ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN
2025/26 to 2028/29

Introduction and strategic aim

1. **The University of Sussex** is a diverse and globally minded community of staff, students, and alumni working together, and with our partners, to make the world a better place through the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge and understanding. The Sussex 2035 Strategy 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.

2. 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. Situated outside Brighton and Hove, a city renowned for inclusivity and diversity, we are a community of around 22,000 students and staff in the heart of the South Downs. We have a global reputation and outlook, with 18,000 students from around 150 countries. Our region contains areas of significant socioeconomic disadvantage, and contains both the major city of Brighton and Hove and smaller towns, and coastal and rural areas, with our home undergraduate student population primarily drawn from London and South-East England.

3. Serving as a force for social justice and social change is at the heart of our history, of our mission, and of our identity as an institution. This means that we are continually striving to reduce and remove barriers to success that students may face due to societal inequalities, whether prior to higher education, during their studies with us, or following graduation. Our Access and Participation Plan (APP) is key to delivering this and aligns with the Race Equality Charter and Mental Health Charter.

4. **Building on strong foundations:** in 2023 we were awarded Silver in the Teaching Excellence Framework, and our plan is part of our strategic plan to achieve Gold in 2027. In 2021 we were named University of the Year for retention (*Time and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2022*) demonstrating our capacity for excellence in supporting student success. Our World Readiness Strategy is proving to be highly successful in enhancing our support for employability and creating opportunities for our students. In 2022 we opened our new state-of-the-art [Student Centre,](#) which brings together all of our student support services and provides a community hub, improving accessibility of support and belonging on campus. We are currently building a new Health and Wellbeing Centre, which will complement the Student Centre, and is due to be launched during this Access and Participation Plan (APP) in 2026. In 2024 we won the AGCAS Award for Excellence in Supporting Student Employability, recognising the scale, diversity, inclusiveness and sustainability focus of our work experience offer.

5. Our Access and Participation Plan 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 these: tackling socioeconomic barriers, challenging structural racism, and ensuring an inclusive environment for mental wellbeing.

6. **Tackling socioeconomic inequalities of opportunity for students in our region:** we strive to be a university not only *of* Sussex, but also *for* Sussex. The South-East has the second lowest rate of progression to Higher Education for pupils who are eligible for free school meals in England. In East Sussex this is as low as 16.9% (2021/22). Working with partners across the region we regard it as part of our civic mission to address this. In collaboration with the other universities in Sussex, we have created a shared access objective that represents an innovative model for supporting attainment raising and access to higher education through partnership.

7. **Tackling socioeconomic inequalities of opportunity for students in our university:** at Sussex we are working not only to enable students experiencing socioeconomic inequalities to join us, but also to thrive in their studies and beyond. To achieve this our plan takes a whole student journey approach:
    - supporting pupil attainment and providing information and guidance on all aspects of higher education before coming to university;
    - enabling students to attain their potential in their degrees through focused activities and a whole institution approach;
    - enriching students' skills through practical, transferrable experience within the curriculum and outside it. We encourage all students to be ambitious and aim to equip them with the means to realise their ambitions.

    This includes important work with specific underrepresented groups such as those from Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boater (GTRSB) backgrounds, in line with our [GTRSB pledge](), and students with experience of care.

8. **Supporting student mental wellbeing**: we know that one in three young people experience mental health-related challenges, and we are proud that a higher proportion of students (relative to the sector) feel confident to disclose these with us. We are committed to providing an inclusive environment that supports all students' mental wellbeing and enables success in their course and following graduation. This reflects our work as a member of the Mental Health Charter Programme. As well as setting specific objectives, our plan outlines how we support the mental health and wellbeing of all our students: building an inclusive whole institution academic experience from transition into university to support for both on-course success and preparation for students' next steps after graduation. An inclusive environment also involves understanding that it can be right for students to step back from their studies for a time, and part of our approach is to support those students whilst they are away from university and as they return.

9. **Tackling structural racism:** we are proud to be a diverse community at Sussex, and we are committed to understanding and addressing the awarding gaps that we see for some student groups linked to ethnicity. We aim for our students to be agents of social change, empowered to challenge structural racism in society. We have designed our focused activities to be partnerships with students and adaptable for each of our ethnicity-based awarding gaps, as we increasingly understand and confront the causes for these gaps. Alongside these we have an ambitious whole institution approach to tackling awarding gaps, through our curriculum, teaching and assessment, which is integrated with strategic commitments such as the Race Equality Charter.

10. **Understanding what works (and doesn't):** embedded throughout our plan is a dedication to robust research and evaluation. It is vital that we understand how and why our activities are working effectively and, if they are not, what changes might be needed. This not only supports our own plans, but we are also committed to disseminating our evaluations to benefit the wider sector.

11. Our APP focuses on key areas that we know to be the greatest risks to opportunity for our 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. We will continue to actively monitor all groups that the Office for Students (OfS) has highlighted as likely to experience risks to opportunity, through a dedicated APP governance structure involving a wide cross-section of staff and students, addressing any future gaps as they emerge. Our plan lays out ambitious commitments to support our students and our region, with a strategic approach to address them. It reflects our community's deep belief in the power of the University to be a force for good, for social justice, and for enabling all students to flourish.

Risks to equality of opportunity

Assessment of performance

In assessing performance, we initially used the OfS APP Dashboard aggregated dataset and the OfS individualised student dataset to take a broad view of all indicators and gaps across all lifecycle stages. We then narrowed our focus to those characteristics where significant gaps have been identified, and supplemented our analysis with data from other sources, including internal data, to better understand and prioritise the risks to equality of opportunity that we have identified.

For access measures, we considered the entry rates of individual student characteristics over time and made comparisons to national and regional contexts. For other lifecycle stages (continuation, completion, attainment, and progression), we compared student outcomes within each demographic characteristic type using a statistical threshold to guide our identification of gaps for further investigation. We then compared our results with sector-wide gaps to understand the nationwide context.

We identified a longlist of indications of risk for each lifecycle stage, the detail of which can be viewed in Annex A. Each indication of risk has been evaluated by assessing the size, persistence and trend of the gap, as well as taking into account the size of the student population and any overlap with other characteristics. Where appropriate, data from other sources have been used to better understand the risk. An intersectional analysis was conducted to identify characteristics that had larger gaps when combined with another characteristic.

We used the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) to link these indications of risks to potential risks to equality of opportunity. These are listed in the Risks section below. After considering the EORR, we also spoke to staff and students to consider further possible underlying reasons for gaps identified in our data. We have used our dedicated student engagement processes, including student focus groups and our student panel, to develop our understanding of risk factors further. These highlighted some important specific challenges for us to address through our activities and whole provider approach. For example, Brighton has a comparatively high cost of living and cost pressures were cited as a real risk to on-course success.

We will continue to monitor any emerging gaps in our identified risks and any emerging risks by regularly examining the data and evaluation of our activities, overseen by a dedicated governance structure involving a cross-section of staff and students, and through embedding data related to the EORR in our regular course and institutional review processes. This will enable us to be responsive to evaluations of effectiveness, as well as to changes to the external environment given current instability within the HE sector. The Plan has been created within the context of the national student support and fee regime in place for 2024/25.

Risks

We have identified ten of the most pressing indications of risk and have set objectives to address these gaps. However, we acknowledge that there are additional student characteristics identified by the OfS that may face increased risks to equality of opportunity. Therefore, we will continue to monitor these groups closely and will ensure that intervention strategies, while targeted at the identified groups, will also be proactively available to student groups that may have emerging risks where relevant.

Risk A1:
Indication of risk: Analysis of UCAS data for applications and enrolment data from the OfS APP dashboard show that there are lower proportions of students who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM), applying for and progressing to the University of Sussex, in comparison to students who have not been eligible for FSM.

Risk to equality of opportunity: the EORR suggests that this indication of risk may be caused by two underlying sector-wide risks relating to: knowledge and skills (1) and perception of Higher Education (3).

Risk A2:
Indication of risk: Data from the Department for Education show that students in West Sussex, East Sussex, and Brighton and Hove who have been eligible for FSM have lower progression rates to Higher Education than the national average for students who have been eligible for FSM.
Risk to equality of opportunity: The EORR suggests that this indication of risk may be caused by three underlying sector-wide risks relating to: knowledge and skills (1); information and guidance (2) and perception of Higher Education (3).

Risk A3:
Indication of risk: Data from the Department for Education show that students from Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boater (GTRSB) heritage have lower progression rates to Higher Education than those not from those backgrounds.
Risk to equality of opportunity: The EORR suggests that this indication of risk may be caused by three underlying sector-wide risks relating to: knowledge and skills (1); information and guidance (2) and perception of Higher Education (3).

Risk A4:
Indication of risk: Data from the Department for Education show that young people with experience of care have lower progression rates to Higher Education than those not from those backgrounds.
Risk to equality of opportunity: The EORR suggests that this indication of risk may be caused by three underlying sector-wide risks relating to: knowledge and skills (1); information and guidance (2) and perception of Higher Education (3).

Risk S5:
Indication of risk: Data from the OfS APP dashboard show that students with a declared mental health condition are less likely to continue to the second year of study than those without a declared disability.
Risk to equality of opportunity: This risk is likely caused by several opportunities to risk outlined in the EORR, including insufficient academic support (6), insufficient personal support (7), mental health (8), and ongoing impact of coronavirus (9). Student focus groups led by the Students' Union also identified that cost pressures (10), as well as ineffective communication are likely to contribute to this indication of risk. Student panels highlighted mental health and wellbeing of students as being a key concern.

Risk S6:
Indication of risk: Data from the OfS APP dashboard show a consistent gap in five of the last six years for mature students completing their degree, as compared to young students.
Risk to equality of opportunity: This risk may be caused by the underlying risks outlined in the EORR around insufficient academic support (6), insufficient personal support (7), mental health (8), ongoing impact of coronavirus (9), cost pressures (10) and capacity issues (11). Student focus groups led by the Students' Union also identified ineffective communication as being likely to contribute to this indication of risk. Further discussion with mature students and academics suggested that early timetable information and increased flexibility in timetabling would support completion due to this cohort often balancing multiple priorities.

Risk S7:
Indication of risk: Data from the OfS APP dashboard show students who have been eligible for FSM are less likely to obtain a good degree outcome than those who have not been eligible.
Risk to equality of opportunity: This risk to on-course success for marginalised students is most like caused by insufficient academic support (6), insufficient personal support (7), mental health (8) and ongoing impact of coronavirus (9). Student focus groups led by the Students' Union also identified that cost pressures (10), as well as ineffective communication were likely to contribute to this indication of risk.

Risk S8:
Indication of risk: Data from the OfS APP dashboard show that students from black, Asian and mixed ethnicity backgrounds are less likely to obtain a good degree outcome than white students.
Risk to equality of opportunity: This risk to on-course success for marginalised students is most likely caused by insufficient academic support (6), insufficient personal support (7), mental health (8) and ongoing impact of coronavirus (9). Students' Union focus groups noted that insufficient academic support is a risk for black students in particular. An Academic Advisory Group, set up as an expert consultative group of staff on the APP within our institution, also noted that black students are less likely to take up placements, which may affect overall attainment (based on internal data analysis from University of Sussex Business School).

Risk P9:
Indication of risk: Data from the HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey show that students with a declared mental health condition are less likely to be in a graduate level employment or further study 15 months after leaving the University, than those without a declared disability.
Risk to equality of opportunity: The EORR suggests that this indication of risk relates to the sector-wide risk around progression from higher education (12), and also mental health (8) noting that students experiencing poor mental health (whether pre-existing or developed during HE study) may have lower progression rates. Other factors such as cost pressures (10) are also likely to affect mental health.

Risk P10:
Indication of risk: Data from the HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey show that students from Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintile 1 (Q1) postcodes are less likely to be in a graduate level employment or further study 15 months after leaving the University, than those from IMD Q5 postcodes. This same gap is not consistently reflected in free school meal data.
Risk to equality of opportunity: The EORR suggests that this indication of risk relates to the sector-wide risk around progression from higher education (12).

We are working to mitigate these risks both through our intervention strategies, outlined below, and our whole provider approach: we believe that the response to these and other potentially emerging risks must be cross-institutional and multi-faceted.

Further rationale for our identified risks is provided in Annex A.

Objectives

Using the EORR and taking a data-led approach, the University of Sussex has set ten broad objectives across the student lifecycle to address risks to opportunity for students most likely to be affected. We will continue to review data on all student characteristics to identify any emerging gaps and ensure objectives remain appropriate.

Objective A1, addressing Risk A1 and linked to intervention strategy IA1.
To increase the proportion of enrolments to the University of Sussex from students who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM).
Rationale: 12.2% of home undergraduate enrolments at the University of Sussex are from students in receipt of FSM. This is significantly lower that the sector average of 18.4%, and lower than other higher education providers within our region.
Target PTA_1: By 2030 the proportion of FSM-eligible entrants will increase by at least 5%.

Objective A2, addressing Risk A2 and linked to intervention strategy IA1.
To increase the proportion of students from our local region (East Sussex, West Sussex, and Brighton and Hove) who have been eligible for FSM progressing to HE.
Rationale: Nationally, 29.2% of learners who have been eligible for FSM progress to Higher Education. The current progression rate for FSM-eligible learnings in East Sussex is 16.9%, in West Sussex it is 18.1% and in Brighton and Hove it is 21.2%. Our region, collectively, is significantly below the national average for FSM-eligible learners progressing to Higher Education. We will continue our work with the Uni Connect to identify "cold spots" in delivery and provide coordinated support to students in target areas.
Targets: By 2030 the proportion of FSM-eligible students progressing to Higher Education will increase by at least 5% in East Sussex (PTA_2), West Sussex (PTA_3) and Brighton and Hove (PTA_4). This is a collaborative objective between the University of Sussex, the University of Brighton, and the University of Chichester.

Objective A3, addressing Risk A3.
To increase the number of learners from a GTRSB heritage progressing to Higher Education.
Rationale: This is one of the most underrepresented groups as identified in the EORR, and we will mitigate against these risks to equality of opportunity. We have not written a separate intervention strategy as the dataset was too low to include a numeric target. However, activities and evaluation can be found in Annex B.

Objective A4, addressing Risk A4.
To increase the number of learners from our region with experience of care progressing to Higher Education.
Rationale: This is one of the most underrepresented groups as identified in the EORR, and we will mitigate against these risks to equality of opportunity. We have not written a separate intervention strategy as the dataset was too low to include a numeric target. However, activities and evaluation can be found in Annex B.

Objective S5, addressing Risk S5 and linked to intervention strategy IS2.
To reduce the continuation gap between students with and without a mental health condition.
Rationale: 2021-22 data report a continuation gap of 6.4% between Sussex students with a declared mental health condition and those without a declared disability, with gaps above 5% over the past two years. The University of Sussex also has a high percentage of students declaring a mental health condition compared to similar institutions. We would also anticipate this to increase given increasing proportions of school-aged learners receiving diagnoses for mental health conditions.
Target PTS_1: By 2030 the continuation gap between students with and without a mental health condition will have reduced to no more than 5%.

Objective S6, addressing Risk S6 and linked to intervention strategy IS3.
To reduce the completion gap between mature and non-mature students.

Rationale: Mature students at the University of Sussex are less likely to complete their degrees than non-mature students with a gap of 8.4% between these groups.
Target PTS_2: By 2030 the mature student completion gap will have reduced to no more than 4%.

Objective S7, addressing Risk S7 and linked to intervention strategy IS4.
To reduce the socioeconomic awarding gap between students who have been eligible for FSM and those who have not.
Rationale: Students at the University of Sussex who have been eligible for FSM are less likely to graduate with a First-class (1st) or Upper second-class (2:1) degree than those who have not, with an awarding gap in 2023 between these groups of 13.1%.
Target PTS_3: By 2030 the awarding gap between students who have been eligible for FSM and those who have not will have reduced to no more than 6.5%.

Objective S8, addressing Risk S8 and linked to intervention strategy IS5.
To reduce ethnicity awarding gaps between minoritised ethnic groups and white students.
Rationale: Students at the University of Sussex from minoritised ethnic groups are less likely to graduate with a 1st or 2:1. The percentages below show the most recent data from 2022/23 (although these data are not formally published at the time of writing, robust internal data are available, and we have based targets on this).
- 2023 awarding gap between black and white students: 24.5% and has been significant for the past six years.
- 2023 awarding gap between Asian and white students: 9.7% and has been significant for five of the last six years.
- 2023 awarding gap between mixed ethnicity and white students: 12.9% and has been significant for three of the last six years.
Target PTS_4: By 2030 the awarding gap between black and white students will have reduced to no more than 12%.
Target PTS_5: By 2030 the awarding gap between Asian and white students will have reduced to no more than 5%.
Target PTS_6: By 2030 the awarding gap between mixed ethnicity and white students will have reduced to no more than 6%.

Objective P9, addressing Risk P9 and linked to intervention strategy IP6.
To increase the proportion of students with a declared mental health condition achieving a graduate level outcome.
Rationale: Sussex students with a declared mental health condition are less likely to be in a graduate level outcome 15 months after leaving the University, according to HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey findings, than students without a declared disability. The most recent dataset (of 2020/21 leavers) reports a gap of 9.3%, and it has been significant for three of the last four years. The population of students with a declared mental health condition is likely to increase over time.
Target PTP_1: By 2030 the graduate outcomes gap for students with a mental health condition will have reduced to no more than 6%.

Objective P10, addressing Risk P10 and linked to intervention strategy IP6.
To increase the proportion of students from IMD Q1 postcodes achieving a graduate level outcome.
Rationale: Sussex students from IMD Q1 postcodes are less likely to be in a graduate level outcome 15 months after leaving the University than students from IMD Q5 postcodes, according to HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey findings. The most recent dataset (of 2020/21 leavers) reports a gap of 8.5% for students from IMD Q1 postcodes, and it has been significant for three of the last four years.
Target PTP_2: By 2030 the graduate outcomes gap between students from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 postcodes will have reduced to no more than 4%.

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

The following six intervention strategies are designed to address eight of the key indications of risk identified, and meet the objectives outlined above. These either build upon objectives from our previous APP, or where these objectives have seen improvement are now considered to be risks to be monitored.

Three themes run throughout our intervention strategies when taken as a whole: addressing socioeconomic barriers, supporting mental health and wellbeing of our students, and addressing ethnicity awarding gaps. Activities will be rigorously evaluated to ensure that they are effective and that APP allocated spending is committed appropriately.

Intervention strategy 1: Access

Context
12.2% of enrolments at the University of Sussex are from students who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM), as compared to the sector average of 18.4%.
Nationally, 29.2% of students who have been eligible for FSM progress to HE. Current progression rate for East Sussex is 16.9%, West Sussex is 18.1% and Brighton and Hove is 21.2%.

The University is an active member of the Sussex Learning Network (SLN), which directs the regional Uni Connect programme. SLN is a partnership of further education colleges, universities and local authorities, working collaboratively to increase engagement in education for people of all ages who are less likely to transition and progress through educational pathways.

The universities involved in Uni Connect have established a Sussex Regional Strategic Outreach Group. Together the group has developed resources (e.g. Regional Risk Register – which provides details about the barriers to learning in our region) which enable a data-driven assessment of gaps in equality of opportunity across the region and supports decision-making as to where collaboration can be most impactful in supporting young people on their educational journey. The collaborative effort also enables coordinated partnerships to be established with schools and colleges, with shared oversight of what outreach activity is happening and where, enabling a planned spread of resource across all areas of the region. Through the work of the Regional Strategic Outreach Group, we have identified the progression of learners who have been eligible for FSM to higher education as a risk to equality of opportunity across the region that, as a partnership, we feel needs to be addressed collectively and as such have worked to agree a joint target and activities to address this.

Objectives and targets
Objective A1: To increase the proportion of enrolments to the University of Sussex from students who have been eligible for FSM.
Target: By 2030 the proportion of FSM-eligible entrants will increase by at least 5%.

Objective A2: To increase the proportion of students from our local region (East Sussex, West Sussex, and Brighton and Hove) who have been eligible for FSM progressing to HE.

Target: By 2030 the proportion of FSM-eligible students progressing to Higher Education will increase by at least 5% across each of our regional local authorities. This is a collaborative objective with the Universities of Brighton and Chichester, and the local Uni Connect (Sussex Learning Network).

Risks to equality of opportunity: Knowledge and skills (Risk 1), Information and guidance (Risk 2), Perception of Higher Education (Risk 3).

Related objectives and targets
Objective A3: To increase the number of learners from GTRSB heritage progressing to Higher Education.
Objective A4: To increase the number of learners from our region with experience of care progressing to Higher Education.

Related risks to equality of opportunity: none

Activity	Description	Inputs	Cross intervention strategy (CIS)	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Key Stage 2 Primary Programme *Existing activity*	Year 5: Skills Sessions. Year 6: Transition activity/event at a local secondary school. 'Graduation' event held at University of Sussex. Parent / carer evening.	Staff: approx. 1.8 FTE. Additional project costs include payment to Student Ambassadors, event consumables and administration.	No	**Medium Term:** Greater understanding of metacognitive skills and how it helps learning; increased engagement and confidence in learning; students experience a positive introduction to secondary school, higher education and a campus HEI; able to imagine themselves as a future university student. **Long Term:** Feel more prepared for the transition to KS3.	**Qualitative Design** Contribution Analysis, integrating data from interviews with teachers; pre- and post- intervention interviews with parents and carers (Type 1). Post-intervention tracking of progression to HE (Type 1).	Final Report: Summer 2028
Key Stage 3/4 Programme *Existing activity*	Year 7 to 11: Subject enrichment activities, careers and general information, advice, and guidance. Year 9: Campus visits. Co-created teacher continuing professional	Staff: approx. 2.3 FTE. Additional project costs include payments to Student Ambassadors, event	No	**Medium Term:** Increased confidence in making informed decisions about higher education; increased capacity to make informed decisions about their future. **Long Term:** Increased: intention to attend Higher Education; intention to	**Proportional Evaluation** Depending on the intensity of the activity: Level 1: Post-activity tracking of short- and mid-term outcomes (with staff) (Type 1). Level 2: Post-activity tracking of short- and mid-term outcomes (with participants) (Type 1). Level 3: One-group pretest-posttest	Interim Reports (impact on short- and mid-term outcomes): • KS4: 2029 • KS3-4: Spring 2031 Full Reports (impact on progression to

	development (CPD), to enhance and support inclusive practice. Parent facing events.	consumables and administration.		participate in post-16 programme; confidence in future success; confidence on post-16 study decisions.	design exploring changes in short- and mid-term outcomes (before and after the intervention) (Type 2). Post-intervention tracking of further participation in the post-16 programme (Type 1). Dosage-response design looking at association between contact hours and further participation in post-16 programme (Type 2).	HE): • KS4: Spring 2032 • KS3-4: Spring 2033
Attainment support programme *New and existing activities*	Year 10/11: Maths and English subject taster and skills development, exam skills. Year 10/11: Maths and English tutoring support. Year 11: Revision strategy support. • Currently collaborating with partner schools to scope programme	Staff: approx. 2.0 FTE. Additional project costs include payment to Student Ambassadors, event consumables and administration.	No	**Medium Term:** Increased subject knowledge (Maths and English); increased metacognitive strategies; increased critical engagement with information, increased academic self-efficacy; increased engagement with academic studies. **Long Term:** Increased Key Stage 4 attainment.	**Mixed-methods design** One-group pretest-posttest design (Type 2). Group interviews with learners (Type 1). Interviews with teachers (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison of attainment with non-random comparison group (Type 2).	Interim report: Spring 2029 Final Report: Autumn 2030
Maths and English GCSE resit support *Existing activity*	GCSE resit focus day 150 participants. Tutoring support.	Staff: approx. 1.2 FTE. Additional project costs include payments to Student Ambassadors, event consumables and administration.	No	**Medium Term:** Increased subject knowledge (Maths and English); increased academic self-efficacy; increased cognitive study strategies; increased confidence to successfully apply to Higher Education. **Long Term:** An increase in GCSE attainment from their 2/3 predicted GCSE grade to 4/5; increased progression to HE; increased progression to University of Sussex.	**Quantitative design** One-group pretest-posttest design (Type 2). Post-intervention tracking of GCSE results (Type 1).	Final Report: Autumn 2028

Key Stage 5 Programme *Existing activity*	IAG supporting university knowledge and application. Academic activities, student shadowing, transition and retention support, parental support. Careers workshops, subject-specific project. Residential summer school targeted at year 12 / year 1 students from partner FE colleges and sixth forms. Access to HE IAG programme. Access to Higher Education diploma – Academic pathways workshops. Teacher CPD supporting university knowledge and application support.	Staff: approx. 3.4 FTE. Additional project costs include payments to Student Ambassadors, event consumables and administration.	No	**Short Term:** Increased knowledge of course choice available at HE; the benefits of HE; ways of learning in HE, the HE experience; HE financial support available; student life in HE; the application process to HE; career options; support available in HE. **Medium Term:** Increased sense of belonging to HE; increased social self-efficacy; raised interest in studying subject at Sussex or HE; increased confidence in making informed decisions about HE and about their future. **Long Term:** Increased confidence to succeed at HE; increased intention to attend Sussex and HE; increased progression to Sussex and to HE.	**Whole Programme: Proportional Evaluation** Depending on the intensity of the activity: Level 1: Post-activity tracking of short- and mid-term outcomes (with staff) (Type 1). Level 2: Post-activity tracking of short- and mid-term outcomes (with participants) (Type 1). Level 3: One-group pretest-posttest design exploring changes in short- and mid-term outcomes (before and after the intervention) (Type 2). Post-intervention tracking of progression to HE. Dosage-response design looking at association between contact hours and progression to HE (Type 2). **Residential Summer School: Mixed-methods design** One-group pretest-posttest design (Type 2). Focus group discussion with participants (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison of progression to HE with non-random comparison group (Type 2).	Interim Report: Spring 2028 Final Report: Summer 2030
Access Buddy *Existing activity*	Applicant transition support for target students. • 100 participants per year	Staff**:** approx. 0.5 FTE. Additional project costs include payments to Student Ambassadors, event	IS2	**Medium term:** Increased sense of preparedness for going to the University of Sussex; increased sense of belonging in HE; increased sense of belonging at the University of Sussex; increased sense of social self-efficacy.	**Quantitative design** One-group pretest-posttest comparison (Type 2). Post-intervention tracking of enrolment at the University of Sussex (Type 1).	Final Report: Spring 2029

		consumables and administration.		**Long term:** Increased progression to Sussex.		

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy 1: £6,322,000 (to the nearest £1,000) over the four-year period, including staff.

Summary of evidence base and rationale:
- Details of the evidence base for this Intervention Strategy are outlined in <u>Annex B</u>.

Intervention strategy 2: Success – Continuation

Context
Sussex students with a mental health condition are less likely to complete their first year of university at Sussex. The 2020-21 OfS dataset reports a continuation gap of 6.4% between this student group and those without a declared disability. The University of Sussex has a high percentage of students declaring a mental health condition compared to similar institutions: we have the 6th highest proportion of students declaring a mental health condition of large HE providers (over 1000 students), 2021/22.

We are committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all our students, including actively monitoring intersections with student characteristics that suggest potential risks, and this is further detailed in the whole provider approach section. This intervention strategy will be enhanced by our institutional focus on wellbeing, which supports all students whose academic experience is impacted by their physical or mental health, as well as work to develop our curriculum, teaching and assessments to be inclusive-by-design. Students are proactively identified as needing support and/or can access a range of wellbeing interventions through a robust triage and registration process. These interventions include one-to-one support, assessment, advice and therapy. We also provide easily accessible psychoeducation workshops and groups. Our Chaplaincy provides spiritual pastoral care to a wide range of students from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Objectives and targets
Objective S5: To reduce the continuation gap between students with and without a declared disability.
Target: By 2030 the continuation gap between students with and without a mental health condition will have reduced to no more than 5%.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Insufficient academic support (Risk 6), Insufficient personal support (Risk 7), Mental health (Risk 8), Ongoing impact of Coronavirus (Risk 9).

Related objectives and targets: Objectives S6, S7, S8.

Related risks to equality of opportunity: This objective will also be supported through our whole provider approach and seeks to mitigate the

following risks: Cost pressures (Risk 10) and Capacity issues (Risk 11).

Through participation in activities associated with Begin at Sussex (transition programme) and Welcome Week (new student induction) students will be given opportunities to build on their knowledge and skills, develop their ambitions and expectations and be encouraged to challenge their perceptions of Higher Education in preparedness for their first year at university. As such, working in close partnership with the Access Workstream, this intervention strategy will also help to address Knowledge and Skills (Risk 1), Information and guidance (Risk 2) and Perception of Higher Education (Risk 3).

Activity	Description	Inputs	CIS	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Begin at Sussex *Existing activity*	Collaborating with other Student Experience teams to deliver a Transition Programme which includes synchronous (2 days, in-person) events prior to the start of term and asynchronous (online) information and guidance, to prepare students for starting at university. E.g. Introduction to Academic Skills for HE, opportunities for building social connections, and meeting named, specialist advisors. This includes additional support for those who are returning to repeat or complete their first year after a period of temporary withdrawal.	Staff: approx. 4.6 FTE. Additional project costs include event consumables and administration. Support from Student Advice and Guidance Team, and Wellbeing Team.	IS1 IS4	**Medium term:** Increased capacity to make informed decisions; increased sense of self advocacy; increased sense of belonging. **Long term:** Increased engagement with more support offered by the Student Engagement and Enhancement department and the University; increased continuation beyond first year.	**Mixed methods design** One-group pretest-posttest design using pre- and post-intervention questionnaires (Type 2). Interviews with participants and comparison group. (Type 1). Focus group discussion at event (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison with matching (Type 2).	Interim Report: Summer 2027 Final Report: Spring 2030
Belong at Sussex *Existing activity*	Programme for APP students to support in facilitating and fostering a sense of belonging at University of Sussex. Students can access targeted support through the programme in the form of events and specialist advice and guidance which enable students to access the full range of available support services.	Staff: approx. 3.6 FTE. Additional project costs include payments to Student Connectors, event consumables and	IS4	**Medium term:** Increased capacity to make informed decisions; increased general self-efficacy (confidence in future success); increased academic self-efficacy; increased motivation; increased sense of belonging. **Long term:** Increased continuation beyond first	**Mixed methods design** Post-intervention comparison looking at the association between engagement with activities and medium-term outcomes (Type 2). Interviews with students in target group (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison looking at association between engagement and continuation/ completion (Type 2).	Interim Report: Summer 2027 Final Report: Spring 2030

		administration.		year; increased completion.		
Residential Life Connectors *Existing activity*	Created to support students in their transition into university to foster feelings of belonging and community in halls of residence through shared social activities and into wider University contexts, and to provide students living on campus with a safe space. The project will encourage participation in co/extra-curricular activities via the Spirit of Sussex Award.	Staff: approx. 6.6 FTE. Payment to ResLife Connectors.	No	**Medium term:** Motivated to engage further with Res Life programme; confidence to declare support needs; increased self-advocacy, self-regulation, engagement, sense of belonging. **Long term:** Increased continuation and completion.	**Mixed methods design:** One-group pretest-posttest design using pre- and post-intervention questionnaires (Type 2). Interviews with ResLife Connectors and students in target group (Type 1). Post-intervention tracking of continuation (Type 1).	Interim Report: Summer 2027 Final Report: Spring 2030

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £3,316,000 (to the nearest 1,000) over the four-year period, including staff.

Summary of evidence base and rationale:
- WonkHE Research has shown that there is a key link between belonging, inclusion and mental health[1]. Through creating an intervention strategy that aids to develop a sense of belonging at Sussex, we expect to reduce gaps of equality of opportunity to skills and knowledge whilst increasing a sense of belonging, giving students the tools they need to succeed at university.
- Research by Benson-Egglenton, J. (2019)[2] shows that there is a link between mental health and financial stability at university. This intervention strategy seeks to support students with financial concerns through co-creation roles, housing affordability and money support and advice.
- Research (Buckley & Lee, 2018[3]) found that there is positive impact between students taking part in extracurricular activity and the student experience. This intervention strategy aims to support students in participating in extra-curricular activity.
- Further details of the evidence base for this Intervention Strategy are outlined in Annex B.

Intervention strategy 3: Success – Completion

Context
Mature students at the University of Sussex are less likely to complete their degrees than non-mature students with a gap of 8.4% between groups.

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[1] Capper, G and D. McVitty (2022), 'Belonging inclusion and mental health are all connected' *WonkHE* [online] Available at: https://wonkhe.com/blogs/belonging-inclusion-and-mental-health-are-all-connected/

[2] Benson-Egglenton, J. (2019). 'The financial circumstances associated with high and low wellbeing in undergraduate students: a case study of an English Russell Group institution'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *43*(7), pp.901-913.

[3] Buckley, P. and Lee, P. (2021). 'The impact of extra-curricular activity on the student experience'. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *22*(1), pp.37-48.

There is also a slight gap for mature students for continuation, but it is believed that the activities listed below will support this too.

Objectives and targets
Objective S6: To reduce the completion gap between mature and non-mature students.
Target: By 2030 the mature student completion gap will have reduced to no more than 4%.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Insufficient academic support (Risk 6), Insufficient personal support (Risk 7), Mental health (Risk 8), Ongoing impact of Coronavirus (Risk 9). Also, mature students will have access to the activities described in IS4 which are designed to address these risks.

Related objectives and targets: To reduce the continuation gap between mature students and non-mature students**.**

Related risks to equality of opportunity: This objective will also be supported through our whole provider approach and seeks to mitigate the following risks: Cost pressures (Risk 10) and Capacity issues (Risk 11).

Activity	Description	Inputs	CIS	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Student Peer Mentoring *Existing activity*	Student Mentors are employed to provide academic peer support to mature students to support them to consolidate their own learning as well as develop a range of skills to improve academic self-efficacy. Mature students will be encouraged to participate in Student Mentoring sessions which will support them to develop their capacity to access appropriate academic skills support. This project supports a mature student-led learning community, complemented with opportunities to build social connections and enhanced learning opportunities, to help foster a sense of belonging.	Staff: approx. 2.2 FTE. Payment to Student Connectors.	IS4	**Medium-term:** Sense of belonging (mentees and mentors); confidence to declare support needs; increased capacity to engage with support; future success self-efficacy (mentees and mentors). **Long-term:** Increased continuation of mature students; increased completion of mature students; narrowed completion between mature and young students.	**Mixed methods design** Difference-in-Difference design (Type 3). One-group pretest-posttest design using pre- and post-intervention questionnaires (Type 2). Focus group discussions with mentors (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison using Propensity Score Matching (Type 3).	Interim Report: Summer 2027 Final Report (Continuation Data): Spring 2030 Final Report (Completion Data): Spring 2031

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £565,000 (to the nearest 1,000) over the four-year period, including staff.

Summary of evidence base and rationale:
- According to the Office for Students (2021)[4], mature students are more likely to not have equal opportunity to develop knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto education courses that match their expectations and ambitions. Additionally, they are less likely to have the information and guidance to enable them to develop these. By providing the above interventions we aim to bridge these gaps.
- The Office for Students (2021) also recognises that mature students may not receive sufficient personalised academic support to achieve a positive outcome, through interventions including personalised academic skill support we aim to reduce completion gaps between mature and non-mature students.
- Further details of the evidence base for this Intervention Strategy are outlined in Annex B.

Intervention strategy 4: Success – Attainment (FSM)

Context
Students at the University of Sussex who, whilst at school, have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) are less likely to graduate with a First-class (1st) or Upper second-class (2:1) degree. The 2021-22 awarding gap between students who whilst at school were eligible for free school meals and those who were not is 13.1%.

Objectives and targets
Objective S7: To reduce the socioeconomic awarding gap between students who have been eligible for FSM and those who have not.
Target: By 2030 the awarding gap between students who have been eligible for FSM and those who have not will have reduced to no more than 6.5%.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Insufficient academic support (Risk 6), Mental health (Risk 8), Ongoing impact of Coronavirus (Risk 9).

Related objectives and targets: Objective S8

Related risks to equality of opportunity: This objective will also be supported through our whole provider approach and seeks to mitigate the following risks: Insufficient personal support (Risk 7), Cost pressures (Risk 10) and Capacity issues (Risk 11).

Activity	Description	Inputs	CIS	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Academic Skills	Synchronous (in person and online) and asynchronous (online)	Staff: approx. 2.2 FTE.	IS2 IS3	**Medium term:** Staff promote resources to	**Mixed methods design** Post-intervention comparison of association	Interim Report:

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[4] Office for Students (2021) 'Improving opportunity and choice for mature students'. *Ofs Insight Brief 9*. [Online] Available at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/19b24842-52a0-41d1-9be2-3286339f8fde/ofs-insight-brief-9-updated-10-may-2022.pdf

			IS5			Summer 2027
Provision *Existing activity*	Academic Skills Resources to support with students' academic development. Where appropriate, students will co-design their academic skills provision focusing on skills development which meets their needs and aspirations. Staff will ensure Academic Skills are embedded where appropriate or otherwise will ensure online resources via Skills Hub (repository for academic skills resources) and Canvas (VLE) are kept up-to-date.	Additional project costs include payments to Student Connectors, event consumables and administration.		students; students have increased capacity to map existing skills and identify areas for skill development; confidence to declare support needs; increased student engagement; increased academic self-efficacy. **Long term:** Narrowing of Awarding Gap for students in receipt of FSM.	between engagement with academic skills provision and short- and mid-term outcomes (Type 2). Pre- and post- intervention review of online provision, with panels of students and staff (Type 1). Case studies of pilot taught programmes that embed academic skills into curricula (including pre- and post- intervention interviews with students and staff; review of materials) (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison looking at the association between engagement with skills provision and attainment (Type 2).	Summer 2027 Final Report: Spring 2030

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £460,000 (to the nearest 1,000) over the four-year period, including staff.

Summary of evidence base and rationale:
Details of the evidence base for this Intervention Strategy are outlined in <u>Annex B</u>.

Intervention strategy 5: Success – Attainment (Ethnicity)

Context
Students at the University of Sussex from minoritised ethnic groups are less likely to graduate with a First-class (1st) or Upper second-class (2:1) degree. The percentages below show the most recent data from 2022-23:
- 2023 Awarding gap between black and white students: 24.5%
- 2023 Awarding gap between Asian and white students: 9.7%
- 2023 Awarding gap between mixed ethnicity and white students: 12.9%

Objectives and targets
Objective S8: To reduce the ethnicity awarding gaps between minoritised ethnic groups and white students.
- Target a: By 2030 the awarding gap between black and white students will have reduced to no more than 12%.
- Target b: By 2030 the awarding gap between Asian and white students will have reduced to no more than 5%.
- Target c: By 2030 the awarding gap between mixed ethnicity and white students will have reduced to no more than 6%.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Insufficient academic support (Risk 6), Insufficient personal support (Risk 7), Mental health (Risk 8), Ongoing

impact of Coronavirus (Risk 9). Also, students from minoritised ethnicity groups will also have access to the activities described in IS4 which are designed to address the above risks.

Related objectives and targets: Objective S7

Related risks to equality of opportunity: This objective will also be supported through our whole provider approach and seeks to mitigate the following risks: Cost pressures (Risk 10) and Capacity issues (Risk 11).

Activity	Description	Inputs	CIS	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Race Equity Advocacy Project *Existing activity*	Race Equity Advocates (REAs): - Students will be employed to work in each faculty to support the development and implementation of Race Equity Action Plans. This is delivered in collaboration with the Students' Union.	Staff**:** approx. 1.5FTE. Payments to REAs. Support from EDI leads in Schools and USSU.	IS4	**Medium term:** increased sense of belonging and inclusion; increased institutional trust in processes to reduce awarding gap; strengthened staff-student and student-student relationships. **Long term:** narrowed degree awarding gaps; increased attainment of black, Asian and minority ethnic students.	**Impact on degree awarding gap** Pre- and post-intervention comparison of degree awarding gap (Type 2). **Participatory evaluation design** Co-creation of research and evaluation activities with REAs, (e.g. may include interviews & focus groups with students, teaching staff, and leadership; case studies of Race Equity Action Plans). (Type 1).	Interim Report: Summer 2027 Final Report: Spring 2030
Curriculum Change Connector Project *New activity*	Curriculum Change Connectors (CCCs) Students will be employed to support Curriculum Change Teams within each academic school to support the implementation of the Inclusive Curriculum Strand of the recent Curriculum Review.	Staff**:** approx. 3 FTE. Payments to CCCs.	No	**Short term:** Increased awareness of measures to be taken to overcome barriers to having an inclusive curriculum; increased institutional trust in processes to reduce awarding gap. **Medium term:** Increased capacity to make informed decisions around inclusive curriculum; increased student and staff engagement with practices required to build an inclusive curriculum; increased sense of belonging and inclusion; fewer reasonable adjustments.	**Impact on degree awarding gap** Pre- and post-intervention comparison of degree awarding gap (Type 2). **Participatory evaluation design** Co-creation of research and evaluation activities with Curriculum Change Connectors, (e.g. may include interviews & focus groups with students, teaching staff, and leadership;	Interim Report: Summer 2027 Final Report: Spring 2030

				Long term: Increased attainment of black, Asian and mixed ethnicity students; narrowed degree awarding gaps.	case studies of curriculum change interventions) (Type 1).	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £1,394,000 (to the nearest 1,000) over the four-year period, including staff.

Summary of evidence base and rationale: evidence base for above interventions is a mixture of internal evidence and external research.

- This intervention strategy will be informed by Universities UK's recent synthesis of evidence and guidance regarding what works to close ethnicity degree awarding gaps (2022).[5]
- Work with CCCs will be informed by Hubbard and Gawthorpe's (2024) 'Inclusive Higher Education Framework'.[6]
- Further details of the evidence base for this Intervention Strategy are outlined in Annex B.

Intervention Strategy 6: Progression

Context
Sussex students with a declared mental health condition and students from IMD Q1 postcodes are less likely to be in a graduate level outcome 15 months after leaving the University, according to HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey findings. The most recent dataset (of 2020/21 leavers) reports a gap of 9.3% for students with a mental health condition, and 8.5% for students from IMD Q1 postcodes.

Objectives and targets
Objective P9: To increase the proportion of students with a declared mental health condition achieving a graduate level outcome.
Target: By 2030 the graduate outcomes gap for students with a mental health condition will have reduced to no more than 6%.

Objective P10: To increase the proportion of students from IMD Q1 postcodes achieving a graduate level outcome.
Target: By 2030 the graduate outcomes gap between students from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 postcodes will have reduced to no more than 4%.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Progression from Higher Education (Risk 12).

Related objectives and targets: none

Related risks to equality of opportunity: Working in close partnership with the Success workstream, this strategy will also help to address: Mental

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[5] Universities UK (2022) 'Closing ethnicity degree awarding gaps: three years on'. [Online] Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Reports/closing-the-gap-three-years-on.pdf
[6] Hubbard, K., & Gawthorpe, P. (2024). Inclusive Higher Education Framework. National Teaching Repository. Educational resource. https://doi.org/10.25416/NTR.25719234.v1

health (Risk 8) through delivery of carefully designed engagement activities and wrap-around support to students before, during and after work experience; and Cost pressures (Risk 10) through provision of a diverse and well-scaled range of work experience opportunities, paid at Living Wage, and completed to flexible hours.

Activity	Description	Inputs	CIS	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Online Global Summer Internship Programme *Existing activity*	In partnership with an external supplier and businesses across the world, deliver Global Online Internship Programme for 110 students p/a.	Staff: approx. 3 FTE for global internships, in-person internships and student consultancy. Payments to students undertaking internships.	No	**Medium term:** Develop skills needed for graduate progression; develop capacity to demonstrate skills to potential employers; develop capacity to navigate graduate employment sectors and make informed choices; develop confidence & resilience to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression; engage with and maximise the benefit of an industry specific network. **Long term:** Graduates transition into further study or graduate level employment; participants report finding their current work "meaningful" at or above the rate amongst peers.	**Exploratory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design** One-group pretest-posttest design (Type 2). Difference-in-Difference design (Type 3). Interviews with participants and other stakeholders (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison using Propensity Score Matching (Type 3).	Interim Report: Spring 2027. Interim Qualitative Report: Autumn 2028 Final Report: Spring 2030
UK Summer Internship Programme *Existing activity*	In partnership with regional employers, deliver in-person internships for 100 student p/a.	Staff: included above. Payments to students undertaking internships.				
Student Consultancy *Existing activity*	In partnership with UK employers, deliver student consultancy opportunities for 300 students p/a.	Staff: included above. Payments to students undertaking consultancy opportunities.	No	**Medium term:** Develop skills needed for graduate progression; develop capacity to demonstrate skills to potential employers; develop capacity to navigate graduate employment sectors and make informed choices; develop confidence & resilience to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression. **Long term:** Graduates transition into further study or graduate level employment; participants report finding their current work "meaningful" at or above the rate amongst peers.	**Exploratory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design** One-group pretest-posttest design (Type 2). Interviews with participants and other stakeholders (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison using Propensity Score Matching (Type 3).	Interim Report: Autumn 2027 Final Report: Spring 2029

Junior Research Associate Scheme *Existing activity*	In partnership with the Sussex Researcher School, deliver on-campus research internships for 30 students p/a.	Staff: approx. 1.1 FTE. Payments to students on research internships.	No	**Medium term:** Able to articulate and reflect upon academic identity and belonging; develop confidence and resilience to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression; identify and develop skills and capacities needed for postgraduate study. **Long-term:** Graduates transition into further study.	**Exploratory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design** One-group pretest-posttest design (Type 2). Difference-in-Difference design (Type 3). Interviews with participants and other stakeholders (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison using Propensity Score Matching (Type 3).	Interim Report: Spring 2027 Interim Qualitative Report: Autumn 2028 Final Report: Spring 2030
Digital & Video Accelerator *Existing activity*	In partnership with an external supplier, deliver digital/video accelerator places for 30 students p/a	Payments to students on digital/video accelerator places.	No	**Medium term:** Develop skills needed for graduate progression; develop capacity to navigate graduate employment sectors and make informed choices; develop capacity to demonstrate skills to potential employers**.** **Long term:** Graduates transition into further study or graduate level employment**;** participants report finding their current work 'meaningful' at or above the rate amongst peers.	**Exploratory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design** One-group pretest-posttest design (Type 2). Difference-in-Difference design (Type 3). Interviews with participants and other stakeholders (Type 1). Post-intervention comparison with matched control group (Type 2).	Interim Report: Spring 2027 Final Report: Spring 2030
Insights Visits *Existing activity*	In partnership with regional employers, deliver taster visits to employer sites for 100 students p/a	Staff**:** approx. 0.1 FTE.	No	**Medium term:** Develop knowledge and awareness of graduate roles and industries; develop capacity to navigate graduate employment sectors and make informed choices. **Long term:** Increased participation with other CareerLab opportunities, including internships.	Post-intervention tracking of medium-term outcomes (Type 1). Post-intervention tracking of engagement with further career opportunities at the University of Sussex (Type 1).	Interim Report: Spring 2028 Final Report: Spring 2030
Entrepreneur Mentoring Scheme *New activity*	Pairs aspiring student-entrepreneurs with local entrepreneur-mentors who will provide bespoke 1:1 advice,	Staff: approx 0.1 FTE.	No	**Medium term:** Develop skills needed for future careers; situate existing knowledge and how to apply it to other contexts; develop confidence and resilience to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression; engage with and maximise the benefit of an industry specific network.	**Mixed-methods design** One-group pretest-posttest design (Type 2). Difference-in-Difference design (Type 3). Interviews with participants and other stakeholders (Type 1).	Interim Report: Spring 2027 Final Report: Spring 2031

	guidance, and coaching, to nurture their confidence, and support them in developing skills.			**Long term:** Graduates transition into further study or graduate level employment (including self-employment/starting a business).	Post-intervention comparison using Propensity Score Matching (Type 3).	
Ideas Fund *Existing activity*	A small fund to offer grants to students with business ideas and coaching to pursue their idea.	Staff: approx 0.05 FTE. Payments to students.	No	**Medium term:** Increased knowledge and awareness of broader entrepreneurship programme; Increased motivation to pursue further entrepreneurship opportunities. **Long term:** Increased participation in the broader entrepreneurship programme.	Post-intervention tracking of medium-term outcomes (Type 1). Post-intervention tracking of engagement with further career opportunities (Type 1).	Interim Report: Spring 2028 Final Report: Spring 2030

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £7,175,000 (to the nearest 1,000) over the four-year period, including staff.

Summary of evidence base and rationale:
- Institute of Student Employers (ISE) Annual Recruitment Survey[7] findings show year after year the importance to graduate recruiters of students being able to demonstrate competencies through work experience.
- Students who completed one or more of the work experience opportunities cited in this strategy in 2020 or 2021 show (a) accelerated career readiness (compared to peers); and (b) a 10% Graduate Outcomes advantage in Graduate Outcomes Survey findings for 2020/21 leavers.
- Further details of the evidence base for this Intervention Strategy are outlined in Annex B.

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[7] ISE Reports - Institute of Student Employers | ISE

Whole provider approach

The intervention strategies detailed above are part of a broader picture of support for student access, success and progression at Sussex. Our commitment to equality of opportunity for all students, and to meeting the ambitions for student outcomes set out in our objectives and targets, runs throughout the institution. Although we have identified objectives based on our current most significant risks to equality of opportunity, we will continue to monitor all student characteristics identified by the OfS and adapt to meet emerging risks. In particular, we have identified a need to closely monitor students from a GTRSB background, those who have experience of care, and neurodivergent students. Our whole provider approach is designed to support this through supporting all students.

Our APP is owned by leadership at every level of the University and governed by a steering group that includes senior leaders from across the University and Students' Union. We ensure that the wider University is engaged with the work of the APP through, for example, a dedicated working group including all workstream managers and student representatives. This group delivers a communications strategy as well as leading engagement events, which supports staff and students to actively contribute to the ongoing work of the APP. Our APP objectives are then embedded as part of our wider work, outlined below, alongside our intervention strategies.

Academic support and skills: our students are encouraged to flourish through a new whole provider approach to student academic support. The model establishes a baseline of personalised academic support through consistent and clearly structured academic tutoring. One of its aims is to build relational contact between staff and students and between students, facilitating a sense of belonging. This follows a student journey approach by progressively tailoring what it focuses on for each stage of study, encouraging student reflection on their developing academic skills as well as making transition between stages more explicit and scaffolded. This creates momentum for students in a personalised and inclusive way, enabling a positive environment for mental wellbeing. A clear and consistent approach ensures that students know what to expect and how to engage, addressing the 'hidden curriculum' barrier experienced by many students who are most likely to be affected by risks to opportunity, and increasing uptake of academic support. Where students would benefit from additional academic support there is an 'enhanced' offer. This includes more specialised academic staff within the relevant faculty that can work with individual students intensively (e.g. 'senior tutors'), as well as activities such as student mentoring, academic skills workshops, our dedicated English Language and Academic Study team (ELAS) who work with any students whose first language is not English regardless of nationality, and additional one-to-one support (e.g. our Royal Literary Fellows). A key aspect of academic support at Sussex is supporting students to identify both their needs and strengths and connecting them with the appropriate support. This is enabled through an 'academic skills and strengths' survey, which is used by students and their tutors and is also a key part in supporting our evaluation process.

This whole provider initiative embeds targeted activities included under Intervention Strategy 4, demonstrating how academic support at Sussex is aligned to ensure that all students benefit and is appropriately matched to student need. In creating this structure, we have been able to draw on exemplary institutional expertise, recognised over the past five years through AdvanceHE, Pearson and UKAT awards for student academic support. This initiative is designed to address risks to opportunity that may be experienced by students at Sussex, specifically S5, S6, S7 and S8 identified above under Risks, and sector-wide risks identified in the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR): insufficient academic support (6), insufficient personal support (7), mental health (8), ongoing impacts of coronavirus (9) and information and guidance (2).

Embedding employability: our approach to embedding employability is closely aligned with our whole provider approach to academic support and skills. As all students are supported to reflect upon the skills and strengths that they are developing through their course, they are also supported to understand how these can relate to employability. This ensures that students can articulate the transferability of their skills flexibly, addressing Risk P10 (EORR risk 12: progression from higher education). Key to this is the role of our dedicated Careers Consultants, who work closely with

academics across all subjects. They support our aim to provide all students with the opportunity to build their 'real world' experiences both within and outside the curriculum.

We build experiential learning into our curriculum in a range of ways, whether modules with integrated placements (with, for instance, local community partners), modules that are structured around live, problem-based briefs from external organisations, and authentic assessments that reflect the tasks that students are likely to encounter in their onward careers. This approach complements the targeted activities outlined under Intervention Strategy 6 and forms part of our wider World Readiness Strategy. Providing experiential learning opportunities in the curriculum directly addresses socioeconomic disparities and differential access to work-based experiences, addressing Risk P10 (EORR risk 11: capacity issues). Experiential learning in the curriculum also provides opportunities for building co-curricular experiences that can support student success on-course, where extra-curricular activities such as volunteering may not be possible due to cost pressures on students, addressing Risks S6 and S7 (EORR risk 10: cost pressures).

Curriculum Reimagined: at Sussex we are completing a whole institution review of our curriculum and assessments. A central principle is to ensure greater inclusivity in our course content, learning resources, teaching, and assessment. This includes enabling greater flexibility in students' learning experiences, to be inclusive-by-design across all courses and to be increasingly proactive in how we adapt our courses to meet students' needs. This will improve accessibility in how we deliver teaching, learning and assessment to support student mental wellbeing, and our diverse student community, reducing the need for some individual reasonable adjustments.

Through this review, and in our curriculum development work more broadly, we work with students-as-partners, to ensure that the experiences and voices of students who are more likely to experience risks to opportunity are included. Student-led activities detailed in Intervention Strategy 5 (Curriculum Change Connectors and Race Equity Advocates) support this work.

As well as working closely and equally with students, we are also drawing upon expertise within our institution, such as the current QAA-funded project led by Professor Gabriella Cagliesi (Economics) on using data to understand the drivers of awarding gaps. The review works in tandem with focused Intervention Strategies 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, whilst particularly addressing our identified Risks S5, S6, S7, S8 and P9 in relation to limited choice of course type and delivery mode (EORR risk 5), mental health (EORR risk 8) and ongoing impacts of coronavirus (EORR risk 9).

To successfully deliver these changes, all student-facing staff will receive further **training for inclusivity** (relating to the experiences and potential barriers for students connected to disability, ethnicity and socioeconomic characteristics). This aims to create a baseline of common understanding and confidence to support cultures and structures that promote inclusivity in the curriculum and student experience (addressing Risks S5, S7, S8 and P9).

Action planning and monitoring: our access, success and progression objectives are a key part of our regular academic review processes: at University, Faculty/School and course levels. Each of our Faculties/Schools owns a Student Experience and Outcomes plan, which draws upon a wide range of data to inform the design and delivery of specific actions. Specific Race Equity plans and Employability plans are key component parts of these (helping to address Risks S8, P9 and P10). Access, success and progression data are key to developing plans and enables local targets to be set and progress to be tracked. Faculties/Schools can then work within the context of delivering institutional objectives, are connected with institutional activities, but can develop local activities to address objectives too which can then be evaluated. This also provides a vehicle across the institution for sharing best practices, evaluations, and build our common understanding of what works.

By looking at measures of both student experience and student outcomes, this process reflects the indicators of risk approach used in the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register. Course reviews take a similar approach, within the context of their Faculty/School plans, but at a more local level still. This enables us to create a shared understanding of access, success and progression at multiple levels,

as well as ensure that staff at each of these levels are engaged and can easily see their roles in supporting our APP objectives across the whole institution.

Student Voice and Communication: Ensuring that we have an effective understanding of student experience is essential to any actions we take. We have established a new process and strategy for hearing student voice, overseen by a collaborative steering group between the University and our Students' Union. Our aims are to make sure that we have consistent ways of gathering student voice, that we particularly engage with underrepresented student groups (not only as part of our evaluation of our intervention strategies, but as part of our whole provider approach), that we act on student feedback and that we close feedback loops with students so that they know what action has been taken. This will enable us to ensure that our communications with students are effective and provide a continuous dialogue. Alongside work on enhancing student voice, we are also undertaking a whole institution project to update our web estate and mobile app. This will improve the visibility and accessibility of communications with students. Together these activities aim to address identified risks relating to communication in S5, S6 and S7.

Alignment with other equality objectives: Sussex is committed to the Race Equality Charter (REC), which works in close connection with our APP activities. Both our work in Intervention Strategy 5 to tackle ethnicity-based awarding gaps (e.g. through our Race Equity Advocates) and our initiatives within our whole provider approach, support our REC strategy. This work is carried out in close collaboration with our Students' Union, and our APP 25-29 is a key vehicle for promoting race equity within the framework of the REC. This includes activity to diversify our workforce across the institution. The Black at Sussex initiative likewise supports our APP objectives in closing ethnicity-based awarding gaps by 'improving the experience of black students at Sussex through the celebration of University of Sussex black alumni and their contribution to British life, alongside a programme of critical discussion about the experience of being a black student at Sussex.' We are also fortunate to be able to have a strong relationship with the Stuart Hall Foundation, which we will be keen to develop further in support of education regarding race equity. Similarly, we are delivering the Mental Health Charter (MHC) at Sussex. Our MHC strategy will be directly supported by our APP Intervention Strategies (IS2 and IS6) and it provides a key framework for our whole provider approach, including our curriculum review and academic support work. This highlights how we are dedicated to support student mental wellbeing throughout our approach. Our Access and Participation Plan is entirely aligned with these Charters and the work being taken forward at the University through them.

Whole provider approach to Access: Our work to support access takes a similarly balanced approach between activities within Intervention Strategy 1 and a whole provider approach. We are adopting a consistent approach to how we deliver outreach through our academic departments, involving them where we can in working with our key targeted schools and colleges. This includes ensuring that experiential learning within modules that involves work with schools is focused on our access objectives wherever possible, that relevant staff projects and partnerships focus on our key local schools and colleges particularly, and our access objectives and partnerships are promoted to staff who undertake volunteering (which full-time staff are provided with two days of paid leave for). The University works in close collaboration with a wide range of community organisations, schools, colleges, and other universities. This is being developed further through our new Global and Civic Engagement Strategy, through which we are working to establish a Civic University Agreement. This will directly support our APP objectives, which are a key consideration in its development. To support our work in access, the University of Sussex also has a consistent and transparent approach to making contextual offers. This is publicised to students through our prospectus to ensure that students who are academically able but have experienced barriers to education are not disincentivised from applying.

The University of Sussex is active in developing diverse and flexible provision for our students, which is exemplified through our recently established degree apprenticeship offering. This includes courses delivered to support the Sussex and Surrey Institute of Technology, which we are one of the founding institutions of. We run a highly successful Foundation Year programme, offer online distance learning and are currently exploring further developments in relation to short courses.

These developments aim to diversify the routes through which students can access Higher Education with us.

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students: the support needs of our students are diverse, and there are various ways that our central teams and Schools promote student wellbeing, support student mental health, and provide proportionate and helpful intervention and support. Our Student Centre is currently the entry and referral point for students with queries, worries, and concerns, but we will be opening a new Health and Wellbeing Building in 2026 to deliver both NHS and University mental health services centrally. Our services include mental health assessment and the provision of one-to-one/ group interventions by therapists, psychological wellbeing practitioners and mental health nurses. Advice and reasonable adjustments are provided by our Occupational Health Advisor and our team of Disability Advisors. Proactively, we offer psychoeducational workshops, peer support, health promotion and spiritual support through our all faiths and none Chaplaincy. We hope that our newly recruited Faculty Wellbeing Consultants will improve communication and referrals between our central teams and Schools, and will provide an embedded provision of mental health expertise / training.

Supporting students with the cost of living: our direct financial support to students will be increasing in our APP 2025-29, relative to our current APP. The household income threshold for students to be eligible for our Bursary is rising by £10,000, to reflect that cost of living within our region and the fact that many familial households may not be able to support students financially. This aims to particularly help students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to be successful in their course. It directly supports our objectives A1, A4, S7 and P10, as well as the risks associated with these socioeconomic objectives. It also addresses the risk of cost pressures (EORR risk 10), which is an important factor in our objectives S5, S6, S7 and P9, and highlighted in Regulatory Notice 1 ('students with fewer financial resources may have been disproportionality affected by the recent increase in the cost of living'). As such, increasing this direct financial support is a key aspect of meeting our overall APP objectives.

We also offer hardship funding where students may be in financial difficulties, to provide a safety net of support where needed, and the total amount available through this will be increased during the lifetime of the next APP. We will be evaluating and reviewing our levels of APP allocated direct financial support annually, details of which can be found in Annex B. At Sussex we are committed to helping students avoid financial difficulties impacting their studies and wellbeing wherever possible. We do this not only through our direct financial support, but also through high quality advice and guidance on managing their finances. The University has partnered with Blackbullion to provide resources and guidance on a range of financial topics, and this is promoted as part of our wider support for students. Blackbullion is an easy-to-use online learning platform filled with short videos, articles and quizzes covering many financial subjects. If students are struggling with money or have questions about financial planning, we have a team of dedicated advisors who can provide help and guidance about budgeting and managing money to students individually as well as running activities to support all students in this.

Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) established in 2002, is a joint partnership between the Universities of Brighton and Sussex. The University has a longstanding collaborative programme with Brighton to address equality of opportunity in access to medicine. Alongside a range of outreach initiatives (such as BrightIdeas, Hub Schools, virtual work experience, and monthly lectures), this also includes BrightMed: the award-winning longitudinal programme for year 9-12 students who live or study in Sussex. On successful completion of the programme - which involves supporting students to understand and develop the required skills for a career in medicine, attendance at Saturday sessions, a residential summer school, and the submission of an evidence portfolio - BrightMed students who meet the academic requirements are offered a guaranteed interview and a reduced offer. It is part of the UK Widening Participation in Medicine (WPMED) scheme and recognised by six other institutions offering medicine. Further information about BrightMed can be found in Annex B.

Student consultation

Consultation with students was an important part of the development of our 2025-29 APP, and ongoing consultation will be key to delivering and reviewing our objectives.

In the development of the Plan, we consulted with a wide range of our home undergraduate students from different backgrounds:
- **Focus Groups:** The University of Sussex Students' Union (USSU) successfully ran around ten Focus Groups involving students from relevant APP groups, focussing on our key target areas including black, Asian, low-income, mature and disabled students. Draft intervention strategies were also presented to focus groups for initial feedback.
- **Students' Union:** The University worked closely with USSU, as detailed in the Student Submission, and the Diversity, Access and Participation Officer is a core member of our APP Working Group and APP Steering Group. The USSU also co-designed and will co-run activities relating to IS5, the Race Equity Advocates scheme.
- **Student Panels**: Over 40 students from relevant APP groups were recruited for a newly developed Student Panel, which was created to ensure positive engagement with the drafting of the new APP and will continue throughout the next APP to provide continuous feedback on the effectiveness of our APP. With initial training and ongoing mentoring by an external facilitator, three student Chairs led the monthly panel, posing questions around the development of the APP. This will be an important resource for including student voice in our ongoing evaluations. All panel members are paid for their time.
- **Student Connectors:** Three recruited positions for APP students to sit on the APP Working Group, to support student voice within the detailed development of our new APP. We also created specific additional paid student project roles for researching best practice within the sector: this worked effectively as an example of co-creation between students and staff (whilst providing an opportunity for the students to develop relevant transferrable skills itself).
- **Student surveys:** Targeted student surveys were conducted with APP relevant cohorts at various stages in the development of the Plan.

Dissemination of feedback
The Student Panel gave feedback directly on activities within the intervention strategies, for example our Careers Lab programme and Academic Skills workshops, and their feedback was incorporated into the design of these activities. Student Panel members then received feedback as to how the ideas and challenges that they identified were integrated within the intervention strategies or wider Access and Participation Plan. Attendees at the USSU-run Focus Groups were also provided with feedback to show where their ideas had been included in the draft APP, as well as where any further work that was identified during the consultation process would be taken forward. For example, 'effectiveness of communication' has been acknowledged as one of our risks due to these groups and we could feedback to students how this would be taken forward through whole provider initiatives. By providing this feedback we were able to close the feedback loop with our student consultation participants and ensure they could see their impact.

Ongoing student involvement
Our Working Group and Steering Group governance structure will continue throughout the life of this APP, and will continue to include a Students' Union Sabbatical Officer as a core member. Our Student Panel will continue during the next APP, with a renewed focus on co-designing and evaluating activity, and its membership will continue to reflect those student groups that our APP has identified as having particular risks to opportunity. Our Steering Group (through its oversight function) will also commission targeted activities to gather student voice (e.g. surveys, focus groups). As outlined in our whole provider approach, ensuring that we are gathering student voice across our community and particularly including our most marginalised groups, is a key priority for our Student Voice Strategy and this will complement APP-specific work. Our APP monitoring activity will include relevant student feedback gathered through our institutional student voice processes (e.g. module evaluations, student representatives, institutional surveys, etc.).

Evaluation of the plan

At Sussex, we are strongly committed to the rigorous and robust evaluation of our interventions to address risks to equality of opportunity. 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.

Understanding our current state
In 2022 we appointed a new Research and Evaluation lead to enhance and strengthen our evaluation and research and undertook the OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment[8] . Our initial results were cause for reflection and invaluable in enabling us to identify and address gaps in our research and evaluation approach. We now undertake this assessment annually and have set ourselves stretching targets for the new APP cycle across all dimensions, acknowledging the significant impact that high quality evaluation will have on the overall success of our Access and Participation Plan.

Self-Assessment Dimension	Baseline (21/22)	Current (23/24)	Target (28/29)
1. Strategic Context (maximum score 24)	Emerging (9)	Good (16)	Advanced (22)
2. Programme Design (maximum score 18)	Emerging (2)	Good (15)	Advanced (17)
3. Evaluation Design (maximum score 12)	Emerging (0)	Advanced (9)	Advanced (9)
4. Evaluation Implementation (maximum score 20)	Below Minimum (8)	Emerging (15)	Advanced (18)
5. Learning (maximum score 22)	Emerging (4)	Emerging (11)	Advanced (20)
Total Score (Maximum score 96)	23	66	86

Figure 1 OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment current progress and targets

Strategic context
We have developed the strategic architecture to enable high quality, robust evaluation, including establishing a new specialist Research and Evaluation department that is operationally independent from intervention delivery teams to enable objective evaluation. We have established clear governance mechanisms for the department to ensure the rigour and integrity of our evaluation designs, implementation, and reporting.

We recruited an Academic Advisory Group, comprised of academics with a range of qualitative and quantitative methodological expertise and research interests in educational inequalities, to provide quality assurance through feedback on evaluation plans and reports. We have worked closely with our Research Governance, Ethics, and Integrity department to create new mechanisms for gaining ethical approval for research and evaluation plans for APP interventions. This governance structure gives us the institutional confidence to disseminate the findings from our research and evaluation outputs across the sector, supporting and contributing to the national evidence base for what works in addressing risks to equality of opportunity.

We have developed a RACI Framework for evaluation across our matrixed APP programme based on the OfS Self-Assessment criteria. We have also developed a Target Operating Model for the Research & Evaluation department, underpinned by the Transforming Access and Student

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[8] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/

Outcomes (TASO)Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. This ensures we have clarity over which teams and roles are responsible and accountable for various aspects of design, implementation, and strategic learning.

Embedding evaluation
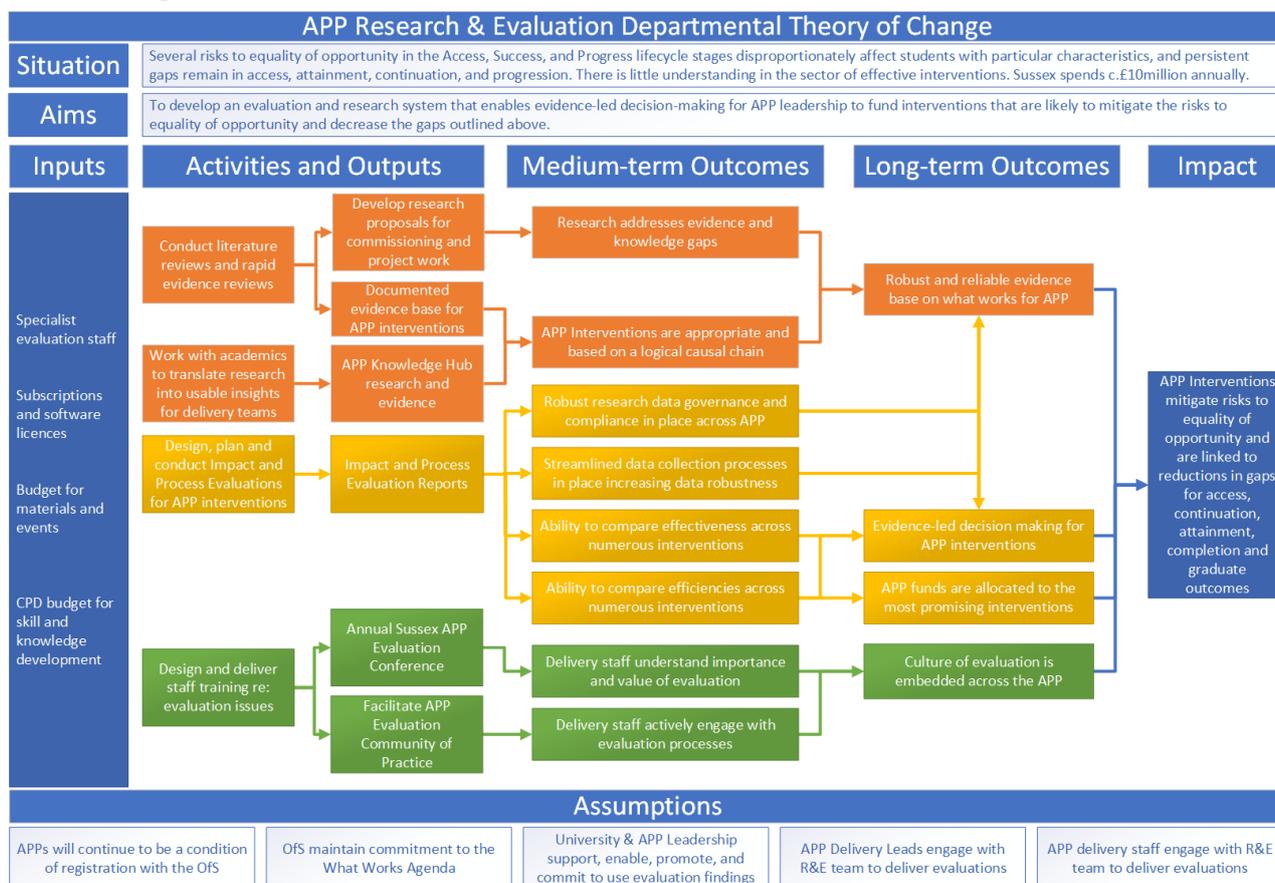
Figure 2 Research and Evaluation Theory of Change

The Research and Evaluation department will work across three key areas, as illustrated by the departmental Theory of Change:

- Support delivery leads in establishing the research and evidence base for intervention and programme design. We use the NERUPI Framework for programme design and draw on wider research literature to ensure that our programmes are research-informed and evidence-led.
- Lead on designing and implementing evaluations across our APP Programme. Drawing on diverse qualitative and quantitative methodological expertise within the team, and our Academic Advisory Group, we will utilise TASO guidance and standards from the wider evaluation sector to ensure robust design, appropriate implementation, and reliable reporting.
- Enhance the culture of evaluation across the APP and Sussex as a whole provider. This will include support for developing Theories of Change, designing evaluability assessments for new initiatives, developing training and resources for staff, establishing an Evaluation Community of Practice, and the delivery of an annual internal conference to disseminate findings from evaluations and research in progress.

The Research and Evaluation department will be working with our Faculties and Schools of Study to support the monitoring of our Student Experience and Outcomes Plans as part of our whole provider approach and to evaluate associated interventions within subject areas. The results of these will feed into ongoing our annual academic quality and performance reviews and provide valuable knowledge and understanding of effective interventions that can be disseminated institutionally and externally.

Evaluation design and implementation

We are developing robust, in-depth evaluation plans for the interventions included in this Plan, which will be reviewed by our Academic Advisory Group and will have the appropriate ethical approvals to enable us to implement them effectively. Each Evaluation Plan includes a risk management analysis with mitigations for foreseeable issues, such as access to data and low response rates.

We are committed to embedding Type 2 Correlational Evidence across all our long-term, intensive, or multi-activity programmes. We have included several Type 3 Causal designs where we are confident that we are able to access the required data.

We are working with local schools and colleges to ensure that we have appropriate Data Sharing Agreements in place to allow us to track participants and non-participants over time. These will be in place from the start of 2025/26 to ensure we can effectively evaluate Access interventions. For the on-course elements of our Plan, we have updated our privacy policy to ensure we have lawful access to student data to support robust evaluation of Success and Progression interventions. We will use the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) for tracking our student participants in Access, Success, and Progression interventions and will use this to provide internal Monitoring Reports to help inform the evidence base and support decision making.

When designing the evaluations for the interventions included in this plan, we identified the need for a more joined-up approach to surveying students that was clearly mapped to outcomes for students. We are establishing an institutional APP survey that will be tied to registration to give us baseline and comparator data across a range of outcomes. We are recruiting academics with expertise in robust survey design to a task and finish group to design and pilot this survey during 2024/25, with the intention of embedding this from 2025/26 onwards.

Contextual research

We know there are many complex drivers for the ways that educational inequalities are experienced by students at all stages of the lifecycle. However, there is not enough detailed and nuanced understanding of how and why particular risks to equality of opportunity emerge for some student groups over others, or how those experiences differentially affect some student groups in particular contexts.

The Research and Evaluation department will keep up-to-date with emerging literature and studies related to educational inequalities and will work with colleagues and the Centre for Teaching and Learning Research to develop a Knowledge Hub, drawing together a themed repository of research and evaluation findings. By conducting literature and evidence reviews to identify persistent gaps in knowledge, the team will develop proposals for project work or commissions of targeted research to help build greater understanding of what may work to mitigate risks to equality of opportunity.

We will utilise an existing Innovation Fund to conduct or support small-scale exploratory research on APP issues and collaborate with academics conducting scholarship of teaching and learning and partner with our Educational Enhancement department to create greater understanding of emerging APP issues, as well as where they intersect with other strategic initiatives (e.g. the Mental Health Charter and the Race Equality Charter).

Student voices in Research and Evaluation

We know that students' experiences with interventions, their courses, the institution, and wider socioeconomic context influence how likely they are to access, succeed in, and progress from HE. There are several projects where we will work with students as partners in our research and evaluation work:

- We will work with our APP Student Panel to refine our intervention design and evaluation questions.

- We will take a participatory approach to our qualitative explorative research with students to better understand their experiences of accessing, succeeding in and progressing from HE.
- We will involve students in our internal APP conferences as participants and delegates, creating space for them to feed into the evolution of the work throughout the course of this APP.

Strategic learning and dissemination

We understand that evaluation outputs are most valuable if they are used in iterative planning and design. We appreciate that as the sector works to establish a national evidence base for what works in reducing the risks to equality of opportunity there will be new findings during the lifecycle of this APP that may have an impact on our intervention design.

We have designed an annual review of each intervention Theory of Change to draw from emerging evidence in the research literature, interim evaluation findings from our own interventions, and those due to be published by other institutions during the next APP cycle. The reviews will be conducted with the Delivery Managers for interventions and Delivery Leads for intervention strategies to ensure they are meaningful and valuable for practitioners. These reviews will allow us to refine our interventions and make adaptations to process where it is suggested.

Our Interim Evaluation Reports and reviewed Theories of Change will go to the APP Steering Group for dissemination. We acknowledge that we do not currently have all the information we might want to design effective interventions, and it is possible that robust evaluation may mean we need to make changes to our planned interventions as we learn more about what is and is not effective. If significant changes are warranted, including stop, start, or scale decisions, the APP Steering Group will assess the level of change and establish whether a Variation to our APP is required.

At Sussex, we are committed to Open Research, understanding the importance of knowledge equity and the value of timely access to emerging findings. We are eager to support the creation of a national evidence base for what works in mitigating the risks to equality of opportunity. We will produce interim findings for each intervention on a regular basis to share emerging learning in a timely manner for both internal and external colleagues. We will use our institutional repository as the point of publication in the first instance, making these reports openly available to interested parties across the sector. We will also publish them on dedicated institutional webpages for our APP. We intend to further disseminate our findings through blogs, articles, and internal and national conferences on a regular basis.

Provision of information to students

The University of Sussex displays information that is accessible 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 which are held several times during the academic year.

We are committed to making information available to all students about the financial support to which they are entitled as a result of the provisions in this Access and Participation Plan. Information is provided via Student Finance England to all eligible students and is widely promoted to students through our dedicated online Student Hub, through advice provided by our Student Centre, and via the University's public website.

Sussex Bursary
The Sussex Bursary is for undergraduate students, with a household income of less than £35,000. The household income level at which students become eligible has been increased by £10,000 compared with our previous APP. This will directly support our objectives, particularly in relation to students who face increased risks to opportunity due to their socioeconomic statues (that is having been eligible for FSM or from IMD Q1: Risks A1, A4, S7, P10) and to address the risk identified through our student engagement relating to cost-of-living. Students whose family income is less than £35,000 and care leavers will all be eligible to receive our entry bursary. Estranged students and carers whose household income is greater than £35,000 may also be eligible to apply and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. This was informed by research that the University commissioned in 2023 to understand the impact of our direct financial support, costs relevant to our local context, and comparisons within the sector. Students will automatically receive the award directly from Student Finance England.

The bursary is paid to students who meet the following criteria:
- Started an undergraduate course on or after September that year
- Funded as a Home student
- Have an assessed household income of less than £35,000
- Not in receipt of non-means tested grant element to funding
- Registered as a full-time student that year
- 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. This aims to support students in prioritising their studies and avoiding financial difficulties. Increasing the household income threshold for eligibility reflects both the cost of living within our local area, and also ensures that a wider range of students whose families may be less likely to be able to support them financially receive the Bursary.

Hardship fund
The University of Sussex provides financial assistance to students who are experiencing financial difficulties while studying. The hardship fund is designed to alleviate the burden of financial stress, enabling students to focus on their studies where they might have pressing financial concerns. The hardship fund is non-repayable and is awarded based on an assessment of the student's financial requirements, ensuring that it is awarded to those who genuinely need it.

The hardship fund is available to undergraduate students, Masters and PhD students. Eligible students who demonstrate financial need will be prioritised for additional hardship funding, reducing the risk of temporary/permanent withdrawal due to financial difficulties. To be considered for hardship funding, students must demonstrate that they have fully explored other means of supporting themselves financially, for instance through paid part-time work. The hardship fund is partly funded through our APP-allocated spending, to ensure that our APP relevant student groups

always have access to this, and is also part-funded through alumni donations and other grant schemes for our wider student body.

Affordable Housing
In addition to direct financial support offered as part of our APP commitments, that is our Bursary and Hardship Fund, we also offer an Affordable Housing Scheme for eligible students. This ensures that students benefit from a rent cap whilst in University-managed accommodation.

Care leavers
We are also fortunate to be able to offer our care experienced students the generous Andrew Rudd Scholarship, made possible by philanthropic donation. This is available to all full-time undergraduate students, who are care leavers and provides each student with £5,000 per year.

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

Overview

To design and assess the performance of the APP targets, we analysed and monitored available data using the OfS APP Dashboard dataset to compare access rates (Table 1) and continuation (Figure 7), completion (Figure 9), attainment (Figure 10) and progression (Figure 13) results within each demographic characteristic type.

For access rates, each demographic split was compared to the sector average to identify areas for further investigation. We then placed the observed outcome in the national and regional context, where possible, by using Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Department for Education (DfE) population datasets. This guided our assessment of access performance and allowed us to prioritise groups. This process in relation to Access is discussed in detail below.

For continuation, completion, attainment and progression, each demographic split is compared to a reference group, for example minoritised ethnic groups are compared against white students as the reference group and IMD quintiles 1-4 are compared against IMD quintile 5 as the reference group. Data were assessed over a six-year period for all lifecycle stages, except progression where only a four-year time period was available.

Gaps between groups were flagged as significant when 95% of the statistical uncertainty distribution was above or below zero. The overall sector gap was also observed to understand the nationwide context for each particular demographic split's outcomes. Where split populations were lower than 23 students, and were therefore suppressed in the OfS APP Dashboard dataset, we have used aggregated data over two or four years. It would have been possible to use the OfS individualised dataset to analyse gaps for these small groups but this would have risked drawing conclusions that were not statistically sound.

Using this dataset, we compiled a long-list of significant, persistent gaps for further investigation. The general rule for inclusion on this long-list was that a gap should be larger than four percentage points (pp) and statistically significant in at least two years of the time period, including one of the two most recent years. Each gap on the long-list was considered for inclusion as an objective group in our APP. The decision for inclusion was based on a number of different factors that are outlined in this section. This included consideration of additional datasets such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and data from our own student record system, as well as consideration of population sizes, overlap of populations across different demographic groups and intersectional effects. All gaps included on this long-list, and the consideration of their inclusion as a specific objective for our APP, are discussed below.

To identify intersectional effects, we have used the OfS individualised dataset to calculate outcomes for each combination of two demographic splits, excluding those where the population size was lower than 23 students. We noted an intersection for further monitoring during the APP cycle where the gap between two demographic splits was consistently larger with the addition of the second demographic split.

Where a characteristic is not discussed below, no significant gaps in outcomes were identified. We will regularly review these datasets through our APP governance structure for indications of any emerging or changing gaps, including intersections, and have identified a number for active monitoring. This work will also be integrated into our dedicated APP governance structure overseen by our executive-led Steering Group.

This Annex is also referenced within the Student Submission from the University of Sussex Students' Union.

Access

Access rates across demographic groups were compared to sector averages to identify areas of underrepresentation for further investigation (Table 1).

		Sussex	Sector average	Gap to sector
ABCS	ABCSQ1	4.8%	7.6%	-2.8%
	ABCSQ2	11.7%	14.3%	-2.6%
	ABCSQ3	19.3%	19.4%	0.0%
	ABCSQ4	26.7%	24.8%	1.9%
	ABCSQ5	37.5%	34.0%	3.5%
Age	Young Under 21	90.2%	72.3%	18.0%
	Mature 21 and Over	9.8%	27.7%	-18.0%
Disability	Disabled	23.3%	16.7%	6.5%
Disability Type	No Known Disability Type	76.7%	83.3%	-6.6%
	Cognitive And Learning	6.6%	5.7%	0.9%
	Mental Health	8.4%	4.8%	3.6%
	Multiple Impairments	5.5%	2.8%	2.7%
	Sensory Medical And Physical	1.9%	2.3%	-0.4%
	Social And Communication	0.8%	1.0%	-0.2%
IMD	IMDQ1	9.1%	21.8%	-12.7%
	IMDQ2	15.8%	21.0%	-5.3%
	IMDQ3	21.1%	18.7%	2.4%
	IMDQ4	23.6%	18.3%	5.3%
	IMDQ5	31.5%	20.2%	11.3%
Ethnicity	Other	2.6%	2.6%	0.0%
	White	73.7%	66.7%	7.0%
	Asian	9.2%	15.0%	-5.9%
	Black	5.7%	10.4%	-4.8%
	Mixed	8.9%	5.3%	3.6%
FSM Eligibility	Eligible For FSM	12.5%	19.2%	-6.7%
	Not Eligible For FSM	87.5%	80.8%	6.7%
Sex	Female	55.7%	57.0%	-1.3%
	Male	44.3%	43.0%	1.3%
TUNDRA	TUNDRAQ1	10.0%	12.0%	-2.0%
	TUNDRAQ2	13.1%	15.4%	-2.3%
	TUNDRAQ3	17.3%	18.8%	-1.5%
	TUNDRAQ4	23.0%	23.4%	-0.4%
	TUNDRAQ5	36.7%	30.4%	6.3%

Table 1 Access rates for Sussex and the sector in 2021-22. Gaps that were flagged for further investigation are highlighted in orange

The five demographic splits across four demographic split types that were identified as being notably lower than the sector as a whole are presented in Figure 3, below.
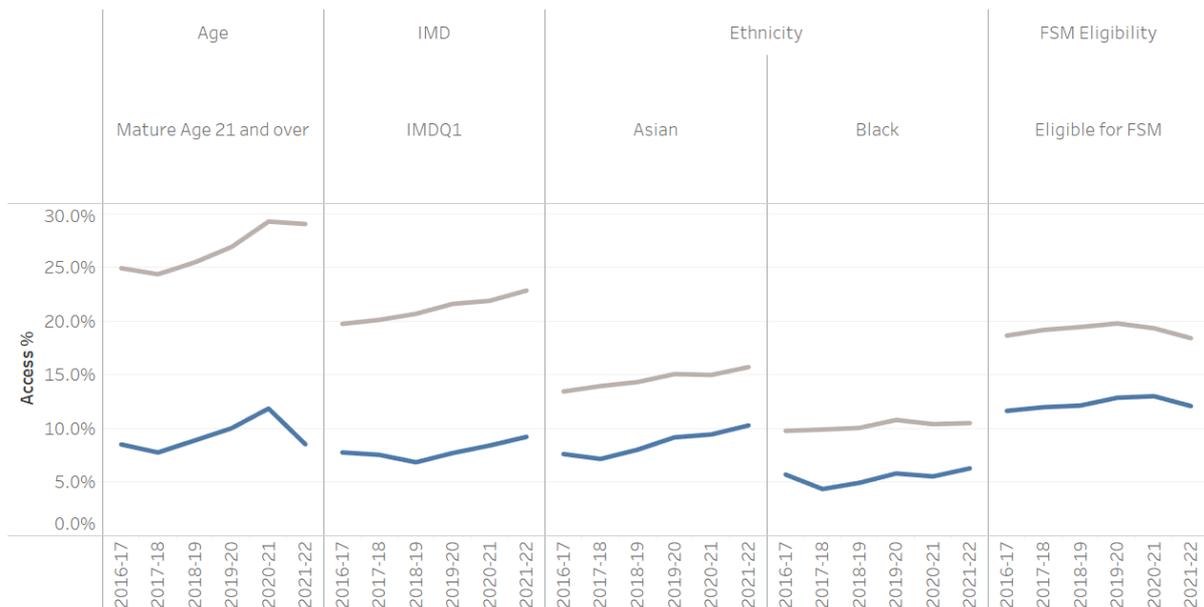
Figure 3 Access rates for Sussex and the sector over six years for those characteristics identified for further investigation.

Age

Mature students made up 8.5% of the Sussex intake in 2021-22, down from a high of 11.9% in the previous year, and considerably lower than the sector average of 29% (Figure 3). The average Sussex intake of mature students over the last four years was 9.8%.

However, when compared to similar universities (medium and high tariff, pre-92s) we have one of the higher mature student populations in England (Figure 4). We have also considered that unlike many of the comparator institutions with larger mature populations, Sussex does not offer Nursing and Midwifery courses. These are often large cohorts of students who are disproportionately mature (Table 2).
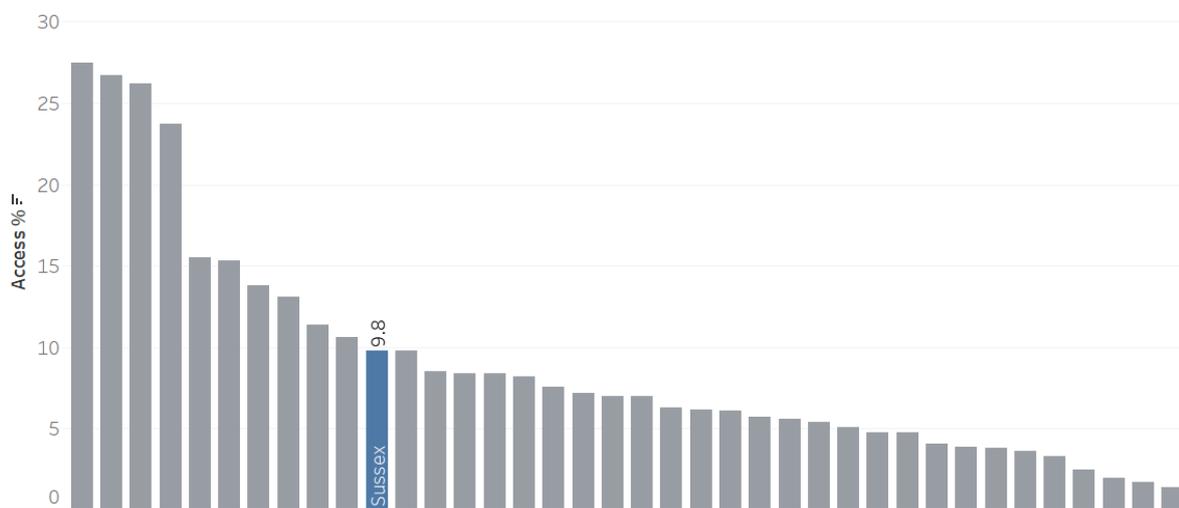
Figure 4 Proportion of intake who were mature, aggregated over last four years. Sussex, in blue, is compared to all other medium and high tariff pre-92 institutions, in grey.

Subject	Mature %	Young %
Nursing	63%	37%
Other subjects	25%	75%

Table 2 Proportion of mature and young undergraduate, full-time entrants in Nursing compared to all other subjects. English providers in 2021-22. Source: HESA HeidiPlus

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for access of mature students.

IMD

Students from IMD quintile 1 made up 8.1% of the Sussex intake in 2021-22. This is 12.7pp below the sector as a whole and 22.3pp below the IMD quintile 5 intake proportion, which was 31.5% in 2021-22. The gap between Sussex and the sector has been fairly consistent over the last six years.

Sussex recruits 43.6% of its UK, undergraduate students from the South East of England and 29.5% from London (Table 3). In order to understand how this localised recruitment might affect our distribution of IMD quintiles we have used ONS data to model a benchmark of what proportion of our intake would come from each IMD quintile if our intake was representative of our recruitment regions.

UK region	% of intake
Channel Islands and the Isle of Man	0.8%
East Midlands	1.7%
East of England	10.5%
London	29.5%
North East	0.4%
North West	1.0%
Northern Ireland	0.4%
Scotland	0.2%
South East	43.6%
South West	8.0%
Wales	0.8%
West Midlands	2.1%
Yorkshire and The Humber	1.0%

Table 3 Sussex UK-domiciles undergraduate full-time intake by UK region over last five years. Source: HESA HeidiPlus

UK Region	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
East Midlands	21.1%	18.6%	17.5%	20.6%	22.3%
East of England	11.3%	18.3%	23.4%	21.2%	25.9%
London	19.8%	32.0%	21.2%	15.3%	11.7%
North East	37.9%	21.8%	13.0%	12.8%	14.4%
North West	39.0%	18.0%	13.6%	15.3%	14.2%
South East	9.0%	14.9%	18.2%	23.3%	34.6%
South West	11.9%	18.9%	24.4%	22.8%	21.9%
Wales	23.2%	19.5%	19.2%	18.8%	19.4%
West Midlands	35.3%	18.5%	17.2%	15.6%	13.4%
Yorkshire and The Humber	36.8%	16.9%	15.6%	16.4%	14.4%
Grand Total	**23.3%**	**19.9%**	**18.5%**	**18.4%**	**19.8%**

Table 4 Proportion of 17 year old population from each IMD quintile by region in England and Wales. Source: ONS 2022 Mid-year population estimates and IMD2019 dataset

ONS data show that the proportion of 17 year olds who live in IMD quintile 1 postcodes in the South East was only 9% in 2022, far below the England and Wales average of 23.3% (Table 4). London, our second biggest recruitment region, was also lower than the national average with 19.8% from IMD quintile 1. Weighting each region by our recruitment proportions (Table 5) allows us to calculate a Sussex-specific benchmark for IMD quintiles, and compare our access rates to that benchmark.

	2021-22	Benchmark	Gap to benchmark
IMDQ1	9.1	14.31	-5.2

IMDQ2	15.8	20.97	-5.2
IMDQ3	21.1	20.05	+1.1
IMDQ4	23.6	20.18	+3.4
IMDQ5	31.5	24.50	+7.0

Table 5 Sussex 2021-22 access rates by IMD quintile compared to regionally-adjusted benchmark

This is a broad benchmarking exercise to contextualise our intakes given our regional recruitment profile. Using this methodology, our access rates of IMD quintiles 1 and 2 are below the level that might be anticipated for our recruitment region. However, consideration was also given to the fact that we observed an access gap for students who were eligible for free school meals. This is discussed below. Both of these measures attempt to identify students by socioeconomic status and we are focusing on the individualised measure of FSM, rather than an area-based, measure.

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for access of students from IMD quintile 1.

Ethnicity

In 2021-22 Sussex's access rate for Asian students was 10.2% and for black students it was 6.3%, these proportions are 5.5pp and 4.2pp below the sector average, respectively. These gaps to sector have been relatively stable over the last six years (Table 6).

		2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Asian	University of Sussex	7.5	7.3	7.9	9.3	9.3	10.2
	Sector average	13.4	13.9	14.3	15.1	15.0	15.7
	Gap	**-5.9**	**-6.6**	**-6.4**	**-5.8**	**-5.7**	**-5.5**
Black	University of Sussex	5.6	4.3	4.9	5.8	5.5	6.3
	Sector average	9.8	9.9	10.1	10.8	10.4	10.5
	Gap	**-4.2**	**-5.6**	**-5.2**	**-5.0**	**-4.9**	**-4.2**
Mixed	University of Sussex	7.0	7.7	7.7	8.9	9.8	8.9
	Sector average	4.7	4.8	5.0	5.2	5.3	5.6
	Gap	**+2.3**	**+2.9**	**+2.7**	**+3.7**	**+4.5**	**+3.3**
Other	University of Sussex	1.4	1.9	2.5	2.2	3.1	2.6
	Sector average	1.9	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.6	3.0
	Gap	**-0.5**	**-0.2**	**+0.3**	**-0.2**	**+0.5**	**-0.4**
White	University of Sussex	78.4	78.9	77.0	73.8	72.3	72.0
	Sector average	70.2	69.2	68.4	66.5	66.7	65.2
	Gap	**+8.2**	**+9.7**	**+8.6**	**+7.3**	**+5.6**	**+6.8**

Table 6 Sussex and sector average access rates by ethnicity

ONS data show that different regions of the UK have considerably different ethnic distributions (Table 7). Our largest recruitment region, the South East, has lower proportions of Asian (7.8% compared to 11.6%) and black (3.4% compared to 6.1%) 17 year olds than England and Wales as a whole. London has higher proportions than the national average.

UK Region	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	White
East Midlands	9.2%	3.5%	4.7%	1.4%	81.1%
East of England	7.8%	4.3%	5.3%	1.6%	81.1%
London	23.1%	21.0%	9.0%	7.7%	39.1%
North East	4.6%	1.3%	2.3%	1.2%	90.6%
North West	12.0%	3.5%	3.9%	1.9%	78.6%

South East	7.8%	3.4%	5.3%	1.6%	82.0%
South West	3.4%	1.7%	3.9%	1.0%	90.0%
Wales	4.1%	1.1%	2.9%	1.1%	90.8%
West Midlands	18.3%	6.7%	5.5%	2.7%	66.9%
Yorkshire and The Humber	13.6%	3.0%	3.9%	1.8%	77.6%
Grand Total	**11.6%**	**6.1%**	**5.1%**	**2.6%**	**74.6%**

Table 7 Proportion of 17 year old population of ethnicity by region in England and Wales. Source: 2021 census

Weighting each region by our recruitment proportions allows us to calculate a Sussex-specific benchmark for ethnicity and compare our access rates to that benchmark (Table 8). Using this methodology, our access rates of Asian students was 2.1pp below the level that might be expected given our recruitment region and access rates of black students was 2.4pp below the benchmark. This is a broad benchmarking exercise to contextualise our intakes given our specific recruitment profile.

	2021-22	Benchmark	Gap to benchmark
Asian	10.2%	12%	-2.1%
Black	6.3%	9%	-2.4%
Mixed	8.9%	6%	+2.7%
Other	2.6%	3%	-0.8%
White	73.8%	69%	+4.4%

Table 8 Sussex 2021-22 access rates by ethnicity compared to regionally adjusted benchmark

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for access of students by ethnicity as the gap has not been found to be significant, but will be actively monitored.

Free School Meals
In 2021-22 Sussex's access rate for students who had been eligible for free school meals was 12.2%, 6.2pp below the sector average which is 18.4%. This gap to sector has declined slightly from a high of 7.4pp in 2017-18 and 2018-19 (Table 9), but has been significant and persistent.

		2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Eligible For FSM	University of Sussex	11.8	11.8	12.0	12.9	13.0	12.2
	Sector average	18.6	19.2	19.4	19.8	19.3	18.4
	Gap to sector	-6.8	-7.4	-7.4	-6.9	-6.3	-6.2

Table 9 Sussex and sector average access rates for FSM-eligible students

Data from the Department for Education show that the proportion of year 11 pupils who have been eligible for free school meals at any time in the previous six years, has been increasing significantly, growing from 14.4% in 2018-19 to 24.5% in 2022-23 (Table 10). These pupils have already started to reach university age and over the period of this Access and Participation Plan will become more and more numerous. The University of Sussex must increase representation from this group to stop the gap to the sector becoming even larger.

Academic Year	**% FSM**
2015-16	13.7
2016-17	13.5
2017-18	13.0
2018-19	14.4
2019-20	16.1
2020-21	19.1
2021-22	21.1
2022-23	22.9

2023-24	24.5

Nationally the gap in the rate of progression to HE between pupils who were eligible for free school meals at age 15 and those who weren't has been growing over the last eight years, reaching 20.2pp in 2021-22 (Table 11).

Academic year	Progression to HE rate - FSM	Progression to HE rate – non-FSM	Progression rate gap
2014-15	24.1	41.6	17.5
2015-16	25.7	43.3	17.6
2016-17	26.2	43.9	17.7
2017-18	26.3	44.9	18.6
2018-19	26.3	45.1	18.8
2019-20	26.6	45.7	19.1
2020-21	28.1	46.8	18.7
2021-22	29.2	49.4	20.2

The gap between these two groups has consistently been highest in the South East of England, reaching 27.4pp in 2021-22 (Figure 5). The region has one of the higher progression to HE rates for pupils who have not been eligible for FSM, at 48.6% in 2021-22. The progression to HE rate for pupils who have been eligible for FSM, however, is the second lowest in the country at 21.2% in 2021-22 (Table 12).
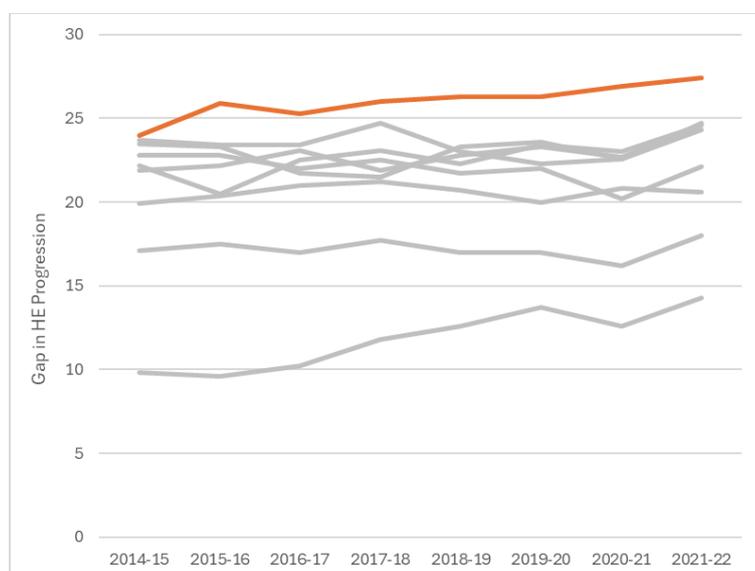
Figure 5 The gap in rates of HE progression between pupils who were eligible for FSM at age 15 and those who were not. Each line is a UK region with the South East shown in orange.

UK Region	FSM Progression Rate	Non-FSM Progression Rate	Progression Rate Gap
South East	21.2	48.6	27.4
North East	21.9	46.7	24.7
South West	18.7	43.3	24.6
East of England	22.9	47.5	24.6
East Midlands	21.4	45.7	24.3
North West	26.6	48.7	22.1

Yorkshire and The Humber	25.7	46.3	20.6
West Midlands	29.9	47.8	18
London	48.8	63.2	14.3

Table 12 Progression rates for those who have been eligible for FSM and not by region in 2021-22. Source: DfE Widening participation in higher education

Looking at our geographically closest Local Authorities we see similarly low FSM progression rates while non-FSM progression rates remain high (Table 13) and this is to be addressed through our collaborative objective with other HE providers within our region.

Local Authority	FSM Progression Rate	Non-FSM Progression Rate	Progression Rate Gap
Brighton and Hove	21.2	52.2	31
West Sussex	18.1	44	25.9
East Sussex	16.9	40.1	23.2

Table 13 Progression rates for those who have been eligible for FSM and not in 2021-22 for Local Authorities of Brighton and Hove, West Sussex and East Sussex. Source: DfE Widening participation in higher education

Assessment: An objective has been set for the access rates of FSM-eligible students to Sussex, linked to Risk A1.

An objective has been set for progression to Higher Education rates of students who have been eligible for FSM from West Sussex, East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, linked to Risk A2.

GTRSB students

Students from Gypsy, Traveller, or Roma ethnic groups, or the Showmen and Boater communities are included in the OfS student characteristics section, indicating that they are most likely to indicate risks to equality of opportunity.

We have included an objective to increase the progression rate for students from GTRSB backgrounds, however our dataset is currently too small to set meaningful numeric targets. We have specific interventions that will support meeting this objective, which can be seen in Annex B. Additionally, a further consideration in this context is that students may not self-identify as GTRSB due to prejudice[9].

Just 6.3% of Gypsy/Roma and 3.8% of Irish Travellers access higher education by the age of 19 compared to around 40% of all young people (Brassington 2020). Research from Sussex academics describes the reasons for this underrepresentation as a complex constellation of historical, political, and social exclusions, racism and misrecognition that result in poor progress through formal education (Danvers and Hinton-Smith 2022). There is a substantial GTRSB community within our local region and we are committed to supporting increased access to higher education for this group.

Students with Experience of Care

According to the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, care-experienced students are less likely to progress to higher education than those who are not care experienced (Figure 6). These students are included in the student characteristics section, indicating that they are most likely to have risks to equality of opportunity.

[9] Chris Derrington, 'Fight, Flight and Playing White: An Examination of Coping Strategies adopted by Gypsy Traveller Adolescents in English Secondary Schools', International Journal of Educational Research, 56(6), 2007, pp.357-67.K.
Kate D'Arcy and Lisa Galloway, 'Access and Inclusion for Gypsy and Traveller Students in Higher Education', in Jason Arday and Heidi Safia Mirza (eds.), Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy, Springer 2018
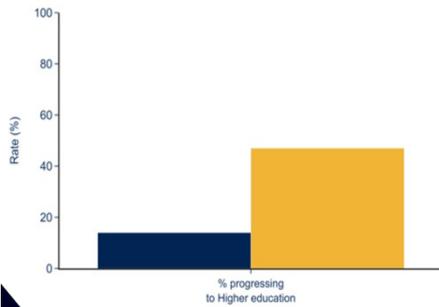
Figure 6 Progression to HE rates of care-experienced young people (blue) compared to those who were not care-experienced (yellow)

We have included an objective to increase the progression rate for students with experience of care, however our dataset is currently too small to set a meaningful numeric target. We have specific interventions that will support meeting this objective, which can be seen in Annex B.

Continuation

The overall continuation rate for the APP population (UK-domiciled undergraduate students) at Sussex was 94.1% for 2020-21 entrants, which is 5.1pp above the sector as a whole. This gap from the sector average has been broadly consistent over the last five years (Table 14). Although Sussex has seen a decline in continuation of around 1pp over the time period, the sector has seen a similar decline. This provides a general context for Sussex's overall continuation rates, which are typically high.

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Sussex	95.2%	95.3%	95.2%	95.9%	94.8%	94.1%
Sector	90.3%	90.3%	89.9%	90.1%	91.2%	89.0%
Difference to sector	4.9	5.0	5.3	5.8	3.6	5.1

Table 14 Continuation rates for Sussex and the sector

Our initial analysis of gaps across lifecycle stages identified continuation gaps in nine demographic splits across five demographic split types. These are shown, with population sizes, in Figure 7.
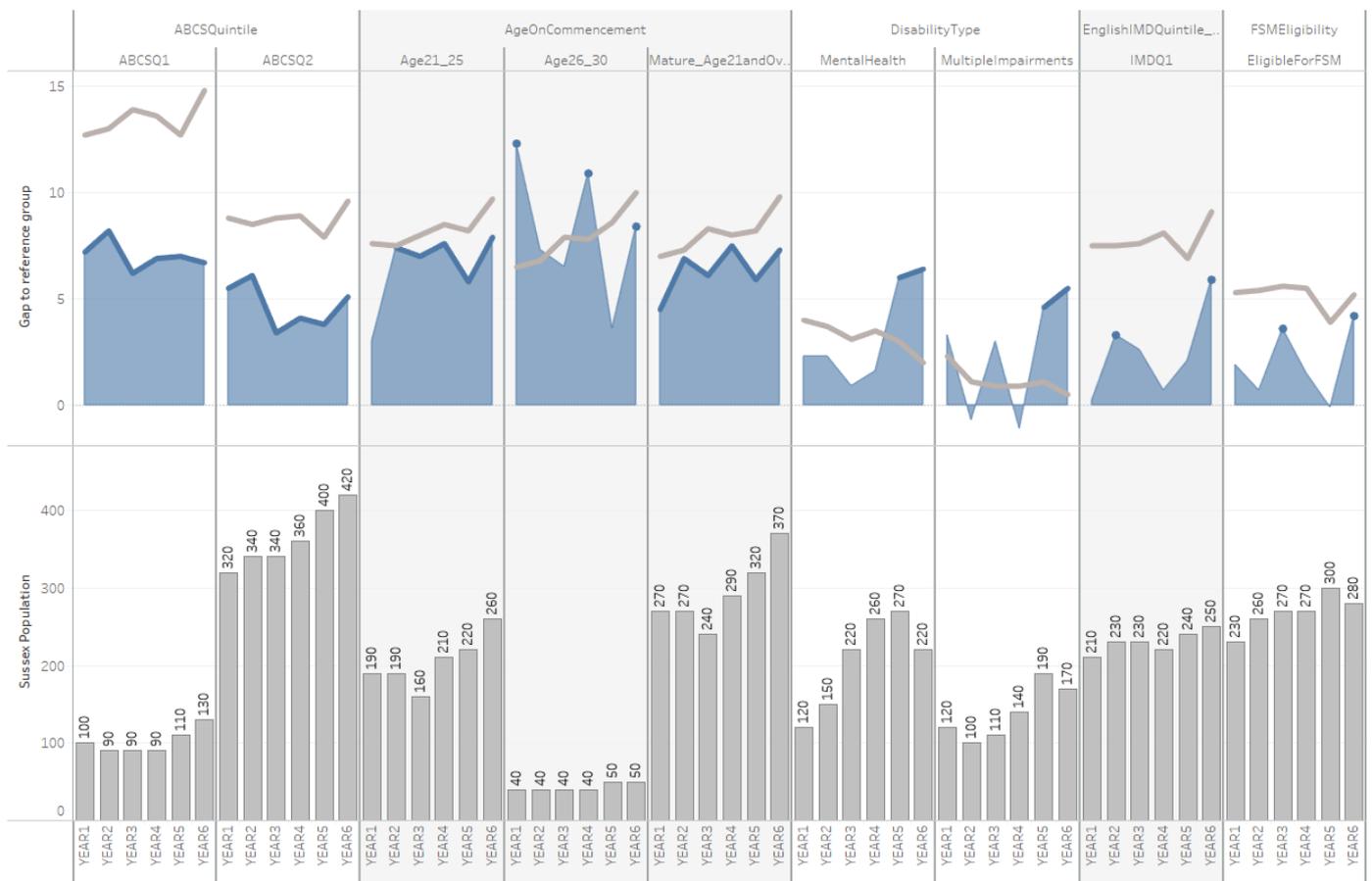
Figure 7 Notable gaps in continuation. Sussex outcomes are shown by the blue area graphs with statistically significant gaps highlighted in dark blue, the sector average is shown by the grey line. Populations of the demographic split are shown by the bars.

ABCS

The Association Between Characteristics of Students (ABCS) is a composite measure that calculates the likelihood of each student having a positive outcome in a particular lifecycle stage, based on a range of characteristics. Students are then split into quintiles based on their overall likelihood of a positive outcome with quintile 5 being most likely to succeed and quintile 1 being least likely to succeed.

There have been persistent and significant gaps in continuation rates between students in ABCS quintiles one and two when compared to those in quintile five. In 2020-21 the gaps were 6.7pp for quintile 1 and 5.1pp for quintile 2, both in comparison to quintile 5 (Table 15).

We have identified some gaps relating to our ABCS data, however we have not set specific objectives for these. As ABCS includes a basket of measures we are instead focusing on specific measures to enable more targeted intervention strategies (i.e. for those who have been eligible for FSM). Because of the ABCS methodology, meeting objectives for these specific measures will then also support a reduction of any ABCS gaps.

ABCS Quintile	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
ABCSQ1	89.9	88.2	90.1	90.2	88.8	88.6
ABCSQ2	91.5	90.3	92.9	93	91.9	90.2
Ref: ABCSQ5	97.1	96.4	96.3	97.1	95.7	95.3
GAP – Q5 vs Q1	7.2	8.2	6.2	6.9	6.9	6.7
GAP – Q5 vs Q2	5.6	6.1	3.4	4.1	3.8	5.1

Table 15 Continuation rates and gaps to reference group by ABCS quintiles for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the continuation of students from ABCS quintiles 1 and 2

Age

The continuation gap between young students (under 21) and mature students (21 and over) has been significant in each of the six years in our time series. The gap has consistently been around 6-7pp (Table 16) which is around 1-2pp below the sector average.

Age	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
21-25	92.6	88.5	88.7	89	89.6	87.1
26-30	83.3	88.6	89.2	85.7	91.8	86.5
Mature (21 and over)	91.1	89.1	89.6	89.1	89.5	87.7
Ref: Young (under 21)	95.6	95.9	95.7	96.6	95.4	95
GAP - Young vs 21-25	3	7.4	7	7.6	5.8	7.9
GAP - Young vs 26-30	12.3	7.3	6.5	10.9	3.6	8.5
GAP - Young vs Mature	4.5	6.8	6.1	7.5	5.9	7.3

Table 16 Continuation rates and gaps to reference group by Age for splits where notable gaps were identified

The largest group within the mature grouping at Sussex is the 21-25 age group which forms around two thirds of the mature population. Continuation gaps for the 21-25 age group tend to follow the patterns observed for the mature group as a whole, while the other age groups often have population sizes that are too small for significant gaps to be detected, although gaps can be seen for the 26-30 age group in three of the last six years. When data are combined over the last four years, we observe that continuation rates are lower for all age groups when compared to under 21s and there is not large variation between the different mature groups (Table 17). Only the 31-40 age group has a continuation rate that is markedly higher than the rate for mature students as a whole. For this reason, we have chosen to focus on the mature group as a whole rather than any specific narrower age group.

Age	Four-year aggregate	
	Continuation	Population
21-25	88.5	850
26-30	88.4	170
31-40	92.4	130
41-50	88.2	30
Mature (21 and over)	88.9	1210
Ref: Young (under 21)	95.7	11230

Table 17 Four-year aggregates of continuation rates and population sizes by age group

Our intersectional analysis found that the continuation gap for mature students who have declared a disability is consistently wider than for those mature students who have not declared any disability (Figure 8, below).
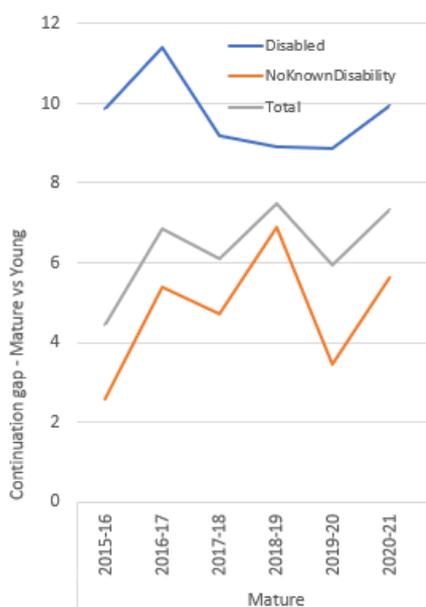
Figure 8 Continuation gap for mature students compared to young students, split by disability status

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As we have identified significant gaps for mature students in both the continuation and completion lifecycle stages we have decided to monitor this activity through a single objective within the completion lifecycle stage. We believe that the activities that aim to address the mature completion gap will also positively affect the mature student continuation gap. This assumption will be monitored through the duration of the APP.

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the continuation of mature students.

Disability

Whilst we have identified that there is little or no gap in attainment outcomes for students with a declared disability, significant gaps have emerged over the two most recent years in continuation rates for students with a declared mental health condition and multiple disabilities or impairments when compared to those with no known disability (Figure 7). The gap is currently 6.4pp for students with mental health conditions and 5.5pp for students with multiple disabilities or impairments (Table 18). These gaps are at least twice as large as for the sector as a whole. Provisional data from 2021-22 entrants show that the gap for students reporting mental health conditions has continued to grow and is now likely to be 7.7pp, while the gap for multiple disabilities or impairments has reduced slightly to 5.1pp.

Disability Type	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Mental Health	93.3	93.2	94.5	94.3	89.9	88.6
Multiple Impairments	92.2	96.2	92.4	97.1	91.4	89.5
Ref: No known disability	95.6	95.5	95.4	95.9	95.9	95
GAP - No disability vs MH	2.3	2.3	0.9	1.6	6	6.4
GAP - No disability vs Multiple	3.4	-0.7	3	-1.2	4.5	5.5

Table 18 Continuation rates and gaps to reference group by Disability Type for splits where notable gaps were identified

Analysis of internal student data found that students in the multiple impairments category very often list a mental health condition as one of their impairments. Over the last five years 72% of students who have multiple disabilities or impairments have listed a mental health condition as one of those disabilities or impairments. We also observed the very similar patterns in continuation rates between these two groups (students with a declared mental health condition and students with declared multiple impairments). Given this we have identified an objective relating to continuation rates for students declaring a mental health condition, and will monitor the continuation rates for students with declared multiple impairments.

Assessment: An objective has been set for the continuation rate of students with a declared mental health condition, linked to Risk S5.

IMD

Although the continuation gap between students from IMD Q5 and IMD Q1 was 6pp in 2020-21, we have not seen a consistent pattern in this gap to establish that there is a risk in this area. As shown in Table 19, in four of the previous five years the gap was much closer to equality and did not meet our threshold for significance.

IMD Quintile	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
IMDQ1	95.6	92.6	93.5	94.9	93.6	89.6
Ref: IMDQ5	95.8	95.9	96.2	95.7	95.7	95.6
GAP - Q5 vs Q1	0.2	3.3	2.7	0.8	2.1	6

Table 19 Continuation rates and gaps to reference group by IMD for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the continuation of students from IMD quintile 1, but this will be monitored.

Free School Meals

Although the continuation gap between students who had and had not been eligible for free school meals when at school was 4.2pp in 2020-21, we have not seen a consistent pattern in this gap to

establish that there is a risk in this area. As shown in Table 20, in four of the previous five years the gap was much closer to equality and did not meet our threshold for significance.

FSM Status	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Eligible for FSM	94	95	92.6	95.1	95.7	91.3
Ref: Not eligible for FSM	95.9	95.8	96.2	96.7	95.6	95.5
GAP – Non-FSM vs FSM	1.9	0.8	3.6	1.6	-0.1	4.2

Table 20 Continuation rates and gaps to reference group by FSM for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the continuation of students who had been eligible for free school meals.

Completion

The overall completion rate for the APP population (UK-domiciled, undergraduate students) at Sussex was 93.6% for 2017-18 entrants, which is 6.4pp above the sector as a whole (Table 21). This gap above the sector average has been broadly consistent over the last five years, and although Sussex has seen a decline in completion of around 1pp over the time period, the sector has seen a similar decline. This provides a general context for Sussex's overall completion rates, which are typically high.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Sussex	94.8	94.9	94.6	93	93.7	93.6
Sector	88.6	88.6	87.9	87.7	87.6	87.2
Difference to sector	6.2	6.3	6.7	5.3	6.1	6.4

Table 21 Completion rates for Sussex and the sector

Our initial analysis of gaps across lifecycle stages identified completion gaps in nine demographic splits across five demographic split types. These are shown along with population sizes in Figure 9, below.
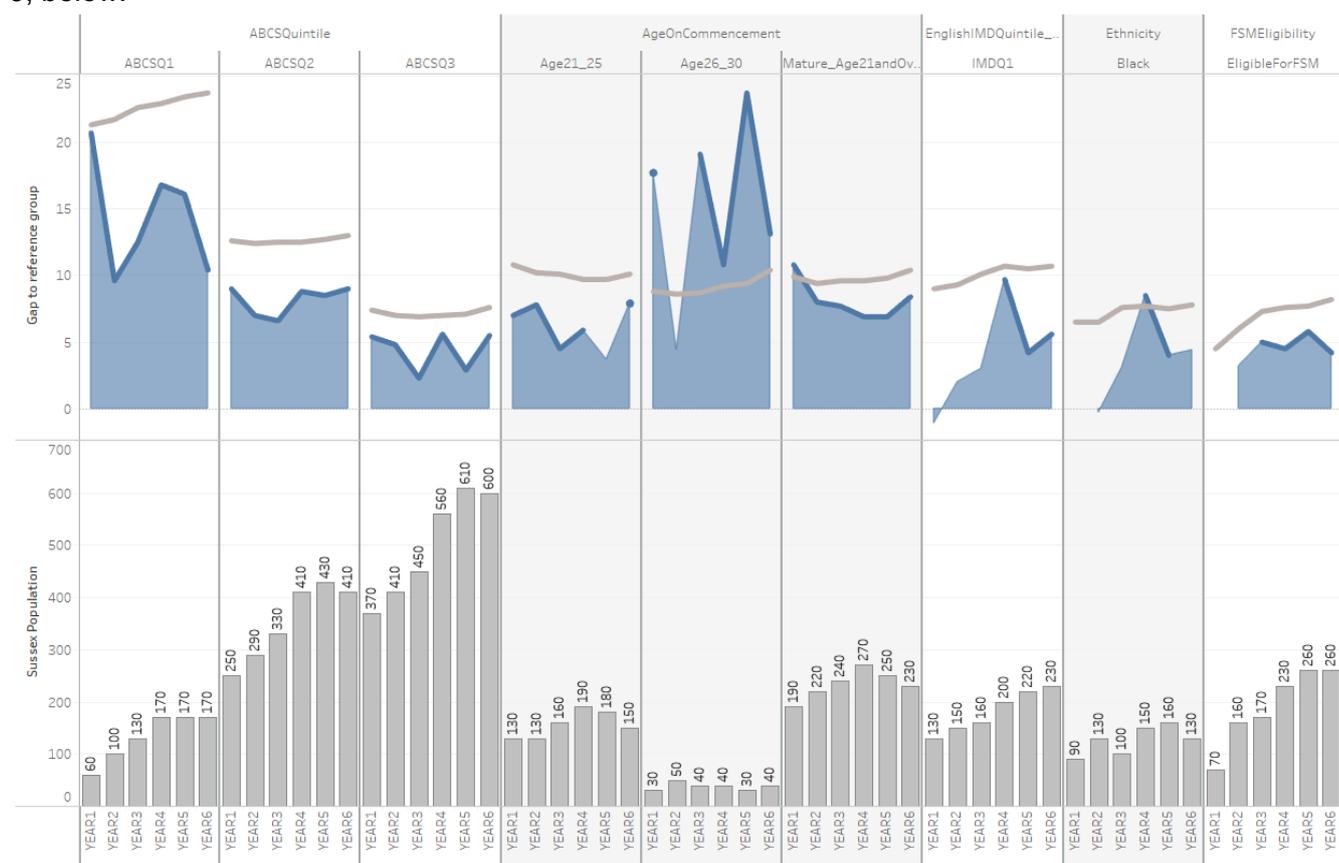
Figure 9 Notable gaps in completion. Sussex outcomes are shown by the blue area graphs with statistically significant gaps highlighted in dark blue, the sector average is shown by the grey line. Populations of the demographic split are shown by the bars.

ABCS

There have been persistent and significant gaps in completion rates between students in ABCS quintiles 1 and 2, and to a lesser extent quintile 3, when compared to those in quintile 5. In 2017-18 the completion gap for students from ABCS quintile 1 was 10.4pp and for ABCS quintile 2 it was 9pp (Table 22).

Although there are significant gaps, we have not set a specific target around this measure as we are focusing on more targeted intervention strategies using individual measures. Meeting those targets would also support a reduction of the ABCS gap.

ABCS Quintile	2012-	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
ABCSQ1	77	87.9	84.2	80.1	80.8	86.7
ABCSQ2	88.8	90.4	90.1	88.1	88.4	88.1
ABCSQ3	92.4	92.7	94.4	91.3	94.1	91.6
Ref: ABCSQ5	97.7	97.5	96.7	96.9	96.9	97.1
GAP - Q1 vs Q5	20.7	9.6	12.5	16.8	16.1	10.4
GAP - Q2 vs Q5	8.9	7.1	6.6	8.8	8.5	9
GAP - Q3 vs Q5	5.3	4.8	2.3	5.6	2.8	5.5

Table 22 Completion rates and gaps to reference group by ABCS for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the continuation of ABCS quintiles 1, 2 and 3

Age

The completion gap between young students (under 21) and mature students (21 and over) has been significant in each of the six years in this time series. The gap has consistently been around 7-10pp which is around 2-3pp below the sector average. The gap at Sussex had been steadily closing, moving from 10.7pp in 2012-13 to 6.9pp in 2016-17, however the latest data in 2017-18 have shown a widening of the gap again, up to 8.4pp (Table 23).

Age	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Age21_25	88.8	87.9	91	87.7	90.6	86.3
Age26_30	78.1	91.3	76.3	82.9	70.6	81.1
Mature_Age21andOver	85.1	87.7	87.7	86.8	87.4	85.8
Ref: Young_Under21	95.8	95.7	95.4	93.6	94.3	94.2
GAP - Young vs 21_25	7	7.8	4.4	5.9	3.7	7.9
GAP - Young vs 26_30	17.7	4.4	19.1	10.7	23.7	13.1
GAP - Young vs Mature	10.7	8	7.7	6.8	6.9	8.4

Table 23 Completion rates and gaps to reference group by Age for splits where notable gaps were identified

The largest group within the mature student population at Sussex is the 21-25 age group which forms around two thirds of the mature population. Although there is a significant completion gap for the mature group as a whole, and therefore for the 21-25 age group which makes up the majority of the category, there does appear to be a consistently larger gap for the 26-30 age group. This was a gap of 13.1pp for the 2017-18 cohort but has been as high as 23.7pp for the 2016-17 cohort. Provisional data for 2018-19 entrants show that the mature completion gap has grown again to 9.9pp.

As we have identified significant gaps for mature students in both the continuation and completion lifecycle stages we have decided to address this through a specific objective for completion. Continuation rates will be monitored to ensure that our approach is having positive impacts.

Assessment: An objective has been set for the completion rate of mature students, linked to Risk S6.

IMD

There have been significant gaps in completion rates between students in IMD quintile 1 when compared to quintile 5 for the last three years. In the latest year the gap was 5.6pp but has been as high as 9.8pp for the 2015-16 cohort (Table 24). This gap is lower than that observed in the

sector as a whole, where it has consistently been around 10pp. Provisional data for 2018-19 entrants show that the gap has reduced to 2.3pp in the latest year.

IMD Quintile	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
IMDQ1	96	92.6	92	86.1	90	89.8
Ref: IMDQ5	94.9	94.6	95	95.9	94.2	95.4
GAP - Q5 vs Q1	-1.1	2	3	9.8	4.2	5.6

Table 24 Completion rates and gaps to reference group by IMD for splits where notable gaps were identified

We have observed a strong intersectional effect of male students from IMD quintile 1 over the last three years, which we will be actively monitoring.

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the completion of students from IMD quintile 1.

Ethnicity

The completion gap between black students and white students was 4.4pp for 2017-18 entrants (Table 25). This gap did not meet our threshold for a significant gap but did in 2016-17 and 2015-16. Provisional data for 2018-19 entrants show that the gap has reduced to 0.7pp in the latest year. The relatively small size of this gap and the lack of consistency across the time period mean that we have decided not to set an objective in this area.

Ethnicity	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Black		95.3	92.1	85.7	90.2	89.3
Ref: White	94.8	94.9	95.2	94.2	94.3	93.7
GAP - White vs Black		-0.4	3.1	8.5	4.1	4.4

Table 25 Completion rates and gaps to reference group by Ethnicity for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the completion of black students.

Free School Meals

The completion gap between students who had and had not been eligible for Free Schools Meals was 4.3pp for 2017-18 entrants (Table 26). This gap has been significant in each of the last four years. Provisional data for 2018-19 entrants show that the gap has reduced to 0.4pp in the latest year. Given relatively small size of this gap and recent reduction we have decided not to set an objective in this area.

FSM Status	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Eligible for FSM		93	90.9	89.5	88.7	90.4
Ref: Not eligible for FSM	97.6	96.3	95.9	94	94.5	94.7
GAP – non-FSM vs FSM		3.3	5	4.5	5.8	4.3

Table 26 Completion rates and gaps to reference group by those eligible for free school meals for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the completion of students who had been eligible for free school meals.

Attainment

Our initial analysis of gaps across lifecycle stages identified awarding gaps in eleven demographic splits across five demographic split types. These are shown along with population sizes in Figure 10, below.
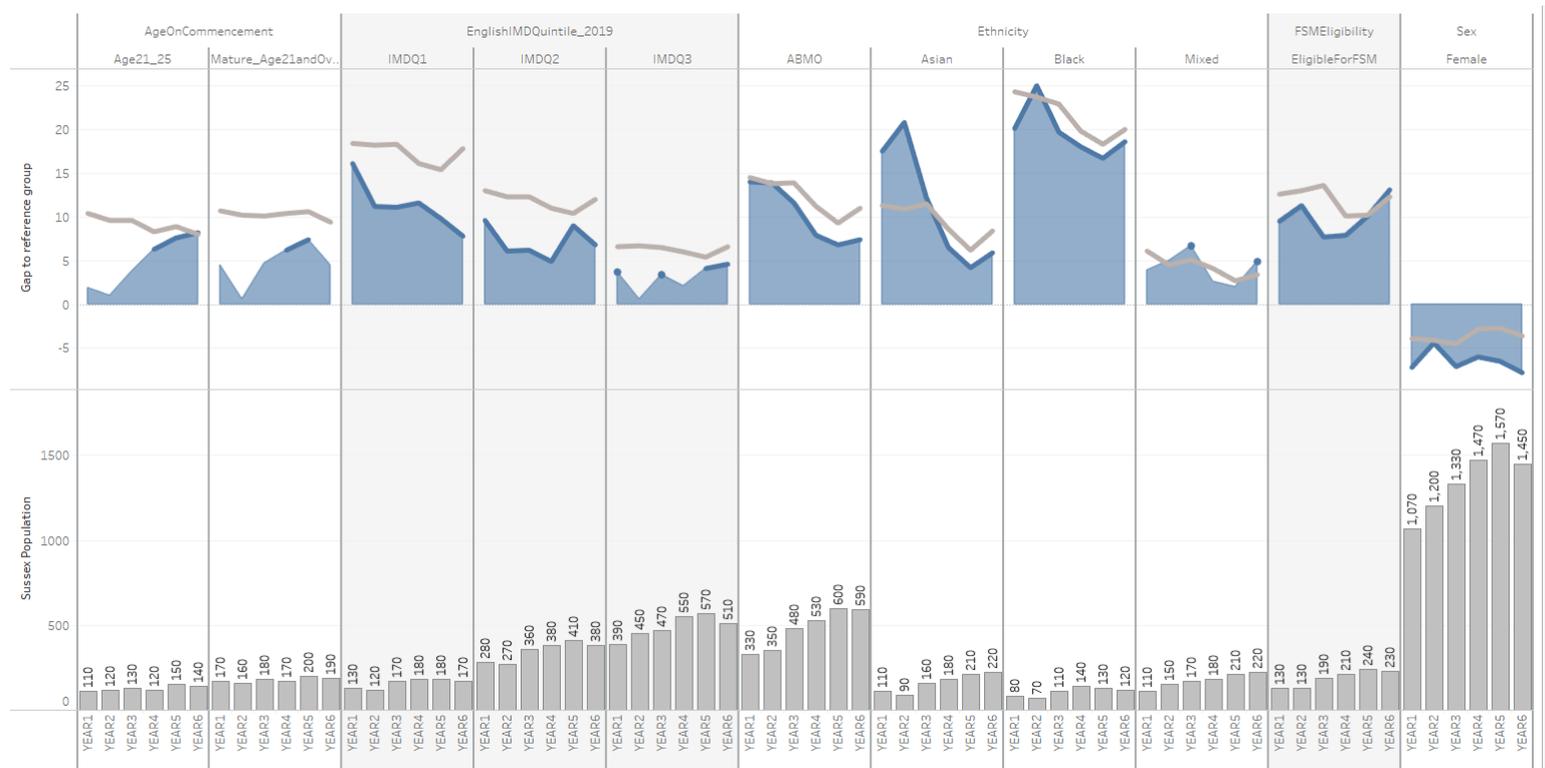
Figure 10 Notable gaps in attainment. Sussex outcomes are shown by the blue area graphs with statistically significant gaps highlighted in dark blue, the sector average is shown by the grey line. Populations of the demographic split are shown by the bars.

Age

Young students have tended to have higher attainment rates than mature students at Sussex and in the sector as a whole (Figure 10). The gap between these groups was 4.5pp in 2021-22 (Table 27), showing a reduction in the gap for preceding years. Provisional data for 2021-22 graduates show that the gap has further reduced and is now a negative (-3.1pp) in the latest year. There has not been a consistent pattern in this gap to establish that there is currently a risk in this area.

Age	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Age21_25	84.8	84.3	81.9	84.9	83.6	80.1
Mature_Age21andOver	82.1	84.7	81	84.9	83.7	83.9
Ref: Young_Under21	86.7	85.3	85.7	91.1	91.1	88.4
GAP - Young vs 21_25	1.9	1	3.8	6.2	7.5	8.3
GAP - Young vs Mature	4.6	0.6	4.7	6.2	7.4	4.5

Table 27 Attainment rates and gaps to reference group by Age for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the attainment of mature students.

IMD

Significant awarding gaps were identified for IMD quintiles 1, 2 and to a lesser extent, 3 when compared to IMD quintile 5. In 2021-22 the attainment gap was 7.8pp for Q1, 6.8pp for Q2 and 4.5 for Q2 (Table 28). The gap for IMD Q1 has generally been closing over this time period from a high of 16.1pp in 2016-17.

IMD Quintile	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
IMDQ1	74.4	75.9	77.1	81.4	84.5	83.2
IMDQ2	80.9	80.9	81.9	88	85.3	84.2
IMDQ3	86.8	86.4	84.8	90.9	90.2	86.5
Ref: IMDQ5	90.5	87	88.1	92.9	94.3	91
GAP - Q5 vs Q1	16.1	11.1	11	11.5	9.8	7.8
GAP - Q5 vs Q2	9.6	6.1	6.2	4.9	9	6.8
GAP - Q5 vs Q3	3.7	0.6	3.3	2	4.1	4.5

Table 28 Attainment rates and gaps to reference group by IMD for splits where notable gaps were identified

Consideration was given to the fact that we also observe an awarding gap for students who were eligible for free school meals. Both these measures attempt to identify students by socioeconomic status and, where possible, we focused on using an individualised, rather than area-based, measure. For this reason we have chosen to not set objectives for attainment of IMD groups.

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the attainment rate of students from IMD quintiles 1, 2 and 3.

Ethnicity

There have been significant awarding gaps for both black and Asian students when compared to white students in all six years of our time series. Students from a mixed ethnicity background have tended to have smaller awarding gaps but they are nevertheless present in some years. Both the black and Asian awarding gaps have narrowed considerably in during the time series with the black awarding gap dropping from a high of 24.9pp in 2017-18 to 16.6pp in 2020-21 and the Asian awarding gap dropping from 20.8pp in 2017-18 to 4.2pp in 2020-21 (Table 29). However, both of these awarding gaps increased in 2021-22.

Ethnicity	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Asian	71.3	67	75.6	85.8	87.8	84.2
Black	68.7	62.9	68.2	74.3	75.4	71.6
Mixed	84.9	82.9	81.2	89.7	90	85.2
Ref: White	88.8	87.8	87.9	92.3	92	90.1
GAP - White vs Asian	17.5	20.8	12.3	6.5	4.2	5.9
GAP - White vs Black	20.1	24.9	19.7	18	16.6	18.5
GAP - White vs Mixed	3.9	4.9	6.7	2.6	2	4.9

Table 29 Attainment rates and gaps to reference group by Ethnicity for splits where notable gaps were identified

Provisional data for 2022-23 graduates also show that awarding gaps have again widened for each of these ethnic groups when compared to white students. For Asian graduates in 2022-23 the gap is 11.7pp, for black students it is 25.8pp and for students of mixed ethnicity it is 12.5pp.

The awarding gap has tended to be larger for black males than black females (Figure 11) and in recent years has been larger for those who have been eligible for free school meals (Figure 12). These intersections will be taken into account within the design and delivery of our intervention strategies and whole provider approach, as well as being actively monitored.
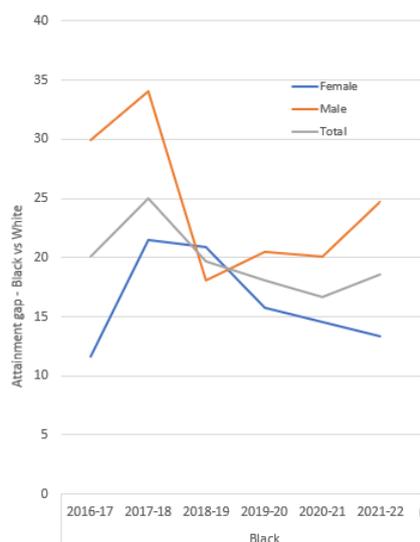
Figure 11 Awarding gap for black students compared to white students, split by sex
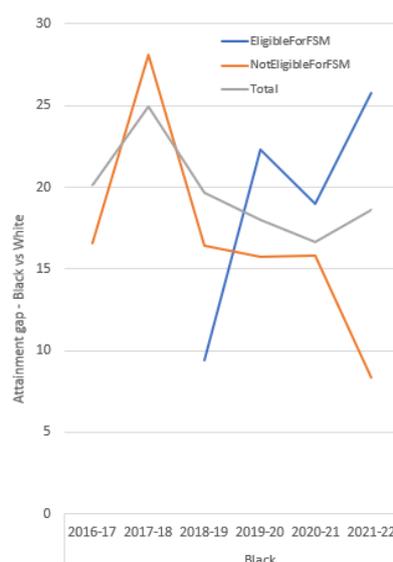
Figure 12 Awarding gap for black students compared to white students, split by FSM status

50

Assessment: Objectives have been set for the attainment rate of Asian, black and mixed ethnicity students, linked to Risk S8.

Free School Meals

The awarding gap for students who have been eligible for free school meals compared to those who have not was 13.1pp in 2021-22 (Table 30). This gap has increased in each of the last four years and is now larger than the gap for the sector as a whole.

FSM Status	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Eligible for FSM	78.4	75.4	78.9	84	82.3	76.5
Ref: Not eligible for FSM	87.9	86.6	86.6	91.9	92.4	89.6
GAP – Non-FSM vs FSM	9.5	11.2	7.7	7.9	10.1	13.1

Table 30 Attainment rates and gaps to reference group by those who have been eligible for FSM for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: An objective has been set for the attainment rate of students who have been eligible for free school meals, linked to Risk S7.

Sex

Male students have had significantly lower attainment rates than female students in every year of this time series. This gap is present in the sector as a whole but is consistently larger at Sussex where the difference was 7.8pp in 2021-22 (Table 31) compared to 3.6pp in the sector.

Sex	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Female	89.4	87	88.5	93.3	93.5	91.5
Ref: Male	82.3	82.7	81.4	87.4	87	83.7
GAP – Male vs	-7.1	-4.3	-7.1	-5.9	-6.5	-7.8

Table 31 Attainment rates and gaps to reference group by Sex for splits where notable gaps were identified

Intersections have been identified with both age and ethnicity. In recent years the gap between male and female mature students has been considerably larger than the gap between male and female students as a whole. The awarding gap between black males and females has also tended to be larger than the male to female awarding gap generally. In the delivery of our intervention strategies related to attainment, and relevant activities within our whole provider approach (e.g. academic support), this disparity will be taken into account. Similarly, additional research will be undertaken to understand the causes behind this gap and it will be actively monitored.

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the attainment of male students.

Progression

The overall progression rate for the APP population (UK-domiciled undergraduate students) at Sussex was 73.7% for 2020-21 graduates, which was 0.5pp below the sector as a whole (Table 32). This rate increased by 3.5pp in 2020-21, which was a greater increase than the sector as a whole, where progression rates improved by 1.9pp. This provides a general context for Sussex's overall progression rates.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Sussex	72.5	69.7	70.2	73.7
Sector	73.3	70.7	72.3	74.2
Difference to sector	-0.8	-1	-2.1	-0.5

Table 32 Progression rates for Sussex and the sector

The initial analysis of gaps across lifecycle stages identified progression gaps in five demographic splits across four demographic split types. These are shown along with population sizes in Figure 13.
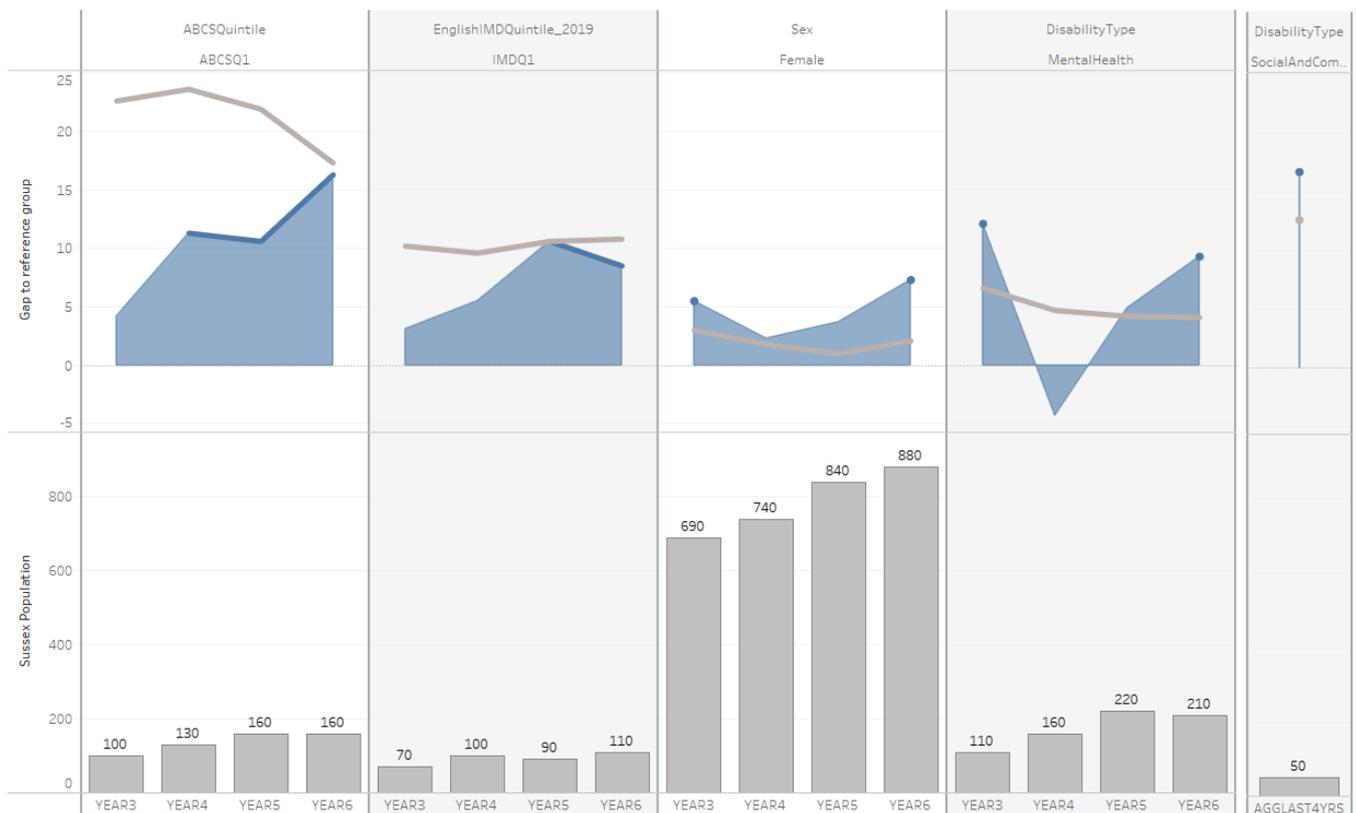
Figure 13 Notable gaps in progression. Sussex outcomes are shown by the blue area graphs with statistically significant gaps highlighted in dark blue, the sector average is shown by the grey line. Populations of the demographic split are shown by the bars.

ABCS

There are significant gaps in progression rates between students in ABCS quintile 1 when compared to students in ABCS quintile 5. This gap has increased substantially in 2020-21, growing by 5.5pp to 16.2pp (Table 33).

ABCS Quintile	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
ABCSQ1	72.7	64.6	59.1	63.4
Ref: ABCSQ5	76.9	75.9	69.8	79.6
GAP – Q5 vs Q1	4.2	11.3	10.7	16.2

Table 33 Progression rates and gaps to reference group by ABCS for splits where notable gaps were identified

Although there are significant gaps, we have not set a specific objective for this. Instead, we are focusing on more targeted intervention strategies (e.g. IMD Q1), as we believe meeting these targets would also support the reduction of the ABCS gap, given the nature of this measure.

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the progression of students from ABCS quintile 1.

IMD

There have been significant gaps in progression rates between students from IMD quintile 1 and quintile 5 in two of the last four years. This gap was 8.4pp in 2020-21 and 10.6pp in 2019-20 (Table 34). In these two years the gap has been roughly the same as the gap seen in the sector as a whole. As such, we are prioritising IMD Q1 as a target group for our new APP interventions. Provisional data from the 2021-22 Graduate Outcomes Survey show that the gap in progression rates between IMD Q1 and Q5 remains high at 10.6pp in the latest year.

IMD Quintile	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
IMDQ1	73.2	67.8	61.1	66.8
Ref: IMDQ5	76.3	73.2	71.7	75.2
GAP – Q5 vs Q1	3.1	5.4	10.6	8.4

Table 34 Progression rates and gaps to reference group by IMD for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: An objective has been set for the progression rate of students from IMD quintile 1, linked to Risk P10.

Sex

Male graduates have had better progression outcomes than female graduates in all of the last four years, including a gap in the most recent year of data of 7.3pp (Table 35). However, we have not seen a consistent pattern in this gap to establish that there is a risk in this area. It is an area that will be actively monitored to identify whether a significant and consistent risk emerges.

Sex	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Female	70.3	68.6	68.6	70.5
Ref: Male	75.8	70.9	72.3	77.8
GAP – Male vs Female	5.5	2.3	3.7	7.3

Table 35 Progression rates and gaps to reference group by Sex for splits where notable gaps were identified

Assessment: No specific objective has been set for the progression of female students.

Disability Type

We have observed significant progression gaps between students with mental health conditions and those without any known disability in three of the last four years (Table 36). This gap has often been larger than that observed in the sector as a whole. Sussex has a high proportion of students with a declared mental health condition and, based on pre-university populations, we expect this number to grow. We are prioritising students reporting a mental health condition as an objective for our new APP interventions.

Disability Type	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	4-year aggregate
Mental health	61.5	73.3	65.7	65.3	66.6
Ref: No known disability	73.7	68.9	70.7	74.7	72
GAP - No Disability vs MH	12.2	-4.4	5	9.4	5.4

Table 36 Progression rates and gaps to reference group by Disability Type for splits where notable gaps were identified

There are small populations of graduates in the Social and Communication Impairment category, however we expect this number to increase and although our sample size is currently small, data suggest that there may be a gap for these students. As such, we will be actively monitoring this group and working to better understand the experiences of students with a social or communication impairment.

Assessment: An objective has been set for the progression rate of students with a mental health condition, linked to Risk P9.

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

Theoretical background

We have used the NERUPI (Network for Evaluating & Researching University Participation Interventions) evaluation framework[10] as the theoretical framework for the development of enhanced theories of change and evaluation plans for our interventions and intervention strategies.

The NERUPI framework integrates theory and practice to inform the design, delivery, and evaluation of widening participation interventions, to maximise, capture and demonstrate their impact. The framework provides a conceptual structure for designing interventions with clear aims and objectives to meet specific purposes. This allows the gathering of meaningful data that enable impact to be assessed in terms of the goals of the interventions.

The framework has five overarching aims:
- Develop students' knowledge and awareness of the benefits of higher education (KNOW)
- Develop students' capacity to navigate Higher Education sector and make informed choices (CHOOSE)
- Develop students' confidence and resilience to negotiate the challenges of university life (BECOME)
- Develop students' study skills and capacity for academic attainment (PRACTISE)
- Develop students' understanding by contextualising subject knowledge (UNDERSTAND

Each of these aims has a range of objectives that are designed progressively for different levels of study, from Key Stage 1-4, A-Level or equivalent Level 3 study, and then FHEQ Levels 4-6. This enables us to use one progressive framework across our full APP Programme with our interventions working from Key Stage 2 to FHEQ Level 6.

Alongside using the NERUPI Framework we also use the TASO Mapping Outcomes and Activities Tool (MOAT) across pre-entry, attainment-raising, and post-entry activities.

Our Research & Evaluation department conduct evidence and literature reviews to ensure that programme design is research informed. As emerging evidence is published during the course of this Plan, we will update Theories of Change accordingly. If any significant changes to delivery or evaluation are required, we will apply for a Variation Agreement for our Access and Participation Plan.

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[10] https://www.nerupi.co.uk/the-theory/framework

Intervention Strategy 1: Access (Free School Meals)

Situation	There is a gap in HE progression between students who have been eligible for Free School Meals and students who have not been eligible for Free School Meals across our local region and within Sussex in particular.
Aims	To increase the proportion of students from our local region (East Sussex, West Sussex, and Brighton and Hove) who have been eligible for FSM progressing to HE. To increase the proportion of students enrolling at the University of Sussex who have been eligible for FSM.

Legend

→ Causal path

- Key stage 2
- Key stage 3
- Key stage 5
- Attainment focused activities (Key stage 4)
- Multi-stage outcomes

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Mid-term outcomes	Long-term Impact

Inputs
- Time and Skills of Widening Participation Team
- Time and Skills of Academic & PS staff
- Relationship with Schools & Colleges
- Funding
- Ambassadors
- Third party providers

Activities
- KS2 primary transition
- KS3 programme
- KS5 programme
- Access Buddy transition programme
- KS4 Attainment programme
- GCSE Resit support programme

Outputs
- Two years of activity (Y5 & Y6). Includes skills sessions and transition event at local secondary school
- Multiple interventions across partner schools. Interventions include IAG assemblies, campus visits, literacy support, teacher CPD
- Multiple interventions across partner institutions. Interventions include careers workshops, access to HE IAG, residential summer school
- Community for contextual offer holders plus wraparound support
- Programme of attainment support over three-year period (Y9, 10, 11)
- Students receive tutoring sessions

Short-term outcomes
- Students who have been eligible for FSM will have positive learning experiences
- Students who have been eligible for FSM will be introduced to the idea of higher education
- Increased knowledge of course choice available at HE
- Increased knowledge of future options
- Raised interest in studying subject at HE
- Students who have been eligible for FSM have increased knowledge about HE
- Students will have increased subject knowledge (Maths/English)

Mid-term outcomes
- Students who have been eligible for FSM have a greater understanding of metacognitive skills and how it helps learning
- Students who have been eligible for FSM have increased engagement and confidence in learning.
- Students who have been eligible for FSM will experience a positive introduction to higher education and a campus HEI
- Students who have been eligible for FSM are able to imagine themselves as a future university student
- Increased confidence in making informed decisions about HE
- Increased capacity to make informed decision about their future
- Students have an increased sense of social self-efficacy
- Students have an increased sense of belonging to Higher Education
- Increased confidence to succeed at HE
- Increased intention to attend HE
- Increased intention to attend Sussex
- Increased metacognitive strategies
- Increased critical engagement with information
- Students will have increased cognitive study strategies
- Students will have increased academic self-efficacy
- Students will have increased confidence to successfully apply to Higher Education

Long-term Impact
- Students who have been eligible for FSM feel more prepared for the transition into KS3
- Increased progression to HE from students who have been eligible for FSM
- Increased progression to Sussex from students who have been eligible for FSM
- Increased Key Stage 4 attainment for students who have been eligible for FSM

Explanation
Our Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 5 work includes various subject enrichment activities, Information, Advice, and Guidance, parents' events, teacher continued professional development (CPD) and campus visits. We work with a number of schools and colleges and deliver flexible provision based on the local needs of our partner schools. These activities provide scaffolding for our more targeted interventions.

Evidence
There is a growing body of evidence across the sector to support the belief that pre-access interventions are most effective when delivered as a multi-intervention approach (CFE Research, 2023; TASO, 2023a). TASO cautions that the evidence base focuses on changing attitudes/ aspirations rather than focusing on actual participation in higher education. They also find that there is lack of causal evidence about the effectiveness of aspiration raising interventions (TASO, n.d. b). Our longitudinal research and evaluation strategy aims to gather evidence that will contribute to the sector's understanding of multi-intervention approaches.

We are focusing our delivery on ten partner schools to deliver a multi-intervention sustained intervention strategy for learners in pre-16 education. Our post-16 work focuses on key partner institutions, as well as secondary tier partners, who we work with somewhat less intensively. Analysis from HEAT of Uni Connect data found that each additional contact hour a student received was associated with a 3-6% increase in the likelihood that they would enter HE. Students with 6-12 contact hours were predicted to be over twice as likely to enter HE as students who received less than one contact hour (HEAT, 2023).

Analysis of the national learner survey conducted on behalf of the Uni Connect programme found learners from lower socio-economic groups are at particular risk of not developing an accurate understanding of HE, including the costs of attending and the potential benefits. This is partly because these learners have less access to informal networks and the report makes clear the need for these learners to have access to interventions which benefit pupil knowledge, such as campus visits (CFE Research, 2023).

Key Stage 2
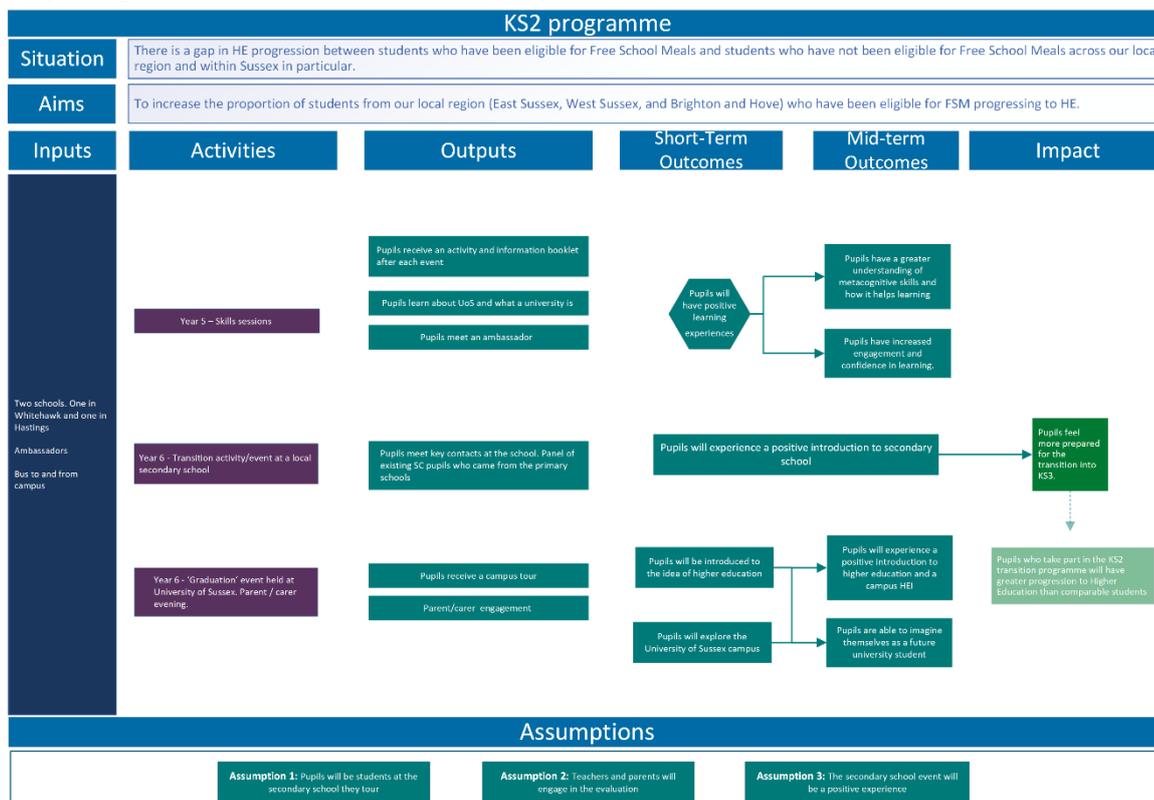
Explanation

The KS2 transition scheme is designed, in the long run to reduce the gap in progression to HE for learners who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) by enabling a smoother transition between primary and secondary school. This transition has been identified as a key point where students from WP backgrounds have struggled and this can have a long-term impact (Bagnall, 2020). The intervention will give students an introduction to higher education and a tailored tour of the new secondary school where they will meet key support staff.

Evidence

As this is a new activity, we do not currently have direct empirical evidence to suggest a tour can have an impact on transition.

Research has shown that environmental differences between primary and secondary school is one of the most problematic aspects of the transition for pupils (Mackenzie et al., 2012). Formal environmental changes, such as the difference in physical school size and moving rooms between classes, are something pupils anticipate before the transition. They can be seen as both an exciting change (Zeedyk, et al., 2003) but also can cause anxiety, for example pupils fear getting lost (Gray et al., 2011). Informal environmental changes, such as changes in social climate, different learning styles, and negotiating new school standards, can take pupils time to realise and cause disruption once they start (Rice et al., 2011). We therefore consider it a reasonable hypothesis to think a programme which gives pupils a chance to experience both formal and informal change, will have an impact on pupils' transition.

Key Stage 4: Attainment Raising
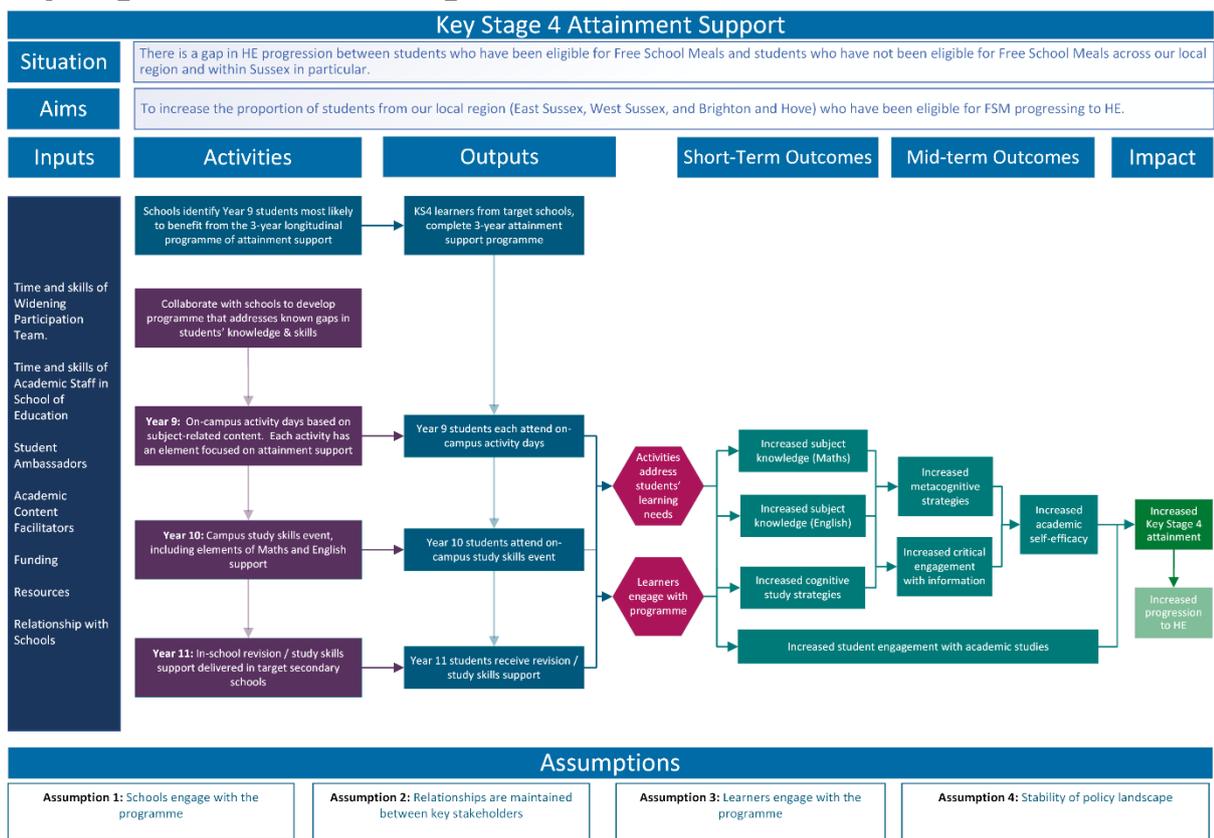
Explanation

Our KS4 attainment programme is a two-year Maths and English intervention working with our ten partner schools across the county. In year 10 there will be a study skills event, which will focus on maths/English support. In the final year, we will provide in-school revision and study skills support. This new programme has developed out of previous attainment programmes we have completed with external providers.

Evidence

Evidence shows that academic attainment is the most important predictor of university progression (Crawford, 2014; Crawford et al., 2016). Yet, while the need for attainment raising interventions has been made clear (OfS, 2022), TASO's rapid evidence review of attainment raising interventions found that there needs to be stronger evaluation of the benefit of attainment raising programmes, particularly causal studies (TASO, 2023c). TASO's review found that there is strong evidence for teaching the national curriculum, but emerging evidence for the effectiveness of study skills interventions. Research has found a positive relationship between soft skills interventions and academic self-efficacy (Schneider and Preckel, 2017).

Key Stage 5: Resit Tutoring
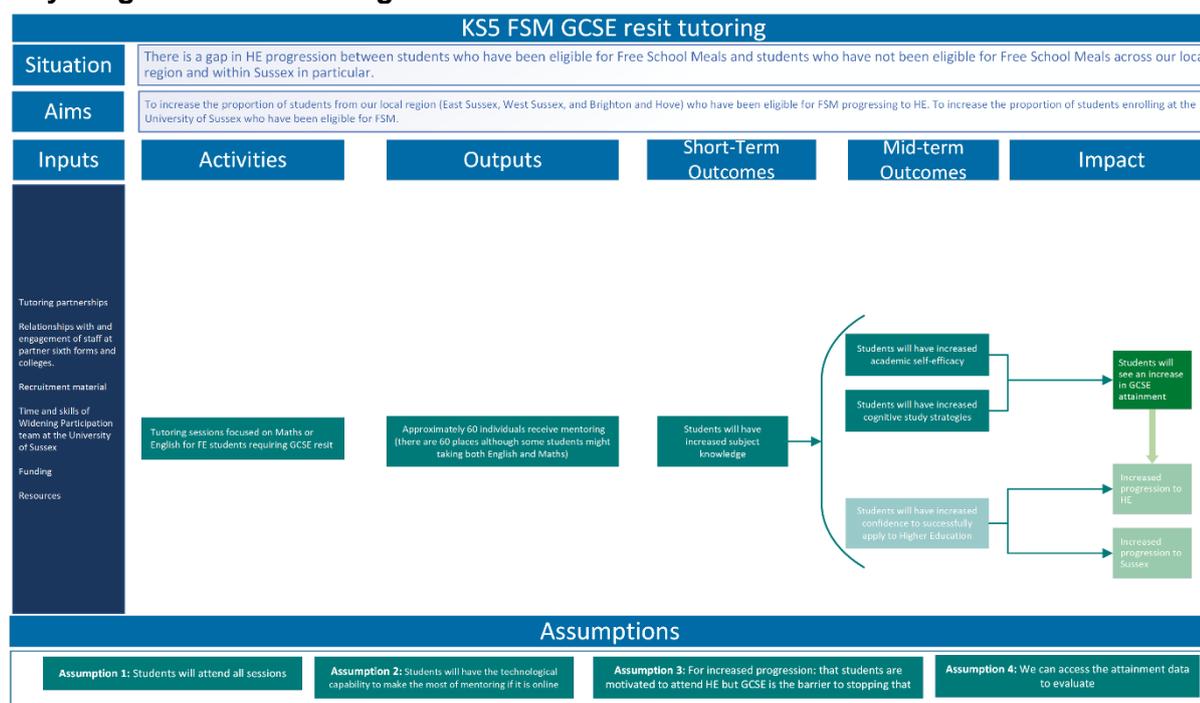
Explanation

This intervention will provide targeted support for those resitting their GCSE in English or Maths (students can sign up to receive both English and Maths if required). This tutoring will be supplied by an external provider.

Evidence

Both TASO's evidence bank (TASO, n.d. a) and the Educational Endowment Foundation's review of 123 studies on one-to-one tutoring (Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.) conclude that tutoring has a positive impact on educational outcomes. Meta-reviews from America have highlighted the attainment raising benefits of tutoring (Nickow et al., 2020). Specifically focusing on post-16 tutoring, Ofsted (2023) conducted a review and found the tutoring which had the best outcomes was aligned with the curriculum and was targeted at specific gaps in pupils' knowledge. This is something the GCSE resit tutoring intervention has factored in.

The delivery method will be either in-person or virtually. For tutoring which is being delivered online the evidence base for the effectiveness is small but expanding. Carlana and La Ferrara (2021) studied the impact of online tutoring in Italy and found it had a substantial impact on students' academic performance. The EEF (2021) have also found some positive benefits to online tutoring but caution that it lacks the benefits of in person tutoring as tutors find it harder to build a relationship with learners. There are also concerns about the impact of technical issues.

In the mid-term we expect tutoring to lead to improved academic self-efficacy and cognitive study strategies. Ofsted's review of post-16 tutoring found all providers saw an improvement in learner confidence, both as "self-confidence and confidence in applying subject knowledge and skills in

class" (Ofsted, 2023, n.p.). Ofsted also reported that increased confidence translates to increased exam readiness (ibid).

Key Stage 5: Summer School
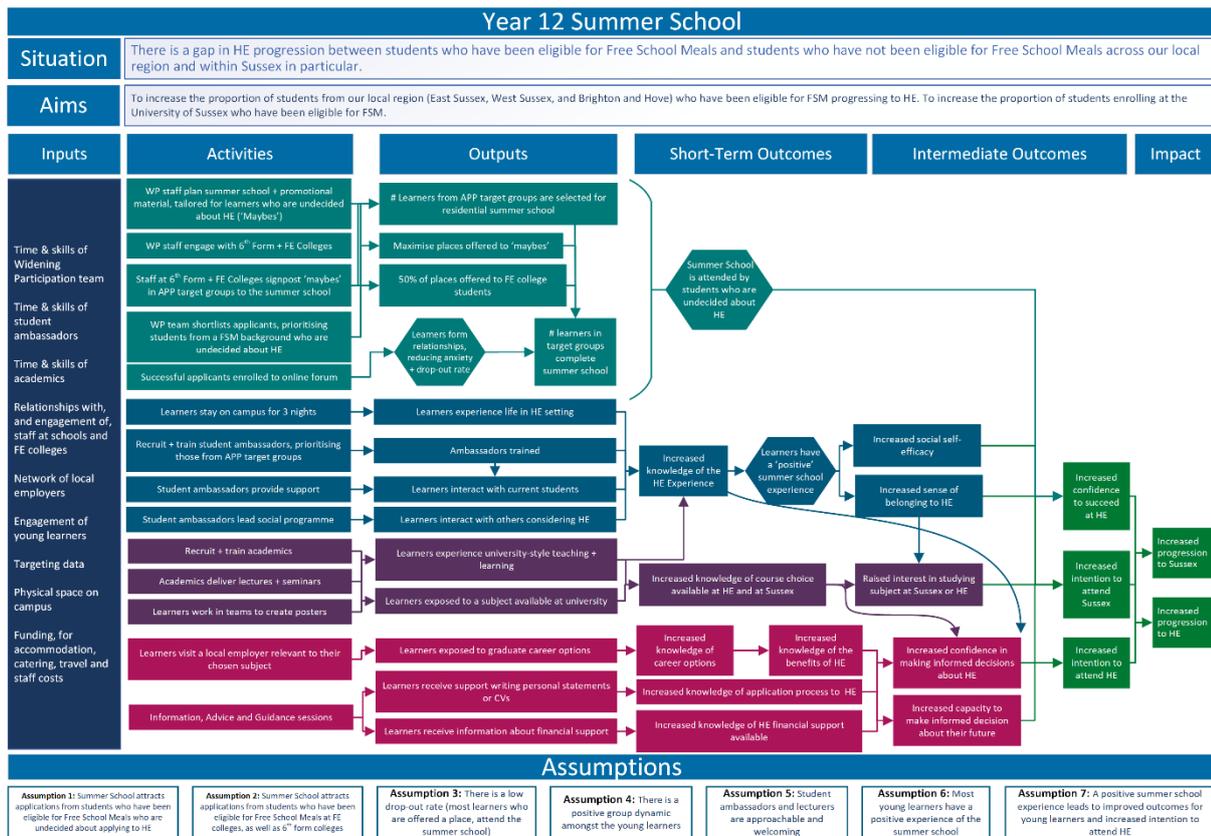
Explanation
Our annual summer-school intervention for Year 12 pupils has been modified to attempt to attract students who are not already likely to go to HE. TASO (2022a; 2023b) found that those who apply for summer schools are largely already interested in progressing to HE. Therefore, it is a good use of resource to target students who are undecided. We consider that, if this is successful, it would be a change mechanism for the rest of the theory of change model. There is currently no evidence to suggest this will be successful, but a trial is taking place in the 2023/24 academic year, and we will conduct information gathering on the success of this with the delivery team.

Evidence
TASO conducted a randomised control trial (RCT) of HE Summer Schools with multiple universities. Their evidence showed that before the summer school, students were concerned they would not fit in, and that university was not for people like them. After the summer school their results showed greater social self-efficacy (TASO, 2023b). The TASO study focused on students who self-reported as likely to go to HE. Given that our summer school intervention aims to target undecided HE students, it is anticipated that this social self-efficacy effect will be an important factor for this group.

Key Stage 5: Access Buddy

Access Buddy Transition

Situation	There is a gap in HE progression between students who have been eligible for Free School Meals and students who have not been eligible for Free School Meals across our local region and within Sussex in particular.
Aims	To increase the proportion of students from our local region (East Sussex, West Sussex, and Brighton and Hove) who have been eligible for FSM progressing to HE. To increase the proportion of students enrolling at the University of Sussex who have been eligible for FSM.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-term Outcomes	Impact

Inputs:
Time & skills of Widening Participation team
Institutional data
PS & Academic staff
Ambassadors

Activities:
- Targeted email sent to all contextual offer holders with details of the programme and an invitation to join
- Contextual offer holders are motivated to engage → Engagement with # number APP target students
- June – Launch event. Expectations setting
- Results day run up - IAG
- Results day phone call with each participant. Check in call and see if they have any support needs
- Students who opt not to go to UoS this is the end of their engagement with programme
- Post results – students who confirm they are coming to University of Sussex are contacted and signposted to transition days run by SEE
- On going supportive relationship with WP team
- Community element. Core part which flows through whole programme

Outputs:
- Students will have a better understanding of support and contacts at University of Sussex
- Students will know and have spoken to University of Sussex staff members and have the contact details of a member of SEE team
- Students will know and have spoken to other University of Sussex students
- Students will know and have spoken to other students who will be registered at the University of Sussex
- Students engage with community element

Short-Term Outcomes:
- Students have increased knowledge of support available in HE
- Students have increased motivation to enrol at the University of Sussex
- Students have increased knowledge about student life in HE

Mid-term Outcomes:
- Students have an increased sense of preparedness for going to the University of Sussex
- Students have an increased sense of belonging to Higher Education
- Students have an increased sense of belonging to the University of Sussex
- Students have an increased sense of social self-efficacy

Impact:
- Students progress to University of Sussex as measured by enrolment data
- Students who took part in Access Buddy transition programme will have increased retention at University of Sussex

Assumptions

Assumption 1: The students have the ability/ hardware to engage with community element	**Assumption 2:** WP team are able to communicate with the students via digital tools the student uses	**Assumption 3:** Buy in and capacity from the wider university support services	**Assumption 4:** Students receive a positive experience with the support services the scheme signposts them to

Explanation

The Access Buddy scheme is designed to support students with contextual offers in their transition journey through to registration. It involves a digital platform where prospective students can interact with each other and with key academic and support staff, designed to help foster a sense of belonging and community before enrolment. Other activities in the intervention include result day phone calls and signposting.

Evidence

We believe this activity will help foster the beginnings of a sense of belonging to the University. The activity will give students the opportunity to interact with each other before enrolment, as well as speak with existing UoS students and staff. Connection is seen as vital in building belonging (Blake, Capper, Jackson, 2022). Thomas (2013) also categorises interpersonal relations as essential for satisfying the need for belonging. She states, "Belonging is characterised by regular contact and the perception that interpersonal relationships have stability, affective concern, and are ongoing" (Thomas, 2013, p.115). She says belonging is achieved from interventions which result in supportive peer relations and meaningful interactions between staff and students. Research from Ireland also shows that fear of social isolation is the highest rated concern for students prior to enrolling (Gibney et al, 2011). This further demonstrates how a transition intervention which aims to reduce social anxiety should produce beneficial impact.

Additional Interventions

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen, and Boater (GTRSB): Primary and Secondary

GTRSB Primary School Project

Situation
At a national level, young people with GTRSB heritage are less likely to progress to higher education than young people who do not have GTRSB heritage.

Aims
(1) To enable primary schools to better support GTRSB learners by celebrating and affirming their cultures and strengthening relationships with families, so that these learners feel an increased sense of belonging at school. (2) To encourage confidence and enjoyment in reading for GTRSB learners in primary school. (3) In the long-term, to contribute to an increase in the number of GTRSB heritage learners from the region transitioning to HE.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Impact

Inputs:
Time & skills of Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT)

Relationships with, and engagement of, staff at Partner Schools

Relationships with, and engagement of, the families of young learners

Time and skills of Widening Participation team at University of Sussex

Relationships with local authorities

Engagement of young learners

Funding

Resources

Activities:
Identify and build relationships with local primary schools where young people who attend have a GTRSB heritage

Sussex WP staff and FFT co-create a framework for the partner schools to implement

1. CPD for school staff
- Provide training for teachers in schools
- Establish a 'school champion' in each school
- Provide practical guidance to schools

2. School Events, including GRT History Month
- Consult with schools to influence the development of school events
- Provide resources including flags, banners, workshop materials

3. Facilitating relationships with families
- Support schools to strengthen parental /carer engagement

4. Reading Activity for GTRSB-heritage Learners
- Provide books that reflect GTRSB cultures
- Peer reading to programme

Outputs:
Partnerships established with # primary schools

School staff have increased understanding of GTRSB cultures

Schools celebrate GRT History month, with input from GTRSB pupils and families

Activities take place in school that celebrate GTRSB cultures

Bespoke communication to parents

Parent and carer forums, including coffee mornings, drop-ins, and/or celebration events

GTRSB learners see their cultures in school-based resources

Peer readers spend up to 10 minutes each day with a younger student, reading

Readers supported by adult once per week

Short-Term Outcomes:
School staff have greater awareness of how to support GTRSB learners

GTRSB-heritage learners see their cultures reflected in school curriculum

Other pupils gain increased understanding of GTRSB cultures + history

Strengthen relations and trust between the school and GTRSB communities

Learners have increased engagement and confidence in reading

Intermediate Outcomes:
School staff affirm and celebrate GTRSB cultures

Students have increased sense of belonging at school

Parents and carers have increased connection with school

Learners have increased engagement and confidence in learning

Impact:
Schools Take the GTRSB Schools' Pledge

Increase in the number of GTRSB-heritage learners from the region transitioning to HE

Assumptions

Assumption 1: Schools engage with the programme

Assumption 2: Relationships are maintained between key stakeholders

Assumption 3: Young learners engage with the programme

Assumption 4: Requirements/ monitoring of the GTRSB Pledge remain in current form

Assumption 5: Stability in policy landscape

GTRSB Secondary School Project

Situation
At a national level, young people with GTRSB heritage are less likely to progress to Higher Education than young people who do not have GTRSB heritage.

Aims
(1) To enable secondary schools to better support their young GTRSB learners, by celebrating and affirming GTRSB culture, and strengthening relationships with families, so that these learners feel an increased sense of belonging at school. (2) To encourage confidence and engagement with learning for GTRSB learners.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Impact

Inputs:
Time & skills of Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT)

Time and skills of Widening Participation (WP) team at University of Sussex

Relationships with, and engagement of, staff at partner Schools

Relationships with, and engagement of, the families of young learners.

Relationships with local authorities

Engagement of young learners

Funding

Resources

Activities:
Identify and build relationships with local secondary schools where young people who attend have a GTRSB heritage

Sussex WP staff and FFT co-create a framework for the partner schools to implement

1. CPD for school staff
- Provide training for teachers in schools
- Establish a 'school champion' in each school
- Provide practical guidance to schools

2. School Events, including GRT History Month
- Consult with schools to influence the development of school events
- Provide resources including flags, banners, workshop materials

3. Facilitating relationships with families
- Support schools to strengthen parental /carer engagement

4. Supporting attainment and providing careers IAG for GTRSB-heritage learners
- FFT deliver a Careers IAG session
- Bespoke support at the request of schools
- FFT deliver a 2 day workshop to GTRSB learners, supporting attainment toward a Royal Society of Public Health Level 2 Qualification

Programme shaped by student voice

Outputs:
Partnerships established with # secondary schools

School staff have increased understanding of GTRSB cultures

Schools celebrate GRT History month, with input from GTRSB learners + families

Activities take place in school that celebrate GTRSB cultures

Bespoke communication to parents

Parent/carer forums, including coffee mornings, drop-ins, or celebration events

Learners receive careers IAG

Learners in Years 7 - 11 complete RSPH Level 2 Qualification

Learners receive RSPH certificate

Short-Term Outcomes:
School staff have greater awareness of how to support GTRSB learners

GTRSB-heritage learners see their cultures reflected in school curriculum

Other pupils gain understanding of GTRSB cultures + history

Strengthen relations and trust between the school and GTRSB communities

Learners have a positive learning experience at school

Students complete the Royal Society of Public Health Level 2 Qualification

Intermediate Outcomes:
School staff affirm and celebrate GTRSB cultures

Students have increased sense of belonging at school

Parents and carers have increased connection with school

Learners have increased confidence + engagement in learning

Impact:
Schools Take the GTRSB Pledge

Increase in the number of GTRSB-heritage learners from the region progressing to HE

Learners become health advocates in their communities

Assumptions

Assumption 1: Schools engage with the programme

Assumption 2: Relationships are maintained between key stakeholders

Assumption 3: Young learners engage with the programme

Assumption 4: Requirements/monitoring of the GTRSB Pledge remain in current form

Assumption 5: Stability in policy landscape

Explanation
At a national level, young people with a Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen, or Boater (GTRSB) heritage are less likely to remain in school, and less likely to progress to HE, than their peers

(Friends, Families & Travellers, 2023). To contribute to addressing this disparity, the GTRSB Schools Programme has been established, through a collaboration between the University of Sussex, the advocacy group Friends, Families and Travellers, and local schools. The programme is currently operating in local primary schools and secondary schools which are known to have relatively high numbers of GTRSB heritage learners.

The programme aims to support schools to celebrate and affirm GTRSB cultures and strengthen relationships with the families of their GTRSB learners, to foster learners' sense of belonging in school. Additionally, the programme provides tailored reading activities in primary schools and a bespoke Royal Society of Public Health qualification for secondary school learners, both of which aim to provide young people with positive learning experiences that will enhance their confidence and enjoyment in learning.

Ultimately, by building their confidence, enjoyment, and sense of belonging in education, the project aims to contribute to an increase in the number of GTRSB heritage learners from the region transitioning to HE.

Evidence

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities have lower attainment at all stages of education than any other disadvantaged group (Atherton, 2020; Brassington, 2022; Cabinet Office, 2018; Friends, Families & Travellers, 2023). In 2021/22 school year, only 15% of Gypsy/Roma pupils met the expected KS2 reading and writing standard (Gov.uk, 2023). A literacy programme run by Hampshire County Council similar in design to the literacy scheme in our KS2 GRT intervention, found their traveller/showmen pupils made up to 3 years' progress in one year. They also found improvements in their questioning and reasoning skills, and the schools which took part gained trust from the traveller/showmen communities (Hampshire County Council, nd).

A significant number of pupils from this group start to leave the school system well before school leaving age (Atherton, 2022; Friends, Families & Travellers, 2023). This is partly a consequence of parents having negative experience of the education system (Atherton, 2022). The Anti-Bullying Alliance reported 86% of GRT pupils considered bullying the biggest challenge they faced in a school setting, followed by racism. The report, conducted with the Anti-Bullying Alliance, recommended that schools should raise awareness of and celebrate GRT ethnicities and cultures, and ensure staff understand the bullying and discrimination GRT people experience (Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2020).

Evaluation

As participant numbers in these interventions are very small, we will take a qualitative approach, using TASO's guidance for evaluating with small cohorts (TASO, 2022). We will use contribution analysis that integrates activity and engagement monitoring, to generate Type 1 evidence through interviews with parents / carers, and pre- and post-intervention focus groups with school staff (weak Type 2). We will also conduct post-intervention tracking of participants in HEAT (Type 1) and post-intervention tracking of schools committing to the GTRSB Pledge. We will publish the findings of these evaluations on our institutional repository by Summer 2029.

Uni & U: Young people with experience of care
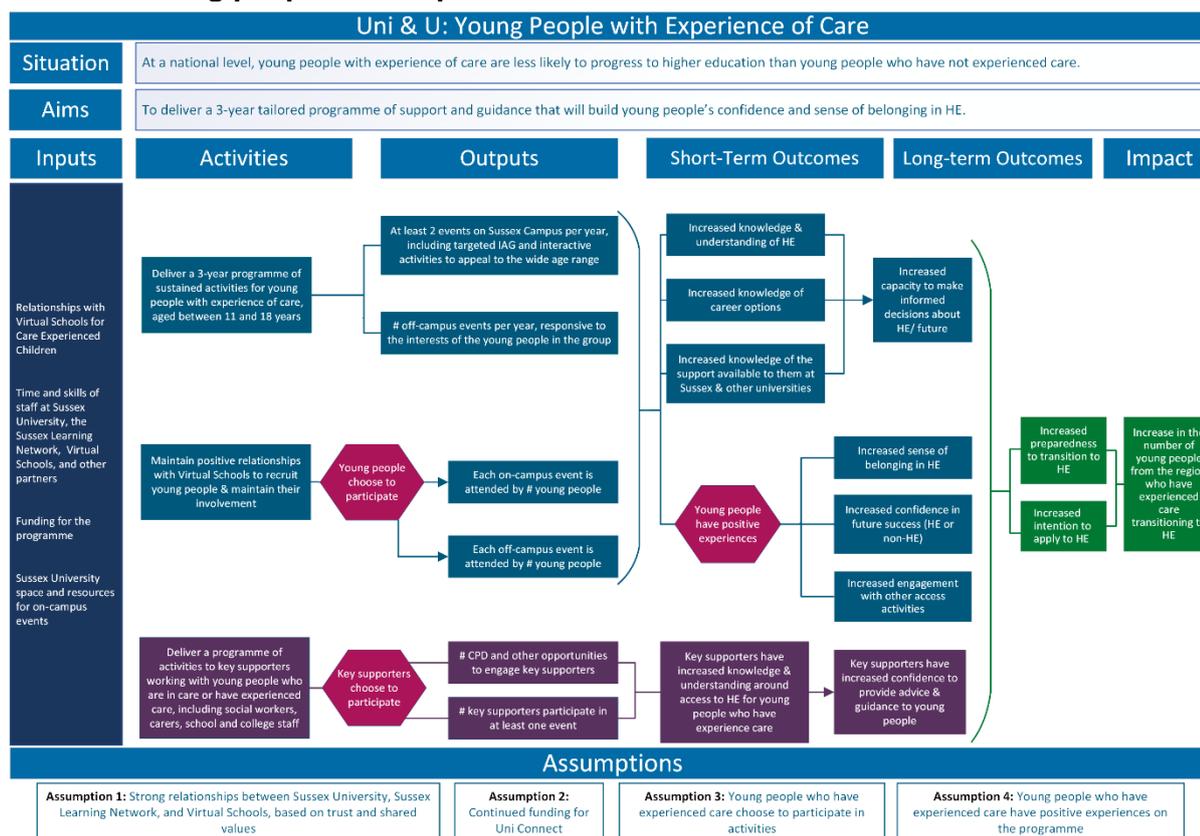
Explanation

At a national level, young people who have spent time in the care of their local authority are less likely to progress to HE than their peers. To contribute to addressing this disparity Uni&U was established through a collaboration between the University of Sussex and Sussex Leaning Network, with support from our regional Virtual Schools for Care Experienced Children. The three-year programme offers tailored information and guidance to young learners, delivered alongside a range of engaging activities, both off- and on-campus. The activities have been designed to enhance participants' confidence and sense of belonging in HE, with the aim of increasing the number of learners with experience of care from the region who transition to HE. The programme currently has participants, aged between 11 and 18, the number of participants is expected to fluctuate across the three years of the programme, due to the individual circumstances of the young people. As well as activities directly with the young people, Uni&U also delivers training for the adults who support them – such as social workers, carers, and school staff – to build their capacity to advise young people on accessing HE.

Evidence

Individuals with care experience are among the most educationally disadvantaged groups in both childhood and adulthood (Cameron et al., 2018). They typically achieve significantly lower educational outcomes (Berridge et al., 2020) and are more likely to leave education at 16 compared to their peers (Harrison et al., 2023). They are often directed into educational paths perceived as lower status (Harrison, 2020; Harrison et al., 2023). Stability and support of trusted adults has been identified as key in helping young people with experience of care thrive in education (Baker, Ellis, & Harrison, 2023). It has previously been found that the Virtual Schools' priority has been focused on guiding students into employment, rather than further and higher education pathways (Driscoll, 2013). Developing and maintaining a positive relationship with the Virtual Schools to act as facilitator for this intervention is seen as key to success.

Prior research conducted by the University of Sussex documents how the knowledge gap is an important factor in success at Higher Education for young people with experience of care (Gazeley & Hinton-Smith, 2018). Their study, which focused on a pre-entry near-peer coaching programme,

demonstrated the importance of pre-entry interventions in building knowledge and understanding of how HE functions and what it can offer. Their findings highlight the importance of IAG around a specific point of support for care experienced students at the University and information around financial support and student life.

Evaluation

As participant numbers in these interventions are very small, we will take a qualitative approach, using TASO's guidance for evaluating with small cohorts (TASO, 2022). We will use contribution analysis that integrates activity and engagement monitoring, to generate Type 1 evidence through interviews with key stakeholders, group discussions with participants, and post-intervention tracking of participants in HEAT. We will publish the findings of this evaluation on our institutional repository by Summer 2030.

Brighton & Sussex Medical School: BrightMed
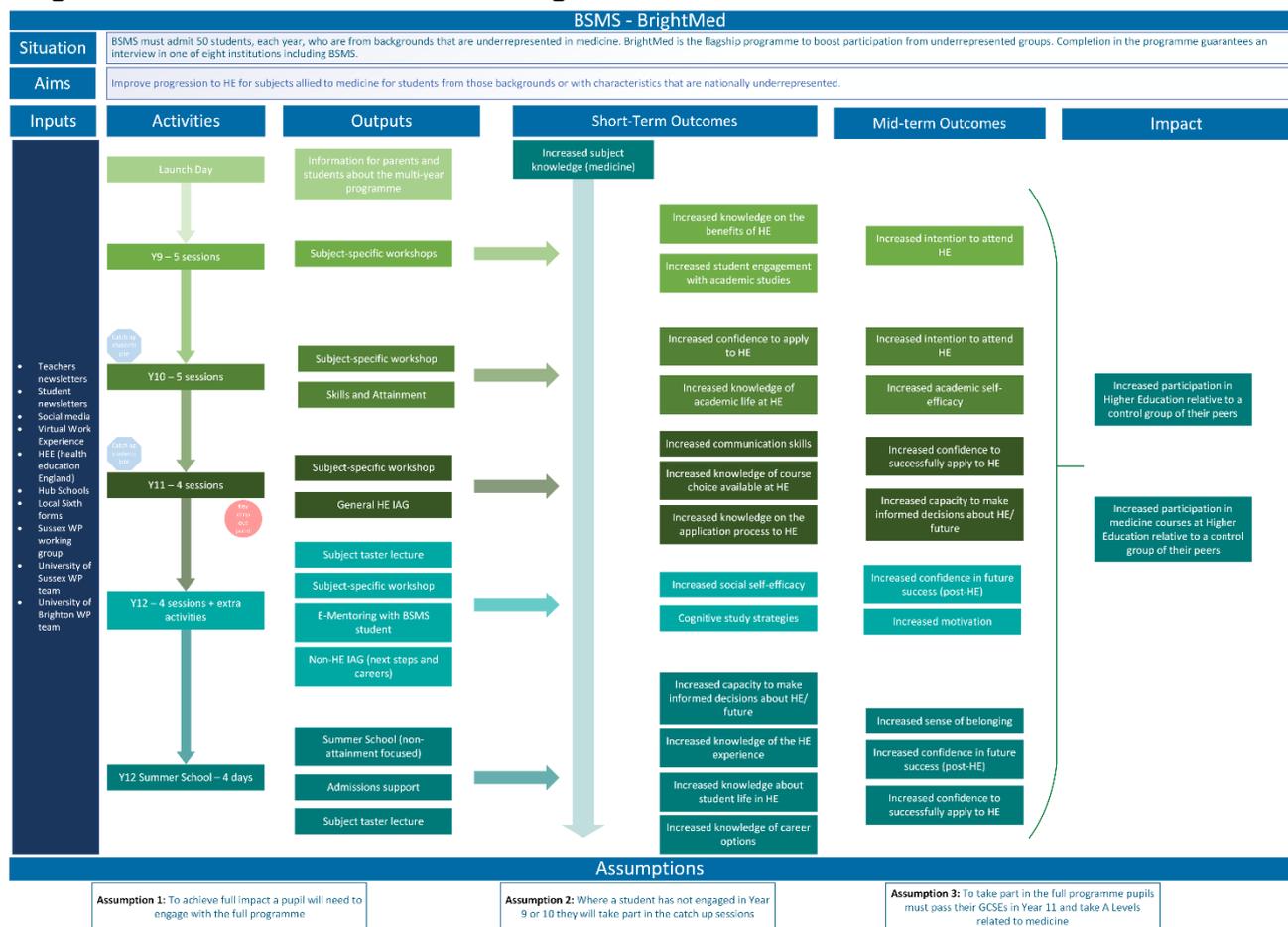
Explanation

BrightMed is the flagship outreach programme for the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS). It is a multi-intervention programme which runs from Year 9 though to Year 12 with the same cohort of students. Each year will contain subject specific workshops which aim to increase student knowledge of medicine. Students who successfully complete the programme are guaranteed an interview at one of eight higher education medical schools, including BSMS. There are two catch-up points, in Year 10 and Year 11, where students from higher year groups can enter the programme later. The events end with a four-day residential summer school, which includes admissions support and taster lectures.

Evidence

It is recognised there is a need for medical schools to widen participation (Apampa, et al., 2019) as students from lower-socio economic backgrounds tend to work in areas where recruitment is more difficult (Dowell et al., 2015). However, pupils from lower-socio economic backgrounds are less

likely to consider studying medicine as an option. This can be due to a lack of positive role models for medicine (Mathers & Parry, 2009; Ryan et al., 2021). For students from a widening participation background, early access to the possibility of studying medicine has been identified as a key factor in helping students strive for higher academic goals (McHarg, Mattick, & Knight, 2007). Effective outreach programmes should provide regular and sustained intervention from a young age (Medical Schools Council, n.d).

Evaluation

We will pursue a joint evaluation of the BSMS BrightMed programme with University of Brighton's evaluation team including a detailed theory of change and process evaluation. We will also collaborate with the BrightMed team to develop a reasonable empirical evaluation strategy that includes pre and post surveys as well as some qualitative interviews with prospective and current students who utilised the programme, generating Type 1 and Type 2 evidence.

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Intervention Strategy 2: Continuation (Mental Health Conditions)

Situation	Sussex students with a mental health condition are less likely to complete their first year at the University of Sussex. The most recent dataset repots a continuation gap of 6.4% between this student group and those without a mental health condition. The University of Sussex has a high percentage of students declaring a mental health condition compared to similar institutions.

Legend
- Begin
- Belong
- Residential Life Connectors

Aims	To reduce the continuation gap between students with and without a mental health condition. By 2030 the gap will have reduced to no more than 5%

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Mid-term outcomes	Long-term Impact

Inputs:
- Wellbeing team
- Connectors
- PS staff
- SEE team
- Accommodation team
- Recruitment and induction material
- Res Life managers

Activities:
- Begin
- Belong
- Residential Life Connectors

Outputs:
- Two-day pre-entry residential event & Online resources
- Workshops, personalised communication, 1:1 personal support, social activities
- Induction welcome event, 'Kitchen meetings', Tea and Talk drop ins, 1:1 peer support, Conflict resolution, Social activities

Short-term outcomes:
- Increased knowledge of support available
- Increased social self-efficacy
- Increased understanding of university life
- Increased knowledge of extra and co-curricular activities
- Increased knowledge of academic and information services
- Increased student self-advocacy
- Increased capacity to make informed decisions
- Increased capacity to situate existing knowledge and interests within the context of university life
- Increased sense of belonging

Mid-term outcomes:
- Increased capacity to make informed decisions
- Increased student self-advocacy
- Confidence in future success
- Increased academic self-efficacy
- Increased motivation
- Confidence to declare support needs
- Increased student self-regulation
- Increased student engagement

Long-term Impact:
- Increased continuation for students reporting a mental health condition beyond first year

Assumption 1: The three activities work together to impact the continuation gap

Assumption 2: We can collect engagement data

Assumption 3: Training for connectors is adequate

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Begin at Sussex

Situation	Sussex students with a mental health condition are less likely to complete their first year at the University of Sussex. The most recent dataset reports a continuation gap of 6.4% between this student group and those without a mental health condition. The University of Sussex has a high percentage of students declaring a mental health condition compared to similar institutions.
Aims	To reduce the continuation gap between students with and without a mental health condition. By 2030 the gap will have reduced to no more than 5%.

Legend
Preparation — Causal path
Student engagement ----- Output as input for another activity

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Mid-term outcomes	Long-term Impact

Inputs: Wellbeing team; Connectors; Accommodation team; SEE team

Activities: Recruitment; Online transition resources; Two-day pre-entry residential event; Workshop sessions: "Get to know" Careers Wellbeing Finance Accommodation; Social activities; Wellbeing workshop session; Campus tour; 1:1 meetings introduction

Outputs: Students are motivated to attend residential; # Students are signposted to university information and support services; Approx 100 future students attend residential (Possibility to attend just a single day)

Short-term outcomes: Increased knowledge of support available; Increased understanding of university life; Increased social self-efficacy

Mid-term outcomes: Increased capacity to make informed decisions; Students have increased sense of self advocacy; Students have increased sense of belonging

Long-term Impact: Increased engagement with more support offered by SEE and the University; Increased continuation for students reporting a mental health condition beyond first year

Assumption 1: Students who attend the pre-entry residential event are likely to have greater outcomes than those who only use the online resources

Assumption 2: Students will use the online resources

Assumption 3: Students can attend a two-day residential (practically)

Explanation

This transition intervention provides students with offers from the University of Sussex with a two-day pre-entry residential event. In this residential, approximately 100 students will attend workshops about the support offered at the University, meet fellow students through social activities to build bonds, tour the campus, and have a 1:1 meeting with support staff. In addition to increasing their knowledge of the support available to them at the UoS, we expect this activity to lead to a better understanding of university life and social self-efficacy. In the long-term we expect this will have an impact on continuation rates and lead to increased engagement with other support schemes in this intervention strategy.

For students who are unable to attend the residential, there are online transition resources that provide similar information to that of given at the main event. We also expect those who attended the residential to use the online resources as a refresher. We do not expect the same impact for students who only use the online resources; instead, the outcomes focus on knowledge of support available.

Evidence

Research shows that belonging and social integration are important factors in the successful transition to university, and consequently impacts retention (Maunder, 2017; Thomas, 2012). A lack of prior information about the institution has been identified as a major risk factor in student continuation (Yorke & Longden, 2008). While research which specifically looked at the mental health impact of transition, found students actively wanted taster classes and events prior to registration (Cage et al., 2021).

Pre-entry programmes have been more widely researched in North America than in a UK context. They have been found to benefit student attainment (Bir & Myrick, 2015) and retention (McCurrie, 2009). For students with autism, summer bridge programmes can significantly reduce anxiety related to transition (Lei et al., 2018). These summer events can help to reduce the mismatch between expectations and the reality of higher education (Cook & Leckey, 1999).

Belong at Sussex

Situation	Sussex students with a mental health condition are less likely to complete their first year at the University of Sussex. The most recent dataset reports a continuation gap of 6.4% between this student group and those without a mental health condition. The University of Sussex has a high percentage of students declaring a mental health condition compared to similar institutions.
Aims	To reduce the continuation gap between students with and without a mental health condition. By 2030 the gap will have reduced to no more than 5%.

Legend
- Preparation
- Student engagement
- Enabling activities
- → Causal path
- ⇢ Output as input for another activity

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Mid-term outcomes	Long-term Impact

Recruitment related activities → Students are motivated to engage

Wellbeing team
Connectors
PS staff
SEE team

Workshops (various topics) → # students attend workshops e.g. Independent living skills, Student voice, Building community at University, Benefits of extra and co-curricular activities

Personalised communication → Target students are better informed

1:1 Personal support → # students feel supported

Social activities → # students attend key social events throughout the year e.g. Halloween, Valentine's day, one world week

Increased knowledge of extra and co-curricular activities → Increased capacity to make informed decisions

Increased knowledge of academic and information services → Increased general self-efficacy (confidence in future success)

Students have increased sense of self-advocacy → Students have increased academic self-efficacy

Increased understanding of university life → Students have increased motivation

Students have increased sense of belonging

Increased continuation for students reporting a mental health condition beyond first year → Increased completion

School staff training → Staff have increased knowledge of student needs

Assumption 1: Students will engage with enough of the programme to have an impact

Assumption 2: Recruitment activities will be able to motivate students to engage

Assumption 3: Staff training will lead to better student outcomes within the context of the belong programme

Explanation

The Belong intervention is designed to help facilitate a greater sense of belonging at the University of Sussex, specifically amongst students with a mental health condition. Rather than being a collective package of activities where students sign up to take part in the entire programme, the intervention is a set of disparate activities. We therefore expect more engagement with different parts will lead to greater outcomes. The events are primarily run by the Student Engagement and Enhancement (SEE) team who run social activities throughout the academic year, offer 1:1 personal support sessions for students, and coordinate workshops with other professional service staff around the University to help build students' knowledge of support services and co/extra-curricular support opportunities.

Evidence

A stronger sense of belonging has been linked to improved wellbeing and mental health outcomes (Gopalan, Linden-Carmichael, & Lanza, 2022; Dost & Mazzoli Smith, 2023), as well as a preventative impact to prevent anxiety, stress, and depression (Moffa, Dowdy, and Furlong, 2016; Arslan, Allen, and Ryan, 2020). Conversely, poor mental health has been identified as a major barrier to belonging in HE (Blake, Capper, & Jackson, 2022). Students with a higher sense of belonging are more likely to remain at university, while students who frequently considered dropping out had significantly lower levels of belonging (Pedler, Willis, & Nieuwoudt, 2021). It has been reported students want better awareness and access to support services and this can have a positive impact on student mental health (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019).

WonkHE identified four areas – connection, inclusion, support, autonomy - which form the foundations of belonging (Blake, Capper, & Jackson, 2022). This research influenced the development of the package of activities in this intervention.

Residential Life Connectors
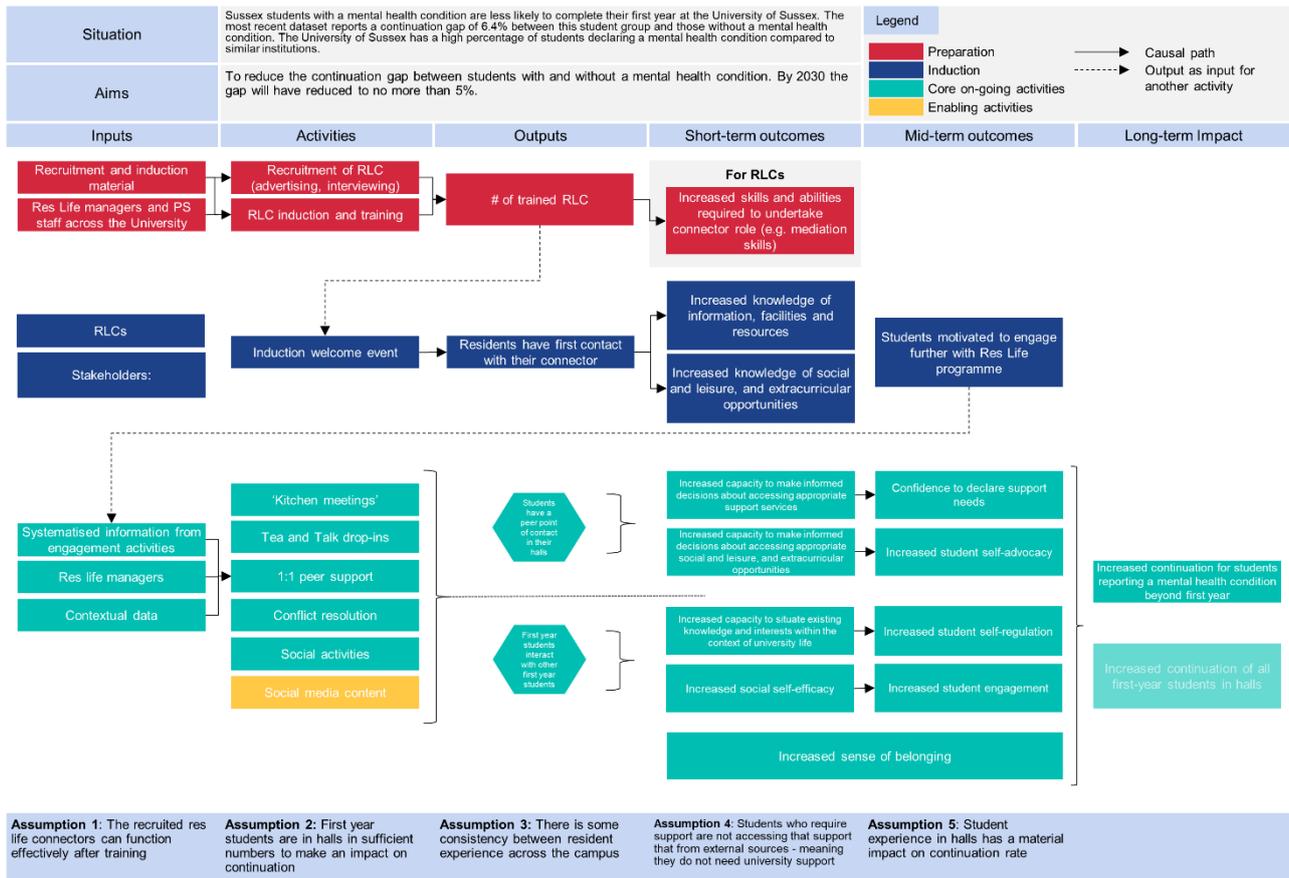
Explanation

This intervention is aimed at improving the experience of those living in halls of residence as a way of reducing the continuation gap for students with a mental health condition compared to those who do not. We have identified halls of residence as being a key space where targeted action can have an impact through embedding second year students in the halls who act as 'Residential Life Connectors'. The connectors will be a key point of contact for student residents and will hold regular meetings and drop-ins. They will be able to act as both sign-posters to further support and a first point of contact for conflict resolution. Within the intervention there will be social activities run in all the halls of residence through the Residential Life Managers and 1:1 peer support offered to those who need it.

Evidence

There is limited empirical research exploring the link between living in halls of residence and student mental health. One qualitative study showed students can withdraw physically and psychologically when they do not form friendships within their residence (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021). Prior research has shown making friends and building meaningful relationships has been identified as one of the biggest challenges facing students when beginning at university and student loneliness peaks in the first three-months of university (Jopling & Valtorta, 2019). Integration within halls of residence has also been linked to retention (McIntosh & Shaw, 2017). The findings from Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran conclude pastoral staff embedded in the residence can provide a 'safe haven' for students. They state: "By allowing each student to develop a trusting relationship with pastoral staff, they are more likely to disclose important information and seek support before reaching a point of crisis" (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021, p13).

There is also evidence to suggest the architecture of halls of residence can have an impact on academic outcomes, whereby students living in halls with socialising architecture had a higher first-semester grade point average than students living in halls with minimal social spaces (Brown & Spratto, 2019). This suggests that interventions that involve students engaging in social spaces can have an impact on success at university.

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Intervention Strategy 3: Completion (Mature Students)

Situation	Mature students at the University of Sussex are less likely to complete their degrees than non-mature students with a gap of 8.4% between groups.

Aims	To reduce the completion gap between mature and non-mature students. By 2030 the mature student continuation gap will have reduced to no more than 4%.

Legend

- Preparation
- Mentors
- Mentees
- Still in development

→ Causal path
⇢ Output as input for another activity

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Mid-term outcomes	Long-term Impact

Inputs:
- Recruitment and induction material
- SEE staff
- School and Academic staff
- Promotion material (welcome week)
- Student mentors
- Timetabled rooms / online platform tbc

Activities:
- Recruitment of student mentors (advertising, interviewing)
- Student mentor induction and training
- Supervision of student mentors
- Student mentors
- Mentor allocation
- 1:1 mentoring sessions (online and in-person) Allocated slot / drop-ins, online or in-person

Outputs:
- # of trained student mentors
- # mentors
- # mentees
- # sessions

Short-term outcomes:
- Academic self-efficacy (skills)
- Sense of belonging
- Knowledge of support available
- Academic motivation

Mid-term outcomes:
- Increased capacity to situate existing knowledge in wider context
- Future success self-efficacy
- Confidence to declare support needs
- Confidence in making informed decisions
- Increased capacity to engage with support
- Increased metacognitive strategies
- Future success self-efficacy

Long-term Impact:
- Increased continuation of mature students
- Increased completion of mature students
- Narrowed completion between mature and young students

Assumption 1: Cross-institutional support for the programme; Model where schools timetable mentoring sessions based on the students' availability

Assumption 2: Mature students will be interested in becoming a mentor; Students have the time and capacity to engage with the programme in all its delivery modes

Assumption 3: Mature students will be interested in being mentored by a mature student

Assumption 4: Identity matching is beneficial for mature students

Assumption 5: Different delivery modes have the same outcome/impact (online vs in person, drop-in vs allocated slot)

Explanation

Mature students are less likely to complete their degrees than non-mature students. This intervention aims to reduce this gap by developing a targeted mature learning peer mentoring scheme at the University. Mentors will be recruited and trained to deliver peer mentoring to first year mature students. Mentoring will be available both online and in person, reflecting the needs of mature students gathered from prior feedback. We anticipate a benefit to both the mentors and the mentees, as reflected in the theory of change.

Evidence

The impact of peer mentoring in higher education is well researched, particularly within the UK context. A systematic review of the efficacy of peer mentoring during the initial phase of academic studies found it is effective support mechanism (Gehreke, Schilling & Kauffeld, 2024). This review found peer mentoring particularly impactful on dropout intention and belongingness at university. They also found digital peer mentoring is effective but often perceived as providing less social support compared to non-digital formats. A hybrid approach combining both formats is suggested. For mature students specifically, a study in Australia of peer mentoring of first-year mature paramedic students saw an increase in academic performance and a decrease in the fail rate of the mentee group compared with the cohort of students that did not participate (Hryciw et al,. 2013).

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Intervention Strategy 4: Attainment (Free School Meals)

Situation	Students at the University of Sussex who, whilst at school, were eligible for free school meals are less likely to graduate with a 1st or 2:1. The 2023 awarding gap between students who were eligible for free school meals and those who weren't was 13.1%
Aims	To reduce the socioeconomic awarding gap between students who were eligible for free school meals and those who were not. By 2029 the awarding gap will have reduced to no more than 6.5%.

Legend

■	VLEs preparation
■	Promotion and Awareness activities
■	Core on-going activities

→ Causal path
⇢ Output as input for another activity

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Mid-term outcomes	Long-term Impact

Inputs:
- Academic Skills Senior Manager
- Academic Skills Consultants
- Academic Skills Connectors
- Digital Engagement and Enhancement Officer
- Academic Staff
- Academic Developers
- Canvas (VLE)
- Social media advertising
- Course material
- Academic advisors
- Student Feedback on Student Hub and Academic Skills Resources
- Academic Skills Team
- Course and Module data

Activities:
- Annual review of Skills Hub
- Planning of Academic Skills Curriculum
- Co-creation of School specific Academic Skills Resources
- Co-creation of cohort specific Academic Skills Resources
- Promotion of academic skills provision
- Skills and strength review
- Interaction with VLEs (Skills Hub &/or Canvas)
- Advertised academic skills Workshops (in person and online)
- Invited bespoke workshops for specific groups
- Reading Groups (Library)

Outputs:
- Skills Hub updated
- Canvas updated
- Students are aware of academic skills provision and VLEs
- Students interact with tailored or generic Academic Skills Resources
- Students interact with subject specific online resources

Short-term outcomes:
- Skills Hub meets the needs of current students
- Skills Hub meets the needs of academic skills curriculum
- Staff knowledge of the resources and support available for students increases
- Increase knowledge and awareness careers information, advice and guidance services
- Increased capacity to make informed decisions about accessing appropriate academic skill development and personal support services
- Increased capacity to map existing skills and identify areas for skill development
- Students feel supported
- Confidence to declare support needs
- Increased motivation through students increased levels of interest, enthusiasm and drive to pursue and succeed in their educational endeavours
- Increased student engagement
- Increased skills and capacities needed to succeed on a course and in a subject area
- Increased academic self-efficacy

Mid-term outcomes:
- Staff promote resources to students

Long-term Impact:
- Roll-out of embedding Academic Skills into the Curriculum
- Narrowing of Awarding Gap for FSM Students
- Increased continuation for all students
- Increased completion for all students
- Narrowing of Awarding Gaps for all students

Assumption 1: Staff will engage in embedding Academic Skills into the curriculum

Assumption 2: Students will want to use Academic Skills Resources

Assumption 3: Skills Hub and VLE will be able to be kept up to date (resource intensive)

Assumption 4: Students who require support will access it through university resources (e.g. Skills Hub)

Assumption 5: Student engagement with Academic Skills Resources will improve Student Outcomes

Explanation

There currently exists an awarding gap between students who, whilst at school, were eligible for FSM and those who were not. The Academic Skills provision intervention is a package of activities designed to help reduce the awarding gap by supporting the development of academic skills for FSM-eligible students.

The intervention is split into three categories. Firstly, the refreshing of our Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) by developing school and cohort specific academic skills resources. Going forward the development of academic skills resources for the VLEs will support the further embedding of academic skills into our curricula. This will be piloted during this cycle and will form part of the evaluation of the intervention. The second part focuses on promotion and awareness of the resources and academic skills provision at the University to students, including through students undertaking 'skills and strength reviews'. We expect this to lead to students having greater capacity to map existing skills and identify areas for skill development. The third section is the core on-going academic skills provision that students will undertake, such as interacting with VLE resources, attending advertised academic skills workshops, and, where appropriate, being invited to tailored academic skills group sessions.

Evidence

Teaching academic and study skills can play a significant role in improving of student academic performance (MacVaugh, Jones, & Auty, 2013; Hassanbeigi et al,. 2011). The nature of delivery of academic skills can impact the effectiveness of intervention. Learners value skills which are central to the curriculum and taught in a way where they exist in relation to the content knowledge (MacVaugh, Jones, & Auty, 2013, Alexander & Judy, 1988). Developing a flipped approach to academic skills, where face-to-face workshops are taught in a tailored way relevant to course material only after students learn more generic material through online platforms has been shown to be successful (Mansfield, 2020). Research into the barriers preventing students from accessing academic skills support sessions (Dougherty, 2022) has shown a greater need for visibility, something built into the design of this intervention.

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Intervention Strategy 5: Attainment (Ethnicity)

Situation	Race inequality at the University (and in the HE sector more broadly) is reflected in an increasing ethnicity degree awarding gap. There is a lack of awareness and understanding of what causes this gap and low institutional engagement in, and commitment to, race equity work.	Legend
Aims	To narrow and close the ethnicity degree awarding gaps at the University of Sussex.	Race Equity Advocates ——→ Causal path Curriculum Change Connectors

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Mid-term outcomes	Long-term Impact

Inputs:
- Induction and training
- Connectors
- PS staff
- SEE team
- Academic staff
- Recruitment and induction material
- Stakeholders

Activities:
- Race Equity Advocates
- Curriculum Change Connectors

Outputs:
- REAs facilitate engagement events: conversations with students, student forums, drop-ins, focus groups, podcasts, engagement with staff
- Co-creation of Curriculum Change Action Plans

Short-term outcomes:
- Increased student and staff engagement with race equity issues, activities and work
- Increased awareness of race inequality and its intersection with other structural barriers
- Increased institutional trust in processes to reduce awarding gap
- Increased awareness of measures to be taken to overcome barriers to having an inclusive curriculum

Mid-term outcomes:
- Increased institutional trust in processes to reduce awarding gap
- Strengthened staff-student and student-student relationships
- Increased sense of belonging and inclusion
- Increased capacity to make informed decisions around inclusive curriculum
- Increased student and staff engagement with practices required to build an inclusive curriculum
- Fewer reasonable adjustments

Long-term Impact:
- Increased attainment of black, Asian and minority ethnic students

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Assumption 1: Students are attracted to become REAs/CCCs

Assumption 2: The training provided is adequate

Assumption 3: We can record engagement with the interventions

Assumption 4: Sense of belonging and inclusive curriculum work will lead to a decrease in the ethnicity degree awarding gaps

Race Equity Advocates
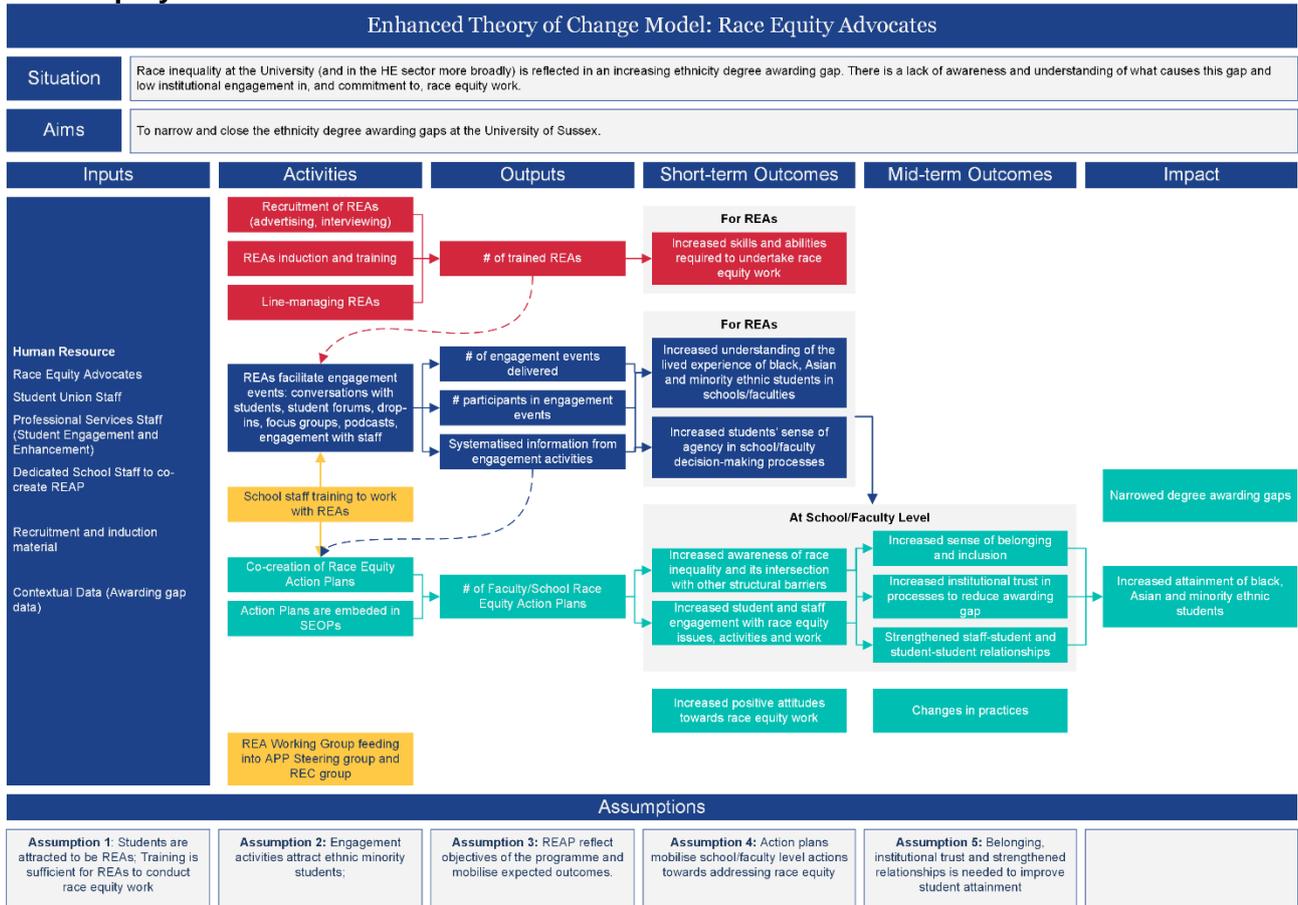
Explanation

The Race Equity Advocacy Project is a project run in collaboration between the University of Sussex Student Union (USSU), Academic Schools (moving to Faculties) and the University's Student Engagement and Enhancement Team (SEE). The project will employ students as Race Equity Advocates (REAs) who will work through co-creation with colleagues across the University to (1) explore, understand and record the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic students in academic schools, (2) create and review School Race Equity Action Plans and support in the delivery and evaluation of these where appropriate, and (3) support the development of practical solutions to issues faced by black, Asian and minority ethnic students within their schools and across the wider University community. In the longer term, the project is expected to help improve student outcomes for students from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, and narrow existing ethnicity degree awarding gaps.

Evidence

Evidence for this intervention comes primarily from the recommendations published by Universities UK on closing ethnicity awarding gaps. In this they recommend institutions prioritise working with students to co-produce initiatives and approaches to removing the awarding gap. Specifically, they support the creation of paid ambassadorial roles or advocate schemes for black, Asian and minority ethnic students. They also recommend institutions prioritise genuine co-production with students to jointly develop a whole-university approach to removing the gap (Universities UK, 2022).

Curriculum Change Connectors
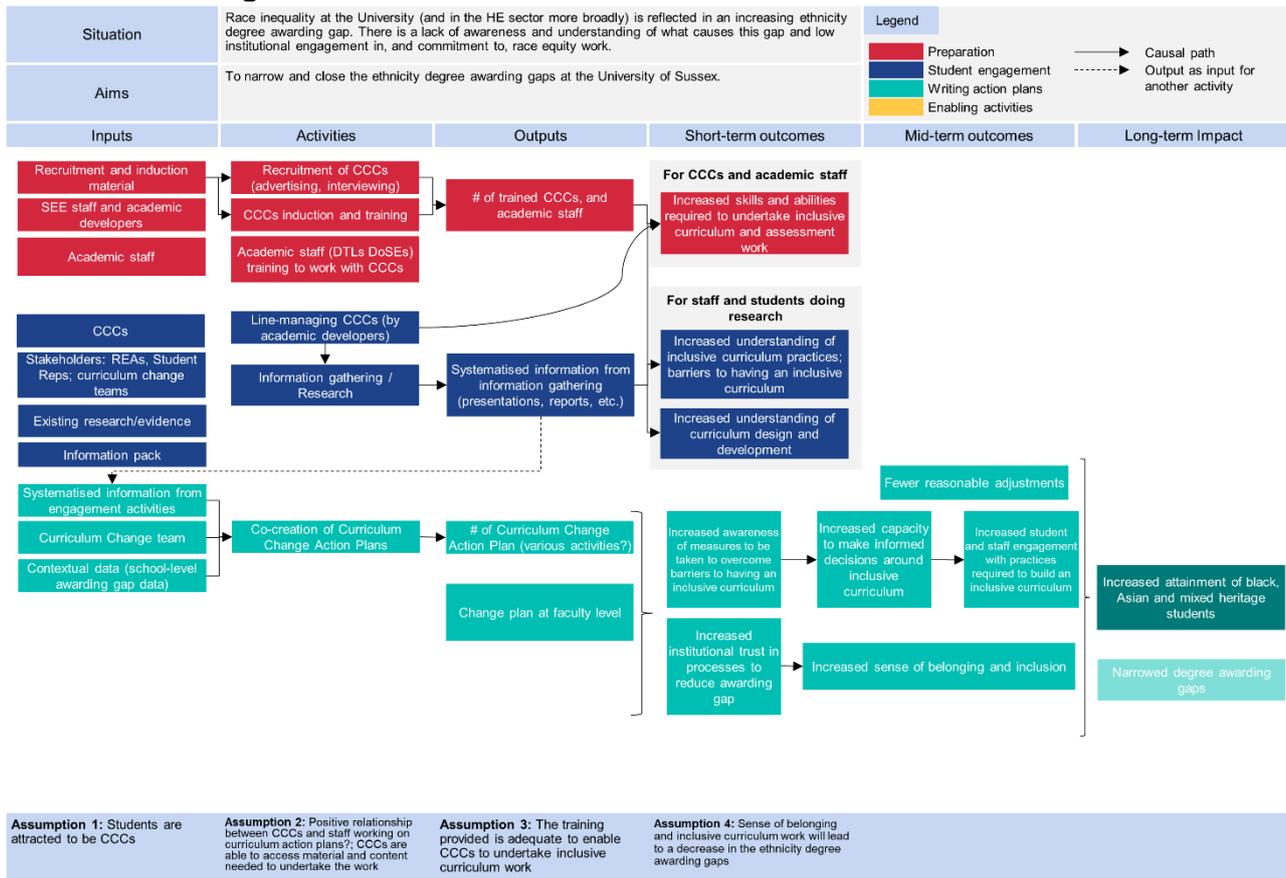
Explanation

The Curriculum Change Connector intervention will engage students to co-develop, alongside academic staff, curriculum change action plans. Students will be employed in ambassadorial roles, and we anticipate undertaking this work will have a positive impact on the skills and abilities of the students involved. The staff involved will also have a better understanding of the benefits of an inclusive curriculum which they will take into their own practice. For the institution, the curriculum change plans will be developed at the faculty level. We anticipate this having an impact on the curriculum overtime and to increased trust from black and ethnic minority communities.

Evidence

The development of this intervention has been informed by the Inclusive Higher Education Framework (Hubbard & Gawthorpe, 2024). In order to build community and belonging, the framework advocates for effective ongoing partnership with students. The partnership work between staff and students within the intervention will then be informed by the framework to develop action plans for an inclusive curriculum. Our understanding of student-staff partnerships in curriculum change work is also informed by the experience of the University of Brighton's published research on the topic (Hall et al,. 2022)

References

Hall, J., MacDonnell, J., McConnell, C. and Jones, J. (2022) 'Student–staff partnerships for diversifying and decolonising the higher education curriculum', *Equity in Education & Society*, p. 275264612211098. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/27526461221109870.

Hubbard, K. and Gawthorpe, P. (2024) 'Inclusive Higher Education Framework', *National Teaching Repository*. Educational resource. Available at: https://doi.org/10.25416/NTR.25719234.v1.

Universities UK (2019) 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic student attainment at UK universities: #closingthegap'. [online] Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/bame-student-attainment.pdf [Accessed 25 Jun. 2024].

Additional Interventions
Financial Support: The Sussex Bursary
The evaluation of the Sussex Bursary will draw upon the Office for Students' Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit[11]. Specifically, we plan to make use of the Statistical Tool to understand the impact of receiving a bursary on student outcomes (i.e. continuation, completion, degree attainment and graduate outcomes), as well as the Interview Tool to provide a more in-depth understanding of the impact of receiving a bursary from the perspective of students.

The statistical tool consists of a quantitative analysis plan that uses a regression model to compare the outcomes of students who received financial support with a comparison group of students who did not. It draws on a student outcome dataset provided annually by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), student bursary and household income information retrieved from the Student Loans Company's Bursary Administration Service (BAS), as well as the University of Sussex's internal student records data. The analysis is used to determine if there are significant differences in outcomes between bursary recipients and students who did not receive a bursary. The interview framework provided by the OfS covers several important areas, enabling us to develop a richer understanding of the effectiveness of financial support provided by the University. The questions address how students learned about their eligibility for financial support and whether this influenced their choice of institution, how they received and used their bursary, and the importance of this funding in enabling them to remain at university.

In addition to the standard tools provided by the Office for Students, we will:

- Recreate the dataset provided by HESA using the University's internal data to allow for an earlier evaluation of the impact on student outcomes, thus enabling a timelier decision-making process regarding the future of student bursaries.

- Augment the standard interview framework to include questions exploring students' lived experiences of the current cost of living crisis and its impact on their capacity to participate fully in their degrees.

Interviews will be conducted annually starting in autumn 2026 to allow the University to develop a clearer understanding of the financial experiences that our students are navigating and to gain early insights into how effectively our bursary provision mitigates these challenges.

The statistical analysis considering the first cohort of bursary recipients (2025/26 entrants) will be conducted in summer 2028 and published in autumn 2028 when the continuation data for this cohort are released by HESA, with a view to recreating the analysis using internal data for an earlier publication in autumn 2027.

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[11] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/financial-support-evaluation-toolkit/interview-tool/

Intervention Strategy 6: Progression from HE

Situation: Sussex students reporting a mental health condition and students from IMD Q1 postcodes are less likely to be in a graduate level outcome 15 months after leaving the University. The most recent data reports a gap of 9.4% for students with a mental health condition, and 8.5% for students from IMD Q1 areas.

Aims: To narrow the progression gap between students reporting a mental health condition and those who do not report any type of disability; and to narrow the progression gap between students from IMD Q1 areas and those from IMD Q5 areas.

Legend
- Early interventions
- Industry-focused
- Entrepreneurship
- Research-focused
- Shared outcomes
- Enabling activities
- Direct pathway
- Enabling pathway

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Mid-term outcomes	Long-term Impact

Activities / Outputs / Outcomes flow:

- Insight Visits → # students complete insight visits → Increased awareness of graduate roles and industries → Increased capacity to make informed choices
- Ideas Fund → # students complete ideas fund → Increased awareness of further support → Increased motivation to engage with further careers & entrepreneurship support → Increased engagement with further careers & entrepreneurship support

Inputs:
- Student Participation Officer
- Careers & Entrepreneurship Staff
- CareerHub (online) platform
- Costs, payments and other financial resources
- Network of local employers
- External providers

- Engagement with APP target groups

- Online Global Summer Internships
- UK Summer Internships → # students complete internships
- Student Consultancy → # students complete consultancies
- Digital and Video Accelerators → # students complete accelerators

- Students develop knowledge of career pathways that align with personal interests
- Increased capacity to situate and apply existing knowledge
- Students develop skills needed for graduate progression after University

- Increased engagement with further support and career opportunities
- Students develop capacity to make informed decisions about future progression
- Students develop capacity to demonstrate skills

- Complementary careers support activities → # students engage with complementary activities
- Mental health training for employers → # employers trained

Positive "objective" graduate outcomes
- Increased chance of progressing to employment
- Increased chance of starting own business
- Increased chance of progressing to further study

Positive "reflective" graduate outcomes
- Increased chance of perceiving current activity as meaningful

- External network of entrepreneurs (mentors)
- Entrepreneurial Mentoring Scheme → # students complete mentoring sessions

- Increased sense of belonging in professional/entrepreneurial/postgraduate study environments → Students have increased confidence to successfully progress

- Narrowed progression gaps for APP target groups

- Sussex Researcher School Staff
- Academic supervisors
- PhD Mentors
- Junior Research Associates → # students complete research project

- Increased capacity to build and engage with relevant networks

Assumptions: strong relationship between UoS and external partners; positive relationships between staff within UoS.

Assumptions: activities can be delivered with existing resource; employers engage with mental health training.

Assumptions: APP target group students are motivated to engage with activities and will be able to participate.

Assumptions: students engage with complementary training and support; employers have a better understanding of APP target group experiences; students have a positive experience.

Assumptions: students proactively build on their experiences through complementary training.

Assumptions: achieving short and mid-term outcomes is enough to drive a change in the students' graduate outcomes.

UK Summer Internships & Online Global Summer Internships

Career Lab – Summer Internship

Situation	Persistent graduate outcomes gaps for: students domiciled in IMD Q1 postcodes; students with a mental health condition; students with a social or communication impairment
Aims	To close the gap in progress outcomes by 2024/25 between: IMD Q1 and Q5 students (11% gap); students with a mental health condition (5% gap); students with a social or communication impairment (31% gap)

Inputs · Activities · Outputs · Short-Term Outcomes · Mid-term Outcomes · Impact

Inputs:
- CEE Staff time and skills
- Student Participation Officer time and skills
- Network of local employer partners across a range of sectors
- Expertise of external training providers
- Support from legal and finance team.
- Collaboration with disability team.
- Career Hub system
- Intern wages (£3000 per intern)
- Cost of external training
- Costs for reasonable adjustments.

Activities:
- Support employers to write inclusive job adverts
- **Encourage applications from students in risk groups**, through targeted emails, etc
- Support from careers consultants regarding CVs, interviews, etc.
- **Student Participation Officer** supports APP students to engage in activities, and provides wraparound support.
- Generate internships through existing networks of local employer and reaching out to new partners.
- **Opt-in preparation programme for students**, with focus on IAG, confidence, belonging and key work skills.
- All employers undertake training on working with students with mental health conditions or social & communication impairments
- Selected employers undertake Employ Autism training
- Sussex team visit student + host over summer; keep in contact via email
- **Opt-in follow-up support.** Workshop considering how to articulate & use new skills & experience.

Outputs:
- Students in risk groups choose to apply
- # Students participate in Employ Autism programme
- Maximise proportion of interns from APP risk groups
- 150 students complete paid 225-300 hour internship.
- Students engage with opt-in training
- Increased confidence and skills going into internship
- Employers have increased understanding of students in risk groups & how to support them.
- Internship is a 'positive' experience
- Difficulties are identified and addressed
- Students engage with opt-in training
- Students build on internship experience

Short-Term Outcomes:
- PRACTISE — Interns develop skills needed for graduate employment
- UNDERSTAND — Interns develop understanding by contextualising existing knowledge
- KNOW — Interns develop knowledge of career pathways that align with their interests & aspirations
- BECOME — Interns develop an increased sense of belonging in professional environments
- Interns build networks of professional relationships

Mid-term Outcomes:
- Students develop the capacity to demonstrate skills to potential employers
- CHOOSE — Students develop capacity to navigate graduate employment sectors & make **informed choices**
- Students develop **confidence & resilience** to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression.
- Students engage with & maximise the benefit of a network industry specific contacts.
- Students engage with a wide range of career development opportunities.

Impact:
- Graduate outcomes rate (HESA) for interns in risk groups at or above the rate amongst peers
- Graduates in risk groups report finding their work 'meaningful' at or above the rate amongst peers

Assumptions

Assumption 1: Strong relationships between Sussex and employee partners, based on trust and shared values.	**Assumption 2:** Employers engage with pre-internship training	**Assumption 3:** Students engage with opt-in wraparound support	**Assumption 4:** Most interns have a 'positive' internship experience	**Assumption 5:** Students proactively build on their internship experience

Career Lab – Online Global Summer Internships

Situation	Persistent graduate outcomes gaps for: students domiciled in IMD Q1 postcodes; students with a mental health condition
Aims	To close the gap in progress outcomes by 2029/30 between: IMD Q1 and Q5 students; students with a mental health condition.

Inputs · Activities · Outputs · Short-Term Outcomes · Mid-term Outcomes · Impact

Inputs:
- Careers Team staff time and skills
- Student Participation Officer (SPO) time and skills
- Disability support team time and skills
- Supplier with global employer network (Virtual Internships)
- Wraparound support provided by Virtual Internships*
- Career Hub system
- Intern wages (£2200 per intern)
- Costs for reasonable adjustments.

Activities:
- **Encourage applications from students in risk groups** through targeted emails, etc.
- Signposting & guidance from disability support team, careers consultants, and SPO
- Careers team shortlist applications prioritising students in APP risk groups.
- **Virtual Internships** generates internships through network of global partners, and matches students to internship opportunities
- *Access to professional development curriculum with focus on soft skills and key professional competencies
- *Regular webinars from industry experts & professionals
- *1-1 meetings with Internship Coach
- *Regular contact with dedicated Internship Experience Manager
- ***Weekly group sessions** provide ongoing support from online community of interns
- **Opt-in follow-up support.** Workshop considering how to articulate and use new skills & experience.

Outputs:
- Students in risk groups choose to apply
- Maximise proportion of interns from APP risk groups (close to 100%)
- 110 students complete 120-hour paid online internship.
- Students engage with opt-in training
- Students engage with support activities
- Difficulties identified & addressed
- Internship is a 'positive' experience
- Students engage with opt-in training
- Students build on internship experience

Short-Term Outcomes:
- PRACTISE — Interns develop skills needed for graduate employment
- UNDERSTAND — Interns develop understanding by contextualising subject knowledge
- KNOW — Interns develop knowledge & awareness of career pathways that align with their interests & aspirations
- BECOME — Interns have an increased sense of belonging in professional environments
- Interns build networks of professional relationships

Mid-term Outcomes:
- Students develop capacity to demonstrate skills to potential employers
- CHOOSE — Students develop capacity to navigate graduate employment sectors & make **informed choices**
- Students develop **confidence & resilience** to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression.
- Students engage with & maximise the benefit of a network industry specific contacts.
- Students engage with a wide range of career development opportunities.

Impact:
- Graduate outcomes rate (HESA) for interns in risk groups at or above the rate amongst peers
- Graduates in risk groups report finding their work 'meaningful' at or above the rate amongst peers

Assumptions

Assumption 1: Students in risk groups apply for internships and are offered appropriate placements	**Assumption 2:** Students engage actively with opt-in wraparound training opportunities	**Assumption 3:** Students engage actively with opt-in wraparound support	**Assumption 4:** Most interns have a 'positive' internship experience	**Assumption 5:** Students proactively build on their internship experience

Explanation

The University runs two paid summer internship programmes. The UK Summer Internship programme provides approximately 150 students, particularly those from APP target groups, with a six- to eight- week work placement hosted through our network of local employer partners. The Online Global Summer Internship programme provides approximately 110 students, particularly those from APP target groups, with a 120-hour online work placement through external provider Virtual Internships. In addition, Virtual Internships also offers comprehensive opt-in support, including training, webinars, and career coaching.

Both interventions aim to enhance short and medium-term outcomes by fostering the development of essential graduate employability skills, and awareness of employment opportunities. By enabling interns to gain practical work experience, work placements are expected to increase students' sense of belonging in professional environments and enable them to build a network of professional relationships. Ultimately, the intervention aims to contribute to improved graduate outcomes, narrowing the University's progression gap, and fostering engagement in meaningful work for the targeted student groups.
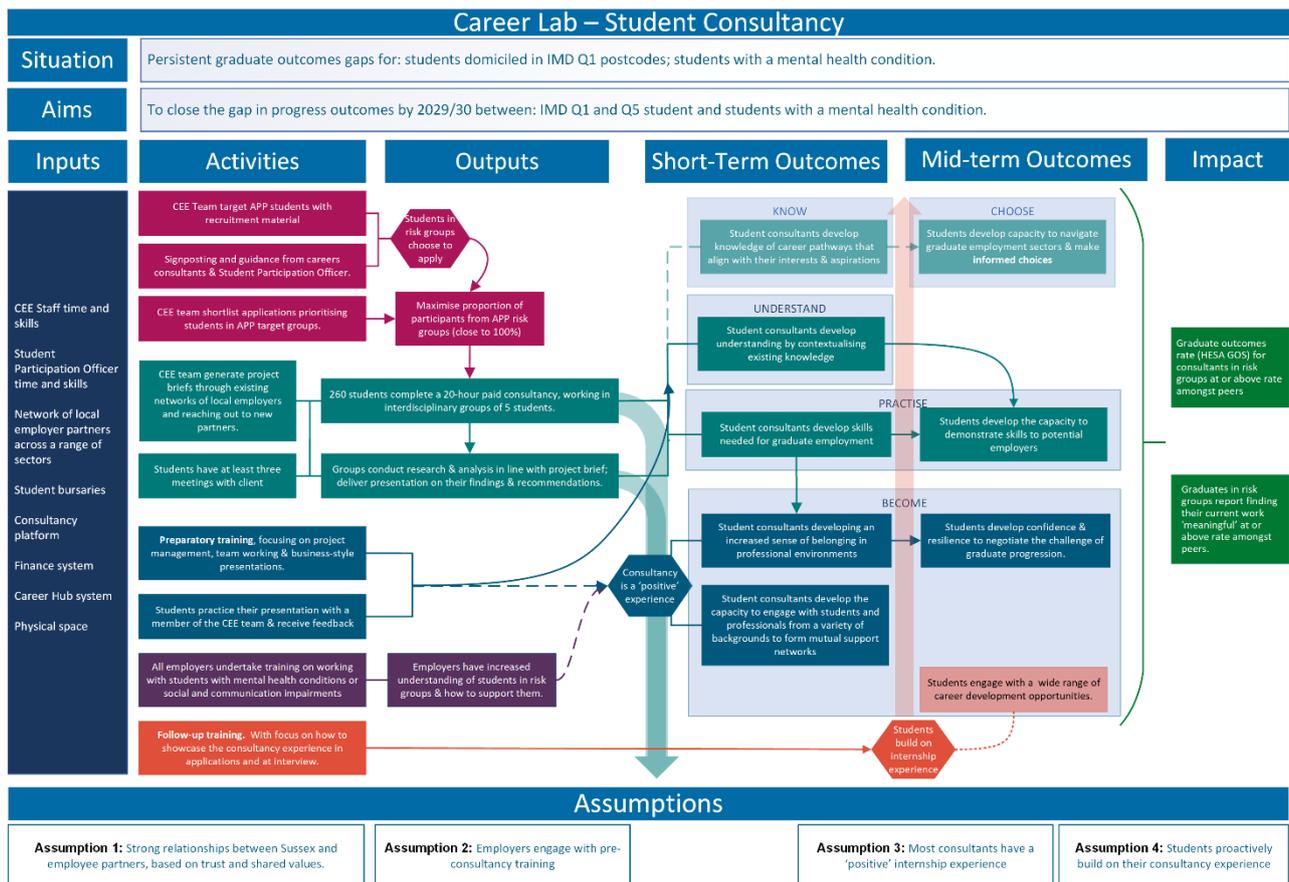
Evidence

We anticipate the internships will develop students' employability skills and give them experience they can use in their future careers. This hypothesis is supported by evidence from research from America (Nunley et al., 2016) who produced fictional CVs with and without internship experience and submitted them to job adverts. Their research findings showed graduate CVs with experience were statistically more likely to be invited to interview. This was especially strong for CVs where the degree subject was not linked to the role, but they had internship experience. This evidence is backed up by findings from a similar study in a European context (not including UK) from Baert et al, (2021) which found applicants with internship experience had, on average, a 12.6% higher probability of being invited to interview.

Enrolling on the internship also provides students with access to the opt-in training. Our assumption is that the opt-in training provides change mechanisms that students would likely not gain through just engaging with the internship placement. This pathway is supported by evidence from TASO's report on *What works to reduce equality gaps in employment and employability* (Ramaiah & Robinson, 2022). In this they quote a meta-analysis which showed a positive impact from information, advice and guidance (IAG) on students' knowledge and readiness for navigating the job market. This was strongest for 1-to-1 career counselling, such as those offered in the remote internship opt-in training. Evidence (Percy & Emms, 2020) from the annual HESA survey found a link between graduate career satisfaction and the job they were in being part of their "wider career plan" which is typically developed through career services. Within this pathway we are hypothesising not just better graduate outcomes but also an increase in moving into meaningful work, via increased career aspirations which we see coming from the opt-in IAG support.

The TASO report does caution on the lack of studies from a UK perspective and more research is needed in this area.

We hypothesise that, if the interns have a positive experience with the programme, they will build professional networks, both inside and outside the organisation they complete the internship with. There is weak evidence to support this hypothesis, however it is commonly thought to be one of the benefits of internships (Ismail, 2018). Evidence from America suggests around a third of internship students went on to secure a position with the company they were interning at (Galbraith & Mondal, 2020). This is an area needing more research, especially in a UK context. It is widely acknowledged (Ramaiah & Robinson, 2022) that the research evidence base for internships is weak.

Student Consultancy

Career Lab – Student Consultancy

Situation	Persistent graduate outcomes gaps for: students domiciled in IMD Q1 postcodes; students with a mental health condition.
Aims	To close the gap in progress outcomes by 2029/30 between: IMD Q1 and Q5 student and students with a mental health condition.

Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Short-Term Outcomes | Mid-term Outcomes | Impact

Inputs:
- CEE Staff time and skills
- Student Participation Officer time and skills
- Network of local employer partners across a range of sectors
- Student bursaries
- Consultancy platform
- Finance system
- Career Hub system
- Physical space

Activities:
- CEE Team target APP students with recruitment material
- Signposting and guidance from careers consultants & Student Participation Officer.
- CEE team shortlist applications prioritising students in APP target groups.
- CEE team generate project briefs through existing networks of local employers and reaching out to new partners.
- Students have at least three meetings with client
- **Preparatory training**, focusing on project management, team working & business-style presentations.
- Students practice their presentation with a member of the CEE team & receive feedback.
- All employers undertake training on working with students with mental health conditions or social and communication impairments
- **Follow-up training.** With focus on how to showcase the consultancy experience in applications and at interview.

Outputs:
- Students in risk groups choose to apply
- Maximise proportion of participants from APP risk groups (close to 100%)
- 260 students complete a 20-hour paid consultancy, working in interdisciplinary groups of 5 students.
- Groups conduct research & analysis in line with project brief; deliver presentation on their findings & recommendations.
- Consultancy is a 'positive' experience
- Employers have increased understanding of students in risk groups & how to support them.
- Students build on internship experience

Short-Term Outcomes:
- **KNOW** — Student consultants develop knowledge of career pathways that align with their interests & aspirations
- **UNDERSTAND** — Student consultants develop understanding by contextualising existing knowledge
- **PRACTISE** — Student consultants develop skills needed for graduate employment
- **BECOME** — Student consultants developing an increased sense of belonging in professional environments
- Student consultants develop the capacity to engage with students and professionals from a variety of backgrounds to form mutual support networks

Mid-term Outcomes:
- **CHOOSE** — Students develop capacity to navigate graduate employment sectors & make **informed choices**
- Students develop the capacity to demonstrate skills to potential employers
- Students develop confidence & resilience to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression.
- Students engage with a wide range of career development opportunities.

Impact:
- Graduate outcomes rate (HESA GOS) for consultants in risk groups at or above rate amongst peers
- Graduates in risk groups report finding their current work 'meaningful' at or above rate amongst peers.

Assumptions

Assumption 1: Strong relationships between Sussex and employee partners, based on trust and shared values.	Assumption 2: Employers engage with pre-consultancy training	Assumption 3: Most consultants have a 'positive' internship experience	Assumption 4: Students proactively build on their consultancy experience

Explanation

The Student Consultancy programme is designed to provide final year students, particularly those from Access and Participation Plan (APP) objective groups, with the chance to gain practical work experience by tackling a real-life challenge faced by an organisation. The University sponsors students who work in interdisciplinary teams of five to undertake mini-consultancy projects for local employers. Participants are paid for 20 hours of work, over a four-week period. In that time, they collaborate with their team to understand the client's business challenge; research and analyse their problem; and present their findings. In preparation for their consultancy, participants receive training on how to manage a project, work as a team, and deliver business-style presentations. After the consultancy, they attend a follow-up workshop exploring strategies for effectively showcasing their experience and skills to potential employers.

Evidence

We expect this intervention to help develop skills required for graduate employment. Specifically, the skills identified are teamwork, project management, and public speaking. In the medium term we expect consultants to develop the capacity to articulate and showcase these skills to potential employers, through their CVs and/or during interviews. It has been argued employers want graduates with both 'hard skills' (subject knowledge) and more general 'soft skills', as well as experience (Andrews and Higson, 2008; Clarke, 2018). Soft skills have been defined by many scholars to include communication skills, problem solving, leadership, critical thinking, creativity, decision making, teamwork, and time management (Asefer and Abidin, 2021). These line up with the skills we expect the consultancy scheme to help the consultants to develop. The Wilson review (2012) highlighted the value of students acquiring relevant work-related experience during their degree to ensure smooth transition between university and the labour market. While the review focused on formal experience provided by their degree, the HEA report into the Employability literature stresses the importance experience not structured within the degree can provide (Artess, Hooley, Mellors-Bourne, 2017).

We also expect students to develop a sense of belonging in professional environments. In the medium-term we anticipate this will lead to students having increased confidence and resilience to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression. Holmes (2015) argued against reducing employability to just skills and attributes, and instead focused on the importance of graduate identity development to smooth the transition from higher education to graduate careers. There is a wide body of literature highlighting the importance of career exploration in early adulthood as being vital to the development of career identity (Jiang et al., 2019; Lent et al., 2016). Career exploration involves gathering information on careers and trialling activities (Praskova, Creed, and Hood, 2015). Therefore, we consider activities which allow students to trial professions to help in their career identity development and sense of belonging in a professional environment.

Praskova, et al's research with 667 students found that young adults who engaged in more career exploration and planning reported a clearer career identity. They state that their findings support the argument that "career identity is a central, cognitive mechanism in the agency of career development; that is, it develops through engagement in career preparation activities" and "promotes more positive career-progress and well-being outcomes" (Praskova, Creed, and Hood, 2015, p.151). This gives us reason to believe that activities which help students develop a sense of belonging and career identity will lead to them being better able to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression, and this will ultimately lead to better graduate outcome rates.

Junior Research Associates
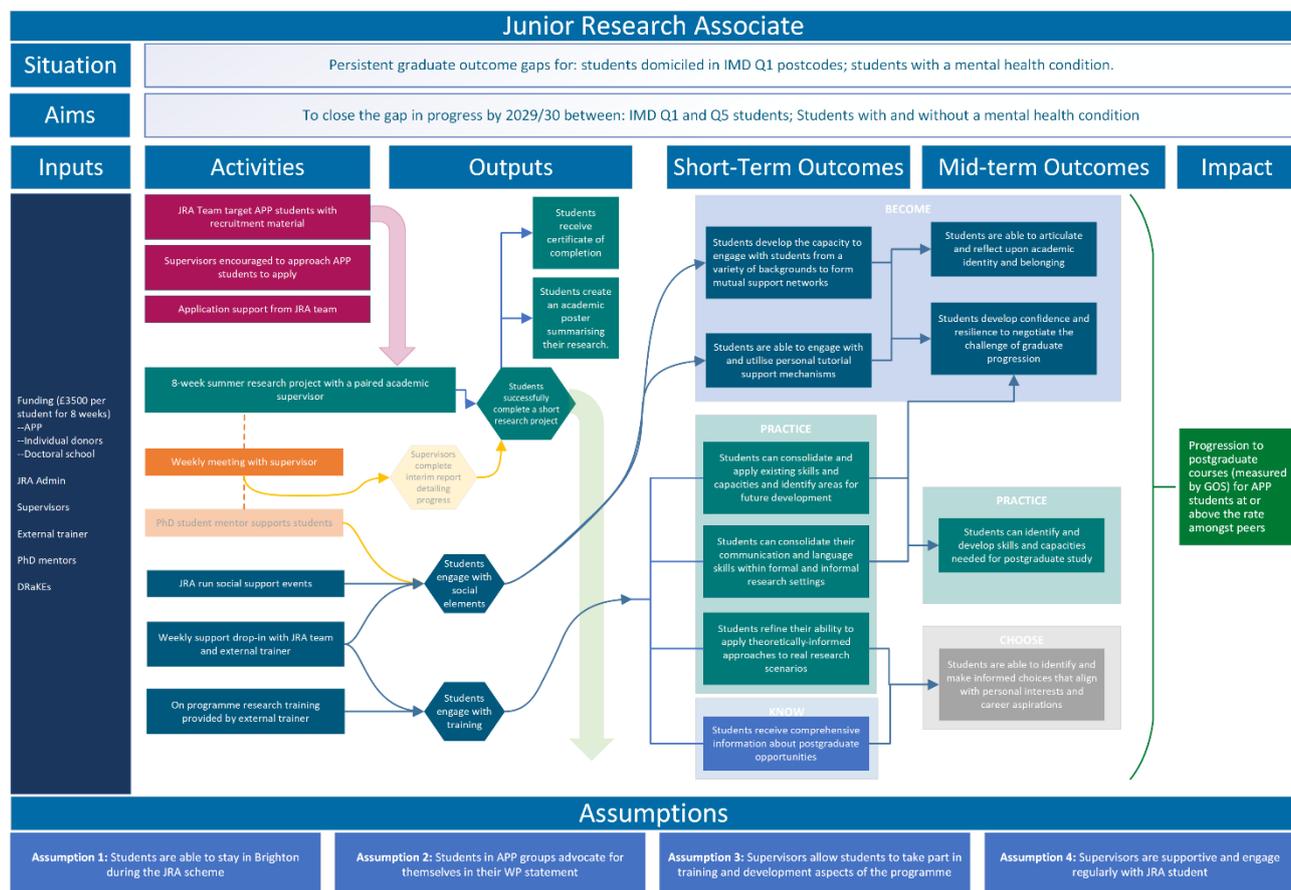
Explanation
The Junior Research Associate scheme (JRA scheme) is designed to provide approximately 70 students, particularly those from Access and Participation Plan (APP) target groups, with an eight-week funded opportunity to engage in an independent research project. Students on the programme receive research training and work with an academic member of staff who acts as their supervisor. At the end of the programme, they must complete a research poster detailing the findings of their research. The intervention aims to improve progression rates to post-graduate study for APP objective students. This will be achieved by supporting students to develop skills,

knowledge and capacities for graduate research, as well as developing students' confidence and resilience to negotiate the challenge of graduate progression.
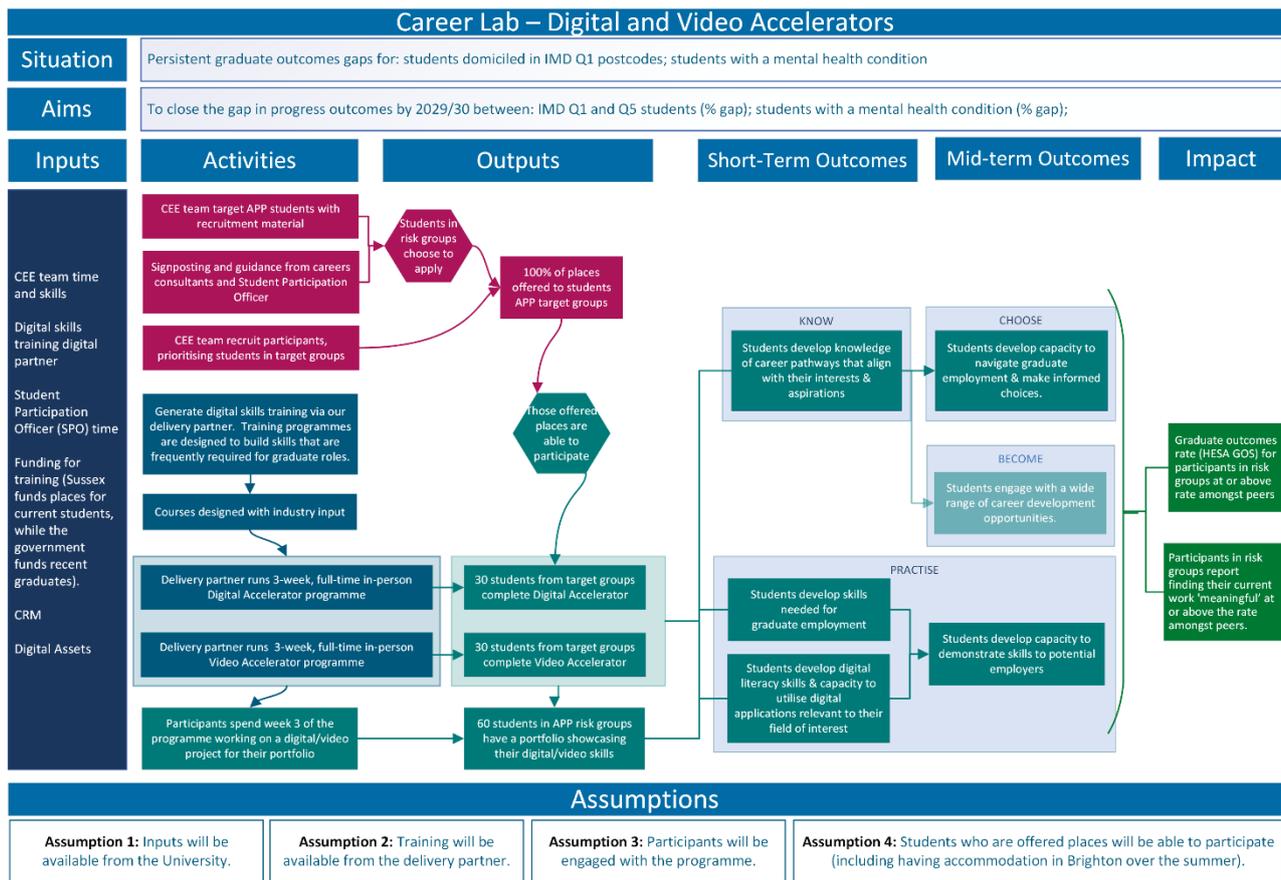
Evidence
Undergraduate research experiences have been identified as one of the highest impact educational practices for enhancing student success (Kuh, 2008). We expect the JRA intervention to help students develop the skills required for post-graduate progression. This hypothesis is supported by evidence of research into graduate summer programmes from around the English-speaking world. The research base is a lot more developed in America than in the UK on this topic. Qualitative work from America by Bruthers & Matyas (2020) focused on the experience of underrepresented STEM students on a summer research programme and reported a strong emphasis from the students about the development of research skills (research design, data analysis and presentation, time management/organization, writing, speaking, network development, math/statistics) through the programme. This is consistent with other studies such as Theim, Preetz, and Haberstroh (2023) in Germany and Baker & DoDonno (2020) in America, who found a strong correlation between participation in undergraduate research experiences and higher research self-efficacy, defined as an individual's confidence to complete research related tasks. They suggest research experience leads to higher critical thinking abilities (Baker & DoDonno, 2020, p.22). The above studies focus on STEM subjects but similar research skills have also been evidenced in social science subjects (Ruth et al,. 2023).

Both Bruthers & Matyas and Baker & DoDonno also found an increase in confidence and motivation to progress to research careers. This is backed up by previous findings from the Survey of Undergraduate Research Experiences in America, which found 83% of participants in undergraduate research experiences began or continued to plan for postgraduate education Lopatto (2004). Chamely-Wiik et al., (2023) also found evidence that undergraduate research experiences can increase progression to postgraduate study. Although their findings showed a programme which lasted a whole academic year would yield stronger impact, there was still some evidence a similar programme to the JRA has impact.

Spronken-Smith et al.,(2013) created the *Framework for Promoting Dissemination of Undergraduate Research and Inquiry* to support the dissemination of such research and complete the 'research cycle'. In this they suggest poster sessions, such as those built into the JRA programme, would have the benefit of improving students' oral communication skills and their ability to explain difficult concepts in lay terms, as well as autonomy and confidence. Gilmore et al., (2015) found a link between participation in undergraduate STEM research and increased research skills in graduate students.

The JRA also offers a limited number of students the chance of taking their research to a national conference. There have been two small-scale studies (Hill & Walkington, 2016 and Little, 2020) looking at the benefits of this particular research conference and found it was important in developing students' communication skills.

Digital And Video Accelerators

Career Lab – Digital and Video Accelerators

Situation: Persistent graduate outcomes gaps for: students domiciled in IMD Q1 postcodes; students with a mental health condition

Aims: To close the gap in progress outcomes by 2029/30 between: IMD Q1 and Q5 students (% gap); students with a mental health condition (% gap);

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-term Outcomes	Impact

Inputs: CEE team time and skills; Digital skills training digital partner; Student Participation Officer (SPO) time; Funding for training (Sussex funds places for current students, while the government funds recent graduates); CRM; Digital Assets

Activities: CEE team target APP students with recruitment material; Signposting and guidance from careers consultants and Student Participation Officer; CEE team recruit participants, prioritising students in target groups; Generate digital skills training via our delivery partner. Training programmes are designed to build skills that are frequently required for graduate roles; Courses designed with industry input; Delivery partner runs 3-week, full-time in-person Digital Accelerator programme; Delivery partner runs 3-week, full-time in-person Video Accelerator programme; Participants spend week 3 of the programme working on a digital/video project for their portfolio

Outputs: Students in risk groups choose to apply; 100% of places offered to students APP target groups; Those offered places are able to participate; 30 students from target groups complete Digital Accelerator; 30 students from target groups complete Video Accelerator; 60 students in APP risk groups have a portfolio showcasing their digital/video skills

Short-Term Outcomes: KNOW – Students develop knowledge of career pathways that align with their interests & aspirations; PRACTISE – Students develop skills needed for graduate employment; Students develop digital literacy skills & capacity to utilise digital applications relevant to their field of interest

Mid-term Outcomes: CHOOSE – Students develop capacity to navigate graduate employment & make informed choices; BECOME – Students engage with a wide range of career development opportunities; Students develop capacity to demonstrate skills to potential employers

Impact: Graduate outcomes rate (HESA GOS) for participants in risk groups at or above rate amongst peers; Participants in risk groups report finding their current work 'meaningful' at or above the rate amongst peers.

Assumptions

| Assumption 1: Inputs will be available from the University. | Assumption 2: Training will be available from the delivery partner. | Assumption 3: Participants will be engaged with the programme. | Assumption 4: Students who are offered places will be able to participate (including having accommodation in Brighton over the summer). |

Explanation

The University of Sussex has partnered with Creative Process Digital to offer the Digital and Video Accelerator Programmes (DVA programmes), two fast-track, diploma-accredited training courses to equip participants in these two groups with digital and creative skills that are in high demand amongst employers. The courses have been designed with industry input to emphasise practical skills and build students' knowledge and understanding of possible career paths in the creative digital industries.

The Career Lab digital skills training opportunities aim to contribute to narrowing the University's graduate progression gap for its objective groups, recognising it as part of a broader initiative. The development of digital skills supports students' progression into graduate roles, but also other Career Lab opportunities such as funded internships where digital skills are sought by employers.

Evidence

The Wilson review (2012) highlighted the value of students acquiring relevant work-related experience during their degree to ensure smooth transition between university and the labour market. This focused on formal experience provided by their degree, however a HEA report into the employability literature stressed the importance experiences not structured within the degree can provide (Artess, Hooley, Mellors-Bourne, 2017).

Research shows employers want graduates with both 'hard skills' (subject knowledge) and more general 'soft skills', as well as experience (Andrews and Higson, 2008; Clarke, 2018). We anticipate that students who take part in the digital and video accelerator programme will develop skills needed for graduate employment by taking part in the scheme. Soft skills have been defined by many scholars to include communication skills, problem solving, leadership, critical thinking, creativity, decision making, teamwork, and time management (Asefer and Zainal, 2021). These align with skills that we expect the digital and video accelerator programme to help students develop.

The intervention is also expected to develop student knowledge or career pathways in the digital and video sectors. There is currently little empirical evidence that smaller external courses can provide students with knowledge of career pathways within the wider career guidance services at universities. The QAA (2016) found institutional careers services struggle to engage students in their services, so offering IAG within a small course structure such as the Digital and Video Accelerators is a way of engaging students who might be less likely to work with career services.

Entrepreneurship (Ideas Fund)
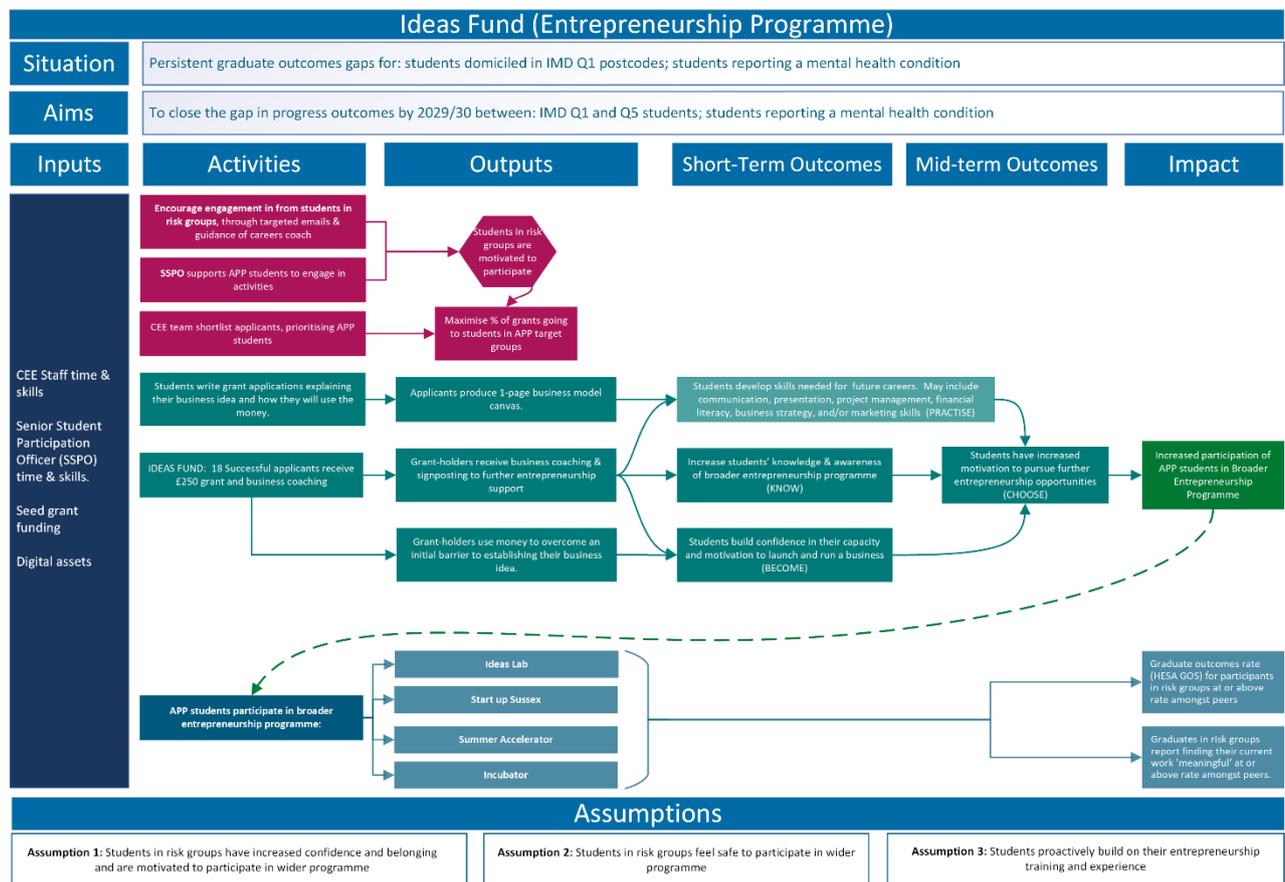
Explanation
The Ideas Fund is one thread of the wider Entrepreneurship Programme at the University of Sussex. The purpose of the intervention is to give approximately 18 students with a business idea a small grant and some coaching to pursue their idea. The aim of the intervention is for students who are entrepreneurially minded to engage with other elements of the wider programme once they have been through Ideas Fund.

Evidence
The purpose of the intervention is to help increase entrepreneurial motivation in the expectation that students will engage with other parts of the entrepreneurial programme. This is supported guidance issued by The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The QAA's Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education guidance for Higher Education Providers illustrated the learning journey towards entrepreneurial effectiveness coming from both learning in the curriculum and learning beyond the curriculum (QAA, 2018). Their model to achieving entrepreneurial effectiveness begins with entrepreneurial awareness. They highlight the role extracurricular activities delivered by career services can have in this. The journey model moves from awareness to developing an entrepreneurial mindset whereby "Students should be encouraged to develop self-awareness of their own enterprising and entrepreneurial capabilities, as well as the motivation and self-discipline to apply these flexibly" (QAA, 2018, p19). By giving students a small grant, the ideas fund is attempting to allow students their own space to test their own entrepreneurial capabilities, where if successful they will develop confidence.

Entrepreneurship (Mentoring)

Explanation

Currently there exists a persistent gap in progression levels among students from IMD Q1 postcodes, and for those reporting a mental health condition. The Entreprenerial Mentoring Scheme is targeted for students in these risk groups and matches students who are aspiring entrepreneurs with local entrepreneur-mentors who will provide bespoke 1-to-1 advice, guidance, and coaching. The mentor and mentee initially commit to meeting three times, although they may choose to extend this relationship. Through this supportive relationship, the intervention is intended to nurture the entrepreneurial confidence and capacity of students, while also developing practical skills and knowledge that are valued across many employment sectors.

Evidence

Prior research from Nabi, et al (2019) into the effect of mentoring in shaping the careers of prospective entrepreneurs in the early years of university informs the belief this intervention can build students confidence and capacity to start a business. Nabi, et al's work looked at the wider mentoring literature and built on the framework of Crisp and Cruz (2009) which identified that mentoring of undergraduate students had four major domains, including 'goal setting and career paths'. Crisp and Cruz state this is based on the "underlying idea that mentoring includes an assessment of the student's strengths, weaknesses, and abilities and assistance with setting academic as well as career goals" (Crisp and Cruz, 2009, p.539). Nabi et al, found evidence to suggest this happens in entrepreneurial mentoring, by helping "mentees to understand themselves (e.g. their own career intentions, goals, strengths, and ideas) and the entrepreneurial career path (e.g. the steps involved in becoming an entrepreneur)" (Nabi, et al, 2021, p.1166). This should enable students to better negotiate the entrepreneurial career pathway and graduate progression.

We also expect the intervention to have an impact on student knowledge about how to launch and run a business. This hypothesis is also supported by the work of Nabi et al (2021) and Crisp and Cruz (2009). Nabi, et al, found evidence that mentoring supports knowledge development, both in terms of career development and specific market/product/financial knowledge. This is consistent

with the framework of Cris and Cruz which had knowledge development as their third domain of mentoring: "academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing a student's knowledge relevant to their chosen field" (Crisp and Cruz, 2009, p.538). Nabi, et al, also found the impact of mentoring went beyond knowledge and had a direct developmental impact on mentees' nascent entrepreneurial behaviour.

Insights Visits

Career Lab – Insight Visits
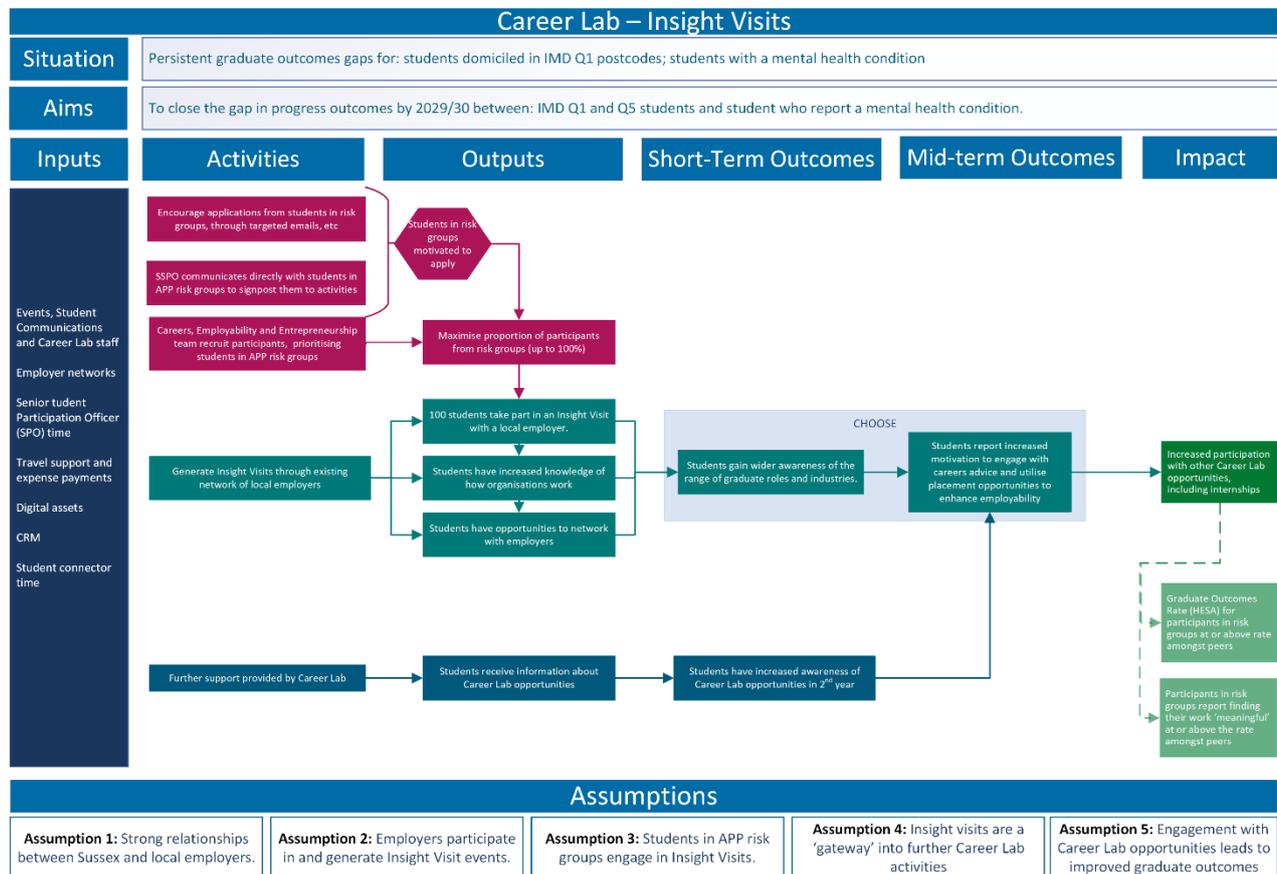
Explanation
Insight Visits are designed to provide approximately 100 first-year students, particularly those from Access and Participation Plan (APP) objective groups, with the opportunity to visit a local employer and develop an increased understanding of the diverse range of roles and career paths that exist within an organisation. Along with other activities offered by the careers service, Insight Visits is designed to be an accessible introduction to the range of opportunities and support offered by the team. In the longer term it is expected that students who participate in an Insight Visit will then engage with further Career Lab opportunities, which will consequently provide them with experience and skills for successful graduate progression.

Evidence
One of the hypotheses in the Theory of Change model is that insight days will give students an increased knowledge of how organisations work, and this will lead to the students having a wider awareness of the range of graduate roles and industries they could work in. There is little evidence to back up this hypothesis. There is weak evidence that workplace visits in secondary school can aid students in their career decision making and providing insight into workplace working (Buzzeo and Cifci, 2017). This causal pathway will need further research through the evaluation of this intervention.

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Intervention Strategy Evaluation Approach

Alongside bespoke evaluation plans for each of the interventions that comprise our Intervention Strategies listed above, we are keen to understand more about the potential impact of our Intervention Strategies as a whole on their corresponding long-term outcomes. This includes identifying the partial contribution of each activity to the long-term outcomes; exploring whether some activities, or groups of activities, are more impactful than others; understanding which factors are associated with the impact, or the absence of impact, of an activity; and appreciating the role of wider interventions, activities, or changes that are not part of this APP.

We have several overarching evaluation questions that we will seek to answer following the culmination of this APP cycle. These include:

Narrative	1.	Have we correctly identified our risks to equality of opportunity?
	2.	Have we correctly identified the key change mechanisms driving the observed outcomes?
	3.	To what extent does our intervention strategy Theory of Change hold true?
Impact	4.	What is the overall impact of the Intervention Strategy on its corresponding long-term outcome?
	5.	Who is the Intervention Strategy impactful for, and under what circumstances?
	6.	What factors moderate the extent to which an Intervention Strategy is impactful?
Exposure	7.	What is the association between the students' level of engagement with the activities in an Intervention Strategy and its corresponding long-term outcome?
Contribution	8.	What is the contribution of each activity to the long-term outcomes of the Intervention Strategy?
Context	9.	What other factors, beyond the Intervention Strategy, have contributed to, or prevented, the desired outcomes?

We appreciate these questions pose challenges for evaluation and will take a complexity aware approach to evaluating Intervention Strategies. In doing so we are acknowledging HE as a complex adaptive system, the changeable nature of HE policy, and the shifting social and economic contexts. At the same time, we will be cognisant of the ways in which this context and the impact of Covid-19 may affect future student cohorts, and thus the approaches required to achieve equality of opportunity for different cohorts. Our work will be informed by the work of the Centre for the Evaluation of Complexity across the Nexus (CECAN, 2018) and HM Treasury's Magenta Book Supplementary Guide for handling complexity in evaluation (2020) to consider how these wider systems influence our work towards eliminating risks to equality of opportunity.

To evaluate complex Intervention Strategies in these within wider systems change contexts, we will explore using sequential mixed methods approaches, such as:

- Meta-analysis of intervention-level evaluations, potentially using network meta-analysis (Rouse, Chaimani, & Li, 2017).
- Dosage response analysis exploring the association between the level and/or type of engagement with interventions and student outcomes.
- Contribution analysis to explore the contribution of different activities to desired outcomes, while also considering how factors beyond our interventions may have shaped these outcomes (Mayne 2011).

- Comparative analysis to understand whether some activities, or groups of activities, are more impactful than others for example, by conducting a dominance analysis (Budescu, 1993; Azen & Budescu, 2003; Azen & Budescu; 2006).

If the impact of intervention strategies is mixed or we lack a clear understanding of the mechanisms leading to the observed outcomes, we will explore using a realist evaluation framework. This approach will help us develop a more nuanced understanding of how, for whom, and under what circumstances our interventions are most effective (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Westhorp, 2014).

We will also draw on the work of colleagues at the University of York (Thomas, 2024) to understand in more depth how the wider context of our Whole Provider Approach affects the achievement of the intended impact through fostering an enabling environment in structure and culture to facilitate institutional transformation. We are also interested in using Sen's Capability Approach (Sen, 1993) to emphasise the substantiated opportunities that students have to achieve particular outcomes. By looking beyond traditional performance metrics, we would seek to consider how Sussex creates opportunities for students to achieve lives they value, across academic outcomes, health and wellbeing (in line with our work towards the Mental Health Charter), social participation, and personal development. It would additionally include the ways in which Sussex enables and empowers students to achieve meaningful outcomes they value, ensuring a holistic view of institutional effectiveness and student success.

As much of this analysis will occur towards the end of, and after, this APP cycle, we have not included publication dates for these higher-level evaluations, however given our institutional commitment to open research we will ensure that we share our findings with colleagues across the sector in due course and will publish these alongside the final evaluation reports outlined in the Intervention Strategies above.

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Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: University of Sussex

Provider UKPRN: 10007806

Summary of 2025-26 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflation statement:

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

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

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	9250
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0		N/A	9250
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT		N/A	9250
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	On a placement year, students pay 20% of standard fee	N/A	1850
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	Student studying abroad pay 15% of standard fee	N/A	1385
Other	*	N/A	*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: University of Sussex

Provider UKPRN: 10007806

Investment summary

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

Notes about the data:

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

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

In Table 6d (under 'Breakdown'):

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

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

Table 6b - Investment summary

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£1,629,000	£1,631,000	£1,669,000	£1,717,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£2,320,000	£2,356,000	£2,431,000	£2,499,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£467,000	£480,000	£492,000	£505,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£811,000	£812,000	£831,000	£855,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£818,000	£819,000	£838,000	£862,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (£)**	**£1,629,000**	**£1,631,000**	**£1,669,000**	**£1,717,000**
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (as % of HFI)**	**5.4%**	**5.4%**	**5.4%**	**5.4%**
Access activity investment	**Total access investment funded from HFI (£)**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Access activity investment	**Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£1,820,000	£1,841,000	£1,890,000	£1,942,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£500,000	£515,000	£541,000	£557,000
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (£)**	**£2,320,000**	**£2,356,000**	**£2,431,000**	**£2,499,000**
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)**	**7.7%**	**7.8%**	**7.9%**	**7.9%**
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£467,000	£480,000	£492,000	£505,000
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%

Office for Students

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: University of Sussex

Provider UKPRN: 10007806

Targets

Table 5b: Access and/or raising attainment targets

Aim [500 characters maximum]	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
To increase the proportion of enrolments to Sussex from those eligible for free school meals.	PTA_1	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		Target of 17% by 2029-30.	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	12	13	14	15	16
To increase the proportion of students from East Sussex who were eligible for FSM, enrolling in HE.	PTA_2	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		Target of 21.9% by 29-30. Working in collaboration with Uniconnect (Sussex Learning Network), University of Brighton and University of Chichester. Data came from Department for Education - Widening Participation statistics.	Yes	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2021-22	Percentage	16.9	17.9	18.9	19.9	20.9
To increase the proportion of students from West Sussex who were eligible for FSM, enrolling in HE.	PTA_3	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		Target of 23.1% by 29-30 Working in collaboration with Uniconnect (Sussex Learning Network), University of Brighton and University of Chichester. Data came from Department for Education - Widening Participation statistics.	Yes	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2021-22	Percentage	18.1	19.1	20.1	21.1	22.1
To increase the proportion of students from Brighton and Hove who were eligible for FSM, enrolling in HE.	PTA_4	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		Target of 26.2% by 29-30. Working in collaboration with Uniconnect (Sussex Learning Network), University of Brighton and University of Chichester. Data came from Department for Education - Widening Participation statistics.	Yes	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2021-22	Percentage	21.2	22.2	23.2	24.2	25.2
	PTA_5														
	PTA_6														
	PTA_7														
	PTA_8														
	PTA_9														
	PTA_10														
	PTA_11														
	PTA_12														

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
To reduce the continuation gap between those with a mental health condition and those without.	PTS_1	Continuation	Reported disability	Mental health condition	No disability reported	Target of 5% by 2029-30.	No	The access and participation dashboard	2020-21	Percentage	6.4	6.1	5.8	5.5	5.2
To reduce the completion gap between mature and non-mature students.	PTS_2	Completion	Other	Other (please specify in description)	N/A	Mature students. Target of 4% by 2029-30.	No	The access and participation dashboard	2017-18	Percentage	8.4	7.5	6.6	5.7	4.8
To reduce the awarding gap between those eligible for FSM and those who were not.	PTS_3	Attainment	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible	Not eligible	Target of 6.5% by 2029-30.	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	13.1	11.8	10.5	9.2	7.9
To reduce the awarding gap between black and white students.	PTS_4	Attainment	Ethnicity	Black	White	Latest HESA data used (2022-23) as shows gap is widening from data published on OfS dashboard (2021-22). Target of 12% by 2029-30.	No	HESA publications (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	24.5	22	19.5	17	14.5
To reduce the awarding gap between Asian and white students.	PTS_5	Attainment	Ethnicity	Asian	White	Latest HESA data used (2022-23) as shows gap is widening from data published on OfS dashboard (2021-22). Target of 5% by 2029-30.	No	HESA publications (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	9.7	8.8	7.9	7	6

Aim	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
To reduce the awarding gap between mixed-heritage and white students.	PTS_6	Attainment	Ethnicity	Mixed	White	Latest HESA data used (2022-23) as shows gap is widening from data published on OfS dashboard (2021-22). Target of 6% by 2029-30.	No	HESA publications (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	12.9	11.5	10.1	8.7	7.3
	PTS_7														
	PTS_8														
	PTS_9														
	PTS_10														
	PTS_11														
	PTS_12														

Table 5e: Progression targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
To reduce the gap between students with a mental health condition and those without achieving a graduate level outcome.	PTP_1	Progression	Reported disability	Mental health condition	No disability reported	Data from Graduate Outcomes Survey. Target 6% by 2029-30.	No	HESA publications (please include details in commentary)	2020-21	Percentage	9.3	8.6	7.9	7.3	6.6
To reduce the gap between students from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 achieving a graduate level outcome.	PTP_2	Progression	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1	IMD quintile 5	Data from Graduate Outcomes Survey. Target 4% by 2029-30.	No	HESA publications (please include details in commentary)	2020-21	Percentage	8.4	7.6	6.7	5.8	4.9
	PTP_3														
	PTP_4														
	PTP_5														
	PTP_6														
	PTP_7														
	PTP_8														
	PTP_9														
	PTP_10														
	PTP_11														
	PTP_12														