

Luminate Education Group, University Centre Leeds

Access and Participation Plan 2025-26 to 2028-29

Introduction and Strategic Aim

University Centre Leeds is part of Luminate Education Group (LEG), a collection of education providers based in the Leeds City Region. The group also consists of Harrogate College, Keighley College, Leeds City College and Leeds Conservatoire and it is University Centre Leeds (UCLeeds) that will be the focus of this Access and Participation Plan.

UCLeeds, through the forerunner colleges mentioned above, has been delivering high quality higher education provision since 1997 when it started delivering a small number of Higher National Diplomas and ITE qualifications. The provision developed over the years with expansions to the programme portfolio both in response to market demand and to provide suitable progression for Leeds City College's Level 3 provision.

We firmly believe that every individual, regardless of their background, should have equality of opportunity to access, succeed in, and progress beyond higher education to fulfil their potential. This principle is evident in our guiding principles for higher education, which underpin every decision we make. We are dedicated to widening access to and success in higher education, ensuring that all individuals have the chance to thrive and succeed.

A large proportion of our students are from the local region and/or are commuter students, with many graduates staying in the region beyond graduation. To give an indication of our student body:

- 30% are 30 and over (60.6% mature, over 21)
- 20.1% have a reported disability
- 93.5% come with BTEC, Access or alternative L3 qualifications rather than A levels
- 67.7% come from areas of highest deprivation (IMD Q1)
- 50.5% of those under 21 come from areas with the lowest participation in higher education (TUNDRA Q1)
- 33.9% are eligible for free school meals

*based on 4-year aggregate 2017-18 to 2021-22

We recognise the importance of embracing the diversification agenda set by the Office for Students and UCLeeds has successfully managed a varied and diverse range of higher education programmes including Foundation Degrees, Degree Apprenticeships, one-year Top-ups and Higher Technical Qualifications. Our provision offers alternative pathways in higher education that meet the needs of a wider range of students.

It is our strategy to work in partnership in our local area via Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) to undertake access and participation work that an individual higher education provider (HEP) cannot do alone. GHWY is a formal consortium of diverse HE providers to enable collaboration on

reducing inequalities in access to and success in higher education, for individuals who experience inequality of opportunity. GHWY's theory of change is that if people, particularly those who experience inequality of opportunity, can get access to information about the whole range of higher education options available to them, it will support them to enrol and succeed in higher education. Through GHWY, we are well-connected with other HE providers locally across West Yorkshire, as well as key stakeholders such as the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, to collaborate on access and participation activity.

In 2018, LEG was awarded Foundation Degree (FD) Awarding Powers, following which all new FD provision was validated under these powers. To align with the implementation of these powers the strategic decision was taken to 'see out' OU validated FDs to provide stability and also the opportunity to focus activity on seeking expansion through the development of new provision. In 2024, UCLeeds applied to the Office for Students (OfS) for indefinite foundation degree awarding powers and to extend the UCLeeds degree awarding powers to include Bachelor Degree Awarding Powers for Luminate Education Group (LEG), and specifically UCLeeds.

Luminate Education Group has an overarching Mission which the HE Strategy aims to achieve. The Group's Mission and Values are published on the website. UCLeeds' provision is planned and integrated in line with the Group's corporate objectives for success in progression and widening participation. The Group works extensively with networks operating within the region to ensure relevance of provision and to develop management of quality and standards. Engagement with these forums also ensures that the Group utilises available opportunities to use relevant sources of information in order to remain abreast of developments, opportunities and potential challenges within the sector.

Aligning with Luminate Education Group, UCLeeds' mission is to:

- Be the leading choice for students and staff;
- Make a positive, life changing impact on our students with clear progression routes into further study and work;
- Help to make our communities more prosperous and cohesive;
- Fully connect to businesses with constantly emerging opportunities.

UCLeeds' strategic priority to equality of opportunity:

- Continue to improve progression into and through HE and increase and widen participation in HE for under-represented groups;
- Design, develop and deliver a relevant curriculum that put the students' needs first, offers flexible, responsive programmes appropriate to the social and economic needs of the locality and region that reflect the diversity of the student body;
- Provide tailored support to address individual needs so that every student receives the support and guidance needed to succeed whilst studying;
- Improve recruitment of part time students, particularly through higher and degree apprenticeships;
- Develop and strengthen partnerships with employers, sector groups, schools and other providers to address the regional economic strategies and priorities;
- Develop a research profile through scholarly and pedagogical activities that will underpin the growth, development and strategic management of HE.

Risks to equality of opportunity

An Assessment of Performance was conducted by the institution (Annex A) utilising the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR), Access and Participation Dashboard and internal data analysis. This enabled the identification of key challenges affecting student opportunities at University Centre Leeds.

This section focuses on what we perceive as the most significant threat to equality of opportunity for students. Annex A, Assessment of Performance, offers a further examination of each phase of the student lifecycle, encompassing both UCLeeds-specific data and our institutional strategies in response to the EORR findings for each stage.

We identified our key risks to equality of opportunity by the following three step process:

1. Identification of our indications of risk in our Assessment of Performance

We analysed available data to identify the largest gaps in performance for student groups and lifecycle stages across a 4-year aggregate.

2. Consideration of the OfS EORR

We considered the applicability of the EORR risks to our context.

3. Staff and student consultation

We undertook a risk determiner process within the Widening Participation Committee. Participants were invited to provide their thoughts on the biggest risks to equality of opportunity that they had encountered, and to consider a whole provider approach to mitigate these risks.

Risks (identified in the EORR)	Assessment of Risk	Lifecycle Stage
1: Knowledge and skills	Medium	Access
2: Information and guidance	Medium	Access
3: Perception of higher education	Medium	Access
6: Insufficient academic support	High	On course
7: Insufficient personal support	Medium	On course
8: Mental health	Medium	On course, Progression
10: Cost pressures	High	Access, On course, Progression
12: Progression from higher education	High	Progression

Access

UCLeeds demonstrates success in attracting students from widening participation (WP) backgrounds across various indicators and student groups. Notably, there are large numbers from the following:

- Mature students (57% compared to 27.7% sector average)
- IMD Q1 (51.6% compared to 21.8% sector average)
- TUNDRA Q1 (24.3% compared to 12% sector average)
- Eligibility for free school meals (33.9% compared to 19.2% sector average)

*based on a 4 year aggregate 2017-18 to 2021-22

As a result of this we do not consider inequality in student access to groups identified in the OfS Data Dashboard to be one of the greatest risks to address within this plan. However, we have committed to widening access to the least represented groups in higher education and recognise the essential need for employer-led technical education for these groups. As such, we have identified the following risks and subsequent objectives:

Risk 1: There are low numbers of applicants from the least represented groups in higher education including care experienced students, refugees and sanctuary seekers and estranged students.

We began collecting application data for these target groups in the 2021/22 academic year, however, there is currently no publicly available data. As part of our plan we will commence collection of application data for all WP groups, disseminated to relevant teams to monitor outreach, applications, enrolment and continuation from 2024/25 academic year onwards.

Wider Risks and Links to the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)

During our assessment of performance, we identified several risks from the EORR that are relevant to the nature of our provision within the sector. Considering that our student body has characteristics that make them less likely to enter higher education, we see the following risks as applicable to most of our student population.

- **Knowledge and skills**
The Size and Shape Dashboard indicates that only 6.5% of our students have A levels on entry, compared with 51.2% in the sector, meaning the qualification on entry profile at UCLeeds is much more diverse. We recognise that this metric impacts students' prior knowledge, academic skills and preparedness for higher education which may also have a detrimental impact on their on-course success.
- **Information and guidance**
We are confident our information, advice and guidance (IAG) is clear and substantial work is done to improve understanding of CBHE in schools, colleges and the community through our widening participation and outreach delivery. Despite this, we consider a risk to equality of opportunity being a lack of understanding of the higher education sector including

financial support available, lack of knowledge of pathways into higher education and lack of family support with no personal experience in HE.

- **Perception of higher education**

Students may not feel able to apply to us despite our diverse range of courses and vocationally focused study options. This is due to ongoing perceptions around brand awareness, degree-level study, financial or familial circumstances. Some students might be discouraged from applying to us because they do not see it as a place for them. Our outreach strategies within schools, colleges and the community must reflect our diverse student body to ensure role models are visible to improve perceptions, sense of belonging and overall understanding of our provision.

On course

There are higher proportions of students disclosing a disability and/or learning difficulty associated with mental health year on year and in comparison, with non-disability or other disabilities. Evidence from our annual reviews suggests students are not then engaging in the support offered from the Student Support Team to continue and succeed on the course and there is a limited uptake in mental health support sessions.

Risk 2: Students who report a disability are less likely to continue and complete their studies than their peers.

Our publicly available attainment data shows that we are lower than the sector average for all student groups, which we accredit to the nature of our provision, including the foundation degree and top-up route. We are focusing on gaps in attainment between student groups, and we have identified three groups who are less likely to achieve a 2:1 or 1st degree, with the following risks:

Risk 3.1 : Students from ethnically diverse backgrounds are less likely to achieve a first class or 2:1 degree classification compared with white students.

Risk 3.2: Students from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds (using IMD Q1 as a measure) are less likely to achieve a 2:1 or 1st degree compared with IMD Q5.

Risk 3.3: Students under the age of 21 from areas of low participation in higher education (TUNDRA Q1) are less likely to achieve a first class or 2:1 compared with students from areas of high participation.

Wider Risks and Links to the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)

- **Insufficient academic support**

Considering our qualifications on entry, some students may require additional academic support. Significant investment has already been put in place to support and mitigate any gaps in achievement including the introduction of Academic Student Support Managers in key areas, Support Tutors and Additional Learning Support Officers, our plan will ensure

there is targeted support including the implementation of an Academic Skills Programme for students.

- **Insufficient personal support**

Similarly to Risk 6, some students may require additional or tailored support, which may not be signposted effectively. Students may not be aware of what support is available to them or may not have the time to access support due to external commitments.

- **Mental health**

Since 2019, students have been more engaged in accessing mental health support, increasing each year (2019-20: 67 , 2020-21: 85 , 2021-22: 87) . Staff and students noted that, since the pandemic, mental health conditions have greatly impacted student wellbeing and their attendance. In addition to this, there may be cultural stigmas for students accessing mental health support, and this is explored further in our whole provider approach.

- **Cost pressures**

Increases in cost pressures may affect a student's ability to complete their course or obtain a good grade. Students from low-income households may need to work excessive hours to financially sustain themselves whilst studying. Financial challenges may also include affording transport, taking up unpaid placements or other employability opportunities and financial hardship. We need to ensure the financial support package in place is sufficient and allows students to succeed on course.

Students may be less likely to apply to us according to financial need and the ongoing cost of living crisis. Despite our provision being accessible, with condensed timetables allowing for flexibility, there are indications that cost pressures have impacted application rates.

Progression

Our dashboard data has several years which are unreportable due to the small sizes of student groups, meaning the data is suppressed in some areas. In addition to this, we have challenges with the Graduate Outcomes survey including low participation rates and responses not reflecting graduate destinations.

Due to the structure of our provision including a predominant focus on the foundation degree and top-up route, students are contacted to complete the Graduation Outcomes survey 15 months after their foundation degree, however, most students go on to study a Top-up degree and therefore will have completed this 3 months prior to the survey being sent. We have an action plan in place to increase both participation rates and accuracy including the appointment of a Graduate Intern in 2024, which will make future reflection in this area more valuable. The progression data provided for the APP reflects only progression to highly skilled and/or higher employment. Many of our students who choose to leave with a level 5 qualification work in traditionally low paid

occupations such as health and social care or childcare and will therefore not qualify as being in highly skilled employment.

Objectives and targets

Access:

Objective 1: Raise aspirations and support progression to higher education for young people from the least represented groups within higher education who experience intersectional disadvantage by increasing the number of applicants from specific groups including:

PTA_1: Increase applications for care-experienced students by 5% by 2029

PTA_2: Increase applications for estranged students by 5% by 2029

PTA_3: Increase applications for refugees and people seeking sanctuary by 3% by 2029

Continuation:

Objective 2

PTS_1: Reduce the continuation gap between disabled students and non-disabled students to less than 1 percentage point by 2029.

Attainment:

Objective 3

PTS_2: Reduce the attainment gap between our ethnically diverse students and white students attaining a first class or 2:1 degree by 2 percentage points per annum by 2029.

PTS_3: Reduce the attainment gap between our students from the most deprived socio-economic backgrounds and least deprived socio-economic backgrounds attaining a first class or 2:1 degree by 1 percentage point per annum by 2029.

PTS_4: Reduce the attainment gap between our students under 21 from areas of the lowest participation in higher education and highest participation in higher education attaining a first class or 2:1 degree by 1 percentage point by 2029.

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Intervention strategy 1: Targeted outreach including enhanced support, access pathways and community partnerships

Risks to equality of opportunity: Knowledge and Skills, Information and Guidance, Perception of Higher Education, Cost Pressures.

Objectives and targets: Raise aspirations and support progression to higher education for young people from the least represented groups within higher education who experience intersectional disadvantage.

PTA_1: Commit to a 5% increase in applications for care-experienced students by 2029.

PTA_2: Commit to a 5% increase in applications for estranged students by 2029.

PTA_3: Commit to a 3% increase in applications for refugees and people seeking sanctuary by 2029.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy
<p>Activity 1: Step Ahead Programme Employability, skills and self-efficacy programme delivered twice a year.</p> <p>We will target the programme to community groups, schools, colleges and internal Luminare Further Education students.</p> <p>Target groups: Care Experienced young people, Sanctuary Seeking young people including Refugees, Young Carers or parents</p>	<p>Staffing costs for individual workshops.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staffing required: Widening Participation and Outreach Manager ▪ Uni Connect Outreach Officer ▪ Access and Participation Officer ▪ 2x6 week per academic year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased engagement in accessible and inclusive practical careers-based outreach sessions. ▪ Development of positive relationships between UCLeeds and participants and overall perceptions of higher education ▪ Positive changes in aspirations towards FE and HE. ▪ Increased practitioner awareness of the enablers, barriers and challenges of outreach with target groups. ▪ Developing partnership working with community stakeholders and collaborative learning opportunities. ▪ Deepened practitioner insights regarding attitudes, views and aspirations towards FE and HE. ▪ Increased access to HE for target groups 	<p style="text-align: center;">No</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of wider cultural models of practice relation to improving access to HE 	
<p>Activity 2: New Scholar's Programme (Academic skills) and Digital Literacy Module (Building knowledge and confidence with digital technologies)</p> <p>Target student groups: Care experienced young people, young people estranged from their families, sanctuary seeking young people including refugees, <i>Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boaters</i></p> <p>All workshops will be delivered in collaboration with student ambassadors and student teachers where appropriate.</p>	<p>Staffing costs for individual workshops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staffing required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widening Participation and Outreach Manager Access and Participation Officer UniConnect Outreach Officer Student Ambassadors <p>New Scholar's Programme:</p> <p>1x8 week per academic year</p> <p>Digital Literacy Module:</p> <p>4x4 week per academic year, admin time 40 hours</p> <p>Online resource including Zoom Education, Blackboard and Mentimeter. (institutional licence already held)</p> <p>Staff training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved knowledge of HE, it's benefits and financial support Increased ability to make informed decisions about HE Improved self-perceptions about belonging, academic abilities and confidence in academic practice, digital literacy and English proficiency. Increased engagement in accessible and inclusive practical careers-based outreach sessions. Development of positive relationships between UCLeeds and participants and overall perceptions of higher education Positive changes in attitudes and views relating to FE and HE. Positive changes in aspirations towards FE and HE. Increased practitioner awareness of the enablers, barriers and challenges of outreach with target groups. Developing partnership working with community stakeholders and collaborative learning opportunities. Deepened practitioner insights regarding attitudes, views and aspirations towards FE and HE. Increased access to HE for target groups 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of wider cultural models of practice relation to improving access to HE 	
<p>Activity 3: Digital Immersion Summer School</p> <p>Provides insight into digital technologies linked to STEM 7 skills and technical qualifications including HTQs and Foundation Degrees</p> <p>Target student groups: Care experienced young people, young people estranged from their families, sanctuary seeking young people including refugees, <i>Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boaters</i></p> <p>All workshops will be delivered in collaboration with student ambassadors and student teachers where appropriate.</p>	<p>Staffing costs for individual workshops</p> <p>Staffing required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widening Participation and Outreach Manager Access and Participation Officer UniConnect Outreach Officer Education Engagement and Recruitment Officer <p>Additional costs: Subject-specific resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved understanding of education and career pathways in STEM Self-awareness and connection to STEM 7 skills Applied knowledge gained about STEM careers to identify future education or employment destinations Raised aspirations towards higher education Understanding of the local industry markets and the importance of innovation and digital skills Increased access to HE for target groups 	
<p>Activity 4: Specific support package(s) and pre-entry work to applicants and students who are care experienced, estranged or seeking sanctuary.</p> <p>We will work with local authority contacts to support students and their supporters by creating an educational pipeline from earliest entry in further education (Level 1).</p> <p>The package also includes enhanced on-course support, all-year round accommodation and a financial package including a named contact and priority</p>	<p>Staffing costs for pre-entry and post-entry support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staffing required: Widening Participation and Outreach Manager Welfare and Progression Officer <p>Bursary :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care Experienced Bursary Estranged Students Bursary Sanctuary Bursary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness of support available Increased sense of belonging amongst target student groups, monitored through Increased continuation on course for target groups Increased degree attainment Improved self-perceptions about belonging, academic abilities and confidence in academic practice, digital literacy and English proficiency. 	IS2, IS3

access to the University Centre Leeds Hardship Fund.			
Activity 5: Marketing activity and information, advice and guidance tailored to students from target groups. Development of resources and web content to address barriers in access to information, advice and guidance.	<p>Staffing costs to create campaigns and monitor engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staffing required: Marketing Executive ▪ Digital Communications Executive ▪ Access and Participation Officer <p>Paid campaign</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased enquiries from potential applicants from target groups. ▪ Increased HE applications from applicants from target groups. ▪ Attendance at targeted Open Events 	
Activity 6: Accommodation Officer role to support students to find accommodation in the local area	<p>Staff costs: Accommodation Officer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased applications from target groups ▪ Increased sense of belonging ▪ Decrease in financial concerns 	
Activity 7: Training for teaching, admissions and support staff on delivering educational services for intersectional disadvantaged students	<p>Staff training plus administrative costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff required: ▪ Widening Participation and Outreach Manager ▪ Outreach Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved knowledge of the needs of students who face intersectional disadvantage ▪ Increased confidence in supporting those students in HE 	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £461000

Summary of evidence base and rationale:

We have conducted a literature review (Annex B), analysed public and institutional data (Annex A), engaged with colleagues at other institutions to recognise best practice (predominantly as part of the Go Higher West Yorkshire Network) and liaised with schools, colleges and community groups on the research, rationale, and design of this intervention strategy.

We intend to evaluate activities within this intervention strategy where appropriate to generate OfS Type 2 standards to establish whether they lead to the intended outcomes. For less intensive activities or where collection of individualised data is not practical, we will rely on regular programme reviews and feedback to ascertain progress. We will also examine the extent to which each activity contributes towards meeting the overall objective. We will start the strategy in the 2025-26 academic year, and we intend to disseminate findings on our website in the 2028-29 academic year.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Activity 1, 2, 3 (Widening Participation and Outreach Programmes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved knowledge of HE, it's benefits and financial support ▪ Increased ability to make informed decisions about HE ▪ Improved self-perceptions about belonging, academic abilities and confidence in academic practice, digital literacy and English proficiency. ▪ Increased academic confidence ▪ Increased applications from target students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Theory of change models ▪ Data analysis: number and % of students engaging in activities and % with target characteristics ▪ Pre and post activity surveys to gauge perceptions and understanding of HE where appropriate, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Knowledge of UK education system ○ Perceptions of higher technical qualifications ▪ Comparative analysis of pre and post survey data to establish whether the activity leads to intended outcomes. ▪ Mid-point review each year to determine whether activities meet the needs of participants. 	<p>We intend to evaluate all activities within Intervention Strategy 1 via an Access and Participation Report (new activity), produced annually. The report will be disseminated internally through the WP Committee and Annual Review processes to establish whether they lead to the intended outcomes. We intend to disseminate findings publicly at the end of this plan.</p>
Activity 4 (Specific Support Package(s))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased awareness of support available ▪ Increased sense of belonging amongst target student groups, monitored through ▪ Increased continuation on course for target groups ▪ Increased degree attainment 	<p>Aim to generate OfS Type 2 evidence including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collection of number and percentage of students accessing support packages, 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved self-perceptions about belonging, academic abilities and confidence in academic practice, digital literacy and English proficiency. 	<p>analysing by target group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of financial support element of the package and what it has being spent on. • Regular communications with target groups and check-ins to determine whether support meets the needs of target groups. • Monitoring the correlation between engagement with the packages and improved continuation and completion. 	
Activity 5 (Marketing Activity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased enquiries from potential applicants from target groups. ▪ Increased HE applications from applicants from target groups. ▪ Attendance at targeted Open Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring the number of UCAS applications from target groups of students ▪ Monitoring of event data targeted at widening participation events (support for care experienced students, support for sanctuary seeking students) 	
Activity 7 (Training for teaching, admissions and support staff)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved knowledge of the needs of students who face intersectional disadvantage ▪ Increased confidence in supporting those students in HE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-post surveys for training sessions ▪ Analysis of increased/decreased communications regarding widening participation 	

Intervention Strategy 2: Holistic support for disabled students to succeed in and progress from Higher Education

Risks to equality of opportunity: Insufficient academic support, Insufficient personal support, Mental health, Cost pressures

Objectives and targets:

PTS_1: Narrow the continuation gap of disabled students compared with non-disabled students to less than 1 percentage point by 2029.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
<p>Activity 1: Holistic support programme for disabled students throughout their studies, with increased support in their first year of study.</p> <p>Support includes reasonable adjustments, information on referrals for diagnostic assessments, arranging assistive technology loans, providing information about Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), information on study skills and exam support</p>	<p>Staffing costs for support team</p> <p>Staffing required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student Support Manager ▪ Welfare and Progression Officer ▪ Additional Learning Support Officer ▪ Counselling and Mental Health Officer <p>Administration and Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased awareness and uptake of support services ▪ Increased applications for DSA ▪ Improved assessment grades ▪ Reduction in mitigation and withdrawals ▪ Improved continuation ▪ Increased sense of belonging ▪ Participants continue from 1st to 2nd year ▪ Improved connections and engagement between students, particularly amongst target groups. 	<p>IS1, IS2</p>

<p>Activity 2: Mental Health, Wellbeing, Counselling and Occupational Therapy Service</p> <p>A range of specialist services including mental health and disability support, counselling, wellbeing sessions and new approaches to embed wellbeing into the curriculum</p> <p>Occupational Therapy</p> <p>The service will aim to enhance the traditional student support offered, and assist in the promotion of students' functional independence and participation</p>	<p>Staffing required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mental Health and Counselling Officer(s) ▪ Occupational Therapist(s) <p>Administration and Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction in resits and extensions and adjustments ▪ Improved outcomes (continuation, progression) for students who engage with services compared with those who do not engage. ▪ Increase engagement in support 	
<p>Activity 3: Embedding wellbeing into the curriculum</p> <p>A modular activity, led by the student support team to highlight key mechanisms used to encourage independence, relieve stress and anxiety in assessment periods and leaving higher education.</p>	<p>Staffing required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mental Health and Counselling Officer ▪ Occupational Therapist ▪ Curriculum Progress Tutor(s) ▪ Student Support Manager(s) ▪ Administration and Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction in mitigation and extensions ▪ Improved continuation ▪ Improved student emotional and mental wellbeing 	
<p>Activity 4: Training for all HE support staff to access and navigate the DSA process, providing staff with a Disability/Neurodiversity toolkit</p>	<p>SFE/DSA External speaker cost</p> <p>Staffing required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Additional Learning Support Officer ▪ Student Support Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved knowledge of the needs of students with a disability and the barriers they can face accessing DSA ▪ Increased confidence in supporting students ▪ Increased continuation rates ▪ Increased uptake in support 	

Activity 5: Identification of quiet spaces across University Centre Leeds campuses, including the newly developed Mabgate campus.	No additional cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved student wellbeing ▪ Uptake in engagement activities ▪ Improved continuation 	
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Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £430000

Summary of evidence base and rationale:

We have conducted a literature review (Annex B), analysed public and institutional data (Annex A) and engaged with our curriculum teams, academic staff and students to form the evidence base and rationale for this intervention strategy. More information can be found in Annex B.

We intend to evaluate all activities related to disability support and mental health development to determine the link between engagement in activities and improved outcomes. We will disseminate all findings through our Student Support Committee each year, and through the Annual Review processes. We will develop a record system to track progress of target student groups to improve data collection for disabled students, aiming to disaggregate data in future plans.

We will start the strategy in the 2025-26 academic year, and interim analysis will take place annually for the previous academic year and presented through our committee structure. We also intend to disseminate findings on our website in the 2028-29 academic year.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Activity 1 (Holistic Support Programme)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased awareness and uptake of support services ▪ Increased applications for DSA ▪ Improved assessment grades ▪ Reduction in mitigation and withdrawals ▪ Improved continuation ▪ Increased sense of belonging ▪ Participants continue from 1st to 2nd year ▪ Improved connections and engagement between students, particularly amongst target groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring of DSA applications as a % of students who declare a support need ▪ Monitoring the correlation between engagement of support programme as a % of students who declare a support need ▪ Module review feedback ▪ Continuation and retention annual report ensuring the % of students reporting a disability who access support is compared against those who do not 	We intend to evaluate all activities within Intervention Strategy 2 via an Access and Participation Report (new activity), produced annually. The report will be disseminated internally through the WP Committee and Annual Review processes to establish whether

		<p>access support and those who do not declare a disability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comparative analysis of year-on-year applications for additional considerations and reasonable adjustments 	<p>they lead to the intended outcomes.</p> <p>We intend to disseminate findings publicly at the end of this plan.</p>
<p>Activity 2 (Mental Health, Wellbeing, Counselling Service and Occupational Therapy)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction in resits, extensions and adjustments. ▪ Improved outcomes (continuation, progression) for students who engage with services compared with those who do not engage. ▪ Increase engagement in support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring the correlation between engagement with student support services and improved outcomes, compared to students who identify a support need at enrolment but fail to engage with support offered. ▪ Monitoring of DSA applications as a % of students who declare a support need ▪ Continuation and retention annual report ensuring the % of students reporting a mental health condition who access support is compared against those who do not access support and those who do not declare a mental health condition. 	
<p>Activity 3 (Embedding wellbeing into the Curriculum)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction in mitigation and extensions ▪ Improved continuation ▪ Improved student emotional and mental wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring engagement in the programme and analysing student characteristics ▪ Monitoring the correlation between engagement with the programme and improved outcomes compared with those who do not engage 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NSS results for student support 	
Activity 4 (Training for support staff)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved knowledge of the needs of students with a disability and the barriers they can face accessing DSA ▪ Increased confidence in supporting students ▪ Increased continuation rates ▪ Increased uptake in support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitor continuation rates through annual review processes for target groups ▪ Module review survey results ▪ Monitoring of DSA applications as a % of students who declare a support need ▪ Pre-post surveys for training sessions ▪ Analysis of increased/decreased communications regarding applications to DSA ▪ Focus groups within our committee structure 	
Activity 5 (Quiet spaces)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved student wellbeing ▪ Uptake in engagement activities ▪ Improved continuation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring the correlation between engagement with student support services and improved outcomes, compared to students who identify a support need at enrolment but fail to engage with support offered. ▪ Provide engagement opportunities for students to feedback on accessible spaces and review through our Student Support Committee including a 'Student Support Survey' and through our student representatives. 	

More detailed information on evaluation can also be provided in the Evaluation section or at Annex B.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Insufficient academic support, Insufficient personal support, Mental health, Cost pressures

Objectives and targets:

PTS_2: Reduce the attainment gap between our ethnically diverse students and white students by 2 percentage points per annum by 2029

PTS_3: Reduce the attainment gap between our students from the most deprived socio-economic backgrounds and least deprived socio-economic backgrounds by 1 percentage point per annum by 2029.

PTS_4: Reduce the attainment gap between our students under 21 from areas of the lowest participation in higher education and highest participation in higher education by 1 percentage point by 2029.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
<p>Activity 1: Holistic support programme for students from target groups in their first year of study.</p> <p>Monitoring and analysis of target student groups to monitor engagement, access to services and opportunities. Regular communications shared through Blackboard to highlight key milestones and upcoming challenges.</p>	<p>Staffing costs to record and monitor records for target student groups</p> <p>Staffing required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Widening Participation and Outreach Manager ▪ Welfare and Progression Officer ▪ Access and Participation Officer <p>Administration and resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased awareness and uptake of support services ▪ Increased attainment ▪ Increased sense of belonging ▪ Increase in uptake of top-up degrees 	<p>IS1, IS2</p>
<p>Activity 2: Financial support and access to opportunities designed to ensure academic success including:</p> <p>University Centre Leeds Bursary for students from low-income households</p> <p>University Centre Leeds Hardship Fund. We will develop the Hardship Fund</p>	<p>Staffing to coordinate bursaries and provide support alongside the Hardship Fund</p> <p>Staffing required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Registry/Finance Support ▪ Welfare and Progression Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved degree awarding outcomes for recipients of financial support compared with those not in receipt. ▪ Improved wellbeing due to financial security ▪ Improved sense of belonging 	

<p>process to prioritise specific groups and complete a review to ensure accessibility. Additional sources of support available include travel fund, meal vouchers and access to the University Centre Leeds Foodbank.</p>	<p>HE Bursary Hardship Fund Administration and resources</p>		
<p>Activity 3: Academic Skills Development</p> <p>Redevelopment of resources and initiatives to support students' academic skills development through our Digital Innovation Hub. This includes academic writing, academic integrity with AI, library tutorials and online skills programmes.</p>	<p>Staffing to deliver support and coordinate resources</p> <p>Staffing required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deputy Head of Digital Learning Development ▪ Academic Support Staff ▪ Student Support Manager ▪ HE Librarian ▪ Study Skills Coaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved degree awarding outcomes for target groups ▪ Increased uptake of top-up degrees ▪ Increased student satisfaction (NSS) 	
<p>Activity 4: Inclusive Curriculum</p> <p>Create inclusive and accessible teaching and learning by developing the language in our assessment resources, policies and guidance in addition to reviewing our assessment methods to be fair and authentic.</p>	<p>Staffing to create resources and commit to research and scholarly activity</p> <p>Staff required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deputy Head of HE Quality ▪ Head of Teaching, Learning and Development ▪ Policy and Compliance Officer ▪ Group Director of HE Quality and Standards <p>Administration and Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased student satisfaction and sense of belonging ▪ Decrease the likelihood of inconsistency in assessment standards ▪ Improved attainment and narrowing of gaps for target groups against comparator group ▪ Increased use of more accessible and inclusive language as a whole provider ▪ Increased NSS scores on assessment and feedback ▪ Provide a collective understanding of the standards used for assessment by staff and students 	

<p>Activity 5: Visiting Professionals</p> <p>Invite guest speakers from target groups to speak to students about their own journey through employment and education. Including previous alumni, document through a podcast series.</p> <p>(Expanding on current activity and widening reach of student groups)</p>	<p>Coordination of activities delivered across the provision</p> <p>Staffing required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welfare and Progression Officer ▪ Widening Participation and Outreach Manager <p>Guest speaker costs including travel and time:</p> <p>Activity evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved degree awarding outcomes for target groups ▪ Increased knowledge relating to employability skills ▪ Increased knowledge and understanding of the labour market, professional standards and competencies ▪ Improved self-efficacy about career and employability capacities, readiness and confidence ▪ Improved motivation and engagement in learning ▪ Increased level of professional networks and contacts 	
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Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £2550000

Summary of evidence base and rationale:

We have conducted a literature review (Annex B), analysed public and institutional data (Annex A) and engaged with our curriculum teams, academic staff and students to form the evidence base and rationale for this intervention strategy. More information can be found in Annex B.

We intend to evaluate individual activities related to academic skills development to determine the link between engagement in activities and improved outcomes. Financial support will be evaluated through a Student Money Survey, disseminated internally to all staff, and through a local network of higher education providers. We will develop a record system to track progress of target student groups to improve early intervention in line with OfS Type 2 standards. We will start the strategy in the 2025-26 academic year, and interim analysis will take place annually for the previous academic year and presented through our committee structure including the Widening Participation Committee and Student Support Committee. We also intend to disseminate findings on our website in the 2028-29 academic year.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
<p>Activity 1 (Holistic support programme)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased awareness and uptake of support services ▪ Increased attainment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring of support service uptake through Annual Review processes, in addition to 	<p>We intend to evaluate all activities listed within Intervention</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased sense of belonging ▪ Increase in uptake of top-up degrees 	<p>comparing against those who have not accessed support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring comparator attainment rates for target groups ▪ Year on year comparison of uptake in top-up degrees ▪ NSS survey results for assessment and support 	<p>Strategy 3 via an Access and Participation Report (new activity), produced annually. The report will be disseminated internally through the Widening Participation and Student Support Committees and Annual Review processes to establish whether they lead to the intended outcomes. We intend to disseminate findings publicly at the end of this plan.</p>
Activity 2 (Financial support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved degree awarding outcomes for recipients of financial support compared with those not in receipt. ▪ Improved wellbeing due to financial security ▪ Improved sense of belonging ▪ Increased attainment rates for target students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct a 'Student Money Survey' and disseminate findings internally ▪ Monitor number and % of students receiving bursaries and hardship fund payments from target groups ▪ Total spend on bursaries and hardship fund payments overall and for target groups 	
Activity 3 (Academic Skills Development)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased attainment for target groups ▪ Increased uptake of top-up degrees ▪ Increased student satisfaction (NSS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Module review surveys ▪ Staff review survey to determine effectiveness of development, and gauge gaps for improvement ▪ Engagement in academic support and impact on results including specific resources through our Digital Innovation Hub ▪ Student feedback opportunities on academic skills development and availability of resources including the NSS results, module feedback reviews and 	

		student representative feedback.	
Activity 4 (Inclusive Curriculum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased student satisfaction and sense of belonging ▪ Decrease the likelihood of inconsistency in assessment standards ▪ Improved attainment and narrowing of gaps for target groups against comparator group ▪ Increased use of more accessible and inclusive language as a whole provider ▪ Increased NSS scores on assessment and feedback ▪ Provide a collective understanding of the standards used for assessment by staff and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (As above) Staff review survey to determine effectiveness of development, and gauge gaps for improvement ▪ Module review surveys ▪ NSS results addressing teaching, learning and assessment for target groups 	
Activity 5 (Visiting Professionals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved degree awarding outcomes for target groups ▪ Increased knowledge relating to employability skills ▪ Increased knowledge and understanding of the labour market, professional standards and competencies ▪ Improved self-efficacy about career and employability capacities, readiness and confidence ▪ Improved motivation and engagement in learning ▪ Increased level of professional networks and contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre/Post surveys for students participating ▪ Monitor attainment rates ▪ Focus groups with staff and students to determine how impactful visiting professionals through student representative award committees 	

More detailed information on evaluation can also be provided in the Evaluation section or at Annex B.

Whole Provider Approach

The Access and Participation Plan is supported by the Luminate Education Group (LEG) Board of Governors, Higher Education Academic Board and Student Support Committee, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and Widening Participation Committee. Our plan works cohesively in line with our HE Strategy, which focused on the development of higher-level skills and vocational learning in line with the findings of Leitch; the building of the skills infrastructure under the direction of the Local Enterprise and Partnership and relevant Employment and Skills boards.

All policies and decision-making are impact assessed to ensure that due regard is had in relation to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Each board/committee is made up of members from a range of different backgrounds, who each bring individual experiences and skillsets that are crucial to the effectiveness and success of the group and its member organisations. All committees and boards have clearly defined terms of reference which articulate their role and responsibilities, reporting lines and membership. These are reviewed regularly and take account of changes in regulatory requirements and organisation structures.

The Widening Participation (WP) Committee works on behalf of UCLeeds and is responsible for:

- Sharing practices, devising solutions to meet challenges and opportunities, relating to widening participation
- Considering and implemented strategies for improving gaps in access, continuation, success, and progression that puts students from underrepresented groups at the forefront
- Participating in research and scholarly activity.

Equality Diversity and Inclusion

UCLeeds, as part of LEG, is dedicated to fostering an inclusive working and learning environment that respects and celebrates diversity. LEG has reinforced its commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion through its updated objectives and comprehensive Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. This policy applies to all current and prospective students and apprentices, governors, staff (both paid and voluntary), external examiners, consultants, guests, and contractors who visit our campuses.

Luminate EDI Objectives (valid until 2026)	
Celebrate Diversity	We will seek and create opportunities to celebrate diversity, being responsive to the needs of our staff and students and ensure excellence through inclusion.

Champion disability, neurodiversity and improve accessibility	We will champion accessibility of the curriculum and the educational environment, challenge ability discrimination, promote respect and be inclusive regardless of ability, disability or mental wellbeing.
Challenge discrimination and foster inclusion	We will create a culture of mutual respect, tolerance, democracy and individual liberty and challenge all oppressive language and behaviours.
Invest in the Race Equality Roadmap	We will create an anti-racist culture that promotes accountability, career development, fulfilling potential and building community partnerships.
Amplify voice and influence	We will promote a diverse culture where students, apprentices and staff are widely consulted and create their own opportunities to shape and promote equality, diversity and inclusion.
Promote social mobility	We will raise aspirations and improve outcomes for all students and staff with protected characteristics or from disadvantaged groups, including economic deprivation.

Pre-entry support

Support for transition to higher education is predominantly provided by the Widening Participation (WP) and Outreach Team with additional support from Admissions, Registry, the Student Support Team and curriculum departments across UCLeeds. The WP and Outreach Team offers tailored information and guidance to students who may need extra support to access higher education. In alignment with our Access and Participation Plan targets and objectives, the team delivers specialised programmes for specific student groups. These programmes aim to enhance academic achievement in schools and colleges, address misconceptions about higher education, and ensure students can make informed decisions about their progression.

Our comprehensive approach spans the entire student lifecycle, including transitions between levels of study and into graduate employment or further study. This includes pre-application and enrolment programmes that support the development of belonging, cultural and social capital, student identity, and resilience, while managing expectations and developing academic preparedness. Example activities include one-on-one application and enrolment support, campus tours, DSA application support, the HE Study Skills Programme, the Progression/Insights into University module, Freshers' activities, and robust induction programmes.

As a college-based HE provider with a significant amount of internal progression from further education (FE) to higher education (HE), we work closely with FE colleges to identify the needs and trends among our FE student cohorts transitioning to our HE provision. This proactive approach allows us to design interventions that support students from pre-application through to their first year of HE study.

Our strategies support the development of self-efficacy and academic integration. Throughout outreach and first-year transitions, all UCLeeds teams encourage students to adopt positive health behaviours and build curriculum confidence. The Student Support Team offers talks, workshops, and “coming to UCLeeds” preparation talks for all students, whether they are new to UCLeeds or transitioning between levels of study.

Wrap around support

In addition to our central Student Support team (interventions provided in this plan), curriculum teams play a crucial role in assessing and addressing student needs. They conduct initial discussions and assessments during interview and induction days, continuing this support throughout the student lifecycle to identify any emerging needs or concerns. Regular pastoral tutorials with students and frequent meetings with the central Student Support Team ensure ongoing support. Additionally, these teams collaborate at the Student Support Committee to enhance student welfare.

Curriculum induction days introduce various themes such as mental health, mental resilience, and management of expectations. As part of the ongoing tutorial process throughout the programme, wellbeing topics like mindfulness, healthy eating, and substance use are discussed. To foster social connectedness, support is integrated within the curriculum through one-on-one pastoral tutorials, the UC Hub (an online VLE), student engagement opportunities, and celebrations of religious and cultural festivals.

UCLeeds provides specific interventions for students facing additional barriers. Learning support is available for those with declared specific learning needs or disabilities (referred to in detail in IS2), with referrals made by admissions during the application or enrolment process, and by the curriculum team during the course. Specific transition programmes with designated contacts are in place for care-experienced or estranged students, those with English as a second or additional language, mature learners returning to education, and individuals from Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showman, and Boater (GTRSB) communities. These programs emphasize early identification of mental health and wellbeing needs, along with promoting positive wellbeing and social connectedness.

Diverse pathways into and through higher education

UCLeeds currently offers awards from Foundation year to level 7, with foundation degrees validated under its own awarding powers, and top-up awards (level 6), full honours degrees, and Masters validated by the by the OU. These levels align to those articulated in the FHEQ, with this alignment fully considered through validation and award confirmation processes.

Non-traditional degree routes:

- Foundation Degrees
- Foundation Year
- Higher Technical Qualifications
- Higher National Certificates and Diplomas
- Degree Apprenticeships

Employer-led degrees

Through the robust approach to curriculum development that centralises employer engagement and employability, UCLeeds provides opportunities for all students to develop skills that enable their professional progression, including employment and future career management skills. The skills sought after, reflecting gains in relation to the development of employability skills, for example, team working, commercial awareness, leadership and influencing, inform curriculum design and are embedded throughout programmes and wider institutional activities.

All HE programmes are designed, monitored and reviewed with stakeholder engagement, including employer consultation and a robust evaluation of labour market information. Their input informs curriculum design and delivery, including professional skills development, and teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Employers are panel members at validation events, providing invaluable insights regarding the relevance of the UCLeeds provision for industry and the production of employable graduates. This comprehensive programme of consultation, review and evaluation ensures that employer needs are identified, taken into consideration, and used to shape the proposed programme in line with their needs and the requirements detailed in the subject benchmarks. This is reviewed through the validation process which employers also engage and play a key role in.

Employers also regularly feedback on the skills development of UCLeeds graduates:

- The breadth of student work that Creative Arts students produce, their professionalism, and how prepared they are to discuss and defend their work.
- Confirmation of appropriate skills development during HTQ approval processes.
- UCLeeds won an invitation to tender for the L5 Health Play Specialist apprentice standard and are Health Education England's preferred provider, meaning the institution is a first choice for NHS Trusts to provide their training.

UCLeeds are involved in several collaborative projects that support students beyond graduation and in preparation for life and employment. For example, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Graduate Skills Programme, which gives all West Yorkshire-based graduates access to skills development workshops throughout the year. Other examples in relation to supporting students for life include financial matters and budgeting.

Students have access to sector-specific advice and guidance, networking opportunities, and insights into life in industry. Within the curriculum students are encouraged to gain work-related experience throughout the duration of their course, to prepare them for life beyond the course and to provide opportunities to apply theory to practice and reflect on practice within assessment tasks and professional development related modules. Live briefs, guest speakers, and sector visits are also embedded across the curriculum.

Partnerships

We work with Go Higher West Yorkshire across our whole institution. Our Dean of Higher Education is a member of the Board of GHWY, which convenes very senior and strategic representatives from across the member institutions to provide governance and strategic steer for the work of the partnership. Our Widening Participation and Outreach Manager is a member of GHWY's 'Access and Participation Strategy Group' which convenes senior representatives in relevant roles to discuss and respond collectively to local and national issues, as well as maintain operational oversight of GHWY's activity. We host and employ a GHWY Uni Connect-funded Outreach Officer, who is embedded within our Widening Participation and Outreach Team. We also have staff members from across the institution participate in various GHWY networks and action groups.

GHWY brings together member institutions and stakeholders to ensure that in our local area:

- Individuals have equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto higher education courses that match their expectations.
- Individuals have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, and to make informed choices about their higher education options.
- Individuals can receive personalised academic and/or personal support to achieve a positive outcome.

In addition to the above, UCLeeds participate in GHWY working groups and networks including:

- Uni Connect Project Assurance Committee
- GRT Forum
- Care-Experienced and Estranged Students Network
- Decolonising the Curriculum Network
- Disabled Students Network
- Males on Free School Meals Network

UCLeeds are also members of several other working groups including, but not limited to:

- Luminate Education Group Employer Board
- Advance HE:
 - College-Based HE Network Group (Chair)
 - Developing a Race Equality Charter for SSIs and CBHE
- QAA:
 - Members Network
 - College HE Policy and Practice Network
- TASO Small n Evaluation pilot
- Mixed Economy Group
- Leeds Student Health & Wellbeing Partnership Board
- Sanctuary Steering Group
- NEON:
 - Mentoring to Widen Access

- Widening Participation in Post Graduate Study
- Mature Learners
- Supporting BTEC Students
- Access and outreach for disabled learners

Student consultation

Student consultation was done at key stages of the development of the plan. In the initial assessment of performance stage, all students were consulted regarding their perceptions of the equality of opportunity risk register and asked to identify any potential risks they may have faced during the student lifecycle. Opportunities to engage in the consultation was done through our Virtual Learning Environment, a Student Voice drop-in and through our Students' Union HE Officer regular feedback process.

To ensure our student feedback was well-represented and views were representative of our student population, as well as students in our target groups, we worked closely with the Student Support Team to ensure students had the opportunity to provide their feedback in a number of different ways.

Further to this, our student ambassadors and student representatives were asked to provide more detailed insight into our risks and proposed intervention strategies through an online forum and survey. Student Representatives, Ambassadors and Students' Union representatives are integral to our strategic mission and thus we provide appropriate training and support for their roles, so they are able to provide informed and meaningful contributions.

As outlined in Annex A, student feedback from the initial assessment highlighted additional considerations and risks for students who are the least represented in higher education, and groups who we do not have publically available data for. As a result of this, we introduced an intervention strategy to improve data collection for these groups.

Moving forward, we will continue to include students in the evaluation and monitoring of the Access and Participation Plan through membership to the Widening Participation Committee. In addition, students and graduates will continue to be involved in the some of the intervention and engagement strategies set out in this plan.

Evaluation of the plan

Increasing the quality and volume of our evaluation has been a strategic priority in recent years and our Access and Participation Plan provides a commitment to this priority. Our annual review process includes theory of change requirements for each strategy using TASO core and enhanced models, as such all interventions in this plan have followed this process and provides us with a foundation for future interventions.

Where it is not feasible to collect individualised data, or for whole institution interventions where it is not possible to attribute change to one specific intervention, we will focus on OfS Type 1 and 2 evidence with qualitative analysis where available. We will be focussing on evaluating individual

activities within each intervention strategy, as opposed to evaluating each intervention strategy as a whole due to the complex nature of inclusive and targeted activity.

Due to the size of our institution and evaluation capabilities, we will focus our efforts on evaluating new activity, those with an emerging evidence base or those which require most resource. As such we will evaluate activities; to OfS type 2 standard to establish whether they lead to the intended outcomes. We will also examine the extent to which each activity contributes to the overall objective. We will share our findings annually in an Access and Participation Report through our committee structure including our Widening Participation Committee and Student Support Committee. We also intend to produce our findings on our website in the 2028/29 academic year. More detailed information on evaluation can also be provided in the intervention strategies evaluation section or in Annex B.

Embedding evaluation

To foster a culture of evaluation, we encourage staff to participate in professional networks and share innovative practices in relation to access and participation. Our involvement in the TASO Small-n Evaluation Project has provided valuable insights into realist evaluation approaches. We will continue to build our evaluation capacity using the OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment Tool, seeking feedback from students throughout the process.

Using the OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment Tool we scored as ‘emerging’ in most areas and have used this as a base to improve evaluation over the course of the plan. This includes improvement of strategic oversight of evaluation processes and we plan to widen the dissemination of activity outcomes to student groups to seek their feedback throughout the evaluation process.

Publication Plan

Intervention Strategy	Activity	Format of findings	Publication of findings	
			Short term	Long-term
IS1	Activity 1, 2, 3 (Widening Participation and Outreach Programmes)	Access and Participation Report End of Project Report	University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually)	University Centre Leeds Website Relevant localised networks
IS1	Activity 4 (Specific Support Packages(s))	Access and Participation Report End of Project Report Course Area Annual Review reporting	University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually) Annual Review process	University Centre Leeds Website Relevant localised networks

IS1	Activity 5 (Marketing Activity)	<p>Access and Participation Report</p> <p>End of Project Report</p> <p>Marketing/Admissions Strategy Report</p> <p>Annual Review reporting</p>	<p>University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually)</p> <p>Annual Review process</p>	<p>University Centre Leeds Website</p> <p>Relevant localised networks</p>
IS1	Activity 7 (Training for teaching, admissions and support staff)	<p>Continued Personal Development Report</p> <p>Course Area Annual Review Reporting</p> <p>End of Project Report</p>	<p>Annual Review process</p>	<p>End of project report internally shared with group members</p>
IS2	Activity 1 (Holistic Support Programme)	<p>Student Support Annual Report</p> <p>Access and Participation Report</p> <p>Course Area Annual Review reporting</p> <p>End of Project Report</p>	<p>University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually)</p>	<p>University Centre Leeds Website</p> <p>Relevant localised networks</p>
IS2	Activity 2 (Mental Health, Wellbeing, Counselling Service and Occupational Therapy)	<p>Student Support Annual Report</p> <p>Access and Participation Report</p> <p>Course Area Annual Review reporting</p> <p>End of Project Report</p>	<p>University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually)</p>	<p>University Centre Leeds Website</p> <p>Relevant localised networks</p>
IS2	Activity 3 (Embedding Wellbeing into the curriculum)	<p>Student Support Annual Report</p> <p>Access and Participation Report</p>	<p>University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually)</p>	<p>University Centre Leeds Website</p> <p>Relevant localised networks</p>

		Course Area Annual Review reporting End of Project Report		
IS2	Activity 4 (Training for support staff)	Continued Personal Development Report Course Area Annual Review reporting End of Project Report	Annual Review process	End of project report internally shared with group members
IS2	Activity 5 (Quiet spaces)	Student Support Annual Report Access and Participation Report End of Project Report	Student Support Committee Student Representative Award Committee	University Centre Leeds Website
IS3	Activity 1 (Holistic support programme)	Student Support Annual Report Access and Participation Report End of Project Report Course Area Annual Review reporting	University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually)	University Centre Leeds Website Relevant localised networks
IS3	Activity 2 (Financial Support)	Student Money Survey Report Student Support Annual Report Access and Participation Report End of Project Report Course Area Annual Review reporting	University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually) Student Representative Award Committee (annually)	University Centre Leeds Website Relevant localised networks
IS3	Activity 3 (Academic Skills Development)	Student Support Annual Report	University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually)	University Centre Leeds Website

		Access and Participation Report End of Project Report Course Area Annual Review reporting		Relevant localised networks
IS3	Activity 4 (Inclusive Curriculum)	Module Review Report Course Area Annual Review Reporting NSS Results Access and Participation Report End of Project Report	University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually) Student Representative Award Committee (annually)	University Centre Leeds Website Relevant localised networks
IS3	Activity 5 (Visiting Professionals)	Module Review Report Course Area Annual Review Reporting NSS Results Access and Participation Report End of Project Report	University Centre Leeds Committee Structure (annually) Student Representative Award Committee (annually)	University Centre Leeds Website Relevant localised networks

Provision of information to students

The Access and Participation Plan, along with the accessible summary, will be published on the University Centre Leeds website along with the [Provider Fee Information](#) and the evaluation of our intervention strategies. Prospective students will be able to see how much the fees are for each

year of study and the financial support available is explained at Open Days, Applicant Days and is visible on the website and prospectus.

Fees we charge

At UCLeeds, the maximum fees charge in academic year 2024-25 are:

- £9250 for full time programmes
- £6600 for full time foundation year programmes
- £4372 for part time programmes

These fees may vary depending on the course. Typical fees are £8745 for most programmes with the exception of Acting and Production Arts. For September 2024-25, our fees are available through our website and are in line with our published Fees and Refund Policy.

Financial help available

We want to ensure that all students have the opportunity to study for a degree qualification, regardless of background or financial circumstances. Financial support is available through bursaries and paid opportunities, alongside the Higher Education Hardship Fund, which provides emergency financial assistance for students so that they can remain in Higher Education, particularly those students who need financial help to meet extra costs that cannot be met from other sources of support.

Our bursaries are designed to support priority groups and include:

- University Centre Leeds Bursary (for students from low-income households)
- Care Experienced Students Bursary
- Estranged Students Bursary
- Sanctuary Seeking Bursary (from 2025/26 academic year)

Financial Support	Purpose	Eligibility	Amount
University Centre Leeds Bursary	To support students from low-income backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK home status • Low-income household (below £42500) • Full time student • In receipt of a student loan from the Student Loans Company 	Household income: £0-£25000= £500 bursary £25001-£42500= £250 bursary Paid in two instalments in each year of study

Care Experienced Student Bursary	To support students with care experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 or under at the start of the course • Full time student • UK home status • In receipt of a student loan from Student Loans Company • Be currently, or have been in public care for a minimum of three months or have been granted independent status from Student Finance England 	£1000 in each year of study, paid in two instalments
Estranged Student Bursary	To support students estranged from family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 or under at the start of the course • Full time student • UK home status • In receipt of a student loan from Student Loans Company • Have been granted independent status from Student Finance England 	£1000 in each year of study, paid in two instalments
Hardship Fund	To provide emergency funding to students who are in financial hardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full time student • In receipt of a student loan from Student Loans Company including maintenance loan • Student can provide evidence of hardship 	

Paid opportunities are offered to all students; however, we engage directly with students from backgrounds currently underrepresented in higher education to highlight the opportunities available to them whilst studying with us. Paid opportunities include:

- Student Ambassadors Scheme
- Lead Student Representatives
- Course-specific industry opportunities
- Student/graduate internships and traineeships

Students receive information about UCLeeds and their programme in the Course Handbook. In addition to the wealth of support and guidance that is provided in relation to academic matters or issues there is also information relating to the following sources of support:

- Tutor support
- Library support
- Admin support – with regards to absenteeism, changes to personal information etc.
- Counselling support
- Welfare support
- Students' Union support
- Health and Safety

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

An assessment of performance was undertaken, employing a variety of data sources including the Office for Students (OfS) [Access and Participation Data Dashboard](#), the [OfS Size and Shape Dashboard](#), [Yorkshire and Humber Census](#), [Leeds City Region datasets](#), [National Student Survey \(NSS\) results](#) and internal data sets.

As outlined in our introduction, UC Leeds is a college-based HE provider, and we are aware of the limitations, complexities, and statistical uncertainties shown in our data, which are typical when analysing small datasets. Aggregate dashboard data for full time undergraduates spanning 4 years were utilised to present an average performance indicator over the period, highlighting variances between the most and least disadvantaged groups. Disaggregated data was not possible in most areas, although we recognise the intersectional risks and disadvantages students may face and have addressed this within our objectives and targets. We have focused solely on areas where there are visible gaps and have not included our full assessment of performance in this Annex. In instances where data is scarce, we have utilised the [Equality of Opportunity Risk Register \(EORR\)](#) to assess how risks identified for national groups may impact our students and potential students.

Our part-time provision has reduced significantly since the last iteration of our Access and Participation Plan and therefore we are focusing on full-time undergraduate data throughout this assessment of performance.

Risks to Equality of Opportunity

We have aligned our identified risk indicators with the [OfS' EORR](#) to examine the associated risks of equality of opportunity for the sector as a whole and their relevance to University Centre Leeds within our provider context. We will address high-risk areas within the relevant lifecycle stages of our performance assessment.

Considering that our student body has characteristics that make them less likely to enter higher education, we see the following risks as applicable to most of our student population.

Consultations with staff highlighted knowledge and skills (EORR Risk 1), information and guidance (EORR Risk 2), perceptions of higher education (EORR Risk 3), and cost pressures (EORR Risk 10) as most relevant. Whilst the student consultation highlighted additional risks including insufficient academic support (EORR Risk 6) and progression from higher education (EORR Risk 12).

Risks (identified in the EORR)	Assessment of Risk	Lifecycle Stage
1: Knowledge and skills	Medium	Access
2: Information and guidance	Medium	Access
3: Perception of higher education	Medium	Access
4: Application success rates	Low	Access
5: Limited choice of course type and delivery mode	Low	Access
6: Insufficient academic support	High	On course
7: Insufficient personal support	Medium	On course
8: Mental health	Medium	On course, Progression
9: Ongoing impacts of coronavirus	Low	Access, On course, Progression
10: Cost pressures	High	Access, On course, Progression
11: Capacity issues	Low	Access, On course, Progression
12: Progression from higher education	High	Progression

Access

UC Leeds demonstrates success in attracting students from widening participation (WP) backgrounds across various indicators and student groups. Notably, there are large numbers from the following:

- Mature students (57% compared to 27.7% sector average)
- IMD Q1 (51.6% compared to 21.8% sector average)
- TUNDRA Q1 (24.3% compared to 12% sector average)

- Eligibility for free school meals (33.9% compared to 19.2% sector average)

*based on 4-year aggregate 2017-18 to 2021-22

As a result of this we do not consider inequality in student access to be one of the greatest risks to address within this plan, however we have provided an assessment of our performance to give further context to our provision.

Access (Overall 4-year aggregate via OfS Size and Shape Dashboard)				
Indicator	Student group	UC %	Sector %	Difference
TUNDRA	TUNDRA Q5	13%	30.4%	-17.4%
	TUNDRA Q4	12.7%	23.4%	-10.7%
	TUNDRA Q3	23.8%	18.8%	5.0%
	TUNDRA Q2	26.2%	15.4%	10.8%
	TUNDRA Q1	24.3%	12.0%	12.3%
IMD	IMD Q5	7.3%	20.2%	-13.0%
	IMD Q4	11.7%	18.3%	-7.6%
	IMD Q3	13.3%	18.7%	-5.0%
	IMD Q2	16.1%	21.0%	-3.6%
	IMD Q1	51.6%	21.8%	30.4%
ABCS	ABCS Q5	17.2%	34.0%	-16.8%
	ABCS Q4	20.1%	24.8%	-4.7%
	ABCS Q3	21.5%	19.4%	2.1%
	ABCS Q2	19.5%	14.3%	4.8%
	ABCS Q1	21.8%	7.6%	14.2%
Ethnicity	White	56.1%	55.5%	0.6%
	Asian	22.6%	4.6%	18.0%
	Black	12.9%	8.0%	4.9%
	Mixed	4.7%	4.2%	0.5%
	Other	2.4%	1.9%	0.5%

	Unknown or not applicable	1.3%	18.1%	-16.6%
Age	21 years and over	57%	27.7%	30.7%
	Under 21	43%	72.3%	-29.7%
Disability	Disability reported	17.1%	16.7%	0.4%
	No disability reported	82.9%	83.3%	0.4%
FSM	Eligible	33.9%	19.2%	14.7%
	Not eligible	66.1%	80.8%	-14.7%

Low-representation groups

There are several groups not identified in the OfS Data Dashboard and therefore rely on internal data sets for the following:

- Estranged students
- Refugee or sanctuary seekers
- Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boaters
- Young carers
- Children from military families
- Student parents

Considering this lack of data, and the introduction of updated questions on the UCAS application system, this is an area we plan to address in this plan to further understand our provision and the intersectionality of disadvantage our students may be facing.

Care Experienced Students

While data is not available on the OfS dashboard, information gathered from the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) indicates that 14% of students with care experience progress to higher education, as opposed to 45% of the general population. Following our promotion of the Care Leavers Covenant, we developed and implemented a Care Leavers and Estranged Student Support Package in 2020-21 leading to a designated webpage, greater promotion of support for care leavers, and proactive reaching out to applicants identifying as care leaver in the enquiry and admissions process. As a result, we have seen increased numbers of students with care experience applying to University Centre Leeds, receiving support, and progressing in their HE studies.

Academic Year	Applicants	Enrolled Students
2020/21	31	11
2021/22	45	23
2022/23	74	20
2023/24	70	26

Estranged Students

In line with the introduction of an estrangement question in UCAS, we commenced collection of this data in the 2022/23 academic year.

Estranged Students		
Academic Year	Applicants	Enrolled Students
2022/23	14	*data suppressed
2023/24	10	*data suppressed

Sanctuary Seeking Students

We commenced collection of this data set in the 2022/23 academic year, following a successful application to become a Place of Sanctuary. We will commit to improving data this group over the course of the plan.

Sanctuary Seeking Students		
Academic Year	Applicants	Enrolled Students
2022/23	58	22
2023/24	72	26

On Course: Continuation

4-year aggregate Continuation Gap 2017-18 to 2020-21			
Indicator	UC gap	National average gap	Difference

TUNDRA	2.0	3.4	-1.4
IMD	3.7	8.0	-4.3
ABCS	4.1	13.7	-9.6
Ethnicity (all other ethnic groups against white)	9.80	11.40	-1.6
Age (mature, over 21)	2	8.7	-6.7
Disability	2.4	0.8	1.6
FSM	2.5	5.0	-2.5

Disability

Students with disabilities are less likely to continue their studies, with a marginal gap of 2.4. The gap at UC Leeds is wider compared to the gaps shown on the APP dashboard for all English HE providers of 0.8 pp (4 year aggregate). We plan to reduce this gap to less than 1pp and have set an objective in this plan.

Our Size and Shape data shows that over the last 4 years, the 2 most reported types of disability reported are cognitive or learning difficulties and mental health. With an increase in students identifying a mental health condition from 4.6% in 2018-19 to 8.3% in 2021-22. We attribute the decline in continuation for students with a reported disability to this increase in students reporting a mental health condition at or after enrolment and the ongoing interventions implemented by our Student Support Team.

Disability 4-year aggregate 2018-19 onwards				
Indicator	Student group	UC %	Sector %	Difference
Disability	Cognitive or learning difficulties	7.2%	5.7%	1.5%
	Mental health conditions	5.6%	5%	0.6%
	Multiple or other impairments	1.1%	2.8%	-1.7%
	Sensory, medical or physical impairments	3.2%	2.2%	1.0%

	Social or communication impairments	2.0%	0.8%	1.2%
	No disability reported or unknown disability	80.9%	83.5%	-2.6%

Our internal reporting data also shows a steady increase in applicants accessing additional learning support prior to enrolment, with a 27% increase from applicants enrolling 2021-22 compared to 2020-21. The Student Support Team have been proactive in increasing the information available to students regarding DSA funding, the application process, and the importance and benefits of claiming it, including the creation of an information video made available to applicants and students leading to a steady increase in the number of students receiving DSA. In 2017-18 less than 10 students received DSA compared to 32 in 2018-19, 39 in 2019-20, 55 in 2020-21, 57 in 2021-22, 75 in 2022 - 2023.

Considering more recent data, of the 368 students disclosing an additional learning need so far in 2023-24, 251 have disclosed a learning disability, sensory impairment, or a physical disability, with 155 of these students listing as a secondary need.

Mental Health Intersectionality

Gender

57.5% of those who accessed our counselling service in this time period were female and 31% male. **Some students preferred not to state their gender.* This data also reflects patterns from previous years with females more likely to access mental health support than males, reflected in local and national data. However, this does show an increase for males accessing MH support from 2021-22, up from 21.8% to 31%, potentially showing the effectiveness of initiatives such as raising awareness of organisations.

Ethnicity

Of the students who accessed counselling support, 67.5% were from White English, Welsh, Scottish, NI: British ethnic backgrounds and a further 8.7% were from other White backgrounds. Conversely, Asian and Black ethnic groups are under-represented in terms of numbers who have accessed MH support. 8.75% were of Asian ethnicity versus 13.4% of the UC student population and 2.5% were from Black backgrounds versus 11.5% of the student population.

Age

75% of students accessing MH support were aged 18-25; 63% of UC students are in this age bracket. The remaining age groups were 26-35 (12%), 36-45 (10%) and 46-55 (2.5%) which is broadly in line with the overall population. Younger students are therefore more likely to approach and access support services and this may be an area for further research in the future.

Continuation Trends

TUNDRA

Our gap in continuation rates for students from areas of low participation have been dissimilar to national averages, in the 19-20 and 20-21 academic years we have been below the national average. Comparing the gap, in 18-19, there was a 2.0pp gap between TUNDRA Q1 and Q5, this gap increased in 19-20 to 5.2pp and further in 20-21 to 18.8pp. Although we attribute this anomaly in our data due to factors including the introduction of new provision attracting predominantly young students and the COVID-19 pandemic, the data does not follow the same trend as the national average. When reviewing all registered HE providers, it shows a gap of:

- 18-19: 3.6
- 19-20: 2.0
- 20-21: 3.7

We will closely monitor continuation rates for students from areas of low deprivation, however as the negative trend is in line with the COVID-19 pandemic years we recognise this to be an anomaly in our data and we have not set out an objective or target against this within our plan.

On course: Completion

Data for completion is only currently available on the OfS Access and Participation Data Dashboard until the academic year of 2017-18, and therefore difficult to determine the impact of our previous Access and Participation Plan interventions and the ongoing improvements to our provision, course portfolio and student success.

The data provided shows that UC Leeds compares favourably to the wider sector when comparing gaps in rates of completion for groups who may be underrepresented in higher education.

For mature students, the gap is 2.3% compared with 9.9% across the sector. Gaps are highest in completion at UC Leeds for non-white students (14.3%), students from IMD Q1 (8.7%), and students in ABCS Q1 (11.6%), although all are below the national average. Whilst some gaps in completion rates are noted, these remain consistent in comparison to the sector and it is felt that objectives in other areas would be more beneficial.

4-year aggregate Completion Gap 2014-15 to 2017-18			
Indicator	UC gap	National average gap	Difference
TUNDRA	-4.0	4.9	-8.9
IMD	8.7	10.5	-1.8

ABCS	15.4	23.2	-7.8
Ethnicity (non-white)	14.3	16.7	-2.4
Age	2.3	9.9	-7.6
Disability	2.1	2.2	0.1
FSM	4.2	7.7	-3.5

Completion Trends

Disability

Similarly to our continuation rates, data from the dashboard over a 4-year aggregate shows that students with a reported disability are less likely to complete their studies. When viewed as a gap, the difference in completion between students without a reported disability and those who do report a disability has increased from 2.1 pp (4-year aggregate data) to 9.5 pp (2year aggregate data).

Attainment

There are some areas with marginal gaps in attainment, with a gap of 1.9pp for age, and -1.1pp for disability. However, there are large gaps in attainment for TUNDRA, IMD and Ethnicity (disaggregated in separate table), with UC Leeds falling under the national average gap in all but one area.

We have identified that students from IMD quintile 1 and those from areas of low participation (TUNDRA Q1) are less likely to achieve a First or 2:1. We attribute this to ongoing pressures faced by those students, predominantly financial pressures requiring part-time work alongside study, and the impact this may have on attendance and aspirations.

There is a wider attainment gap between white and non-white students, including a gap of 31.4pp for Asian students (22.8 pp above national average), a 35.7pp gap for Black students (15.5pp above national average) and 17.9pp for Mixed students (14.1pp above national average). As such, we have set three attainment targets in this plan.

4-year aggregate Attainment Gap			
Indicator	UC gap	National average gap	Difference
TUNDRA (Q5-Q1)	10.1	5.8	4.3
IMD (Q5-Q1)	26.9	16.9	10.0

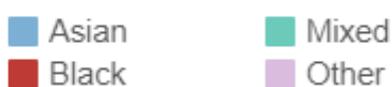
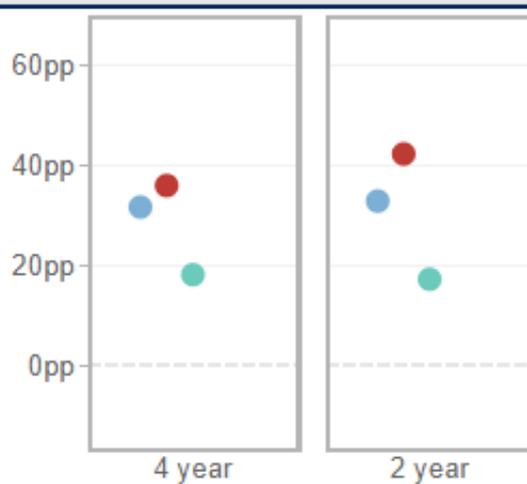
Age (Under/Over 21)	1.9	10.2	-8.1
Disability (disabled/non disabled)	-1.1	1.0	-2.1
FSM (Eligible)	10.8	11.6	-0.8

Ethnicity

Ethnicity Attainment Gap compared with white and other ethnic groups			
Indicator	UC gap	National average gap	Difference
Asian	31.4	8.6	22.8
Black	35.7	20.2	15.5
Mixed	17.9	3.8	14.1
Total non-white	28.3	10.8	17.5

Ethnicity: gaps between White and other ethnic groups

Choose a split to show statistical uncertainty ▼



Progression

Our dashboard data has several years which are unreportable due to the small sizes of student groups, meaning the data is suppressed in some areas. In addition to this, we have challenges with the Graduate Outcomes survey including low participation rates and responses not reflecting graduate destinations.

Considering the lack of data in this area, we will not focus on progression in this Access and Participation Plan and will look to improve our access and collection of data for future plans.

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.

We have conducted a literature review to underpin our approaches to intervention strategies and provided context to aid the review through our current processes and rationale for enhancement and or/ implementation of new activities, and the necessary investment set out in our plan. We predominantly drew upon the TASO Evidence Toolkit and Theory of Change template, Advance HE's literature review and searchable dataset on student success, the OfS ABSS programme and generated our own evidence from student and staff consultations, committees and annual review processes.

Intervention Strategy 1

Includes:

- Widening participation programmes
- Pre-entry support package and marketing activity

We have redefined our widening participation programmes, led by our consultation with schools, colleges and community groups to meet the needs of those least represented in higher education and to address social mobility and a skills shortage in the region.

Intervention Strategy 1 aims to ensure that information, advice, and guidance is appropriate for a wider range of audiences to clarify our provision and the unique differences in college-based higher education (CBHE). Programmes including; Step Ahead, New Scholars, Digital Literacy, and Digital Immersion Summer School aim to enhance understanding and engagement among specific groups including students with care experience, estranged from family, refugees or sanctuary seekers, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boaters, and children from military families.

We explored current evidence available to show a correlation between the target groups and availability of IAG for higher education. We used TASO's evidence toolkit, which outlines that IAG activities, summer schools and pre-entry coaching has a positive impact on students progressing to higher education. They highlight that there is a clear link between a lack of understanding or experience with higher education and scepticism towards specific educational institutions. QAA reflects that the core purpose of CBHE has always centred on widening participation, enabling a community environment, and offering vocationally relevant curricula that embed work-based learning opportunities. In addition to this, a Sutton Trust study shows that individuals with limited exposure to higher education environments tend to have more doubts about the value and trustworthiness of these institutions. This is particularly evident among underrepresented groups

who may not have familial or community support systems that emphasise the importance of higher education. It also highlights the importance of effective careers guidance to students in schools/colleges to empower students to make informed decisions about their future pathways. The pre-entry aspect of our outreach work is designed to support this knowledge building for staff and teachers in our key outreach partnerships to deliver effective careers guidance to their students.

Ongoing work has identified increasing challenges in data collection and identification of learners from specific underrepresented groups, reflecting the national landscape. Strategies and support packages, such as the [StandAlone Legacy Pledge](#) and the [GTRSB Into HE Pledge](#), have helped to identify this challenge and to create working groups to work towards improving encouragement of those from specific groups who may require more support to self-declare and the benefits of declaring at the earliest possible opportunity.

Collaborations with local councils and targeted support for two specific groups currently (care experienced and estranged students) have shown to be effective in building trust and reducing scepticism thus we aim to recreate the same opportunities for additional student groups. The new, targeted support packages will provide enhanced messaging to potential students and applicants, work with professionals and parents/carers working with students, and changes made to the enrolment form such as definitions of difficulties, easier access to informal support, and designated contacts. Again, [The TASO Toolkit](#) suggests there is emerging evidence of a positive impact of pre-entry financial support on both aspirations/attitudes and behaviour/outcomes when financial support is provided through grants, bursaries and supporting the cost of applying to university and thus we see this as a vital element of our renewed offer for target groups.

In terms of rationale for specific groups, the [UCAS Next Steps report](#) shows that care experienced and estranged individuals are not receiving adequate advice and guidance on HE or the guidance which they receive is not of high enough quality. Many receive advice from informal sources and 60% of those surveyed for the report had received no specific support around going to University or College. The report recommends that local authorities, schools and colleges engage with WP teams to help fill knowledge gaps for those advising young people. In addition, [OfS best practice for Estranged students](#) found they also experience equality gaps based on national data. This highlights a clear gap in support for care experienced and estranged students but also for their supporters and other stakeholders.

The support packages currently in place have helped established improved working practices and early intervention. Applications with identified care experienced and estranged students are referred to the designated contact(s) at application processing stage, and they are contacted to discuss support available and to introduce relevant contacts.

We are an official [College/Place of Sanctuary](#) after being awarded the status in May 2023 committing us to becoming a safe and welcoming place for all, especially those seeking sanctuary. We want all students, staff and the wider community to understand what it means to be seeking sanctuary and therefore developing a specific support package will highlight the challenges facing students.

Intervention Strategy 2:

Includes:

- Holistic support for disabled students
- Mental health, wellbeing and counselling service
- Occupational Therapy
- Training for HE support staff
- Quiet spaces

Intervention Strategy 2 comprises five key activities designed to support disabled students throughout their studies, with a particular focus on their first year. Data from UC Leeds indicates a notable gap in continuation rates between students with disabilities and those without. We recognise that this group is not homogenous, and their experiences will vary, including the possibility that risks to equality of opportunity will not be uniformly felt, however, we have grouped these students in this strategy due to suppressed data sets leading to statistical uncertainty. Individual activities will benefit students with specific needs, and the rationale for these activities is provided below.

Our support for disabled students has transformed significantly since the last iteration of our Access and Participation Plan. Most notably, we have introduced a Student Support Team whose core aim is to ensure that students at UC Leeds receive equal opportunities to achieve their full potential. Alongside this team, a Student Support Procedure was established to ensure consistent implementation of processes across HE campuses and to make staff and students aware of how to access support while studying with us.

A review of available support revealed that our students have a range of complex needs and often multiple disabilities which may impact their studies. Additionally, as part of our literature review, a report from the Disabled Students' Commission 'Enhancing the disabled student experience: Lessons from a pandemic' provided us with a renewed set of expectations for disabled students. The report shows clear positives and setbacks in the aftermath of COVID-19 for disabled students, which we aim to address in our renewed strategy.

Our data (Annex A) shows that due to additional interventions in the last five years, there has been an increase in self-referrals. Although more students are receiving Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) than in previous years, there remains a gap between the number of students diagnosed with a qualifying condition and those claiming DSA or engaging in the support offered. This has led to actions for 2023-24 to support students in understanding DSA and making applications for support. Interventions are being developed to engage those choosing not to engage, whether because they are not ready, do not want support, think they do not need support, or have another barrier that is not being addressed.

Additionally, the report showed a significant increase in applications for mitigation, especially for stress and anxiety, over the past three years (2020-2023). To address the continuation and attainment gaps, and reports of stress and anxiety, strategies to build resilience, improve mental health awareness, and access to support are a priority. This includes outreach work with students progressing from further education to higher education. Our holistic approach aims to cover transition support, reasonable adjustments, inclusive learning, and self-advocacy, providing

students with a toolkit to build independence skills and a feeling of belonging and mattering throughout their studies.

Mental health, wellbeing, and counselling

We offer a counselling service, and students have increasingly accessed mental health support, with initial assessments rising each year (2019-20: 67 (5%), 2020-21: 85 (6%), 2021-22: 87 (7%)). Once students are referred to the Counselling and Mental Health service, they attend an initial assessment to discuss support needs. During this session, their mental health needs are identified, along with any general wellbeing or learning disability needs. Following this, students receive signposting information, referral support if needed, and the option of short-term counselling through UC Leeds, which includes six weekly sessions, with the option of returning if necessary.

We plan to introduce a modular activity to highlight mechanisms for encouraging independence and relieving stress and anxiety during assessment periods and the transition from higher education. [A blog post from HEPI](#) shows that embedding wellbeing into the curriculum helps normalise discussions about mental health, reduces stigma, and equips students with tools to manage stress and anxiety, also, a [The Student Mental Health Manifesto from Student Minds](#) also reflects a similar notion, with a recommendation that HE Providers should offer structured support during critical periods, such as assessments and transitions out of higher education, and that this can significantly reduce stress and anxiety, thus improving overall student wellbeing.

Where further enhancement of support is identified, sufficient work will be implemented, including ongoing group and individual tutorials throughout the programme on wellbeing topics such as resilience, positive mental health, mindfulness, healthy eating, and drugs and alcohol. The goal is to promote positive mental health for all staff and students, utilising universal approaches and specialised, targeted approaches aimed at vulnerable students. We endeavour to create an environment where talking about mental health is the norm, where it is acceptable to acknowledge difficulties and ask for help, and where those with serious problems are quickly responded to and referred to appropriate support.

As part of the student support responsibilities, we recognise the need to improve access to mental health support and to understand why some students are less likely to access this support. There is a gap in academic literature, with limited large-scale studies focusing on the intersection between mental ill health and protected characteristics in higher education. [OfS](#).

Our counselling service showed that students from ethnically diverse backgrounds were underrepresented (28.7%) compared to the overall student population, while female students were overrepresented (74%). Previous research has identified several possible reasons for these statistics at University Centre Leeds, including language and cultural barriers, concerns about how seeking support might reflect on their academic progress, and worries about peer responses. We plan to work with our students to develop more accessible services, and to break down stigmas related to accessing support.

We plan to introduce an occupational therapy (OT) service focused on promoting functional independence and participation. Research by [Goodman](#) shows that OT is a viable support resource across universities in the US and Ireland, where there is an appreciation of Occupational Therapists (OTs) expertise. More locally, the [Royal College of Occupational Therapists](#) notes that enhancing

traditional support with occupational therapy can improve students' functional abilities, leading to better academic and personal outcomes. As part of the Luminate Education Group, Leeds Conservatoire already has a successful approach to OT, and we aim to implement the same process, bridging the gap between mental health/counselling services and disability support.

Training for staff

Our student support team regularly organises valuable training sessions aimed at enhancing the skills and knowledge of academic staff in neurodiversity. Training has previously covered a range of topics, equipping staff with the necessary tools to better support students with these conditions. We plan to create a central hub for information, advice, and guidance on supporting students with disabilities, devising a 'Toolkit' similar to the student toolkit mentioned above. We reflected on an existing toolkit, produced by The University of Warwick which aims to help academic staff support neurodivergent students. The toolkit is interactive and includes student testimonies, which we plan to develop over the first year of the plan (2025-26).

Intervention Strategy 3:

Includes:

- Financial support and literacy
- Academic skills development, enhanced academic support, inclusive teaching and learning

The Access and Participation Dashboard data reveals a significant attainment gap for students from ethnically diverse (Asian, Black, Mixed, and Other) backgrounds, as well as students from areas of high deprivation (IMD Q1) and those from low participation areas in higher education (TUNDRA Q1). These gaps surpass sector standards (see Annex A).

In developing Intervention Strategy 3, we focused on addressing key barriers to student attainment, including financial stress, academic support, and the availability of inclusive opportunities. We are also focusing on sense of belonging through engagement with individuals with relevant lived experiences, cultural awareness, sharing opportunities, and activities to enhance staff and student knowledge.

Financial support

Post-entry financial support has been shown to positively impact retention and completion rates in higher education, detailed in the TASO Toolkit. Although the connection to attainment could be clearer, our bursary for low-income students has demonstrated significant benefits for attendance and continuation. We have revised the eligibility criteria for our bursary and hardship fund to address recurring issues and or/barriers such as low attendance, usually due to other commitments or health issues. Additional financial support measures are being introduced including travel, meal, and food vouchers, and an on-campus food bank.

When completing a literature review, we found multiple sources of evidence to show the correlation between financial support for specific groups and improved attainment. Mountford-Zimdars et al. (2015) found that post-entry financial support reduces anxiety, improves integration into university life, reduces the need to work while studying, and enables the purchase of essential study materials. Bowes et al, 2013 research on widening participation shows that the key to

breaking down associated barriers is delivering a range of pre and post-entry support as a package to achieve maximum impact; implying that no single intervention can achieve the desired improvements and that a variety of complementary measures are required. A growing body of research emphasises that the effects of rising living costs are not felt evenly by all students (such as Staffordshire University's Survey of Basic Needs). Therefore, it is likely that many of these gaps will continue to increase.

As part of the plan, we intend to evaluate whether our financial support is effective in improving outcomes for students from under-represented groups and plan to utilise the OfS Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit. We will also introduce a 'Student Money Survey' aiming to better understand our students' financial worries, and aim to provide a plan to help students become more financially independent.

Sense of belonging

There is strong evidence that sense of belonging is a critical factor in student success, attainment and overall wellbeing. As highlighted by Advance HE - fostering a sense of belonging in educational environments can lead to improved academic performance, greater student satisfaction, and higher retention rates (Advance HE). According to this research, students with a higher sense of belonging are less likely to drop out and more likely to achieve their academic goals.

Considering our diverse student body, we explored how students perceive sense of belonging, relating to the target groups in this intervention. Cureton and Gravestock argue there are ethnic-based differences in how students perceive and experience belonging at university. Our intervention strategy aims to improve sense of belonging by providing more opportunities for student consultation in our development of an inclusive curriculum, as well as providing networking opportunities through our visiting professionals commitments. Strategies we also see to improve sense of belonging include regular, scheduled, informal 1:1 meetings with each student, mental health check-ins and celebrating achievements rather than chasing students for attendance or other punitive matters.

Academic Skills Development

Students on all UC Leeds programmes receive academic tutorials as part of their course, and staff maintain an open-door policy to receive additional support when needed. Our performance in relation to Academic Support in the NSS has remained consistent over recent years, performing above benchmarks in each of the 4 years with the difference being 4% marks above the benchmark in 2022. The impact of COVID-19 was evident in 2021 when we saw a dip in satisfaction with academic support (although still 0.5% marks above benchmark), this was despite the establishment of an online virtual learning. We will develop academic skills resources through our Digital Innovation Hub, focusing on academic writing, integrity with AI, library use, and online skills programmes.

UCLeeds wide pre-application/enrolment programmes and inter-level/year activities support the development of a sense of belonging, student identity, and resilience, whilst managing

expectations and developing academic preparedness and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing through continued building of curriculum confidence. Such programmes and activities are monitored and evaluated through appropriate data collection methods and tools relevant to the set aims, objectives and outcomes including, for example, student feedback, data sets (eg attendance, retention, achievement, progression), and engagement measures.

Example activities enabling student development and achievement include those striving towards educational gains in relation to academic skills within the WP and Outreach Programme and that continue throughout the HE student lifecycle to post-graduate study and graduate employment. In 2021-22 Level 3 learners at LCC and Keighley College completed the pilot HE Study Skills module. These learners were largely from underrepresented backgrounds studying either A Levels, Access to HE, or BTEC diploma. 85.2% of those who completed evaluations felt sessions were relevant and supported their decision making (55.6% noted this). As well as support for early academic skills development, the programme also observed positive movement towards consideration of studying HE pre- (35%) and post-programme (61%).

We explored various sources to support our work, A study by [Garrison & Kanuka, 2004](#) shows that enhancing academic skills is critical for student success, especially for those from non-traditional backgrounds. Digital resources make this support more accessible and scalable. In addition to this, research from [Means et al, 2010](#) shows that using technology to develop academic skills caters to diverse learning styles and needs, promoting equity in education.

As part of our research, we found the [ABSS funded project led by New College Durham](#) aimed to improve retention, achievement, attainment and progression rates for college-based higher education students. Their data indicates that attainment, achievement and progression are particularly low among students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in particular young, white males, as well as for students with learning difficulties or mental health issues. We'd plan to further disaggregate our attainment data over the course of the plan to determine where there are areas of improvement for students with multiple indicators of disadvantage.

Annex C: Targets, investment and fees