University of Sheffield

Access and participation plan 2025-26 to 2028-29

Introduction and strategic aim

1. Our University Vision 2020-27 sets out that 'our research-led programmes will inspire, enthuse and challenge a diverse community of outstanding students. Our graduates will be equipped to stand out as confident global citizens guided by strong values, ethics and standards, able to make meaningful contributions to society.'

2. We are one of the Russell Group of universities and each year we have around 20,000 undergraduate students in active study out of a total student population of around 30,000. The majority of our programmes are delivered on campus and 93% of our students study on a full-time basis.

3. We offer a wide range of subjects with the largest numbers of full-time undergraduate students studying an Engineering discipline (around 20%), Medicine and Dentistry related disciplines (nearly 10%), and Business and Management related degrees (around 8%)[1]. We are also committed to developing and expanding our high quality apprenticeship offering to support the needs of local, regional and national employers whilst providing different pathways into HE that may be more attractive to students from some widening participation backgrounds.

4. We are guided by our values of inclusivity and fairness; to provide opportunities for all students to succeed regardless of their background. We develop our programmes and learning communities in ways that support and challenge our students and allow our graduates, whatever their backgrounds, to leave us with the knowledge, skills, confidence and self-awareness needed to succeed. We have defined what it means to be a 'Sheffield Student' and what **all** of our students should experience. This plan is an important vehicle in making sure we live up to the values we espouse.

5. We place the academic programme at the heart of the student experience, because all our students are here to study. Student-facing processes, services and support build out from the academic programme to ensure that students receive the experience they deserve and are supported to succeed. Chart 1 below reflects our view of the student journey, recognising that each student's experience is unique and rarely linear. The outer parts of each segment demonstrate how services and support are increasingly tailored to more individual student needs. This model has been used to inform the design of our intervention strategies.

6. Our University Vision has four pillars (Education, Research, Innovation and One University), each with key performance indicators (KPIs) against which progress is measured. One of the 12 KPIs relates specifically to our widening participation commitment and progress is communicated internally and externally via our Annual Report. The Widening Participation KPI has historically been our rank in the Russell Group for Low Participation Neighbourhood student intake, for which The University of Sheffield have been ranked first since 2018/19.

7. We work collaboratively with our neighbour University, Sheffield Hallam (SHU) as part of the Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP), and engage with The Sheffield College, other local and regional secondary and FE/HE providers, and City and regional authorities to connect our access, success and progression activities. HEPP and HeppSY (our UniConnect partnership) are well regarded nationally as a model for regional collaboration.

8. The Students' Union is a critical partner in delivery of the objectives within this plan and more detail of their involvement in its development can be found in paragraph 36.

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[1] OfS size and shape of provision dashboard 2019-20 to 2022-23, https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/
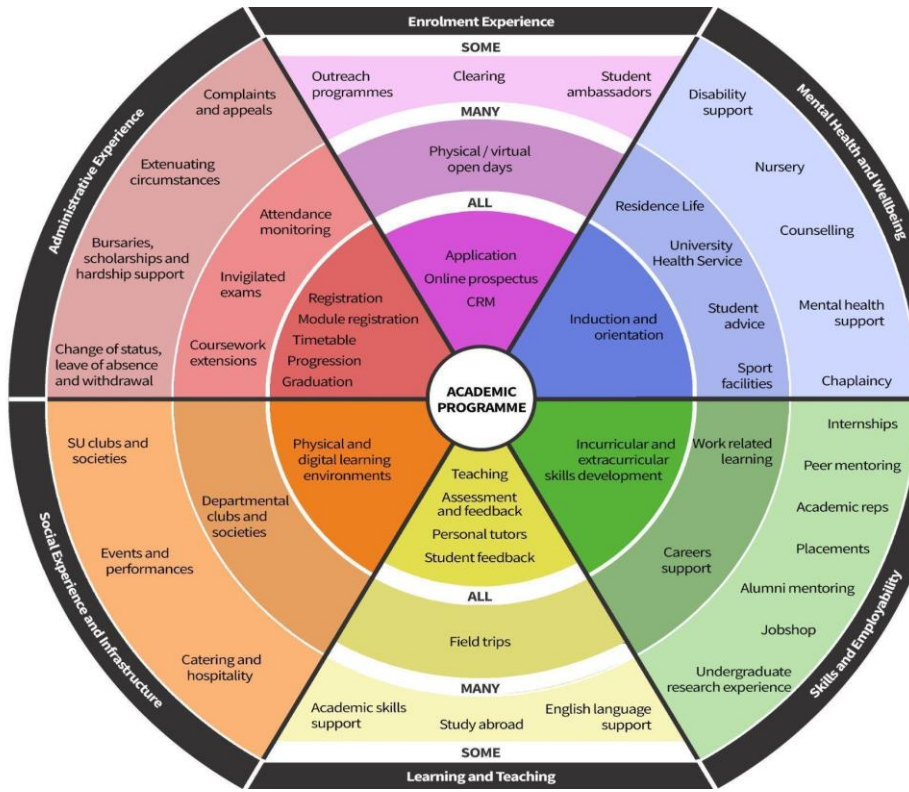
Chart 1: The University of Sheffield Student Experience

Risks to equality of opportunity

9.   In preparing this Plan we identified a number of risks to equality of opportunity that students may experience at The University of Sheffield (see Table 1). These also correlate to risks identified in the national Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)[2]. Annex A provides an in depth analysis of our performance against the risks and Annex B an overview of the evidence underpinning these risks and rationale for the intervention strategies we have designed to mitigate against these risks for identified student groups.

Risk	Definition	IS
1. Lower application and offer rates	Even after accounting for prior attainment, students from lower-socio economic backgrounds are still less likely to apply to university than their less disadvantaged peers. There remain persistent barriers such as reduced levels of personal aspiration and expectation, a poor sense of belonging or lack of support mechanisms and access to quality advice and guidance. Students that do apply may also be less likely to receive offers as a result of admissions processes and the gap in knowledge/skills that the student has to navigate these successfully. Students may also experience inequity, discrimination or unconscious bias which impacts on their likelihood of receiving an offer.	**1,2**
2. Lack of sufficient personal support and quality IAG	A lack of sufficient, timely and quality information, advice and guidance can mean students are ill-equipped to make decisions about their higher education, on-course and career choices. Gaps in their knowledge of how to access support services can leave them feeling unsupported, misunderstood and in crisis before they do receive specialist inputs. This (perceived) lack of personal support can have a negative impact on their wellbeing including mental health, academic engagement and attainment. There is also a need to ensure that University staff are resourced effectively to provide	**1,2,3,4,5**

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[2]Equality of Opportunity Risk Register. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/

	requisite personal support.	
3. **Lack of sufficient, quality academic support**	Inadequate provision of sufficient and quality academic support can result in students experiencing lower levels of academic confidence and becoming disengaged in their studies, also resulting in reduced levels of attainment, aspirations and expectations of the future. If students' needs are consistently neglected through a lack of sufficient academic support, they are more likely to show non-continuation in their studies, particularly where students face additional needs as a result of their background or personal circumstances, which they feel are not appropriately accommodated for or supported by their institution.	**3,4**
4. **Lack of immediate network and sense of belonging**	Having access to an immediate network of relatable role models can play an important part in shaping a student's decisions about, and participation in, higher education. These influencers can cultivate both a present sense of belonging and inspire future decision-making on aspects such as graduate careers. Similarly, where students lack a local support network with relatable peers, they can experience a number of perceived barriers to participating in higher education and feel a lack of affinity for university study. There is even evidence to suggest that students' attainment may reflect anticipated barriers and that individuals are less likely to succeed academically if they do not feel a sense of belonging to their institution.	**1,2,3,4,5**
5. **Lower levels of academic confidence and attainment**	Lower levels of academic confidence and attainment are often intrinsically linked and can create a self-perpetuating cycle which may lead to students losing confidence in their academic ability and their potential to succeed throughout their education. Where students lack this self assurance, they are less likely to feel a sense of belonging to the university community and may be less likely to apply, or to continue and complete their studies. Students that do apply may not attain highly enough to progress to university or more competitive institutions such as Sheffield. If students are able to access university, they may lack confidence relative to their peers, wrongly perceive that in-curricular and extra-curricular activities are not for them and fail to attain highly enough to progress to competitive graduate careers or further study.	**1,2,4**
6. **Financial Pressures**	Students that experience financial pressures during their studies are often required to undertake levels of paid work alongside their studies that make it difficult for them to engage effectively. This can lead to students having less time for their learning, impacting on their academic confidence, attainment and in some cases, even completion. Such pressures are also likely to harm students' mental health and wellbeing, particularly where financial pressures, or the demand of undertaking paid work, leaves students unable to engage thoroughly in the university community, form friendships and take part in other valuable extra-curricular activities. Over time, this can negatively impact students' experiences and skill set, leaving them less likely to progress into competitive graduate careers.	**3,4,5**

Table1: Definition of Risks to Equality of Opportunity evident at The University of Sheffield

10. In assessing the indication of risks at The University of Sheffield we have focused on the following: Age, Gender, Ethnicity, Disability, Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility. We have primarily relied on the OfS Data dashboard for Access and Participation[3] and UCAS Exact Admissions Data, as these provide robust longitudinal datasets against which analysis across the student lifecycle can be undertaken.

Access

● **Indication of risks 1, 2, 4 and 5:** Compared to the national population and competitor institutions within our mission group, there are lower proportions of students at The University of Sheffield from

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[3] OfS APP dashboard March 2024, https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/

postcodes in IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 (versus other quintiles) and those that have been eligible for FSM (versus those who are ineligible). A higher proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic entrants (nearly half) come from IMD Quintile 1 and 2 postcodes compared to around a fifth of our white entrants. We currently have a high proportion of degree apprentices from lower-socio economic backgrounds, but as the University develops its apprenticeship provision we are conscious that there is a risk that these groups are crowded out from accessing this alternative route to HE.

Continuation

- **Indication of risks 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6:** continuation rates for students aged 21 and over are 9.0 pp lower than for students who started their course aged under 21. This is similar to the national gap and has been persistent over the last 6 years, with the exception of the 2019/20 entry cohort, for whom the gap closed to 5 pp. Intersectional analysis suggests nearly half of these older age group students are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, implying a strong link to cost-pressures, particularly as students aged 21-25 report that they are living independently, but not eligible for the maintenance loan support available to students aged over 25. Older students are also more likely to have caring responsibilities that add time and financial constraints.

Completion

- **Indication of risk 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6:** A number of student groups are completing at rates comparatively lower than the University's overall completion rates. This includes students;

  - aged 21 and over who are completing at a rate 14.2 pp below that of under 21s. This gap has widened over the last 6 years from 11.0 pp for students who commenced their studies in 2012/13.
  - reporting a disability, who are completing at a rate nearly 4 pp lower than those who do not declare a disability. There is also significant intersectionality between older and disabled students, with those aged 21+ with a declared disability being even less likely to complete their course, meaning older disabled students have a completion rate of 77.4% versus the 81.9% for mature students with no disability who started in 2017/18.
  - from lower socioeconomic groups, with those eligible for FSM being on average (over the last 6 years) 6.8 pp less likely to complete than those not eligible. This group also experienced one of the largest drops in completion rate during Covid-19 (from 92.6% to 84.6%). There is also a similar, though not quite as wide, gap between students from lower IMD postcodes.
  - Black students, who are completing at a rate 8.2 pp below white students: a widening trend over the last 6 years, albeit within a small population (around 100 students per year). These students are spread across all disciplines, making it difficult to analyse causal factors. The intersectional analysis of ethnicity, IMD quintiles and FSM eligibility also indicates a correlation with national risks relating to cost pressures and a weaker sense of belonging within the University community for this group.

Attainment

- **Indication of risk 2, 3, 5 and 6:** Within the context of strong rates (91.7% overall in 2021/22) of awarding a good honours degree (1st or 2:1) there are notable attainment gaps for the following groups:

  - Black, Asian and minority ethnic students, with the widest attainment rate gap being for Black students where the attainment rate was 21.6pp lower than the white attainment rate in 2021/22. Significant progress had been made to close the gap between these two comparator groups prior to 2021/22. The attainment gap for Asian students had closed from 18.4 pp in 2016/17 to 4.3 pp in 2020/21, before widening again in 2021/22, though not as significantly as for Black students, to 9.9 pp. The regressions are similar to those seen nationally and there are several factors that are contributing to this risk, including the changes to assessment practice during the coronavirus pandemic and the return to pre-Covid assessment practices in 2021/22. As mentioned above, there is a clear intersection between black, Asian and minority ethnic and lower socioeconomic groups.

- ○ Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds relative to those from higher income backgrounds, with those eligible for FSM 11.2 pp below those not eligible. This gap had closed between 2016/7 and 2020/21 from 13.3 pp to 2.7 pp but reversed in 2021/22. The gap is not as wide (7.9 pp in 2021/22) when analysed by IMD postcode but it is still sufficient to suggest that socioeconomic background is an indicator of risk for attainment.
- ○ Students aged 21 or over at entry, who are 4.7 pp less likely to attain a good honours award than those aged under 21. This gap widens further for the older age ranges, though the number of students in each age bracket gets significantly lower once over 30. There is a strong intersection with lower socioeconomic groups for the 21 to 25 age group and these students are more likely to have caring responsibilities and/or to declare disabilities.

Progression

- **Indication of risk 2, 4, 5.** The overall progression rate at Sheffield has increased by 2.1 pp since 2017. The most significant deviations from this are for graduates from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Those who were eligible for FSM were 7.9 pp less likely to progress to further study or a graduate level role in employment in 2020/21. The gap for those in lower IMD quintiles is not as large but is still enough to support this indication of risk. Whilst rates of progression have improved since 2017/18, when they were 69.2%, the rates for those eligible for FSM dipped again in 2020/21 from a peak of 78.0% in 2019/20 when they exceeded those of graduates who had not been eligible. This indication aligns with national risks of progression from higher education.

Small groups and cohorts

11. We have low numbers of students who meet the definitions of care leavers, estranged, carers, parents, refugees or asylum seekers. However, internal analysis suggests that these students face similar challenges to those of the larger student groups from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 and who were eligible for FSM. We continue to support the very individual needs of these students through pre-entry advice and guidance and priority places on access programmes. As they transition to the University we feel that their needs are best met through personalised, individual support rather than aggregated within the broader national risk framework and we will continue to support them in that way.

12. The institution is a signatory to the Care Leavers Covenant, Stand Alone Pledge and our research has contributed to the development of the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) quality mark, of which we are also a recipient. We have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and in recognition of our support for refugees and asylum seekers have been awarded University of Sanctuary status.

Objectives

To note:

13. In comparing this and previous plans, our APP targets have historically been based on Undergraduate First Degree populations. This plan however includes all undergraduate populations, including integrated masters programmes, recognising that these are now studied by c.25% of our home undergraduate population.

14. In January 2024, the University Council approved plans to introduce a new school structure, moving from 42 academic departments to 21 schools. A major change process has commenced with the intention that the new structures will be fully operational by September 2025. This plan has been drafted against a backdrop of significant change with both academic and professional services teams transitioning to the new arrangements. Whilst we do not expect this to impact on our intervention strategies, it may impact operational delivery as a consequence of staff roles and responsibilities changing.

Access

- **Objective PTA_1:** Sheffield will increase the proportion of students eligible for FSM applying to and registering at the University from 8.4% in 2021-22 to 10% in 2029-30.
- **Objective PTA_2:** Sheffield will increase the proportion of students from IMD quintile 1 and 2 postcodes from 25.5% in 2021-22 to 30% in 2029-30.
  These will be achieved through targeted and sustained widening access activity, with a focus on quality information, advice and guidance, skills development and attainment raising, linked through into University recruitment via an associated contextualised admissions strategy.
- **Objective PTA_3:** Sheffield will increase the number of degree apprenticeships at Level 6, working with local and regional employers to ensure the offer supports the skills needs of the area, whilst providing access routes to those who may not previously have considered HE, including those from IMD quintile 1 and 2 postcodes and for whom apprenticeship education provides a more accessible route to degree level study.

Success

- **Objective PTS_1:** Sheffield will reduce the gap in **completion** between under 21s and those 21 and over from 14.2 pp in the 2017-18 entry year to 10 pp in the 2025-26 entry year.
  This will be achieved by working across degree programmes to identify the barriers mature students face in completing their course.
- **Objective PTS_2:** Sheffield will remove the gap in **completion** for students declaring a disability (3.8 pp for 2017-18 entrants) in 2029-30.
  We will do this through a commitment to ensuring all our activities are accessible for all, identifying the differing challenges and barriers to success that are experienced by the disabled student population and providing targeted personal and academic support so that their student outcomes are the same as the overall student population.
- **Objective PTS_3:** Sheffield will work to remove the **attainment** gap for students from Black backgrounds in 2035-36.
- **Objective PTS_4:** Sheffield will work to remove the **attainment** gap for students and Asian backgrounds in 2030-31.
  We will seek to understand the specific challenges for black, Asian and minority ethnic students so that more targeted academic and personal support can be offered.
- **Objective PTS_5:** Sheffield will close the **attainment** gap for students eligible for FSM from the baseline of 11.2 pp in 2021-22 to 5 pp in 2029-30.
- **Objective PTS_6:** Sheffield will close the **attainment** gap from 7.9 pp to 3 pp in 2029-30 for students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 compared to those in IMD quintiles 3, 4 and 5.
  We will do this by working to better understand the financial and other barriers to success for these groups of students.

Progression

- **Objective PTP_1:** Sheffield will reduce the gap in terms of the number of students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 entering graduate level employment or postgraduate study compared to those from IMD quintiles 3, 4 and 5, from a baseline of 4.4 pp in 2020-21 to 2.0 pp in 2029-30.
- **Objective PTP_2:** Sheffield will reduce the gap in terms of the number of students eligible for FSM entering graduate level employment or postgraduate study relative to those who are not eligible, from 8.0 pp in 2020-21 to 4.0 pp in 2029-30.
  We will do this by continuing to develop our careers and employability support (both in programme and through our extra curricular offer) and provide further tailored provision for these students.

Intervention Strategies and expected outcomes

15. Our intervention strategies include only areas of work that are new or have been altered to better enable us to meet the objectives detailed above. They do not therefore represent the full scale of our access and participation activities or the associated investment. As stated in paragraph 14

above, the University is transitioning to a school model. Whilst this will not change the objectives as stated, or the proposed intervention strategies, there may be impacts in terms of the accountabilities and the distribution of resources across teams as services adapt to meet the needs of new academic and governance structures. For this reason, the investments/inputs across the interventions may be subject to change as interventions are progressed.

16. As would be expected, some intervention strategies are more developed than others, with some requiring further research, investigation and testing before they can be implemented and rolled out across the institution.

17. Our targeted intervention strategies are to:

- **IS One:** increase applications, offers and enrolments of students from lower socio-economic groups and black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.
- **IS Two:** sustain the proportion of new entrants to degree apprenticeships from lower socio-economic backgrounds as degree apprentice numbers grow.
- **IS Three:** improve completion rates for underrepresented groups, with a focus on disabled and mature, whilst creating a more inclusive environment for all.
- **IS Four:** improve attainment rates for underrepresented groups, with a focus on Black, Asian, FSM and IMD 1 and 2.
- **IS Five:** reduce the gaps in progression to graduate level employment or postgraduate study for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

IS One: increase applications, offers and enrolments of students from lower socio economic groups and black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds

A number of activities in this intervention strategy have been developed and piloted in the 23-24 academic year building on existing programmes which together better enable us to meet the Objectives detailed in this Plan.

Objectives and targets
PTA_1: Sheffield will increase the proportion of students eligible for FSM applying to and registering at the University from 8.4% in 2021-22 to 10% in 2029-30.
PTA_2: Sheffield will increase the proportion of students from IMD quintile 1 and 2 postcodes from 25.5% in 2021-22 to 30% in 2029-30.

Risks to equality of opportunity: IS 1 aims to provide students with access to an immediate network of supporters, a robust sense of belonging, quality personal support, information, advice and guidance, increased levels of academic confidence and attainment, and increased application and offer rates. This represents mitigation of institutional risks 1, 2, 4 and 5, which correlate with OfS EORR Risks 1 (Knowledge and skills), 2 (Information and guidance), 3 (Perceptions of higher education) and 4 (Application success rates).

Activity/Description **Inputs:** Estimated investment to delivery over four years: **£5.3m**	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy
Targeted Sustained Engagement Activity: ***Access to Sheffield Programmes Y9-11 and Y12-13 (Piloted 23-24)***: Engaging c.1,400 students per year in on campus experiential activity including a residential summer school. Skills Builder Impact Level 4 accredited curriculum, block mentoring opportunities (all) and academic tutoring (Y12-13) with partners UpLearn / Study Mind (New). ***Partnership Programmes (Existing)***: Local and national collaborations with HeppSY - Multiple Intervention Programme (UniConnect Y8-11), The Brilliant Club Scholars Programme (KS2-5) and Realising Opportunities (RO - Y12-13). Engaging with c.6,000 students per year in activity focused on academic skills development, on campus experiential opportunities and PhD tutor guided research projects. HeppSY's curriculum is aligned to the Skills Builder framework.	**Short Term:** Participants feel more comfortable in a University setting, have increased access to IAG and relatable role models. **Medium Term:** Participants have access to consistent support; their supporters are more engaged and informed. They have increasing academic skill, self-efficacy and greater confidence in their ability to progress to HE. **Long term:** Participants have deeper subject knowledge, stronger critical thinking skills and attain at higher levels increasing their opportunity to be made and achieve university offer conditions.	**IS2** Race Equality Charter

Regional Partnerships: Further development of ***Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP - Existing)*** and ***South Yorkshire Children's University (SYCU - Existing)*** collaborative partnership with Sheffield Hallam University. Engaging with c.42,000 students per year (Primary to pre-16) through delivery of an incremental universal information, advice and guidance offer of in school activities aligned to the [Skills Builder](#) framework and for SYCU participants to engage in enrichment activities beyond the school curriculum.	**Short term:** Participants feel more comfortable in a University setting, have access to IAG and extra/co-curricular activities. **Medium Term:** Participants and their supporters are more engaged and are developing career aspirations which include progression to HE. **Long term:** Participants have greater skills literacy, aspirations to apply to HE and increased academic attainment.	**IS2** Race Equality Charter
Targeted National Summer Schools: Currently two residential summer schools for Y12 students: ***Access to Sheffield*** (Existing - experiential) and ***Sheffield [Sutton Trust](#)*** (Existing - subject strand) summer schools engaging c.250 students per year with potential to add one additional summer school (New) during Plan period. The curriculum is [Skills Builder](#) Impact Level 4 accredited and offers block mentoring opportunities and academic tutoring with partners [UpLearn](#) / [Study Mind](#) (New).	**Short Term:** Participants feel more comfortable in a University setting, have increased access to IAG and relatable role models. **Medium Term:** Participants can make informed choices about their post-18 options and have the skills to make high quality applications. They also have increasing academic skills, self-efficacy and greater confidence in their ability to progress to HE. **Long term:** Participants attain at higher levels, their barriers to accessing HE are reduced and they apply to university, able to be made an offer and achieve offer conditions.	**IS2** Race Equality Charter
Contextual Admissions (Existing) and Transition Support (Piloted 23-24): Contextual admissions (reduced academic offer/additional consideration) and transition support for Access to Sheffield, Summer School and RO participants and new applicants identified as meeting one or more of our ***Access+*** eligibility criteria inc. IMDQ1 and 2 (new) and FSM (existing) engaging c.5,000 per year. Support includes TUoS specific transition sessions for offer holders and named contact handover to student support staff on enrolment, Travel Bursary to facilitate attendance at on campus events e.g. Offer Holder Open Days,1:1 mentoring with current students and Access+ IT and Equipment bursary supporting the purchase of technology/ course equipment in advance of registration.	**Short Term:** Participants have a reduced academic offer, access to timely transition specific IAG and relatable role models through which to foster an initial sense of belonging within the University community whilst having the financial/equipment resources to participate in pre-entry/enrolment activities. **Medium Term:** Participants are given additional consideration at confirmation giving the greatest chance of being accepted for entry, feel confident they will fit into the University community and enrol. **Long Term:** Participants are able to engage fully in University life and continue at rates comparable to their wider peer group.	

Summary of evidence base and rationale: By analysing institutional, UCAS and OfS data, including competitor analysis and through extensive horizon scanning research into student characteristics and sector best-practice, we have identified the student groups most at risk with respect to accessing our institution and the specific barriers they face. This comprehensive research approach has allowed us to map, using logic chains, the barriers, outcome goals and to plan timely interventions. Our interventions are designed to address risks in a time-bound way, providing the right intervention at identified points in the prospective student journey, ultimately leading to increased applications, offers and acceptances to the University of Sheffield.

Evaluation

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan.
Targeted Sustained Engagement Activity	Multiple summative and formative assessment points across programmes including utilisation of surveys, Mentimeters, interviews and listening rooms (Type 1 and 2). Participants progress to/through HE tracked via HEAT/HESA and UCAS utilising quasi-experimental methods (Type 2 and 3). Skills Builder Benchmark for participant skills development/deficit tracking and programme developments based on identified group needs (Type 1 and 2). Access Service Quality Assurance peer observations ensuring programme leads are meeting Service standards and agreed session outcomes. (Type 1)	Production of internal annual reports feeding from and into evolving programme theories of change. Evaluation findings will be shared with Partners and funders via regular in-cycle reports, Partnership Executive Board/Strategy Group meetings and joint publications. Programme case studies to be shared with schools/colleges and on our webpages from January 2026. The Access Service and Partners will also share best practice findings through presence at sector conferences/events.
Regional Partnerships	Mixed method approaches and comparative analysis of Local Authority student level data (school attainment and attendance) analysed against participant responses in pre and post intervention surveys using age specific pre-validated questions from the NERUPI question bank and/or mapped to the Skills Builder Framework (Type 1 and 2).	Evaluation findings will be shared with Partners and funders via regular in-cycle reports, Partnership Executive Board/Strategy Group meetings and joint publications. Intervention case studies will be shared with schools/colleges and on partnership webpages. The Access Service and Partners will also share best practice findings through presence at sector conferences/events.
Targeted National Summer Schools	Pre and post intervention summative and formative assessment including utilisation of surveys, Mentimeters, interviews and listening rooms (Type 1 and 2). Participants progress to/through HE tracked via HEAT and HESA and UCAS utilising quasi experimental methods (Type 2 and 3). Skills Builder Benchmark for participant skills development/deficit tracking and programme developments based on identified group needs (Type 1 and 2).	Production of internal annual reports feeding from and into evolving programme theories of change. Evaluation findings will be shared with Partners and funders via regular in-cycle reports, Partnership Executive Board/Strategy Group meetings and joint publications. Programme case studies to be shared with schools/colleges and on our webpages from Jan. 26. The Access Service and Partners will also share best

	Access Service Quality Assurance peer observations will take place ensuring programme leads are meeting Service standards and agreed session outcomes (Type 1).	practice findings through presence at sector conferences/events.
Contextual Admissions and Transition Support	Analysis of institutional, UCAS and OfS data, including competitor analysis (Type 1) and tracking applicants to/through HE via HEAT and HESA utilising quasi experimental methods (Type 2 and 3). Additional surveying via standard decisions survey and exploration of contextual offer impact (Type 2).	Production of internal annual reports feeding from and into evolving programme theories of change. Programme case studies to be shared with schools/colleges and on our webpages from Jan. 26. The Access Service and Partners will also share best practice findings through presence at sector conferences/events.

IS Two: sustain the proportion of new entrants to degree apprenticeships from lower socio economic backgrounds as degree apprentice numbers grow.

Objectives and targets:
PTA_3: Sheffield will increase the number of degree apprenticeships at Level 6, working with local and regional employers to ensure the offer supports the skills needs of the area, whilst providing access routes to those who may not previously have considered HE, including those from IMD quintile 1 and 2 postcodes and for whom apprenticeship education provides a more accessible route to degree level study.

Risks to equality of opportunity: IS 2 aims to provide students with access to an immediate network of supporters, a robust sense of belonging, quality personal support, information, advice and guidance, increased levels of academic confidence and attainment, and increased application and offer rates. This represents mitigation of institutional risks 1, 2, 4 and 5, which correlate with OfS EORR Risks 1 (Knowledge and skills), 2 (Information and guidance), 3 (Perceptions of higher education) and 4 (Application success rates), 5 (Limited course type) and 12 (Progression from higher education).

Activity/Description Inputs: Estimated investment to delivery over four years: **£300k**	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy
Student Journey Mapping: TUoS Access Service, Central Apprenticeship Hub and appropriate regional recruitment and delivery partners to undertake facilitated *Apprentice Student Journey Mapping (New).*	**Short term:** Production of a cross-lifecycle Student Journey Map for apprentices engaging with University of Sheffield Provision. **Medium Term:** Shared understanding of the decision-making timeline and student experience apprentices have when interfacing with the institution. Pinpointing critical points of loss and conversion. **Long Term:** Loss prevention/conversion and growth activities.	Race Equality Charter

IAG Resource Development and Roll Out: TUoS Access Service, Central Apprenticeship Hub (CAH), Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) Access Team and HEPP to co-create a suite of quality *information, advice and guidance resources (New)* for use within the South Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority Region. Particularly focused on support for lower socioeconomic groups.	**Short term:** Development of multi-purpose IAG resources for prospective apprentices. **Medium Term:** Utilising these resources offering timely, quality IAG to prospective apprentices and regional employers. **Long Term:** University able to offer employers a wider pool of high quality, well-informed students.	**IS1**
Recruitment and Progression Activity Development and Roll Out: TUoS Access Service, Central Apprenticeship Hub, AMRC Access Team and HEPP to *co-create a catalogue of quality, age/stage student and employer appropriate activities, utilising developed IAG and which can be embed within current transition to HE activities (New)* engaging c.3000 prospective students per year in ad-hoc or short term, high impact discovery activities aimed at students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds whilst also engaging employers to provide work related projects that students of all ages can engage and complete.	**Short term:** Development of multiple quality age/stage student, teacher and employer activities with an apprenticeship focus. **Medium Term:** Begin delivery of these sessions through existing programmes, partnerships and through regional employer engagement initiatives. **Long Term:** Increased awareness and recruitment to degree apprenticeships.	**IS1**

Summary of evidence base and rationale: The University has a portfolio of apprenticeships from Level 3 to 7, with the majority of degree apprenticeships (Level 6) in Engineering and Health related disciplines. As we look to expand our Level 6 apprenticeship provision, we are mindful of concerns raised about the changing demographic of apprentices following the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. Whilst we need to undertake further research into the prospective apprentice journey there is significant evidence to suggest apprentices from lower-socio economic backgrounds require better information, advice and guidance, and support from their school or colleges to inform decision making, and access to employers who themselves make informed recruitment decisions about the background and lived experiences of the apprentices they recruit.

Evaluation

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Student Journey Mapping	Focus Groups, surveys and desk-based research will help inform production of a coherent student journey map (Type 1 and 2).	Publication internally and externally of the Student Journey Map. The Access Service and appropriate CAH/AMRC colleagues will share findings and best practice of the mapping techniques at sector conferences/events.

IAG Resource Development and Roll Out	Activity to gauge initial knowledge and understanding of apprenticeship programmes of students, their supporters and employers will be gathered through surveys, opinion-poll, focus-group and interview techniques (Type 1 and 2). Further surveys will also be undertaken to understand the impact of resource provision (Type 2).	Reports with recommendations on the type and scale of resources to create will be shared internally and through partnership and mission groups such as HEPPSY and the Russell Group Apprenticeship Network. Reports on the receipt and effectiveness of IAG resources will be shared and utilised to inform further developments and/or adaptations.
Recruitment and Progression Activity Development and Roll Out	Multiple summative and formative assessment points across programmes inc. utilisation of surveys, Mentimeters, interviews and listening rooms (Type 1 and 2). Participants progress to/through HE tracked via HEAT/HESA and UCAS utilising quasi-experimental methods (Type 2 and 3) Access Service Quality Assurance peer observations will take place ensuring that those leading elements of the programme are meeting Service standards and agreed session outcomes. (Type 1)	Reports with recommendations on the type and scale of resources to create will be shared internally and through partnership and mission groups such as HEPP and the Russell Group Apprenticeship Network. Reports on the receipt and effectiveness of IAG resources will be shared and utilised to inform further developments and/or adaptations.

IS Three: improve completion rates for underrepresented groups, with a focus on disabled and mature, whilst creating a more inclusive environment for all.

Objectives and targets
PTS_1: Sheffield will reduce the gap in **completion** between under 21s and those 21 and over from 14.2 pp in the 2017-18 entry year to 10 pp in the 2025-26 entry year.
PTS_2: Sheffield will remove the gap in **completion** for students declaring a disability (3.8 pp for 2017-18 entrants) in 2029-30.

Related Objectives and targets: **PTS_3, PTS_4, PTS_5, PTS_6**

Risks to equality of opportunity: IS 3 aims to provide students with access to an immediate network of supporters, a robust sense of belonging, quality academic support, personal support and information, advice and guidance, and decreased levels of financial pressure. This represents mitigation of institutional risks 2,3,4 and 6, which correlate with OfS EORR risks 6 (Insufficient academic support), 7 (Insufficient personal support), 8 (Mental health), 9 (Ongoing impacts of coronavirus) and 10 (Cost pressures).

Activity/Description **Inputs:** Estimated investment to delivery over four years: **£4.4m**	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy
Programme Level Approach (all): **Ongoing focus on embedding the University's** *Programme Level Approach (Existing)***, with programmes teams taking a holistic view of the students' academic experience. Targeted support available to academic teams via Education Development Services.** **Minimum Accessibility Standards (disabled):** **Introduce a requirement for** *minimum standards for accessibility of the curriculum and assessment (New)* **across all programmes, reflecting common interventions, reducing the need for large numbers of disabled students needing individual Learning Support Plans (LSPs).** **Inclusive Design/Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs) Training Programmes (disabled):** **Developing training programmes (New) for:** ● Programme teams to help them design and embed common interventions as matter of course and to evidence how this will improve experience for all learners. ● DLOs* in Schools and Faculties to support delivery of a more consistent student experience in relation to the implementation of common interventions and LSPs. *The transition from academic departments to schools will facilitate to refresh of the DLO roles and structures across the University	**Short term:** renewed emphasis on the need for inclusive programme design and opportunities for co-creation with students. **Medium term:** Reduction in the number of individual LSPs required, and the overhead to administer and implement these, allowing resources to be targeted more effectively. All students begin to feel the benefits of a more inclusive learning environment. Improved student mental health. **Long term:** improved continuation, completion and progression rates. Reduced risk of students from underrepresented groups feeling 'othered.'	**IS 4** **IS 5** Mental Health Charter

Academic Skills Support (mature): Education Development Services to develop *targeted academic skills support for mature learners (New)* ensuring that all mature, direct entrants to undergraduate programmes have access to the same comparable resource of mature students entering via the Lifelong Learning Foundation Year programme, recognising the challenges of transitioning back into and through full time education.	**Short term:** opportunities for distributed mature students to build communities with peers beyond their disciplines. **Medium term:** better engagement with learning, confidence in learning environments and attainment in academic modules. **Long term:** improved completion rates and higher good honours rates	**IS4**
Summer Academic Skills Workshops (mature): Educational Development Services and Lifelong Learning teams develop short *Summer academic skills workshops (New)* for mature entrants who want to understand more about skills gaps they may have as they transition back to education. This also provides an opportunity to introduce them to available ongoing academic support at an early stage. Current mature learners and alumni would be invited to support delivery to share lived experiences.	**Short term:** builds confidence. Helps build communities. **Medium term:** better take up of available education support services. **Long term:** improved continuation and completion rates.	**IS4**
Academic Tutoring (all): Institution-wide *implementation of new Academic Tutor role (Piloted 23-24)* (to replace former Personal and Academic Tutors); placing greater emphasis on academic support and allowing academic staff more time to focus on students' academic progress; whilst referring personal support requirements and more complex issues to professional services teams and resources.	**Short term:** greater clarity for academics on the boundaries of their roles and time released to increase levels of academic support. **Medium term:** students directed to most appropriate support services, gaining a richer understanding of their academic performance and development needs. More consistent levels of support across disciplines. **Long term:** improved academic support recognised through student feedback.	**IS4** **IS5**
Wellbeing support/Wellbeing workshops (mature): Student Support Services, via Wellbeing Advisors in faculties and partnering with the Students' Union, to provide *targeted wellbeing support (New)* for mature students with specific support for the challenges they	**Short term:** students have a better understanding of wellbeing and how it impacts university life and academic success. Students made aware of available wellbeing services and how to access these ahead of needing them, with signposting to financial, health, related and other support.	**IS4**

face. ***Wellbeing workshops (New)*** to which older student cohorts will be invited to attend within the academic year. Facilitated by Wellbeing Advisors in Faculties and cross faculty. Development of enhanced web resources for mature entrants.	**Long term:** mature student communities achieve the same levels of awareness to support as their under 21 peers and access this support. Improved continuation and completion rates.	
Mature students on Campus: Student Support Services, partnering with the Students' Union and the Mature student representatives, **review the ways in which mature students use the campus (New)**; with a view to identifying and removing potential barriers that hinder their ability to study effectively, build communities beyond disciplinary boundaries, and engage with wellbeing services.	**Short term:** a richer understanding of our mature student communities, their commonalities and differences. **Medium term:** better designed services. Students feel a greater sense of belonging. **Long term:** improved attendance, completion and academic performance.	**IS4**

Summary of evidence base and rationale: Mature students may have limited contact with students from similar backgrounds across the University and successful role models are often not visible. Students are concerned they will not be able to engage with the social aspects of university life because of their circumstances and are not comfortable declaring these. Students are not aware of the support available to them. Our internal analysis suggests that older students who participate in our Lifelong learning Foundation programme have more successful outcomes than those older students who are direct entrants to undergraduate programmes. Between 20-25% of students (around 900 home UG students in 2021/22) declare a disability when they enter their studies each year, there is also a growing number of students who are receiving a formal diagnosis during their time of study. This intervention strategy complements the University's Disability Equality Strategy and Action Plan[4] and Mental Health Strategy Action Plan[5].

Evaluation

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Programmes Level Approach (all)	Theory of change, Annual Reflection process, student surveys, focus groups (Types 1 and 2)	Internal publication each year to support Annual Reflection exercise across all disciplines and reported through formal governance routes
Minimum Accessibility Standards (disabled)	Reduction in the number of individual LSPs issued. Staff and student (with and without disabilities) focus groups. Use of Core Digital Tracker across	Annual progress report from Disability and Dyslexia Support Services. Routine re-baselining as intervention develops. Findings published externally and conference materials delivered to support sector-wide

[4] https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/inclusion/disability/action-plan

[5] https://cc.sheffield.ac.uk/ss/mental-health/mental-health-action-plan/

	schools. Theory of change and case studies. (Types 1 and 2)	dissemination in 2029. Internal reporting of Core Digital Education compliance.
Inclusive Design/DLO Training Programmes (disabled)	Attendance rates. User evaluation and feedback.	Annual reporting internally, including proposals for improvements to the training offer. Sharing of progress through sector networks.
Academic Skills Support (mature)	Take up (web hits, attendance at workshops, individual contact points) of new service offer. User evaluation and feedback. Comparison of continuation and completion rates for students accessing skill support and those not (Types 1, 2 and 3)	Annual reporting internally. Case studies developed and used in applicants and student communications. Best practice findings shared through presence at sector conferences/events.
Summer Academic Skills Workshops (mature)	Take up (attendance). User evaluation and feedback. Comparison of continuation and completion rates for students accessing workshops and those not (Types 2 and 3)	Annual reporting internally, including proposals for improvements to the offer.
Academic Tutoring (all)	Feedback via Educational governance routes, student surveys and focus groups. Impact on student academic performance. (Types 2 and 3)	Annual reporting internally via Education governance structures. Ongoing review via Annual Reflection exercise across all disciplines. Sharing of good practice via relevant sector conferences/events, led by the Academic Tutoring Steering Group.
Wellbeing support/ Wellbeing workshops (mature)	Take up (attendance). SU led user evaluation and feedback. Comparison of continuation and completion rates for students accessing workshops and those not (Types 2 and 3)	Reports to be shared internally and through SU/TUOS Partnership Boards, with actions being fed through relevant internal management structures. Case studies to be developed and shared externally through relevant student and university fora.
Mature students on Campus	SU led student surveys and focus groups. Analysis of service usage (SU and TUOS) by mature students	Reports with recommendations to be shared internally and through SU/TUOS Partnership Boards at the end of 2025/26, with recommendations being fed through relevant internal management structures. Case studies to be developed and shared externally through relevant student and university fora.

IS Four: improve attainment rates for underrepresented groups, with a focus on Black, Asian, FSM and IMD 1 and 2.

Objectives and targets

PTS_3: Sheffield will work to remove the **attainment** gap for students from Black backgrounds in 2035-36.

PTS_4: Sheffield will work to remove the **attainment** gap for students and Asian backgrounds in 2030-31.

PTS_5: Sheffield will close the **attainment** gap for students eligible for FSM from the baseline of 11.2 pp in 2021-22 to 5 pp in 2029-30.

PTS_6: Sheffield will close the **attainment** gap from 7.9 pp to 3 pp in 2029-30 for students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 compared to those in IMD quintiles 3, 4 and 5.

Related Objectives and targets: **PTS_1, PTS_2**

Risks to equality of opportunity: IS 4 aims to provide students with access to an immediate network of supporters, a robust sense of belonging, quality academic support, personal support and information, advice and guidance, increased levels of academic confidence and attainment, and decreased levels of financial pressure. This represents mitigation of institutional risks 2,3,4,5 and 6, which correlate with OfS EORR Risks 6 (Insufficient academic support), 7 (Insufficient personal support), 8 (Mental health), 9 (Ongoing impacts of coronavirus) and 10 (Cost pressures).

Activity/Description **Inputs:** Estimated investment to delivery over four years: **£1.2m**	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy

Analyse issues, design and pilot interventions:
A detailed *analysis (New)* of the relationship between resit rates, completion rates and attainment for black, Asian and minority ethnic students. Using these findings to:
  a) determine the extent to which assessment design and delivery are critical features affecting outcomes
  b) identify where interventions can be timed to maximise impact
  c) Inform the University's Programme Level Approach (see IS3 above)
 	
Design and pilot interventions (New) to test the above findings, evaluate and disseminate best practice and underpinning evidence.
	Short term: Greater understanding of the experiences of Black students on academic programmes and the complex factors affecting attainment gap. Understanding of where attainment gaps can first be seen, the possible reasons for this, and how interventions might be targeted early to reduce risks.
	Medium term: Evidence informed assessment design principles being rolled out across programmes. Early (pre-entry, in curricular and extra-curricular) interventions being developed and targeted.
	Long term: Improved attainment and completion rates across black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.
		IS3
		Race Equality Charter

Consistent assessment practice: Undertake a University-wide review of assessment with a view to *creating greater consistency of practice (New)* across subject areas and removing barriers that can be experienced disproportionately by students from underrepresented groups (including, but not limited to, clarity of marking criteria, extension	**Short term:** Shared understanding of assessment landscape and improved scaffolding for assessment design across programmes. **Medium term:** students from underrepresented groups are clearer round expectations relating to assessment and empowered to seek support. Reduced stigma for students	**IS3** Race Equality Charter

requests, extenuating circumstances, understanding feedback).	who are struggling to study/engage with assessments due to conflicting wellbeing, financial or personal issues. **Long term:** Inclusive assessment practices established as the norm across all programmes. Improved attainment across black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 and those eligible for free school meals.	
Lived experiences: Student Support Services' Impact and Evaluation Team to ***conduct deep dive conversations (New)*** with black, Asian and minority ethnic students and students from lower socio economic backgrounds to understand their lived experience, enriching our understanding of the barriers to success, framing these on the following risks (academic support, personal support, mental health, cost pressures, capacity issues).	**Short term:** A better understanding of students' lived experience. **Medium term:** A clearer sense of how different risks to the equality of opportunity balance for students and the complex interrelationships. **Long term:** Improved support and service provision, better signposting, and the ability to develop support targeted to individual needs. Improved continuation, completion and attainment across black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 and those eligible for free school meals.	**IS1** **IS3** **IS5** Race Equality Charter
Review of scholarships, bursaries and financial support: Student Recruitment, Marketing and Admissions led ***review of scholarships, bursaries and financial support (Ongoing)*** arrangements to test the extent to which current schemes are genuinely having impact. A critical assessment of how these can be improved, working with internal and external delivery partners, to ensure that students from lower socioeconomic groups are able to engage fully with their studies, covering investment levels, ease of access, and eligibility criteria.	**Short term:** better understanding of the value and impact of financial support, before, during and after study. A sense of the relative impact. **Medium term:** Enhancements to in-cycle financial support (hardship, participation and related funds). Lowering barriers for students needing to access financial support. Greater confidence that financial support is reaching the most at need. **Long term:** More impactful use of finite resource. A decline in students citing financial issues as the reason for poor engagement/non-continuation. Improved attainment for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.	**IS1** **IS3**
Financial skills training and resources: Develop ***financial skills training and resources (New)*** such that all students are better equipped to manage their finances during their studies and, for students experiencing serious financial hardship, that	**Short term:** raised awareness about the importance of good financial planning and basic money management skills. Improved, easily accessible, year round, information, advice and guidance available.	**IS3**

they are confident about the support available and how to access it before they reach a crisis point and/or begin to disengage with their studies. These include web resources; year round workshops and training sessions; easy access to information, advice and guidance; Student Money Ambassadors; and basic cooking skills. An appropriate third party provider will be engaged to deliver personal finance tools and learning modules.	**Medium term:** High numbers of students using money tools. Student communities accessing practical and financial support without stigma. Increased numbers of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds accessing broader learning opportunities (study abroad, placements, etc) **Long term:** A decline in students citing financial issues as the reason for poor engagement/non-continuation. Fewer students presenting with financial difficulty as a consequence of being supported to manage their finances more effectively. Improved attainment for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.	

Summary of evidence base and rationale: The higher education sector has been working to understand the black, Asian and minority ethnic awarding gap in more detail for some time. The work that TASO has led suggests a number of intervention approaches may help but it is not clear which targeted interventions will have the greatest impact at the University of Sheffield. There is a need to explore assessment practice in more detail due to the drop in black, Asian and minority ethnic attainment in 2021/22 when we returned to pre-Covid assessment practice. The University has a variety of financial support offerings for students who experience financial barriers to access and participate fully in their university life. Bursaries and scholarships are issued on a criteria basis at the point of entry and additional financial support funds are available to all students at any time during their university journey. However challenges still exist, students report not feeling financially literate when navigating the costs of being at university and whilst the University has provided additional financial support funds for students to apply to, take up of these funds has been low. There is a need to improve the visibility of where barriers to funding may exist for particular students. Students do not want to put themselves forward to access additional funds as they do not want to be stigmatised for not being able to cope with the cost pressures. Students have told us they want more financial guidance (SU Cost of Living evaluation 2022). Less than 50% of students say they budget (NSMW 2024 survey). Co-curricular opportunities can be costly and prohibitive to students on already stretched budgets.

Evaluation

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Analyse issues, design and pilot interventions	Evaluation plans for pilot interventions will be agreed at the point that these activities are confirmed.	To be determined.
Consistent assessment practice	Feedback in the form of interviews and focus groups with black, Asian and minority ethnic students on experience of using assessment schemes, focusing on whether this made the difference to their attainment. Seeking ethics approval for a longitudinal study over 2 years (2026/27 and 2027/28). Tracking of students' 'satisfaction' with	Annual internal reporting and tracking of performance data via Annual Reflection. External publication and dissemination externally in 2028/29. Updated web resources, workshops and support provided to programme teams by Education

	assessment and feedback via internal module evaluation and NSS measures. Engagement with student representatives at a disciplinary level. (Type 2 and 3) Minimum standards for academic practice set and monitored accordingly e.g. through VLE (Type 1)	Development Services.
Lived experiences	Theory of change (Type 1)	Summer 2026 internal publication and review in education governance committees. Report to Senate in July 2026 Production of 'lived experience' pieces to camera for awareness raising purposes across campus.
Review of scholarships, bursaries and financial support	OfS financial Support Toolkit (Type 2)	Publish findings on our website 2026
Financial skills training and resources	User evaluation and feedback. Comparison of continuation rates for students accessing support and those not. Qualitative data through focus groups with students about how they feel about accessing funds (Type 2)	Publish findings on our website 2027. Share findings externally 2028/29 via sector conferences and events.

IS Five: to reduce the gaps in progression to graduate level employment or postgraduate study for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Objectives and targets:
PTP_1: Sheffield will reduce the gap in terms of the number of students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 entering graduate level employment or postgraduate study compared to those from IMD quintiles 3, 4 and 5, from a baseline of 4.4 pp in 2020-21 to 2.0 pp in 2029-30.
PTP_2: Sheffield will reduce the gap in terms of the number of students eligible for FSM entering graduate level employment or postgraduate study relative to those who are not eligible, from 8.0 pp in 2020-21 to 4.0 pp in 2029-30.

Risks to equality of opportunity: IS 5 aims to provide students with access to an immediate network of supporters, a robust sense of belonging, quality personal support, information, advice and guidance and decreased levels of financial pressure. This represents institutional risks 2,4 and 6, which correlate with OfS EORR risks 7 (Insufficient personal support), 9 (Ongoing impacts of coronavirus), 10 (Cost pressures), 11 (Capacity issues) and 12 (Progression from higher education).

Activity/Description **Inputs:** Estimated investment to delivery over four years: **£250k**	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy
Support and guidance: Research and develop enhancements to existing *careers and employability resources (New)* which support and account for the specific needs of lower socio-economic groups (FSM and IMD Quintiles 1 and 2). Developments to initially focus on skills, 1:1 career coaching and peer group activities to enhance belonging, personal employability development and career confidence with clear communication of the offer and an expectation that students identified engage with at least some elements of support offered. Further developments will then be guided by student need and response to feedback during the lifetime of the Plan.	**Short term:** An evidence-informed, tailored careers and employability support offer available for students from FSM and IMD 1 and 2 backgrounds; A communication plan to present the offer and encourage engagement. **Medium term:** A functional communication model that drives positive engagement from target group students including with preparation for work sessions prior to experiential opportunities. Students report enhanced career confidence and ability to self-reflect and articulate skills and attributes; Students using this self-knowledge to inform their career thinking. **Long term:** Continuing growth in proportion of students engaging. Students report positively on the value and impact of engaging with the careers support offered. More students from target groups participate in work experiences. Enhanced graduate outcomes for students from FSM and IMD 1 and 2 backgrounds, reducing the gap in outcomes between them and their peers.	
Work experience: *Further research (Existing)* the reasons students at the University from FSM and lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be deterred from accessing extra-curricular work experience and internships. *Extend existing internship activity* to reach more students (increase of c.60+ students per year), and **create *a programme of funded 4-week, 140 hour work experience internships (New)*** within the University and with regional SMEs or VCS organisations. This builds on experience/evaluation of delivering 2-week / 70 hour funded internships allowing target students to engage in higher level work activities and projects to develop workplace confidence and competence. Brokering *paid internships (New)* to help level the playing field between those who have financial resources and social networks to be able to	**Short term:** Greater understanding of the nature of the barriers to participation in work experiences and internships. Creation of new 'preparation for work' resources and services for students. **Medium term:** Availability of an enhanced range of paid internship opportunities for students inc. tailored promotion and support to enable more students from underrepresented backgrounds to access and benefit from high quality, short-term internships; c.60 students a year from FSM and IMD quintile 1 and 2 backgrounds access high quality, paid 4-week work experiences; Evaluation indicates increased career confidence, greater awareness of career options, enhanced skills development, and improved ability to articulate their skills in the recruitment process for graduate roles or further study. **Long term:** Enhanced graduate outcomes for students from FSM	IS 4

undertake high quality work experiences, and those who do not. Provide **work preparation sessions** *(New)* and guidance (as above) for students to help manage anxiety or imposter syndrome, and carefully evaluate the impact of the work experiences. Support the ongoing work to **extend access to in-curricular work experiences**.	and IMD quintiles 1 and 2 backgrounds, reducing the gap in outcomes between them and their peers.	
Funding: Consolidate financial support schemes available to students who face financial barriers to accessing work experiences, placements and other employability development opportunities into a ***unified work experience and employability fund (Existing/New)*** ensuring that these are promoted more effectively and the evaluation of impact improved. These schemes cover: travel expenses, interview clothing, work-related skills training, and/or transition costs such as rent deposits if undertaking a placement year and moving accommodation	**Short term:** Consolidated work experience support fund created; mechanisms for application and allocation to students are established. **Medium term:** Enhanced awareness and disbursement of funds available to target students enabling access to positive work and career experiences. Positive feedback from students on the impact of the receipt of funding to enable experiences. Students feel more able to participate in work experience opportunities once some of the financial barriers are removed. **Long term:** Enhanced graduate outcomes for students from FSM and IMD Quintile 1 and 2 backgrounds, reducing the gap in outcomes between them and their peers.	
Graduate Transition: *Research* target group students' concerns and perceived barriers to achieving positive graduate outcomes, and the support they would like, ***using insight to establish dedicated transition-point career guidance, job application, and work readiness information and advice*** for identified FSM and IMD Quintile 1 and 2 students during the final stages of their programme and in their first two years after completion. Promote and encourage student engagement with support to optimise their graduate transitions into further study and/or employment outcomes.	**Short term:** Improved insights and understanding of students' concerns and barriers to achieving positive outcomes. Graduate transition service established with raised awareness of the support. **Medium term:** Students engage with continuing support during their transition period. Evaluation provides continued insights and case studies to inform ongoing enhancements in support, and other students. Enhanced awareness and engagement with PGT/PGR options. **Long term:** Enhanced graduate outcomes for students from FSM and IMD Quintile 1 and 2 backgrounds, reducing the gap in outcomes between them and their peers	

Summary of evidence base and rationale:
Building on work from the Ambition programme supported by the Law Family Foundation we have identified that there are several barriers to students from lower-socio economic backgrounds participating in work experience placements, both paid and unpaid. These include: Perceptions of their skills and therefore ability to succeed on a placement; lack of prior work experience, especially in professional work environments, and a linked lack of confidence to even apply for available opportunities; perceptions of 'people like' me in the workplaces providing the work experience opportunities;

the need to take time out from paid work alongside their studies to participate in a short term placement; and having the finances to afford to pay for accommodation/clothing/travel etc to be able to take up the placement.

Evaluation

Activity	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Support and guidance	Review level of engagement with Careers IAG and activities as recorded on Career Connect system (Type 2). Use of mySkills self-assessments and Career Confidence survey to review progression in career confidence (Type 2).	Internal to education governance committees. Case studies for website and internal/external communications.
Work experience	Data from university placement management systems to record and monitor trends in participation in work experiences and placements amongst students from target groups (Type 2). Use of mySkills portfolio self-assessments to review progression in career confidence. (Type 2). Review of Career Confidence survey responses as a measure of learning gain and growth in confidence as a result of participation. (Type 2). HESA Graduate Outcomes survey to review progress in positive Graduate Outcomes for target groups. (Type 2).	Annual internal reporting to governance committees. Externally with sector groups e.g. AGCAS, to compare and contrast levels of engagement and impact - 2027/28 onwards Share findings externally via sector conferences and events.
Funding	Monitor the number and proportion of students from target groups accessing funding for these purposes, and to what extent this is used to unlock access to employability development experiences, work experiences and placement years (Type 2). Student interviews and focus groups to record and evaluate the impact of receipt of funding (Type 1).	Annual internal reporting. Annual impact evaluation report
Graduate transition	Evaluation of feedback and impact of all careers and employability support provided using Career Confidence survey questions, the mySkills assessments and individual reflection (Type 1 and 2). Recording numbers of students and graduates from target groups engaged in career Transition support (Type 2). Gather case studies of various types of transitions, both positive and otherwise, and evaluate the reasons behind these outcomes. Student and graduate reflection reviewed for feedback on impact of work experience on graduate transition (Type 1). Track Graduate Outcomes data to assess impact on outcomes for target groups (Type 2). Track Outcomes data against target group engagement with support outlined in this Plan to assess impact of such interventions (Type 2).	Annual internal reporting and to University governance committees. Externally with sector groups e.g. AGCAS, to compare and contrast levels of engagement and impact - 2027/28 onwards.

Whole provider approach

18. To support the development of this section of the plan, we engaged with the Whole Provider Support Programme that York University has developed[6]. This approach utilised a self-assessment tool that has enabled reflection on where and how we can develop further strategic alignment between the APP and our broader education strategy and vision.

19. As an institution we are guided by our values:
- We are **ambitious** and strive for **excellence** in all that we do.
- We believe in **collaborative** working.
- We champion an **inclusive** and **diverse** community.
- We are **responsible** – for our people and the wider world.
- We are open and **transparent** about the decisions we make.

20. Our University Vision is predicated on four pillars; Education, Research, Innovation and 'One University.' Access and participation activity is clearly embedded within the Education and One University pillars of our Vision. Under the 'One University' pillar, we aspire to *"build a diverse community of staff and students from a broad range of backgrounds, demographics and cultures, and create an inclusive, supportive and collaborative environment in which they can succeed and flourish."* This also supports wider strategic objectives for the student population, including: the Mental Health Charter, Race Equality Charter (Bronze), Disability Strategic Plan and Athena Swan Award (Silver).

21. In July 2023 the University received the University Mental Health Charter Award from Student Minds with the University Health Services; Disability and Dyslexia Support Service; Residence Life programme; Belief, No Belief and Religious Life Centre; and the University's Campus Masterplan being cited as areas of sector good practice.

22. We are signatories to the Care Leaver Covenant and the Stand Alone Pledge. We have also declared our support for the Armed Forces covenant[7]. There are small populations of students from these backgrounds, but we are committed to supporting them with the unique and individual requirements they have.

23. Through our NNECL membership/Quality Mark accreditation and ongoing collaboration with NNECL, we are committed to improving the educational outcomes for people with care experience. This collaborative approach offers a strategic lever to addressing institutional, regional and national equality gaps and actively encourages institutions to engage with and monitor their students. Crucially, working with NNECL addresses the sector-wide risks that may affect people with care experience, and their opportunities to access and succeed in higher education.

24. We have been named a University of Sanctuary in recognition of our support for displaced people. This underpins our commitment to supporting all students to thrive and succeed.

25. This plan has been informed by recent feedback from the TEF 2023 panel. The panel highlighted areas of outstanding quality in relation to the student experience, including provision of *'a supportive learning environment, [where] students have access to a wide and readily available range of outstanding academic support tailored to their needs.'* It also identified areas where there were inconsistencies in the experience of students across some subject areas and we are committed to addressing these, with work underway in those areas. Particular intervention strategies within this plan are directly aligned.

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[6] Thomas, L. (2024) Higher Education Provider enabling environment review tool (version 1). WPA support programme. CRESJ, University of York.

[7] The Armed Forces Covenant | University Secretary's Office, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/uso/armedforcescovenant

26. All programmes are required to embed our Sheffield Graduate Attributes (SGAs)[8] in subject and discipline appropriate ways, to ensure that students are developing more than just discipline based knowledge. SGAs help students contextualise their academic and wider experience, and to track and measure their progress in terms of *My learning, My impact* and *My self.* These play an important role in helping students from underrepresented backgrounds to reflect on achievements in a structured way alongside peers and building confidence.

27. We continue to create a positive environment that supports and encourages the wellbeing of our staff and students, whilst empowering individuals to be responsible for their own wellbeing. An area of focus has been on mental health and providing staff and students with appropriate support and advice. Our Mental Health Strategy 2022-2027 goes beyond a simple focus on providing effective and accessible mental health services into cross-organisational consideration of all aspects of the University experience that could be improved to reduce the likelihood of students being affected by significant mental health difficulties. Our Mental Health Strategy Action Plan covers the whole spectrum of response from proactive interventions through to clinical treatment.

28. Our Alumni remain an important part of our community, making invaluable contributions both as advocates, donors, and mentors to future generations. For example, the Careers and Employability Service works with Alumni and employers to provide targeted mentoring support for students from a range of backgrounds, offering an established portfolio of opportunities and interventions.

Governance

29. This plan has been developed in consultation with education leaders, the Students' Union, local partners and service providers. It has been taken through relevant governance structures for endorsements and/or approval.

30. University Council receives annual reports on progress against the plan and remains fully engaged with monitoring of performance. On approval of this plan, institutional KPIs will also be reviewed and updated in line with the stated ambitions.

31. Through our strategic planning framework, all academic schools/departments have a five year plan and agreed strategic targets (noting that these are currently being refreshed to reflect the new school structures). These are aligned with the overall University Vision, KPIs and strategic objectives (including widening participation). Threats to the delivery of these aims are captured in school risk registers. Progress against targets is monitored through the annual planning cycle, and informed by the Annual Reflection process, meaning that access and participation priorities are fully embedded.

Student consultation

32. Students' Union Officers are active members of the Access and Participation Steering Group that has overseen the development of this plan and have been key in helping to analyse the identified areas of risk. Through their recent student voice survey, the Officers have provided rich insights to inform the design of new interventions in this plan and also help us reflect on where current activity is having a positive impact.

33. Whilst developing the plan we have run open invitation workshops for students to gain a deeper understanding of the key themes emerging as the intervention strategies were developed. Student contributions have helped inform the specific activities that sit beneath each intervention strategy and Student Ambassadors have contributed to our theories of change through Change Busters.

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[8] Sheffield Graduate Attributes https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/skills/sga

34. More informally, relevant SU Officers and SU staff have had access to the draft plan and been invited to contribute as this has progressed. They have called out where they felt interventions needed to be more robust. For example, highlighting that for students with severe financial hardships the proposed activities did not go far enough.

35. They directly challenged our interventions for black, Asian and minority ethnic students and the need to strengthen these, recognising the intersectional challenges many, black students in particular, face in terms of racial prejudice, financial and educational disadvantage. This led to changes to IS4 and highlighted the benefits of the 'lived experience' work to build understanding of the complex challenges facing these students

36. The Students' Union were invited to detail, in their own words, their involvement in the process (below):

> *Here at Sheffield Students' Union, we've had full access to this analysis and actively engaged in the Access and Participation Steering Group (APSG) meetings where we explored the implications of the draft objectives and targets before they were circulated.*
>
> *The University team made sure to meet with us, the Students' Union officers and representatives, outside of the APSG meetings. This was crucial to ensure we were fully in the loop and equipped to contribute to crafting tailored and relevant intervention strategies.*
>
> *We've hosted insightful focus groups with Student Ambassadors who are connected with our diverse student body. These sessions were a chance to gather feedback on four main themes concerning Student Success: academic skills, sense of belonging, mental health, and cost of living. The feedback from these sessions has been transparent and seamlessly woven into our intervention strategies. This involves our collaborative efforts with the University as partners in delivering and evaluating various aspects of these strategies. We're eager to keep working closely with the university in the upcoming phases of this project as we recognise its pivotal objectives.*
>
> *Here at Sheffield Students' Union, we're dedicated to ensuring that the student voice and experiences remain at the core of our plans. We want to make sure that the changes we implement in partnership with the university benefit and support all students throughout their journey here at the University of Sheffield.*

37. The rich and varied experiences of our students have helped the development of new approaches to recruiting and supporting students from more diverse backgrounds. For intervention strategies IS 3 and 4 in particular, students' NSS feedback and Tell US data, including textual comments, also provided a critical resource.

38. Student consultation and engagement will continue as we further refine, review and implement our intervention strategies, with the Students' Union acting as both a delivery partner and 'critical friend'. Students will continue to be represented on formal education governance bodies including the Access and Participation Strategy Group, Senate Education Committee, Senate and University Council, as well as across wider university governance structures. This is a commitment that will be retained as we move to the new Schools structure.

39. The Students' Union recruits, trains and supports up to c.1000 academic representatives volunteers each year and this community's engagement is invaluable, providing a feedback mechanism locally across subject areas as well as via Students' Union structures.

40. The University's Impact and Evaluation Team has established a Student Panel to shape and improve the student experience across the whole student journey by engaging with students directly, thereby allowing the student voice to drive change and influence decision making at the University. These students are followed throughout their full student journey, allowing us to benchmark how their attitudes and experiences alter over time.

Evaluation of the plan

41. We have utilised the OfS evaluation self-assessment tool to review the University's evaluation activity, identifying where this can be strengthened in this new Plan.

42. Working across teams this matrix of self assessment has enabled us to reflect on our current evaluation activity giving an overview score of 'Emerging' across our work in this area. There is already a good level of integrated evaluation work happening with many services and/or intervention activity. The next phase in developing our capacity is to bring more strategic coherence to these activities as a whole.

43. An internal, community of practice team meets regularly to draw alignment with evaluation practice across the institution. During 2024/25, this will be evolved into a more formal evaluation structure to ensure that evaluation is robust and of a consistent standard, that finite resources are deployed effectively, and to support routine sharing and publication of findings internally and externally.

44. There is growing confidence in using evidence to support the design of programmes and initiatives, but areas for improvement have been identified. Within the Access Service there is an excellent model of engagement with HEPP, HeppSY and third party providers including Realising Opportunities, Brilliant Club, and The Sutton Trust. The success of these partnerships provides a firm platform to expand this approach to initiatives for personal and financial support and is evidence of the sector wide horizon scanning taking place to identify and embed examples of best practice and continuous improvement.

45. We have developed Theories of Change, utilising the AdvanceHE Change Busters[9] methodology to construct access and participation strategies with evaluation activity embedded from the start. Each intervention strategy within this plan has an underlying Theory of Change, providing clarity on our aims and how we will know we are making progress in the short, medium and longer term. Staff have been supported to develop their understanding of Theory of Change, evaluation skills and our work with the Change Busters toolkit has been reported by HEAT as being sector leading for the way in which we have involved diverse groups of students and staff.

46. Beyond the plan this has also been particularly useful in the design and implementation of our Ambition Programme (a donor funded cross-institution initiative for students from disadvantaged backgrounds) ensuring we have been collaborative by design and have incorporated authentic student voice, having current students participate as equal members in design panels which set the foundations for the development of an evaluation framework. Staff involved have reported feeling more confident to develop problem statements and using logic chains to assess the impact of an intervention.

47. Education Development Services are developing online resources to support academic teams in evaluating teaching practice and interventions locally. This will be launched ahead

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[9] Change Busters, https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/consultancy-and-enhancement/teaching-learning/exploring-theory-change-using-changebusters

of this plan going live and supports a drive to ensure that evaluation is a routine part of any intervention at the design phase, across all education related activities.

48. Multiple summative and formative assessments will be undertaken across each programme, using mix methodologies and approaches to evaluation, mainly through type 1 and 2, with a focus on developing practice around type 3. Analysis of various internal and external data will allow continued engagement with the narrative underpinning our plans and intervention.

49. The Access and Participation Strategy Group will continue to undertake regular 'spotlights' on activity supporting the widening participation agenda at Sheffield and recommend the refocusing of activity where it can be seen that it could have more impact. Recent and planned changes to the University's governance structures under the Senate Education Committee will provide avenues for greater assurance that intervention strategies are having the expected impact. The newly formed Student Experience Sub Committee has strategic oversight and monitoring of the APP as one of its core terms of reference.

50. The University's Senate Academic Assurance Committee has undertaken a review of the current Access and Participation Plan to scrutinise where activities are having a positive impact on the current targets and objectives. It will continue to provide assurance to the Senate on matters relating to the new Plan.

Further action we will take to improve the evaluation and understanding of the effectiveness of this plan includes:
   o Establishing a small APP implementation group from the start of the 2024/25 academic session. This group will oversee the transition from the current APP into the new plan.
   o Establishing an APP evaluation group that formalises the building of the wider evaluation community across professional services both centrally and within faculties.
   o Ensuring that delivery against the objectives of the plan is captured appropriately within the new School governance structures for Education
   o Reviewing University level KPIs for Widening Participation to ensure these align with the revised APP objectives.

51. Publications of findings will be recorded within internal annual reports feeding from and into evolving programme theories of change. Evaluation findings will be shared with partners and funders via regular in-cycle reports, Board and similar meetings, and through joint publications.

Provision of information to students

52. The University provides information to prospective students through a range of media channels. For prospective students, we use the University-wide online prospectus, the University webpages, electronic newsletters, targeted online information sessions on key topics such as financial support. We carry out a large number of face to face sessions in local schools and colleges to support teachers and advisers, prospective students and their families to understand more about the support we offer.

53. The University provides a number of schemes that offer financial support to students from lower income backgrounds (£40,000 or less) and other backgrounds that are typically under-represented in higher education. These include for the 2025/26 year of entry:

● An annual bursary of between £250 and £1,000 (or up to £1,250 for students who study in the Department of Lifelong Learning).
● An extra £250 per year if a student meets one or both of the following criteria:
   - from one of the country's most deprived postcode areas (as defined by the government index of multiple deprivation) and household income is below £25,000

- achieves ABB or higher (or equivalent) and is from a postcode in the Sheffield City Region where it is not usual for people to go to university (not dependent on household income)
- An annual bursary of up to £10,000 for students who are care leavers, estranged and those with caring responsibilities.
- Students are can to apply for the following additional financial support (subject to eligibility criteria being met):
  - A financial support fund for students with higher than average costs - for example those with a disability - or exceptional circumstances.
  - Emergency funding for students who are in urgent financial need and require funds immediately.
  - Equal Opportunities Fund of up to £300 to support access to volunteering and work based placements
  - Participation grant of up to £150 to support participation in sports, clubs and societies.

54. The University provides information on financial support to students in the following ways:
- **Prospective students** receive information about fees and financial support at in-person events, such as open days. Also online via webinars and public facing web pages and through our applicant processes which includes targeted email communications highlighting funding available.
- **Current students** receive information about fees and financial support available via the Student Hub webpages, internal communication campaigns such as National Student Money Week and via emails providing useful links to money management tools and notifying when funding schemes open for applications.

55. The Undergraduate fees and funding web pages provide the most up to date information including the detailed eligibility criteria for bursaries and scholarships. students)

56. All of our information regarding financial support adheres to the Competition and Markets Authority's advice to ensure we comply with consumer law. Our approved Access and Participation plan will be available on our University Finance webpages, approved and reviewed through committees that have student representation.

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

1. In preparation for this Plan we have analysed a number of data sources: Office for Students (OfS) access and participation (APP) aggregated and individualised data; HESA data supply files; UCAS Exact End of Cycle data; internal UReports student record data; OfS student outcomes data; NSS student experience data; data used for financial evaluation; and corresponding OfS guidance for reference (RN1 and RA6). We have primarily relied on OfS and UCAS data and figures should be assumed to be from these sources unless otherwise stated. Analysis of OfS data is based upon the July 2023 release. We have reviewed the most recent release of indicative data from the OfS (April 2024), and we are confident that our proposed objectives are relevant and valid.

2. We have also focused on the following student characteristics: Age, Gender, Ethnicity, Disability, IMD and Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility. The University has made a strategic decision not to undergo in-depth analysis of TUNDRA or ABCS indicators in establishing our objectives for this Plan. For access related analyses we have considered individual characteristics, with comparisons in proportions to our UCAS direct competitor and Russell Group mission groups. For all other lifecycle stages a summary table with key headlines is provided, followed by a more in depth analysis of each student characteristic. Where relevant we have provided explanations of our targeting setting and the risks to equality of opportunity applicable to a group within our University, city and regional context.

Context and Student Population:

3. We are one of the Russell Group of Universities and think it is important to set out our student population in context, based on analysis of the 2021/22 academic session where there were around 19,400 undergraduate (UG) students at the University.

4. The majority of our programmes are delivered on campus and 93% of our students study on a full time basis. A very small number, around 100 UG students, opt to study part time whilst around a quarter (5,650) are studying on UG programmes that have an integrated masters element. This significant population size supports our reasoning to analyse our APP data for First Degree UG with postgraduate components (source: OfS Size and shape of provision data dashboard).

5. We offer a wide range of subjects with the largest numbers of full time undergraduate students studying an Engineering discipline (around 20%), Medicine and Dentistry related disciplines (nearly 10%), and Business and Management related degrees (around 8%) [10]. We have also seen a growing population of degree apprentices. These are mainly programmes in population health and engineering developed in focus on meeting the needs of local and regional employers.

6. There is a relatively even gender split in the full time UG population. Within apprenticeships, 66.7% are female and for part time study the proportion of female students is 83%. Over 90% of entrants are not local to the University with the majority travelling from within a 3 hour journey time. 90% of UG student population is aged under 21, 8% are aged 21 to 30 with the remainder being over 30 at entry. 20.5% of students reported having a disability, a percentage which has been growing steadily over the last 6 years. In 2021/22 over 6% of students reported having a cognitive or learning difficulty; over 6% reported having a mental health condition; around 4% reported multiple or other impairments; nearly 2% reported sensory, medical or physical impairments; and under 1% reported social or communication impairments. Whilst there have been increases in all types of disability reported, the largest increase is in those reporting a mental health condition.

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[10] source is OfS size and shape of provision dashboard 2019-20-2022-23

7. The ethnic mix of the undergraduate population is around 57.7% white, 8.9% Asian, 2.4% black, 4.1% mixed. Around 25% of the student population has not reported their ethnic background. There has been a gradual increase in the black, Asian and minority ethnic population at the University over the last 6 years. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (IMD quintiles 1 and 2) account for nearly 18% of the undergraduate population (around 3,460 students). Nearly 900 students had been eligible for free school meals during their secondary education. There is also significant intersectionality between black, Asian and minority ethnic and lower socio-economic student groups at the University. We have low numbers of students who meet the definitions of care leavers, estranged, carers, parents, refugees or asylum seekers. We do not have the ability to report on the number of military children or ex-service personnel studying at the University.

Access

8. For student groups identified by the OfS as being 'at risk' regarding access to higher education we have looked at application, offer and acceptance rates numerically and as a proportion of the applicant population at TUoS. Though not linked to any specific risks we have also looked to IMD data as a proxy for household income and a robust longitudinal geographical dataset available across the UK regions. Assessment has been undertaken using UCAS Exact Admissions Data, which is rounded to the closest 0 or 5, through which we have also been able to make comparisons of TUoS against UCAS competitors and our mission group. We have also assessed access data published in the OfS' Access and Participation data dashboard for our individual provider across the published student characteristics and where necessary have also used internal admissions population data.

9. Within our Mission Group we generally compare ourselves to the following: University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, University of Manchester, University of Nottingham (UCAS Direct Competitors). Through the provision of UCAS data however we have been able to undertake an analysis of our performance compared to these Universities and against the Russell Group as a whole.

10. There are on average **c.30,400 Home-Undergraduate applications** (including for courses with PG elements) to the University each year (5 year average). From these applications **c.23,250,** mostly conditional offers, are made annually with **c.4,700** students accepted and expected to register (Figure1).

Figure 1. Applications, Offers and Expected Registrations for Full and Part Time undergraduate home students 2019/20-2023/24) - TUoS Internal Admissions Population Data

TUoS Only	2019			2020			2021			2022			2023		
	Apps.	Offers	Expec. Reg.	Apps.	Offers	Expec. Reg.	Apps.	Offers	Expec. Reg.	Apps.	Offers	Expec. Reg.	Apps.	Offers	Expec. Reg.
Full Time	30073	23566	4040	30808	23749	5007	28973	22136	4801	29675	22426	4874	31868	24121	4628
Part Time	156	88	82	109	43	35	69	44	42	72	50	50	126	50	42
Total	30229	23654	4122	30917	23792	5042	29042	22180	4843	29747	22476	4924	31994	24171	4670

11. Degree apprentices now account for around 5% of our undergraduate population, with over 200 new entrants in 2021/22. Based on a review of the OfS APP data dashboards, it is clear our performance for degree apprenticeships is strong within our Mission Group.

Age - Mature Vs Young
12. Whilst the University of Sheffield offers dedicated access routes for mature students via our Department for Lifelong Learning, and additional consideration through admissions for those applying for direct degree entry, we have seen a jagged profile in number of accepts and general decline in the proportion (excluding 2020/21) of students aged 21 and over (mature) applying to, made offers and accepted as expected registrations. Whilst these decreases reflect the trend seen in the Russell Group and amongst our direct competitors, it is in contrast to the National picture where the proportion of mature students reflected in

the latest publicly available registration data has increased in the last six years and in 2021/22 was around **29%** (**20.9 pp** higher that TUoS in the same year)

Figure 2. TUoS Proportion of Accepts by Age: Mature (21 and Over) Young (Under 21) - OFS APP Data Dashboard

TUoS Only	Accepts (OfS APP Database)			
	Mature		Young	
2016	408	8.4%	4450	91.6%
2017	434	9.9%	3962	90.1%
2018	418	10.5%	3546	89.5%
2019	425	11.6%	3236	88.4%
2020	435	9.6%	4112	90.4%
2021	377	8.1%	4291	91.9%

13. There are however larger proportions of mature students studying on health related courses such as nursing and midwifery and the age of entry onto the University degree apprenticeships also tends to be over 21. This reflects the nature of apprenticeship programmes, as many of these entrants will have undertaken a level 4 or 5 programme before commencing level 6.

14. Looking at the provision offered locally, Sheffield Hallam University and Sheffield City College provide a wide number of degree programs more specifically targeted at the mature student population therefore we do not perceive that there is a risk to the equality of opportunity for mature students accessing degrees at the University of Sheffield within our local context.

15. We will continue to focus on the experience that mature students have at the University of Sheffield and ensure that there is targeted and focused support so that they can achieve and succeed at the same rate as students under the age of 21.

Socio economic background – IMD

16. At TUoS there has been an increase in the number and proportion of applications from students with a home postcode in IMD Quintiles 1 and 2, up from around 7,530 (**28.5%**) in 2018/19 to 9,455 (**31%**) in 2023/24. Proportionally this increase in applications however has led to only a marginal, and not statistically significant, increase in offers, **24.8%** in 2023/24 (**+0.2pp**) which is stark in comparison to the **+1.7pp** and **+1.5pp** gains made by competitors and the Russell Group respectively. Equally, in contrast to these two groups the University has seen a reduction in the percentage of registrations from IMD quintile 1 and 2 students whilst increases are seen by competitors and the Russell Group (Fig.3). ***This area is an indication of risk.***

17. In comparison to publicly available national data for 2021, the University is also **10pp** lower than national proportions for registrations from IMD Quintile 1 and 2 students and our 2022/23 and 2023/24 data shows this gap will have grown further (Fig.3.).

Figure 3. Expected Registrations (Accepts) - Percentage IMD Q1and2 Vs Q3-5 TUoS, Competitors and Russell Group - UCAS Exact Data
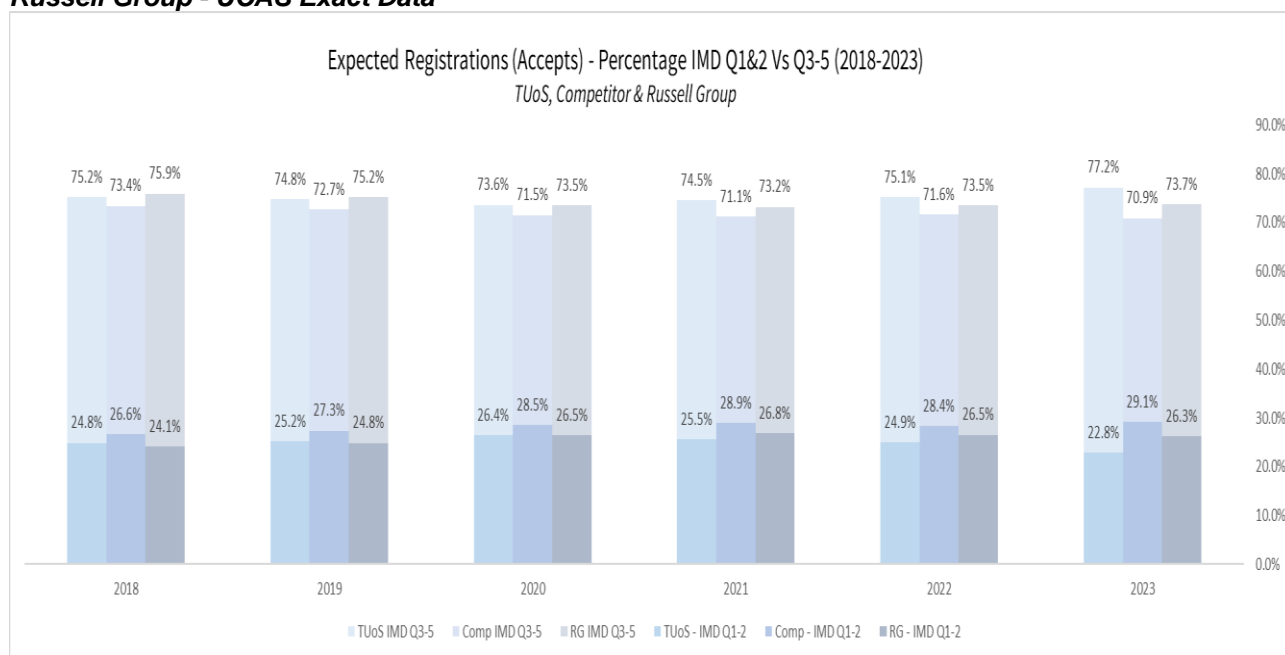
18. We are also aware of the intersectionality between IMD and ethnicity with nearly half of our black, Asian and minority ethnic entrants being from IMD Q1 and 2 postcodes compared to only **19%** of white student entrants to the University (Fig.4). ***This further compounds the indication of risk identified above.***

Figure 4: TUoS Proportion Accepts by Ethnic Group from IMD Q1 and 2 vs 3-5 - OfS APP Data Dashboard

TUoS Only	Year	BAME			Uknown			White		
		%	Num	Den	%	Num	Den	%	Num	Den
IMD Q 1&2	2016	43.20%	374	866	33.30%	13	39	17.00%	651	3824
	2017	47.00%	365	776	25.00%	11	44	19.40%	674	3473
	2018	47.30%	350	740	30.00%	12	40	18.60%	575	3092
	2019	47.50%	358	753	32.40%	11	34	18.50%	516	2793
	2020	49.90%	484	969	21.70%	10	46	19.10%	652	3420
	2021	46.10%	493	1069	27.00%	10	37	19.10%	654	3426
IMD Q 3-5	2016	56.80%	492	866	66.70%	26	39	83.00%	3173	3824
	2017	53.00%	411	776	75.00%	33	44	80.60%	2799	3473
	2018	52.70%	390	740	70.00%	28	40	81.40%	2517	3092
	2019	52.50%	395	753	67.60%	23	34	81.50%	2277	2793
	2020	50.10%	485	969	78.30%	36	46	80.90%	2768	3420
	2021	53.90%	576	1069	73.00%	27	37	80.90%	2772	3426

19. Our focus on POLAR as a geographical measure of low participation has likely added to these negative trends, particularly for postcodes where there is no intersectionality between the IMD and POLAR quintiles. We also recognise that area based measures have inbuilt imperfections, however IMD does account for different types of deprivation including income and education outcomes, links which when considered with our analysis highlight risk and warrant targeted measures to be included within this Plan.

20. Figure 5 shows the proportion of degree apprentices from IMD quintiles for the Access phase. The highest proportion of entrants are from IMD 1 and 2, making up over 50% of the entrant cohort since 2017/18. As we look to expand our apprenticeship provision we are conscious of maintaining this proportion of lower IMD groups.

Figure 5. New apprentices access degree apprenticeships at the University of Sheffield by IMD quintile
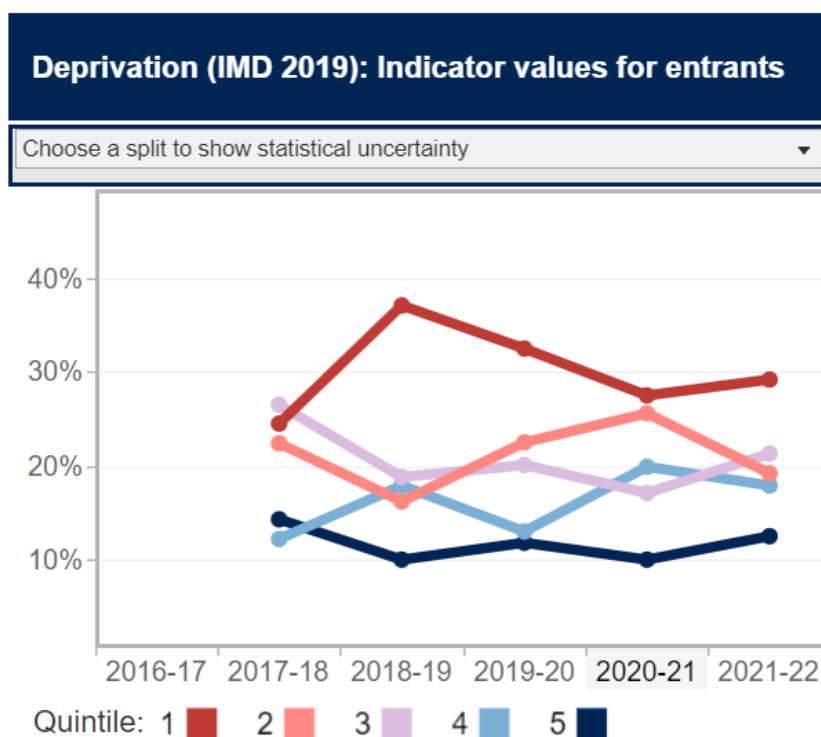
Socio-Economic - POLAR

21. POLAR has been a focus measure within our current Access and Participation Plan (2020/25). During this time we have seen the number and percentage of applications, offers and accepts for students from POLAR 4 Quintile 1 postcodes increase, with these students continuing to reflect roughly **10%** of our UG Home intake annually. As per our APP target we have also reduced the ratio of Polar4 Q5:1 students and in 2021/22 reported a ratio of **3.3:1** (Figure6)

Figure 6. Ratio of POLAR4 Q5:Q1 registrations at TUoS 2017/18-2021/22 - TUoS Internal Admissions Population Data

POLAR - Ratio		Registrations (Accepts) Young POLAR Only								
		2017		**2018**		**2019**		**2020**		**2021**	
TUoS Only	POLAR4 Q1	266	4.2:1	246	4.0:1	257	3.2:1	236	4.9:1	347	3.3:1
	POLAR4 Q5	1129		990		822		1159		1149	

22. Given the age of the POLAR dataset and that it will no longer be maintained we will not commit to using this measure within our future access considerations.

Socio-Economic Background - Free School Meals (FSM)

23. Whilst UCAS are only able to provide Free School Meals data for 2023/24 (Figure 7) we are able to see that the proportion of students entering the University that were eligible for FSM has remained relatively steady **(8.6%** in 2016/17 to **8.4%** in 2021/22) which is clearly lower proportionally but reflects similar changes to that seen in the national picture (**18.6%** down to **18.4%**).

Figure 7. TUoS Proportion of Accepted Students by Free School Meals Eligibility - OfS APP Data Dashboard

TUoS Only	Accepts (OfS APP Database)			
	FSM N		FSM Y	
2016	3348	91.4%	315	8.6%
2017	2975	91.9%	262	8.1%
2018	2759	92.6%	220	7.4%
2019	2455	91.2%	237	8.8%
2020	3118	91.1%	303	8.9%
2021	3290	91.6%	303	8.4%

Figure 8. Applications, Offers and Expected Registrations (Accepts) by FSM eligibility for TUoS, Competitors and Russell Group in 2023/24 - UCAS Exact data

FSM - 2023 Only		Applications		Offers		Accepts	
		Num.	%	Num.	%	Num.	%
UoS	FSM - Y	3335	10.6	2045	8.6	395	8.5
	FSM - N	27160	86.2	21075	88.8	4135	88.8
	FSM - Don't Know	1015	3.2	610	2.6	125	2.7
Comp.	FSM - Y	42195	11.9	22765	9.9	5005	9.8
	FSM - N	300285	74.6	201590	87.2	44520	87.2
	FSM - Don't Know	12365	1.7	6750	2.9	1535	3.0
RG	FSM - Y	90000	11.9	44330	10.0	10200	9.5
	FSM - N	637530	84.6	387015	87.1	93620	87.6
	FSM - Don't Know	26410	3.5	12920	2.9	3090	2.9

24. Within the Russell Group there is a more mixed picture. Several institutions have seen falling proportions of students eligible for free school meals whilst others have seen slight increases, however the 2023/24 UCAS figures indicate that the University will fall further behind both competitors and our mission group with respect to registration of FSM students. ***This is an indication of risk for us to address.***

25. Reviewing the intersectionality of free school meals with IMD quintiles, it is clear those who are eligible for free school meals are from postcodes which fall across all IMD quintiles. It is therefore not possible to draw a correlation between the two metrics, meaning both will be relevant to the institution in our access context. As with IMD however, there is an intersectionality apparent between ethnicity and FSM in our access context with **17.5%** of black, Asian and minority ethnic entrants in 2021/22 having previously been eligible for FSM compared to only **5.9%** of white entrants (Figure 9).

Figure 9. TUoS Proportion of Accepts by Ethnicity - OfS APP Data Dashboard

TUoS Only	Year	BAME			White		
		%	Num	Den	%	Num	Den
FSM Y	2016	22.80%	139	609	5.70%	172	3031
	2017	21.40%	119	555	5.20%	139	2660
	2018	17.60%	96	546	5.10%	123	2419
	2019	18.40%	96	523	6.50%	139	2148
	2020	21.40%	154	721	5.50%	148	2672
	2021	17.50%	141	806	5.90%	162	2769
FSM N	2016	77.20%	470	609	94.30%	2859	3031
	2017	78.60%	436	555	94.80%	2521	2660
	2018	82.40%	450	546	94.90%	2296	2419
	2019	81.60%	427	523	93.50%	2009	2148
	2020	78.60%	567	721	94.50%	2524	2672
	2021	82.50%	665	806	94.10%	2607	2769

26. The table above (Figure 9) shows that there is a significantly higher proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic accepts who were eligible for FSM compared to white students. This suggests a strong focus on FSM within our access interventions will also provide additional support for black, Asian and minority ethnic applicants.

27. We believe it is desirable to use FSM as a metric within targeted approaches to access, using this Plan period to increase our pre-entry engagement with this group via refreshed sustained programmes. These will focus on skills development, mentoring and building a sense of belonging for the FSM community within the TUoS population.

Disability

28. The University has seen significant increase in the number and proportion of applications, offers and accepts for students declaring a disability, remaining in line with both competitors and the Russell Group. In real numbers terms this is an increase of over 200 students per year registering with us and declaring a disability. Nationally the acceptance rate has increased from **13.7%** to **17.4%** over the same period, a figure the University is ahead of.

Figure. 10. TUoS Proportion of Accept Disability Vs No Disability - OfS APP Dataset

TUoS Only	Accepts (OfS APP Database)			
	Has Disability		No Disability	
2016	678	14.0%	4180	86.0%
2017	706	16.1%	3690	83.9%
2018	646	16.3%	3318	83.7%
2019	687	18.8%	2974	81.2%
2020	877	19.3%	3670	80.7%
2021	896	19.2%	3772	80.8%

29. Looking in more detail at the types of disability declared, the largest proportions are for students declaring a mental health condition with around a third of the disabled student population reporting one of these types of disability.

Figure 11. TUoS Proportion of accepts by Disability category - OfS APP Dataset

Proportion of students admitted by Disability

Disability Year	D: Cognitive #	D: Cognitive %	D: Mental health #	D: Mental health %	D: Multiple #	D: Multiple %	D: None #	D: None %	D: Physical #	D: Physical %	D: Social #	D: Social %
2016	268	5.5%	187	3.8%	136	2.8%	4180	86.0%	59	1.2%	28	0.6%
2017	255	5.8%	197	4.5%	144	3.3%	3690	83.9%	82	1.9%	28	0.6%
2018	235	5.9%	176	4.4%	152	3.8%	3318	83.7%	57	1.4%	26	0.7%
2019	226	6.2%	238	6.5%	135	3.7%	2974	81.2%	59	1.6%	29	0.8%
2020	306	6.7%	270	5.9%	184	4.0%	3670	80.7%	83	1.8%	34	0.7%
2021	300	6.4%	268	5.7%	184	3.9%	3772	80.8%	92	2.0%	52	1.1%

30. It should be noted however that UCAS Exact data has a much lower number of students in the expected registrations than Universities actually registers and reports through HESA. This implies there is still a sector-wide issue with students declaring a disability during the application process. Therefore whilst disabled students will not be a specific focus for access interventions within this Plan period, the University still commits to advocate for and support disabled students to declare their circumstances via UCAS and our own disrupted studies admissions process as necessary.

Figure 12. Expected registrations (Accepts) TUoS, Competitors and Russell Group 2023/24 - UCAS Exact Data

Disability - Number		Expected Registrations (Accepts)					
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
TUoS	Disability Declared	430	465	595	585	695	985
	No Disability	3635	3270	4165	4250	4175	3710
Comp.	Disability Declared	5220	5685	6625	7040	7410	10820
	No Disability	45555	45015	48775	51175	44000	40780
RG	Disability Declared	9705	10785	12995	14185	14260	21230
	No Disability	89410	88540	100915	107365	91315	87130

Ethnicity

31. We have already referenced the intersectionality between ethnicity and IMD and Free School Meals which indicates some risk for the University. That being said, ethnic minority students made up **23.7%** of the registering population at the University in 2021/22, an increase from **18.4%** in 2016/17 (Fig.13). Whilst this is below national proportions (**34.2%** in 2021/22) the percentage increases achieved are similar, and relative to our local area we attract a diversity in student population similar to other HE providers in the region.

Figure 13. TUoS Proportion Accepts by Ethnicity - OfS APP Dataset

TUoS Only	Accepts (OfS APP Database)									
	Asian		Black		Mixed		Other		White	
2016	453	9.4%	162	3.4%	210	4.4%	60	1.2%	3933	81.6%
2017	395	9.1%	127	2.9%	192	4.4%	72	1.7%	3566	81.9%
2018	394	10.0%	108	2.8%	202	5.1%	47	1.2%	3172	80.9%
2019	408	11.2%	103	2.8%	192	5.3%	66	1.8%	2858	78.8%
2020	486	10.8%	151	3.4%	274	6.1%	76	1.7%	3513	78.1%
2021	591	12.8%	175	3.8%	262	5.7%	65	1.4%	3534	76.4%

32. Between 2018/19 and 2023/24 we have seen the number of applications from black, Asian and minority ethnic students increase but the conversion rate between applications and offers decrease. This is something the University will continue to monitor, linked to commitments in our Race Equality Charter Action Plan.

33. The largest increase in the black, Asian and minority ethnic population has been for students from Asian backgrounds (9.4% to 12.8%). The black student population has remained relatively steady over the same period of time whilst those of a mixed ethnic background have had a slight increase from 4.4% to 5.7%. Whilst our cohorts are not very ethnically diverse they do reflect the ethnicity of the city and region. As our degree apprentice population is predominantly from the local area, our current provision is designed to meet the needs of local and regional employers; having a similar diversity mix to the region is a suitable position.

34. By including IMD and FSM within contextual offer policies we assume this will improve the conversion rates given the intersectionality outlined above. Therefore we will not initially set a target for black, Asian and minority ethnic access within this Plan period.

Gender

35. Application and Offers are virtually 50/50 between males and females with expected registrations in 2023/24 sitting at **49%** male to **51%** female. We are aware that pre-entry male attainment and aspirations to HE are lower to those of females based on our regional profile. We continue to particularly support white working class boys to consider and enter higher education but do not currently feel this is a scale of risk which warrants further targeting or intervention.

Care Experience

36. From an Access perspective the University takes a holistic approach to the care experience of degree entrants and offers dedicated support and contextual offers to any affected student irrespective of whether they are categorised as a statutory care leaver. The institution is a signatory to the Care Leavers Covenant and our research has contributed to the development of the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) quality mark, of which we are also a recipient. Since 2018/19 we have seen increases in the number and proportion of applications, offers and accepts of care experienced students - with particular growth seen since the inclusion of this group within contextual admissions proactive (2019). The application to offer conversion rate for these students is now **23%** (2023/24) one of our highest conversion rates for underrepresented student groups. We will remain committed to supporting care experienced students through our sustained access programmes, contextual offer and transitions support programmes included within this Access and Participation Plan but will not set specific targets for this group.

Estranged

37. As with care experienced students within Access activity a more holistic approach is taken to definitions of estrangement, accounting for the fact many young people will be on a journey to formal estrangement prior to entering University. We do not have year on year

comparisons of estranged application, offer and acceptance rates but can see from UCAS Exact Data our rates are proportionally similar to those of our competitors and within the Russell Group. Internal conversion data also shows a particularly high rate of application to offer conversion for estranged students in 2023/24 (**26%**) and we commit to continuing to support estranged students through our sustained access programmes, contextual offer and transitions support programmes included within this Access and Participation Plan but will not set specific targets for this group.

Carers

38. Whilst we do not have year on year comparative data for prospective students with caring responsibilities we are able to see that in 2023/24 the proportion of application, offer and expected registrations for this group at TUoS is below that of our competitors and the wider Russell Group. We commit to continuing to monitor the access rates for this group during the Plan period and will support prospective students through our sustained access programmes, contextual offer and transitions support programme included within this Plan but will not set specific targets for this group.

Parents

39. Looking at prospective students with parenting responsibilities, beyond those with other familial caring duties, we are able to see that in 2023/24 our application, offer and acceptance rates are only marginally behind our competitors and the Russell Group. We do not have year on year data to assess growth or trends and have only included parents within our contextual offer from 2024/25 entry, therefore we will commit to further monitoring access rates for this group but will not set specific Plan targets at this time.

Continuation

Figure 14.

Continuation Rates by Academic Year
First Degree including Integrated Masters, FT

Year / Characteristics	2015 %	Den	2016 %	Den	2017 %	Den	2018 %	Den	2019 %	Den	2020 %	Den
Overall	96.8%	4500	96.3%	4735	96.0%	4275	96.2%	3850	96.9%	3560	95.7%	4425
OUG L5+	85.7%	40	91.5%	80	96.0%	25	95.8%	25	100.0%	25	94.4%	20
Not FSM pop	95.0%	1095	95.1%	1160	94.4%	1120	93.5%	940	95.9%	935	92.8%	1090
IMD NA	96.4%	110	99.2%	125	95.0%	100	94.3%	85	97.5%	80	98.1%	105
IMD 3,4,5	97.3%	3440	97.2%	3605	96.4%	3170	97.1%	2865	97.4%	2625	96.3%	3215
IMD 1&2	94.8%	950	92.9%	1005	95.0%	1005	93.7%	900	95.2%	855	93.6%	1100
G: Other				0				0	75.0%	5	100.0%	5
G: Male	96.7%	2300	96.6%	2335	96.3%	2080	95.9%	1865	96.5%	1700	94.9%	2140
G: Female	96.8%	2200	96.2%	2400	95.8%	2195	96.5%	1985	97.3%	1855	96.5%	2280
FSM Y	94.5%	275	91.7%	300	93.7%	250	95.2%	210	95.7%	230	93.0%	285
FSM N	97.6%	3130	97.2%	3275	96.9%	2900	97.2%	2695	97.4%	2395	97.0%	3050
FD with integrated Fdtn	81.1%	55	75.0%	80	80.8%	125	82.0%	135	88.9%	135	81.4%	155
FD Not Fdtn	97.0%	4445	96.7%	4655	96.5%	4150	96.7%	3715	97.2%	3425	96.2%	4265
EG: White	96.8%	3715	96.5%	3850	96.1%	3465	96.2%	3085	97.1%	2780	96.0%	3435
EG: Unknown	97.6%	40	97.4%	40	93.2%	45	97.5%	40	93.8%	30	100.0%	40
EG: BAME	96.5%	745	95.6%	850	95.9%	765	96.3%	725	96.3%	750	94.6%	945
E: White	96.8%	3715	96.5%	3850	96.1%	3465	96.2%	3085	97.1%	2780	96.0%	3435
E: Unknown	97.6%	40	97.4%	40	93.2%	45	97.5%	40	93.8%	30	100.0%	40
E: Other	96.1%	50	91.4%	60	95.7%	70	89.4%	45	93.8%	65	93.2%	75
E: Mixed	95.7%	210	94.5%	200	94.7%	190	96.0%	200	95.1%	185	94.7%	265
E: Black	97.6%	125	92.9%	155	93.5%	125	98.0%	100	93.1%	100	94.4%	140
E: Asian	96.7%	360	97.7%	435	97.4%	380	96.9%	380	98.0%	400	94.8%	465
DF: No Disability	97.0%	3960	96.4%	4080	96.4%	3585	96.5%	3225	97.3%	2900	96.4%	3575
DF: Has Disability	95.0%	540	95.9%	655	94.0%	685	94.9%	625	95.1%	660	92.9%	850
D: Social	100.0%	15	96.3%	25	92.6%	25	96.2%	25	85.2%	25	93.8%	30
D: Physical	82.5%	40	96.5%	55	92.2%	75	96.2%	55	96.6%	60	96.3%	80
D: None	97.0%	3960	96.4%	4080	96.4%	3585	96.5%	3225	97.3%	2900	96.4%	3575
D: Multiple	94.7%	130	97.7%	130	93.0%	140	93.8%	145	95.3%	130	92.7%	175
D: Mental health	96.5%	115	92.1%	180	92.6%	190	91.8%	170	93.8%	225	90.0%	260
D: Cognitive	96.3%	240	97.3%	260	96.4%	250	97.4%	230	97.3%	220	94.6%	300
Age: Young	97.4%	4165	97.1%	4350	96.8%	3860	97.3%	3455	97.5%	3155	96.6%	4005
Age: U21	97.4%	4165	97.1%	4350	96.8%	3860	97.3%	3455	97.5%	3155	96.6%	4005
Age: Mature	89.3%	335	88.0%	385	88.3%	410	86.8%	395	92.1%	405	87.6%	420
Age: 51+	57.1%	5	62.5%	10	77.8%	10	100.0%	5	80.0%	10	85.7%	5
Age: 41-50	89.5%	20	92.0%	25	84.6%	15	86.7%	15	85.7%	15	92.3%	15
Age: 31-40	89.7%	30	80.9%	45	92.0%	50	83.7%	45	95.9%	50	87.2%	45
Age: 26-30	88.2%	50	84.5%	70	84.7%	70	81.7%	70	92.9%	70	85.9%	80
Age: 21-25	90.4%	230	91.0%	235	89.2%	270	88.5%	260	92.0%	265	87.9%	275

Note on reading the table: areas in blue are more divergent from the University's overall continuation rate.

40. The table above (Figure 14.) compares the overall continuation rate at the University with the continuation rates for the widening participation characteristics. We have had strong overall continuation rates of around 96% over the last 6 years from 2015/16 to 2020/21. This compares very favourably above the national rate of 90.5% and is similar to that of our Mission Group. The rate of 95.7% in 2020/21 is 0.7 pp below the trend of the previous 5 years. This is not a significant cause for concern but does indicate that this is an area that we will need to continue to monitor performance. The areas below describe where we have some deviation from the overall rate for the institution. For most student characteristics the continuation rate is not that divergent from the overall rate.

Age

41. Students aged 21 and over are 9 pp less likely to continue than those aged under 21. This gap had closed to 5 pp for the 2019/20 cohort but has widened back to that seen in the prior cohorts from 2015/16 to 2018/19. This is likely due to the impact of the covid pandemic meaning more mature students wanted to continue their studies during the period of uncertainty. Figure 13 shows how this gap is even more pronounced for the older age ranges. The most significant number of older students are in the 21 to 30 age bracket. This is an area of concern for us in this new APP.

Degrees with an integrated foundation year

42. Students on these courses, as classified in the OfS data set, are predominantly mature students who undertook a foundation year entry route via the University's Department for Lifelong Learning. They tend to be from non-traditional entry routes to HE and may not have attained highly at GCSE or A level. Compared to sector benchmarks this group of students performs in line with the sector benchmark. As a result they will not be reviewed as a separate characteristic group but will instead be analysed by the age indicator which gives a richer insight into any barriers or challenges they may experience.

Disability

43. The continuation rate trend for those who declare a disability continue at a rate 2 to 3 pp below those who do not declare a disability. This has been a steady trend across the 6 years of data available. This does mask an emerging trend for students who declare a mental health condition where the continuation rate has reduced from 96.5% in 2015/16 (nearly equal to those with no disability) to 90.0% in 2020/21. This trend has not been observed for other disability types and suggests that this is an area for the University to continue to monitor.

Socio economic background

44. Those students who were eligible for free school meals do show a slightly lower rate of continuation compared to those who were not eligible; around 4 pp. There is a similar pattern when comparing IMD quintiles 1 and 2 with quintiles 3, 4 and 5 where the gap in the rate is 3 pp lower.

Ethnicity

45. The continuation gap between black, Asian and minority ethnic and White students was 2 pp in 2020/21. Whilst this is not that significant, it is the widest the gap has been over the last 6 years. This hides a trend of slightly declining continuation rates for black students where it has dropped from 97.6% to 94.4%. Asian students have seen a similar fall from 96.7% to 94.8%. These are not so significant for specific action to be taken on the continuation for these groups. The intersectional analysis (Figure 15.) below reveals that black, Asian and minority ethnic students from lower socioeconomic groups are less likely to continue at the same rate as their white peers. This suggests that work to reduce the financial barriers to success is likely to support stronger continuation rates.

Figure 15. Continuation rates by IMD and ethnicity
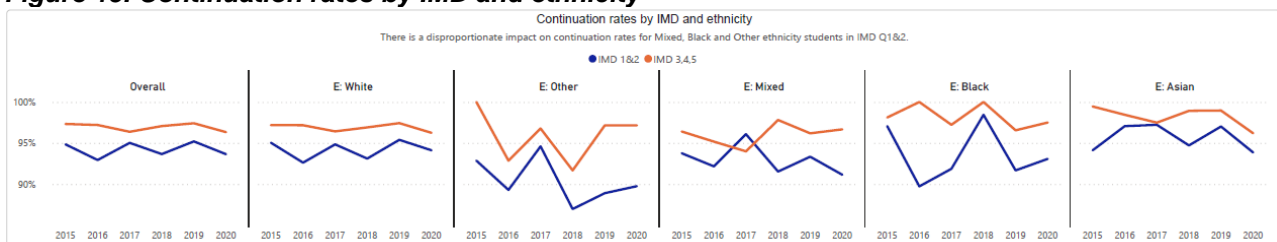
Completion

Figure 16.

Completion Rates by Academic Year
First Degree including Integrated Masters, FT

	Overall											
Year	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
Characteristics	%	Den	%	Den	%	Den	%	Den	%	Den	%	Den
Overall	95.0%	3425	95.4%	4115	94.2%	4235	94.0%	4385	94.3%	4580	93.3%	4185
OUG L5+	95.7%	25	95.8%	25	95.7%	25	87.5%	40	91.4%	80	100.0%	25
Not FSM pop	93.3%	1365	93.2%	1080	90.8%	1060	90.4%	1060	92.3%	1110	89.7%	1105
IMD NA	94.7%	95	95.3%	125	92.0%	135	90.8%	110	93.4%	120	93.0%	100
IMD 3,4,5	96.1%	2700	96.3%	3180	95.0%	3245	95.1%	3370	95.8%	3505	94.5%	3115
IMD 1&2	90.1%	630	91.9%	810	91.7%	855	90.1%	905	88.9%	955	89.5%	970
G: Other										0		
G: Male	93.8%	1675	93.6%	2075	92.4%	2120	92.2%	2245	94.1%	2240	92.6%	2030
G: Female	96.1%	1750	97.2%	2040	96.0%	2115	95.9%	2140	94.4%	2340	94.1%	2155
FSM Y	88.2%	85	89.3%	150	90.3%	205	92.6%	255	84.5%	280	89.2%	240
FSM N	96.4%	1975	96.5%	2885	95.7%	2970	95.3%	3065	95.8%	3190	95.1%	2840
FD with integrated Fdtn	75.0%	5			68.4%	20	68.8%	50	63.8%	70	67.8%	120
FD Not Fdtn	95.0%	3420	95.4%	4115	94.3%	4220	94.3%	4335	94.7%	4510	94.1%	4065
EG: White	95.3%	2945	95.6%	3530	94.7%	3630	94.1%	3625	94.5%	3740	93.7%	3405
EG: Unknown	84.6%	15	93.1%	30	84.6%	15	94.9%	40	89.5%	40	90.7%	45
EG: BAME	93.3%	465	94.4%	555	91.4%	595	93.5%	720	93.6%	805	91.7%	735
E: White	95.3%	2945	95.6%	3530	94.7%	3630	94.1%	3625	94.5%	3740	93.7%	3405
E: Unknown	84.6%	15	93.1%	30	84.6%	15	94.9%	40	89.5%	40	90.7%	45
E: Other	93.1%	30	82.9%	35	91.9%	35	94.0%	50	90.6%	55	88.1%	65
E: Mixed	93.2%	115	94.2%	155	91.6%	155	92.4%	200	94.3%	195	92.4%	185
E: Black	90.7%	75	91.7%	85	89.7%	105	89.3%	120	90.6%	140	85.5%	115
E: Asian	94.2%	245	96.8%	285	91.9%	295	95.4%	350	94.7%	420	94.0%	370
DF: No Disability	95.3%	3095	95.8%	3730	95.0%	3785	94.4%	3870	94.7%	3955	93.9%	3515
DF: Has Disability	91.5%	330	91.4%	385	87.8%	450	91.1%	515	91.4%	625	90.1%	665
D: Social	100.0%	5	66.7%	5	81.8%	10	83.3%	10	95.7%	25	80.8%	25
D: Physical	84.6%	25	93.5%	30	83.3%	30	82.9%	35	94.4%	55	89.5%	75
D: None	95.3%	3095	95.8%	3730	95.0%	3785	94.4%	3870	94.7%	3955	93.9%	3515
D: Multiple	90.1%	120	89.1%	90	87.4%	125	89.8%	125	91.2%	125	89.1%	140
D: Mental health	87.8%	40	90.7%	45	84.5%	70	88.0%	110	85.7%	170	89.6%	180
D: Cognitive	94.8%	135	92.9%	210	90.0%	210	94.8%	235	94.1%	255	92.2%	245
Age: Young	95.7%	3195	96.0%	3865	95.3%	3950	95.3%	4060	95.4%	4220	94.7%	3785
Age: U21	95.7%	3195	96.0%	3865	95.3%	3950	95.3%	4060	95.4%	4220	94.7%	3785
Age: Mature	84.7%	230	86.1%	250	79.9%	290	77.6%	320	81.7%	360	80.5%	400
Age: 51+		0	66.7%	5		0	57.1%	5	57.1%	5	77.8%	10
Age: 41-50	100.0%	10	90.9%	10	76.9%	15	77.8%	20	91.3%	25	69.2%	15
Age: 31-40	71.4%	20	78.6%	30	80.0%	30	72.0%	25	79.5%	40	76.0%	50
Age: 26-30	76.5%	35	89.7%	40	75.0%	50	70.8%	50	76.1%	65	72.1%	70
Age: 21-25	88.4%	165	86.5%	170	81.3%	195	80.3%	225	83.5%	225	84.3%	260

Note on reading the table: areas in blue are more divergent from the University's overall continuation rate.

46. The overall completion rate for the 2017/18 cohort was 93.3% at Sheffield. This is above the national average of 89.1% and is strongly comparable with our mission group and the comparator institutions that we measure ourselves against. It is slightly lower than the 95% rate for the 2012/13 cohort and the analysis below highlights the areas that may have contributed towards this slight drop as well as areas where there is significant divergence from the University's overall rate. The table above (Figure 16.) shows the completion rates by widening participation characteristics.

Age
47. The gap in the rate of completion between under 21s and those aged 21 and over has widened at the University over the last 6 years from 11 pp to 14.2 pp. The gap has been

consistently wider than this for students aged over 25 over the same period. There are many reasons for this gap, some of which include cost of living pressures, caring responsibilities and the length of time since they were in a formal education setting. The intersections of age and other characteristics have been explored to see if further insight can be gleaned.

Figure 17. Completion rates by age group and disability flag
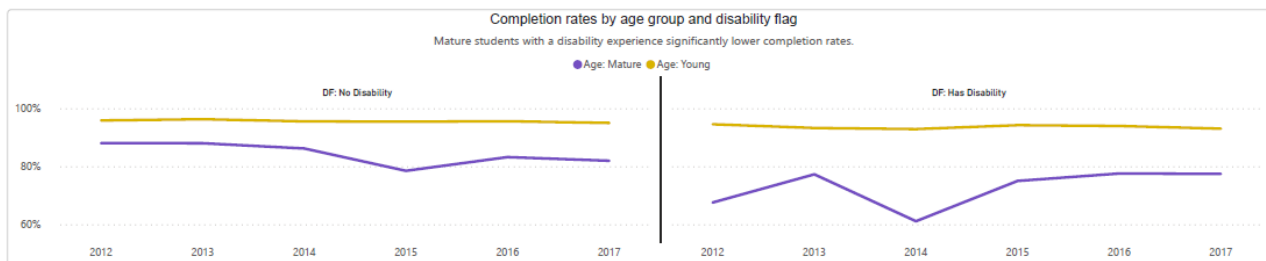
48. The graphs above show that where a mature student also experiences a disability there is further impact on their rate of completion. There have been some improvements in the rates of completion for mature students with a disability and these are quite significant in some areas. Figure 18 below shows the splits of completion rates for students with a disability, highlighting the trend for those with a mental health condition to have experienced improvements in their completion rate by nearly 11 pp at the same time as the number of students declaring their disability is growing. This is an area that needs further understanding so that the support already in place through our Disability and Dyslexia Support Service (DDSS) is further embedded across our programmes and will be a priority area of focus with this new APP.

Figure. 18. Completions rates by age group and disability type

Does a further breakdown by disability affect the completion rate within each age group?

Age	Year	D: Cognitive %	D: Cognitive Den	D: Mental health %	D: Mental health Den	D: Multiple %	D: Multiple Den	D: None %	D: None Den	D: Physical %	D: Physical Den	D: Social %	D: Social Den
Age: Mature	2012	92.3%	15	66.7%	10	37.5%	10	88.0%	190	50.0%	5		
	2013	78.9%	20	87.5%	10	80.0%	10	88.0%	210	80.0%	5		0
	2014	70.4%	25	46.7%	15	61.9%	20	86.2%	215	57.1%	5		0
	2015	80.0%	35	72.7%	20	71.4%	20	78.5%	235	66.7%	5		
	2016	83.8%	35	72.2%	35	77.8%	20	83.2%	260	71.4%	5		
	2017	78.6%	40	77.5%	40	73.3%	30	81.9%	275	81.8%	10		0
Age: Young	2012	95.1%	120	96.6%	30	93.8%	115	95.8%	2900	90.9%	20	100.0%	5
	2013	94.3%	195	91.4%	35	90.2%	80	96.3%	3525	96.2%	25	100.0%	5
	2014	92.9%	185	94.6%	55	92.5%	105	95.5%	3570	91.3%	25	88.9%	10
	2015	97.5%	200	91.9%	85	93.4%	105	95.4%	3630	86.2%	30	83.3%	10
	2016	95.9%	220	89.4%	130	93.5%	105	95.6%	3695	97.9%	45	95.7%	25
	2017	95.1%	205	93.0%	140	93.5%	110	95.0%	3240	90.8%	65	80.0%	25

Note on reading the table: areas in blue are more divergent from the University's overall completion rate.

49. Figure 19 analyses the intersection of age with IMD. Mature students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 have a compounded impact on their chances of completion with this being nearly 15 pp lower for the 2017/18 mature student cohort compared to those aged under 21.

Figure 19. Completion rates by age and IMD grouping.

		Age: Mature		Age: Young	
IMD	Year	%	Den	%	Den
IMD 1&2	2012	72.9%	85	92.8%	543
	2013	81.6%	98	93.3%	713
	2014	74.3%	101	94.0%	752
	2015	70.9%	110	92.7%	796
	2016	74.6%	138	91.3%	816
	2017	77.0%	165	92.0%	804
IMD 3,4,5	2012	92.1%	139	96.3%	2561
	2013	88.1%	143	96.7%	3034
	2014	82.0%	178	95.7%	3069
	2015	82.6%	201	95.9%	3167
	2016	86.6%	209	96.4%	3295
	2017	82.8%	227	95.5%	2888

Caption above table: Do different age groups within the IMD groupings have different completion rates?

50. This mature-young completion gap is an area that we look at closely in this new APP. We have had very positive outcomes for mature students that participate in our Department for Lifelong Learning foundation year programme where our internal data shows that these cohorts do go on to have better outcomes than those mature students that are direct entrants into year one of a degree programme.

Disability

51. Disabled students are completing at a 3.8pp lower than those not declaring a disability for the 2017/18 cohort. This gap has narrowed from its widest point of 7.2pp for the 2014/15 cohort and the actual change in the rate of completion for disabled students has only dropped by 0.6pp over the last 6 year period. These overall figures do mask some concerning trends for students with a social or physical disability who have seen rates as low as 80%. With more students declaring a disability on entering the University we are keen to focus on continuing to close the gap and to better understand the discrete needs of the different types of disability. The experience of disabled students will be an area of focus within this new APP.

Ethnicity

52. Black students are completing at a rate 8.2 pp lower than white students in the 2017/18 cohort. There has been a falling trend in completion rates for Black students from 90.7% in the 2012/13 cohort to 85.5% in the 2017/18 cohort. This is a concerning trend and also appears to lead on from the falling continuation rates for this ethnic group. The trend is also dropping at a faster rate than the national average (from 82.9% to 80.7%) and is the opposite of the improvement in completion rates seen at several of our Russell Group comparator institutions.

53. The number of Black students had increased from the 2012/13 cohort at 75 students up to 138 in the 2016/17 cohort. This number did dip in the 2017/18 cohort and our access figures suggest that they are continuing to grow again. The trend in the falling completion rates and the growing number of black students means that this student group will be a key area of focus in our new APP.

54. By comparison, Asian students had completion rates higher than white students in the last 3 years with relatively good numbers in the overall student population. This sustained position is better than the national picture where the average completion rate across all providers has dropped from 89.3% to 86.8% over the last 6 years for Asian students.

Socio-economic background

55. There is a marginally widening gap in completion rates between students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 compared with IMD 3, 4 and 5; this has grown from 6 pp to 6.9 pp in 2016/17. Our rates are not that different to our comparator group and are somewhat better than the national averages.

56. For those students eligible for free school meals the gap has closed from 8.2 pp in the 2012/13 cohort to 5.9 pp for the 2017/18 cohort. Over the last 6 years of data the rate has also improved from 88.2% to 89.2%. This is a better position than the national trend but is still some way off the completion rates for those eligible for free school meals at our comparator institutions (most are in the low 90%s) but many have seen a drop in the completion rates for this group. In order to continue to improve the completion rates for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the University will continue to monitor these groups through the life of the next APP.

Degree Outcomes and awarding gaps

Figure 20.

Good Honours Degree Outcome Rates by Academic Year
First Degree including Integrated Masters, FT

Year	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
Characteristics	%	Den	%	Den	%	Den	%	Den	%	Den	%	Den
Overall	86.7%	3675	86.5%	3615	88.0%	3770	91.1%	3575	93.0%	3450	91.7%	2795
Not FSM pop	80.4%	910	81.6%	780	83.5%	840	88.7%	780	89.8%	765	90.1%	625
IMD NA	81.0%	115	84.1%	80	82.8%	85	83.7%	90	94.5%	75	88.1%	65
IMD 3,4,5	88.6%	2870	87.9%	2805	89.8%	2955	92.4%	2765	93.5%	2600	93.6%	2090
IMD 1&2	79.8%	690	81.2%	725	81.3%	730	87.3%	720	91.2%	780	85.7%	635
G: Other									66.7%	5		0
G: Male	83.2%	1875	83.5%	1765	85.7%	1835	88.6%	1815	91.1%	1715	89.5%	1330
G: Female	90.3%	1805	89.3%	1845	90.2%	1935	93.8%	1765	94.9%	1730	93.6%	1465
FSM Y	76.2%	150	78.9%	185	81.4%	215	85.4%	190	91.4%	210	81.7%	155
FSM N	89.5%	2615	88.4%	2650	89.9%	2715	92.3%	2605	94.1%	2480	92.9%	2015
FD with integrated Fdtn	54.5%	10	52.6%	20	83.7%	50	89.4%	45	89.8%	60	86.9%	100
FD Not Fdtn	86.8%	3665	86.6%	3595	88.1%	3720	91.2%	3530	93.0%	3390	91.8%	2695
EG: White	89.4%	3135	88.7%	3000	89.9%	3085	92.9%	2890	94.6%	2760	94.8%	2085
EG: Unknown	60.2%	90	69.4%	110	63.9%	120	69.7%	110	77.5%	180	75.7%	255
EG: BAME	73.1%	455	76.9%	505	83.0%	565	86.2%	580	89.6%	510	86.3%	455
E: White	89.4%	3135	88.7%	3000	89.9%	3085	92.9%	2890	94.6%	2760	94.8%	2085
E: Unknown	60.2%	90	69.4%	110	63.9%	120	69.7%	110	77.5%	180	75.7%	255
E: Other	82.8%	30	70.4%	25	85.0%	40	87.0%	45	83.8%	35	81.8%	35
E: Mixed	81.1%	120	86.8%	150	90.5%	145	89.6%	165	91.5%	140	96.7%	120
E: Black	63.4%	80	72.6%	85	80.5%	85	87.4%	85	87.1%	95	73.2%	55
E: Asian	71.0%	220	72.8%	245	79.8%	290	83.7%	285	90.3%	235	84.9%	245
DF: No Disability	87.0%	3140	87.0%	3060	88.2%	3020	91.6%	2830	93.4%	2685	91.3%	2135
DF: Has Disability	84.8%	540	83.6%	555	87.2%	750	89.4%	750	91.5%	765	92.7%	660
D: Social	88.9%	10	63.6%	10	94.1%	15	92.9%	15	100.0%	20	93.3%	15
D: Physical	88.1%	40	81.6%	40	91.8%	60	91.3%	70	88.2%	50	94.0%	50
D: None	87.0%	3140	87.0%	3060	88.2%	3020	91.6%	2830	93.4%	2685	91.3%	2135
D: Multiple	90.2%	80	83.3%	115	90.1%	160	91.5%	165	89.3%	170	93.5%	170
D: Mental health	85.3%	145	86.0%	170	84.5%	240	89.4%	275	92.4%	265	92.0%	225
D: Cognitive	82.1%	260	83.3%	220	86.4%	270	87.2%	225	92.0%	260	92.5%	200
Age: Young	87.6%	3530	87.3%	3455	88.8%	3585	91.6%	3395	93.8%	3215	92.0%	2575
Age: U21	87.6%	3530	87.3%	3455	88.8%	3585	91.6%	3395	93.8%	3215	92.0%	2575
Age: Mature	64.4%	150	68.3%	160	72.2%	185	83.0%	180	81.1%	240	87.3%	220
Age: 51+		0		0	100.0%	5		0	100.0%	5	66.7%	5
Age: 41-50	50.0%	5	100.0%	5	63.6%	10	100.0%	10	83.3%	10	85.7%	5
Age: 31-40	54.5%	10	76.5%	15	69.0%	30	82.4%	15	89.7%	30	77.8%	25
Age: 26-30	73.5%	35	70.0%	20	73.1%	25	74.2%	30	81.1%	35	87.8%	40
Age: 21-25	62.6%	100	64.7%	115	72.4%	115	83.7%	125	78.7%	155	89.5%	145

Note on reading the table: areas in blue are more divergent from the University's overall attainment rate.

57. Sheffield compares very favourably to the national good honours rate of 78.1% with an overall rate of 93.0% in 2020/21 and 91.7% in 2021/22. The analysis below, and the data in Figure 20, indicates that there is work to do to understand the significant shifts in the awarding gaps between 2020/21 and 2021/22 for some student characteristics. The university has been exploring if the shift in assessment practice during Covid has been the cause of some of this impact but this does not account for such significant drops for black students and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds

Age

58. Good progress has been made to increase the good honours rate for students aged 21 and over from 64.4% in 2016/17 to 87.3% in 2021/22. The most significant improvement has been in the 21-26 age group. This indicates that there are some good interventions already in place to build upon for the University's older student cohorts. As we work to improve the completion rates for students aged 21 and over it will be important to sustain the progress that has been made with the good honours rate for this group as well.

Disability

59. There has also been a good improvement in the good honours rate for disabled students over the last 6 year reporting period with an increase from 84.8% to 92.7% which exceeds the good honours rate for students who do not declare a disability. The most notable improvement is for students with a mental health condition. We are also performing above others in our competitor group for disabled students and need to continue to sustain this significant improvement being mindful of the growing population of students declaring a disability now being close to 1 in 4 in our overall student population.

Ethnicity

60. The overall black, Asian and minority ethnic good honours achievement rate has improved from 73.1% in 2016/17 to 86.3% in 2021/22. The gap between black, Asian and minority ethnic and white students has also closed from 16.3 pp to 8.5 pp. These improvements are welcome but do hide a more complex picture for some minority ethnic groups.

61. For Black students there had been a significant improvement in the good honours rate from 63.4% to over 87% in 2019/20 and 2020/21. However this was followed by a drop to 73.2% in 2021/22. The reasons for this are not immediately clear and are being explored by the University as it is not apparent if this is a trend or one off drop due to a small cohort size.

62. For Asian students there was also a significant improvement in attainment from 71.0% good honours rate in 2016/17 to 90.3% in 2020/21. This minority ethnic group also experienced a drop in 2021/22 to 84.9%. Whilst this is not as significant as for black students it is still a concern and will be monitored closely.

63. These changes do reflect the changes seen more widely in the national picture but given the good progress made before 2021/22 this is an area that will need renewed focus in our new APP.

Socio-economic background

64. For those eligible for Free School Meals the gap in attainment had closed considerably from 13.3 pp in 2016/17 to 2.7 pp in 2020/21 compared to those who were not eligible. This gap widened again though in 2021/22 to 11.2 pp. This is a worrying reversal of significant progress. It is not clear if this is a one-off impact as a result of Covid or a sustained downward shift.

65. For students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 the attainment gap had closed from 8.8 pp in 2016/17 to 2.3 pp in 2020/21 compared to IMD quintiles 3, 4 and 5. This gap widened again in 2021/22 to 7.9 pp. This is a worrying reversal of significant progress. It is not clear if this

is a one-off impact as a result of Covid or a sustained downward shift.

66. Figure 21 below explores the intersection of IMD and ethnicity and shows that whilst lower IMD groups experience lower rates of attainment overall as do students from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, this is particularly pronounced for black students.

Figure 21. Intersectional analysis of IMD and ethnicity
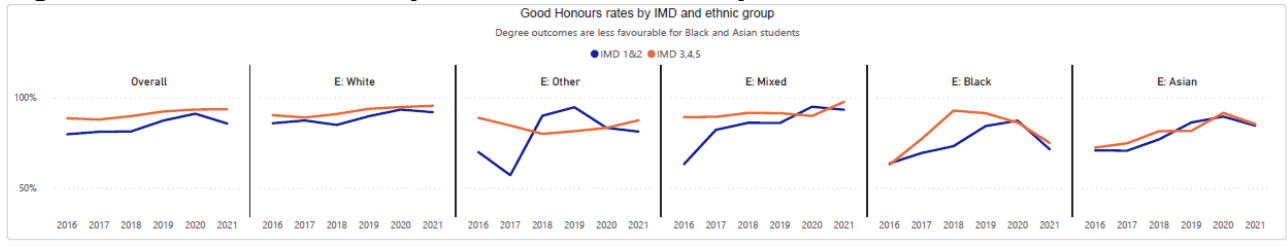
67. Figure 22 below explores the intersection of FSM and ethnicity. This shows that for all students who had been eligible for FSM there are lower rates of good honours. This is even more pronounced for black students who had been eligible for FSM.

Fig. 22. Intersectional analysis of FSM and ethnicity
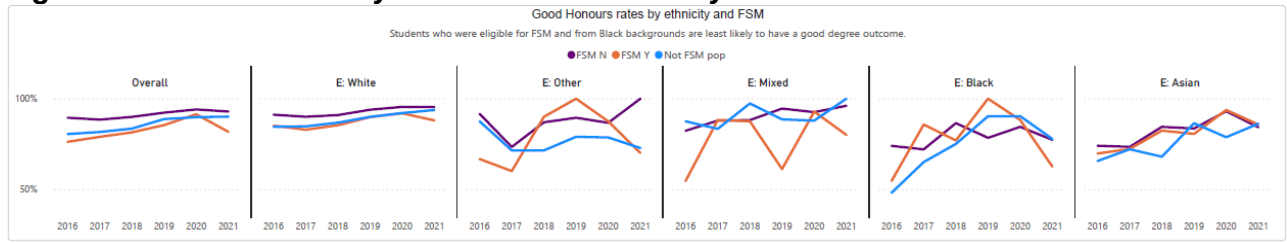
68. The conclusion of this intersectional analysis is that there is a significant indication of risk for lower socioeconomic groups and this is most pronounced for black students. This will be an area of core focus in our intervention strategies.

Progression
Figure 23.

Progression Rates by Academic Year
First Degree including Integrated Masters, FT

Year Characteristics	2017 %	2017 Den	2018 %	2018 Den	2019 %	2019 Den	2020 %	2020 Den
Overall	78.6%	2310	75.7%	2565	77.1%	2380	80.7%	2090
OUG L5+	100.0%	15	98.6%	30	92.9%	15		0
Not FSM pop	83.9%	530	81.2%	610	78.8%	545	84.7%	445
IMD NA	86.2%	55	81.8%	65	75.0%	70	82.0%	40
IMD 3,4,5	79.5%	1805	75.4%	1975	78.2%	1855	81.6%	1605
IMD 1&2	73.8%	450	76.0%	525	73.0%	455	77.2%	445
G: Other							50.0%	5
G: Male	81.6%	1135	76.6%	1215	77.6%	1190	83.1%	1035
G: Female	75.7%	1175	74.9%	1345	76.6%	1190	78.4%	1055
FSM Y	69.2%	105	72.8%	120	78.0%	115	71.9%	110
FSM N	77.5%	1675	74.1%	1835	76.5%	1720	80.1%	1535
FD with integrated Fdtn	67.7%	15	84.8%	35	83.9%	20	73.8%	30
FD Not Fdtn	78.7%	2300	75.6%	2530	77.0%	2360	80.8%	2060
EG: White	79.2%	1945	75.3%	2135	77.0%	1930	81.1%	1715
EG: Unknown	75.0%	10	80.0%	20	77.9%	20	85.7%	15
EG: BAME	75.2%	355	77.8%	410	77.3%	430	78.3%	360
E: White	79.2%	1945	75.3%	2135	77.0%	1930	81.1%	1715
E: Unknown	75.0%	10	80.0%	20	77.9%	20	85.7%	15
E: Other	62.5%	15	66.2%	30	79.2%	25	85.7%	20
E: Mixed	70.0%	105	79.4%	105	79.2%	110	77.1%	90
E: Black	71.9%	55	91.5%	60	90.5%	70	81.5%	65
E: Asian	80.2%	180	74.9%	220	71.9%	225	76.7%	185
DF: No Disability	78.8%	1945	75.5%	2060	77.5%	1855	80.9%	1600
DF: Has Disability	77.4%	370	76.5%	500	75.5%	525	80.0%	490
D: Social	100.0%	5	90.0%	10	50.0%	10	84.6%	15
D: Physical	75.9%	30	71.7%	45	71.7%	55	69.6%	40
D: None	78.8%	1945	75.5%	2060	77.5%	1855	80.9%	1600
D: Multiple	85.3%	75	75.7%	110	78.8%	115	76.5%	105
D: Mental health	70.6%	105	73.9%	150	73.9%	180	78.0%	165
D: Cognitive	77.6%	150	79.4%	190	77.6%	165	86.2%	170
Age: Young	78.4%	2195	75.2%	2415	76.9%	2240	80.7%	1955
Age: U21	78.4%	2195	75.2%	2415	76.9%	2240	80.7%	1955
Age: Mature	82.0%	120	83.3%	150	79.7%	140	80.6%	135
Age: 51+		0	75.0%	5			75.0%	5
Age: 41-50	66.7%	5	87.5%	15	85.7%	5	71.4%	5
Age: 31-40	50.0%	10	72.7%	20	100.0%	15	76.9%	15
Age: 26-30	73.3%	15	84.6%	25	59.1%	20	78.3%	25
Age: 21-25	88.1%	85	85.1%	85	81.1%	95	82.7%	90

Note on reading the table: areas in blue are more divergent from the University's overall Progression rate.

69. The overall progression rate at Sheffield has increased by 5 pp since 2018/19 to 80.7%. This is a strong performance against the national rate of 73.9%. It is important to note that progression metrics are based upon Sheffield graduates choosing to respond to the graduate outcomes survey. The response rate in 2020/21 was 57.7%, this means that other data points will be needed as we evaluate the impact of interventions in relation to progression.

70. The new social mobility index: <u>2023 English Social Mobility Index - HEPI</u> that has been trialled in recent years does show a shift down 22 pp though compared to the previous assessment. This may be as a result of median graduate earnings in the region being the lowest for all regions in England (source: <u>LEO Graduate outcomes provider level data, Tax year 2020-21</u>) compared to the national median levels for graduates. Sheffield graduates tend to stay in the region more than those at RG comparators; they will have comparatively lower earnings than graduates from other universities.

71. The level of highly skilled employment in the region was around 58% in 2022 (source Government Education Statistics). This is in the lower half for regions in England and will also contribute to their levels of social mobility. We will monitor the development of this index to see if it can provide further insights as to support intervention design to support Sheffield Graduates.

72. Figure 23 above shows the progression rates by characteristic. For many characteristics there is evidence of good progression outcomes. The analysis below draws out indicators for some of the groups where lower progression are shown and explores the intersection of different characteristics. The actual numbers are small but significant deviations from the overall rate suggest areas that need further exploration through our intervention strategies.

Socioeconomic groups

73. For students in IMD quintiles 1 and 2 the rate of progression has increased from 73.8% in 2017/18 to 77.2% in 2019/20. Over the same time period the gap compared to IMD quintiles 3, 4, and 5 has closed slightly from 5.7 pp to 4.4 pp. Figure 24 shows the intersection of IMD and BAME and indicates that there is a disproportionate impact of IMD on all black, Asian and minority ethnic students.

74. For students eligible for FSM the progression rate had improved significantly from 69.2% in 2017/18 to 78% in 2019/20. This trend reversed in 2020/21 with a drop back to 72.1%. The gap in progression rates for those eligible for FSM and those who are not has only closed by 0.3 pp over the same period. This is a concerning trend and suggests an indication for risk to be addressed especially as we focus on increasing entrants from these lower socioeconomic groups. Figure 25 explores the intersection of FSM progression rates with ethnicity and suggests that white students who were eligible for FSM have lower progression rates than black, Asian and minority ethnic who were also eligible.

75. This intersectional analysis highlights that FSM and IMD are key indicators of risk relating to progression.

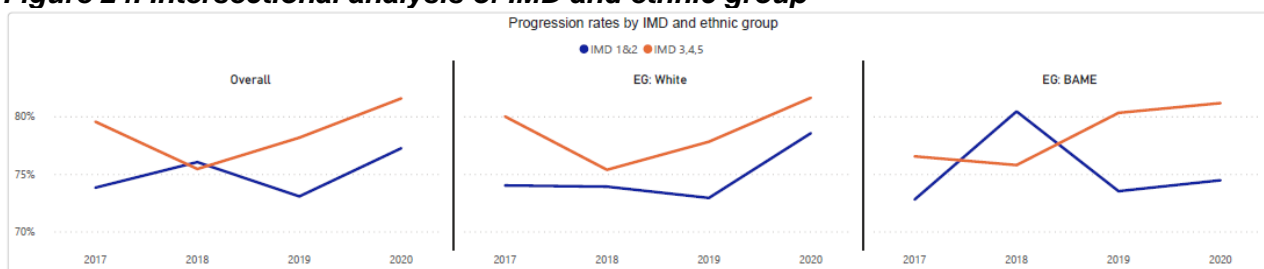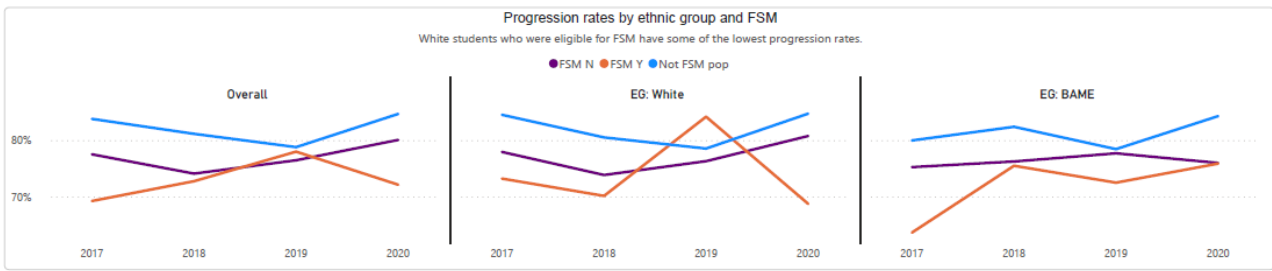*Figure 24. Intersectional analysis of IMD and ethnic group*

Figure 25. Intersectional analysis of FSM and ethnic group

Progression rates by ethnic group and FSM
White students who were eligible for FSM have some of the lowest progression rates.

● FSM N ● FSM Y ● Not FSM pop

Disability

76. There are notably lower rates of progression for physically disabled students (69.6% in 2020/21). The rate of progression for this group has seen a downward trend since 2017/18 (75.9%). This is the lowest progression rate for any of the disabled characteristics and significantly below those students who do not declare a disability. Whilst the number of graduates in this group is small (38 in 2020/21) this indicates a risk that needs further exploration.

Annex B: Evidence Base and Rationale for Intervention Strategies

We have utilised sector research, subject matter expertise and a developing understanding of the problems that specific student groups face to establish an evidence base for the intervention strategies outlined within this Plan. Each intervention strategy is underpinned by a robust theory of change and detailed evaluation plan supporting monitoring and further development of our activities over the Plan period. This Annex complements the detailed assessment of performance (Annex B).

IS1: increase applications, offers and enrolments of students from black, Asian and minority ethnic and lower-socio economic groups.

In preparation for this Plan, the University's Access Service has undertaken a substantive review and evaluation of its current programmes. This has enabled us to identify group specific problem statements, embedding a theory of change approach across the service and into provision aligned with sector best practice. There is a new service delivery model, focused across all stages of the prospective student journey, (awareness, consideration, conversion and validation) from primary to post-16. Programmes are designed to provide quality information, advice and guidance alongside sequential activity injections which promote progressive and incremental skills development as an approach to proxy-attainment raising. We have partnered with SkillsBuilder, a social enterprise, embedding essential skills development within our own and regional partnership provision (through HEPP, HeppSY and South Yorkshire Children's University). Mentoring with trained current university students and academic attainment raising initiatives provided by partners UpLearn and Study Mind are also embedded within all Post-16 provision.

Partnership working delivers economies of scale, enhances value for money, reduces regional duplication and streamlines delivery particularly with schools and colleges (Tazzyman, 2023). We are aware that no one sector can resolve the barriers which persist for pupils underrepresented in higher education and numerous sources suggest that sustained change can only be achieved through effective collaboration and partnerships (Universities UK, 2016; Murphy and Fleming, 2003). Impact reporting issued by our partner, The Brilliant Club finds that for our Scholars Programme, students studying with a UoS researcher made strong progress across the academic competencies – a 14 point increase in subject knowledge, critical thinking and written communication, all exceeding national averages. A significant shift in students' self-efficacy scores was also observed. Similar findings were noted in the 2023 HeppSY long term outcomes report, with analysis highlighting a positive association between the number of HeppSY contact hours received by students and their chance of progressing to higher education; even after controlling for students' baseline expectations and motivations.

TASO (2024) provides evidence to suggest that multi-intervention programmes have a greater impact on students' aspirations/attitudes towards higher education than approaches delivered in isolation. The Office for Students has also published evaluation outcomes which state "Sustained and progressive outreach with multiple activities has a more positive impact on learners' knowledge and attitude toward higher education than single or ad-hoc outreach activity" (OfS: 2019). Furthermore, quasi-experimental evaluation of the UniConnect multi-intervention outreach programme has shown that engagement with the programme was associated with a greater likelihood of achieving a place in HE and the more learners engaged with UniConnect, the greater were their chances of HE acceptance (Burgess et al., 2021). The study also found that summer schools and a combination of information, campus visits and master classes were most effective for progression to HE. Findings which are replicated in our own data (via HEAT) which shows excellent progression to higher education from former participants. More than 50% of each cohort progressed to HE in their expected year of entry between 2018/19-2021/22 and during the same four year period we have seen increases in the percentage of these participants attending high tariff universities including an increase in those registering at The University of Sheffield.

There is also considerable evidence to show that participating in a summer school has a positive impact on young people's attainment and confidence (Hatt, Baxter, and Tate, 2009; HEFCE,

2010). Findings suggest that summer schools enable students to feel socially and academically comfortable within the higher education environment. Participation is also associated with increased progression, with disadvantaged students being over twice as likely to be accepted to higher education than their peers who do not participate. With TASO (2023) findings also suggesting that students who attend an in-person summer school have greater confidence that university 'is for people like them', compared to those who did not attend. Again, analysis of formative evaluation collected at our pilot residential summer schools suggest that as a result of participation, students have an increased awareness of available courses and feel more confident about making subject choices; they have improved confidence and capability in demonstrating the essential skills required for academic success; have increased confidence in their academic ability to study a degree; an increased awareness of the social opportunities at university and feel more confident about meeting new people and living away from home; meaning overall they are more likely to apply for university after the completion of their post-16 studies.

Gaps in knowledge begin at an early age and perpetuate throughout a student's education shaping their future ambition and potential for years to come (The Russell Group, 2020), this is one of the reasons we commit to working with primary aged students ensuring they see higher education as a standard route available to all. There is extensive evidence to show that inadequate provision of IAG is a key barrier to students progressing to higher education (Smyth and Banks, 2012; Chorcora, Bray and Banks, 2023) and that a lack of knowledge about higher education leaves students ill equipped to make informed university choices in ways which can impact negatively on their confidence to fulfil future ambitions (The Russell Group, 2020). In fact, it is cited that poor advice and guidance is a leading reason for students to abandon their aspirations to higher education (National Audit Office, 2008) and that being ill informed can result in students undertaking inappropriate qualifications for the courses and careers they hope to progress to.

In addition to advice and guidance, there is extensive evidence that a student's immediate network and their access to relatable role models directly influences their university application behaviour (Burgess, et al, 2018; Bowes, et al, 2015). Students who are exposed to an inspirational university advocate are significantly more likely to aspire to higher education than those who do not (Silva, Sanders, and Chonaire, 2016). The presence of an immediate network is also essential for establishing a positive perception of Higher Education (Moore, Sanders and Higham 2013) with evidence showing that a student's perception of how they will fit into the higher education environment can act as a key barrier to their progression (Robinson and Salvestrini, 2020). There is also a common perception amongst underrepresented groups that they will not fit in at more selective institutions and that if a student does not feel a sense of belonging to higher education, their academic attainment can reflect these perceived barriers (Chowdry et al., 2013). Mentoring in particular has been found to improve students' knowledge and skills and grow their social and cultural capital, as a result of the personal and professional networks they are introduced to through these interventions (Robinson and Salvestrini, 2020). Evidence suggests that the most effective mentoring model is 1:1 regular support from a relatable role model. An effective mentoring relationship can help participants overcome key barriers that an existing sustained programme may not be able to address alone. However, to ensure an effective mentoring relationship, mentors need to be thoroughly trained in order to create a comfortable, confidential, secure and productive mentoring environment supported by a mentoring contract and core mentoring skills (Lindt and Blair, 2017; Dappen and Isernhagen, 2006). Evaluation data collected from our Transition Mentoring has shown that as a result of participation students gained a positive experience of university life, and they are now able to imagine themselves as a student at the University of Sheffield. Overall students report coming away from the programme feeling more confident in the transition to university, now knowing that they will have plenty of support offered to them and how to access it. The mentors were key to this as they were friendly, knowledgeable and perceived as personally experienced to the mentee.

Lower levels of attainment are consistently cited as being the main barrier to underrepresented groups accessing higher education (Anders, 2012; Crawford and Greaves, 2015). There is extensive evidence that shows disadvantaged pupils do not tend to attain as highly as their more advantaged peers (Chowdry et al, 2013; Crenna-Jennings, 2018). However, research suggests

that students from the poorest 20% of families are almost equally as likely to go to university as their peers from the wealthiest 20% of families when they achieve comparable GCSE grades, suggesting that attainment at KS4 is a key predictor of participation in higher education, regardless of background, and should be a key focus of widening access interventions (Bolton and Lewis, 2023). Yet, there is compelling evidence that even after controlling for prior attainment, disadvantaged students are still less likely to apply to and be made an offer for university and particularly Russell Group universities, than their more advantaged peers, even when they achieve the right grades (Anders, 2012; Hoxby and Avery, 2012; Sanders, Chande and Selley, 2017). Similarly, research shows that students from an ethnic minority are less likely to receive an offer to study at a Russell Group institution, even if they are studying the same qualifications and attaining at the same level as other applicants (Boliver, 2013). This evidence cements our commitment to contextual admissions as part of a comprehensive pre-entry support package.

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IS2: Sustain the proportion of new entrants to degree apprenticeships from lower socio-economic groups.

The University has a portfolio of apprenticeships from level 3 to 7, with the majority of degree apprenticeships in Engineering and Health related disciplines. As we look to expand our Level 6 apprenticeship provision, we are mindful of the concerns raised in recent Sutton Trust reports relating to the socio-economic background of apprentices.

"In degree apprenticeships at universities, just 12% of those aged 19-24 are from the most deprived areas… [and] the picture is getting worse over time. Young apprentices from deprived areas made up 9% of degree level apprentices in 2016/17, but 6% in 2018/19. In that same time, the proportion of degree level apprentices older than 25 from the most advantaged backgrounds has more than doubled, from 5% to 11%. This provides clear evidence that young apprentices from deprived backgrounds are being crowded out since the establishment of the apprenticeship levy" (Cullinane and Doherty: 2020)

As our assessment of performance shows, despite these national trends, we currently have high representation of degree apprentices from lower socio-economic backgrounds, a proportion we wish to maintain as our offer expands. However, we do not currently have clarity on how we have achieved these proportions to date or the decision making journey of younger prospective apprentices in the region. Therefore we feel that regionally focused, facilitated, apprenticeship student journey mapping will support creation of a shared understanding of the thoughts, decision-making timeline and experience of prospective apprentices interfacing with the institution, also supporting us to pinpoint critical points of loss and conversion for students from less advantaged backgrounds. In turn we can utilise this knowledge to inform recruitment and admission activities.

Like many disadvantaged students attempting to access higher education within a Russell Group University, tariff and attainment remains a barrier and in time we may need to explore further contextualised admissions (Cullinane and Doherty: 2020). However, 26% of employers also reported that applications and interviews with prospects fell short in areas other than grades. It is apparent there are gaps in available, quality information, advice and guidance on degree apprenticeships. Sutton Trust polling in 2019 revealed that only 47% of 11-16 year olds surveyed had discussed apprenticeships with a teacher, compared to the 64% that expressed an interest in doing an apprenticeship (Cullinane and Doherty: 2020) and when asked what could have encouraged their peers to do an apprenticeship almost 1 in 3 apprentices said better information or support from their school (Doherty and Holt-White: 2021). There is an emerging need therefore for universities and employers to support the provision of good quality careers advice on apprenticeships as an alternative to 'traditional degrees' into schools and colleges, not just to students directly but to their teachers and other influencers.

Although apprenticeship outreach is much less developed, we will build on the strong links our Access Service and Apprenticeship Hubs already have with employers, regional partners, schools

and colleges to enhance understanding of the degree apprenticeship offering. Experiential opportunities are always attractive to learners so supporting employers to offer ad hoc, short term high impact discovery or work-related projects will be a priority. Harnessing the experience of the Access Service here at Sheffield and collaborating across the region to support the development and sharing of best practice activities which could also include partnership with employers not currently using all their levy allowance by encouraging the spending of levy money on access and outreach activities (Doherty and Holt-White: 2021).

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IS3: Improve completion rates for underrepresented groups, with a focus on disabled and mature learners, whilst creating a more inclusive environment for all.

Mature learners and disabled students represent a very heterogeneous group with high levels of intersectionality to other underrepresented groups in higher education, including being from low-income backgrounds and coming from black and minority ethnic communities. However, evidence nationally, and within our own assessment of performance, shows that these students are more likely to drop out of their course than their younger or non-disabled peers (TASO: 2021, TASO:2023) and that in both cases more needs to be done to understand both the ongoing effects of Covid and the impact of the rising cost of living.

TASO notes "there are few rigorously evaluated studies relating to mature learners" (TASO: 2021) and that "despite legal requirements and funding, there is little research on what support is effective" (TASO: 2023) for disabled students. This is why we will seek to engage, through Student Support Services and our Students' Union, directly with these students to understand more about how they utilise the campus and potential barriers they face, harnessing the value of student and staff voice in embedding inclusion within our approaches. This aligns with Disabled Students UK (2022) and Million Plus (2018) research that recommends taking an anticipatory approach, improving engagement with students, acknowledging their diversity and potentially establishing places or opportunities for them to meet on campus, creating spaces, physical or virtual, in which learners can "interact with each other and discuss topics (academic or not) that do not require a heavy level of commitment" (Million Plus: 2018).

Disabled Students UK also call for universities to 'resource staff to provide accessibility' ensuring the "appropriate staff training and resources. Necessary for accessible implementation of teaching and individualised student support." (Disabled Students UK: 2022) whilst raising awareness of the impact that things like new teaching methods or short notice changes to term timetables might have on these student groups. Our transition from academic departments into the new schools structure will also facilitate a refresh of roles within Faculties helping to ensure commonality and

consistency in approaches across the institution, particularly with respect to the implementation of common interventions and Learning Support Plans.

There is some limited evidence that transition programmes may be helpful in giving mature and disabled students the information, advice, guidance and preliminary academic skills or access to assistive technologies that will support their transition into higher education (TASO: 2021, TASO:2023). We also note from our own internal evidence that older students who participate in our Lifelong Learning Foundation programme, have more successful outcomes from their degree courses than those older students who did not participate in the programme. Building upon a case study into the 'Step Up to Higher Education programme at University of Staffordshire' (Million Plus: 2018) and expertise within our own Lifelong Learning function therefore we propose to implement pre-entry summer academic skills workshops to introduce early the ongoing academic and disability support available to students. The University has a comprehensive package of support available but students report feeling overwhelmed by the number of emails and communications about what they might be eligible for and are wary of the barriers to accessing the support such as providing bank statements and other evidence of their financial position.

We are one of three UK universities with accreditation from the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the British Psychological Society for our Student Mental Health, Counselling and Therapies Service. We offer a comprehensive in-house clinical service providing a range of clinical interventions, consultation, community education, training as well as conducting research into student mental health and psychological health. This service is the cornerstone of our broader Mental Health Strategy and was key in our achievement of the University Mental Health Charter Award from Student Minds in July 2023. This underlines our commitment to student mental health for all students and therefore there we have not committed to a separate intervention strategy addressing mental health.

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IS4; improve attainment rates for underrepresented groups including black Asian, FSM and IMD quintile 1 and 2 students, whilst removing barriers to success for all.

It has been observed nationally and within our own assessment of performance that there is a persistent and disparate awarding gap between black, Asian and minority ethnic and white students (OfS, 2019; Universities UK, 2022). For many minority student groups, barriers caused by cultural differences, such as a lack of belonging, social isolation and societal or institutional discrimination inhibit their university experience and fulfilment of learning and wellbeing, which can undermine their desire for success and limit their future potential (Bunce et al, 2021). We are committed to eliminating racial inequalities at Sheffield, and our submission to the Race Equality Charter Bronze Award is an important step in the right direction. Underpinning our work is the University's [Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan](#).

Similar trends have been observed between a student's socioeconomic status and their degree outcome, with those from higher levels of deprivation attaining at a consistently lower level than their more advantaged peers (Bolton and Lewis, 2023). Prior attainment, insufficient advice and guidance and financial pressures are all understood to be key barriers to success for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, however, the evidence remains incomplete and open to interpretation, highlighting the need for further research and exploration to inform the design of corrective measures (Gaskell and Lingwood, 2019).

For institutions to better explore the black, Asian and minority ethnic and low socioeconomic awarding gap in their own context, students should not only be consulted on plans to address inequality but institutions should also develop models for co-creation which offer students the flexibility and autonomy to influence sustained change (Andrews, et al, 2023, Campbell, et al, 2019). Empirical studies have also shown that engaging current students in the co-creation of support and intervention strategies can harness a sense of belonging to the institution and provide students with greater influence over their university experience, fostering their desire for academic success (Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bovill, 2021). To fully understand the lived experiences of our students and enrich our understanding of the barriers which impact on their attainment, we seek to conduct deep and meaningful conversations with both black, Asian and minority ethnic students and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, exploring opportunities for the co-creation and implementation of future interventions and support mechanisms.

Where black, Asian and minority ethnic or low socioeconomic students are minorities within the academic community and see fewer identifiable role models, this can undermine their feeling of belonging, community and peer support. In addition, if curriculum content does not reflect the diversity of the classroom, this can also contribute to perceptions that they belong less, consequently impacting engagement (Amos and Doku, 2019). Research commissioned by TASO into the impact of curriculum reform on the ethnicity degree awarding gap explored the impact of interventions conducted by The University of Kent and The University of Leicester (TASO, 2022), which respectively focused on creating a more inclusive and culturally sensitive curriculum and providing guidelines for staff on the creation of inclusive teaching and learning practices, including module content and assessment methods. Limited evidence was noted of the impact on the ethnicity awarding gap, however, TASO concluded that "Other interventions should be piloted and evaluated to assess their impact on the ethnicity degree awarding gap."

Feedback from our recent APP student consultation highlighted that some of the primary challenges within the context of the institution lie with assessment practices and the difficulties faced by students in obtaining reasonable adjustments to support additional learning needs. To build on this understanding, we seek to undertake a detailed analysis and a university wide review of assessment, with a view to designing and piloting interventions that will create greater consistency of practice across subject areas, removing barriers that can be experienced disproportionately by students from black, Asian and minority ethnic and low socioeconomic groups.

Financial pressures and the cost of university study also present a key barrier to continuation and success for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. There is a robust evidence base which demonstrates that amongst this student group, improved retention and attainment can be achieved through the provision of needs based financial support (Castleman and Long, 2016, Murphy and

Wyness, G, 2016). This supplementary support can mitigate the need for students to undertake larger amounts of paid work than what is feasible alongside full time study - a practice which is often associated with decreased levels of academic performance (Zhang and Yang, 2020). Alongside maintenance packages, supporting the development of students' financial literacy and their ability to navigate the range of financial support available to them can promote improved self-efficacy and mental wellbeing which also correlates with increased rates of continuation and attainment (Burchell, 2023).

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IS5: Reduce the gaps in progression to graduate level employment or postgraduate study for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The University has a well-established, forward thinking Careers and Employability Service (CES) and clear objectives embedded in the institutional vision and strategy to transform the lives of our graduates through our research, innovation and education. Employability is one of three pillars of the Education strategy, and the strategy delivery plan objectives include elements which are echoed in the Activity outlined in this Plan which aim to reduce the gaps in progression for students from certain backgrounds, focusing on skills development and reflection, and more consistent access to work-related learning including integrated placement year experiences.

There is comparatively limited evidence and research into successful strategies for reducing gaps in progression for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and little causal evidence is available. However, one study indicates that work experience appears to be one of the more impactful interventions, with benefits for the graduate outcomes for all groups, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Ramaiah and Robinson, 2022). The same research also provides evidence to support the value of careers information, advice and guidance (IAG).

In 2022 TASO commissioned research into the impact of work placements on widening participation and outcomes. The University of Surrey and Nottingham Trent University should be reporting soon, however regular local reviews of graduate outcomes and students' participation in sandwich year placements have indicated clear links. There are multiple factors at play which might influence this relationship, not least students' socioeconomic backgrounds and access to placement year opportunities. In 2023 our University extended the opportunity to undertake a placement year as part of undergraduate programmes to incoming students in all academic departments. There is a high level of interest in doing so amongst our current first year students, 82% of whom responded with a degree of positive interest to a question in our Career Confidence survey included as part of the student registration process.

There are a variety of barriers to participation in work experiences, including for many students from FSM and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Having expanded access we will be exploring the data, the evidence and the causes for lower levels of participation at Sheffield and will be exploring the equality gaps in participation and accessing the benefits of work experiences, and working on further strategies to overcome these barriers.

Access to careers information and guidance is also an important factor influencing positive graduate outcomes and this is something that we feature in our proposed activity to reduce the current progression gaps. A wide-ranging analysis of research studies concluded that there is a positive association between participating in one-to-one career counselling and graduates' self-efficacy and ability to make effective career choices (Whiston, Li, Mitts, and Wright, 2017). Another study shows that possessing a good career plan was the most important factor in determining whether graduates' future employment was at graduate-level (professional or managerial) or at a non-professional level (Shury, Vivian, Turner, and Downing, 2017).

Another report indicates a link between students' engagement with careers and employability services and increased earnings as graduates including when controlling for academic

achievement and socioeconomic backgrounds (Percy and Emms, 2020). This report highlights various key features of students' university experience that were associated with higher career satisfaction and higher salaries, including 'support for transferable skills', and 'work experience within the degree course'.

Whilst we have developed pioneering tools to focus on transferable skills and attributes, including the 'mySkills' student online skills portfolio and reflection tool, and good progress is being made to embed regular skills reflection into all undergraduate programmes, there is further to go. Full evaluation of the impact of embedding this activity in relation to our students' outcomes as new graduates is not yet possible as our first adopters have yet to graduate. However, we are confident the research evidence indicates we are on a positive track, and our early data indicate links between a focus on skills and personal development and increased career confidence. It appears to be a firm foundation on which to build and provides data which enables us to focus more targeted support to those students who appear to need it.

Quotes from students who have recently used the mySkills tool:
"It is a great way to have an overview of how much you have actually learned and be proud of yourself."
"Makes self-evaluation much easier and more quantifiable."

Recent developments include our work on an 'Ambition Scholars Programme' funded by an alumni donation which is piloting a series of interconnected and targeted support activities for incoming students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, particularly white working-class males. This wraparound programme of outreach, bursary funding, welcome and belonging support, personal development, career mentoring and employability provision is providing new insights into the challenges faced and the support needed, and building an evidence base of 'what works' for this particular cohort of c.30 students per year.

Research also shows that access to professional networks can significantly enhance the value of a degree as graduates begin their careers. A 2019 report by Universities UK identifies networking as an important skill "critical to success in a high proportion of careers" and recommends "implementing programmes to develop individuals' specific skills in communications, networking and cross disciplinary thinking" to optimise career opportunities (UUK: 2019). The ability to develop these networks is a skill we can and do support and seek to enhance.

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2025-26 fee information

Provider name: The University of Sheffield

Provider UKPRN: 10007157

Summary of 2025-26 course fees for new entrants

*Course type not listed by the provider as available to new entrants in 2025-26. This means that any such course delivered to new entrants in 2025-26 would be subject to fees capped at the basic fee amount.

Inflation statement

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

Table 1a - Full-time course fee levels for 2025-26 new entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	£9,535
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (classroom based)		N/A	£5,760
Foundation year/Year 0 (non-classroom based)		N/A	£9,535
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE		N/A	£9,535
Postgraduate ITT		N/A	£9,535
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year		N/A	£1,271
Sandwich year	There are a small number of courses in Chemistry and Biosciences which charge £1,905 for the sandwich year. Most courses will charge £1,271	N/A	£1,905
Turing scheme and overseas study years		N/A	£1,430
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 1b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2025-26 new entrants

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

Table 1c - Part-time course fee levels for 2025-26 new entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	£7,145
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0 (classroom based)		N/A	£4,315
Foundation year/Year 0 (non-classroom based)		N/A	£7,145
HNC/HND		N/A	£7,145
CertHE/DipHE		N/A	£7,145
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Turing scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 1d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2025-26 new entrants

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

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: The University of Sheffield

Provider UKPRN: 10007157

Investment summary

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

Notes about the data:

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

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

In Table 6d (under 'Breakdown'):

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

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

Table 6b - Investment summary

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£2,077,000	£2,077,000	£2,077,000	£2,077,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£6,200,000	£6,350,000	£6,500,000	£6,650,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£250,000	£300,000	£350,000	£400,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£495,000	£495,000	£495,000	£495,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£830,000	£830,000	£830,000	£830,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£752,000	£752,000	£752,000	£752,000
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (£)**	**£2,077,000**	**£2,077,000**	**£2,077,000**	**£2,077,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment (as % of HFI)*	**4.6%**	**4.6%**	**4.5%**	**4.5%**
Access activity investment	**Total access investment funded from HFI (£)**	**£2,077,000**	**£2,077,000**	**£2,077,000**	**£2,077,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)*	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£5,500,000	£5,600,000	£5,700,000	£5,800,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£700,000	£750,000	£800,000	£850,000
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (£)**	**£6,200,000**	**£6,350,000**	**£6,500,000**	**£6,650,000**
Financial support investment	*Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)*	**13.7%**	**13.9%**	**14.1%**	**14.3%**
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£250,000	£300,000	£350,000	£400,000
Research and evaluation investment	*Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)*	0.6%	0.7%	0.8%	0.9%

Office for Students

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: The University of Sheffield

Provider UKPRN: 10007157

Targets

Table 5b: Access and/or raising attainment targets

Aim [500 characters maximum]	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
Sheffield will increase the proportion of students eligible for FSM applying to and registering at the University from 8.4% in 2021-22 to 10% in 2029-30.	PTA_1	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible			No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	8.4%	8.3%	8.7%	9.2%	9.7%
Sheffield will increase the proportion of students from IMD quintile 1 and 2 postcodes from 25.5% in 2021-22 to 30% in 2029-30.	PTA_2	Access	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1 and 2	IMD quintile 3, 4 and 5		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	25.5%	26.4%	27.3%	28.2%	29.1%
Sheffield will increase the number of degree apprenticeships at level 6, whilst maintaining the proportion of students from IMD 1 and 2.	PTA_3	Access	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1 and 2	IMD quintile 3, 4 and 5		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	48.4%	48.5%	48.5%	48.5%	48.5%
	PTA_4														
	PTA_5														
	PTA_6														
	PTA_7														
	PTA_8														
	PTA_9														
	PTA_10														
	PTA_11														
	PTA_12														

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
Sheffield will reduce the gap in completion between under 21s and those 21 and over from 14.2 ppt in the 2017-18 entry year to 10 ppt in the 2025-26 entry year.	PTS_1	Completion	Age	Mature (over 21)	Young (under 21)		No	The access and participation dashboard	2017-18	Percentage points	14.2	13	12.5	11.7	10.9
Sheffield will remove the gap in completion for students declaring a disability (3.8 ppt for 2017-18 entrants) in 2029-30.	PTS_2	Completion	Reported disability	Disability reported	No disability reported		No	The access and participation dashboard	2017-18	Percentage points	3.8	3.2	2.3	1.4	0.5
Sheffield will work to remove the attainment gap for students from Black backgrounds in 2035-36.	PTS_3	Attainment	Ethnicity	Black	White		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	21.6	18.3	17	15	13
Sheffield will work to remove the attainment gap for students and Asian backgrounds in 2030-31.	PTS_4	Attainment	Ethnicity	Asian	White		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	9.9	8.9	7.3	5.5	3.6
Sheffield will close the attainment gap for students eligible for FSM from the baseline of 11.2 ppt in 2021-22 to 5 ppt in 2029-30.	PTS_5	Attainment	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible	Not eligible		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	11.2	8.4	7.7	6.8	5.8
Sheffield will close the attainment gap from 7.9 ppt to 3 ppt in 2029-30 for students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 compared to those in IMD quintiles 3, 4 and 5.	PTS_6	Attainment	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1 and 2	IMD quintile 3, 4 and 5		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	7.9	7	6.1	5.1	4
	PTS_7														
	PTS_8														
	PTS_9														
	PTS_10														
	PTS_11														
	PTS_12														

Table 5e: Progression targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone

Target	Ref	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Group 1	Group 2		Is this target split by...	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Sheffield will reduce the gap in terms of the number of students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 entering graduate level employment or postgraduate study compared to those from IMD quintiles 3, 4 and 5, from a baseline of 4.4 ppt in 2020-21 to 2.0 ppt in 2029-30	PTP_1	Progression	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1 and 2	IMD quintile 3, 4 and 5		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	4.4	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.3
Sheffield will reduce the gap in terms of the number of students eligible for FSM relative to those who are not eligible, from 8.0 ppt in 2020-21 to 4.0 ppt in 2029-30.	PTP_2	Progression	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible	Not eligible		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	8	6.5	5.9	5.2	4.5
	PTP_3														
	PTP_4														
	PTP_5														
	PTP_6														
	PTP_7														
	PTP_8														
	PTP_9														
	PTP_10														
	PTP_11														
	PTP_12														