Access and Participation Plan 2025-26 to 2028-29

Introduction and strategic aim

Context

1. Newcastle University is a globally recognised research-intensive university and an anchor institution in the North East. From our origins in the 1830s, we have built a proud legacy of education, research and innovation and provided students with the knowledge, skills and ideas to meet the region's maritime, industrial, agricultural, social, cultural and healthcare needs. This legacy is echoed today in our thematic strengths across a research-informed educational curriculum with a rich seam of training in professional and vocational practice in: Ageing & Life Sciences, Data, OnePlanet, Cities & Place, and Culture & Creative Arts. We continue to serve regional, national, and international educational needs with 21% of our students from the North East. Today, we are a diverse community comprising: ˜29,500 students (˜22,500 undergraduate, from >140 countries), >6,500 colleagues (17% from >90 non-UK countries), and ˜250,000 alumni worldwide, all working together with a host of partners in the community, public and private organisations.

2. Our three faculties are based in Newcastle city centre within a 15-minute walking radius: Humanities and Social Sciences (HaSS) is the largest, with nine discipline-based schools, three research institutes and School X, established in 2021 to develop distinctive interdisciplinary programmes; Medical Sciences (FMS), with five schools (including medicine and dentistry) and three research institutes; and Science, Agriculture and Engineering (SAgE) with four schools. As the University has grown (23,000 students in 2016 to 29,000 in 2024), we have diversified our disciplinary base, re-established physics and launched film and media, and education in 2015, added sport and exercise sciences in 2017 and dietetics in 2020, and incorporated pharmacy from Durham University in 2017. We also operate in Singapore to educate students in engineering (NUIS) and in Malaysia to meet the demand for medical and biomedical graduates (NUMed).

University vision

3. In 2018, we launched our University Vision & Strategy comprising four cross-cutting strategies: Education for Life, Research for Discovery and Impact, Engagement and Place, and Global. In 2022, we reaffirmed our vision to be a values-led world-leading University, advancing knowledge, providing creative solutions, and solving global problems. We have recently refreshed and re-written our strategy for education, our new **Education for Life 2030+ Strategy**, a vision for education and skills at Newcastle that we have launched in April 2024. This expresses our collective sense of purpose as a global, future-facing provider of leading edge, inclusive and transformational higher education for all our students.

4. The aims of our new Education for Life strategy are to ensure equity, provide encounters with the leading edge and to be fit for the future; with our aim for equity resonating with our commitments in this plan.

> **Aim 1: Equity**
> To provide a core, universal offer for all students, including tailored provision where needed, to ensure equity of access, experience and in outcomes for all, regardless of background, identity, nationality, location or mode of study.

5. Our University is made up of a diverse community of learners who come together in the experience of higher education. Our strategy recognises, embraces, and supports that diversity, meeting students where they are, and acknowledging and responding to who they are, to ensure that all our students have the opportunity to discover and fulfil their potential.

6. We are passionate in our belief that universities should play a fundamental role in creating and fostering more equitable societies. Our sector leading supported entry route, 'PARTNERS' has recently celebrated 25 years of success, with over 9000 students studying at Newcastle via the PARTNERS programme. We actively work in partnership with other education providers via our leadership of collaborative approaches to widening access (Realising Opportunities, NERAP) and coordinated engagement in raising attainment (UniConnect, IntoUniversity and the Brilliant Club) (see also **Annex B**). This plan includes a commitment, working with our partner Northumbria University, to establish a second IntoUniversity centre in the region. We are also working closely as part of our Engagement and Place Strategy with partners across the region, including other HEIs, cultural partners, VCSE and cultural organisations and local government to collaborate for social change through policy and action.

7. We are a University of Sanctuary, hold an institutional Athena Swan Silver award and a Bronze Race Equality Charter award, however, we seek to do more to tackle our identified Risks to Equality of Opportunity and to continue to listen to and work with our students to enhance the educational experience for all, across the full lifecycle. Both through this new APP as well as throughout our new Education for Life 2030+ Strategy, actions are planned which are designed directly to mitigate these Risks and to shape what we do with and for our students to create a more equitable environment.

8. The strategic aim for this APP is to address and tackle the social, cultural, societal or institutional barriers and risks to equality of opportunity that students may face at Newcastle University, at all stages of the student journey, and reduce the inequity we see. Despite the improvements we have made to date, we have further work to do to address these underlying risks and it is the aim of this Plan to tackle these, taking an institution-wide, joined up approach, using evidence-based activities that have evaluation embedded into their design and with student voice centred throughout all our work.

Risks to equality of opportunity

9. Through a systematic assessment of our performance, provided in detail in **Annex A**, we have identified the following risks to opportunity as those that have the greatest impact on our student population and/or are national risks where we believe we have the capacity and capability to contribute to addressing them.

	Indicator of risk	Student groups	Underlying risks to equality of opportunity
Access	IR1 Lower proportion of applicants and/or entrants	IR1.1 Students from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 and FSM IR1.2 Students 21 and over on entry IR1.3 All minoritised ethnic groups (particularly Black and Asian)	Knowledge and skills Information and guidance Perceptions and expectations of HE
	IR2 Lower rates of offers made	IR2.1 Students from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 R.2.2 Students 21 and over on entry	Knowledge and skills Information and guidance (see also paragraph 11 below)
Continuation & Completion	IR3 Lower proportion of	IR3.1 Students from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 and FSM	

	Indicator of risk	Student groups	Underlying risks to equality of opportunity
	students continuing and/or completing their programme	IR3.2 Students 21 and over on entry IR3.3 Students from some disabilities (particularly Mental health conditions, Other or multiple impairments, Sensory, medical and physical disabilities) IR 3.4 Students from some minoritised ethnic groups (Black and Other)	Lack of awareness and engagement in academic and personal support Inequitable access to support opportunities beyond the curriculum Sense of belonging Financial strain Mental health need disclosure and expectations
Attainment	IR4 Lower proportion of students attaining 'good degrees' (1st & 2:1) and/or 1st class degrees	IR4.1 Students from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 IR4.2 Students 21 and over on entry IR4.3 Students with some disabilities (Cognitive and learning difficulties, Sensory, Medical and Physical disabilities) R4.4 Students from minoritised ethnic groups	Lack of awareness and engagement in academic and personal support Inequitable access to support opportunities beyond the curriculum Sense of belonging Financial strain Mental health need, awareness, disclosure, and expectations
Progression	IR5 Lower proportion of students progressing to positive graduate outcomes	IR5.1 Students from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 and FSM IR5.2 Students with some disabilities (Mental health)	Mental health need, awareness, disclosure, and expectations Progression from higher education
Other	IR6 Multiple indicators of risk for small groups	IR6.1 Students with a social or communication impairment IR6.2 Care experienced and estranged students	Multiple

10. We have identified six indicators of risk affecting various student groups, and nine underlying risks to equality of opportunity that are most relevant to our students taking into account the national Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, internal evidence and information, and our APP Student Collaborative Group.

1 Knowledge and skills

Students may not have the equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto higher education courses, particularly at a high tariff research-intensive university, that match their expectations and ambitions.

2 Information and guidance

Students may not have equal access to provision that supports ambition and helps them to make informed choices by developing an understanding of the expectations of a research-intensive institution.

3 **Perceptions and expectations of higher education**

As a result of their lived experience of higher education students may not feel able to or be supported to apply to higher education, particularly to a research-intensive university, despite being qualified.

4 **Lack of awareness and engagement in academic or personal support**

Students may not have the knowledge and skills to recognise and effectively engage with targeted academic and personal support to achieve a positive outcome.

5 **Inequitable access to opportunities beyond the curriculum**

Students may not be able to engage with the full range of opportunities and benefit from wider university life outside of their academic programme.

6 **Sense of belonging**

Students lived experience of being in higher education as part of an underrepresented group may impact on their ability to succeed in higher education.

7 **Mental health need, awareness, disclosure, and expectations**

Risk of students not recognising they have a mental health disability, feeling able to disclose a mental health disability or recognise that their mental health disability needs impact upon their ability to succeed. They may have joined us from schools and/or NHS trusts where mental health support and treatment input levels are greater or different than available in the region or in a higher education environment. This risks them encountering a gap between expectation and provision leading to negative impacts.

8 **Financial strain**

Increases in the challenge of functioning day to day with critical and multiple financial challenges that may affect a student's ability and time available to engage fully with university life and complete their course or obtain a good grade.

9 **Progression from higher education**

Students may not have equal opportunity to progress to a positive graduate outcome such as a highly skilled professional role or continuation of study.

11. We recognise that our full assessment of performance (**Annex A**) shows that there are substantial differences in offer rates for students from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 and for students age 21 or older on entry and that this may indicate an underlying risk around application success rates. We make a commitment to explore this further as part of our intervention strategy (IS 1.9) but we are not yet clear on what the mostly likely underlying risks are to explain these differences – beyond our existing understanding of the impact of knowledge and skills and information and guidance – and so have not named a specific further underlying risk. Work in this area may lead to a future variation to our plan.

Objectives

12. We have set our objectives to frame our ambitions for addressing the indications of risk identified in our assessment of performance. We have not included all sub-groups, reflecting on the variations in the size of the risk between different sub-groups, and the size of the sub-group populations, focusing on the most significant indicators of risk. With our range of interventions, benefits are intended to be generated outside of the groups identified in specific objectives. 5

13. This assessment of significance takes into account the analysis of multi-year metrics within our assessment of performance, which can show the underlying gaps which can be hidden in year-to-year variation. However, the objective and associated target(s) necessarily reflect any indication of trend and use the most recent data available as a starting point. In some cases, this leads to an objective to ensure that a gap does not widen, where the most recent data shows a much smaller gap than identified in the multi-year average.

14. Each objective, with the exception of 'combined' objectives, has one or more associated numerical targets as set out in our **Fees and Investment Template**.

Access

15. To ensure that students, regardless of their background, have equal opportunity to progress to study at Newcastle:

    • Objective A1: To increase the proportion (%) of students from lower socioeconomic groups (FSM) progressing to Newcastle University.
    • Objective A2: To increase the proportion (%) of students from minoritised ethnic groups (particularly Black) progressing to Newcastle University.

16. We also hold a shared objective along with our partners in Realising Opportunities:

    • Objective A3: To contribute to the improvement in national entry rates to highly selective providers for those most likely to experience risks to equality of opportunity.

Success

17. To ensure that all students, regardless of their background have equal opportunity to successfully complete their studies and attain a degree outcome that reflects their academic capabilities:

    • Objective S1: Reduce the gaps in student success (continuation and attainment at 1st & 2:1) between students from lower socioeconomic groups (FSM) and other students.
    • Objective S2: Reduce the gaps in student success (continuation and attainment at 1st & 2:1) between students age 21 and over on entry, and younger students.
    • Objective S3: Reduce the gap in student success (attainment at 1st & 2:1) between Black and White students.
    • Objective S4: Reduce the gap in student success (attainment at 1st & 2:1) between East Asian and White students.
    • Objective S5: Ensure that the gap in student success (completion) between students with mental health conditions and students without a disability does not widen in the light of an increasing proportion of students declaring a mental health condition.

Progression

18. To ensure that all students, regardless of their background have equal opportunity to progress to a highly skilled professional role or continuation of study:

- Objective P1: Ensure that the gap in progression to positive graduate outcomes for students from

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Combined

19. Our combined objectives recognise the complexities in identifying robust data that reflects the gaps in equality of opportunity in access, success and progression in higher education for some groups where the institutional population is small but where there are indications in internal data or sector evidence that there are risks across the lifecycle. Numeric targets have not been set for these objectives for this reason, but we will work to identify through our evaluation of interventions, the impact on these two student groups:

- Objective C1: To improve educational outcomes for students with social or communication impairments.

- Objective C2: To improve access to education and educational outcomes for care experienced and estranged students.

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Intervention strategy 1: Access to higher education

Objectives:

• Objective A1: To increase the proportion (%) of students from lower socioeconomic groups (FSM) progressing to Newcastle University.

• Objective A2: To increase the number of students from minoritised ethnic groups (particularly Black) progressing to Newcastle University.

• Objective A3: To contribute to the improvement in national entry rates to highly selective providers for those most likely to experience risks to equality of opportunity.

Targets:

PTA_1, PTA_2, PTA_3

Risks to equality of opportunity:

• Knowledge and skills

• Information and guidance

• Perceptions and expectations of HE

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS1.1 Supported entry routes	Multi intervention programmes that support student progression to higher education via lower entry requirements and early introduction to university level study: -PARTNERS Supported Entry Route, >1500 participants/yr entry **(existing)** -Realising Opportunities Collaborative Partnership, > 80 participants/yr entry **(existing)** -Sutton Trust Pathways, > 60 participants/yr entry **(existing)** Target student groups (all activities): FSM, minoritised ethnic groups, care experienced young people and care leavers **Collaboration:** Realising Opportunities & Sutton Trust	Staff: 5.65 total FTE per year Non-staff: £354k per year plus a proportion of £124k per year split across activities IS1.1 to IS1.6	-Increased positive perception of studying at a research-intensive university. -Enhanced academic skills and capacities -Broadened geographical horizons (RO-specific). -Increased meta-cognition, academic self-efficacy & awareness of university expectations.	IS2	T1 (Theory of Change, feedback surveys, external adviser review (PARTNERS)) T2 (pre and post activity questionnaire; participant vs non-attendee comparator data) T3 (HEAT analysis by IES)	Annual reporting available (Oct each year) via NU website which highlights the impact of the activity and progress towards outcomes. RO-specific reports to be made available via the RO website (Sept each year).

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS1.2 Contextual admissions	Contextual offers and contextual admissions – approx. 3000 offers per year **(existing)** Target student groups: FSM, Care Experienced students	Staff: 0.14 total FTE per year Non-staff: Proportion of £124k per year split across activities IS1.1 to IS1.6	-Students receive offers which consider their individual circumstances. -Students feel confident they can achieve the grades they need to progress to Newcastle -Students can meet the academic requirements which they need to progress to Newcastle		T2 (participant vs nonparticipant comparison for admissions and on course)	Evaluation summary available via NU website by Oct 2025.
IS1.3 Widening access	Progressive targeted outreach including in school and on campus activities **(existing):** -Aspiration-raising activity -Information Advice and Guidance -Soft skills and study support c.300 identified target schools; c.100 participants annually (Choices Together - NERAP) Target student groups: FSM & Minoritised ethnic groups (all activities), Care experienced young people and care leavers (Choices Together – NERAP) Collaboration: Choices Together programme delivered in collaboration with the North-East Raising Aspiration Partnership of five regional universities.	Staff: 13.73 total FTE per year Non-staff: £204k per year plus a proportion of £124k per year split across activities IS1.1 to IS1.6	-Increased knowledge and awareness of the benefits of higher education and graduate employment -Enhanced study skills, including meta-cognition and self-efficacy -Enhanced identification with positive outcomes from HE and role models		T1 (Theory of change, teaching feedback surveys) T2 (pre and post questionnaires) T2 (review of enrolment data for target schools) T2 (participant data review) Methods stated apply to one of more of the individual activities.	Annual reporting available (Nov each year) via NU website which highlights the impact of the activity and progress towards outcomes.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS 1.4 Attainment raising	Range of collaborative programmes designed to support attainment and positive destinations in the North-East: 1. Further Maths Teaching Centre **(existing)** - 20 schools/colleges 2. Primary Literacy Programme **(existing)** - 1 primary school 3. IntoUniversity academic support – - IntoUniversity Newcastle East: 5 primary and 3 schools/colleges (1,000 annual participants) **(existing)** - Second IntoUniversity centre, target launch Jan 2025 **(new)** 4. Uniconnect Student Tutoring **(existing)** - 26 schools/colleges 5. The Brilliant Club Scholars Programme **(existing)** - 600 annual participants Target student groups: - FSM (1, 3, 4, 5) - Minoritised ethnic groups (2, 5) - Care experienced young people and care leavers (3, 4, 5) Collaboration: identified secondary schools and colleges (1, 3, 4, 5), identified primary schools (2, 3), regional universities (3, 4).	Staff: 0.24 total FTE per year Non-staff: £269k per year plus a proportion of £124k per year split across activities IS1.1 to IS1.6	-Increased academic attainment -Enhanced identification with positive outcomes from HE and role models -Enhanced study skills, including meta-cognition and self-efficacy		T1 (teacher feedback survey) T2 (pre and post questionnaires) T2 (A level performance analysis) T2 (quasi-experimental using National Pupil Database) Methods stated apply to one of more of the individual activities.	Reporting available via Newcastle University website (Nov each year) which highlights the impact of the activity and progress towards outcomes.
IS 1.5 Mentoring	Online mentoring for Year 12 Black heritage students from across the UK. Mentoring culminates in an on-campus event which introduces students to university life. New pilot in 2023/24, with planned expansion in 2024/25. 10 current Black heritage UG Newcastle	Staff: 0.07 total FTE per year Non-staff: £11k per year plus a proportion of £124k	-Increased life and confidence building skills, improved metacognition and self-efficacy. -Increased student capacity to make informed decisions		T2 (pre and post questionnaires; participant data and HEAT tracking)	Annual reporting available via Newcastle University website (Nov

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
	University students work with 20 pupils throughout the academic year. **(existing)** Collaboration: 'With Insight' Charity	per year split across activities IS1.1 to IS1.6	regarding choosing a university and a course. -Increased student knowledge and awareness of the benefits of higher education and graduate employment. -Enhanced identification with positive outcomes from HE and role models -Enhanced identification with positive outcomes from HE and role models			each year) which highlights the impact of the activity and progress towards outcomes.
IS1.6 Summer schools and residential visits	Residential event that aims to give an introduction to student life, including the academic and social aspects of university-level study. The event also showcases the facilities that Newcastle University has to offer. Between 200-300 participants per year **(existing)** Target student groups (all activity): FSM & Minoritised ethnic groups, care experienced young people and care leavers. Collaboration: Ad-hoc collaboration with external bodies, such as educational charities	Staff: 2.88 total FTE per year Non-staff: £115k per year plus a proportion of £124k per year split across activities IS1.1 to IS1.6	-Increased skills for independent living -Enhanced interpersonal and group work skills and capacity to work collaboratively with others. -Enhanced communication and presentation skills using different mediums -Increased knowledge needed to make a successful application and transition to HE. -Enhanced social and mutual support networks		T1 Narrative (participant feedback survey) T2 Empirical (participant pre/post questionnaires) T2 Empirical (HEAT tracking)	Annual reporting available via NU website (in Nov each year) which highlights the impact of the activity and progress towards outcomes.
IS1.7 Pre-entry entrepreneurship and HE	Working from pre-entry to on course, targeting PARTNERS students to develop enterprise skills based on the EntreComp framework and present entrepreneurship as a positive future destination supported by HE experience to develop a programme of activity with secondary schools to raise awareness of entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial skills and	Staff: 0.40 total FTE per year Non-staff: £20k project fund per year	-Increased knowledge and understanding of enterprise skills as well as University opportunities -Increased confidence and self-efficacy		T1 (Theory of change) T2 (Surveys, case studies)	ToC change published before Sept 2025

Activity	Description how these can be developed	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
	through their University experience. **(new)** -Website with resources for schools ready to launch September 2024 -Activity in schools including workshops, activities and engagement with pupils in North East PARTNERS Schools from September 2024 for a pilot year -National distribution and engagement with national network of PARTNERS Schools from September 2025. -Summer activity to be hosted on campus 2025/26					
IS1.8 Product Design and Development Engineer (PDDE) apprenticeship programme	Working with Industry and Educational Providers, including the North-East Institute of Technology, to build a strategic pipeline into the degree level Product Design and Development Engineer (PDDE) apprenticeship programme by ensuring more accessible progression routes, including addressing gaps in prior learning. Target for 2025-26: 75 (60 in 2024-25). Target student group: multiple (nontraditional learners). **(expanded)**	Staff: 15.00 total FTE per year	-changed perception of the nature of HE experience available at a research-intensive university	T1 (student and employer feedback)		Initial publication by January 2027; followed by an end-of cohort evaluative publication in October 2030
IS1.9 Offer-making review	Research will be carried out during 2024-25 to understand the reasons why mature applicants (21 and over) and those from TUNDRAQ1 and IMD Q1 are less likely to be offered a place on some courses than students from other groups. The findings will be used to inform any future interventions that are required to support equality of opportunity for these groups of students. **(new)**	**Staff: 0.10 FTE per year**	An understanding of why mature applicants (21 and over) and those from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 are less likely to receive an offer, and based on these findings we will seek to improve the inclusivity of our selection processes and provide information and enhanced support where needed.	N/A		Findings shared with key internal stakeholders by Spring 2025 to inform approach for 2025-26 academic year.

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £11,745,993 over 4 year plan. The spend is based on best estimates and plans are subject to further refinement of activities and the University's annual planning process.

Summary of evidence base and rationale: A review of the evaluation findings from existing activities, which includes participant feedback and student ambassadors, alongside consultation with schools/colleges and teachers underpins our approach. Furthermore, for over 10 years we have collected participant data and tracked their outcomes through the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) database, and this research is also fundamental to our approach. Research from the TASO Evidence Toolkit has also helped to inform our intervention strategy. We developed all our intervention strategies following consultation with the student body, including the APP Student Collaborative Group and representatives from the Students' Union. In 2028/29 we will publish a summary report of our overall findings from this intervention strategy, and these findings will be used to inform future intervention strategies. For further information see **Annex B.**

Intervention strategy 2: Success in higher education – belonging and thriving	
Objectives: • Objective S1: To reduce the gaps in student success (continuation and attainment at 1_{st} & 2:1) between students from lower socioeconomic groups (FSM) and other students. • Objective S2: Reduce the gaps in student success (continuation and attainment at 1_{st} & 2:1) between students age 21 and over on entry and younger students. • Objective S3: Reduce the gap in student success (attainment at 1_{st} & 2:1) between Black and White students. • Objective S4: Reduce the gap in student success (attainment at 1_{st} & 2:1) between East Asian and White students. • Objective S5: Ensure that the gap in student success (completion) between students with mental health conditions and students without a disability does not widen in the light of a growing population.	**Targets:** PTS_1, PTS_2, PTS_3, PTS_4, PTS_5, PTS_6, PTS_7 **Risks to equality of opportunity:** • Lack of awareness and engagement in academic and personal support • Inequitable access to support opportunities beyond the curriculum • Sense of belonging.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS2.1 Curriculum-based skills support enhancement	Specific skills development interventions, embedded within the curriculum. Working with course teams to identify cohorts that would benefit from targeted interventions to promote the development of the academic skills required to complete specific assignments.	Staff: 2.52 total FTE per year (shared with IS2.2)	-Improved generic and subject specific academic skills		T2 (cohort tracking)	Initial case study published on NU website Summer 2025

Activity	Description Contextualised and discipline specific	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
	teaching and online materials will be developed as part of the programme of study. **(existing)**					
IS2.2 Skills support triage	Ensure effective triaging to academic skills support through the emerging Academic Support model (Education for Life Strategy). To include Peer Mentors; and Faculty / School-based Academic Advisers, using insights from the roll-out of Learning Analytics, and building on the success of current referral arrangements with the Student Health and Wellbeing Advisers. Initial pilot 2025-26, wider roll out from 2026-27 **(new)**	Staff: 2.52 total FTE per year (shared with IS2.1)	-Improved academic skills		T1 (Theory of change)	ToC change published before Sept 2025
IS2.3 Build on and enhance peer mentoring model	Piloting the targeted extension of support into Semester 2 and potentially Stage 2; investigate creation of senior Peer Mentor role and expansion/pilot of alternative models. This may include dedicated support during the induction period for students with similar lived experiences (for example BAME students, disabled students or first-generation students). Pilots in 2024-25 for evaluation and potential wider roll out from 2025-26. **(expanded/enhanced).**	Staff: 0.60 total FTE per year Non-staff: 90 hours paid student contribution per year	-Increased sense of belonging (social and academic)		T1 (Theory of change)	ToC change published before Sept 2025
IS2.4 Pre-arrival and induction information	To review and update the pre-arrival communications and induction materials to provide targeted additional information to mature students, black students, students from Q1/FSM socioeconomic backgrounds and disabled students and those with known mental health problems. The review will be based on feedback from the APP Student Collaborative Group and materials will be co-created with students and Schools. This will include information from students who experience similar lived	Staff time: 0.4 FTE total Non-staff: 250+ hours paid student contribution	-Increased confidence in accessing information -Increased understanding of student support services -Increased sense of belonging and welcome		T1 (Theory of Change) T1 (student survey) T2 (engagement measurement)	ToC change published before Sept 2025; post-intervention evaluation report Dec 2025.

Activity	Description experiences at Newcastle University	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
	(i.e. first generation students, BAME students, disabled students). Pilot in 2025 for roll-out across the University from 2026 onwards. **(enhanced)**					
IS2.5 Welcome programme for target groups	To introduce a welcome activities for students from FSM backgrounds, mature students and disabled students. Pilot in 2025 for roll-out across the University from 2026 onward **(new)**	Staff: 0.20 total FTE per year Non-staff: 240 hours paid student contribution, £12k student guides per year	-Increased sense of welcome and belonging -Increased understanding of student support services -Increased understanding of extra/co-curricular activities		T1 (Theory of Change) T1 (student feedback)	ToC change published before Sept 2025; post-intervention evaluation report Feb 2026.
IS2.6 Understanding and supporting transition	To explore how we can better meet the needs of students from FSM backgrounds, mature students and disabled students in supporting their transitions. (Transitions from Stage 1 to Stage 2; Stage 2 to Stage 3 and into PGT provisions). Pilot 2026 with University-wide rollout in 2027 **(new)**	Staff: 0.35 total FTE per year Non-staff: 250 hours paid student contribution in year 1, 60 hours years 2 to 4	-Increased understanding of student support services -Increased self-efficacy in proactively engaging with support		T1 (Theory of Change) T1 (student feedback)	ToC change published before Sept 2025
IS2.7 Bridging the Gap project – support for transition into HE	A set of online resources developed in collaboration with sixth form and UG students, teachers and academics, targeting key academic skills identified by students to support transition from School into H.E. Launch in 2024-25 **(new)**	Staff: 1.40 total FTE per year	-Increased academic skills -Increased confidence		T1 (Theory of Change)	ToC change published before Sept 2025
IS2.8 Supporting care experienced and estranged students on course	Support is reflected in our Stand Alone Pledge and Care Leaver Covenant, which provide targeted support **(existing)** -transition and community settling support -accommodation (guarantor and summer provision)	Staff: 0.61 total FTE per year	-Enhanced sense of welcome, belonging and inclusion -Increased financial management skills -Increased self-efficacy in seeking support when needed	IS3	T1 (Theory of Change)	ToC change published before Sept 2025

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
	-finance & skills (supporting access to funding, budgeting training) -tailored careers provision -priority access to counselling -named contacts supporting peer social engagement and proactive contact For September 2024 plans to host an 'induction event' for new care-experienced students **(enhanced)**					
IS2.9 Academic societies funding scheme	Provide funding and support for Newcastle University Student Union's Academic Societies to work more closely with Academic Units to hold student-led welcome events for new students aimed at improving sense of belonging; and facilitation of 6-weeks' free membership of Academic Societies for all new students. From Sept 25 to be enhanced through improving targeted support for priority students to participate. (**existing**)	Staff: 0.03 total FTE per year Non-staff: £30k funding for Welcome Events in scheme, £1.5k NUSU student evaluation costs per year	-Increased engagement with academic societies -Improved peer networks and support -Increased sense of belonging and inclusion in academic discipline -Increased confidence and sense of value as part of academic community -Greater self-efficacy in seeking academic advice	IS4	T1:(Theory of Change) T2: (Survey, focus group, case studies)	ToC change published before Sept 2025; evaluation report published annually (March)
IS2.10 Participation bursaries	Participation Bursaries for eligible underrepresented groups to cover some costs of extracurricular activities. Enhancing through substantial additional funding provided to enable access for more students. **(Existing)**	Staff: 1.04 total FTE per year Non-staff: £150k funding for participation bursaries per year	-Decreased financial concerns -Improved financial affordability for bursary recipients -Increased engagement with extracurriculars from target groups > Increased diversity within membership -Increased sense of belonging and inclusion	IS4	T1:(Theory of Change) T2: (Survey)	ToC change published before Sept 2025; evaluation report published annually (Sept)

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS2.11 Short-term international mobility programme	The short-term mobility programme has been designed with the aim to make mobility more accessible to students from priority groups who may not be able to go abroad for a longer period of time. Short-term mobilities can usually be undertaken during the summer and without the need to extend the length of a degree programme. We will continue to enhance our offer and build in new placement types to increase the number of students from priority groups on those programmes **(Existing)**	Staff: 1.00 total FTE per year (shared with IS2.12, IS2.13 and IS2.14)	Student' skills in the following areas will be developed: -intercultural awareness -knowledge of other countries -confidence -self-awareness -sociability	IS5	T1 (Theory of Change)	Published on NU website by Sept 2025
IS2.12 Funding to support access to international experiences	Funding to students from priority groups to allow access to short-term programmes that are not eligible for Turing funding (less than 28 days) **(Existing)**	Staff: See IS2.11 Non-staff: £500k per year of funding to support access to international experiences	-problem-solving -decisiveness -adaptability -empathy Increased sense of community and belonging; that international mobility is 'an option for students like me'	IS4		
IS2.13 Global ambassadors scheme	Global Ambassadors (students who have undertaken an international mobility themselves) promote our mobility offer and encourage students to undertake international placements. We will recruit Global Ambassadors who are representative of our overall student population to create a sense of belonging, to provide peer-support and to address the additional barriers that students from priority groups face when considering going abroad. Built into recruitment cycle for 2024-25 **(new)**	Staff: See IS2.11		IS5		

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Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS2.14 Targeted support for international mobility	We will develop summer programmes with our own overseas campuses in Singapore and Malaysia to be able to offer enhanced support, not only during the application and preparation phase, but also in-country support during the programme that may be crucial to encourage students from priority groups to go abroad but may not be available elsewhere. Pilot summer 2024. **(new)**	Staff: See IS2.11		IS4		

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £4,377,835 over 4 year plan

Summary of evidence base and rationale: As part of internal research on sense of belonging (Razak and Laing 2023, and Boulton 2023) students have consistently told us that they want to see improvements to existing initiatives (e.g. personal tutoring, peer mentoring, student societies) to better support belonging and community. This is why most of our interventions in this strategy are enhancement or extensions of existing activities. The activities are aimed at facilitating awareness and access to academic and personal support, opportunities beyond the curriculum and overall, support a greater sense of belonging, with a focus on: supporting peer relationships, supporting student-staff relationships and generating a sense of community.

Intervention strategy 3: Mental health

Objectives:

- Objective S5: Ensure that the gap in student success (completion) between students with mental health conditions and students without a disability does not widen in the light of a growing population.

- Objective C1: To improve educational outcomes for students with social or communication impairments.

- Objective C2: To improve access to education and educational outcomes for care experienced and estranged students.

- Objective P2: Reduce the gap in progression to positive graduate outcomes between students with mental health conditions and students without a disability (secondary objective)

Targets:

PTS_7, PTP_2

Risks to equality of opportunity:

- Mental health need, awareness, disclosure, and expectations.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS3.1 Whole University approach	Via our Steering Group and workstream activity, implement the Student Minds Mental Health Framework, ensuring mental health support is adequately resourced, effective and accessible. Create an environment and culture that reduces poor mental health, supports good mental health, and facilitates staff and students to develop insight, understanding, and skills to manage and maintain their own wellbeing. With an aim to submit for a charter award by Sept 2025 (subject to Student Minds capacity) **(Enhanced)**	Non-staff: £5k per year for membership of charter programme £25k fee for assessment for charter award	-Successful Student Minds Charter Award	IS2; IS5	Via Student Minds assessment team	Application will be published on Student Minds website
IS3.2 Pre-entry transition	Lifecycle support via a pre-entry three-day in person transition programme for those with declared mental health and social and communication disabilities needs, to assist in the transition from often intensive school support into higher education **(Existing)**	Staff: 0.35 FTE per year Non-staff: £5k per year for pre-entry programme costs	-Greater understanding of how and when to access help -Increased and more timely disclosures of disability -Reduced anxiety and disengagement from study	IS2	T1 (Theory of Change) T2 (pre/post questionnaire)	ToC change published before Sept 2025

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
			-Increased engagement with wider student experience		T2 (student tracking)	
IS3.3 Supporting transition into local NHS treatment	Aid transition into local NHS treatment programs via access to a University- funded GP registration program and full time University funded mental health nurse seeing < 50 students per year for those with declared mental health needs **(Existing)**	Staff: 1.10 FTE total per year Non-staff: £2k per year for students employed on campus spend on GP registration events	-Earlier identification of students in need -Swifter access to NHS treatment for mental health needs -Improved personal and academic experience for students with mental health disabilities	IS2; IS5	T1 (Theory of Change) T2 (student tracking)	ToC change published before Sept 2025
IS3.4 Mental health literacy in the curriculum	Pilot of embedding a credit bearing mental health literacy module into the curriculum. Piloted in two schools in 2023-24. Further expansion to be considered after the pilot **(New)**	Staff: Approx 20 hours academic staff time Non-staff: VLE development	-Increased mental health literacy -Increased understanding of where to seek help -Enhanced self-compassion -Enhanced functional coping	IS2	T2 (pre/post intervention survey)	Summary published on NU website by Sept 2025
IS3.5 Learning analytics	Explore the use of Learning Analytics to inform early referral and wellbeing interventions. **(New)** - student support flag will be available within the platform from September 24 - extenuating circumstances data to be included in future - wellbeing impact measurement scale to be integrated in future versions of the system with a section called 'interactions' allowing users to leave a comment and an impact score following an interaction with a student.	Staff: contributions from IT and wellbeing teams	-Earlier identification of students in need -Reduction in IMS scores	IS2; IS5	T1 (Theory of Change)	ToC change published before Sept 2025

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £429,830 over 4 year plan

Summary of evidence base and rationale: Mental health needs, whether formally disclosed or not, are a key risk factor affecting students' equality of opportunity at Newcastle (and across the sector). The University has prioritised support for students with mental health needs and support for wider student wellbeing in its education and support approaches, but we recognise from our assessment of performance that there is more that must be done to ensure equality of opportunity. There is substantial sector and academic literature assessing the challenge of student mental health to student success but less high-quality evaluation evidence exploring what works in the context of higher education. Our intervention strategy commits us to a series of activities that we will believe reflect key activities to address our specific identified underlying risk and we will seek to develop our evaluation approach further to contribute to the sector evidence base.

Intervention strategy 4: Cost of living

Objectives:	Targets:
• Objective S1: To reduce the gaps in student success (continuation and attainment at 1_{st} & 2:1) between students from lower socioeconomic groups (FSM) and other students.	PTS_1, PTS_2, PTS_3, PTS_4, PTS_5, PTS_6, PTS_7
• Objective S2: Reduce the gaps in student success (continuation and attainment at 1_{st} & 2:1) between students age 21 and over on entry and younger students.	**Risks to equality of opportunity:**
• Objective S3: Reduce the gap in student success (attainment at 1_{st} & 2:1) between Black and White students.	• Financial strain.
• Objective S4: Reduce the gap in student success (attainment at 1_{st} & 2:1) between East Asian and White students.	
• Objective S5: Ensure that the gap in student success (completion) between students with mental health conditions and students without a disability does not widen in the light of a growing population.	

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS4.1 Targeted financial support	Targeted support and funding for marginalised student groups, including: 1) transition bursaries **(existing)** 2) support for food on campus **(existing)**	Staff: 0.20 total FTE per year Non-staff: £26k per year for transitional bursaries to support estranged students, £50k per year support	-Decreased financial concerns -Increased wellbeing	IS2	T1 (Theory of Change) T2 (Beneficiary assessment)	ToC change published before Sept 2025 Beneficiary assessment

Activity	Description 3) support for emergency	Inputs for affordable	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
	accommodation **(existing)** Target student groups: care leavers (1 & 3); estranged (1 & 3), all under-represented groups (2)	food initiatives, £10k per year support for emergency accommodation				published by Sept 2026
IS4.2 Improve online resources around cost of living	Review and improve online resources on the University's Cost of Living hub and information on additional student experience and course costs for clarity, accessibility, and relevance to target student groups and wider student population. Review will be supported by APP Student Collaborative Group user journey testing, focus groups and student co-created evaluation. Reviews will be conducted on an annual basis prior to each new academic year. **(enhanced)**	Staff: 0.30 total FTE per year Non-staff: 160 hours paid student contribution in year 1, 100 hours in year 2, 60 hours in years 3 & 4	-Decreased financial concerns. -Increased knowledge and skills, associated with increased confidence with budgeting -Increased feelings of representation and confidence from target groups. -Increased engagement from students in accessing cost of living content.	IS2	T1 (Theory of Change) T2 (Focus groups)	ToC change published before Sept 2025 Empirical study published Sept 2027
IS4.3 Opportunity and UG support scholarships	The Opportunity and UG support Scholarship is our commitment to ensuring that ability, not circumstance, is what matters; enabling highly motivated, enthusiastic students from all backgrounds to fully enjoy a Newcastle University education. These means-tested scholarships help talented students to focus more on their studies, giving them the financial security to apply for summer internships or take up extra-curricular activities that may have been out of reach. Target group: household income below £35k (existing) and UG Support Scholarships for household income £35k - £40k **(existing)**	Staff: 2.90 total FTE per year Non-staff: £6.6m per year for Opportunity Scholarships (including admin fees)	-Increased capacity for engagement in academic tasks -Increased engagement with extra and co-curricular activities -Increased sense of belonging	IS2	T1 (survey and interview (OfS model))	Evaluation summary published annually from 2025-26

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £27,528,793 over 4 year plan

Summary of evidence base and rationale: Students from under-represented groups have always been more likely to be affected by financial strain than other groups, and this is even more likely to be the case now and in the future with the rising gap between maintenance loans and living costs. The need for an intervention strategy targeting financial strain was supported by the commentary from our APP Student Collaborative Group and is evidenced from national surveys. Our biggest intervention in this area remains our existing scholarship schemes that seek to bridge the gap between maintenance loans and the real cost of living for all students from low-income households. Secondly, we will seek to raise awareness of new and existing interventions amongst the student groups most in need of financial support.

Intervention strategy 5: Progression from higher education	
Objectives: • Objective P1: Ensure that the gap in progression to positive graduate outcomes for students from lower-socioeconomic groups (FSM) does not widen. • Objective P2: Reduce the gap in progression to positive graduate outcomes between students with mental health conditions and students without a disability.	**Targets:** PTP_1, PTP_2 **Risks to equality of opportunity:** • Progression to HE

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS5.1 Enterprising Futures Academy	Support PARTNERS students during their university journey to deepen their understand and knowledge of those skills by engaging them in an Enterprise Academy offer including workshops, events and cross-curricular collaborative projects**. (New)** -Work with the PARTNERS Team on targeted messaging and engagement. Supported by the pre-entry in school activity for early engagement in the concept (IS1.7). Pilot year 24-25 fully delivered by 28-29. -Build social capital by building into the Enterprise Academy offer links with local businesses and entrepreneurs at a national	Staff: 0.55 FTE total per year Non-staff: £40k project fund per year	-Increased employability relevant skills -Increased social capital -Increased confidence	IS1	T1 (Theory of change) T2 (Surveys, case studies, including pre and post assessment of skills, knowledge and confidence)	ToC change published before Sept 2025 Longitudinal study – using Entrecomp - entrepreneurial competency framework 2028

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
	level by hosting networking events and delivering a student led SME Innovation Lab.					
IS5.2 Support for freelance careers	Launch a freelancer platform with marketing and engagement campaigns targeted at underrepresented groups including Q1, ethnically minoritised, PARTNERS students helping all students access remuneration for their skills and talents whilst developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills to support their future careers **(new)**. Platform scoped and identified by Sept/Oct 2024 with deployment in academic year 24/25. Activities to increase engagement and platform promotion from January 2025, with a target of 100 freelancers signed up to the platform by August 2025. **(New)**	Staff: 0.40 FTE total per year Non-staff: £40k project fund per year	-Increased employability relevant skills -Increased social capital		T2 (Surveys, case studies, numbers of businesses created, user journeys)	Empirical study published September 2027
IS5.3 Work experience and skills development – opportunities	Deliver more varied and diverse opportunities for students from underrepresented groups specifically targeting students from Q1 socioeconomic backgrounds, disabled students and those with known mental health problems to engage where appropriate with graduate level work experience and skills development. **(Enhanced)** - Create increased opportunities overall for work experience to offer as much flexibility as possible - Consult with students and co-create materials and the support infrastructure to help them in their journey to securing work experience - student consultation to take place by end 2024 with roll out for first enhanced communications in February 2025, to be evaluated and iterated for February 2026	Staff: 2.05 FTE total per year Non-staff: £30k internship funding & £30k placement funding per year	-Increased engagement from students from underrepresented backgrounds with work experience opportunities -Increased employability relevant skills -Increased social capital		T1 Theory of change T2 (Surveys, case studies, including pre and post assessment of skills, knowledge and confidence)	ToC change published before Sept 2025 Summary published on website shared with key stakeholders annually from 2025-26

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
IS5.4 Work experience and skills development - financial support	Ensure that the majority of work experience opportunities are paid and where this is not possible that a stipend is offered for students taking part. Offer enhanced financial support to students who identify financial barriers to participation. **(Existing)**	Staff: 0.40 FTE total per year Non-staff: £40k Make it Happen Fund per year	-Increased engagement from students from underrepresented backgrounds with work experience opportunities -Increased employability relevant skills -Increased social capital	IS4	T1 Theory of change	ToC change published before Sept 2025 Summary published on website shared with key stakeholders annually from 2025-26
IS5.5 Embedding employability in the curriculum	Identify target academic units to prioritise and roll out a new approach to embedding employability with a view to rolling this out across the institution. Embedded employability offers parity of access to opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills required for successful graduate outcomes (including work, further study and business creation) for students from underrepresented backgrounds specifically students from Q1 socioeconomic backgrounds. **(New)** -Understand the current curricular offer through desk based and active research (taking place through Semester 1 of 2024/25) within the institution with a view to addressing gaps in provision and significantly enhancing access to employability and enterprise skills in the curriculum within the pilot academic units -Identify pilot academic units by February 2025. Work on new approaches to the curriculum with a view to rolling out some minor initiatives in 25-26 and more major changes for academic year 26-27 - review and produce recommendations	Staff: 0.25 FTE core input per year plus engagement from academic and Professional Service staff across the University	-Increased opportunity for students from underrepresented groups to access employability support -Increased development of employability relevant skills and awareness of opportunities		T1 (Theory of change) T2 (Surveys, case studies, including pre and post assessment of skills, knowledge and confidence, Graduate outcomes data for those subject areas)	ToC change published before Sept 2025 Summary published on website shared with key stakeholders annually from 2025-26

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	X-IS	Evaluation	Publication
	ready for work with additional programmes from 27/28 onwards. - Train and develop the Careers team to identify and act upon opportunities to embed employability in the curriculum by December 2024 **-** Work with students to create opportunities for enhanced industry links and live projects within their academic journey from February 2025 with review groups in Summer 2026 and Summer 2027					

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy: £1,427,197 over 4 year plan

Summary of evidence base and rationale: At the heart of both the Education Strategy and our Careers & Employability Strategic Plan is an ambition to develop equity of provision, where irrespective of discipline or stage, all students benefit from a transformational and meaningful academic experience. Social justice and HE research shows that students from underrepresented backgrounds face more challenges in participating in skills development opportunities outside of the curriculum, so we plan to collaborate with colleagues in Academic Units to identify, develop and implement opportunities that embed employability within the curriculum experience wherever possible. To meet the needs of our diverse student population, our approach is enhanced by tailored financial and support interventions to mitigate other perceived barriers to participate in employability and enterprise related opportunities such as placements, work experience, freelance and business exploration as well as in preparation and attendance at interviews. In responding to the evidence and rationale summarised in **Annex B**, we plan to ensure our careers and employability education provision is as impactful as possible with the greatest relevance and reach, ensuring careers and employability education is a structurally unmissable aspect of the educational experience for all our students and, in particular, for those groups of students that evidence suggests are most in need of support. To ensure meaningful provision, and in the context of the Education Strategy, we will work together to adopt effective methods that can be nuanced to support established points of transition and choice for students along with discipline-specific curriculum requirements. We will employ evidence-based interventions informed by our data, TASO Toolkits and industry best practice.

Whole provider approach

20. All our University strategic commitments are underpinned by the University-wide commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as one of our core institutional values.

21. Our new Education for Life 2030+ strategy is the foundation upon which this APP has been developed and the mechanism that will ensure a whole institution approach to our delivery to become a truly inclusive HEI. This strategic narrative will enable us to achieve our vision of being a global, future-facing provider of leading edge, inclusive and transformational higher education for our students. The process of developing our new Education for Life 2030+ strategy has been co-created by colleagues across the institution and with students. It is a future-facing strategy with a clear implementation plan, realistic in its phased timelines and ambitious in its transformational intent across the whole student lifecycle. At its heart sit Equity as one of our three driving aims. This plan is integral to its delivery.

22. Senior University committees are involved in the ongoing development and monitoring of access and participation, embedded as part of normal business. The Education Strategy delivery is overseen by University Education Committee (chaired by PVC Education), whilst the elements which relate to student development and the student experience are overseen by the Student Experience and Wellbeing Sub-Committee (chaired by Academic Registrar). The University Recruitment Strategy Committee (co-chaired by PVC Education and PVC Global) is responsible for overseeing all matters relating to access and admissions – for example determining the University's approach to holistic admissions and the use of contextual information to inform admissions decisions. The University Engagement and Place Committee (chaired by PVC Engagement and Place) has an overview of regional engagement in this agenda and as such, almost all Executive board members have oversight of the development and monitoring of the APP, giving it true whole-institutional buy in at senior level.

23. Our research and evaluation work on students' Sense of Belonging and Community tell us that students develop most meaningful affiliation with the university experience and are most likely to thrive if they feel they 'fit' or belong, both academically and socially at the level of their programme, in their academic School or Unit. For this reason, we know both that we must ensure our interventions are felt in a meaningful way right across the University, through our central provision as well as across our Faculties and Schools – recognising that they will be tailored and adapted to the many different disciplinary contexts of our institution. This approach underpins our interventions with implementation of University-wide interventions with local impact within the practices of academic units.

24. We have also made sure that our planning for this APP has aligned the ambitions we hold in many other areas of the University's work which have an impact on our inclusive intent. These include our work on the Race Equality Charter, University of Sanctuary, Research Culture, Social Justice and Engagement and Place.

25. The Plan has been developed through wide consultation and collaboration; by an APP working group consisting of academic and professional service colleagues from across the institution as well an SU sabbatical officer, who has also led student input through our highly successful APP Student Collaborative Group. The Working Group has been chaired by the Academic Registrar and its work overseen by the PVC for Education, who is a member of the group. The work of developing the intervention strategies has been dispersed across the whole institution and undertaken by the teams best placed to design, implement and evaluate their impact.

Student consultation

26. Working with students as partners in educational change is a key strategic commitment in our Education Strategy and has been a long-established guiding principle in relation to our access and participation approach and activities.

27. Students are deeply engaged with design and feedback within many of our existing activities, and their feedback and input has informed new and enhanced activities included in this plan. PARTNERS students' feedback on their experience to inform changes for future cohorts, our Student Advisory

Group works to review activities around widening access and our dedicated Student Ambassadors feed into student recruitment and outreach work.

28. Leadership on behalf the student body has been undertaken by the Newcastle University Students' Union Education Officer – who is a member of University Education Committee that has oversight of the plan, a member of the University's APP Working Group and Chair of the APP Student Collaborative Group (SCG). In addition to the Education Officer as Chair, the SCG included further Sabbatical Officer representation including the Students' Union President and Welfare and Equality Officer. A number of student members also held Liberation Officer positions, including the Ethnic Diversity Officer, Disability Officer, LGBTQ+ Officer and International Students' Officer. 27

29. The SCG was established in October 2023 as a joint project between the University and Newcastle University Students' Union. The goal of the SCG was to engage students from a range of backgrounds in the APP development process as active partners in the design of the plan. To ensure equitable membership of the SCG, the roles were advertised through the University's Student Employment on Campus process and sent to all student representatives. Different stages of study, Home, EU and International experiences, ethnicities, genders, disability status, socioeconomic background and other identities were well-represented through the membership of the Group, and important intersectional insights were key to the process. The diversity of the candidates was considered when forming the group to ensure a range of students from underrepresented backgrounds as well as broad representation across faculties and schools. 11 places were offered to successful students from various backgrounds and experiences. SCG members were paid for their preparation time and for attending a series of meetings between October 2023 and March 2024.

30. Students engaged with the design of the APP through a series of meetings where the progress of the University's APP Working Group was presented and discussed, acting as a critical friend and providing insights, ideas and commentary to ensure intervention strategies were authentically informed by students. The Group also consulted the wider student body using surveys, focus groups and innovative methods to gather students' opinions on proposed activities and strategies. By taking a structured and intentional approach to working closely with the Students' Union and the SCG, the University has benefitted from significant and carefully considered student input to the development of the plan. Several students from the SCG joined a staff-student panel to present on their experiences at a regional student-co-creation network event hosted by Northumbria University, illustrating their commitment as advocates to this work.

31. Due to the success of the Student Collaborative Group in the design phase of the Plan, and the desire to ensure that there is consistent student involvement in all aspects of the APP, its implementation, integration across the institution and evaluation, the University has committed to continuing the group for the implementation and evaluation phases of the plan.

32. The Newcastle University Students' Union Education Officer, working with the Students' Union Representation and Democracy Manager, are co-ordinating an APP Student Submission.

Evaluation of the plan

33. We continue to be committed to the development of evaluation capacity and expertise within the University to ensure our intervention strategies and the activities contained within them are making an impact in the lives of students by breaking down barriers to equality of opportunity. We are committed to contributing to the development of knowledge of what works in access and participation, to improve our own future activities and to contribute to the sector

34. Our evaluation strategy encompasses a number of key supporting approaches:
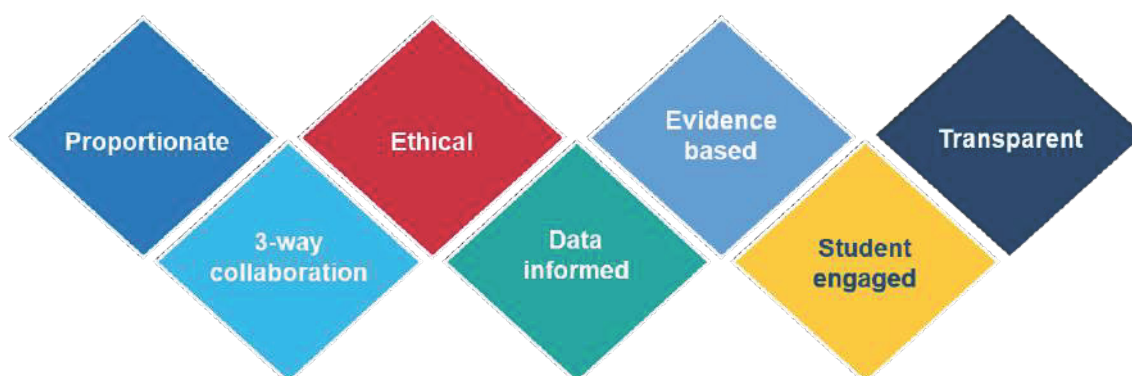
- **Proportionate** – focusing evaluation resources on interventions that are novel, complex, resource intensive and potentially high-impact, whilst maintaining light touch evaluation and monitoring across all APP activity.

- **Three-way internal collaboration** – drawing together academic expertise from the University's discipline communities with core evaluation and support roles located within a central team, and those planning and delivering interventions with practical evaluation expertise in widening participation approaches creating a cross-role evaluation community of practice. We are committed to enhancing the evaluation capacity of university staff.

- **Ethical** – adopting the ethical principles of the British Association for Educational Research and obtaining approval from NU Ethics Committee for in-depth evaluation.

- **Data-informed** – through the development of core internal monitoring tools such as our 'Student Education Journey Dashboard', teams designing intervention are able to draw on a single source of truth for key access and participation data and have access to up-to-date internal indicators in advance of national publication in the OfS dataset.

- **Evidence-based practices, methods, tools and networks** – wherever possible using established tools, e.g., the Higher Education Access Tracker's (HEAT) Evaluation Planning Tool; existing frameworks, e.g., the framework established by the Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI); and validated surveys, e.g., the Access and Success Questionnaire (ASQ) established by Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO).

- **Student engaged** – through the ongoing work of our APP Student Collaborative Group we will engage students in our overall plans for and approaches to evaluation as well as involving students as co-evaluators and key stakeholders in individual interventions and evaluation activities.

- **Transparent** – we are committed to publishing and disseminating the results of our evaluation methodologies through internal dissemination events, our website, engagement in conferences and where appropriate academic publication.

35. We intend to evaluate each activity (or group of related activities) within intervention strategies to establish the extent to which they lead to the intended outcomes, developing theories of change at each level to build an intervention strategy level theory of change. Evaluation will consider how each individual activity contributes towards the overall objectives. Different evaluation methods will be used for individual activities, with a strong focus on student co-creation of evaluation across the Plan. We endeavour to use a combination of Type 1 and Type 2 evaluation, seeking to strengthen our Type 2 evaluation where possible. We are committed to exploring the development of Type 3 evaluation approaches where possible. Both process and impact evaluations will be explored.

36. With a wide range of evaluation approaches and methodologies identified for activities and groups of activities within our intervention strategies our community of practice will provide a cross-institutional venue for sharing findings, learning and developing evaluation capability and skills. Direct publication on the University's website will allow both internal and external audiences to track our developing

understanding of the self-generated evidence base for our activities and intervention strategies.

Provision of information to students

37. The provision of clear and timely information about fee levels and financial support for each year of a student's study is a key element to ensure informed choice, and ultimately support retention. In addition to our own provision of information to students, we supply relevant information to UCAS, the Student Loans Company, UCAS Teacher Training and other relevant bodies.

Fees

38. Fee levels for all students (for each year of their study) are published on our website.

Financial support information

39. Information on our financial support is available on our website and the websites of other relevant bodies to ensure that students at any point during the application cycle receive up-to-date, accurate information that is easy to find.

40. The website includes information about how and when to apply for financial support, eligibility criteria considered for each, as well as any exceptions, for example, students who are in receipt of NHS funding are not eligible for financial support in particular years of study. For our scholarships that are automatically allocated based on the information we receive from Student Finance England (or equivalent assessment authority), we are clear that this relies on students themselves and their sponsors agreeing to share their financial information. We are clear that the financial support advertised to them at this stage, will continue for each year of their study, subject only to inflationary increases or decisions to increase the support offered.

41. For students who choose to defer entry, we are clear that the financial support they will be able to access will not be confirmed at the point of application. We ensure that all deferred entrants are sent the full details of the financial support package applicable to their year of entry as soon as this has been finalised.

42. Post-entry, information about financial support for continuing students is circulated as part of our ongoing communications plan designed to support and inform current students. This is tailored to include financial support relevant to them for each particular year of study (including access to Hardship funds and specific provision for targeted groups such as care-leavers, students with dependent children etc). In addition, our student support services can provide one-to-one financial budgeting support for targeted students.

Financial support offer

43. The following are the key eligibility criteria[1] and the level of financial support students will be offered in each year of study in relation to financial support offered as part of our plan:

Scheme	Key criteria	Support offered (annually)
Opportunity scholarships	Household income £25,000 or less	£2,000 bursary
Opportunity scholarships	Household income between £25,001 and £35,000	£1,000 bursary

[1] Full criteria: Scholarships | Newcastle University | Newcastle University (ncl.ac.uk)

UG Support scholarships	Household income between £35,001 and £40,000	Receive £500 bursary

Annexes:

Annex A: Assessment of performance

Annex B: Evidence base

Fees, investment, and targets (FIT) document

Annex A: Assessment of Performance

Introduction

1. The data we have used to conduct this assessment of performance is as follows:

   - The OfS access and participation aggregated data (OfS APP data set) was brought into PowerBI to aid analysis. The OfS data set is used as default (with 4 year aggregates covering 2018/19 to 2021/22), with internal data identified in the text where used.

   - Internal and other data was reviewed via our PowerBI Student Education Journey Dashboard (SEJD). This brings data together from a wide range of sources including: internal student record data, admissions data etc. Internal data has been matched to the basic parameters of the OfS aggregated data but they are not fully comparable. Internal data also draws on the most recent data available and so multi-year averages cover different years to the OfS APP data set. The SEJD was used to generate additional indicators for access and attainment:

     o proportion of applications (% of applicant population from group) (4-year average covers 2020-21 to 2023-24 as was taken after the UCAS 2023 application deadline)

     o offer rate (proportion of applicants that receive an offer) used to calculate an offer rate gap (the difference between the offer rates of two groups) (4-year average covers 2020-21 to 2023-24)

     o attainment at First (4-year average covers 2019-20 to 2022-23)

     o intersectional analysis undertaken for IMD and TUNDRA (5-year average covers 2019-20 to 2023-24 for access measures; 2018-19 to 2022-23 for continuation and attainment). Where stated significance is noted with $p < .05$.

2. Both sets of data were subject to the same sequenced analytical process:

1. An assessment of indication of risk of the absolute value or gap for NCL 4-year aggregate	Risk rating
2. A comparison of that gap or value with the sector 4-year aggregate	
3. Review of any change in that absolute value or gap over time for NCL	Progress rating
4. Review of any change in that absolute value or gap over time for Sector	

5. 4-year aggregate values were used as the initial step of analysis in order to overcome the issue of small numbers for many of the student groups under consideration and to ensure a robust assessment and prioritisation of overall risk.

6. In assessing our performance in relation to students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds we have used three proxy measures.

   - TUNDRA (measuring rates of participation in higher education)
   - IMD (measuring relative deprivation)
   - FSM eligibility (as a proxy for low income)

7. None are perfect measures but looking at them in combination allows for a more rounded assessment. We have selected FSM eligibility as the indicator to be used in our objectives and targets around socio-

economic disadvantage given it is the best available marker for childhood poverty (*Measuring Disadvantage*, Sutton Trust, May 2021).

8. As ABCS is a new measure, we have focused our analysis on established measures where we feel the data is better understood and where we are more likely to be able to make a meaningful impact. We are committed to closely monitoring this new dataset and during the lifetime of this plan will develop our data analysis around the ABCS characteristics. 32

9. This was then brought together in a single view with a summary analysis and assigned risk and progress ratings for interrogation to identify areas with the greatest indicator of risk for Newcastle both in its own context and in the context of the sector.

Access

Measures of disadvantage (TUNDRA, IMD, FSM eligibility)

10. The proportion of entrants coming to Newcastle from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 or with FSM eligibility is substantially below the sector average.
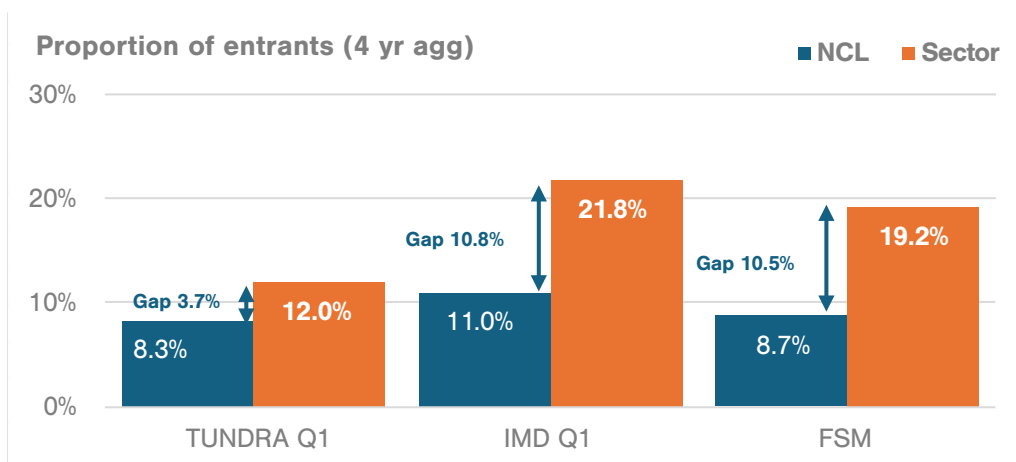

11. The proportion of entrants coming to Newcastle from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 or with FSM eligibility has increased steadily over the most recent six years of data available from the OfS dataset. The sector also shows an increase almost year on year from 2016–17 to 2021–22: 11.5% to 12.3% for TUNDRA Q1 and 19.7% to 22.8% (IMD Q1).

12. However, adding the two most recent years (2022–23 and 2023–24 entrants) from internal records (FSM data only incorporated from 2023–24 entrants onwards), shows a fall back indicating that the more recent boost in entrants from these groups may be primarily a phenomenon of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, this will become more obvious when sector data is released.

Proportion of entrants
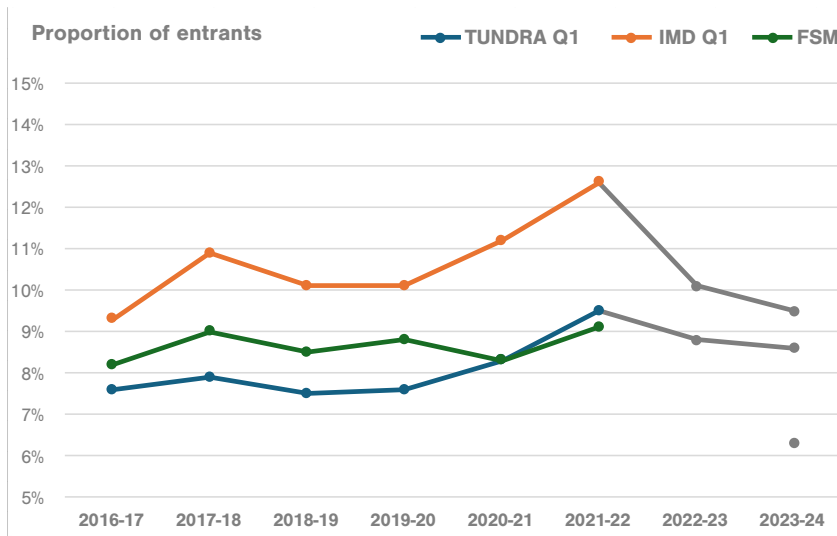
13. Considering this data in our regional context,we recruited 21% of our students in 2022/23 from the North East region which has the second lowest 19-year-old progression rate of all English Regions at 42.5%[2] , and a wider gap in progression between students eligible for FSM and those who are not in the North East in comparison with England overall (29.2% vs 49.4% English average; 21.9% vs 46.7% North East). 33

14. Working back in time in the application and entry cycle we have also examined, using internal data (for which FSM data is not available until 2023-24), the proportion of applicants from these groups and also their likelihood of being made an offer. As this uses internal data there is no sector data for comparison. This analysis shows that the proportion of applications Newcastle receives from applicants from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 is relatively stable over time.
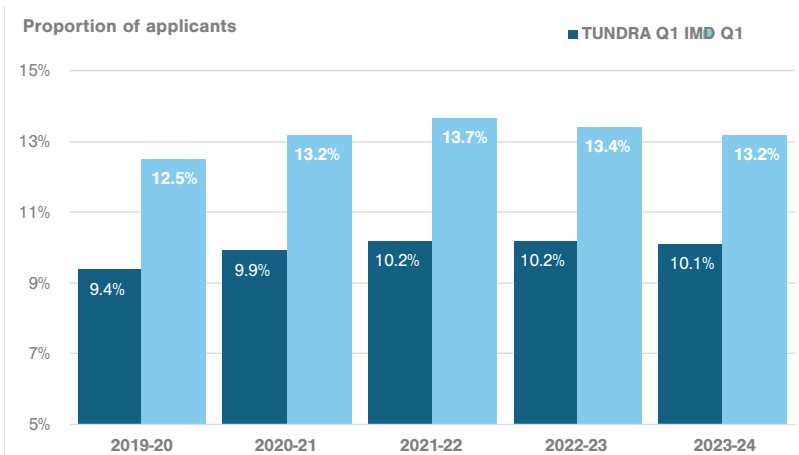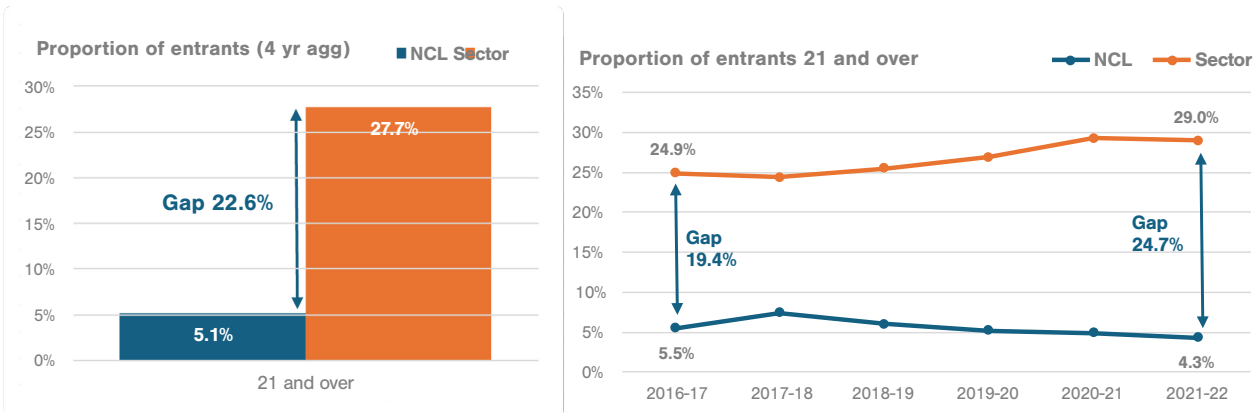

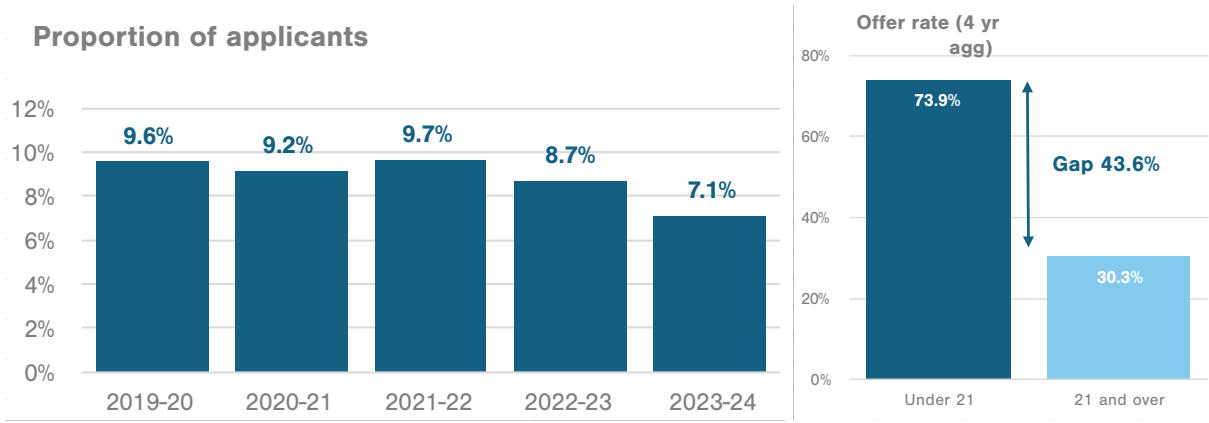Proportion of applicants

Offer rate (4 yr agg)
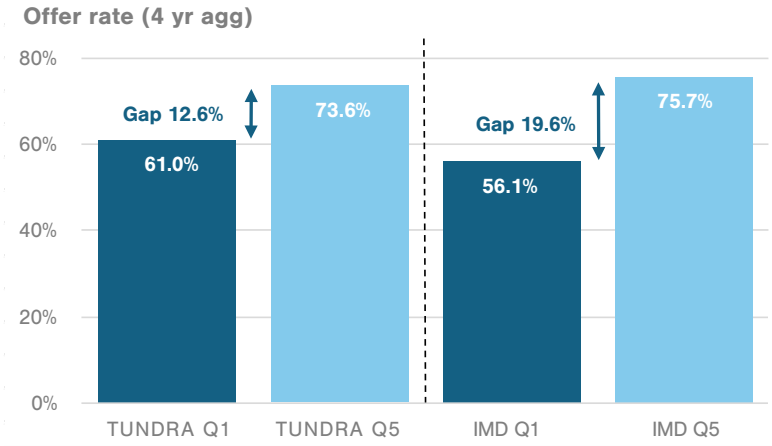
15. The offer rate analysis shows that applicants from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 are less likely than applicants in TUNDRA Q5 and IMD Q5 to receive an offer for a place at Newcastle – with offer rate gaps of 12.6% and 19.6% respectively. We have included a commitment in IS1 Access to a review to understand the reasons why mature applicants (21 and over) and those from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 are less likely to be offered a place on some courses than students from other groups.

Age

16. The proportion of entrants age 21 and over coming to Newcastle is substantially below the sector average with a 22.6% gap. The gap between Newcastle and the sector has been growing in the period covered by the OfS dataset.
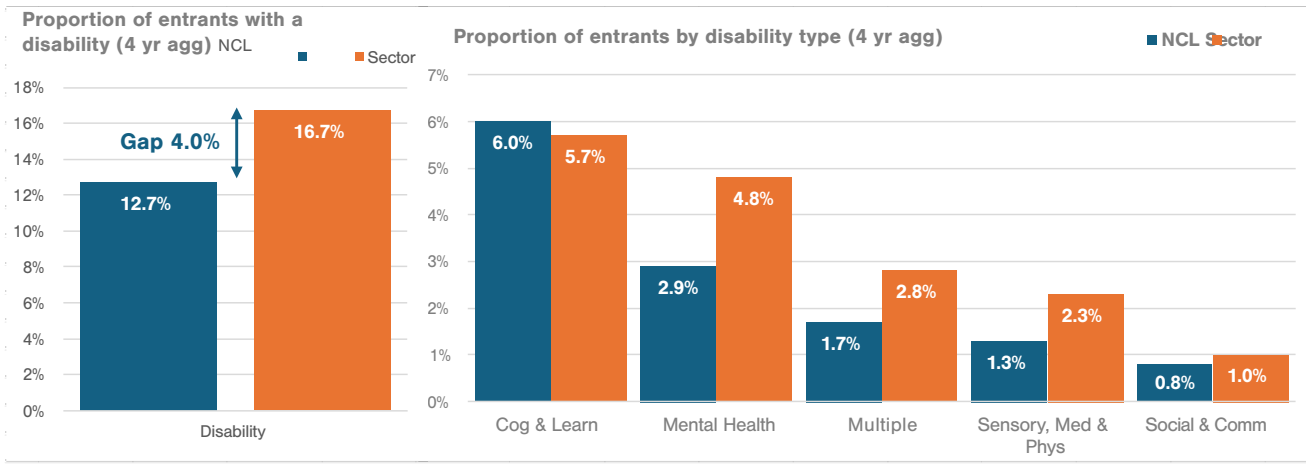

17. The proportion of applicants to Newcastle age 21 and over has declined over time, with the gap with the sector widening. The substantial offer rate gap – of 43.6% – explains the difference in proportion of applicants with proportion of entrants. The reasons for this gap will be explored further as part of our offer-making review.

Proportion of applicants

Year	%
2019-20	9.6%
2020-21	9.2%
2021-22	9.7%
2022-23	8.7%
2023-24	7.1%

Offer rate (4 yr agg)

Under 21: 73.9%
21 and over: 30.3%
Gap 43.6%

Disability

18. Newcastle has a lower proportion of entrants declaring a disability compared with the sector and a different balance of disability types. The proportion of entrants declaring a disability is however trending upwards at Newcastle, closing the gap with the sector – to 1.5% in 2021-22.

Proportion of entrants with a disability (4 yr agg) — NCL / Sector

Disability: NCL 12.7%, Sector 16.7%, Gap 4.0%

Proportion of entrants by disability type (4 yr agg) — NCL / Sector

| Type	NCL	Sector
Cog & Learn	6.0%	5.7%
Mental Health	2.9%	4.8%
Multiple	1.7%	2.8%
Sensory, Med & Phys	1.3%	2.3%
Social & Comm	0.8%	1.0%

19. Across the most recent five years of internal data the proportion of applicants declaring a disability has increased across all disability types, with a notable jump for the 2023-24 academic year.

Proportion of applicants by disability type

■ 2019-20　■ 2020-21　■ 2021-22　■ 2022-23　■ 2023-24
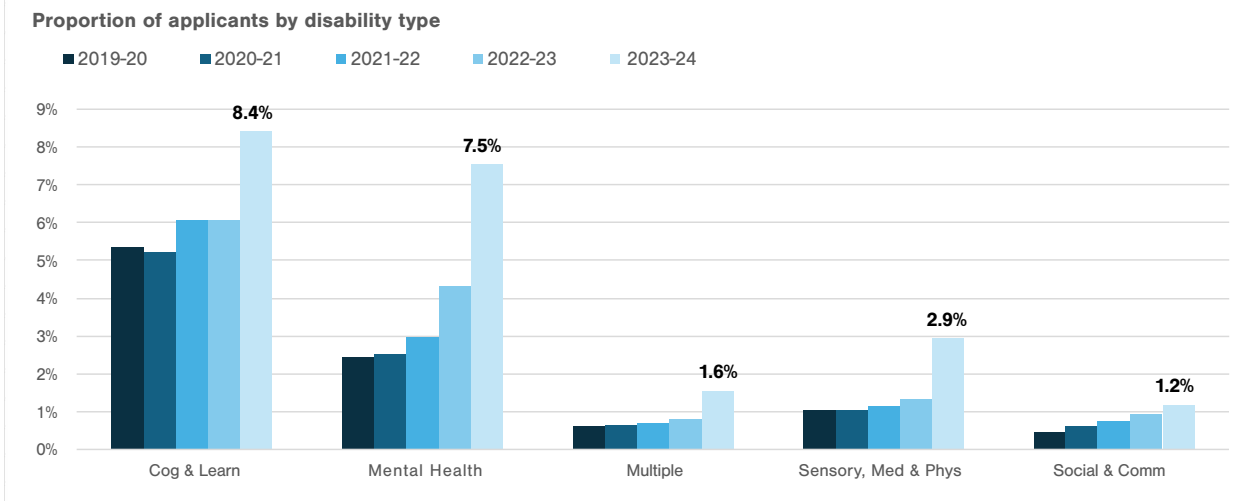
20. Students with certain disability types are less likely to be offered a place at Newcastle. The 4 year average offer rate gap between students who declare a disability and those who don't is 2.1% - but this hides variation between students with different types of disability. The groups of students with the largest offer rate gaps – looking at data for the most recent 4 years combined – are those with Sensory, Medical and Physical disabilities, Multiple disabilities or Mental Health disabilities.

Gaps in offer rates -No Known Disability: Challenge type (4 yr agg)
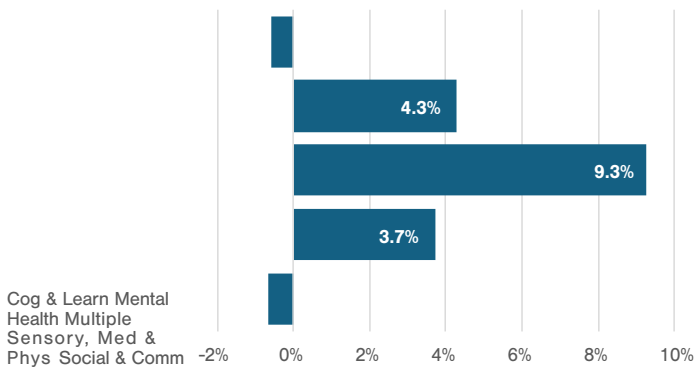

Ethnicity

21. Newcastle has a substantially higher proportion of White entrants than the sector average, with lower proportions of entrants in comparison with the sector across all ethnic groups provided in the OfS data set, with particularly small numbers of Black students.

Proportion of entrants (4 yr agg)
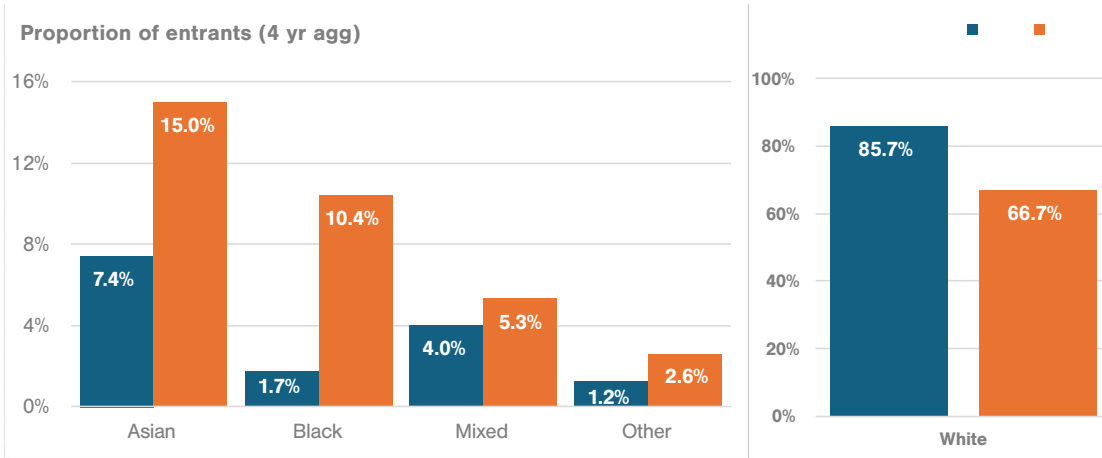
22. Using internal data to show proportion of entrants over time – which also allows us to breakdown the 'Asian' group into 'South and South East Asian' and 'East Asian' – shows some progress in the diversification of Newcastle's student intake – with 15.8% of entering students in 2023-24 being from minoritised ethnic groups.
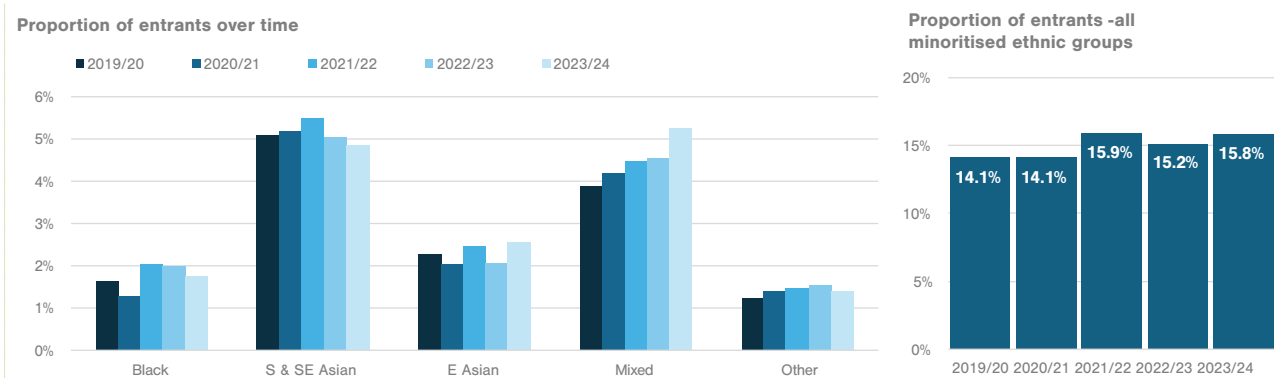
23. The North East of England is one of the least ethnically diverse areas of the UK – with approximately 7% of the population from minoritised ethnic groups (Census 2021) – and this both impacts on the diversity of who we recruit as 21% of our students came from the North East in 2022-23, but may also impact on the attractiveness of the region to students who have grown up in more ethnically diverse areas, particularly students from minoritised ethnic groups.

24. We did not hold data on the ethnicity of our applicants at the time of this analysis, although it is our goal to bring this into our systems, therefore we have been unable to analyse proportion of applicants and offer rate in the same way as we have for other characteristics.

25. Analysis undertaken as part of our preparation for the Race Equality Charter identified that there is a loss of minoritised ethnic applicants between offer received and entrance. We will be investigating this further.

Sex

26. The ratio between male and female students entering studies at Newcastle is more balanced than the sector (Newcastle 52% female, 48% male; sector 57% female, 43% male – OfS 4 year aggregate). There is a small offer rate gap with male students marginally less likely to receive an offer (1.7% (average of 4 most recent years internal data))

Intersectional analysis

27. Intersectional analysis explored the relationship between IMD and TUNDRA and age, ethnicity and sex for access measures using internal data.

   - Age – IMD and TUNDRA show similar patterns. For students under 21 on entry, those in higher quintiles for both IMD and TUNDRA are more likely to apply to and enter the University, this pattern does not hold for students over 21. Younger students are increasingly likely to receive an offer from Q1 (62%) to Q5 (78.5%) with a strong, significant correlation (IMD), whereas the positive correlation between quintile and offer rate is not as strong for students over 21 on entry and is not significant.
   - Ethnicity – For White students there is a significant strong positive correlation between quintile and entry rate (IMD and TUNDRA) - with 5 times as many entrants from Q5 as Q1. We recognise that from national data White Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are substantially impacted in relation to progression to higher education[3]. With the exception of students identified as 'Mixed' for IMD there is negative correlation between quintile and entry rates for minoritised ethnic groups – with lower quintiles making up a larger proportion of the entering population – but this is not significant. For TUNDRA there is a strong significant positive correlation between quintile and entry rates for White, Mixed, Other and S & SE Asian students.
   - Sex – there are no substantial differences between males and females in terms of application, offer or entry by IMD or TUNDRA. For both sexes higher quintiles are more likely to access the University and be offered a place.

| Summary indicators of risk - Access	
Student groups	**Indicator**
Students from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 and FSM **Students 21 and over on entry** **All minoritised ethnic groups (particularly Black and Asian)**	Lower proportion of applicants and/or entrants
Students from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 **Students 21 and over on entry** Students with some disabilities (Sensory, medical and physical disabilities, Multiple disabilities, or Mental health conditions)	Lower rates of offers made

28. Those student groups highlighted in bold are represented in our final set of risks to equal opportunity contained within the plan. In this case due to smaller gaps or values indicating risk, in comparison with other student groups, and the fact that the proportion of applicants in these groups is similar to the sector, students with some disabilities (Sensory, Medical and Physical disabilities, Multiple disabilities or Mental Health disabilities) have not been included in our final set of risks. They will, however, be included in our wider review of offer making to be undertaken in the light of this assessment of performance.

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[3] White students who are left behind: the importance of place - Office for Students
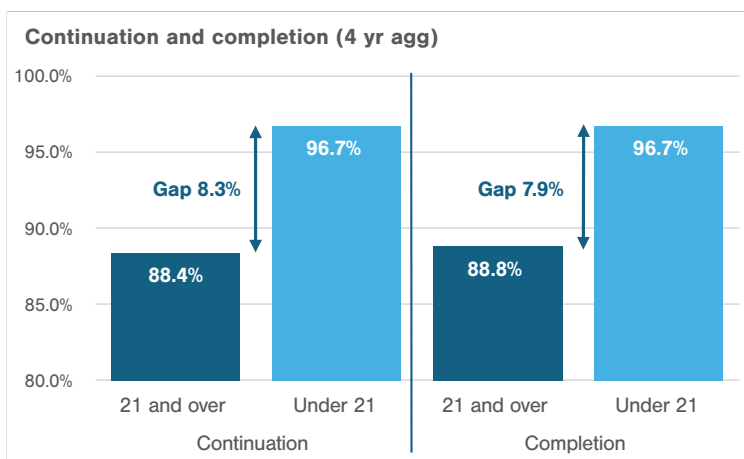
Continuation and completion

Measures of disadvantage (TUNDRA, IMD, FSM)

29. Overall continuation and completion rates for students at Newcastle from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 or with FSM eligibility are high, and higher than the sector average, but they are lower than for students in comparator groups meaning that students in these groups are less likely to continue their course after the first year and complete their programme in a timely manner.

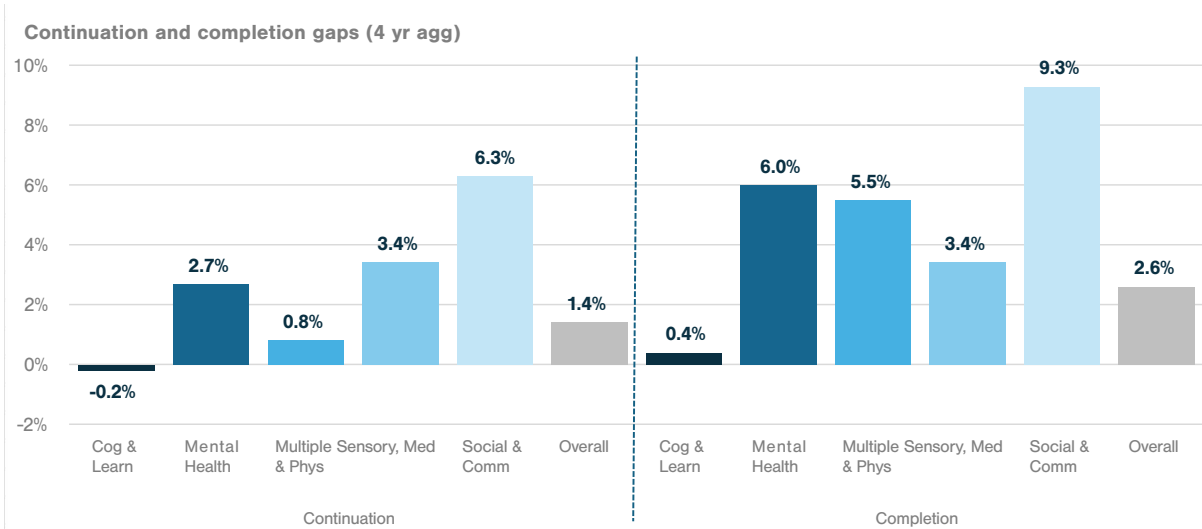**Continuation and completion gaps (4 yr agg)**
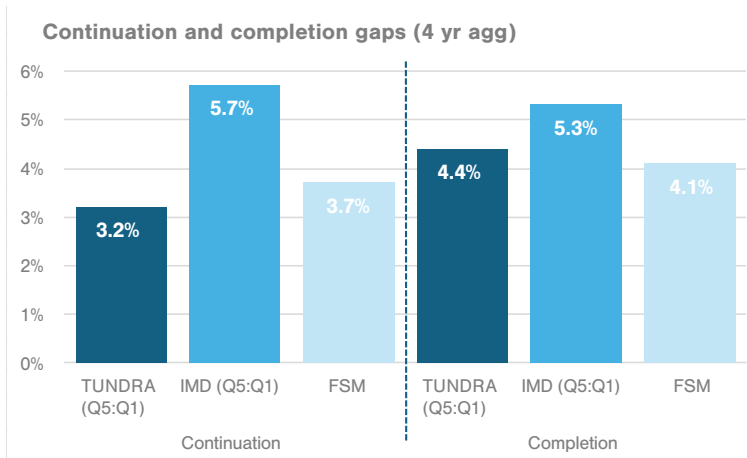
Age

30. As with measures of disadvantage, in the wider context of high continuation and completion rates, students age 21 or over on entry are less likely to continue their programme or complete it than students under 21. Gaps at Newcastle are similar to the sector with no clear change over time.

Continuation and completion (4 yr agg)

Disability

31. As with other student groups, continuation and completion rates for students with disabilities are high overall and the overall gaps between students with disabilities and those who do not declare a disability are small (4 yr agg - 1.4% gap for continuation, 2.6% gap for completion). But the large group of students with cognitive or learning difficulties mask, within the average, gaps for other disability types. Students with

mental health conditions have a 6.0% completion gap (4 yr agg), although this has actually reduced in recent years from 8.7% (2014-15 starters) to 2.4% (2017-18 starters) due to an underlying rise in completion rates. For other disability types these indicators relate to sometimes very small numbers of students. This is particularly true for the gaps identified for students with a social or communication impairment.

Continuation and completion gaps (4 yr agg)

Ethnicity

32. As with other student groups, continuation and completion rates for students from minoritised ethnic groups are high overall in comparison with the sector. Whilst the chart below shows some gaps across continuation and completion, analysis of ethnicity data in relation to continuation and completion is difficult due to the underlying small numbers of students in these groups.

Continuation and completion gaps (4 yr agg)
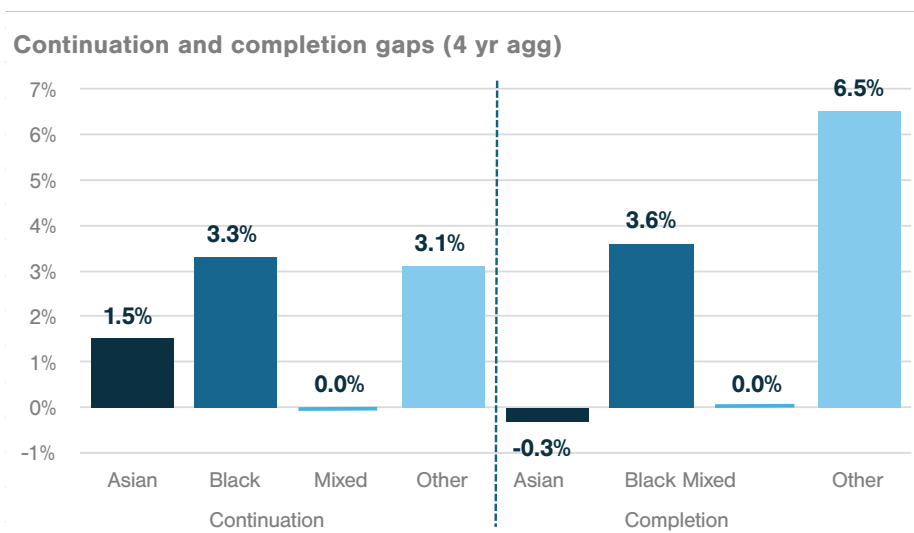
Sex

33. There are marginal gaps between continuation and complete rates for male and female students – with male students slightly less likely to continue and complete (gaps of 1.9% and 1.8% respectively (OfS 4 yr aggregate)). 41

Intersectional analysis

34. Intersectional analysis examined any relationship between IMD and TUNDRA and age, ethnicity and sex.

   - Age – For students age 21 and under on entry there is a strong significant positive correlation between continuation and quintile (IMD and TUNDRA) – with students in higher quintiles being more likely to continue from Year 1 to Year 2. This pattern is much weaker for students age 21 and over on entry.

   - Ethnicity – For IMD White students there is a strong significant positive correlation between quintile and continuation - Q1 89.7% to Q5 95.4%. There is no significant correlation between quintile and continuation for minoritised ethnic students. The same pattern is observed for TUNDRA.

   - Sex – For IMD there is a strong significant positive correlation between quintile and continuation for both male and female students. For TUNDRA there is a correlation for both male and female but this is only significant for female students. **Summary indicators of risk – Continuation & Completion**

Student groups	Indicator
Students from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 and FSM **Students 21 and over on entry Students from some disabilities (particularly Mental health conditions, Other or multiple impairments, Sensory, medical and physical disabilities,** or Social or communication impairments**)** **Students from some minoritised ethnic groups (Black and Other)**	Lower proportion of students continuing and/or completing their programme

35. Students with Social or communication impairments are included in the final list of risks under a separate risk, as discussed further in paragraph 53.

Attainment

Measures of disadvantage (TUNDRA, IMD, FSM)

36. The OfS data set (for 1_{st} & 2:1 showing Newcastle and sector) and our internal data (for 1_{st}, showing Newcastle only) shows awarding gaps particularly for IMD at 1_{st} & 2:1, and TUNDRA at 1_{st}. Time series data for all of these indicators shows great variability from year to year.

Awarding gaps -1st & 2:1 (4 yr agg)

Awarding gaps -1st (4 yr agg)
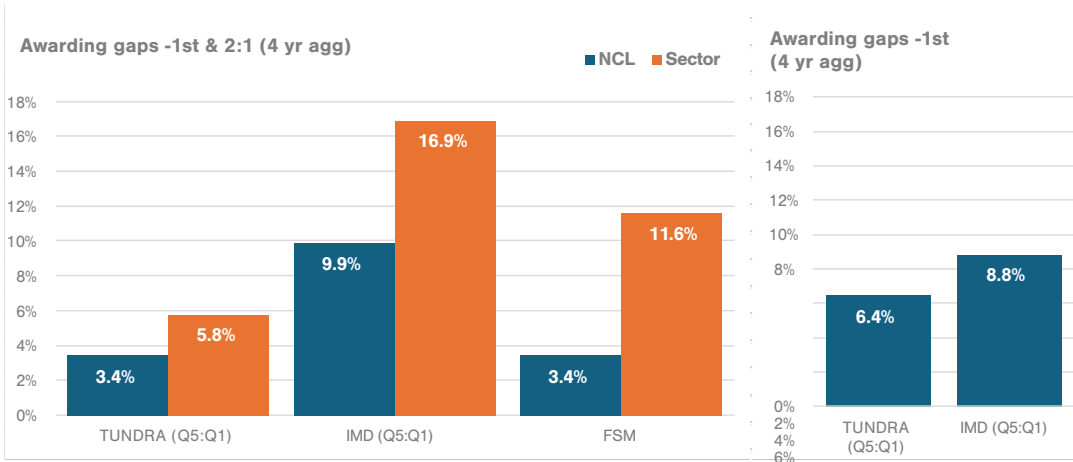
Age

37. The OfS data set (for 1st & 2:1 showing Newcastle and sector) shows awarding gaps between students under 21 on entry and those 21 and over. The gap is not present when looking only a 1st class degrees (-0.2% internal 4 yr aggregate).

Awarding gap - 1st & 2:1 (4 yr agg)
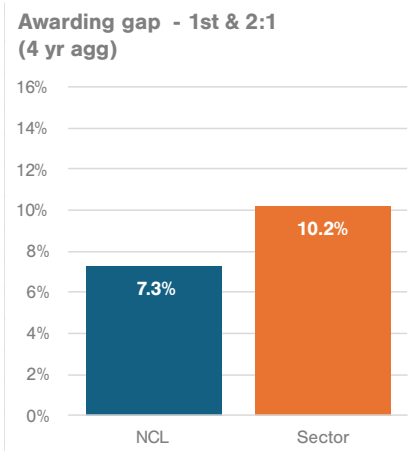
Disability

38. Overall, there is a very small awarding gap at 1st and 2:1 between students with a disability and those with no known disability (OfS data set). Broken down by disability type there are some small gaps but with the caveat that there are relatively small numbers of students in these groups even using aggregated data. There is 15% awarding gap for students with social or communication impairment but this is a very small group of students.

42

Awarding gap 1st & 2:1 (4 yr agg)   ■ NCL ■ Sector

	Cog & Learn	Mental Health	Multiple	Sensory, Med & Phys	Social & Comm	Overall
NCL	2.6%	0.1%	3.3%	-3.4%	15.0%	1.8%
Sector	2.1%	-0.5%	0.2%	0.7%	5.2%	0.0%
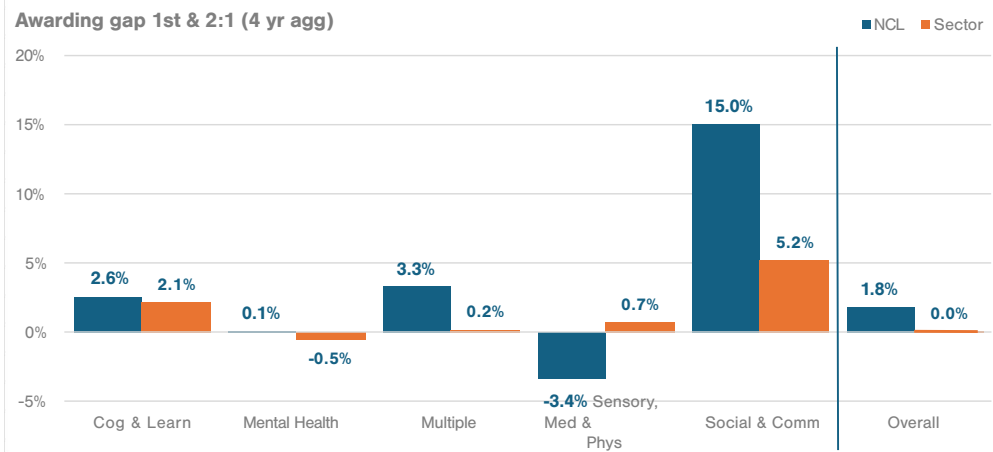
39. Awarding gaps are noticeable at 1st class degree level for some disability types for students with: Cognitive and learning difficulties, Sensory, medical or physical impairments and Social or communication impairments.

Awarding gap 1st (4 yr agg)   ■ NCL

	Cog & Learn	Mental Health	Multiple	Sensory, Med & Phys	Social & Comm	Overall
NCL	4.1%	-1.2%	-0.4%	2.9%	4.2%	1.5%
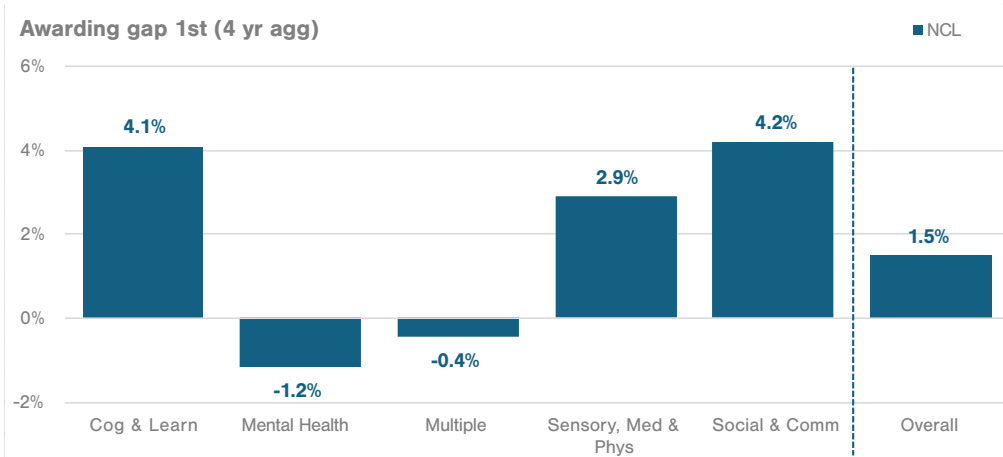
Ethnicity

40. The OfS data set (for 1st & 2:1 showing Newcastle and sector) and our internal data (for 1st, showing Newcastle only) shows awarding gaps for students from all minoritised ethnic groups. Time series data for all of these indicators shows great variability from year to year.

Awarding gap -1st & 2:1 (4 yr agg) NCL ■ Sector

Asian: NCL 8.7%, Sector 8.6%
Black: NCL 14.1%, Sector 20.2%
Mixed: NCL 4.9%, Sector 3.8%
Other: NCL 16.0%, Sector 11.1%

Awarding gaps -1st (4 yr agg)

Black: 13.8%
E Asian: 9.3%
S & SE Asian: 3.2%
Mixed: 4.2%
Other: 9.4%
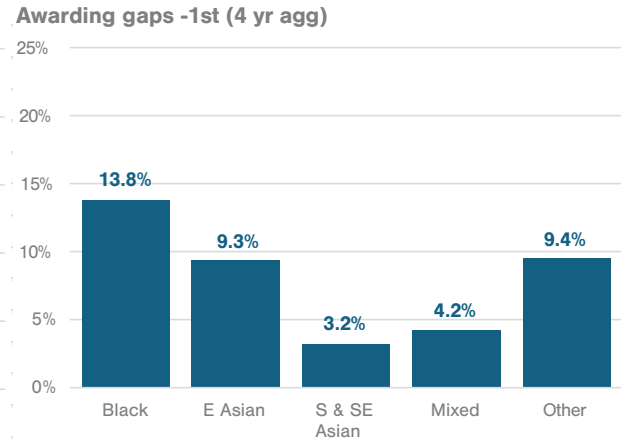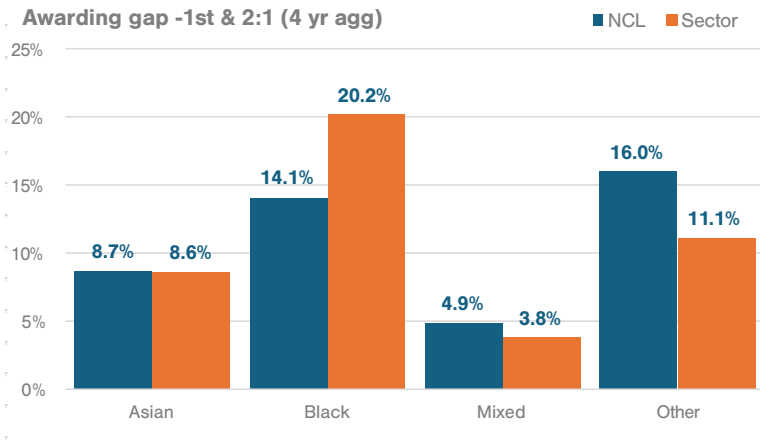
Sex

41. There are gaps between male and female students in awarding patterns for both 1st & 2:1 and 1st class degrees only – with male students less likely to be awarded a 1st and a 1st & 2:1.
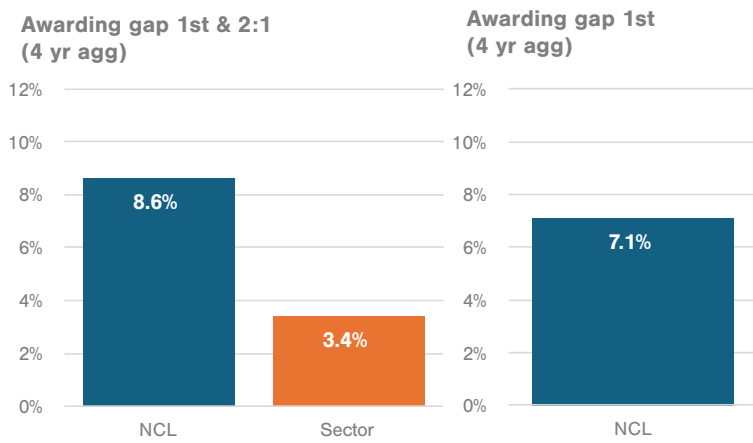
Awarding gap 1st & 2:1 (4 yr agg)

NCL: 8.6%
Sector: 3.4%

Awarding gap 1st (4 yr agg)

NCL: 7.1%

Summary indicators of risk – Attainment	
Student groups	**Indicator**
Students from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 **Students 21 and over on entry** **Students with some disabilities (Cognitive and learning difficulties, Sensory, Medical and Physical disabilities, Social or communication impairments)** **Students from minoritised ethnic groups** Male students	Lower proportion of students attaining 'good degrees' (1st & 2:1) and/or 1st class degrees

42. Students with Social or communication impairment are included in the final list of risks under a separate risk, as discussed further in paragraph 53.

43. We have decided not to take the identified male awarding gap through to our final list of risks included within the plan. Whilst there is an awarding gap similar in scale to other student groups, over the student lifecycle our analysis does not show substantial risks to opportunities for males, particularly in relation to progression where male students have a higher rate of positive outcomes than female students. Male students are still likely to benefit from interventions to address the underlying risks that have been identified as contributing to our awarding gaps.
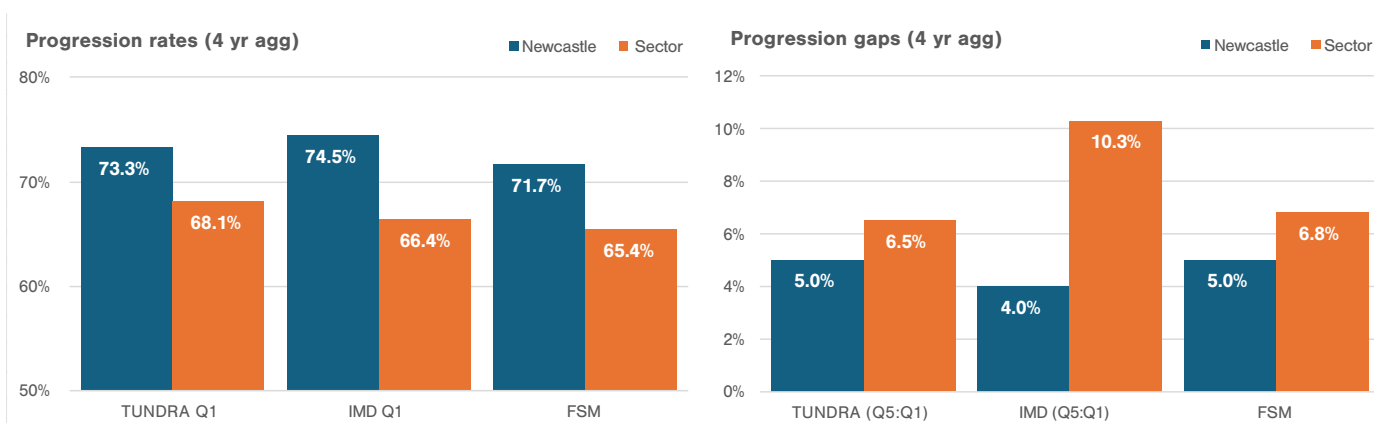
Intersectional analysis

44. Intersectional analysis examined any relationship between IMD and TUNDRA and age, ethnicity and sex.

- Age – across students under age 21 on entry and those over for both IMD and TUNDRA and for attainment at 1st and 1st & 2:1 there is a strong positive correlation between quintile and attainment (significant except for under 21 attainment at 1st).
- Ethnicity – there is a strong significant positive correlation between quintile and attainment at 1st and 1st & 2:1 for White students (TUNDRA at 1st is not significant). The relationship for minoritised ethnic students is much less clear with some positive correlation but not significant.
- Sex – there is a strong significant (except for male attainment at 1st) positive correlation between IMD quintile and attainment at 1st and 1st & 2:1 for both male and female students. For TUNDRA the relationship varies between male and female, with a strong significant positive correlation for male students and attainment at 1st and 1st & 2:1, and a weaker negative (but not significant) correlation for female students.

Progression

Measures of disadvantage (TUNDRA, IMD, FSM)

45. Progression to positive outcomes rates at Newcastle are higher across all measures of disadvantage than the sector average, but there are still gaps in progression for students across all measures although these are smaller than the sector average. Gaps vary substantially from year to year with no clear trend.

Progression rates (4 yr agg) ■ Newcastle ■ Sector

	Newcastle	Sector
TUNDRA Q1	73.3%	68.1%
IMD Q1	74.5%	66.4%
FSM	71.7%	65.4%

Progression gaps (4 yr agg) ■ Newcastle ■ Sector

	Newcastle	Sector
TUNDRA (Q5:Q1)	5.0%	6.5%
IMD (Q5:Q1)	4.0%	10.3%
FSM	5.0%	6.8%

Age

46. Noting the gaps for students age 21 and over on entry in the other lifecycle stages these gaps are reversed for progression to positive outcomes with students age 21 or over on entry having a higher rate of positive

progression than students under 21 on entry – with a negative gap of -6.3% for the four years of OfS data. While the negative gap has reduced slightly over the four years of available this change is not significant.

Progression rates (4 yr agg)   ■ NCL ■ Sector

Bar chart showing progression rates for two age groups:
- 21 and over: NCL 83.8%, Sector 72.8%
- Under 21: NCL 77.5%, Sector 72.5%
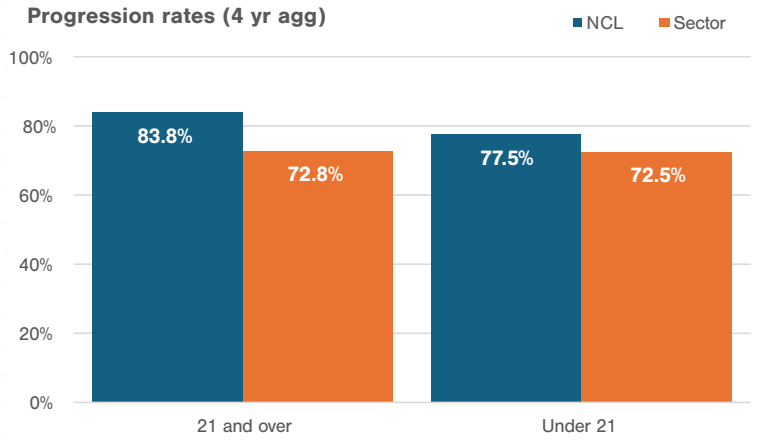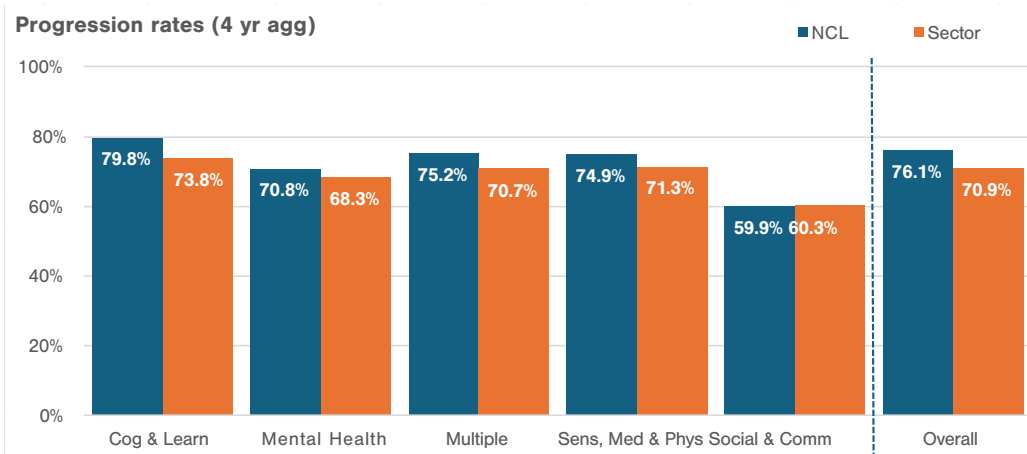
Disability

47. Positive progression rates across all disability types and for disabled students overall exceed those for the sector.

Progression rates (4 yr agg)   ■ NCL ■ Sector

Bar chart showing progression rates by disability type:
- Cog & Learn: NCL 79.8%, Sector 73.8%
- Mental Health: NCL 70.8%, Sector 68.3%
- Multiple: NCL 75.2%, Sector 70.7%
- Sens, Med & Phys: NCL 74.9%, Sector 71.3%
- Social & Comm: NCL 59.9%, Sector 60.3%
- Overall: NCL 76.1%, Sector 70.9%

48. There are substantial gaps in positive progression rates between students with disabilities and those without. These vary by disability type with students declaring a mental health condition or a social or communication impairment showing the largest gaps in positive progression (noting the latter group is very small).

Progression gaps (4 yr agg)
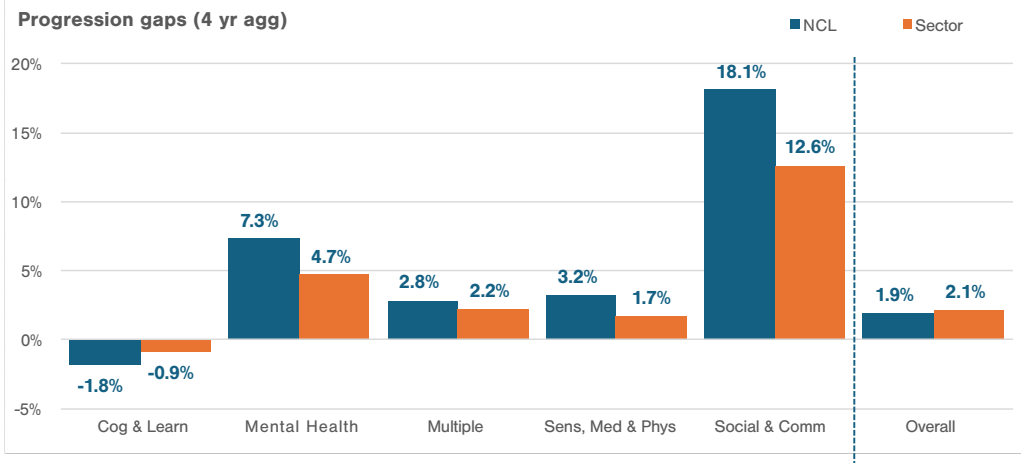
Ethnicity

49. Rates of progression to positive outcomes for students from all minoritised ethnic backgrounds exceed those for the sector and these rates exceed those for White students for those from Asian or Black minoritised ethnic backgrounds, with very small gaps for other groups.

Progression rates (4 yr agg)

Progression gaps (4yr agg)
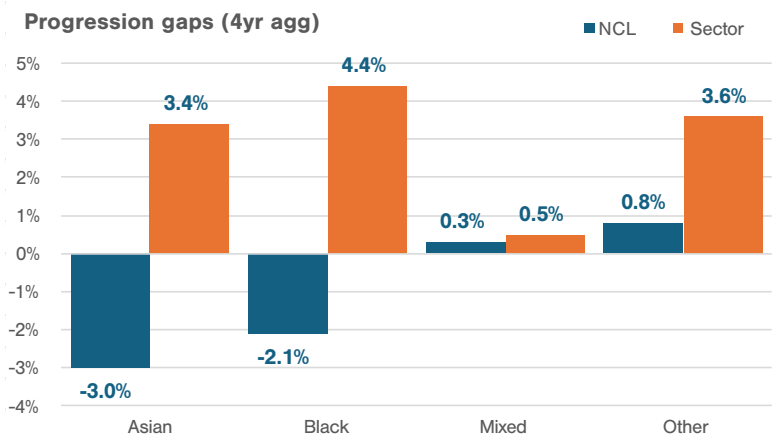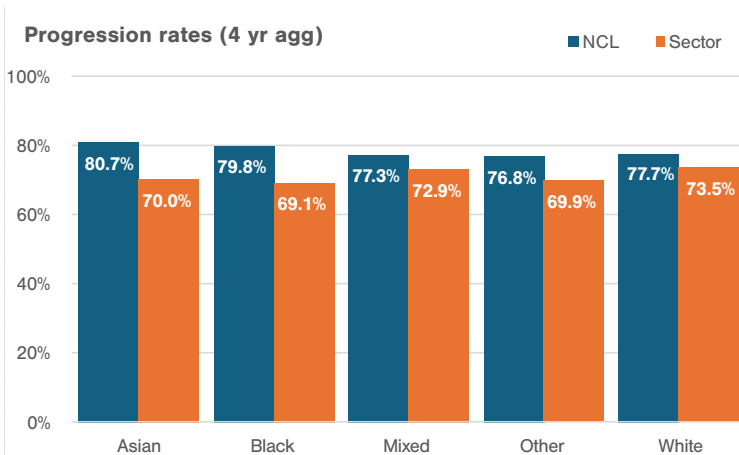
Sex

50. Progression rates for male and female students exceed the sector average and are similar, although with the pattern reversed for other lifecycle stages, with male students rates of positive progression exceeding female students by 2.4% . 48 **Summary indicators of risk – Progression**

Student groups	Indicator
Students from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 and FSM Students with some disabilities (Mental health, social or communication impairment**)**	Lower proportion of students progressing to positive graduate outcomes

51. Students with Social or communication impairment are included in the final list of risks under a separate risk, as discussed further in paragraph 53.

Summary indicators of risk by lifecycle stage

	Indicator	Student groups
Access	Lower proportion of applicants and/or entrants Lower rates of offers made	**Students from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 and FSM Students 21 and over on entry All minoritised ethnic groups (particularly Black and Asian) Students from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1 Students 21 and over on entry** Students with some disabilities (Sensory, Medical and Physical disabilities, Multiple disabilities, or Mental Health disabilities)
Continuation & Completion	Lower proportion of students continuing and/or completing their programme	**Students from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 and FSM Students 21 and over on entry Students from some disabilities (particularly Mental health conditions, Other or Multiple impairments, Sensory, Medical and Physical disabilities,** or Social or communication impairments**) Students from some minoritised ethnic groups (Black and Other)**

Attainment	Lower proportion of students attaining 'good degrees' (1st & 2:1) and/or 1st class degrees	**Students from TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1** **Students 21 and over on entry** **Students with some disabilities (Cognitive and learning difficulties, Sensory, Medical and Physical disabilities,** Social or communication impairments**) Students from minoritised ethnic groups** Male students
Progression	Lower proportion of students progressing to positive graduate outcomes	**Students from TUNDRA Q1, IMD Q1 and FSM Students with some disabilities (Mental health,** Social or communication impairments**)**

52. Student groups highlighted in bold will be included in the final list of risks in the plan, noting the separate consideration of students with social or communication impairments in paragraph 53.

Summary indicators of risk by high level student group

Student groups	Access (Population)	Access (Offer rate)	Continuation & Completion	Attainment	Progression
Students who are socio-economically disadvantaged	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Students age 21 and over on entry	☑	☑	☑	☑	
Students with a disability		☑ (greyed)	☑	☑	☑
Students from minoritised ethnic groups	☑		☑	☑	
Male students				☑ (greyed)	

53. Student groups indicated with a greyed tick mark will not be included in the final list of risks in the plan

Other student groups with equality of opportunity risks

54. Some indications of risk appear for students with social or communication impairments across continuation, completion, attainment, and progression but the numbers of students in this group and so represented in the data are very small making the indication of risk uncertain based solely on the core OfS and internal

data. However these do correlate with gaps present at sector level therefore we consider them a valid indication of risk for Newcastle.

55. Numbers of care experienced and estranged students are too small in our data for meaningful analysis but national data and analysis clearly identifies care experienced and estranged students as experiencing significant risks to equality of opportunity in terms of accessing, succeeding in and progressing successfully from higher education.[4] [5] The University has made a commitment to support care experienced and estranged students and we consider the national data to provide an indication of risk for this group.

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[4] Bayfield, H and Smith, L (2024) The bridge between school and uni, that's the bit that's missing": improving access to higher education for care-experienced students. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, Volume 26, Number 1, March 2024, pp. 191-200(10). https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.26.1.191

[5] Spacey, R, Sanderson, R, Bland B (2024) Support for estranged students in UK Higher Education: An analysis of the Stand Alone Pledge. In: IMPact e-journal of Higher Education Research Volume 6(2) 2023. http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10462233

Annex B: Rationale and evidence

Intervention strategy 1: Access to higher education

Summary of evidence base and rationale: A review of the evaluation findings from existing activities, which includes participant feedback and student ambassadors, alongside consultation with schools/colleges and teachers underpins our approach. Furthermore, for over 10 years we have collected participant data and tracked their outcomes through the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) database, and this research is also fundamental to our approach. Research from the TASO Evidence Toolkit has also helped to inform our intervention strategy. We developed all our intervention strategies following consultation with the student body, including the Student Consultation Group and representatives from the Students Union. In 2028-29 we will publish a summary report of our overall findings from this intervention strategy, and these findings will be used to inform future intervention strategies.

Addressing risk(s) to equality of opportunity:

Knowledge and skills

Students may not have the equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto HE courses, particularly at a high tariff research-intensive university, that match their expectations and ambitions.

Information and guidance

Students may not have equal access to provision that supports ambition and helps them to make informed choices by developing an understanding of the expectations of a research-intensive institution.

Perceptions and expectations of HE

As a result of their lived experience of higher education students may not feel able to or be supported to apply to higher education, particularly to a research-intensive university, despite being qualified

IS1.1 Supported entry routes	
We acknowledge that evidence for the wider impact of multi-intervention outreach on participation in HE is inconclusive, particularly in the UK (TASO Evidence Toolkit) but that these approaches are associated with positive outcomes for students and suggests that multi-intervention programmes are likely to have a bigger impact than other approaches on their own. A quasi-experimental evaluation of the UniConnect multi-intervention outreach programme also showed that engagement with the intervention was associated with a	Burgess, A.P., Horton, M.S. and Moores, E. (2021) Optimising the impact of a multi-intervention outreach programme on progression to higher education:

greater likelihood of achieving a place at HE (Burgess et al. 2021). The study also found that summer schools and combinations of information, campus visits and master classes were most effective for progression to HE.

PARTNERS

Our PARTNERS Supported Entry Route is a multi-intervention programme which is an integral part of the University's commitment to social mobility. The Programme offers support and opportunities to help young people from under-represented groups in higher education have a successful experience through application, enrolment and study. These include a reduced offer of up to three grades below standard entry requirements with successful completion of the PARTNERS Academic Summer School (PASS); the development of academic knowledge in their chosen subject area and the skills necessary for study and life at University; cultivating networks, increasing confidence and continued support once they enter the University. The majority of PARTNERS applicants are consistently from the North East, with the remaining applicants spread across the UK with clusters in Yorkshire, the North West and London. Eligibility criteria for PARTNERS is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that we are targeting key underrepresented groups including, FSM eligibility, minoritised ethnic groups, care experienced students.

Applications to PARTNERS has increased by 53% since 2019 and in September 2023 over 1000 PARTNERS students registered at Newcastle University. Our evidence also shows that PARTNERS students have been more likely to remain on their course than other WP students in each of the last three years (21-22, 20-21, 19-20).

Realising Opportunities

See 'Approach to Collaboration' below

Sutton Trust pathways

Working with the Sutton Trust, activities target students interested in studying Medicine with a programme of activities over the two years of A-level study including: skill workshops and information sessions, mentoring opportunities, networking events with universities and leading professionals, and a summer residential/conference.

recommendations for future practice and research. Heliyon, 7(7), p.e07518

TASO (2023) Summary report: Evaluating multi-intervention outreach and mentoring programmes. TASO.

TASO, 'Multi-intervention outreach', *Evidence Toolkit*, Accessed 23 April 2024.

IS1.2 Contextual admissions

Contextual admissions allow for students' circumstances to be taken into account in the admissions process for those candidates that are not engaged with a supported entry route. Our Undergraduate Admissions Team use certain contextual data from the UCAS application form, to take into account challenges that an applicant may have faced in their education and the potential effect this may have had on their qualifications.

Students from less advantaged backgrounds are significantly less likely to meet the high academic requirements set by higher tariff providers (Boliver, V., S. Gorard & Siddiqui, N (2019). Findings from our own analysis shows that there are a significant number of students who would never have received an offer from Newcastle if contextual admissions was not in place.

With the introduction of FSM as an eligibility criterion, we intend to carry out further research in 2025/26 into the impact of our contextual admissions programme on student decision making, retention and student outcomes.

Boliver, V., S. Gorard & Siddiqui, N (2019) Using contextualised admissions to widen access to higher education: A guide to the evidence base. TASO.

IS1.3 Widening access

Addressing the underlying risk of information and guidance (IAG) as part of Newcastle's outreach programme, light-touch IAG is included throughout to support students to make informed decisions about their future. Existing evidence suggests that light-touch information, advice and guidance (IAG) can have a small positive impact on students' aspirations/attitudes, and sometimes on HE participation (Silva et al 2016) however, financial information alone may be ineffective.

The University's Outreach Targeting strategy is used to support our outreach delivery, ensuring that activities reach at-risk student groups. Schools and colleges are targeted for outreach provision using a basket of indicators, including FSM, ethnicity of student population, attainment and postcode. Outreach provision includes on-campus and off-campus aspiration-supporting activities

The programme covers a range of key HE topics including finance, HE options, and study skills, these are delivered in different formats and to small groups, whole classes or entire year groups. Our outreach programme is progressive and also runs alongside more intensive outreach, including summer schools. All our sessions are aligned with a number of benchmarks which include Gatsby, the National Curriculum and the NERUPI Framework.

Findings from our own evaluation has shown a positive impact of our outreach activity on progression to HE.

Silva, A. S., Sanders, M., & Chonaire, A. N. (2016). Does the heart rule the head? Economic and emotional incentives for university attendance. Behavioural Insight Team.

IS 1.4 Attainment raising

One key aspect of mitigating risks to equality of opportunity around access is supporting pre-16 attainment, addressing the underlying risk of knowledge and skills.

The Education Endowment Foundation has reviewed 123 studies on tutoring delivered one-to-one (EEF, 2021a) and 62 studies on tutoring delivered in small groups (EEF, 2021b). They found that both approaches are effective for attainment-raising, delivering four to five additional months progress on average.

Further Maths Teaching Centre

Newcastle University offers Further Maths AS/A Level teaching to local state school students to support students' attainment in Maths and their progression to HE. The key aim of the Further Maths Teaching Centre has been to improve access to high quality provision of Further Maths AS and A-level, specifically for students from North East schools where this is not currently available.

Primary Literacy Programme

At primary and secondary-school age, a high proportion of school students eligible for Free School Meals and/or Pupil Premium have lower Maths grades than their peers, and/or a reading age which is lower than the average for their chronological age. The consequent decrease in opportunities to access learning materials across the curriculum means there is correlation between student reading ability and eventual performance across all subjects at GCSE, including Maths and Science (Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie, 2000).

This programme offers targeted support to Year 6 pupils to raise attainment in literacy. Pupils are assigned a 'Reading Mentor' who will be a current Newcastle University student, meeting for an hour each week for up to 8 sessions. Pupils take part in a Celebration Event at the end of the Programme, which includes a visit to Newcastle University, taking part in Higher Education-related activities, and a mock 'graduation ceremony'.

Through this series of structured interventions, pupils are encouraged to engage with age-appropriate books, complete activity worksheets and interact with their student mentors, with the ultimate aims of increasing individual reading ages, and promoting confidence and a positive attitude towards reading and literacy.

For the 2022-23 academic year there was an increase in all pupils' reading ages following our intervention. On average over the two pupil groups, there was a 9.85 month increase in reading age, with two students seeing an improvement of their reading age by 2 years or more following testing at the start and end of the Programme. Accelerated Reader tests are taken in school at the start and end of each Reading Group cycle. 17/21 pupils felt that their reading level was excellent or good, demonstrating the increased confidence the programme provided students. The remaining 3 pupils thought their reading level was average. Additionally,

Education Endowment Foundation (2021) Mentoring | EEF

TASO, Typology of attainment-raising activities conducted by HEPs: rapid Evidence Review (2022)

Baker, L., Guthrie, J. T., Dreher, M., J. (2000). Engaging Young Readers: Promoting Achievement and Motivation

TASO, 'Tutoring (pre-entry)', *Evidence Toolkit*, Accessed 23 April 2024.

NERUPI Framework. Accessed 24 April 2024.

RENAISI (2019) Understanding IntoUniversity's impact on attainment.

The Brilliant Club (2023a) Research Note: The Scholars Programme and Raising Attainment.

The Brilliant Club (2023b) The Scholars Programme: Evaluation Update 2022/23.

The Brilliant Club (2023c) The Scholars Programme: Theory of Change.

17/21 students stated they would like to go to university in the future. Although the primary aim of the programme is to support pupils reading attainment, our secondary aims as part of the NERUPI Framework Level Zero include allowing them to experience a positive introduction to higher education and to discover what it's like to be a university student.

IntoUniversity academic support

Developed as part of the Collaborative Newcastle Universities Agreement (CNUA), the IntoUniversity Centre, in partnership with Northumbria University and IntoUniversity opened in the East End of Newcastle in October 2021. The Centre delivers free additional and long-term after-school educational support to students aged 7-18, providing aspiration-building workshops and a Mentoring programme with current university students and professionals. Supporting raised attainment is at the centre of IntoUniversity's approach and programme offer, alongside work that supports Higher Education aspiration, soft skills development and careers education.

In 2022-23, the Centre worked with 1283 unique students in total, with 670 students being from primary and 613 from secondary. In total, there have been 1531 unique students engaged with since the Centre opened. The average progression rate for the Centre is 74%, up from 67% in 2021-22, compared with the local average of 12% - 62% higher than the average.

RENAISI (2019) explored the impact that IntoUniversity has on the attainment of the students they support. The research involved engaging with over 300 people across eight IntoUniversity centres, including 62 young people, parents, teachers, IntoUniversity staff and volunteers, and other local stakeholders. The research found that 'IntoUniversity delivers a holistic and supportive programme and can be confident that there are many ways in which this supports increased attainment.'

The University has committed to expanding this successful partnership with a new IntoUniversity centre to open in the region in January 2025.

Uniconnect Student Tutoring

See 'Approach to Collaboration' below.

The Brilliant Club Scholars Programme

We work with The Brilliant Club to deliver the Scholars Programme which supports students from less advantaged backgrounds to secure a place at a competitive university. PhD tutors share their subject knowledge and passion for learning with small groups of pupils aged 8-18. The programme is available to non-selective state schools across the UK and targets students eligible for Pupil Premium. It is structured around seven tutorials, and pupils also attend a Graduation Event at a partner university to speak with current

undergraduates and learn about university life. It helps them to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to secure a place at a competitive university.

Research using data from the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) has shown that The Scholars Programme has a positive impact on GCSE attainment (The Brilliant Club (2023a)). The Brilliant Club has worked with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to independently evaluate the impact of the Scholars Programme on progression to HE (The Brilliant Club (2023b)). Findings suggest that Year 12 students who complete The Scholars Programme are statistically significantly more likely to apply and progress to a competitive university than students from similar backgrounds.

For the 2022 university intake, 185 Scholars Programme graduates applied to Newcastle University, 165 received offers and 45 accepted. Additionally, since 2018, 130 students who worked with a tutor from Newcastle University or attended a Scholars Programme Event at the university have been tracked by HEAT into university, with 25 progressing to Newcastle.

IS 1.5 Mentoring

The TASO Evidence Toolkit states that there is evidence from the UK which suggest that mentoring type interventions are associated with an increase in students' attitudes/aspirations and in some cases attainment (2022). In 2023-24 Newcastle University's Student Recruitment Team delivered a pilot programme in collaboration with Insight Charity to undertake online mentoring for Year 12 Black heritage students from across the UK. Mentoring culminates in an on-campus event which introduces students to university life. The programme successfully paired 17 mentees with 10 student mentors from various subject areas. In addition to ethnicity, the programme targets pupils with other Widening Participation characteristics. Overall, the mentees successfully completed the programme with a slight increase in their motivation and preparedness to apply to higher tariff institutions. Furthermore, there was a significant improvement in mentees' confidence in their ability to adapt to university life at such institutions. 78% of the mentees highlighted the significance of having a mentor from a black heritage background. Mentees recognised the importance of shared cultural understanding and guidance in overcoming challenges. Witnessing successful individuals from their heritage served as a powerful source of empowerment, inspiring mentees to pursue their goals with confidence.

Pedler, M. L., Willis, R., & Nieuwoudt, J. E. A sense of belonging at university: and HE progression. student retention, motivation and enjoyment. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(3), 397–408.

TASO, 'Mentoring, counselling, coaching and role models (pre-entry)', *Evidence Toolkit*, Accessed 23 April 2024.

IS1.6 Summer schools and residential visits

Studies have found that summer schools are positively correlated with an increase in attitudes towards HE (Robinson and Salvestrini, 2020). TASO (2021) analysis in collaboration with HEAT, found that participation in summer schools is associated with higher KS4 attainment and higher HE progression and that summer schools are strongly linked to acceptance on to a HE course. TASO (2023) analysis found that participation in summer schools had a small positive impact on students' perception of whether they will fit in at university. However, it is not clear whether summer schools are having an impact on progression only there is a positive correlation between summer schools and student outcomes[6].

Newcastle University has delivered Bitesize Uni (BSU) since 2005-6. BSU is aimed at high-attaining year 12/first year college students from underrepresented groups. Places on the programme are limited (between 200-400 per year) and if oversubscribed, priority is given to student groups who are most at risk of inequality of opportunity at Newcastle University, for example black-heritage students. All other students given a place on the programme meet at least one of the WP criteria that are aligned to the institution's supported entry route, PARTNERS.

The programme is evaluated annually, to assess its progress towards its stated aims. A Theory of Change was implemented in 2023 to aid with programme planning, evaluation and review.

Data from the most recent programme shows that for 2023 entry, 53% of attendees applied to study at Newcastle University, compared to 40% of non-attendees (ie those who applied but did not take part in BSU). This type 3 evidence highlights the impact that BSU has on student intention to study at Newcastle University. A review of student pre- and post-event surveys showed an increased likelihood to apply to Newcastle University (44% vs 67%). All attitudinal questions linked to the NERUPI framework showed increases in the NERUPI aims; Know, Choose, Become, Understand and Practise.

Robinson. D, Salvestrini. V. (2020) The impact of interventions for widening access to higher education: a review of evidence

TASO and the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) (2021) An investigation into the relationship between outreach participation and KS4 attainment/HE progression

TASO (2023) School's in for the summer: interim findings on the impact of summer schools

TASO, 'Summer Schools', *Evidence Toolkit*, Accessed 23 April 2024.

IS1.7 Pre-entry entrepreneurship and HE

According to Peschl, Deng & Larson (2021) entrepreneurial education supports the development of key competencies to be competitive in today's labour market which contribute to self-efficacy in support of positive progression choices. Young people generally view self-employment and running their own business as desirable and feasible, but less than one in ten adults under thirty in England are reported as self-employed. Penaluna is among many entrepreneurship researchers and policy-makers that support the practical benefit of entrepreneurship education to be included in all phases of the education system with the

Houston Peschl, Connie Deng, Nicole Larson (2021) [Entrepreneurial thinking: A signature pedagogy for an uncertain 21st century - ScienceDirect](#) Accessed 18 May 2024

European Commission Entrecomp Competency Framework used as a tool to support progression through school to more advanced entrepreneurial learning.

The Enterprising Futures project aims to build a community of practice with teachers and educators – sharing how they are using their resources to foster the development of entrepreneurial skills within secondary school students. Unlike Wales, England does not have a curriculum requirement for entrepreneurial learning; the Enterprising Futures project aims to contribute to supporting the growing demand for this by building a community of practice with teachers and educators. Working in partnership with stakeholders including the University's network of secondary schools (340 across England, 117 of which are based in the North East) the project will seek to develop online resources (toolkits) that teachers can embed into the learner experience. Our (Newcastle University's) team of Student and Graduate Ambassadors will also work with partner schools to engage and inspire students through in-person events in support of their progression choices.

Cross ref to IS5.1 Enterprising Futures Academy; IS5.2 Support for freelance careers

Office for National Statistics (2020). Young people in self employment, England, 2019 to 2020.

Andrew Penaluna, Kathryn Penaluna (2015) OECD Entrepreneurship Education in Practice – Building Motivations & Competencies

OECD & European Commission (2020). Policy brief on recent developments in youth entrepreneurship. OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Papers, 19.

Embedding Enterprise - Teacher Support Resources | Business Wales - Big Ideas (gov.wales) Accessed 15 May 2024

IS1.8 Product Design and Development Engineer (PDDE) apprenticeship programme

Product Design and Development Engineer (PDDE) is a new offer for the University. Introducing it will significantly expand Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision in our Science, Agriculture and Engineering Faculty. Three Level 6 Degree Apprenticeship pathways, each addressing an identified critical area of higher-level skills need in the region, have been selected for development. This offer supports the wider Levelling up agenda and seeks to address part of the urgent need for advanced manufacturing skills in the North East of England, particularly in Electrification.

As a research-intensive University committed to our role as an anchor institution in the North East we see engaging with such key apprenticeship provision as one mechanism for addressing perceptions and expectations of HE by offering new routes to access our degrees whilst addressing national and regional skills gaps.

Our existing higher and degree apprenticeship offer at Level 5 and 7 have attracted apprentices from different backgrounds and contributed to a greater gender and age diversity across the suite of apprenticeships.

Levelling Up White Paper (HM Government, 2022)

Approach to collaboration

Collaboration is an important element of our Access Intervention Strategy and our approach is summarised here: Newcastle University is lead institution of Realising Opportunities (RO), the North East Raising Aspiration Partnership (NERAP) and the North East UniConnect Programme.

Realising Opportunities

Realising Opportunities (RO) is a unique collaboration of highly selective, research intensive universities (RIU), who have made a long-term commitment to, and demonstrated impact in, supporting access to and transition into selective universities. RO aims to encourage, support, and upskill the most able 16–18year-olds at risk from inequalities of opportunity groups to access RIUs via a single, national supported entry route. The programme aims to break down barriers related to study, broaden participants' geographical horizons and prepare students for success at RIUs. RO originated in 2009, involving 12 RIUs and initially received funding from HEFCE and is now fully funded by all partners.

Since 2012, RO has contracted the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) as an external evaluator providing the Partnership with a wealth of longitudinal data to inform and instruct the evolution of the programme to support its students' success. RO targets schools and students using eligibility criteria to address the risks set out in the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register. Over the last 13 years, RO has evolved to provide a wide range of in-person and online events on a variety of topics with its Partner universities to support transition to RIUs. Most recent data demonstrate that, at programme completion, over three quarters of RO students feel better prepared for higher education. In addition, UCAS data from 2021-22 (Cohort 11) demonstrates that 85% of RO students applied to a RIU (including RO universities) compared to a 13.4% of all underrepresented groups. From UCAS end of cycle data in 2022, 88% of RO students went on to accept an offer at university, 10% higher than the benchmarked group.

North East Raising Aspiration Partnership

The North East Raising Aspiration Partnership of the five universities in the region (Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside) collaborate extensively to address equality gaps in the region. The Partnership was established in 2014, and is fully funded by all five institutions. the university collaborates on activity that creates economies of scale and impact to support our region's schools and specific targeted programmes for underrepresented groups to enhance their opportunity to access, succeed and progress in higher education. The collaboration facilitates a strategic, holistic approach to supporting students to address regional and national equality gaps.

Our core stream of work is to offer high quality, consistent support to care-experienced students and young carers across their educational journey. This is demonstrated through our intensive, progressive programme of support for care-experienced students and young carers, Choices Together and the creation of the first regional Care Leaver Covenant in England. A recent UCAS report shows that nationally, 60% of students who have spent time in care have high hopes about going to university or college, yet received no specific guidance at school or college about applying to higher education tailored to their needs. This is despite mechanisms such as financial bursaries, year-round accommodation, and mental health and disability support that could make a difference to

their decision. NERAP's commitment will provide this assistance and ensure care-experienced young people in the North East and those supporting them, have all of the information and support that they need.

NERAP also provide a wide range of free in-school and online workshops/activities on a variety of topics on behalf of all of our university Partners for students from Year 2 to Year 13. All activity is mapped against the Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Careers Guidance and the North East Regional Progression Framework. Through joint representation visits for young pupils, partners gain extended reach across schools in the region. Since 2014, NERAP have delivered activity for over 200,000 beneficiaries in primary and secondary schools across the region.

Uni Connect Programme

The region's universities have both led the development of the North East Uni Connect programme and actively collaborated on all strands of activity. We are members of the governance board and have supported the development of the new priority for Uni Connect to raise attainment at Key Stage 3 and 4. The Partnership vision is to create an effective and sustainable collaboration between schools and higher education providers to contribute towards attainment raising activity and maximise opportunities to work with external partners to support the regional education and skills agenda. The goal of our ambition will be to establish meaningful relationships with schools to co-create a high quality tutoring intervention which is responsive to need but also provides evidence of the effectiveness and impact, to inform and enable continuous improvement.

To achieve this ambition, all five universities in the region will:

- Support the recruitment of undergraduate tutors and coordination of the delivery of activity as part of the Uni Connect Student Tutoring Programme.
- Provide operational support and guidance for the training of undergraduates and the implementation of the tutoring programme.
- Provide hosting support for staff working on the coordination and delivery of the attainment raising programme.
- Provide strategic oversight and direction of the attainment raising programme.
- Provide on-campus resources for events planned as part of our Complementary Careers in the Curriculum offer.
- Provide academic expertise and support as part of the Complementary Careers in the Curriculum Offer.

Intervention strategy 2: Success in higher education – belonging and thriving

Summary of evidence base and rationale: As part of internal research on sense of belonging (Razak and Laing 2023, and Boulton 2023) students have consistently told us that they want to see improvements to existing initiatives (e.g. personal tutoring, peer mentoring, student societies) to better support belonging and community. This is why the majority of our interventions in this strategy are enhancement or extensions of existing activities. The activities are aimed at facilitating awareness and access to academic and personal support, opportunities beyond the curriculum and overall, support a greater sense of belonging, with a focus on: supporting peer relationships, supporting student-staff relationships, and generating a sense of community.

Addressing risk(s) to equality of opportunity:

Lack of awareness and engagement in academic and personal support

Students may not have the knowledge and skills to recognise and effectively engage with targeted academic and personal support to achieve a positive outcome

Inequitable access to support opportunities beyond the curriculum

Students may not be able to engage with the full range of opportunities and benefit from wider University life outside of their academic programme.

Sense of belonging.

Students lived experience of being in higher education as part of an underrepresented group may impact on their ability to succeed in HE.

Academic skills and support – IS2.1 Curriculum-based skills support enhancement, IS2.2 Skills support triage , IS2.3 Build on and enhance peer mentoring model

This set of activities relate to the enhancement of our existing established Academic Skills provision. We note the TASO Evidence Toolkit summary on 'Embedding Academic Literacy Skills: Towards a Best Practice Model' shows evidence to support programmes of this type in supporting positive outcomes in relation to attainment, continuation and completion. Our approach aligns with theories developed over the last 30 years around the embedding of academic literacies within the discipline (Wingate, 2019; Lea and Stuart, 2006). Alongside our successful model of embedded, contextualised academic skills teaching, we provide a programme of centrally provided workshops and one to one appointments. We maintain the latter extra-curricular element of our offer as,	Lea, M R. and Street, B.V. (2006) 'The 'Academic Literacies' model: theory and applications'. *Theory into Practice*, 45 (4), 368-377. McWilliams, R., & Allan, Q. (2014) 'Embedding Academic Literacy Skills: Towards a Best Practice Model' *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 11(3).

whilst more able students may be more like to take up this type of support (McWilliams and Allan, 2014), it does allow us to be agile and responsive to students' needs. IS2.1 is intended to be structured around enhanced data collection and impact analysis to help us understand to a greater extent the success of our current approach in supporting students from different under-represented groups.

Alongside curriculum-based activity a wider review of academic support has been identified as part of our new Education for Life strategy. IS 2.2 specifically focuses on the place of triaging in this model in terms of early referral and insights. The model is in early stages of development and so this activity will be adapted as the model matures.

Our Peer Mentoring programme is well established and successful in its current form. We recruit around 1000 peer mentors each year across all Faculties and Schools, and new students are mentored through their first semester, with the aim of enhancing their overall University experience and helping them to develop a sense of belonging. The scheme is reviewed annually with feedback from both mentors and mentees being fed into future developments. Within the new model of academic support, peer mentors will continue to be an important element of a joined-up School-level infrastructure which will support students at the point of need, and signpost them to the wider support networks available across the University. IS2.3 proposes to expand provision into Semester 2 in response to student feedback and the identification of Semester 1 as a key point for students considering withdrawal.

TASO, 'Mentoring, counselling, coaching and role models (post-entry)', *Evidence Toolkit*, Accessed 19 April 2024.

Wingate, U (2019) 'Achieving transformation through collaboration: the role of academic literacies' *Journal of learning development in higher education*, (15).

Transition and induction - IS2.4 Pre-arrival and induction information, IS2.5 Welcome programme for target groups, IS2.6 Understanding and supporting transition, IS2.7 Bridging the Gap project – support for transition into HE

Sense of belonging is understood to be key to both the retention and success of students in higher education (Thomas, 2012). Studies have shown that interventions aimed at fostering a sense of belonging can encourage continuation (Yeager et al., 2016), produce stronger feelings of social and academic fit (Murphy, 2020) and narrow attainment gaps (Walton and Cohen, 2011). It has been suggested that belonging interventions should be mainstream and delivered in the academic sphere to entire cohorts of students to be effective, with a focus on 'opt-out' methods so less confident students are still able to participate without having to nominate themselves (Thomas, 2012) and this has informed our approach.

An induction process which fosters and nurtures social integration can reduce attrition, tackle isolation and increase a sense of belonging. Research raises the importance of induction to include participatory social activities to enable the building of peer and staff relationships, an ability to develop an understanding of the programme students are joining and develop academic skills. It is important to have these peer and staff interactions both within and outside the formal learning and teaching environment (Willis and Takeda

Crawford, I. and Wang, Z. (2015) 'The impact of individual factors on the academic attainment of Chinese and UK students in higher education'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40 (5), 902-920.

Murphy, M. et al. (2020) 'A customized belonging intervention improves retention of socially disadvantaged students at a broad-access university', *Science Advances* 6 (29), 1-7.

Thomas, L. (2012) Building student engagement and belonging in Higher

2006). The literature also raises the importance of early engagement pre-entry to promote belonging which should continue through the university student journey to avoid attrition (Thomas 2012). IS2.5 introduces a targeted welcome programme of activities to support the transition and induction of students from underrepresented groups – particularly focusing on those with FSM backgrounds mature students and disabled students. This connects with feedback from our Student Consultative Group. IS2.4 also focuses on the clarity and impact of pre-arrival and induction information, and we will use student contributors to ensure our materials are presented in the right way and the right time to have maximum benefit.

IS2.7 connects our approach to induction and transition with our approach to academic skills (IS2.1 to 3), ensuring resources are developed around the topics that students have identified they need most in their transition to University that they are effectively communicated.

We want to better understand our students' experience of transition within their time as a student - this is the motivation behind the more exploratory approach of IS2.6. Crawford and Wang (2015) state that in year 1 of an undergraduate's study, learning is "surface" and in year 2 it becomes "deep and strategic" whilst Senyshyn et.al. (2000) state that adjustment to this higher-level learning plateaus in year 2, suggesting that institutions must go beyond the first year in providing transition support. This area for exploration was supported by the Student Collaborative Group – particularly Year 1 to Year 2; Year 2 to Year 3 and into PGT). They raised the idea of a 're-induction' into second year, noting that moving from 1st to 2nd year represented a difficult acceleration of independent studies.

Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme. Advance HE.

Senyshyn, R.M., Warford, M.K. and Zhan, J. (2000) 'Issues of adjustment to higher education: International students' perspectives'. *International Education*, 30(1), 17.

Walton, G. and Cohen, G. (2011) 'A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and Health Outcomes of Minority Students', *Science*, 331 (6023), 1447-1451.

Willis, L. and Takeda, K. (2006) Design, build, test, float, fly and race – the School of Engineering Sciences Induction Week, Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre.

Yeager, D. et al. (2016) 'Teaching a lay theory before college narrows achievement gaps at scale', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 113 (24), E3341-E3348.

IS2.8 Supporting care experienced and estranged students on course

Two key commitments frame the University's approach in IS2.8:

- In collaboration with the other four NE universities, the University is part of the first regional Care Leaver Covenant (2022-23) to ensure there is sustained support for care experienced students throughout their higher education journey.
- The Stand Alone Pledge (2013 – 2016) has shaped the support we provide for Estranged Students and focuses on their four pillars: mental health and wellbeing, financial support, accommodation and outreach, feeling connected.

TASO (2023) Rapid review to support the development of the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)

Bland, B (2016) Focus on access and retention. Risks for students who are estranged or disowned by their family, Stand Alone.

The Positive Impact? (2020) report highlighted that although HEIs had a wide range of strategies in place to manage transition in to HE, many students still continued to struggle during their studies and/or consider withdrawing early. They stated that having clear classifications of Care Experienced and Estranged students meant that financial support can be targeted, and that access to a consistent named contact who will advocate on behalf of the student is essential to support students during their studies. Cotton, Nash & Kneale (2014) found that the key factors for Care leavers success in HE included motivation and participation, preparation and academic, personal and financial support, and the ability to access a safety net, which was often provided by the University.

Evidence and recommendations from the Unite Foundation also highlight that insufficient personal support means that Care Experienced and Estranged Students may be more likely to report lower wellbeing and/or sense of belonging, experience poor mental health, achieve lower than-expected on-course attainment and lower continuation rates. Recommendations included a named contact/team, informal catch ups, support with accommodation (including all-year accommodation to support with travel/subsistence costs). Due to capacity issues, they may also not have equal opportunity to secure suitable private accommodation and accommodation support could therefore include providing guarantor support.

The Stand Alone report highlighted the challenges that Estranged Students faced when transitioning out of university and in particular, material barriers. The University's Transitional Support Bursary was created following this report and is targeted at UG final year Estranged and Care Experienced students. The University's Emergency Accommodation Framework enables the University to provide support for Estranged Students with additional accommodation costs such as moving costs, gaps in tenancies and other costs relating to their circumstances, to ensure their safety, security and parity with other students.

Bland, B and Shaw, J (2015) New Starts: The challenges of Higher Education without the support of a family network. Stand Alone and Unite Foundation.

Cotton, D., Nash, P., Kneale, P., (2014) The Experience of Care Leavers in UK Higher Education Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning 16:3 pp 5-21.

ScotCen (2022) Estranged students in Further (FE) and Higher Education (HE) - experiences: research. Learning Directorate, Scottish Government.

Rouncefield-Swales, A and Bland, B (2019) Stand Alone: What Happens Next? Transitioning out of Higher Education: Barriers and Challenges For Students Estranged From their Families. Stand Alone.

Stevenson, J et al (2020) Positive Impact? What factors affect access, retention and graduate outcomes for university students with a background of care or family estrangement? Unite Foundation

Unite Foundation et al. (2023) Supporting APP development – addressing risk to equality of opportunity for care experienced and estranged students

Enabling extra-curricular engagement – IS2.9 Academic societies funding scheme, IS2.10 Participation bursaries

In a Wonkhe survey of over 1,400 students nationally, they found a positive association between engagement in a range of student opportunities and feeling part of a community (Dickinson, 2023). 84% of respondents who were involved in societies reported positive feelings about being part of a community, with 82% of students involved in sports reporting positively too. However, when students were asked what may stop them from taking part in student opportunities, financial reasons were a key reason cited. IS2.9 and IS2.10 provide financial support to engagement with academic societies (providing six weeks of free

Boulton, C. (2022) 'A Review of the Literature on Sense of Belonging and Community in Higher Education'. Newcastle University.

membership) and participation in other extra-curricular activities (funding available each academic year). This financial support offer connects as a cross-intervention with Intervention Strategy 4 but appears in Intervention Strategy 2 as its primary motivation is to support engagement and belonging by removing financial barriers and so equalising access to opportunities.

Academic societies provide social engagement within the disciplinary community of students on a programme and within an academic school – a key nexus of belonging bridging 'social fit' and 'academic fit' (Boulton, 2022). Feedback from Newcastle students suggests that they place significant importance on interactions with their academic school and peers within their discipline. This suggests that facilitating opportunities to form peer networks with others in their academic discipline would contribute to developing sense of belonging, which research shows is associated with higher continuation rates (Yeager et al., 2016).

The final *What works?* report from Thomas (2012) argues that sense of belonging in higher education "is most effectively nurtured through mainstream activities with an overt academic purpose that all students participate in". Thomas suggests that there is value in focusing on 'opt-out' strategies to ensure participation from a broader range of students, rather than only those who self-select which is the motivation between offering this support to all students.

Participation Bursary eligibility is specifically targeted at under-represented groups aiming to address the access gap and mitigate the financial pressures which may prevent students from more financially disadvantaged backgrounds from participating fully in extracurricular activities. Evaluation of the funding (Blows, 2023) has shown that financial barriers to participation are a key reason for inequalities in access to extracurricular activities, and that the current cost of living crisis is increasing financial pressure on students from various backgrounds and lived experiences. The evidence gathered from students throughout these reports underpins the decision to focus on providing financial support to enable equitable extracurricular participation opportunities for student and facilitate their opportunities to build connections with other students and develop a sense of belonging at university.

Dickinson, J (2023) 'There may be serious sector problems when it comes to students and food', Wonkhe, 7 November 2023.

Lewis, K. and Hodges, S. (2014) 'Expanding the concept of belonging in academic domains: Development and validation of the Ability Uncertainty Scale', *Learning and Individual Differences*, 37, pp. 197-202.

Thomas, L (2012) Building student engagement and belonging in higher education at a time of change: final report from the What works? Student retention & success programme. AdvanceHE.

Yeager, D. et al. (2016) 'Teaching a lay theory before college narrows achievement gaps at scale', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 113(24), pp. E3341-E3348.

Blows, C. 'NUSU Participation Bursary Evaluation Report 2022-23'. Newcastle University.

International experiences – IS2.11 Short-term international mobility programme, IS2.12 Funding to support access to international experiences, IS2.13 Global ambassadors scheme, IS2.14 Targeted support for international mobility

We have developed an inclusive offer of international placement opportunities, which includes funding and ensures that students from a variety of backgrounds can participate. This supports our aim to be a globally inclusive institution and foster an environment that places international ambition and activities as central to our everyday thinking and working. This addresses gaps in funding of wider schemes such as Turing and ensure that all students have access to international experiences regardless of financial means. This set of activities connect as a cross-intervention with Intervention Strategy 4 but appears in Intervention Strategy 2 as its primary motivation is to support engagement and belonging by removing financial barriers and so equalising access to opportunities.

International placements develop important global skills (e.g. intercultural awareness, language skills, knowledge of other countries, confidence, tolerance, self-awareness, sociability, problem-solving, decisiveness, adaptability, curiosity). International mobility enhances our students' skills and employability and prepares them for the opportunities and challenges of a globalised world. Short-term mobility, which is part of our new and innovative mobility offer, reaches a much broader audience than 'traditional' mobility and enables students who are not able to travel abroad for a semester or full-year to gain an international experience. Students who go abroad are more likely to do better at every key indicator in higher education, from attainment to employment (UK HE International Unit 2012).

According to the Erasmus+ higher education impact study (2018), financial concerns and personal reasons remain the most frequent barriers for students not to spend parts of their studies abroad. Around two thirds of the non-mobile students reported some type of financial concern and around one in two reported family reasons and personal relationships as main obstacles to mobility. These figures were confirmed by the ESN survey (2019) where approximately 70% of respondents considered financial conditions as the main reason not to go abroad. Providing funding has been crucial for successfully delivering an inclusive offer of international placements as well as offering shorter mobility opportunities (alongside Virtual Exchanges). Overall a third of centrally supported placements are undertaken by students meeting widening participation criteria, whilst over 70% of those participating in short-time mobility placements meet WP criteria which shows funded short-term mobility opportunities are crucial in creating an inclusive offer that is accessible to all students. Short-term mobility is also explicitly recommended by UUKi as a tool to support inclusion (University UK International 2018).

ESN Survey (2019) Erasmus Student Network European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2018) Erasmus+ higher education impact study – Final report

UK HE International Unit (2015) Gone International: mobile students and their outcomes Report on the 2012/13 graduating cohort.

Universities UK International (2018) Gone International: Expanding Opportunities Report on the 2015-16 graduating cohort

Intervention strategy 3: Mental health

Summary evidence based and rationale: Mental health needs, whether formally disclosed or not, are a key risk factor affecting students' equality of opportunity at Newcastle (and across the sector). The University has prioritised support for students with mental health needs and support for wider student wellbeing in its education and support approaches, but we recognise from our assessment of performance that there is more that must be done to ensure equality of opportunity. There is substantial sector and academic literature assessing the challenge of student mental health to student success but less high-quality evaluation evidence exploring what works in the context of higher education. Our intervention strategy commits us to a series of activities that we believe will address our specific identified underlying risk and we will seek to develop our evaluation approach further to contribute to the sector evidence base.

Addressing risk(s) to equality of opportunity:

Mental health need, awareness, disclosure, and expectations

Risk of students not recognising they have a mental health disability, feeling able to disclose a mental health disability or recognise that their mental health disability needs impact their ability to succeed. They may have joined us from schools and/or NHS trusts where mental health support and treatment input levels are greater than available in the region or in a higher education environment. This risks them encountering a gap between expectation and provision leading to negative impacts.

IS3.1 Whole University approach

We have made a commitment to the operation of a 'whole university approach' to mental health and wellbeing through the implementation of the Student Minds Mental Health Framework for which we will seek recognition through the University Mental Health Charter. It is a comprehensive framework which, in preparation for our submission, will require us to systematically reflect and review our offer and approaches within and beyond student wellbeing services. The Framework provides the necessary structure for planning and supporting the ongoing improvement of student mental health. Across the four domains – learn, support, live, work – and the 18 enabling themes, we are considering every stage of the student lifecycle and aspect of the student experience. Our commitment to the Framework and recognition through the Charter is our key intervention to address the differences in equality of opportunity for students with mental health needs.	Hughes, G. & Spanner, L. (2019). The University Mental Health Charter. Leeds: Student Minds TASO. Student Mental Health Evidence Hub. Accessed 24 April 2024.

IS3.2 Pre-entry transition

The TASO evidence toolkit identifies transition to HE as a critical point for disabled students, with existing literature providing anecdotal evidence that transitions support could positively impact continuation and attainment. Our activity targets students with mental health and social and communication disabilities – groups that we know face challenges in transitioning to higher education. By engaging with students at the beginning of their higher education journey through this targeted activity we can ensure that there is early engagement and identification of need.	TASO, 'Transition support into HE for disabled students (pre-entry)', _Evidence Toolkit_, Accessed 23 April 2024.

IS3.3 Supporting transition into local NHS treatment

One of the most challenging aspects of transitioning to HE for disabled students is the need to re-establish clinical support and treatment in their University location. Services may vary between NHS areas and relationships with key clinicians need to be established. By ensuring there is a close working relationship with our NHS Trusts, dedicated resource including in the form of funding for a GP registration programme and a NHS Mental health nurse, we aim to make the transition for students as seamless and supported as possible.	TASO, 'Transition support into HE for disabled students (pre-entry)', _Evidence Toolkit_, Accessed 23 April 2024. TASO, 'Intersystem Collaboration', _Student Mental Health Evidence Toolkit_, Accessed 23 April 2024. Universities UK Task Group on Student Mental Health Services (2018) Minding our Future: Starting a conversation about the support of student mental health. Universities UK.

IS3.4 Mental health literacy in the curriculum

This activity is part of a wider collaborative UKRI funded research project (Nuture University) exploring what works to improve student wellbeing and mental health. Online mental health literacy provision has been identified by research as a potentially effective universal approach to promoting and supporting university student mental health that are scalable and sustainable. We are piloting this approach and will expand provision subject to the outcomes of evaluation of the pilot.	King, N., Linden, B., Cunningham, S. et al. (2022) The feasibility and effectiveness of a novel online mental health literacy course in supporting university student mental health: a pilot study. _BMC Psychiatry_ 22, 515 Nurture University website

IS3.5 Learning analytics

We note the emerging evidence base around the use of learning analytics interventions (TASO Evidence Toolkit). The University has piloted learning analytics – focusing on attendance/engagement and assessment data – for use in scaffolding academic support. The system will be rolled out fully in 2024-25. Future system developments will be focused on informing early referral and wellbeing interventions to address the underlying risk identified.	TASO, 'Learning analytics' (post-entry)', _Evidence Toolkit_, Accessed 19 April 2024.

Intervention strategy 4: Cost of living

Summary of evidence base and rationale: Students from under-represented groups have always been more likely to be affected by financial strain than other groups, and this is even more likely to be the case now and in the future with the rising gap between maintenance loans and living costs. The need for an intervention strategy targeting financial strain specifically was supported by the commentary from our Student Collaborative Group and is evidenced from national surveys. Our biggest intervention in this area is still our existing scholarship schemes that seek to bridge the gap between maintenance loans and the real cost of living for all students from low-income households. Secondly, we will seek to raise awareness of new and existing interventions amongst the student groups most in need of financial support.

Addressing risk(s) to equality of opportunity:

Financial strain

Increases in the challenge of functioning day to day with critical and multiple financial challenges that may affect a student's ability and time available to engage fully with university life and complete their course or obtain a good grade.

IS4.1 Targeted financial support

This activity brings together different strands of targeted financial support, designed to support student groups with particular needs (transition bursaries and emergency accommodation – see evidence base for IS2.8) as well as wider funding that is used to support students universally who may be experiencing financial strain	Newcastle APP Student Collaborative Group with Newcastle University Students' Union, _Cost of living survey_, 2023 (support for food on campus).
Access to adequate nutrition and being able to study without worrying where your next meal is coming from is fundamental to a successful student education experience.	Dickinson, J (2023) 'There may be serious sector problems when it comes to students and food' _Wonkhe_, 7 November 2023.
A NUSU cost of living survey (2023) found that students are concerned about the prices of food and necessities increasing, with some concerns about not being able to afford to eat nutritional food, impacting	

their health and wellbeing. Students reported wanting more support from the University regarding information about recipes, supermarket options, and tips for keeping food costs down. They also reported wanting more practical and financial support relating to access to food. The survey found that some students were affected by the stresses of affording food and keeping up with their studies.

Food poverty and insecurity is a growing challenge for many students. Save the Student's National Student Money Survey (2023) found that 18% of respondents had used a food bank in the 2022-23 academic year – almost double the 10% who reported the same in the previous survey. Similarly, 22% said they often skip meals to save money, with an additional 42% saying they do so at least some of the time." (Allingham 2024). Wonkhe's national survey (Dickinson 2023) found that students from under-represented groups were more likely to express food insecurity with 32% of respondents who were state educated, 39% of students who received a bursary and 33% of first in family students were 'very or somewhat' worried that their food would run out before they received money to buy more. These concerning numbers suggest that student financial support is not sufficiently covering their essential costs, particularly for more financially disadvantaged students. The article also suggests there may be correlations between higher worries relating to finances and food, with poorer perceptions of the academic experience and more negative feelings around sense of belonging and community.

Providing support for food on campus allows students access to food to support them staying on campus – either to continue studying or before attending paid work - and not having to travel back to accommodation to prepare cheaper food, skip meals or incur additional food costs.

Allingham, T (2024) 'It's time for maintenance support to catch up with inflation', *HEPI*, 17 Jan 2024

Save the Students (2023) 'Student Money Survey 2023', Save the Students, 5 Sept 2023

IS4.2 Improve online resources around cost of living

This activity is in response to feedback from our APP Student Collaborative Group that there is a lack of awareness of resources and confusion about finding and using the resources available around cost of living and course costs. The activity will involve students in the review and redesign of information (Roberto, 2022). By providing accessible and comprehensive information on the cost of living we hope to reduce the impact of financial strain on students affected as they will be more likely to access the support available and use the information and strategies provided.

National campaigns have called on universities to provide more information on the costs of participation (Dickinson, 2023) and reports from the Newcastle University Students' Union have raised similar concerns (*Hidden Course Costs,* 2023).

Dickinson, J (2023) 'Some universities are getting worse over info for students on costs' *Wonkhe,* 7 July 2023.

Newcastle University Students' Union, *Hidden course costs,* 2023.

Newcastle University Students' Union, *Cost of living survey,* 2023

Cibyl, *Student Mental Health Study,* 2023

The *Student Mental Health Study* (Cibyl, 2023) found that 62% of respondents worried about money frequently and 30% of respondents worried about money sometimes. Only 7% of respondents never worried about money. The Newcastle University Students' Union *Cost of living survey* (2023) found that 41% of respondents had thought about dropping out because of financial pressures. Student comments for reasons why they had considered withdrawal included fearing the rising cost of living, feeling overwhelmed by the costs of attending university, and the impact the cost of living crisis was having on their mental and physical wellbeing. These data reinforce the concerning links between financial pressures, mental health, and withdrawal. Students commented that they would like to see more clear support and information from the University about available resources.	Roberto, T (2022) 'Why you need student content creators', Keystone Education Group, 8 Sept 2022.
IS4.3 Opportunity and UG support scholarships	
Financial support provided by the University to assist under-represented UK undergraduate students is made available primarily through the Opportunity Scholarship Scheme and its extension, UG support scholarships. Students do not need to complete an application form to be considered for either of these schemes as they will be automatically assessed. Eligible students receive a non-repayable cash award, supplementing any support from Student Finance, with awards being paid in either two or three instalments depending on the scheme. Termly instalments are used to assist students with cash-flow and to support retention, helping students to avoid financial difficulties throughout the academic year. These scholarships are a key mechanism through which the University seeks to address the underlying risk of financial strain, reduce the need for students to supplement their income through part-time work, support engagement, completion and attainment. Evaluation to date has been undertaken utilising the OfS Financial Support Evaluation toolkit.	Office for Students. Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit. Accessed 15 May 2024. TASO, 'Financial support (post-entry)', *Evidence Toolkit*. Accessed 19 April 2024.

Intervention strategy 5: Progression from higher education

Summary of evidence base and rationale: At the heart of both the Education Strategy and our Careers & Employability Strategic Plan is an ambition to develop equity of provision, where irrespective of discipline or stage, all students benefit from a transformational and meaningful academic experience. Social justice and HE research shows that students from underrepresented backgrounds face more challenges in participating in skills development opportunities outside of the curriculum, so we plan to collaborate with colleagues in Academic Units to identify, develop and implement opportunities that embed employability within the curriculum experience wherever possible. To meet the needs of our diverse student population, our approach is enhanced by tailored financial and support interventions to mitigate other perceived barriers to participate in employability and enterprise-related opportunities such as placements, work experience, freelance and business exploration as well as in preparation and attendance at interviews. In responding to the evidence and rationale summarised above, we plan to ensure our careers and employability education provision is as impactful as possible with the greatest relevance and reach, ensuring careers and employability education is a structurally unmissable aspect of the educational experience for all our students and, in particular, for those

groups of students that evidence would suggest are most in need of support. To ensure meaningful provision, and in the context of the Education Strategy, we will work together to adopt effective methods that can be nuanced to support established points of transition and choice for students along with discipline-specific curriculum requirements. We will employ evidence-based interventions informed by our data, TASO Toolkits and industry best practice.

Addressing risk(s) to equality of opportunity:

Progression from higher education

Students may not have equal opportunity to progress to a positive graduate outcome such as a highly skilled professional role or continuation of study

IS5.1 Enterprising Futures Academy; IS5.2 Support for freelance careers

Research conducted by Santander Universities UK shows that more than a quarter of university students are currently running or plan to run their own business while studying. As this route grows as a viable option for students in terms of graduate outcomes, we aim to ensure that all students are able to access the development of entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial skills as part of their Higher Education and broader education journey. This aligns with the development of graduate skills and will support students to access graduate level outcomes whether through creating their own roles or using their skills and experience, developed through the academy to secure a role in an organisation they aspire to work for. Students from underrepresented backgrounds often lack the points of reference and social capital that would allow them to see entrepreneurship as a viable graduate route, this programmes aims to address some of those perceptions, whilst demonstrating that university can be an excellent way of developing the skills needed for an entrepreneurial career. Cross ref to IS1.7 Pre-entry entrepreneurship and HE	Lackéus, M. Lundqvist, M., Williams Middleton, K., Inden, J. (2020) The entrepreneurial employee in the public and private sector – what, why, how (M. Bacigalupo Ed.), EUR 30108 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Musaddique, S. (2018) More than 25% of university students run or plan to run their own business, shows new study, Independent, 12th Feb 2018. Osmani, M., Weerakkody, V., Hindi, N.M. et al. Identifying the trends and impact of graduate attributes on employability: a literature review. Tert Educ Manag 21, 367–379 (2015) Linked here Mason, G., Williams, G. & Cranmer, S. (2009) Employability skills initiatives in higher education: what effects do they have on graduate labour market outcomes? Education Economic. 17 (1), 1–30.

IS5.3 Work experience and skills development – opportunities; IS5.4 Work experience and skills development - financial support

The TASO evidence toolkit states that 'Work experience is the most-well evidenced employability intervention, with six quantitative studies showing a strong association with better graduate outcomes. These outcomes include a higher probability of being invited to interview, a higher salary and a lower likelihood of unemployment from at least six months after graduation.'

We believe that by targeting our programmes, creating better support and scaffolding for engagement and increasing outreach specifically around paid work experience programmes we can increase engagement from underrepresented groups and support better outcomes. Specifically understanding the experience of students with mental health disabilities in engaging with these programmes, will help us to address barriers to engagement and participation by better tailoring the experience.

Research from the Sutton Trust (Montacute et al 2021) recommends that by embedding employability and life skills within courses, providers can ensure that students have equal access to work experience opportunities – rather than only be available to students with more social support and the ability to be proactive. Embedded activities can take a range of forms including sandwich years, service learning and employability modules.

A review of effective models and action research around the skills agenda and academic gains compiled by Advance HE in 2021 identifies that work experience and internship opportunities contribute favourably to students' future-readiness. The Advance HE research demonstrates the value of opportunities, including virtual placements and the creation of placement opportunities *within* university settings themselves, bringing wider integration of different cohorts of students.

Kerrigan, M., Manktelow, A. & Simmons, E. (2018) Sandwich placements: negating the socio-economic effect on graduate prospects. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning. 20, 81–107.

Norton, S and Dalrymple, R (2021) Employability: breaking the mould. Advance HE. Accessed 3rd May 2024

Montacute, R, Holt-White E and Gent A (2021) The University of Life: Employability and essential life skills. The Sutton Trust

Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2013) Business and Social Mobility: A Manifesto for Change. London: Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission

TASO, 'Work experience (post HE), *Evidence Toolkit*, Accessed 23 April 2024

IS5.5 Embedding employability in the curriculum

Students need "more than just a good degree to compete effectively in the marketplace' (Bridge Group 2017) but those from lower socio-economic backgrounds participate less in activities that are valued by employers. Embedded employability provision allows students from non-traditional backgrounds to access opportunities to improve their employability.

Bridge Group (2017) Social Mobility and University Careers Services. UPP Foundation.

Daubney, K. (2022), ""Teaching employability is not my job!": redefining embedded employability from within the higher education curriculum", Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 92-106.
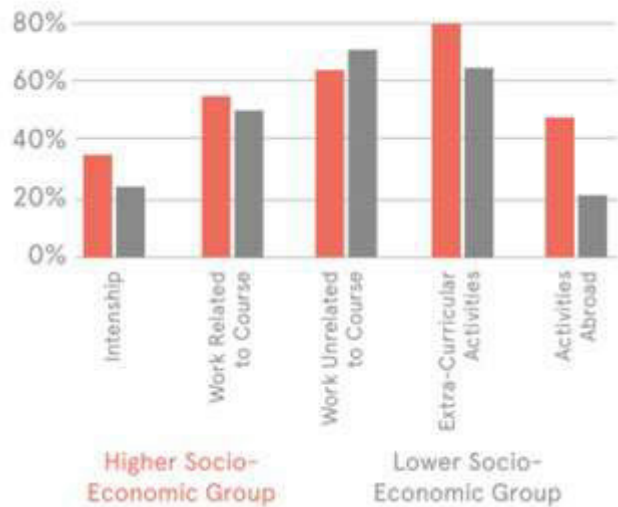
Experiences of students undertaking employability activities by socio-economic background, n> 40,000 (Trendence 2015, reproduced in Bridge Group 2017)

There are multiple reasons contained in the literature as to why embedded employability is more inclusive than extracurricular employability to students from widening participation backgrounds, including:

- Not all students are able to commit to undertaking activities outside of their course, due to financial barriers or caring responsibilities.

- Many of the opportunities to boost career readiness have a cost associated with them (for example, participation in sports) or entail opportunity costs (unpaid internships, for example).

- Students may not have the professional networks or cultural capital to source extracurricular opportunities to develop their employability.

- Students from non-traditional background may lack the self-confidence to engage with optional, extracurricular sessions and may self-select out of taking part, particularly when other students taking part are perceived to have higher levels of social and cultural capital.

- Due to an increasingly competitive graduate marketplace, students are often required to develop their employability earlier in their studies, often during the first year, when many students from lower-

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. (2012) Evaluation of GO Wales Phase 5. Caerphilly, HEFCW.

Gradconsult (2023) Insights Report: Careers Service - Embedded Employability and Experiential Learning

Laurison, D. and Friedman, S., Introducing the Class Ceiling: Social Mobility into Britain's Elite Occupations, 2015

Rea, C (2023) Student engagement in careers activities is in decline. *Wonkhe*. Accessed May 2024.

Newcastle University internal report: by Vanessa Armstrong on value of career enhancing opportunities from SNES/ SNBS student perspective (Oct. 2022)

participation backgrounds are negotiating the transition to higher education and are unlikely to invest in extracurricular opportunities.

- Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often place a greater emphasis on their academic work, often at the expense of other activities that are desired by employers. They may lack the awareness of the value of these activities to future employers.

Office for Students - Fees, investments and targets (FIT) 2025-26 to 2028-29: Full-time fees

Provider name: University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Provider UKPRN: 10007799

Table 3b: Full-time fees

Course type	Where you charge a range of fees for the same course type, please provide more information e.g. subject or faculty groupings.	Is this course sub-contracted?	Sub-contractual provider UKPRN	Sub-contractual provider name	Earliest year this will apply to new entrant cohorts	Predicted number of entrants in earliest year of course	Course fee (£)
First degree	Business Accounting Finance (placement across three years)	No		N/A	2025-26	<= 100	£6,833
First degree	Students who started in 2016-17 or later	No		N/A	2025-26	>= 3,000	£9,535
Foundation year/Year 0	Students who started in 2016-17 or later	No		N/A	2025-26	<= 100	£9,535
Postgraduate ITT	PGCE	No		N/A	2025-26	101 to 500	£9,535
Sandwich year	Certificates in Architectural/Planning Practice	No		N/A	2025-26	<= 100	£1,430
Sandwich year	Placement year fee	No		N/A	2025-26	101 to 500	£1,430
Sandwich year	SAgE Industrial Training	No		N/A	2025-26	<= 100	£1,905
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	Placement year fee	No		N/A	2025-26	101 to 500	£1,430
Other	M.Arch	No		N/A	2025-26	<= 100	£9,535

Table 4b: Part-time fees

Course type	Where you charge a range of fees for the same course type, please provide more information e.g. subject or faculty groupings.	Is this course subcontracted?	Sub-contractual provider UKPRN	Sub-contractual provider name	Earliest year this fee will apply to new entrant cohorts	Predicted number of entrants in earliest year (£) of course	Full-time equivalent course fee	Maximum course fee charged in any academic year (£)

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]		Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
To increase the proportion (%) of students from lower socioeconomic groups progressing to Newcastle University (FSM)	PTA_1	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		To have 12% of entrants to the University identified as FSM in 2028-29	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	9.1	9.5	10.0	11.0	12.0
To increase the number of students from minoritised ethnic groups (particularly Black)	PTA_2	Access	Ethnicity	Black		To have 2.5% of entrants to the University identified as Black in 2028-29 (based on an absolute target of 140)	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	2	2	2.2	2.4	2.5
By working in collaboration, Realising Opportunities (RO) will contribute to national improvement in entry rates to highly selective providers for those most likely to experience inequality of opportunity.	PTA_3	Access	Other	Other (please specify in description)		Proportion of Realising Opportunities (RO) students who are tracked into HE who will access a research intensive university (RIU) within two years of becoming 'HE ready' and completing their Post-16 studies. 'Other' has been selected as the characteristic owing to multiple eligible at-risk groups. Details provided by RO, 1% yearly increase forecasted using historic HESA data from 2016-2019	Yes	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2019-20	Percentage	48	55	56	57	58

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic group	Target	Comparator group	Description and commentary (500 characters maximum)	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
To reduce the gaps in student success between students from lower socioeconomic groups (FSM) and other students (non-FSM)	PTS_1	Continuation	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible	Not eligible	Continuation gap between students identified as FSM and other students reduced from 3.7% to 1.5% by 2028-29	No	The access and participation dashboard	2020-21	Percentage points	3.7	3.5	3.0	2.0	1.5
To reduce the gaps in student success between students from lower socioeconomic groups (FSM) and other students (non-FSM)	PTS_2	Attainment	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible	Not eligible	Awarding gap between students identified as FSM as other students reduced from 14.7% to 6.0% by 2028-29	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	14.7	14.0	12.0	9.0	6.0
Reduce the gaps in student success (continuation and attainment at 1st & 2:1) between students age 21 and over on entry and younger students	PTS_3	Continuation	Age	Mature (over 21)	Young (under 21)	Continuation gap between students age 21 and over on entry and younger students reduced from 10.7% to 6.0% by 2028-29	No	The access and participation dashboard	2020-21	Percentage points	10.7	10.5	9.5	8.0	6.0
Reduce the gaps in student success (continuation and attainment at 1st & 2:1) between students age 21 and over on entry and younger students	PTS_4	Attainment	Age	Mature (over 21)	Young (under 21)	Awarding gap between students age 21 and over on entry and younger students reduced 4.9% to 2.5% by 2028-29	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	4.9	4.5	4.0	3.0	2.5
Reduce the gap in student success (attainment at 1st & 2:1) between Black and White students	PTS_5	Attainment	Ethnicity	Black	White	Awarding gap between Black and White students reduced from 18.1% to 10.0% by 2028-29	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	18.1	16.0	14.0	12.0	10.0
Reduce the gaps in student success (attainment at 1st & 2:1) between East Asian and White students	PTS_6	Attainment	Ethnicity	Not specified (pleease give detail in description)	White	Awarding gap between East Asian and White students reduced from 13.3% to 9.0% by 2028-29 Own data source to identify specific group	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage points	13.3	14.5	13.0	11.0	9.0

Aim	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
Ensure that the gap in student success (completion) between students with mental health conditions and students without a disability does not widen in the light of a growing population	PTS_7	Completion	Reported disability	Mental health condition	No disability reported	The gap in completion between students with mental health conditions and students without a disability remains at 2.5% or less by 2028-29	Yes	The access and participation dashboard	2017-18	Percentage points	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5

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
Ensure that the gap in progression to positive graduate outcomes for students from lower-socioeconomic groups (FSM) does not widen	PTP_1	Progression	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible	Not eligible	The gap in progression to No positive graduate outcomes between students identified as FSM and other students at 1.5% or less by 2028-29	No	The access and participation dashboard	2020-21	Percentage points	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Reduce the gap in progression to positive graduate outcomes for students with mental health conditions and students without a disability	PTP_2	Progression	Reported disability	Mental health condition	No disability reported	The progression gap between students with mental health conditions and students without a disability to reduce from 9.0% to 5.0% by 2028-29	No	The access and participation dashboard	2020-21	Percentage points	9.0	8.0	7.0	6.0	5.0

Table 6b: Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£4,864,000	£4,931,000	£5,015,000	£5,100,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£0	£0	£0	£0
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£0	£0	£0	£0

Optional commentary box to explain fluctuations in levels of investment:

(Please comment here if appropriate)

Table 6c: Fee income

Total and higher fee income (HFI) (to the neare	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
	Total higher fee income (£)	£52,177,000	£51,653,000	£51,653,000	£51,653,000
	Total fee income (£)	£162,726,000	£161,105,000	£161,105,000	£161,105,000

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	£339,000	£344,000	£349,000	£353,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities	£3,440,000	£3,495,000	£3,552,000	£3,610,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities	£1,085,000	£1,092,000	£1,114,000	£1,137,000
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (£)**	£4,864,000	£4,931,000	£5,015,000	£5,100,000
Access activity investment	***Total access investment (as % of HFI)***	9.3%	9.5%	9.7%	9.9%
Access activity investment	***Total access investment funded from HFI***	£4,074,000	£4,127,000	£4,195,000	£4,226,000
Access activity investment	***Total access investment from other funding (as if id)***	£789,000	£804,000	£819,000	£835,000
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships	£7,912,000	£7,917,000	£7,922,000	£7,928,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds	£730,000	£735,000	£740,000	£746,000
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (£)**	£8,642,000	£8,652,000	£8,662,000	£8,674,000
Financial support investment	***Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)***	16.6%	16.8%	16.8%	16.8%
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£426,000	£438,000	£450,000	£462,000
Research and evaluation investment	*Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)*	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%

Table 7b: Intervention strategies

Intervention strategy Please link these to the intervention strategies set out in your plan - one row per intervention strategy	Further Information	Amount (to the nearest £1,000)
IS1 Access		£11,746,000
IS2 Belonging and thriving		£4,378,000
IS3 Mental health		£430,000
IS4 Cost of living		£27,529,000
IS5 Progression		£1,427,000