The School of Information and Risk Management (SIRM)

UKPRN: 10057622

Access and participation plan 2025-26 to 2028-29

Introduction and strategic aim

Incorporated in England and Wales in May 2014, as a private limited company. Numerica Risk Management and Consulting Ltd (registered at Companies House, holding company #09031204) trading as 'The School of Information Risk Management'. Its UKPRN: 10057622 and it has been registered with Office for Students (OFS) as an Independent Training Provider (ITP) since August 2023.

SIRM is a medium-sized provider with a team of over 50 staff members, and campuses in Ilford, East London and Leicester. It currently partners with the College of Salford for franchise undergraduate programmes and East Sussex College Group. In addition, SIRM delivers a range of direct entry HND programmes.

The college's vision is to 'Guide our students so that they become heroes of today and leaders of tomorrow'. Its mission is 'to enhance the knowledge and skills of our students hence helping our economy grow and benefiting society'.

At the heart of our strategic aims, is our commitment to provide a transformational education experience, for the communities we serve, through a highly responsive curriculum supported by learning and teaching excellence. We aim to secure outstanding outcomes for our students, regardless of age or demographic, providing an education that equips them with the knowledge, skills, attributes and qualifications to navigate work, study and life in the 21st century.

Lead by the CEO, the College's Changing Lives Employability and Enterprise Strategy aims to transform futures by equipping individuals with the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed for sustainable employment and entrepreneurship. Through tailored training, mentorship, and business support, it fosters economic resilience and social mobility. The strategy prioritises inclusivity, innovation, and partnerships with employers, education providers, and communities to create pathways to graduate work, self-employment and enterprise success. By addressing barriers to employment, promoting lifelong learning, and supporting start-ups, it ensures individuals can thrive in a dynamic economy. This approach drives long-term prosperity, empowering people to build sustainable careers and successful businesses.

We understand the vital role HE plays as a catalyst and key driver for economic and social mobility. We will continue to have ambitious plans to increase the availability and accessibility of our education programmes, ensuring they meet the needs of the local and regional population, as well as business, employers and the economy.

Lifelong learning and widening participation are at the heart of our strategic aims. We will continue to develop clear routes into, through and progressing beyond HE. We are committed to providing up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities for those who wish to progress further at work. Supporting continuous professional and technical development will remain central to our vision of a ladder of progression and we will work closely with our partners and stakeholders to raise aspirations and access to postgraduate study.

We recognise that meeting the skills demands of the future will require more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it will involve the mobilisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands. We will develop our future-ready students to have both broad and specialised knowledge.

Background

SIRM has a proven track record of successfully providing high-quality, accessible, education to students from non-traditional backgrounds for over ten years. Widening participation is embedded in SIRM's strategic approach to its provision of higher education programmes. To this end, SIRM actively seeks partnerships with organisations who also prioritise widening participation and access to Higher Education. Through these strategic partnerships, SIRM has been able to design, develop and deliver programmes which meet the needs of its non-traditional entrants.

Equality, diversity and inclusion are central elements to our student experience, reflected in our Admissions Procedures, mapped to our partner's criteria and The UK Quality Code for Higher Education. We provide impartial advice and guidance to ensure all applicants are supported to secure the most appropriate programme for them. We analyse the data we hold on the backgrounds of our applicants and students, to assess the areas where we are performing well and the areas where we wish to take further action to improve participation. We adopt a whole college approach to promoting access and participation by fostering a transformational student-ready, and nurturing culture, in which all staff own a shared responsibility with students, for their success and progression.

This Access and Participation Plan has been developed and implemented after careful analysis and consideration of a wide array of student data sources including the process of programme development and review, admissions, progression, retention, assessment, HESA indicators, post-graduation employment, the number of our students receiving the maximum maintenance grant, NSS and other student surveys. It sets out where here are disparities in student outcomes across the life cycle stages of access, success and progression and the strategies we are committed to undertaking to mitigate risks to equality of opportunity that we already know about and those we have identified following the assessment of performance process.

What we Offer

The programmes that we offer are market-oriented and specifically designed and structured to meet the market and employer demands of the future. SIRM students are mature and generally employed or self-employed, studying to progress their careers or businesses. Our courses are designed to help each individual to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours that employers say is needed to increase their employability.

In 2018 the College restarted its higher education provision, offering the Pearson Higher National Diploma in Business with an initial intake of 40 students in part. Subsequently the numbers have grown through the development of its partnership with East Sussex College Group and the College of Salford in 2025 to offer initially a Level 6 BSc (Hons) Business with Management Top-up. SIRM also delivers the following direct delivery HNDs: Business; Fashion & Textiles; Leadership & Management; Digital Technologies; International Travel and Tourism Management; Hospitality Management.

The College's main campus is located in Ilford, East London, with a new campus in Leicester, which has been fully operational since November 2024. At the time of drafting the Access and Participation Plan, SIRM had 634 active students.

Both campuses recruit students from their local communities, with Redbridge having 11 neighbourhoods amongst the 20% most deprived in England. Leicester is ranked 32nd most deprived local authority for the Index of Multiple Deprivation. 7% of Leicester's population reside in the most deprived 5% of areas nationally. 35% of the population reside in the most deprived 20% of areas nationally.

The College's approach to ensuring equality of opportunity includes a number of initiatives:

a. The College has a widening participation and social inclusion approach to the recruitment of its students, focusing on underrepresented groups, including those who are seeking to return to learning or who have never studied higher education. SIRM consequently has a high proportion of its students who may be identified as 'non-traditional' students. The majority of students are mature students and come from a wide range of ethnic and national backgrounds. The majority are English as a second language speakers. The information made available uses clear language and applicants are encouraged to contact the College for further information. However, successful engagement with younger adult students has been limited, and targets for engagement are being put in place to address this.

b. The admissions process is contextualised to support and encourage applications from students from underrepresented groups, including those with non-traditional education backgrounds and to explore prior experiential work-based learning. The College is able to offer students with lower formal qualifications and high quality work experience the opportunity to access provision which can offer progression from level 4 to level 6 as part of its lifelong learning agenda.

c. Additional student support is offered through a wide range of academic support services including student Progress Mentors, individual learning plans, group and individual tutorial sessions, language support and study skills sessions. The College

aims to ensure that every student receives appropriate support and guidance to enable them to achieve their academic and personal goals and to reduce the risk of them struggling to complete their studies.

d. The College seeks to provide a welcoming, nurturing and inclusive learning environment for all students where they can develop and reach their full potential. Inclusion, equality and diversity are at the heart of the College's programme management and delivery strategies which are supported by Student Services to help to meet individual learning needs. The College holds a range of events aimed at promoting understanding of, and engagement with, students from a variety of cultures and backgrounds to raise their awareness of the provision offered.

e. Working with partners including universities, colleges, local employers, faith groups and community representatives assists the College in identifying both work placement and work-related experience opportunities for students to enhance their employability and access to career pathways. The College is just in the process of developing its Enterprise Incubation Centre to complement the curriculum and maximise our students' opportunities for employment and self-employment advancement.

Approach to widening access

SIRM's approach to widening access is underpinned by a strong evidence base that has been developed through working with stakeholders, along with its ongoing collaboration with our student body. Over 85% of our student come from personal recommendation and referral. An important component of our widening participation approach is our contextual admissions policy. The policy aims to mitigate both educational disadvantage and individual circumstances, ensuring that anyone who can flourish at SIRM can join us, irrespective of background.

The transition of students under-represented in higher education, particularly ethnic minority students, first-generation students and students from low-income backgrounds to higher education is crucial to ensuring their future success and engagement in a HE. Students returning to learning after a long break or studying in the UK for the first time, will benefit from comprehensive support provided by our academic and student support teams. Induction activities and ongoing support are in place to enable students to successfully succeed on their programme. This holistic approach ensures that their transition into higher education is not only well supported but also guided with care and attention. From language and mental health resources to academic guidance, we are committed to fostering a nurturing environment where students can thrive academically and personally.

Through a range of wellbeing support initiatives and interventions, we facilitate the success of all students in overcoming obstacles that could otherwise hinder their continuation and completion of their programme. Recognising that mental health is intricately linked to academic performance and overall well-being, we provide comprehensive support to ensure that students have the resources they need to thrive both academically and personally.

Academic staff and Progress Mentors are in place to support student motivation and ensure all students have very high expectations for their own performance and want to work hard to achieve the best possible grades.

The College has had success in attracting students from under-represented groups including those from low-income socio-economic groups, in particular mature students who would not normally progress into higher education. The College recognises that providing effective support for non-traditional students is a key element in supporting continuation, completion and progression rates. As part of building successful student achievement, SIRM seeks to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of its provision through access to accurate and timely data, which allows staff and managers to make timely interventions to support student progress. Consideration is also given to module reviews, which include student feedback and programme meetings, which include staff and student representatives. The College also undertakes annual monitoring and evaluation of all its provision through self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans. Student continuation, completion and progression data is monitored by the Senior Leadership Team at monthly meetings and student focus groups provide a forum for identifying areas for improvement.

SIRM's core values focus on supporting student learning and welfare, promoting equality and celebrating diversity. Students are provided with high quality educational support and guidance which is reflected in the high overall continuation and completion rates. The development of key competencies are supported through timetabled study skills sessions which focus on supporting digital literacy, academic writing and research skills, independent learning, environmental awareness and broader employability skills. The College's approach to programme delivery aims to prepare students for the demands of the modern workplace in addition to fostering a safe, supportive and stimulating learning environment.

The whole provider approach section of the College's Access and Participation Plan sets out its vision, strategy and delivery model, which is holistic, supportive and inclusive, placing the student at the centre of the learning experience.

Our Students

Our diverse student population comprise 634 full-time (FT) students on the two SIRM campuses. 9% of those who declare their ethnicity are from the Asian, Black, Mixed, Other population; and 95% are from the lowest two quintiles as measured by Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The diversity of our student population is further evidenced by representation from 22 different nationalities, a significant proportion (90%) of whom are first generation scholars. White (eastern European) students are the largest ethnic group at 88%, with Asian students at 4%; Black students (<1%) and Other (7%). The majority of SIRM students are first-generation students (90%). This supports our positioning as a major supporter of Social Mobility. 80% of our students were aged over 30; while less than 1% of our students disclose a disability or learning difficulty. As such, we attract a heterogenous population of students and endeavour to create a socially inclusive environment for all our students. Over 96% of our student work either full or part-time whilst also completing their full-time course. The demographics and personal circumstances of our students are key to understanding the context of our performance metrics in access, success and progression from the College.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The College's recruitment policy includes research into the local employment market and the population demographic. To date, this has led the College to focus on upskilling mature non-traditional students. However, the College also acknowledges that it needs to do more to engage hard to reach younger students who may not have the requisite knowledge and skills, information and guidance, or indeed any perception of higher education as being applicable to them, as well as insufficient academic and pastoral support to progress to higher education).

To identify risks to equality of opportunity, the College has drawn on its recruitment, retention, progression and achievement data as well as making reference to the Office for Students (OfS) Access and Participation Dashboard[1], and the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR). We have considered all risk groups within our analysis, where we have sufficient data to draw meaningful conclusions.

This has assisted the College in identifying risks including those linked to recruitment and accessibility of provision, engaging potential students from areas of high social and economic deprivation, particularly those in the under 21 age group. Risks have also been identified in relation to retention and achievement amongst some groups and issues related to non-disclosed mental and physical health issues. A key focus has been on improving attendance in class, as this has been shown to have a direct correlation to progression and achievement[2].

Risk 1: Access to provision for younger students including those who are eligible for free school meals at KS4

EORR Risk 2: Information and guidance - Students may not have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, or to make informed choice about their higher education options.

Internal data shows that 9% of students are aged under 21 years as compared to a national average of over 71% of the student undergraduate population, as shown in the OfS Dashboard data. The large majority of students (73%) are 30 years and over, indicating that the College is successful in attracting mature students. However, the data would suggest that young people are not receiving the information on their opportunities for study or are not attracted by it. This will in some part be because we are not effectively getting recruitment information to those, aged under 25, that are new to the country. The College operates an earn and learn model which attracts mature students. However, this could equally appeal to younger employed students from low-income groups who may also be able to take advantage of the two days in college attendance requirement whilst continuing in paid employment. The SIRM campuses are all well served by affordable public transport in Leicester as well as in London.

[1] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/

[2] Beheshti Fard Sh, Vahedian-Shahroodi M, Khashi Z. The Effect of Class Attendance on Students' Academic Achievement, Professors' Motivation, and Student Professionalism: Perspective of Medical Sciences Students. Med Edu Bull 2023; 4(1): 647-58. DOI: 10.22034/MEB.2023.385682.1072

As part of its plan to address recruitment targets, the College will focus on increasing the proportion of students who were eligible for free school meals to access higher education by 10% by 2028-29.

Evidence collected by the DfE suggests that students who are eligible for free school meals are less likely to continue with their education than those who are not eligible for free school meals. These students often have access to less academic and personal support and are also aware of the costs associated with higher education, without fully being aware of the support they may be entitled to. Strategies are being developed to reach out and to and support these students.

Risk 2: Ethnic Minority Representation.

EORR Risk 2: Information and guidance - Students may not have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, or to make informed choice about their higher education options.

EORR Risk 3: Perception of higher education - Students may not feel able to apply to higher education, or certain types of providers within higher education, despite being qualified.

The representation of ethnic minorities groups is significantly lower than the OfS data profile of 35.5% nationally, with only less than 10% of SIRM students being Asian, Black or Mixed Ethnicity (BAME). The overall percentage of BAME in the localities in which the SIRM campuses are based is also higher, with Redbridge at 65% and Leicester 59% ethnic minorities.

Whilst the College welcomes applications from BAME students, it needs to ensure that the information is targeted at BAME communities, including by the recruitment agents used by the College.

The lower number of applications for BAME students suggests that potentially access to information and guidance is more limited and that perceptions of higher education and courses along with mode of delivery are not transparent.

Risk 3: Students with Disabilities.

EORR Risk 2: Information and guidance - Students may not have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, or to make informed choice about their higher education options.

Data for students that have enrolled on SIRM programmes over the last four years shows very low levels of declared disabilities, including physical and mental difficulties or disabilities. Overall, the number of students who have a declared disability as compared with a national average of over 5% is low at the start of their course[3]. A low number of students later disclose a disability within the first year as part of their student support sessions, however this does not still come close to national rates. The reluctance to declare disabilities, particularly any mental

[3] OfS Dashboard Data.

health or learning difficulties is confirmed by the students themselves as part of their individual tutorial sessions.

Recruitment data reveals that very low number of applicants have a reported disability and information on the nature of support available may not be reaching this target audience. Last year only 1 student undertook a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) assessment.

Risk 4: Progression to further studies for BAME students

EORR Risk 3: Perception of higher education - Students may not feel able to apply to higher education, or certain types of providers within higher education, despite being qualified.

Whilst signposted through their HND, only 29% of the students completing their Higher National Diploma in 2024 from IMD Quintile 1 and 2 postcode areas progressed on to the BSc (Hons) Business with Management (Top-Up) degree at SIRM to further enhance their knowledge, skills and graduate career prospects. Progression to degree programmes is far lower amongst BAME students, and Asian students in particular, than amongst their white counterparts, representing only 7% of students progressing to the Top Up degree. The data indicates that female and male white students are both equally more likely to aspire to progress to the top up degree than their BAME counterparts.

Risk 5: Achievement of higher grades on the Higher National Diploma in Business.

EORR Risk 6: Insufficient academic support – differences in educational experiences before university that did not equip them with the same level of relevant skills or knowledge as other students.

Students on the Higher National Diploma have low rate of achievement of higher grades, with only 9% achieving merit or distinction grades in their units, which is substantially lower than the national average. Many students have English as a second language, have not studied for over five years, often never in this country. Students also struggle with the level of academic writing required, and the evaluative nature of the assessments. Evidence from TASO and OfS data suggests that students from IMD Quintile 1 achieve lower grades than those from Quintile 5, and many of the HND students come from London Boroughs and Leicester with high level of social and economic deprivation. There is no significant difference based on ethnicity or gender. The College is committed to supporting students to achieve higher grades (Risk 6 and Risk 7).

Risk 6: Non-completion by Black and Asian Students

EORR Risk 10: Cost pressures - some students undertaking more paid work than is feasible alongside full-time study

EORR Risk 6: Insufficient academic support - Students may not receive sufficient personalised academic support to achieve a positive outcome.

EORR Risk 7: Insufficient personal support - For many students, extracurricular activities are a core part of the higher education experience, but these are not equally accessible.

Across the student lifecycle from access to progression there is a risk that some groups may feel higher education is not for them due to their protected characteristics, such as people from minority and ethnic backgrounds. For our cohort of students, this is compounded by their busy work and home lives, restricting their ability to attend as they would wish to. Historically, the most frequently cited reasons for withdrawals are pressures from the competing demands of home lives, caring responsibilities and work, including short notice changes to shift patterns or working hours.

Risk 7: Progression from higher education

EORR Risk 12: Progression from higher education - Students may not have equal opportunity to progress to an outcome they consider to be a positive reflection of their higher education experience.

Our assessment demonstrates that the main indication of risk from the EORR, as observed in the data, is employment outcomes. The group identified as most affected are our entire student body, who are adult second language speakers in lower paid jobs. Evidence suggests that graduate level employment opportunities may be limited in these poorer areas, where many students return post-graduation. Therefore, the main risk to equality of opportunity from the EORR for these students is risk 12: progression from higher education; students may not have equal opportunity to progress to an outcome they consider to be a positive reflection of their higher education experience. In practice, the overarching risk 12 encapsulates several other risks identified in the EORR.

Objectives

The recognition of the need for support for students and the removal of any barriers to participation in learning is central to the SIRM philosophy. The College has identified six key risks and the objectives linked to these. It is committed to providing an inclusive environment that offers suitable opportunities for all students who would benefit from engagement with higher education irrespective of age, gender, disability, ethnicity or socio-economic background.

Objective 1: The College will **increase the number of younger students including those aged under 21 and under 25 years from IMD Quintile 1 and 2 postcodes** so that they represent at least 15% of students accessing higher education at SIRM by 2028-29. This will include students who will have been eligible for free school meals. SIRM will also increase its data capture as it relates to free school meals. The College will aim to achieve this through working with colleges, community / faith groups and private providers (ITPs) on pre-entry activities to build raise awareness of higher education opportunities across young people from our recruitment demographic, as well as providing clear information and guidance about accessing higher education and the financial support available, working with community groups and partnerships to widen choices and make study available including through blended learning. This links to PTA_1.

Objective 2: The College will **increase the proportion of students from BAME groups accessing higher education** from the current baseline of 4% to 9% (Asian) and 0% to 6% (Black) by 2028-29 through increased marketing activity, work with local colleges, ITPs and community groups to develop transferable skills including study skills, digital literacy and higher level language skills. The College will also seek to broaden its range of programmes to appeal to more BAME students, provide positive role models and provide support for applicants in completing their application to the College and to the Student Loans Company. This objective is linked to PTA_2.

Objective 3: The College will **increase the number of students with disabilities including learning difficulties and disabilities and mental health conditions** from less than 1% to 5% by 2028-29, through targeted work with colleges, ITPs and community groups to raise awareness of the support and guidance available to disabled students. This will include outreach work with groups that support individuals with disabilities and mental health conditions, ensuring that they are aware of the personal support and financial grants that are available to enable them to access higher education studies. The college will also work to ensure students are more confident in talking to us about a possible disability. We will also work to increase the number of students who undertake a DSA assessment. This objective is linked to PTA_3.

Objective 4: The College will look at ways to **support more BAME students to progress to higher level studies**, including progression from continuation of IMD Quintile 1 and 2 postcode areas and the HND to a one-year top up degree programme. This will include more focused workshops to raise progression aspirations generally and in particular, provide support for BAME students, highlighting the longer-term value of the qualification to their career aspirations. A level 5 to level 6 bridging course will be developed to support students to have the confidence to progress academically. This objective is linked to PTS_ 1 & 2.

Objective 5: The College will introduce greater opportunities for blended study, multiple attendance options, financial support, additional study support and catch-up classes for those who for whatever reason are not able to attend as frequently as they want to. This initiative will therefore enable improved attendance and **enable more HNC/D students to gain merit and distinction grades** with a target of 35% by 2028-29 to support their progression and overall achievement. This will be supported through additional study skills support, workshops and enhanced constructive feedback to support students to understand the requirements for higher grades and how these may be achieved. This objective is linked to PTS_3.

Objective 6: The College will **Reduce the gaps in attainment between students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and other students by improving outcomes for students from minoritised Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds**. Overall achievement rates for Black and Asian student in the last full academic year, 20/21, is 77% and 76% respectively. This objective aims to increase awareness and accessibility of higher education among underrepresented groups, combat stereotypes and misconceptions about who "belongs" in higher education, create a more diverse and inclusive college culture, provide targeted support to address specific barriers faced by different communities. We will foster an inclusive higher education environment that actively promotes and supports participation from all ethnic and social backgrounds, ensuring equal opportunities and representation across diverse communities.

The College will seek to increase achievement through additional study skills and tutor support for students, and additional induction and first term student support to raise achievement to 90%. This links to PTS_4, PTS_5.

Objective 7: Increase in positive graduate progression outcomes (further study or highly skilled occupations) of our students. Our aim is to align our progression outcomes with the sector rate for mature students of 72% by the 2028/29 graduating cohort. This links to PTP_1.

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Intervention strategies and objectives and targets

The strategies identified by the College are aimed at increasing student numbers for underrepresented groups in particular younger students and ethnic minority students from IMD Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 postcodes, and to have in place appropriate strategies to support high levels of engagement and progression to degree study for all students, thus providing a truly inclusive learning environment. Please note target reference numbers that relate to those set out in the Fees, Investments and Targets document (FIT).

Intervention strategy 1: Recruitment, engagement and achievement

Access Target 1 (PTA_1): The College will seek to increase the percentage of young students from IMD Quintile 1 and 2 postcodes from 9% to 15% by 2028-29.

Access Target 2 (PTA_2): The College will seek to increase the number of students from Asian minority groups from 4% to 9% to more closely match the regional demographics of the SIRM campus locations.

Access Target 3 (PTA_3): The College will seek to increase the number of students from Black minority groups from 0% to 6% to more closely match the regional demographics of the SIRM campus locations.

Access Target 4 (PTA_4): The College will seek to increase the proportion of students with learning difficulties, including those with mental health from low numbers to 5%.

Access Target 5 (PTA_5): The College will seek to increase the proportion of students with disabilities, including those with physical disabilities from low numbers to 5%.

Intervention Strategy 2: Continuation and Attainment

Continuation Target 1 (PTS_1): The College will seek to increase the continuation of IMD Quintile 1 and 2 postcode areas from HND programmes to the top up degree from the current level of approximately 27% to 60% by 2028-29.

Continuation Target 2 (PTS_2): The College will seek to improve the continuation rates of HND students from BAME backgrounds to the top up degree from 7% to 17%.

Attainment Target 3 (PTS_3): The College will seek to increase the number of students achieving merit and distinction grades on HND programmes from 9% to 35% by 2028-29.

Attainment Target 4 (PTS_4): The College will seek to increase attainment for Black students, with an increase from 77% to 90% by 2028-29.

Attainment Target 5 (PTS_5): The College will seek to increase attainment for Asian students, with an increase from 76% to 90% by 2028-29.

Intervention Strategy 3: Progression from higher education

Progression Target 1 (PTP_1): To improve the proportion of mature students who progress to employment and/or further study, with an increase from 49% to 72% by 2028-29.

Risks to equality of opportunity and expected outcomes

SIRM will introduce intervention strategies to address the risks that it has identified, as shown above, to equality of opportunities for students. The College's key indications of risk were mapped against the OfS EORR to help inform the development of the intervention strategies set out below.

Risks to equality of opportunity: The two broad areas of risk to equality of opportunity have been broken down into a number of sub areas linked to current and future targets. The nature of the activities linked to each of the areas are shown below.

The main risks identified link to Intervention Strategy 1, underrepresented groups not having the requisite knowledge and skills to access higher education (EORR Risk 1), not having ready access to information and guidance to facilitate higher education choices (EORR Risk 2), and/or may not see themselves as being able to apply for a higher education course (EORR Risk 3). Potential applicants from underrepresented groups may also see the range of provision offered by SIRM as not meeting their interests (EORR Risk 5)

The risks identified in relation to Intervention strategy 2 include consideration of the sufficiency of academic and personal support (EORR Risk 6 and 7), risks and support associated with poor mental health (EORR Risk 8) and financial pressures with having to earn and learn (EORR Risk 10).

The risks identified in relation to Intervention strategy 3 is progression from higher education (EORR risk 12); students may not have equal opportunity to progress to an outcome they consider to be a positive reflection of their higher education experience. In practice, the overarching risk 12 encapsulates several other risks identified in the EORR, most notably cost pressures, which can restrict students' access to key progression opportunities.

Intervention strategy 1: Recruitment, engagement and achievement and expected outcomes (PTA_1, 2 and 3)

Equality of Opportunity Risk	Objectives
Intervention Strategy – 1 Broadening access for younger students, students with disabilities and students BAME groups. The SIRM strategy to enhance access and participation encompasses targeted activities to boost awareness amongst younger students, students with disabilities and students from underrepresented minority groups, of the higher education learning opportunities available, and to help raise interest and promote engagement. Activities will include internal and external events, social media and digital marketing initiatives, taster classes, and open days. We will collaborate with external organisations and groups to focus on increasing student awareness and engagement, as sector analysis suggests that young people from areas of social and economic deprivation, as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintile 1 & 2, along with those with disabilities and from ethnic minorities may not see higher education as an option due to prior attainment. SIRM plans to promote awareness through targeted outreach and engagement with local colleges, and other groups for level 4 options which promote access to higher education. Targeted financial support for students from low-income households, those who will find university particularly challenging from a financial perspective, or from specific socioeconomic backgrounds. This will be promoted internally and through the admissions team, Uni Connect and tailored communications to community groups.	**1.** SIRM will seek to recruit more young students, increasing the participation rate of less than 9% to 15% by the end of 2028-29. **2.** We will increase the proportion of disabled students from less than 1% to 5% by the end of the academic year 2028-29. We will also increase participation for students with Cognitive and learning difficulties and those with mental health issues to match the national average of 5% by the end of the academic year 2028-29. **3.** We will increase the proportion of Asians, Black, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds from the current level for Black minority groups of 0% to 6% and Asian minority groups from 4% to 9% by the end of the academic year 2028-29. **4.** Introduce an outreach programme to engage with local ITPs, colleges, employer groups and faith organisations to engage with those from underrepresented groups. **5.** £85,000 bursary fund to improve access to higher education for students from a range of low-income or specific socioeconomic backgrounds.

Intervention strategy 2: Attainment and continuity (PTS_1; PTS_2; PTS_3; PTS_4)

<table>
<tr>
<td rowspan="2">Intervention Strategy – 2 Student continuation and achievement.

SIRM will build on the induction initiatives which identify students with support needs and put in place appropriate support. This will include recording goals and support needs in Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). ILPs will be reviewed as part of individual tutorials on a schedule which reflects individual support needs, but with a minimum of review meetings held once per term. Induction assessments will also be more widely implemented following their pilot with groups within the College. Study skills development will be delivered as part of the extended induction period. The strategy aims to help ease students into understanding assessment models and to identify any learning support needs including additional English language, numeracy and IT support. The further development of the SIRM support framework will serve to support diversity within the student population and promote retention and progression as well as achievement and high grades.

SIRM will continue to develop its approach to early interventions for students identified as being at risk through the use of BRAG rating, in order that appropriate academic and pastoral support is made available to support their engagement and progression. This will include working with external organisations to signpost students with mental health issues to additional help as needed. All students' attendance and engagement with resources provided through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and MySIRM will be monitored, and tutors and other academic and support staff will continue to make contact with students who are not attending or accessing resources needed to identify any difficulties and to support their achievement.

The College will provide all students with high-quality information, advice, and guidance, to support their achievement and to ensure that</td>
<td>6. Improve the non-continuation rate of students from the IMD Quintile 1 and 2 areas from 27% to 60% by 2028-29 ensuring that they receive the advice, guidance and support that is tailored to their needs.</td>
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<td>7. Increase the progression rate of students from Black and Asian backgrounds by at least from 7% to 17% by 2028-29 to reflect the local demographic and to increase parity of achievement with white students.

8. Provide resources and additional support to students with physical, mental health and learning disabilities including:

a. hearing loops for hearing impaired students
b. software packages to produce materials in fonts and formats appropriate to those with learning difficulties such as dyslexia
c. increase provision of access to support for students with mental health issues, though building links with local advice centres and support providers across all campus areas.
d. Additional information and English language support including pre-course proficiency programmes to support students with English as a second language.

9. Provide additional guidance and support for HND students on how to achieve higher grades including more formative activities and clear, coherent and constructive feedback on how their work may be improved.</td>
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</table>

they are clear about progression options. For identified groups with lower progression rates, additional information sessions will be provided to support progression choices. The College will also build on its employer partnerships to offer more opportunities for work-based learning to help students to gain more experience and enhance their understanding of employers' requirements and opportunities. The College will ensure that a hardship fund is in place to help students who may require some additional support with elements such as travel costs to continue their engagement To ensure that all staff are clear about SIRM's approaches and mechanisms for supporting student engagement, achievement and progression, the College will continue to invest in the professional development of its staff, ensuring they are well-equipped support students and enhance the overall quality of the learning experience offered.	**10.** Support HND students to improve attendance, their access to personal support and extra curricular activities. **11.** CPD opportunities for the staff to further develop skills and knowledge to better to better understand learning disabilities as well as identify and assess them, supporting students from underrepresented groups including those with mental health and learning disabilities. **12.** Promote health and wellbeing including nutrition and physical health.

The actions that the College has identified to address the identified risks are supported by evidence of sector success including those set out in The Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) Mapping Outcomes and Activities Tool (MOAT).

The Pre-entry MOAT has been referenced to inform the recruitment and inclusion targets and the Attainment-raising MOAT has been used to inform the attainment and progression identified activities. SIRM has taken into consideration the factors associated with change management and will look at how this can be embedded and the impact measured.

The activity and outcomes tables set out the range of activities and the linked planned outcomes which have come out of discussions, evaluation of current practices and shortfalls and the work undertaken by other providers which have positively impacted on the engagement, recruitment, retention and attainment of students, including those from underrepresented groups or groups where variation from national norms have been identified.

Intervention strategy 3: Progression from Higher Education (PTP_1)

Intervention Strategy – 3 Changing Lives Strategy.

SIRM's changing lives plan is a collection of initiatives aimed at raising the aspiration of our students to be the very best they can be by:

- staying in education to achieve higher qualifications
- developing their employability skills, behaviours and attitudes
- developing their entrepreneurial self and becoming business owners

It is designed to provide all students the opportunity to learn through hands-on activities and networking spaces designed to build social capital and confidence in students.

A well resourced Enterprise Incubation Centre will be at the heart of this intervention strategy. Core to the wider learning experience of all students.

Central to each student's personal development journey will be the use of online tools and a self assessment framework to measure and build their essential skills – listening; speaking; problem solving; creativity; staying positive; aiming high; teamwork and leadership. these are broken down into a sequence of steps, starting with absolute beginner through to mastery.

All students will have access to work-like experience (WLE). Students will gain experience within a professional environment, building confidence, providing greater exposure to external organisations and career possibilities

Employers, alumni and staff also have key roles within the programme.

13. Training for all staff on challenges facing target students and the Changing Lives plan.

14. WLE, including placements, live consultancy projects, community engaged learning or work insights visits will be used to facilitate equity and fair access for students who otherwise may not undertake extracurricular activity.

15. Advice sessions with careers specialists and employer experts

16. Networking events with recruiters

17. Enterprise competitions and funding opportunities

18. Online enterprise community, with linked employers and mentors

19. Business startup resources and masterclasses

20. Eight essential employability skills to succeed embedded into the curriculum journey

Intervention strategy 1: Recruitment, engagement and achievement and expected outcomes (PTA_1, 2 and 3)

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Outreach and marketing initiatives to attract younger students to SIRM provision. This will include the development of a programme of visits and activities including with local employers, Colleges and ITPs in IMD areas to draw attention to higher education opportunities for all and routes into higher education. Bursary information for students eligible for FSM students Aspiration raising activities to be organised with partner organisations. EORR Risk 1, Risk 2 and Risk 3.	Marketing Team Admissions Team Programme Leads Student Services Staff	• A programme of visits to local employers, ITPs and colleges with low progression to higher education rates to raise awareness of HE opportunities. • The organisation of collaborative activities with schools including offering mentorship opportunities • A programme of activities in College including offering short taster classes for potential students. • External activities including provision of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for externals stakeholders including teachers and student careers staff. • Develop marketing activities and IAG tailored to students from low-income families to engage younger students including events. • Provision of progression and employability pathways information linked to local economic regeneration and development plans through tailored careers days. • Enhanced understanding of higher education pathways and the application process amongst the younger students group. • Aspiration raising amongst students from IMD 1 & 2 postcodes. • Collaboration with Uni Connect to increase engagement with under 25s. • Clear information about funding support and student loans to support students understand how costs are met.	**Yes**

		• Training opportunities for recruitment and admissions staff on engaging with younger students from IMD areas and raising aspirations. • Develop support materials and activities to support meta-skills development and cognitive skills development and achievement.	
Targeted marketing activities focusing on BAME groups to increase representation to reflect the regional population profile including students living in IMD Quintile 1 & 2 postcodes EORR Risk 1, Risk 2, Risk 3 and Risk 10.	Marketing Team Admissions Team Programme Leads	• Develop links with employers, community and faith groups to better understand subject areas in which local communities may have an interest • Work with local employers and community groups to develop links and materials which will more closely meet the interests of BAME students • Develop clear marketing and informant materials linked to regional economic development and employment prospects. • Clear and tailored information about funding and links to career development and income, highlighting the value of higher education qualifications to personal and professional development. • Increase applications from BAME students.	**Yes**
Open day and inclusive activities for students from underrepresented groups Working with Uni Connect and other providers as well as own events. EORR Risk 1 and Risk 2	Marketing Team Recruitment and Admissions Team	• Provide targeted higher education outreach to young people in targeted parts of our catchment. • Raise awareness and interest amongst potential students through improved knowledge and understanding of higher education opportunities • Promote higher education aspirations amongst potential student groups • Provision of information for students and stakeholders so that the value of higher education is clearly highlighted. • Increase applications from underrepresented groups	**Yes**

Develop awareness raising programme for students with disabilities and learning difficulties including outreach events. Provision of tailored IAG and outreach work including with employers, ITPs, schools and community groups. EORR Risk 2 and Risk 3	Marketing Team Programme Teams	• Appropriate support mechanisms available to students with a range of learning difficulties and disabilities • Enhanced College infrastructure which supports students to have access to appropriate technology and individual support, including additional study skills and classroom support as appropriate. • Promote the potential benefits of undertaking a DSA assessment. • Additional careers support to support the range of post education opportunities. • Increased applications from students with disabilities due to improved knowledge of learning opportunities and support available from less than 1% to 10%	**Yes**
Develop of support services for those with mental health and wellbeing conditions. Training for recruitment, admissions, academic and support staff to ensure information provided includes support available. EORR Risk 2 and Risk 8	Marketing Team Programme Team Student Support and Welfare Team	• Development and provision of materials that make clear mental health awareness and support. • Training for staff on recognising and supporting students with mental health concerns. • Develop additional mental health and wellbeing support services including links to external counselling services and medical support.	**Yes**

Intervention Strategy 2 – Continuation and Attainment including PTS_1, PTS_2, PTS_3, PTS_4 and PTS_5

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Support the continuation of students from the HND to the top-up of the associated degree with a particular focus on students from IMD Quintile 1 & 2 areas and those who do not have English as their first language. EORR Risk 1 and Risk 10	Programme Team Student Support Team	• Introduction of early intervention systems to provide additional support and guidance to support progression • Access to student mentors to provide one-to-one opportunities to discuss concerns and raise aspiration. • Provide additional sessions on skills development and understanding of employability opportunities for those with level 4 and above awards • Provide additional sessions on skills development and understanding of what is required to secure a graduate career • Provision of additional subject-specific workshops to support knowledge and understanding in areas where students may be struggling • Support progression rates to over 90% of those students who successfully complete their HND.	**Yes**
Support for BAME students to encourage continuation and completion Workshops to support continuation of studies for BAME students Aspiration raising workshops and taster sessions for HND classes.	Academic Team Student Support Team	• **Improved continuation rates from students from Black and Asian** backgrounds from 7% to 17%, and continuation to degree from HND from 27% to 60%. • **Improved completion rates from students from Black and Asian** backgrounds from 77 and 76%% to 90%. • Provide financial support for those struggling to afford to attend. • Provide extra lessons or alternative timetables for those impacted by their working patterns. • Provide a bridging course to support the successful jump from L5 to L6 study.	**Yes**

EORR Risk 1 and Risk 10		• Additional subject specific tutoring to support attainment and aspiration. • Improved understanding of assessment criteria • Improved aspiration and understanding of opportunities and higher proportion of attainment and progression. • Increased retention and progression	
Support for HN students to raise grades Workshops to support understanding of grade criteria Unit specific workshops	Academic Team Study Skills Team	• Increased critical thinking and critical engagement with information resulting in higher grades on HNC/D units. • Increased understanding of language and the command verbs, resulting in higher grades on HNC/D units. • Increased cognitive skills strategies • Increased subject knowledge and student motivation and engagement	**No**
Continuation rates Greater individual student monitoring and tutorial support, with the introduction of new Progress Mentor role. Student mentoring for HND students to support achievement. Additional subject specific workshops. CPD activities for staff to enhance student engagement and active learning.	Student Mentors Programme Teams Study Skills Team	• Improved continuation rates from HND to top-up year of degree programmes through access to enhanced support • Enhanced material and teaching which supports student engagement and achievement • Provide a bridging course to support the successful jump from L5 to L6 study • Improved study skills strategies • Workshops to improve engagement with information and assessments • Increased academic motivation and achievement • Student involvement in module and programme review and development as part of an ongoing process of enhancement to support students to progress between programme levels.	**Yes**

Intervention Strategy 3 – Progression from Higher Education PTP_1

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Final Year **work-like experience (WLE)** Programme for students that have not undertaken work experience as part of their programme. Students are proactively contacted and offered tailored information, advice and guidance relating to their careers and next steps after graduation. EORR Risk 12	0.5 Careers Consultant (New) Student Mentors Study Skills Team	• Increase in students engaging in appointments with Careers Consultants and an increase in the number of final year students who engage with the Enterprise Incubation Centre. • More students take optional placements. • Graduate Outcomes and progression to further study will improve to sector levels for mature students.	**Yes**
Embed the use of the Skills Builder Framework into curriculum delivery to raise awareness of and capability in employability skills.	Programme Teams Study Skills Team	• A common approach to develop and deliver the transferable essential skills which all students need to develop to do almost any job. Students recognise their strengths and areas for improvement. • Employers can more easily identify these skills in candidates and students are supported to build them in incremental steps. • Those with stronger essential skills have been shown to enjoy greater life satisfaction and can earn up to 12%[4] more than their peers. • Students are more competitive in job markets by demonstrating practical abilities beyond academic knowledge.	**Yes**

[4] https://www.skillsbuilder.org/file/essential-skills-tracker-2023

The Enterprise Incubation Centre is central to the wider learning experience of all students.		• Hands-on entrepreneurial experience allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world business scenarios. • Access to mentorship, expertise and guidance from experienced entrepreneurs, industry experts, and governors faculty members. • Financial support through seed funding or investor connections. • Skill development on business planning, marketing, finance, and legal aspects of startups. • Encourages teamwork and idea exchange between students, encouraging them to take control of their high outcomes.	**Yes**

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy:

Summary of evidence base and rationale

SIRM has identified key priority areas to promote engagement with underrepresented groups within the SIRM student body to promote their retention, progression and achievement, as well as strategies for encouraging more interest and the recruitment of young student aged under 21 and 25 years, more BAME students and more disabled students. Additionally, this plan seeks to increase progression from level 5 to level 6. This will require increased recruitment and marketing activities, events and production of clear information, advice and guidance to attract and progress students from these groups, particularly those from IMD Quintile 1 and 2 postcode areas. Funding has been provisionally allocated to the different areas over the life of the plan:

Intervention strategy	**Further Information**	**Amount (to the nearest £1,000)**
Implement personal support entitlement strategy	Review student engagement and propose a set of recommendations to provide minimum levels of tutorial and Progress Mentor support based on student BRAG categories. Monitor the effectiveness of this through attendance monitoring, course assessment progress, first time completion rates, grade profiles and BRAG rating improvements.	£650,000
Implement student enrichment strategy	Review student engagement and propose a set of recommendations to provide support and encourage participation in extracurricular and employability activities. Use engagement and attendance monitoring, along with other metrics to provide insights into engagement in on campus facilities and extracurricular activity. Use Skills Builder Framework to enable students to self-assess their position in the framework and Skills Builder Launchpad for improvement.	£602,000
Students with a declared disability or learning difficulty	Meet regularly with students who declare a disability or learning difficulty to ensure they have appropriate support in place; study skills opportunities to be made clearer to students with declared disability or learning difficulty and careers support to work with employers to find an improved range of opportunities. Implement a CPD programme for staff to enhance their understanding.	£246,000
Wellbeing, mental health and counselling	Provide targeted funds towards further wellbeing support, additional mental health support services, CPD and a dedicated budget to support external counselling services.	£264,000
Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance	Improve levels of information provided for employment; self-employment; CV preparation, job search; application process and interview process; ensure 1:1 CEIAG interventions are provided to all at the start, middle and end of their programme. Work with course teams to embed new tutorial support relating to employability strategy, plus long-term careers support for individual students.	£382,000

Recruitment of low participating groups	Collaboration with Uni Connect to increase engagement of under 25s, run guidance events, marketing, information advice and guidance in target neighbourhoods, establish links with relevant education, community and faith organisations.	£364,000
Changing Lives Strategy for progression	Implement a new Enterprise Incubation Centre. The wider learning experience of all students enhanced with a self assessment framework to measure and build their essential skills, All students will have access to work-like experience (WLE).	£320,000

The evidence base for the identification of risks and actions.

The review and development of pre-entry information to raise awareness and aspirations amongst underrepresented and hard to reach groups is a common feature of higher education recruitment, and also a key feature of widening participation and social inclusion strategies. Research by TASO in 2023 has shown that these activities are most effective when implemented early in the recruitment process and linked to other activities including outreach initiatives as part of a holistic strategy. The offer of financial assistance to students who are or would have been eligible for the Free School Meals (FSM) provision, has been shown to be a positive incentive, though it may also have some risk of stigma attached where this is means-tested (Baars, Mulcahy and Bernardes, 2016). Available bursaries could link to FSM status and Quintile postcode data. Students should also be able to provide evidence to show that they are eligible for a bursary if they do not fall within the more formal categories to support inclusion and fairness.

To make higher education more accessible, SIRM uses a range of modes of delivery, including full face-to-face on campus teaching, 50/50 blended learning. Courses are timetabled to meet student availability, including one week-end day on campus and two online evening classes, and a mixture of on campus day and evening sessions. The mode of delivery is also dependent on the requirements of the validating body/partner, though the earn and learn model of no more than two days in college applies to all provision. Research cited by TASO shows that the earn and learn models are popular with mature non-traditional students which includes the College's current cohorts of mature and BAME students.

Forums and feedback from students confirm that blended learning and delivery models which allow students to continue to earn and support their families account for a significant part of what initially attracted them to SIRM provision. Research has also shown that BAME students are more likely to wish to study closer to home than white students, so that local provision which supports an earn and learn model is attractive (McCabe, Keast and Kaya, 2022). The relatively small range of SIRM courses may, however, be a limiting engagement factor, and the College's longer term strategy is to expand the range of subject/sector areas and levels covered by its provision.

Whilst there is limited research to support a positive correlation between additional personal and academic support on continuation and attainment, there is evidence that the personalised approach and availability of additional support helps to build student confidence and engagement and a sense that they belong to the College community, which has a positive impact on retention (Pedler, Willis and Nieuwoudt, 2022).

Analysis of student end of module and end of programme surveys, student forums and Quality & Performance meetings with programme staff have highlighted the value of additional academic and personal support on the continued engagement of students and progression and achievement (Risk 6 & 7). The higher education sector as a whole has acknowledged the need to support students with mental health issues, that OfS data shows represent between 5%-6% of the student population. SIRM has less than 1% of students who declare a disability, and very few who declare a mental health issue at enrolment. A small number of students later admit to a mental health issue and are signposted to support. The College seeks to provide a safe environment conducive to wellbeing (Risk 8), and the ILPs and individual tutor support provide support and guidance for student with disabilities. Increased use of DSA assessments will bring the necessary financial support needed for students.

Evaluation

We have reviewed our evaluation practices using the OfS evaluation self-assessment tool and we have identified areas we can work on over the life of the plan. These institutional improvements, along with ongoing monitoring and evaluation, will enhance both the quality and quantity of our interventions. Our evaluation efforts will also contribute to sector knowledge on effective evaluation practices.

We aim to generate OfS Type 1 and 2 evidence across all our activities. This means:

1. Providing coherent explanations for our actions and their rationale
2. Ensuring our claims are research and data based.
3. Demonstrating that our interventions are associated with beneficial results, particularly when comparing outcomes for activity participants to relevant comparator groups.

We will also use the OfS Financial support evaluation toolkit[5] to evaluate the bursary system to better monitor how our students use the bursaries and the perceived value to them. This will also help understand how and why financial support affects academic, personal, and social outcomes.

The intervention strategies in relation to the recruitment of underrepresented groups including younger students, BAME students and students with learning difficulties and physical and mental disabilities will be evaluated as a whole. The Colleges will monitor the enquiry and application rates to SIRM of the underrepresented groups of students, along with their attendance. Student satisfaction as collected by college surveys and less formal feedback provided to tutors and student services will also be reviewed to support the enhancement of the Colleges' support. The College will therefore conduct its evaluation using Type 1 and Type 2 evidence on an annual basis, with outcomes being reported to SLT and the Board of Governors as well as the Quality & Performance Group, a sub-group reporting to SLT. The evaluation of individual recruitment initiatives will also be monitored by the College's Admissions Team who provide reports to SLT on a monthly basis as well as by the Quality & Performance Group.

Enhanced Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for students with disabilities and learning difficulties will be aimed at supporting recruitment as well as continuity of studies. The data available through the College is very small and the College aims through its outreach work to contact local community groups and schools to highlight opportunities for disabled students including those with

[5] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/evaluation/financial-support-evaluation-toolkit/survey-tool/

mental health and wellbeing conditions. Type 1 and Type 2 data will be used to monitor recruitment and non-continuation rates to highlight where more support and development work is needed.

Support for HND students to gain higher grades and continuation rates of students will be continuously monitored and evaluated by programme teams and as part of the Self-Assessment Reports produced by programme teams annually and reviewed and updated termly. The impact of the initiatives will also be reviewed through the Quality Improvement Plan, and areas for further review and improvement identified. Updates will be provided to Quality & Performance Group and to the SLT at least termly. A key focus will be on gathering and analysis of Type 2 data, along with benchmarking of SIRM performance against other comparable higher education providers.

All intervention strategies will be monitored and evaluated as whole for their impact on recruitment, retention, progression and achievement and evidence published as part of the annual institution report.

Activity	**Outcomes**	**Method(s) of evaluation** Include type of evidence you intend to generate e.g. empirical (Type 2).	**Summary of publication plan** When evaluation findings will be shared and the format that they will take.
The Student Recruitment and Outreach team delivers a rich menu of activities and CEIAG materials for younger students. Deliver support and programmes which will aim to increase young students' ability to access higher education	Increased level of enquiries from, and recording of, younger students including those eligible for FSM and in Quintile 1 & 2 postcodes leading to recruitment targets of 15% of the College cohorts. Better understanding for higher education pathways and more applications.	Type 2 – monitoring of applications rates for age groups, ethnicity and Quintile categories and quantitative analysis of intake-on-intake profiles. Type 1 – narrative from applicants including when attending organised events.	Monthly reports to SLT and to the Quality and Performance Group. Published updates on the College website. Updates to students during 'voice' meetings. Admissions team data and projections available to staff on the intranet.
Younger learner pre-16 attainment support	Improved academic abilities and academic skills.	Type 1 - Narrative complemented by use of quantitative methods to gather insights into the experiences and perceptions	Reports to the Quality & Performance Group and SLT.

through collaborative provision with schools and business networks drawing on TASO evidence.	Enhanced confidence and knowledge of vocational pathways offered across HND pathways.	of practitioners within the network and through focus groups. The College will also use surveys to gauge how students are benefitting from events to build a broader understanding of the impact. Type 2 – collection of college/school-based attainment results pre and post collaborative initiatives	Outcomes of initiatives published on the College website.
Aspiration raising activities for BAME and disabled students including Open Days, attendance at community events, and other Uni Connect London partnership activities.	Increased engagement from underrepresented groups and interest in progression to higher education	Type 1 – narrative along with engagement numbers and requests for information. Feedback on the quality and clarity of information provided. Type 2 – enquiry and application data to highlight raised interest.	Reports on events to SLT and information published on events via social media and the College website. Monthly reports to SLT and evidence consideration and outcomes monitored by Quality & Performance Group. Support availability and developments to be published on the College website and VLE.
Support for BAME students to encourage continuation and achievement	Improved BAME progression to top up degree in line with non-BAME students.	Type 1 – narrative including feedback from students on workshops and additional support. Type 2 – comparative analysis of cohort continuation data to show improved continuation and achievement	Consideration of impact by the Quality & Performance Group and SLT.
Additional HNC/D support to enhance achievement of higher grades	Around 35% of HN students gaining merit and distinction grades	Type 1 – feedback from students on the additional workshops in supporting achievement and their confidence in achieving higher grades. Type 2 – termly analysis of student grade profile achievement to show where	Consideration of impact by the Quality & Performance Group

		a pattern of improvement is being built.	
Continuation support for HND to Top-up study and for progression between years.	Improved continuation rates from HND to Top-up degree particularly amongst BAME students.	Type 1 – narrative including through ILPs and tutorials on the impact of additional support and workshops. Type 2 – profile of continuation across years, groups and analysis by ethnicity to show impact and improvements in continuation.	Consideration of impact by the Quality & Performance Group
Continuing English language support	Improved continuation and engagement from English as a second language students.	Type 1 – feedback gathered as part of tutorials and in support workshops Type 2 – data showing continuation rates, grade improvements, first time passes and achievement rates.	Outcomes reported to Quality & Performance Group and SLT.
Comparing outcomes (e.g Graduate Outcomes Survey, progression rates) between participants and sector averages.	Increase the number of students who progressed to highly skilled employment, further study or other positive outcomes 15 months after leaving higher education	Type 1 – engagement rates and feedback gathered as part of engagement activities Type 2 – data showing progression rates.	Outcomes reported to Quality & Performance Group and SLT.

We will increase our external evaluation output by regularly publishing reports relating to specific activities and/or the Intervention Strategies that underpin them on a new page on our website. In addition to this, we plan to publish a report on an annual basis (by the end of each calendar year, starting 2026), for each of the four years of the plan, which summarises our main evaluation findings from the previous academic year.

Our plans for achieving robust impact evaluation may be subject to external forces and/or the macro environment. To mitigate any factors beyond our control, we will embed implementation and process evaluation methodologies to help us understand how our provision is being delivered, the student groups it is reaching and the perceived value from beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

Whole provider approach

Central to SIRM's approach is its Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy, which forms part of the suite of strategies to achieve our Strategic Plan. To further embed equity, diversity, and inclusion across all facets of the College, this Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy was embed as a thematic ambition within the Strategic Plan.

One of the principal aims of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy is to undertake and embed robust Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's) across all policies, practices, projects, and decision-making: The EIAs help SIRM ensure that its policies, practices, and decision-making are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups from participation. EIA's are undertaken at the start of a policy review or introduction of an intervention and are an integral part of all evaluations. This enables the identification of any unintended adverse impacts and opportunities to advance further equality of opportunity for specific student groups. All EIAs are reviewed and signed off by the SLT.

We are committed to enabling and ensuring fair access and participation, and to ensure a comprehensive approach the College has an Access and Participation Group with student and staff representation. This group has overall strategic ownership of the College's Access and Participation Plan.

Through the work of this Committee in general, and the development of this plan in particular, we have paid due regard to the Equality Act 2010 and our obligation to advance equality of opportunity. As part of our strategic and institutional approach to equity and inclusion we collect, analyse and publish student data, broken down by protected characteristics, on an annual basis. This information is explored at the Quality & Performance Group, used to inform the strategic priorities for the EDI action plan, and shared with the Access and Participation Committee.

Intentionally, there is considerable overlap in the membership of these two committees to ensure there is a common agenda. This qualitative data is complemented by the collation of qualitative data including student focus groups and student representatives, enabling us to evidence that we are eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between those who have a protected characteristic and those who don't.

The College seeks to embed the access and participation concepts of equality and support for everyone to reach their potential across all the College's provision. The approach of additional support (Risk 6 and Risk 7) aligns with the College's mission and vision of: providing and promoting opportunities for personal, professional and academic growth for students from all backgrounds; helping each individual student develop the tools and skills needed to enhance their abilities and support their career development. This inclusive ethos underpins the College's approach to ensuring equality of opportunities for all who may wish to access and participate in higher education, and to support achievement.

To broaden opportunities and to promote inclusivity and lifelong learning, the College has developed a broad range of enrichment, enhancement and skills development support interventions to help students to progress through all levels and to achieve their ambitions. The College's High Expectations Strategy is used to raise aspirations amongst students who would not otherwise have knowledge of, or access to, pathways to progression (Risk 3 and Risk 4).

The ethos of equality of opportunity and the College's obligations under the Equality Act are set out in policies and procedures including the College's Widening Participation and Social Inclusion Policy and the Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy. The College seeks to ensure access to its provision, including funding for learning, is made clear and available to all stakeholders, and that information advice and guidance supports students to gain access to provision at the appropriate level and to progress in line with their goals.

For higher education provision, the admissions process is outlined as clearly as possible to all stakeholders, with the focus being on ensuring that applicants have the skills and capability as well as the capacity to engage with higher level study. Whilst the College delivers its higher education provision through an earn and learn model, which allows students to study on days that suit them including in the evenings, at weekends and online, the additional study time also needs to be fully understood. The College sees supporting flexible access to study, within a neutering environment as a central part of making higher education available to students who need to work and its widening participation and social inclusion strategy.

The College also focuses on ensuring that students who do not have English as a first language, have the English language proficiency to engage with higher education content and the demands of higher education study, as a pre-requisite to success. Where students need to further develop their English language skills, they are signposted to English language resources or given additional language support sessions. Putting in place essential skills is part of the College's strategy for enabling participation for both mature students who are returning to learning and, students who may not have had achieved success at school, especially those who live in areas with low levels of higher education participation including Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 postcodes.

The development of systems which can support the tracking of student engagement and achievement is being taken forward with the development of MySIRM, a student support portal tailored to the needs of our student demographic. This will enable the College to provide additional support for students whose progress and attainment is falling short of target. Alerts will be created for students; programme manages and tutors who can work with students to understand reasons for under achievement and to provide ongoing support.

The Access and Participation Plan (APP) activity is overseen by the College's Quality & Performance Group which is made up of senior managers and programme managers. The role of the Quality & Performance Group is to ensure that activities are delivered, monitored and evaluated consistently as part of a whole provider approach. This approach aims to ensure that there is accountability for implementing improvements at module and programme level. The Quality & Performance Group reports to the SLT and the Board of Governors.

Student consultation

Throughout the deliberative structures of the College, student voice is captured in a variety of forum. As part of the process of producing this Access and Participation Plan the Student Governors have been a part of the review group, ensuring that the views of students were brought into the document.

Beyond the Access and Participation Plan, student representatives play an active role at all levels of College committees including key decision-making bodies such as the Board of Governors and Student Council. Within these spaces representatives are invited to provide reports and bring forward student issues for discussion and action. Students are invited to contribute to SIRM's strategic and

operational priorities through student voice activities which capture ideas on how the College can make improvements to the student experience. Routinely, reports and issues from these activities are brought to the attention of the College to action.

The engagement with students is also central to the effective management of the learning delivered by SIRM. Students are offered the opportunity to engage with the management of their learning experience at module, programme and college level. Elected student representatives are members of a range of college committees including Academic Board, the Student Council and the Board of Governors. Student representatives are invited to programme team meetings where termly performance is reviewed and areas for enhancement identified based on student feedback through end of term module surveys, student achievement and staff and student views. The student representatives play an important role as a direct conduit between the College's management and the student body, reporting a broad range of student commentary on key issues and developments including student access to information and additional support.

Student consultation also takes place through termly focus group meetings where students can raise any concerns and are also invited to give their views on new developments. A focus group has been held to make students aware of the principles of the EDI action plan and the targets that the College has set for itself, both in terms of recruitment and supporting student continuation and attainment. The student representatives who joined the focus group were supportive of the College targets and the focus on inclusion, student support and student engagement. Students' comments on the targets included confirmation that the underpinning rationale was clear, appropriate and aspirational. Students were in agreement with identified risks and associated actions on the EDI action plan, and how each one relates to each of the targets. Students agreed with the identified strategies and made a few additional suggestions, including more information of DSA tests and other financial support options. The concept of bursaries was well received as was the programme for outreach work with schools and community groups. Students are invited to comment on the APP and the identified risks and strategies.

Students had previously identified the need for, and the positive impact of, additional student support and tailored provision to meet their individual needs. Students highlighted the value of pastoral support and signposting to sources of additional advice and guidance.

The College places a high value on student input as it is crucial in the shaping of the inclusion plans and EIAs, ensuring they are not only reflective of the institution's goals, but also of the student body's views, needs and aspirations.

Underrepresented groups form the core of SIRM's student body. Therefore, this Access and Participation Plan is a pivotal document setting out actions to improve access and success for current and future students. The participatory approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by students and enables the development of targeted interventions. By involving students in the creation of the Access and Participation Plan, the College ensures that the strategies implemented are not only effectively evaluated but also inclusive. Students receive clear information about improved support and information and guidance and how these can impact on the student learning experience and the opportunities that are available to them.

Implementation of the APP at local and strategic level.

To support the effective introduction and implementation of the APP, staff with responsibility for widening participation and social inclusion will be appointed and will report to the Chair of the Quality & Performance Group. The College's SLT will also have oversight of implementation across all provision and will ensure that actions taken are timely and meet the APP target requirements.

Evaluation of the plan

We recognise that evaluation is an ongoing process to understand how our activity is being delivered, what impact it is having, and how it is being influenced by internal or external factors. To effectively evaluate the approaches used to address the identified risks and to measure their impact, SIRM will access sector-standard measures utilising the TASO Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. The College will also evaluate impact through exploring and applying Theory of Change models to assess short, medium and longer-term outcomes. The tool kits and training materials offered will be introduced to staff through CPD training which the College will invest in, so that these will become integral to the evaluation of progress against risks and targets.

We have adopted a 'Theory of change' approach across our activity, allowing us to identify the issues we are trying to address, establishing the outcomes we want to achieve and the activities that we will deliver. This will be supported by utilisation of TASO's Theory of Change (TOC) templates where appropriate. Each major project and overarching targeted activity will give careful consideration to the effectiveness of each intervention and how the outcomes will be measurable, monitored, and time bound. The impact of interventions will be evaluated by utilising appropriate frameworks, including the Office for Students standards of evidence, TASO guidelines, the Colleges Self-Assessment and Quality Improvement Planing, alongside an annual review of the Access and Participation Plan data performance milestones using the OFS data dashboard.

Academic teams' assessment of programme quality and standards are also informed by end of module student survey feedback, external examiner feedback and outcomes of awarding body and partner visits. The College will build on current self-assessment and quality approaches to develop a report format for the systematic evaluation of the identified risks, APP targets and their impact. Advice will also be sought from partner universities as to best practices linked to evaluation of risks. We will also seek to work with external evaluation groups and organisations across the sector to ensure that the College learns from their evaluation practices, including Advance HE, NERUPI, TASO and Uni Connect partners in London, to support and to strengthen access and outreach activities and the evaluation of their impact.

Evaluating Impact

Our objective is to evaluate the impact of our activities using both process and outcome evaluation methods. The objectives of each intervention will be proportionate, evidence-based and clearly communicated through a logical theory of change. We will continuously evaluate to ensure we reach our target audiences with effective interventions.

We will analyse quantitative outcomes, measuring baseline and relative changes, using naturally occurring datasets (e.g. existing surveys and MIS data) to ascertain which factors are associated with producing desired outcomes. Analyses will take into account data variance (such as student

characteristics, frequency of interactions/contact hours, prior attainment, and type of intervention) whenever feasible. We will utilise counterfactuals and comparative groups of students with similar backgrounds, where available.

Limitations associated with evaluation techniques, such as self-reported data, will be acknowledged and communicated. We will aim to triangulate results from multiple perspectives to increase self-reported data reliability, objectivity, accuracy and validity. Qualitative analyses (e.g. focus groups) will be employed when relevant to deepen our understanding of delivering impactful interventions. Evaluation of key activities will be continuous throughout the life of the plan.

Monitoring and Review

The Quality & Performance Group will have responsibility for the oversight, monitoring and review of the APP and associated activities and, will ensure that SIRM meets its APP targets and objectives. The Group will undertake reviews of interim and end of year evaluation reports and will produce progress feedback to SLT and to the Board of Governors. The College expects that it will take some time to set up some of the initiatives, including making contact with schools, employers, ITPs and community/faith groups and putting in place relevant activities to raise aspirations and support knowledge and skills.

Sharing of progress

The College will publish summary progress and evaluation reports on its website so that it is accessible to all stakeholders. More detailed progress reports will be shared across the College through SharePoint and will be scrutinised by the Quality & Performance Group, the SLT and the Board of Governors. Reports will also be available to students through the College's VLE and the Student Council will be consulted on the best ways to share key outcomes with all students across all campuses. Progress will be shared with staff during Town Council meetings.

Investment

The College will continue to commit over 10% of higher fee income to access activities which deliver our commitment to equality of opportunity to access higher education and to develop, deliver and assess the impact of new interventions which will support the objectives of this Plan. The equates to £2.8m over the life of this plan.

We will continue to provide financial support, primarily through our bursary scheme, to students who are suffering financial hardship, and will closely evaluate the impact of this scheme to ensure that it supports our intervention strategies to improve the continuation, completion and attainment for students from deprived local areas.

Our investment in our intervention strategies to support student success and attainment takes into account our whole provider approach to delivering equality of opportunity to all our students. Over 95% of our students have at least one characteristic which could indicate a risk to equality of opportunity and our investment to support student success and attainment includes direct and staff costs to deliver equality of opportunity for all students through the interventions we are putting in place to meet the objectives of this Plan, as well as investment in evaluating the impact of these interventions to address the risks and meet the targets we have identified.

Provision of information to students

Fees

The College will charge the maximum fee of £9,275 in 2025/26 for all our degree courses and £7,500 for all our HND courses. The College provides comprehensive information for students on multiple platforms and throughout the student lifecycle. This includes:

- Information on fees and financial support published on our website – sirm.ac.uk under Admissions > Fees & Funding. This information is clearly accessible to students, e.g. via menu navigation or the search bar. This is further supported by an annual consultation with student representatives to monitor and assess any additional costs associated with the study of their course.
- Printed collateral with our offer packs sent out to students once they have received their offer letters.
- Presentations and information sessions at outreach activities, open days and enrolment days.
- Induction information prior to arrival at the College, both in print and on-line.

Financial Support

The College offers financial support to eligible students via its bursary scheme. This is kept under constant review and may change from time to time as it is amended to reflect our developing understanding of its impact and efficacy, along with the changing financial position of our students.

All students studying on undergraduate higher education programmes are eligible for their fees to be covered by the Student Loans Company, and the majority are also eligible for a grant based on their level of household income to cover the cost of travel and, as appropriate, childcare. The College ensures that all students have applied for their student loan, and provides information and guidance, as needed, on the application process from student advisors within the College.

Advice and Guidance

Confidential advice and guidance are offered on all aspects of student finance and funding processes. This includes advice on organising budgets and checking entitlement for bursaries, loans, DSA assessments and hardship funds. 1:1 sessions are available for all students and talks and information sessions are available, as well as being a feature of our induction programme.

All students have access to the SIRM Fee Policy which is available on the College website and all fees are clearly published for each programme. The criteria for refunds are also made clear, though only postgraduate students currently pay fees.

Providing Information

SIRM is committed to providing prospective students and other interested stakeholders, with information, advice and guidance on SIRM provision, which is clear, accurate and accessible. This includes how and where more information can be obtained on programme content, mode of study, fees, funding and pre-entry bursaries, as well as the application process. The College places great emphasis on transparency and accessibility of information and advice, including through its website and through direct contact with college advisors, either online or in person.

Information to prospective students is available in the first instance via the SIRM website. Information on all programmes offered is provided through individual programme descriptors which set out the programme content, and the entry criteria, including for prior experiential learning and qualifications which may have been gained abroad. Advice on gaining access to funding through student loans for higher education programmes is provided, as well as links to the Student Loans Company and a summary of eligibility criteria.

The College aims to ensure that all information provided is clear, well prepared and relevant, and supports students to explore higher education opportunities. In the future this will include information about modular studies funded through the Lifelong Loan Entitlement from 2025-26, which may support students to meet their short or medium term learning and skills requirements.

Bursary and Hardship Fund

Our bursary fund will pay up to a maximum £500 per student as a yearly payment if they are paying full fees and fall into one or more of issued categories:

- Household income is below £25,500 per year.
- Minority ethnicity, or from Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller backgrounds.
- Permanent home address is in an under-represented area in Higher education (POLAR 4 Quintile 1 or 2 area).
- In receipt of Disabled Students Allowance or be in the process of applying for DSA.
- Are an adult carer in receipt of a Carer's Allowance.
- Have been in receipt of FSM.
- Are a care leaver or estranged student.

This information is widely available. It is on our website and when interviewing prospective students, we discuss fees and bursaries. We send timely letters to students and publish information on our student portal MySIRM about our bursary process and how to apply. It is also covered as part of induction and in the student handbook. There are also links to the application forms for bursaries and the hardship fund.

Within this plan, we have added categories to include allowances for care providers, students who received FSM, care leavers and estranged students, and students who are training to be Counsellors. This will be implemented over the life of the plan, including more rigorous data collection for these categories at the point of enrolment.

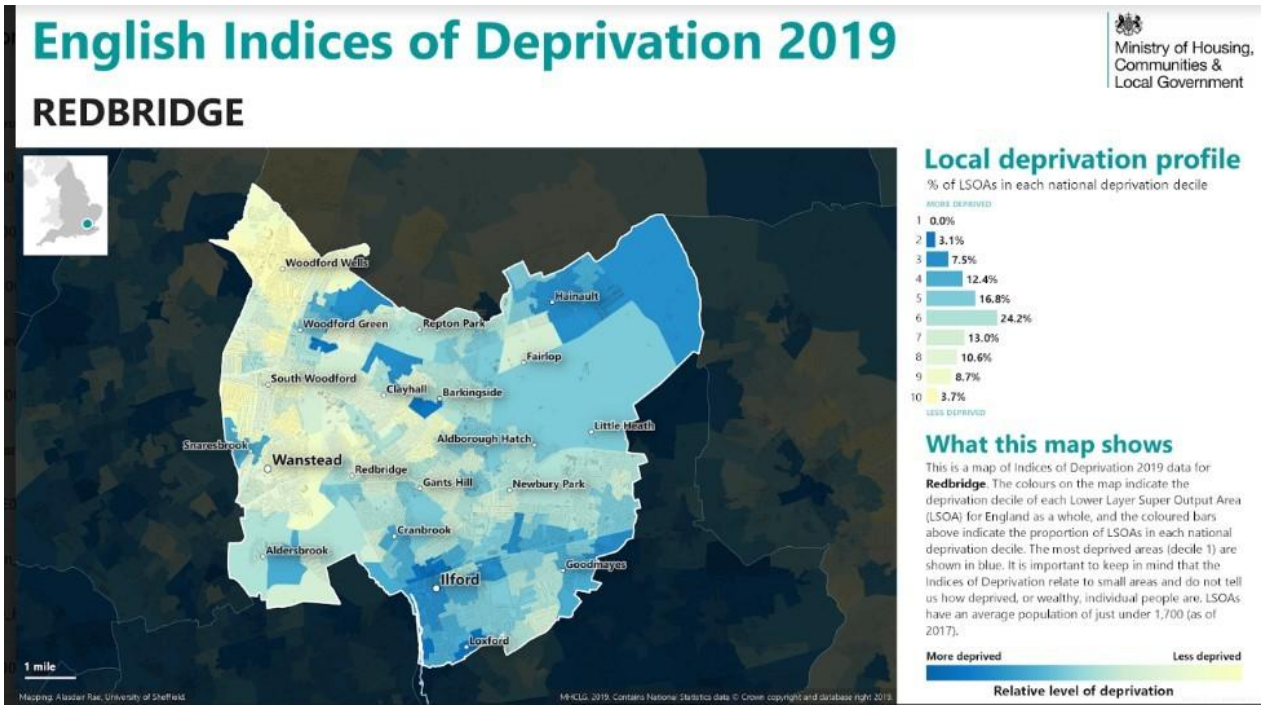
Additionally, we can provide small hardship payments to students struggling to meet their basic living costs. Eligibility is based on an assessment of household income and expenditure. This discretionary fund provides students with a non-repayable award towards unforeseen costs or changes to their financial situation. We plan to streamline the application process to increase the number of applicants.

Annex A: Further Information and Analysis Relating to The Identification and Prioritisation of Key Risks to Equality of Opportunity

The College has a widening participation and social inclusion approach to the recruitment of its students, at both further and higher education level. SIRM consequently has a high proportion of its students who may be identified as 'non-traditional' students. The majority of students are mature students and come from a wide range of ethnic and national backgrounds.

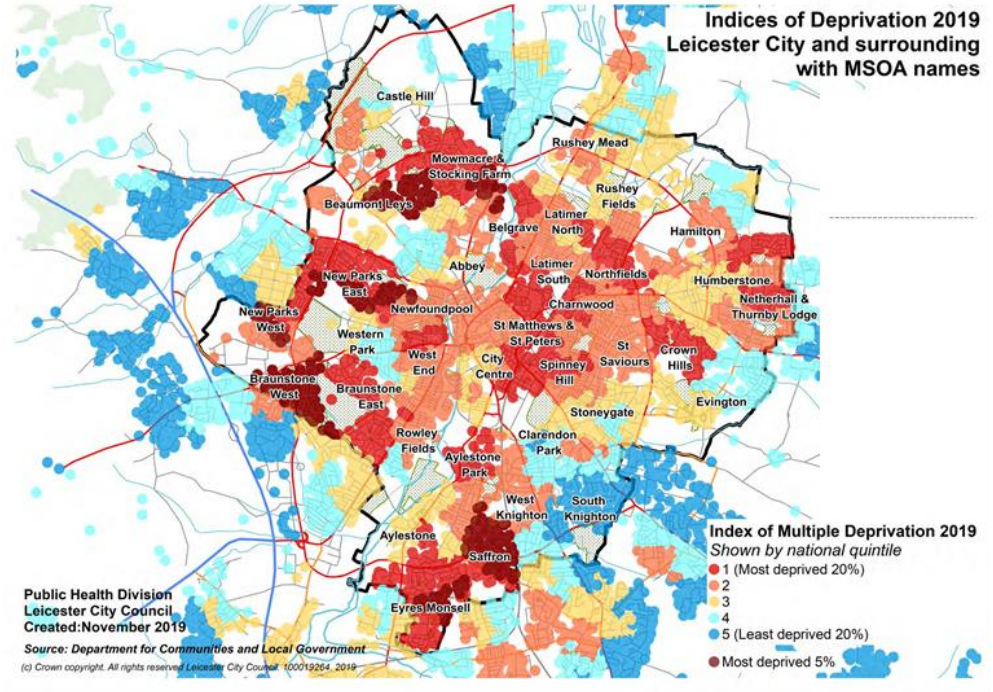
Levels of disadvantage for Redbridge as a whole are modest but vary significantly within the borough with pockets of significant disadvantage in south of the borough (Ilford, Seven Kings, Goodmayes and Loxford areas).

Redbridge % of LSOAs in national deprivation decile, 2019



Source: Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government

Leicester is ranked 32nd most deprived local authority for the Index of Multiple Deprivation. 7% of Leicester's population reside in the most deprived 5% of areas nationally. 35% of the population reside in the most deprived 20% of areas nationally.



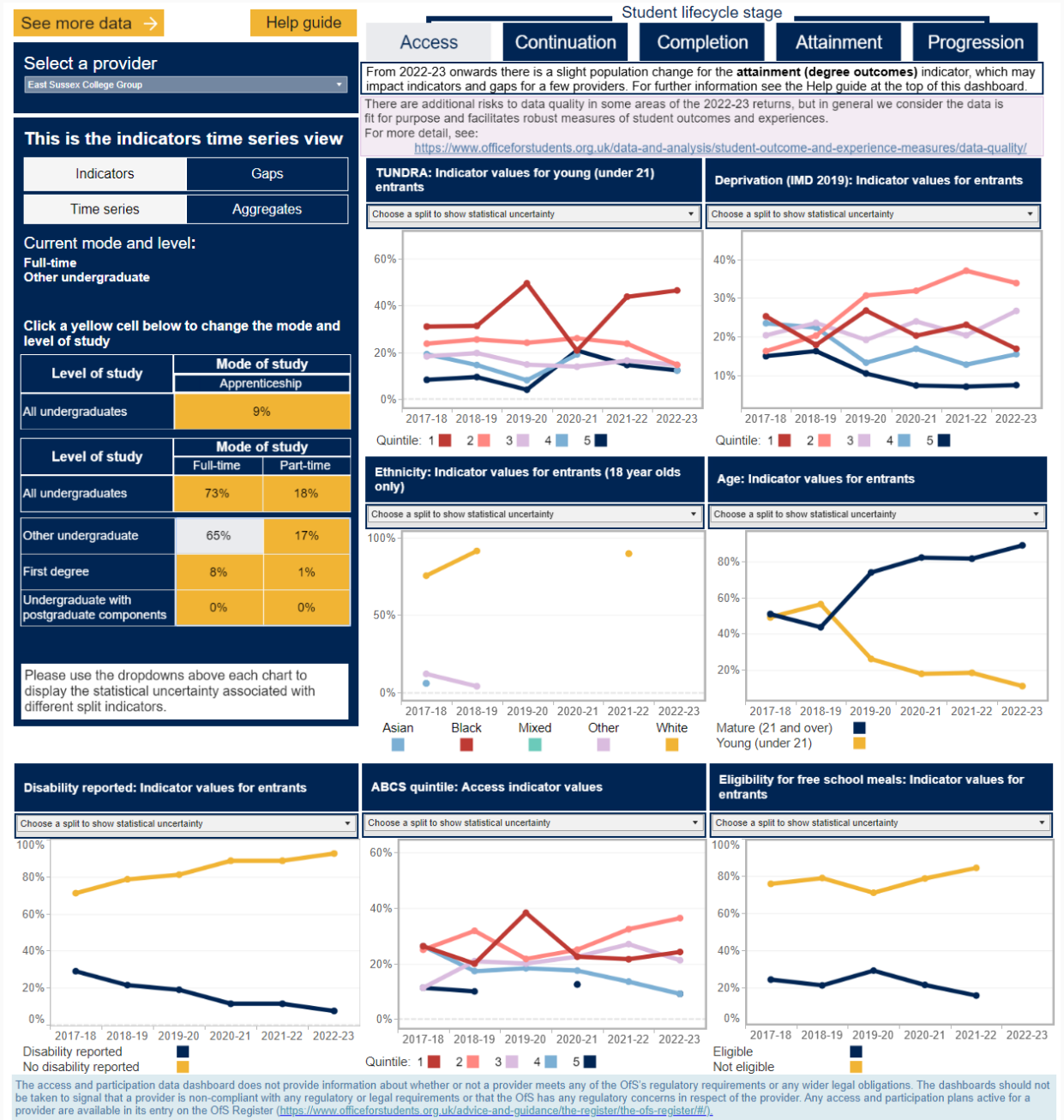
However, looking at measures of young people's access to HE depending on where they live, the campuses are in areas including all quintiles, one to five, for POLAR4, TUNDRA MSOA/LSOA and Adult HE 2011 classifications.

	TUNDRA MSOA	TUNDR LSOA	POLAR 4	Adult HE 2011
Ilford, IG1 2DR	Quintile 5	Quintile 5	Quintile 5	Quintile 4
Leicester, LE1 5TH	No data	No data	Quintile 5	Quintile 4

These measures classify areas into five groups (quintiles) with quintile one showing the lowest participation rates, and quintile five shows the highest participation rates. Quintiles 1 and 2 are where we will be directing some of our action plan to increase access and participation from these areas.

Access data

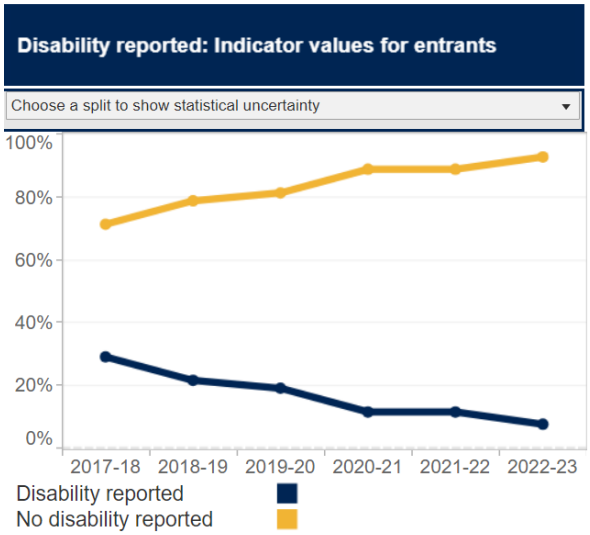
SIRM's student completions to date, were all delivered through it's partnership with East Sussex College Group. As such we have filtered the Access and Participation data dashboard to most closely represent our cohort's data profile. Our first students completed in 2019/20.



Our age indicator values show how the increasing number of SIRM students in the dataset from 2019/20 onwards has increased the percentage of over-21-year-olds year on year. This is positive in terms of reaching out to non-traditional groups, but we now need to increase access to our under-21-year-olds. Nationally 71% of HE students are under 21, and we attract 9%.

Nearly 73% of our students are over 30, meaning they are likely to have adult caring responsibilities and part or full time work, which can impact their ability to study. They are also likely to not have been in education for five or more years.

Data for Disability shows on the dashboard that as SIRM's numbers increase, so the proportion of students with a declared disability has reduced. Our findings suggest that this may be due to mature students who are either undiagnosed or do not wish to declare any disability.

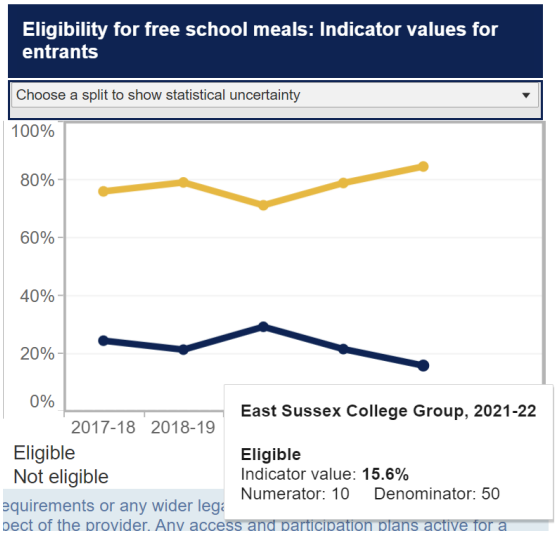


Our internal data for 2023/4 shows low numbers of our students have a declared disability and declare a learning difficulty. Nationally, the figure for all providers is 4.5%.[6] As 1 in 6 of the UK population will declare a mental health concern in any given week[7], and OfS data suggested that students are significantly more anxious than the general population of Great Britain[8], we recognise that making our courses accessible to all with mental health issues, and all disabilities, is a priority, as is encouraging those that enrol with us to declare their mental health issues and disabilities.

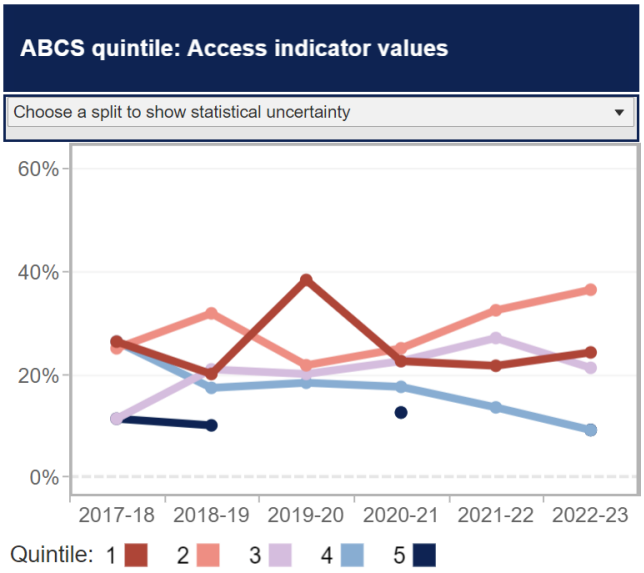
The student cohort data 23/24 shows the low proportion of Asian students (4%) and Black students (0%) accessing SIRM programmes, which accounting for 60% of the total population in Redbridge and 59% for Leicester. This underrepresentation of access is targeted for improvement through the life of this plan.

The percentage of students with Eligibility for FSM has decreased slightly. However, at only ten students out of 50 recorded, it is clear our internal mechanism for measuring FSM is minimal and is on the action plans for improving data collection. Nationwide, 24.6% of school children are eligible for FSM, and 18% study at HE level. Data to track students eligible for free school meals is relatively new, so our mature students, who make the majority of our HE students, cannot be measured in this way.

[6] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/meeting-the-mental-health-needs-of-students/
[7] https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/mental-health-facts-and-statistics/#:~:text=1%20in%204%20people%20will,week%20in%20England%20%5B2%5D.
[8] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/making-student-mental-health-a-priority/#:~:text=Our%20access%20and%20participation%20data,students%20with%20no%20known%20disability.

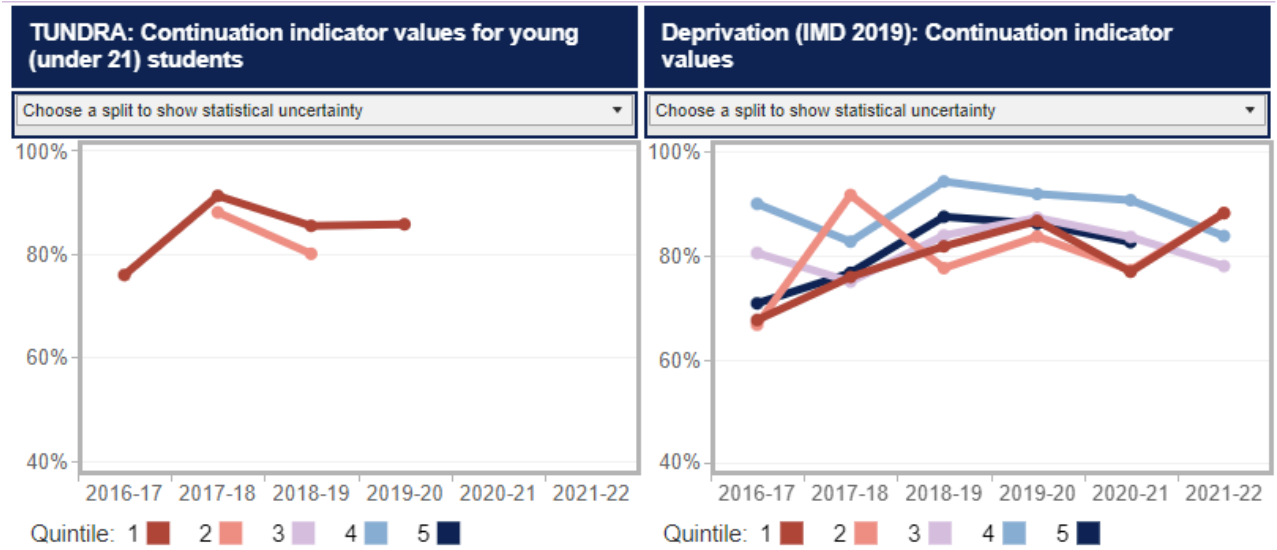


Our Associations Between Characteristics of Students (ABCS) quintile data, below, shows a spike in Quintile 1 (least likely to access HE) in 19/20 and then a return and slight increase from 20/21. The last two year has seen a marked increase in Quintile 2. There is minimal data for Quintile 5 (most likely to access HE) for ABCS and a decline in Quintile 4.



The College has been successful in attracting students from under-represented groups including mature students who would not normally progress into higher education. However, the College has not been successful in recruiting younger students and has set targets to recruit students from underrepresented groups including younger students, black and Asian students and students with disabilities. This has informed the perceived risks and Access Targets 1, 2 and 3 (PTA_1; PTA_2; PTA_3; PTA_4; PTA_5).

Continuation data



Our Tundra data shows small number to 19/20, predominantly Quintile 1, and then no data, which supports our target to increase the number of young people enrolling in the College. Our own internal data shows the target for this should actually be under 25s.

Deprivation (IMD 2019) shows improved continuation rates from 20/21 for those from Quintile 1 and Quintile 2, the most deprived geographic area.

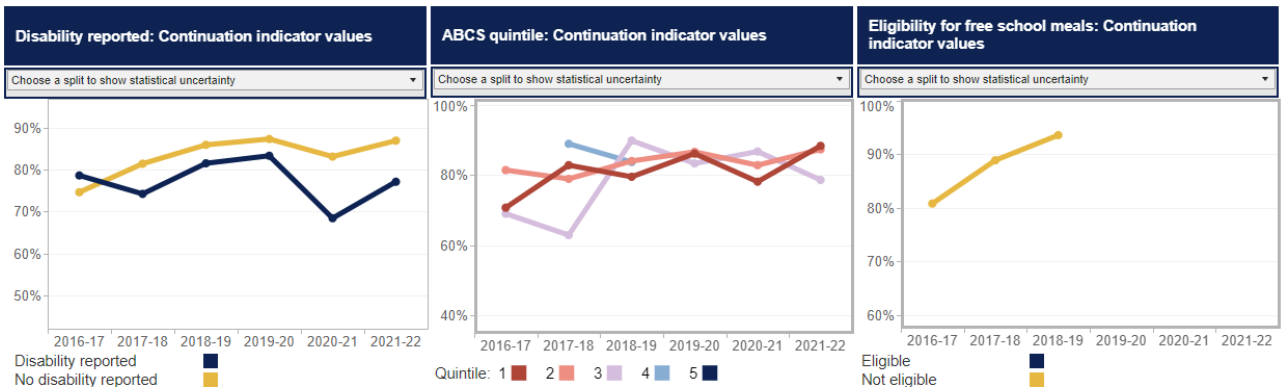
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Non-continuation rate	13%	10%	13%	10%	4%
Continuation rate	87%	90%	87%	90%	96%
Non-continuation rate Male	13%	9%	13%	10%	3%
Non-continuation rate Female	12%	11%	13%	10%	5%

The table above shows 4% of our students did not continue onto 2023/24, with an even split between males and females. When looking at the 5-year data, the non-continuation rate of males and females is similar, indicating this is not a risk.

In January 2025, SIRM introduced a BSc (Hons) Business with Management (Top-Up) degree to support progression into graduate careers. Whilst signposted through their HND 2nd year, only 27% of the students completing their Higher National Diploma in 2024 from IMD Quintile 1 and 2 postcode areas progressed on to the Top-Up degree to further enhance their knowledge, skills and graduate career prospects. This is considered a significant continuation risk, that is targeted for improvement in this plan.

Our Ethnicity data shows Continuation data for students from BAME backgrounds 1s only 7% of the students completing their HND in 2024 progressed on to the Top-Up degree. This is considered a significant continuation risk, that is targeted for improvement in this plan.

The Age shows a generally pleasing improvement for mature students. However, our continuation for Under 21s falls sharply in 20/21 and rises in 21/22. With such small numbers, this is not considered to be a risk.



We can also see that our continuation values for students with Disabilities reported is consistently around 10% below those without a declared disability. However, with such small numbers who report a disability, we believe the priority target is to increase the number with a declared disability and then revisit continuation rates.

ABCS Quintile 1 and 2 continuation values, for those from the most deprived areas show higher continuation levels, which is pleasing. As previously discussed, there is not sufficient FSM data to draw any meaningful conclusions.

This has informed the perceived risks and Continuation Targets 1 and 2 (PTS_1; PTS_2).

Completion data

The access and participation data dashboard does not contain data for SIRM students.

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Completion	93%	81%	91%	90%
Merit Grade	0%	0%	0%	1%
Distinction Grade	0%	0%	0%	0%
Male	93%	83%	90%	90%
Female	92%	79%	91%	89%
Attendance	88%	78%	85%	85%

Our internal data shows that despite a dip in 2021/22, which we predominantly COVID students impacted by the pandemic, completion rates are consistently in the low 90% area.

Merit and distinction grades are very low. This is not due to poor teaching or other quality issues, despite much work our mature students choose not to put the extra effort in to achieve the higher

grades, citing competing commitments as the reason. This plan targets to raise the aspiration of students, helping them see the value in achieving higher grades.

Attendance is seen as a having a direct impact on completion outcomes. Low attendance is not considered a quality issue, as observation data confirms the quality of teaching practice. Rather, our own internal investigations identify student's individual circumstance - work, home, caring responsibilities impact attendance. This plan seeks to identify mechanisms that enable students to improve their overall attendance and therefore their completion rates.

This has informed the perceived risks and Completion Targets 3 and 4 (PTS_3; PTS_4; PTS_5).

Attainment data

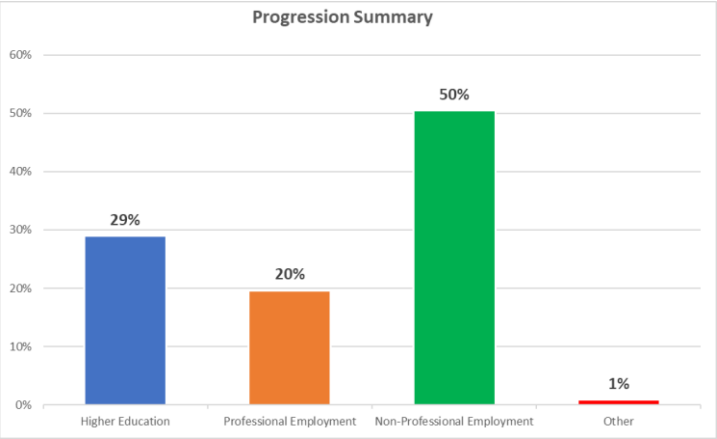
At the time of preparing this plan, SIRM was in its first year of delivering degree programs, so had no attainment data.

Progression data

It is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from the Graduate Outcomes data on the data dashboard. Looking at internal data, we know that over 90% of students are employed when they join their course, which is why we work so hard to ensure programmes run at a time when they can study, including evenings and weekends.

Looking at internal data for the most recent year available, we can see that only 49% of students progressed to highly skilled employment, further study or other positive outcomes 15 months after leaving higher education. This is significantly lower than the 2021/22 mature student national progression indicator of 72%.

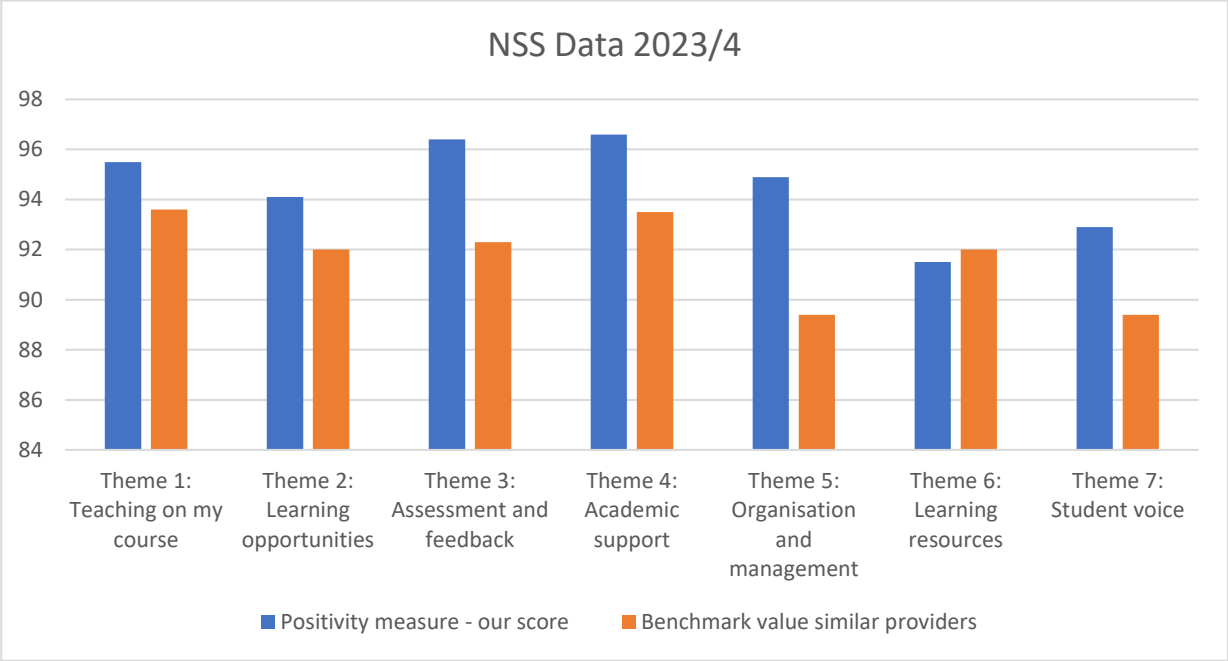
Summary	**Cohort**	**22/23**
Higher Education	31	29%
Professional Employment	21	20%
Non-Professional Employment	54	50%
Other	1	1%
Total Positive Destinations	**52**	**49%**



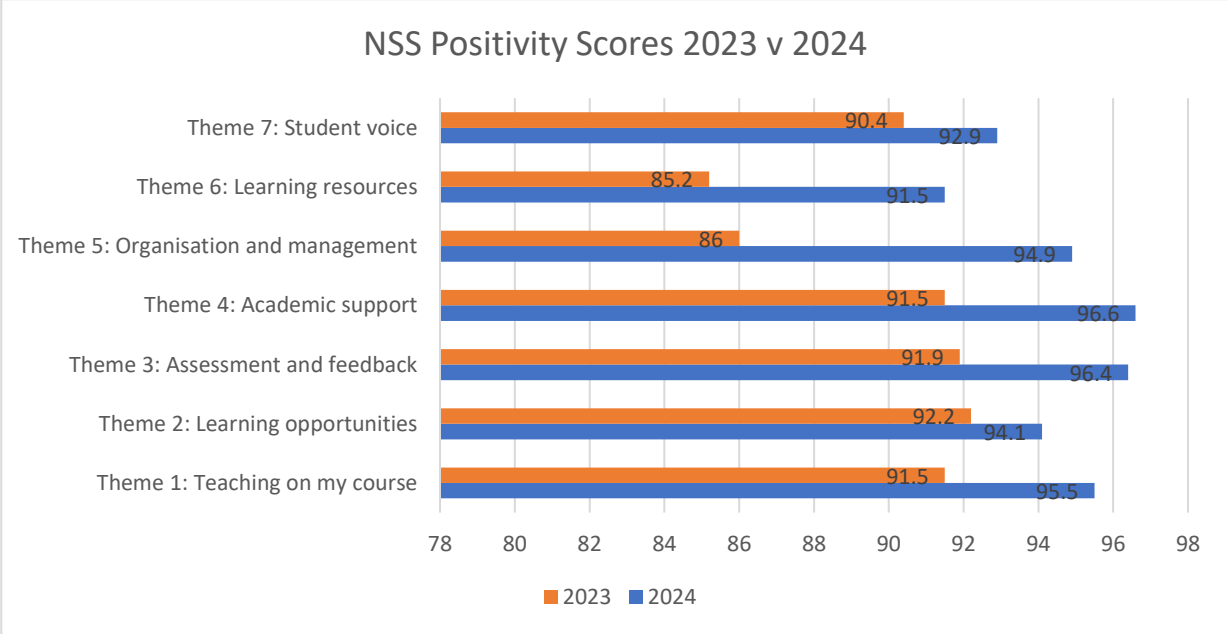
This low progression rate, compared to the sector, was the main driver for introducing the level 6 Top-up, to give students a better chance of securing highly skilled employment. This gap is a target for improvement through the life of this plan through Progression targets (PTP_1).

National Student Survey Data

Our NSS data is consistently above the benchmark for similar providers.

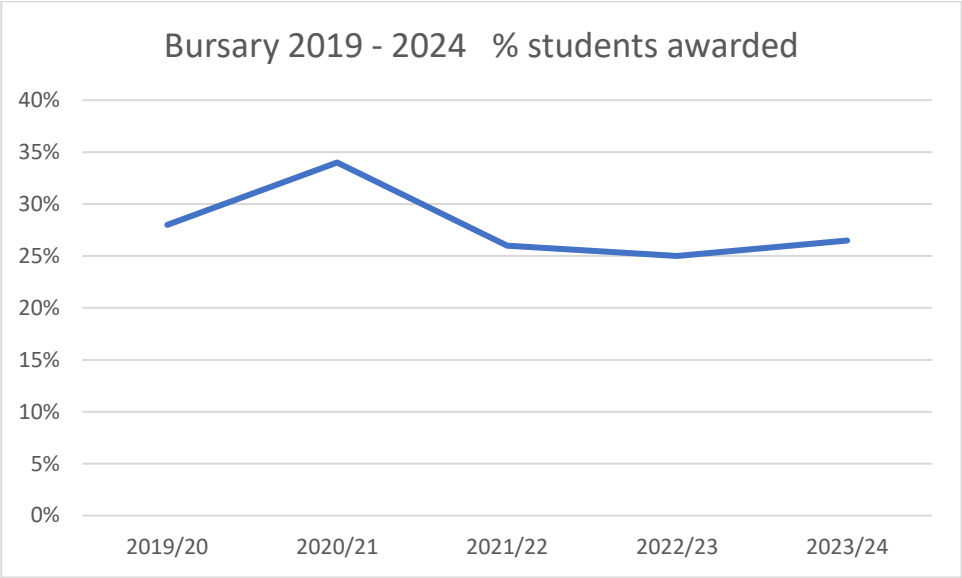


When comparing our data from the past 2 years, our 2020-25 APP has had a positive effect, in addition to increased investment in staff and infrastructure, on all NSS Themes, particularly Theme 6 Learning resources, Theme 4 Academic support and Theme 5 Organisation and management.



Bursaries and hardship fund.

We have looked at how successful our existing APP bursary scheme has been. Over the past 5 years we have given small bursaries to students to help as many as possible. This shows in increase in uptake over the covid period and a levelling off since then.



We have a high uptake; last year, 26.5% of our students were awarded a bursary from between £200 and £500 depending on what categories they qualified for. A recent survey by ONS, *Cost of living and higher education students in England, summary statistics by sex: 30 January to 13 February 2023*, indicated that from their sample, 23% of university students had applied for a bursary, so our figures demonstrate our targeting and messaging around the bursaries is working.

However, our data capture of the categories of the students awarded is not consistent with our bursary categories. We record students with disabilities, but only award to student with DSA's, which is a very small number.

Our 2023/24 data shows 26.5% of student claimed a bursary, and 0.01% claimed from the hardship fund.

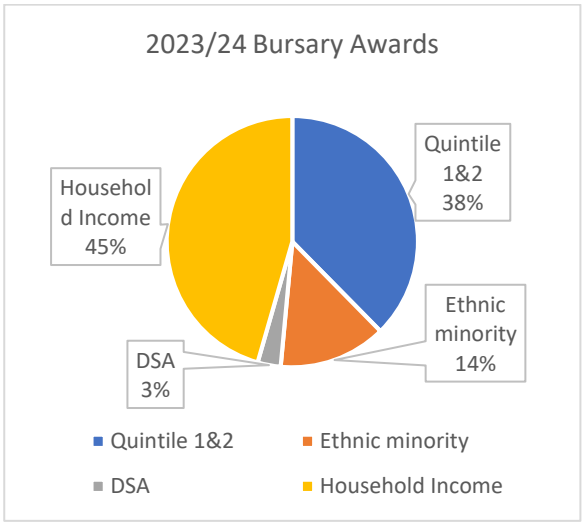
	Household income	Ethnic minority	POLAR4 quintile 1&2	DSA
2023/24 % of total access	Not recorded	7%	55%	15%
2023/24 % of total bursary awards	14%	38%	3%	46%
2023/24 % of total hardship fund awards	12.5%	25%	50%	12.5%

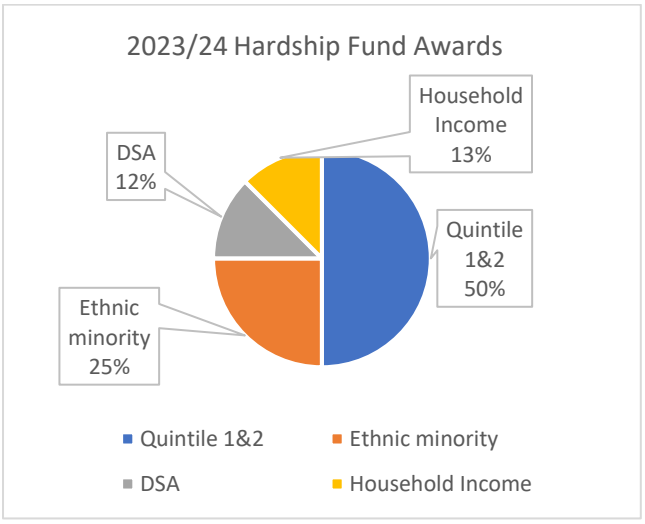
Our ethnic minority students are claiming their bursaries as 14% of bursaries are awarded against this category, against a 7% access rate, but only 50% is awarded to Quintile 1&2, compared to 55% intake.

Bursary & Hardship	Bursary Category		Hardship Fund Category	
	Ethnic Minority	POLAR Quintile 1&2	Ethnic Minority	POLAR Quintile 1&2
2023/24 % of total Access	7%	55%	7%	55%

2023/24 % of total Awards	14%	38%	25%	50%

When we break down the data further the student categories most in need according to the hardship fund are Disabled students and Ethnic minority, proportionally compared to access rates.





Annex B: Further information that sets out the rationale, assumptions and evidence base for each intervention strategy

Intervention Strategy 1 – Recruitment of underrepresented groups

Evidence Base and Rationale

Different levels of academic achievement at pre-higher education level is one of the most significant barriers for students who do not see themselves as eligible to access higher education. Research shows that this is a particularly important factor for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Turhan & Stevens, 2020)[9]. These barriers often link to a number of social and economic issues, including limited resources at home, less educational support, and lower exposure to aspiration raising opportunities. Addressing the associated risks and disparity in education achievement amongst those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Quintile 1 and Quintile 2), is essential to promoting individual success and for enhancing equality of opportunity.

The College's initiatives for encouraging wider participation particularly amongst younger students, will focus on supporting local schools to improve educational outcomes through offering targeted interventions to enhance student engagement, providing additional academic support that caters for a wide range of diverse needs. These initiatives aim to raise the attainment levels of students whilst at school, with the outcome of better preparing them the challenges higher education and, succeeding in obtaining higher level qualifications. This objective of raising attainment is central to breaking the cycle of disadvantage and lack of higher education engagement amongst those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Education research suggests that provision of academic tutoring and academic support has a positive impact on students' aspirations and their levels of academic achievement. Academic support is especially effective when tailored to individual needs which have been identified through diagnostic assessment or individual tutor support. The additional small group sizes and tailored individual support can result in an average of four months' additional progress over the course of a year[10]. In addition, analysis of TASO information has confirmed that the impact of this activity is largely positive. The College plans to use this evidence to partner with schools and develop tailored programmes to support specific groups of students with lower academic achievement to improve their achievement levels and to raise aspirations. We will also look at supporting the development of metacognition skills amongst younger students from disadvantaged backgrounds as these skills have been shown to have a high impact on students learning and achievement.[11]

Coertjens et al, 2017[12] and Nicolson, 1990[13], suggest that students go through four phases in transitioning to university (preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilisation) and that offering students tailored support in each phase should lead to long-term improvements through all stages

[9] Turhan, B. and Stevens, P., 2020. *Pathways for potential: How universities, regulators and government can tackle educational inequality*. https://pathwaysforpotential.russellgroup.ac.uk/
[10] Education Endowment Foundation, EEF (2021) Small group tuition https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/small-group-tuition
[11] https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/metacognition
[12] Coertjens, L; Brahm, T., Trautwein, C and Lindblom-Ylanne, S (2017) 'Student transitions into Higher Education from an Intenational perspective' Higher Education 73 (3) 357-69.
[13] Nicolson, N (1990) 'The Transition Cycle: Causes, Outcomes, Processes and Froms' On the Move: The Psychology of Change and Transition, edited by S. Fisher and C.L Cooper, 83-108, Chichester: Wiley

of the post-entry student lifecycle. Information, advice, and guidance (IAG) is most effective when it is accompanied by personalised support, targeted to particular student groups (e.g. ethnically diverse groups) and part of a wider offer (e.g. access course) (McGuigan et al, 2016[14]; Silva et al, 2016[15]). The range of activities Lancaster is presenting as part of its access strategy demonstrate a richness of tailored support across all stages of the educational journey. The veracity of these methods is demonstrated across the range of impact studies compiled and delivered by others in the sector such as TASO.

Intervention Strategy 2 - Continuation and Attainment

Academic practice literature points to the effectiveness of coaching in relation to student performance, retention, and completion (Harding et al., 2018[16]) There sector evidence from UK higher education seems to suggest that coaching programmes can be associated with positive effects on students (TASO). Some of the evidence is informed by quantitative studies which compared participant groups with non-participant groups to show that individuals who take part in the programmes have better outcomes.

Other studies suggest a positive impact on attainment, retention or completion or other outcomes, such as the intention to remain on the course. Kerrigan and Maktelow (2021[17]) suggest that programmes involving coaching are associated with better outcomes for students in terms of attainment and retention or completion. Additionally, strong evidence of impact is suggested by several studies conducted in the United States adopting multiple randomised controlled trials (TASO).

One study investigated the effect of coaching for first-year students which revealed that recipients were more likely to persist to the second year than non-recipients, with the strongest effect on male students (Bettinger & Baker, 2011[18]). The findings of another study show that college students who received academic coaching either online or in-person had increases in their metacognitive skills over the course of the intervention (Howlett et al., 2021[19]). Another group of studies utilising quasi-experimental methods also suggested a positive impact (TASO). Crisp and colleagues (2017[20]) observed how factors such as ethnicity and existing aspirations seem to have a critical part in how students experience these programmes.

[14] McGuigan, M., McNally, S., & Wyness, G. (2016) 'Student Awareness of Costs and Benefits of Educational Decisions: Effects of an Information Campaign'. Journal of Human Capital, 10(4), 482-519.
[15] Silva, A.S., Sandres, M., & Chonaire, A.N. (2016). Does the heart rule the head? Economic and emotional incentives for university attendance. (London: Behavioural Insight Tea).
[16] Harding et al. (2018). Exploring the Impact of Coaching in Higher Education. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education
[17] Kerrigan, M., & Manktelow, A. (2021). 'Extra-curricular activities in higher education: enhancing the student experience'. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 23(1), 123-147
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[19] Howlett, M. A., McWilliams, M. A., Rademacher, K., O'Neill, J. C., Maitland, T. L., Abels, K.& Panter, A. T. (2021). 'Investigating the effects of academic coaching on college students' metacognition'. Innovative Higher Education, 46(2), 189-204.
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Reducing non-completion rates of those students with a declared disability, and specifically those with a declared mental health disability A recent report into student mental health has found that the proportion of students identified as experiencing a mental health challenges has nearly tripled, from 6% in 2017 to 16% in 2023, with a particularly significant increase of 32% in the academic year 2022/23, generally considered to be due to the coronavirus pandemic (Sanders., 2023[21]). Presenting issues have included increased anxiety, low mood, interpersonal issues, and students reporting high levels of anxiety around their ability to maximise the potential of their study in future education or employment.

Although, there is evidence that racial inequalities experienced by Asian, Black or other ethnic minorities students are a contributing factor, more recent research (e.g. Stevenson and Whelan, 2013) confirm that the analysis of Asian, Black or ethnic minorities factors in student achievement is often oversimplified. Austin et al (2017[22]), Richardson, 2008[23], claimed that the varying levels of success of many HEI equality and diversity practices is because they fail to grasp the complexity of the issue and treat Asian, Black or other ethnic minorities groupings as a generic category (e.g. Black students) and fail to take into account the complexities of various intersectionality (e.g. gender, SES, being mature or part-time). So, while there is a growing body of research (e.g. Broecke & Nicholls, 2007[24]) which highlights the need to improve the students' experience in the classroom, other research argues that there is a fundamental need for in-depth research into the Asian, Black, or other ethnicity minorities student experience in HE, particularly fined grained institutional research to address systemic and engrained discrimination (e.g. Davies & Garrett, 2012[25]).

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[23] Richardson, J.T. (2008) 'The attainment of ethnic minority students in UK higher education. Studies in Higher Education, 33, 33-48.

[24] Broecke, S., & Nicholls, T. (2007). Ethnicity and Degree Attainment. Department for Education and Skills (DFES). Research Report RW92 from: www.dfes.gov.uk/research Bush, T., Glover, D. and Sood, K. 2006. Black and minority ethnic leaders in England: A portrait. School Leadership and Management, 26 (3), 289 – 305.

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Annex C: Targets, investment and fees

The OfS will append the information from the fees, investment and targets document when an access and participation plan is published.