP works in hand-in-hand with our aims to deliver positive outcomes for all students.

Fees we charge

The maximum fees charged for Home students at the University of Sussex are £9,535. Income from charging higher fees enables us to deliver our Access and Participation Plan, including financial support for eligible students. More information can be found on our website: [Tuition fees](#).

Financial help available

The Sussex Bursary is paid to students who meet all of the following criteria:

- Studying an undergraduate course on or after September 2025
- Resident and settled in the UK (Home student)
- Have an assessed household income of less than £35,000
- Not in receipt of non-means tested grant element to funding
- Studying at Sussex (i.e. not on a placement year or year abroad).

Bursaries include cash payments to students of £1,000 in the first year of study (either Year 1 or Foundation Year) and £500 in subsequent years.

Hardship fund: We provide financial assistance to students who are experiencing financial difficulties while studying at Sussex. This does not need to be paid back and payments are based on an assessment of the student's financial situation.

Information for students

We display accessible information to all potential and current students on fees and funding in our prospectus, both physical and online. This includes information on tuition fees, direct financial support, living and accommodation costs, student loans and budgeting. Information is also provided to students at open days and applicant visit days.

What we are aiming to achieve

We work continuously with both external and internal data to identify where there are risks to equality of opportunity for students at Sussex, drawing upon the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register to support this. From this work, the key areas of focus within our Plan are:

1. Increasing access to higher education for students who have been eligible for free school meals (**FSM**) at school, with the proportion joining Sussex up by at least 5% from 12.2%.
2. Increasing access to higher education generally for students within the Sussex region who have been eligible for free school meals (**FSM**) while at school through a collaborative objective, alongside other Sussex HE providers, by at least 5% from 16.9% in East Sussex, 18.1% in West Sussex, and 21.2% in Brighton and Hove.
3. Increasing access to higher education at the University of Sussex for students from gypsy, Roma, traveller, showmen, boater (**GRTSB**) backgrounds and those with **experience of care**.
4. Reducing the gap between students with a declared **mental health condition**, and those with no disability, in continuing from their first to second year of study to no more than 5%;
5. Reducing the gap between **mature** and non-mature students in completing their degree from 8.4% (2023) to no more than 4%;
6. Reducing the awarding gap between students who have been eligible for **FSM** and those that have not from 13.1% (2023) to no more than 6.5%
7. Reducing ethnicity-based awarding gaps between:
 - a. **Black** students and white students from 24.5% (2023) to no more than 12%
 - b. **Asian** students and white students from 9.7% (2023) to no more than 5%
 - c. **mixed-heritage** students and white students from 12.9% (2023) to no more than 6%.
8. Reducing the graduate outcomes gap between students with a declared **mental health condition** and students without a declared disability achieving a graduate level outcome from 9.3% (2020/21 leavers) to no more than 6%.
9. Reducing the graduate outcomes gap between students from **IMD Q1** postcodes (where people are less likely to attend higher education) and **IMD Q5** achieving a graduate level outcome from 8.5% (2020/21 leavers) to no more than 4%.

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

Our plan outlines six broad intervention strategies that are designed to address the risks to equality of opportunity that we have identified for students. Each intervention strategy has a series of activities that we believe will address some of the inequalities to opportunity certain groups face.

Access to higher education: our access programme includes dedicated outreach for primary, secondary and sixth form. This involves a range of events, information, and guidance, as well as academic support for attainment, including Maths and English GCSE resits. With the other regional HE providers in Sussex we have developed a Regional Risk Register, which provides details about the barriers to learning in our region and enables a data-driven assessment of gaps in equality of opportunity across the region. Through this work we have identified access to HE for learners who have been eligible for FSM as a risk to equality of opportunity across the region and we are coordinating with the other Sussex HE providers to meet our shared objective.

On-course success: interventions to support our objectives relating to mental health and wellbeing include a focus on student transitions, community building and fostering a sense of belonging from students' first welcome to Sussex and throughout their courses. Our Residential Life scheme provides students living on campus with spaces to build peer communities, and

encourages participation in extra-curricular activities. Work to support student completion and to close awarding gaps includes our peer mentoring scheme, helping students to consolidate learning and develop new skills to improve academic self-efficacy, and our Academic Skills resources to support students' academic development. We are working to implement an increasingly inclusive curriculum, and our Curriculum Change student connectors directly support this alongside the Race Equity Advocates scheme that we run in partnership with our Students' Union and through which students are employed to work in each of faculties to develop Race Equity Plans. Our Whole Provider Approach outlines work across the university to improve student outcomes, and address risks to equality of opportunity. This includes a new, consistent approach to academic advising and a new system for academic planning in relation to student experience and outcomes, with a focus in each plan on addressing gaps or emerging gaps in student outcomes.

Progression from higher education: a suite of careers and employability activities are designed to support students on their onward career path, including Online Global Summer Internships, UK Summer Internships, Student Consultancy, Junior Research Associate Scheme, Digital & Video Accelerator, Insights Visits, and an Entrepreneur Mentoring Scheme through our broader 'Career Lab' programme. Our work to embed employability within and across our curriculum is a key part of our progression strategy and forms part of our Whole Provider Approach.

See pages 8-26 of the Access and Participation Plan for more information.

How students can get involved

Collaboration with students has been fundamental to the development of our Plan and is a key aspect of how we will deliver it going forward. We work in close partnership with the University of Sussex Students' Union, who are included at every level of our APP governance. Representative student voice is central to our Plan through the student representatives scheme and focus groups. We also created and continue to run an APP student panel, made up of students from our APP objective groups, who were actively involved in designing and reviewing our Plan, and going forward now focus on co-designing and evaluating activity. We also have three paid positions for students ('connectors') that directly support our APP Working Group, which has day-to-day oversight of the delivery of our APP activities.

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved

We are strongly committed to the rigorous evaluation of our interventions. By understanding more about what works, why, for whom, and in what contexts, we will be able to ensure interventions are effective and funding is used for the most promising initiatives. We have developed the strategic infrastructure to enable high-quality evaluation, and we have established a new specialist Research and Evaluation (R&E) department to undertake objective evaluation. An Academic Advisory Group with a wide range of research expertise provides quality assurance.

We are committed to [open research](#) and are eager to support the creation of a national evidence base for what works. We will produce interim findings for each intervention to share emerging learning in a timely manner. We will disseminate our findings through our university repository, dedicated webpages, blogs, articles, and internal and national conferences.

Contact details for further information

Please contact PVCEducation@sussex.ac.uk for more information about the plan.