



University of  
Central Lancashire  
UCLan

# Access and Participation Plan

2025-26 to 2028-29



# University of Central Lancashire

## Access and participation plan 2025-26 to 2028-29

### 1. Introduction and strategic aim

- 1.1. The University of Central Lancashire is a large, multi-campus university with c35,000 students studying courses in Lancashire and across the world. Proud of our role in delivering widening participation and as a significant anchor institution, we aim to transform lives by delivering an outstanding educational experience, creating prosperity and opportunity in the communities we serve.
- 1.2. We take our Widening Participation mission seriously and it has run as a golden thread through all that we do for nearly two centuries. Our University Strategy was refreshed in 2021, reaffirming our mission, as follows:
- To deliver real-world, practice-based education.
  - To ensure our extensive curriculum offer is research informed and employer engaged.
  - To push boundaries with our innovative ideas and our research expertise.
  - To improve the lives of people across Lancashire, the UK, and the world.
  - To demonstrate we care about sustainability and our valuable natural environment.
  - To promote healthy and sustainable lifestyles, to support the physical and mental wellbeing of our students, colleagues, and communities.
  - To ensure educational programmes are collaborative and partnership-based bringing life-changing benefits of higher education to communities worldwide.
  - To encourage every student to become a global citizen.
  - To be a genuine anchor institution.
- 1.3. The first of six priorities described within the strategy is entitled *Student Opportunity and Success*, demonstrating our commitment to widening participation (WP). Our strategic aim for equality of opportunity is articulated here as follows:

*To provide a superlative student experience, ensuring that all our students – irrespective of their background – have the opportunities and support they need to access, participate and succeed in learning.*

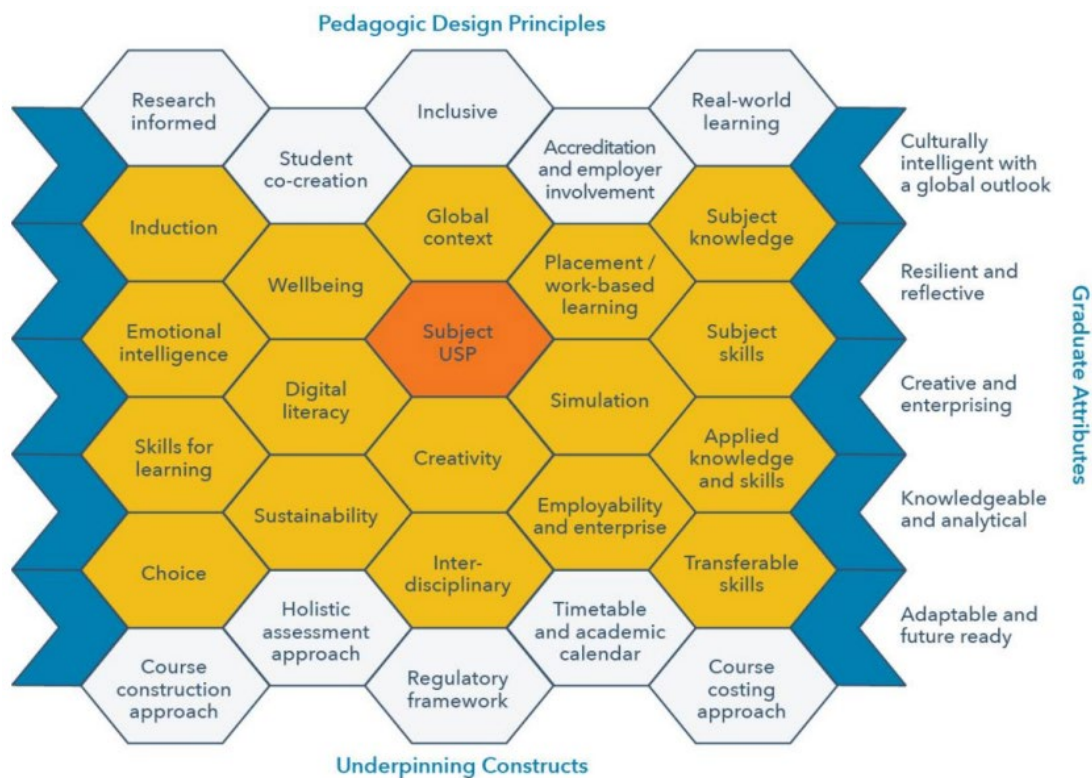
The *Student Opportunity and Success* strategy includes a focus on the following objectives – retention, attainment, graduate outcomes, effective student support with an emphasis on early intervention, access and participation, and student voice and experience.

- 1.4. As an anchor institution with a WP mission, we have invested in significant campus developments to provide opportunity and respond to local need. The Preston campus has c26,000 students studying a range of undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) courses, and degree apprenticeships. Our Burnley campus serves a population of over half a million residents in east Lancashire and has significantly developed since its creation in 2009, providing courses relevant to the current and emerging needs of the region's economy. Our Westlakes campus was established in 2005 and is based in West Cumbria, offering vocational courses in areas such as Medicine and Nursing. In addition, we operate a wholly owned subsidiary company, Training 2000, an

apprenticeship training provider in Blackburn. This increases access to level 3 learning in Lancashire and leads to further progression pathways at the University.

- 1.5. The University dedicates significant resources to local and regional priorities, and as a major employer has supported 4,500 FTE jobs across Lancashire, generating £220m in annual gross value added (GVA) for the North West economy through education, research, and scholarship.
- 1.6. We currently have 21 partnerships with UK further education colleges and specialist training providers, as well as partnerships operating globally including in China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and the Middle East. We lead the Lancashire-wide Future U project, part of the OfS Uni Connect Programme, bringing together universities, colleges, schools, and businesses to help learners overcome barriers to progression to higher education (HE). Future U has engaged with over 43,000 young people and of these, c27,000 were from geographical areas of deprivation and had at least three postcode indicators for disadvantage.
- 1.7. Full-time students account for the significant majority of our UG student numbers at c90% of the total population, while our growing Degree Apprenticeships learner numbers account for c7%, and our part-time mode account for c3%. Approximately half of our UG students are the first in their family to participate in HE.
- 1.8. Students from areas of high deprivation (IMD Q1) have constituted the largest proportion of our student population for the past five years with this proportion increasing.
- 1.9. We have a large and increasing proportion of mature students, higher than the sector average. We have also seen an increase in student carers, care leavers, and estranged students.
- 1.10. Our commitment to nurturing our diverse student population has encouraged and led to a corresponding increase in the proportion of UG students declaring a disability, from below the sector average in 2018-19 (13.9%) to being 6.4% higher by 2020-21 (23.4% compared to 17%). 1,125 students with a declared disability in 2020-21 had a mental health condition, compared to 545 in 2018-19, demonstrating a sharp and concerning rise.
- 1.11. As a WP institution that recruits significantly from the region, we ensure we provide a comprehensive portfolio to support all student aspirations. We offer over 350 UG courses covering a broad spectrum of arts, humanities, social sciences, business, science, engineering, and health. In line with our mission, most of these provide a Foundation Year route to support academically disadvantaged students with fewer UCAS points. We are one of less than 10 universities - and the only post-92 - to offer Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, and Optometry. We are the largest trainer of the region's health workforce. Our School of Veterinary Medicine is the first of its kind in Lancashire, and second in the North West. We have significantly developed Degree Apprenticeships to offer additional pathways for learners.
- 1.12. In Figure 1, is our distinctive Curriculum Framework (CFW), developed in 2020 to bring together characteristics that shape and define the unique University of Central Lancashire student experience:





1.13. The *Blockbusters*-inspired 'gameboard' approach sets out the curriculum characteristics that students experience while traveling through their learner journey, including research informed and real-world learning, which contribute to the development of graduate attributes outlined on the right of the board. The CFW elements provide students with a greater skillset, summarised in the CFW as a set of 'graduate attributes', relating to academic and personal development, and work readiness:

- Culturally intelligent with a global outlook
- Resilient and Reflective
- Creative and Enterprising
- Knowledgeable and Analytical
- Adaptable and Future Ready

1.14. The CFW diagram above includes a wellbeing curriculum characteristic, demonstrating how we embed mental health and wellbeing into the student journey. We are undertaking the University Mental Health Charter (UMHC) to build on our practice. We have developed a diverse network of staff members to drive the different domains (Support, Learn, Work, and Live). We deliver wellbeing events, operate a Mental Health Champions scheme, and roll out training opportunities. We are committed to a whole provider approach to mental health that delivers timely and impactful support and mitigates the disparities in outcomes posed by mental health challenges. This includes:

- A Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing service to ensure accessible, timely and appropriate access to support. This is to help mitigate any impact wellbeing issues have on ability to fulfil academic potential.
- A comprehensive Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy which ensures regular review of support mechanisms, resources, procedures and policies in line with best practice.
- The implementation of a Support to Study process to facilitate joint working to offer a multi-disciplinary, holistic approach to students and apprentices.

1.15. In all, we believe in “helping people to seize every opportunity to flourish in education, at work and for life.” This Access and Participation Plan sets out our priorities and strategies for doing exactly that.

## 2. Risks to equality of opportunity

2.1. In preparing our Access and Participation Plan (APP), we conducted an investigation of our performance to identify the key indications of risk to equality of opportunity most relevant to our context. This included:

- Utilising the Office for Students (OfS) access and participation data dashboards<sup>1</sup> to build a picture of what our strategic priorities should be, as determined by our most significant gaps, both in comparison to the sector, and in absolute terms.
- Once a draft list of priority student characteristic groups had been agreed, we disaggregated data for these groups. One example of this included exploring completion data for disabled students by disability type, to determine which disability types were contributing most to the gap in outcomes.
- Performance of the priority student characteristic groups was investigated at school level, so we could understand which academic schools and subject areas were key areas of focus.
- An assessment of how these student characteristic groups interacted with student support services was conducted, this included data related to uptake of bursary and hardship funds, counselling and mental health services, and inclusive support services for students with a declared disability.
- We sought to understand how student characteristics intersect (i.e., students with multiple characteristics) and this informed our understanding of outcomes for these groups across the student lifecycle.

2.2. A summary of our assessment of performance for this plan can be found in Annex A: Assessment of Performance. The key indicators of risk, and the basis for the objectives of our APP are:

- The rate of pupils in Lancashire eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieving Grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSE: 20.8% compared to 25.4% for FSM pupils across England, and 43.4% in the overall pupil population.
- The gap in HE progression rates between FSM pupils in Lancashire and the wider population: 25.7% of FSM pupils compared to 48.2% of non-FSM pupils, a gap of 22.5%.
- The completion gap between students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintile 1 and IMD Quintile 5 neighbourhoods is currently 7%.
- The completion gap between disabled and non-disabled students is currently 4.8%.
- The continuation gap between young and mature students is currently 8.2%.
- The awarding gap between Black and White students is currently 24%.
- The progression gap between students from IMD Quintile 1 and IMD Quintile 5 neighbourhoods is currently 12.1%.

2.3. To understand the correlation between the indications of risk derived from the OfS dashboard and the potential risks to equality of opportunity, we utilised the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)<sup>2</sup>. This register outlines 12 overarching risks within the sector that could potentially impede specific student demographics from accessing and succeeding in HE. The EORR was constructed by analysing national datasets, pertinent research, and conducting a literature review. Through the utilisation of the EORR, we have identified several risks that are likely to be the most relevant to our context in Lancashire:

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<sup>1</sup> [Access and Participation Dashboard – Office for Students](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Equality of Opportunity Risk Register - Office for Students](#)

- 2.3.1 The rate of pupils in Lancashire eligible for FSM achieving Grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSE may be related to the following potential risks:
- Risk 1: Knowledge and skills
  - Risk 2: Information and guidance
- 2.3.2. The gap in HE progression rates between FSM pupils in Lancashire and the wider population may be related to the following potential risks:
- Risk 1: Knowledge and skills
  - Risk 2: Information and guidance
- 2.3.3. Our completion gap between students from IMD Quintile 1 and IMD Quintile 5 neighbourhoods may be related to the following potential risks:
- Risk 6: Insufficient academic support
  - Risk 7: Insufficient personal support
  - Risk 8: Mental health
  - Risk 10: Cost pressures
- 2.3.4. Our completion gap between disabled and non-disabled students may be related to the following potential risks:
- Risk 7: Insufficient personal support
  - Risk 8: Mental health
  - Risk 10: Cost pressures
- 2.3.5. Our continuation gap between young and mature students may be related to the following potential risks:
- Risk 6: Insufficient academic support
  - Risk 7: Insufficient personal support
  - Risk 8: Mental health
  - Risk 10: Cost pressures
- 2.3.6. Our awarding gap between Black and White students may be related to the following potential risks:
- Risk 6: Insufficient academic support
  - Risk 7: Insufficient personal support
  - Risk 8: Mental health
  - Risk 10: Cost pressures
- 2.3.7. Our progression gap between students from IMD Quintile 1 and IMD Quintile 5 neighbourhoods may be related to the following potential risks:
- Risk 6: Insufficient academic support
  - Risk 7: Insufficient personal support
  - Risk 8: Mental health
  - Risk 10: Cost pressures
  - Risk 12: Progression from higher education

### 3. Objectives

- 3.1. Our Assessment of Performance (See Annex A) provides a detailed analysis of the risks to equality of opportunity across the different stages of the student lifecycle, alongside contextual information about the University's geographic context and student population. This analysis has informed the below targets:
- 3.1.1. **Performance Target Access 1 (PTA\_1):** increase the number of pre-16 pupils eligible for free school meals reporting improved academic self-efficacy.
  - 3.1.2. **Performance Target Access 2 (PTA\_2):** increase the number of pre-16 pupils eligible for free school meals reporting improved attitudes towards HE.
  - 3.1.3. **Performance Target Success 1 (PTS\_1):** embed a whole university approach that prioritises mental health and wellbeing for all students, measured by reducing the completion gap between those from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 7% in 2021/22 to 3.5% by 2028/29.
  - 3.1.4. **Performance Target Success 2 (PTS\_2):** reduce the completion gap between disabled and non-disabled students from 4.8% in 2021/22 to 1.5% by 2028/29.
  - 3.1.5. **Performance Target Success 3 (PTS\_3):** reduce the continuation gap between young and mature students from 8.2% in 2021/22 to 4% by 2028/29.
  - 3.1.6. **Performance Target Success 4 (PTS\_4):** reduce the awarding gap between Black and White students from 24% in 2021/22 to 12% by 2028/29.
  - 3.1.7. **Performance Target Progression 1 (PTP\_1):** reduce the progression gap between those from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 12.1% in 2021/22 to 6% by 2028/29.



## 4. Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

4.1. In this section, we outline our intervention strategies which summarise the programmes of work we will deliver to address our identified risks to equality of opportunity and achieve our objectives listed in Section 3. All our intervention strategies embed evaluation as a core component and have been developed in partnership with colleagues and students (See Section 7: Student consultation).

### 4.2. Intervention strategy 1 (IS1): increase the number of pre-16 pupils eligible for free school meals reporting improved academic self-efficacy (PTA\_1)

**Primary target:** Increase the number of pre-16 pupils eligible for free school meals reporting improved academic self-efficacy (PTA\_1).

**Related target:** Increase the number pre-16 pupils eligible for free school meals reporting improved attitudes towards HE (PTA\_2).

### 4.3. Risks to equality of opportunity

4.3.1. **Knowledge and Skills (Risk 1):** Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to achieve a Grade 5 at Maths and English at GCSE and this is a larger issue in Lancashire where the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is greater (See Table 1). The only exception to this trend is Blackburn and Darwen, where there is a large gap, but it is slightly lower than the national average. Recent figures show that the rate of pupils in Lancashire eligible for FSM achieving Grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSE is 20.8% compared to 25.4% for FSM pupils across England, and 43.4% in the overall pupil population. This discrepancy in attainment levels between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers highlights a significant risk to equality of opportunity, particularly in terms of the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills necessary for academic success.

4.3.2. Table 1: secondary school academic attainment by geography 2022/23<sup>3</sup>

| Secondary School Academic Attainment                       | England | North West | Blackburn with Darwen | Blackpool | Lancashire |
|--|---------|------------|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Attainment 8 score (All Pupils Average)                    | 46.4%   | 44.6%      | 44.9%                 | 34.9%     | 44.9%      |
| Attainment 8 score (Disadvantaged)                         | 35.1%   | 33.5%      | 34.2%                 | 26.3%     | 32.4%      |
| Grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSE                 | 45.5%   | 41.7%      | 44.0%                 | 26.5%     | 43.4%      |
| Grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSE (Disadvantaged) | 25.4%   | 21.9%      | 25.4%                 | 12.6%     | 20.8%      |
| Achieving 9-4 passes                                       | 65.4%   | 62.4%      | 63.4%                 | 45.1%     | 64.3%      |

<sup>3</sup> Data sources:

- <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/11-to-16-years-old/a-to-c-in-english-and-maths-gcse-attainment-for-children-aged-14-to-16-key-stage-4/latest/>
- <https://www.get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/>

| Activity  | Description  | Inputs  | Outcomes   | Cross intervention strategy  |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| IS1.1<br>Academic development programme – Key Stage 4<br>(New Activity) | The academic development programme will be delivered in schools. It will be a series of workshops that cover skills and techniques to help pupils develop their study skills and meta-cognitive abilities. We will work with schools to tailor their package according to the need of the school and its pupils.                                   | 4 FTE<br>Student staff costs<br>School and staff transport costs<br>Session resources           | Increased motivation to study<br>Improve academic skills (self-efficacy)   | IS2: HE progression<br>IS3: mental health, IMD completion<br>IS6: Black and White awarding gap |
| IS1.2<br>Academic development programme – Key Stage 5<br>(New Activity) | An extension of the Key Stage 4 programme (IS1.1) offered to our feeder schools and colleges and aims to work with pupils that are from groups that have on-course awarding and progression gaps. We will tailor the offer to the groups we are supporting and the needs of schools and colleges.  | 1.5 FTE<br>Student staff costs<br>School and staff transport costs<br>Third-sector partnerships | Increased motivation to study<br>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)  | IS2: HE progression<br>IS3: mental health, IMD completion<br>IS6: Black and White awarding gap |
| IS1.3<br>Scholars programme<br>(Enhanced Existing Activity)             | This is a programme that supports Year 12 pupils to develop the academic skills needed to flourish in HE. Pupils undertake an independent research project, with the support of a mentor. Those who complete the programme and meet our WP criteria are eligible for a contextualised offer and bursary of £500 per year to support their studies. | 1.5 FTE<br>Student staff costs<br>School and staff transport costs<br>Third-sector partnerships | Increased motivation to study<br>Increased academic skills (self-efficacy) | IS2: HE progression<br>IS3: mental health, IMD completion<br>IS6: Black and White awarding gap |

|   |   |  |  |   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <p>IS1.4</p> <p>Young Scientist Centre subject-specific workshops for secondary pupils</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p> | <p>The Young Scientist Centre (YSC) is a purpose-built outreach laboratory that is dedicated to engaging young people with STEM and creative subjects. We deliver a range of subject-specific workshops using equipment that is not usually available in schools or colleges. Workshops link to the curriculum and aim to motivate pupils to engage with their studies.</p> | <p>1 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> <p>School and staff transport costs</p> <p>Consumables and equipment</p> | <p>Increased motivation to study</p> <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved attitudes towards HE</p> <p>Better understanding of education and career pathways</p> | <p>IS2: HE progression</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |
| <p>IS1.5</p> <p>Young Scientist Centre subject-specific workshops for primary pupils</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p>   | <p>The YSC delivers workshops for primary school pupils to support primary science learning. Many primary schools lack specialist skills in science teaching. The subject-specific workshops link to the curriculum and support schools in delivering on key topics in the Key Stage 2 curriculum.</p>  | <p>1 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> <p>School and staff transport costs</p> <p>Consumables and equipment</p> | <p>Increased motivation to study</p> <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved attitudes towards HE</p> <p>Better understanding of education and career pathways</p> | <p>IS2: HE progression</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |

|   |   |  |  |   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <p>IS1.6</p> <p>Young Creative Centre - subject-specific workshops for secondary pupils</p> <p>(New Activity)</p> | <p>The Young Creative Centre is a new project that will mirror the concept of the Young Scientist Centre but for creative subjects. We will deliver curriculum enhancing workshops, providing access to equipment, expertise and facilities typically not offered in schools.</p> | <p>1 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> <p>School and staff transport costs</p> <p>Consumables and equipment</p>   | <p>Increased motivation to study</p> <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved attitudes towards HE</p> <p>Better understanding of education and career pathways</p> | <p>IS2: HE progression</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |
| <p>IS1.7</p> <p>Young Creative Centre – Teacher CPD</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>                                     | <p>We will develop new specialist Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions for teachers. We will work with specialist teachers to create resources that develop the skills of non-specialist teachers, with the aim of enhancing teaching practice.</p>                 | <p>0.7 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> <p>School and staff transport costs</p> <p>Consumables and equipment</p> | <p>Improved classroom teaching practices</p>   | <p>IS2: HE progression</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |

#### 4.4. Evaluation of intervention strategy 1 (IS1)

#### 4.5. Summary of evidence base and rationale

- 4.5.1. The evidence base for IS1 activities are listed in Annex B and rely on emerging evidence of “what works” and the principles of Transforming Access and Student Outcomes’ (TASO) attainment-raising Mapping Outcomes and Activities Tool<sup>4</sup>. We have focused our activities to address motivations to study and increased academic self-efficacy.
- 4.5.2. Motivations to study: by delivering activities that will increase pupils’ motivation to engage with school and college study. This will be achieved by incorporating tutoring provision into the Scholars Programme (IS1.3), and subject-specific activities that engage pupils in curriculum related activities (IS1.5 and IS1.6).
- 4.5.3. Increase academic self-efficacy: by delivering activities that directly lead to academic learning, improved study skills and improved meta-cognitive skills. The provision we deliver as part of the Academic Development Programme (IS1.1 and IS1.2) will focus on study skills and techniques that increase academic self-efficacy. Workshops delivered within the subject specialist outreach centres (IS1.4) will be focused on enhancing school and college based teaching with specialist equipment and expertise not available within schools and colleges. Our rationale for developing the specialist teacher CPD (IS1.7) is drawn on consultation with teachers which highlighted many teachers in creative subjects are required to teach beyond their specialism. We will therefore work with teachers to develop CPD packages for colleagues teaching beyond their specialism. The objective is to upskill non-specialist teachers and improve teaching practice.

#### 4.6. Evaluation of activities

- 4.6.1. We have an Access Evaluation Map for our access provision to measure whether the desired outcome of an activity has been achieved (See Annex B). We have significant evaluation expertise and will draw on experience completing a randomised controlled trial in the Young Scientist Centre (IS1.4) to explore whether there are further activities where we could apply similar methodology. The focus of IS1 is attainment-raising and the two outcomes most relevant are: increased motivation to study and improved academic skills (self-efficacy). For each outcome within the Access Evaluation Map, we have a series of standardised questions we use before and after interventions to assess self-reported measures linked to our outcomes. We use this methodology for all our access activities and therefore as a minimum meet Type 2 (empirical enquiry) evaluation requirements<sup>5</sup>. We plan to validate our survey questions and adapt them if our validation exercise shows this is required.
- 4.6.2. To create a control group for our Academic Development Programme (IS1.1), we will measure attainment-linked measures/outcomes on interventions with no attainment-raising activity (e.g. IS2 interventions). This quasi-experimental approach will achieve Type 3 (causality) evaluation for these interventions. For interventions that do not engage young people, we will develop bespoke evaluations looking at measuring the specific outcomes for that cohort. With the teacher CPD (IS1.7) we aim to develop evaluation to measure how the intervention has impacted teachers’ confidence in teaching in that subject area and how it has impacted their classroom teaching.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://taso.org.uk/evidence/evaluation-guidance-resources/mapping-outcomes-and-activities-tool-moat-resources/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/>



#### 4.7. Intervention strategy 2 (IS2): ): increase the number of pre-16 pupils eligible for free school meals reporting improved attitudes towards HE (PTA\_2)

**Primary target:** Increase the number pre-16 pupils eligible for free school meals reporting improved attitudes towards HE (PTA\_2)

**Related target:** Increase the number of pre-16 pupils eligible for free school meals reporting improved academic self-efficacy (PTA\_1)

#### 4.8. Risks to equality of opportunity

4.8.1. **Knowledge and Skills (Risk 1):** The indication of risk is that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to progress into HE. There is a sizable gap in HE progression rates between pupils eligible for FSM and the wider population<sup>6</sup>. Whilst the gap between those eligible for FSM and the wider population is smaller in Lancashire than the national average, there remains a large gap and the overall progression rates for both the wider population and the pupils eligible for FSM is lower than the national average. This discrepancy in progression rates underscores a significant risk to equality of opportunity, particularly in terms of the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills necessary for academic success. Despite initiatives aimed at promoting access to HE, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to face barriers in accessing HE opportunities, hindering their ability to develop the knowledge and skills required for academic excellence and future success.

4.8.2. **Information and Guidance (Risk 2):** Data suggests a gap in access to effective information and guidance for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (See Annex A). Despite attempts to narrow the disparity, there remains a notable gap in progression rates between pupils from different socioeconomic backgrounds. While initiatives have been implemented to provide support and guidance, the data suggests that adequate information and guidance may not be reaching those who need it most. This lack of information and guidance could be exacerbating the challenges faced by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, hindering their ability to navigate educational pathways effectively and access opportunities for academic advancement.

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<sup>6</sup> Data source: [Widening participation in higher education, Academic year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics)

| Activity   | Description   | Inputs   | Outcomes  | Cross intervention strategy |
|--|---|--|---|-----------------------------|
| IS2.1<br><br>Campus visits:<br>primary schools<br><br>(Existing<br>Activity)   | The programme of activity for primary schools includes a combination of activities delivered in-school and on-campus. Sessions aim to introduce Year 5 and Year 6 pupils to the concept of studying at university and showcase the different types of courses in an age-appropriate manner. This programme of activity is offered to schools that meet our WP criteria. | 0.75 FTE<br><br>Student staff costs<br><br>School and staff transport costs<br><br>Session resources | More pupils expect to study at HE when older<br><br>Better understanding of education-career pathways<br><br>Improved knowledge of HE<br><br>Increased sense of belonging within HE |                             |
| IS2.2<br><br>Campus visits:<br>secondary schools<br><br>(Existing<br>Activity) | The programme of on-campus visits for secondary schools and colleges highlights the range of courses that can be studied at university, with interactive workshops combined with information and guidance on progressing to HE. This programme of activity is offered to schools and colleges that meet our WP criteria.  | 0.75 FTE<br><br>Student staff costs<br><br>School and staff transport costs<br><br>Session resources | More pupils expect to study at HE when older<br><br>Better understanding of education-career pathways<br><br>Improved knowledge of HE<br><br>Increased sense of belonging within HE |                             |

|  |   |   |  |                                    |
|--|---|---|--|------------------------------------|
| <p>IS2.3</p> <p>School University Network (SUN) secondary programme</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p> | <p>We work in partnership with a group of secondary schools to offer a programme of sustained outreach activity from Year 5 to Year 11. The programme showcases the different courses that can be studied at university, combined with information and guidance about university life and how to progress to HE. The programme is progressive, with the information on HE embedded within sessions building on previous activity to develop knowledge throughout the educational pathway.</p> | <p>0.75 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> <p>School and staff transport costs</p> <p>Session resources</p> | <p>More pupils expect to study at HE when older</p> <p>Better understanding of education-career pathways</p> <p>Improved knowledge of HE</p> <p>Increased sense of belonging within HE</p> |                                    |
| <p>IS2.4</p> <p>SUN primary programme</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p>                               | <p>We work with the primary feeder schools for our SUN secondary schools to offer age-appropriate activities that introduce the idea of studying at university and increasing familiarity with universities. A high proportion of pupils in these schools go on to study at our SUN secondary schools, enabling pupils to engage in a progressive programme from Year 5 through to Year 11.</p>   | <p>0.75 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> <p>School and staff transport costs</p> <p>Session resources</p> | <p>More pupils expect to study at HE when older</p> <p>Better understanding of education-career pathways</p> <p>Improved knowledge of HE</p> <p>Increased sense of belonging within HE</p> | <p>IS1: academic self-efficacy</p> |
| <p>IS2.5</p> <p>Lancashire Science Festival</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p>                         | <p>We deliver a biennial festival that welcomes over 10,000 visitors comprising primary school pupils and families onto campus. The festival engages children and families at the University campus in a range of activities and enhances school-based learning</p>   | <p>2.1 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> <p>School transport costs</p> <p>Event delivery costs</p>         | <p>Improved perception of university</p> <p>Positive impact on science teaching in classroom</p>   | <p>IS1: academic self-efficacy</p> |

## 4.9. Evaluation of intervention strategy 2 (IS2)

### 4.10. Summary of evidence base and rationale

4.10.1. The intermediate outcomes that we evaluate in our access provision align with those identified by TASO as being associated with HE progression and success<sup>7</sup>. The mapping of our activities with each intermediate outcome and the evidence base is outlined in Annex B. We have focused on activities that improve attitudes toward HE in the following ways:

- Increasing pupils' expectations that they will go to university when they are older.
- Improving pupils' understanding of how university and education are linked to career pathways.
- Improving knowledge of HE by knowing more about study options including alternative routes and increased knowledge of what it's like to study at university.
- An increased sense of belonging at university – pupils feel like university is for 'people like me'.

4.10.2. The activities in IS2 focus on bringing young people onto campus to make university a more familiar setting. The content that is delivered as part of these visits combines information and guidance about accessing HE with workshop activities that demonstrate how subjects in school link to courses at university, and subsequent career pathways. The primary aim of the Lancashire Science Festival (IS2.5) is to improve the perceptions of HE among primary school children and families. It has the secondary aim of improving science teaching in primary schools and therefore overlaps with IS1.

### 4.11. Evaluation of activities

4.11.1. The IS2 evaluation strategy follows the same evaluation principles as IS1, but will focus on outcomes associated with HE progression. For all IS2 activities we will have Type 2 (empirical enquiry) evaluation and will consider opportunities to create control groups so that we can move towards Type 3 (causality).

4.11.2. For our SUN programme (IS2.3), we are adapting the delivery method so that whole cohorts receive the same activity, which is developed to be progressive and sustained from either Year 5 or Year 7 through to Year 11. We utilise the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) database to analyse which activities are most likely to improve HE progression. As part of the SUN programme, we ask pupils to complete a survey that measures their attitudes towards HE and career progression. We link data to their HEAT records and map which activities they have participated in. We intend to use this data in the long-term to understand whether specific activities are linked to changes in attitudes and whether these attitudes at different points in the educational journey are linked to HE progression outcomes. We intend to create a control group once ethical approvals are granted, from our other on-campus visits that are not part of the SUN programme (IS2.1 and IS2.2). We will ask all pupils participating in non-SUN campus visits to complete the same attitude survey anonymously. This will help us create control data sets with which to compare SUN pupils, enabling us to see whether a sustained and progressive programme improves attitudes towards HE compared with pupils participating in one-off visits.

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<sup>7</sup> TASO: [Understanding the impact of interventions to address inequality in the student experience](#)

#### 4.12. Intervention strategy 3 (IS3): embed a whole university approach that prioritises mental health and wellbeing for all students, measured by reducing the completion gap between those from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 7% in 2021/22 to 3.5% by 2028/29 (PTS\_1)

**Primary target:** Embed a whole university approach that prioritises mental health and wellbeing for all students, measured by reducing the completion gap between those from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 7% in 2021/22 to 3.5% by 2028/29 (PTS\_1)

**Related targets:** Disability completion gap (PTS\_2). age continuation gap (PTS\_3), Black and White awarding gap (PTS\_4), IMD progression gap (PTP\_1)

#### 4.13. Risks to equality of opportunity

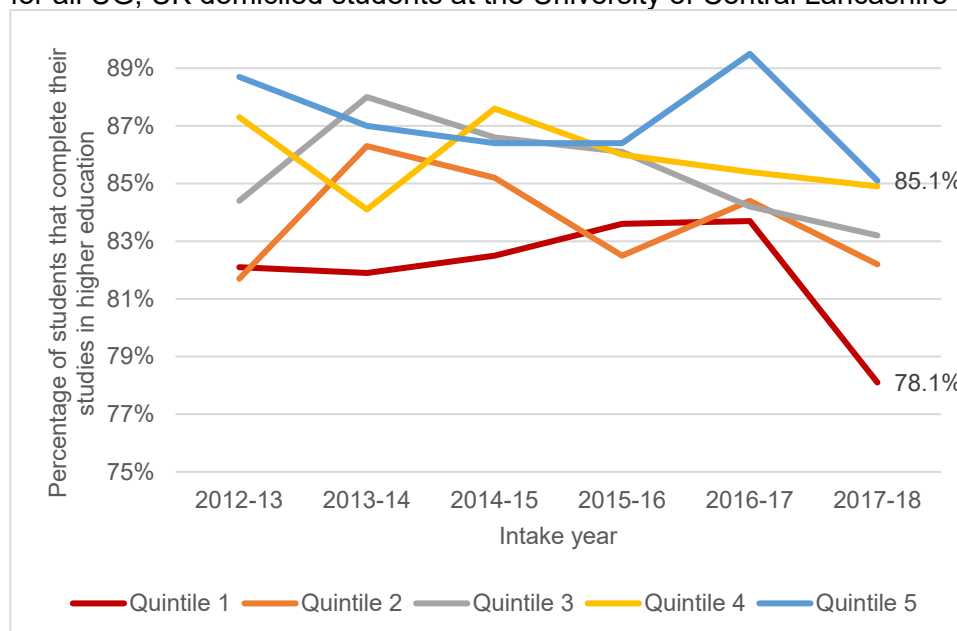
##### 4.13.1. Insufficient Academic Support (Risk 6) and Insufficient Personal Support (Risk 7):

The primary indication of risk is that students from IMD Quintile 1 neighbourhoods are less likely to complete their course than students from IMD Quintile 5. Data indicates that students from disadvantaged backgrounds face barriers such as lower levels of prior attainment, which contribute to the completion and progression gaps (See Annex A). Analysis of National Student Survey (NSS) scores reveals disparities in the perception of teaching, assessment, and academic support between students from IMD Q1/2 and IMD Q3/4/5.

4.13.2. **Mental Health (Risk 8):** Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress are more prevalent among students from deprived backgrounds which exacerbate the challenges faced by these students, hindering their ability to succeed academically and progress through their studies. In addition, a substantial proportion of referrals to the University's Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing service are from IMD Q1 students, who also exhibit higher rates of non-engagement with support services (See Annex A).

4.13.3. **Cost Pressures (Risk 10):** A significant portion of our bursary spending is allocated to IMD Q1 and Q2 students. These interconnected challenges underscore the need for targeted interventions to address socioeconomic barriers.

4.13.4. Graph 1: completion indicators (2012/13 – 2017/18 entrants) by deprivation (IMD quintiles) for all UG, UK domiciled students at the University of Central Lancashire





| Activity   | Description  | Inputs                                | Outcomes   | Cross intervention strategy  |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| IS3.1<br><br>Enhanced Personal Tutor Framework<br><br>(Enhanced Existing Activity) | <p>Personal Tutoring is our institutional student support system delivered by academic staff with the support of institution wide Achievement Coaches. Coaches primarily provide individual support to help students overcome barriers to their learning. We will significantly enhance our current Framework by providing enhanced training and development for Personal Tutors. This will include registering with the UK Advising and Tutoring Association (UKAT) to provide development programmes for Personal Tutors. In addition, we will implement role-specific training for Personal Tutors to support student mental health and disability support needs by identifying students at risk, making timely referrals and supporting engagement in specialist student support services.</p> | 0.5 FTE<br><br>UKAT membership costs  | Improved attendance and engagement in Personal Tutor sessions<br><br>Referrals to support services<br><br>Improved student continuation<br><br>Improved student completion | IS5: age continuation gap<br><br>IS6: Black and White awarding gap<br><br>IS7: IMD progression gap                                       |
| IS3.2<br><br>Engagement analytics<br><br>(Enhanced Existing Activity)              | <p>The University's intention is to develop a bespoke engagement analytics dashboard to enable staff to better understand a student's engagement and to proactively identify and provide pastoral support to those with poor engagement. We will use engagement indicators alongside attendance at timetabled sessions to develop an improved understanding of the risk of student withdrawal. This will help us direct attention and support towards students whose pattern of engagement could signal that they are at risk of withdrawing.</p>  | 0.3 FTE<br><br>Software licence costs | Improved attendance and engagement in course provision<br><br>Engagement with support services<br><br>Improved student continuation<br><br>Improved student completion     | IS4: disability completion gap<br><br>IS5: age continuation gap<br><br>IS6: Black and White awarding gap<br><br>IS7: IMD progression gap |

|   |   |                |   |   |
|---|---|----------------|---|---|
| <p>IS3.3</p> <p>First Year Achievement programme</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>                                  | <p>The creation of an on-course support package that will include individual and group provision focused on providing academic and careers support. Students will create a personal development plan early in Semester 1 to facilitate goal setting and identify support needs, which will link to an annual programme of events. The programme will be integrated with the prospective applicant journey, so will strengthen our onboarding and transition offer for students.</p>   | <p>0.5 FTE</p> | <p>Improved attendance and engagement in induction events</p> <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p> <p>Improved student completion</p>                         | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> <p>IS7: IMD progression gap</p> |
| <p>IS3.4</p> <p>Embedding mental health and wellbeing in the Curriculum Framework</p> <p>(New Activity)</p> | <p>As part of our institutional Curriculum Framework and aligned to the Learn domain of our University Mental Health Charter submission, we will enhance the wellbeing elements of the Curriculum Framework by embedding evidence based best practice in curriculum and assessment design.</p> <p>In the School of Arts and Media, we will pilot the delivery of Art Psychotherapy in the first-year curriculum to improve student wellbeing. In the School of Psychology and Humanities, we will pilot the integration of psychoeducation on anxiety and stress in the first-year curriculum to provide students with practical guidance and evidence based coping strategies to reduce the frequency and severity of reported symptoms.</p> | <p>0.2 FTE</p> | <p>Decreased mitigating circumstances applications</p> <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved student belonging</p> <p>Improved student wellbeing</p> <p>Improved student completion</p> | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p>                                 |

|   |  |   |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <p>IS3.5</p> <p>Early intervention and coaching support</p> <p>(Enhanced Existing Activity)</p> | <p>We will use our data expertise to deliver a proactive early intervention approach to support student success. Achievement Coaches will identify students with concerning patterns of engagement and deliver individual coaching sessions to help them to succeed in their studies, and where appropriate, signpost students to specialist support services to mitigate mental health and wellbeing challenges. Typical themes of coaching sessions include goal setting, study strategies, improving confidence, improving engagement in specialist support services and building resilience.</p> | <p>3 FTE</p>                              | <p>Decreased mitigating circumstances applications</p> <p>Improved attendance and engagement in induction events</p> <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p> | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |
| <p>IS3.6</p> <p>Student Mentoring programme</p> <p>(Enhanced Existing Activity)</p>             | <p>Our Student Mentoring programme provides an opportunity for higher year students to share their experiences and knowledge in weekly group sessions for new students to support their transition to university and develop a peer network. Student Mentors provide transition support and signpost students to engagement activities and specialist student support services. We will grow our Student Mentoring programme to include additional Year 0 and Year 1 students and phase implementation across priority courses with the highest proportion of IMD Q1 students.</p>                   | <p>2.7 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> | <p>Improved attendance and engagement in induction events</p> <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved student belonging</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p>                      | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |

|   |  |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| <p>IS3.7</p> <p>Early assessment and formative feedback in Semester 1</p> <p>(New Activity)</p> | <p>Implementation of early assessment as part of Year 1 Semester 1 modules to identify students requiring additional support. We will combine early assessment with enhanced levels of formative feedback and support.</p> <p>This activity will be piloted in our School of Law and Policing and implemented in additional academic schools if evaluation suggests a positive impact on student outcomes.</p> | <p>0.1 FTE</p>                            | <p>Improved first time submission measures</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p> <p>Improved student completion</p> | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p>                                 |
| <p>IS3.8</p> <p>Student experience and success fund</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>                   | <p>Establishment of a student experience and success fund to offer financial support to colleagues and students to deliver new projects or events which improve the student experience. We will prioritise financial support and improvements targeted at mature students and commuter students to acknowledge the challenges such groups face in seeking to engage with the broader student experience.</p>   | <p>0.2 FTE</p> <p>Project fund</p>        | <p>Improved student belonging</p> <p>Improved student satisfaction measures</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p>   | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p>                                 |
| <p>IS3.9</p> <p>Development of Student Partner role</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>                   | <p>Creation of a new Student Partner role to inform the design and delivery of intervention strategies. Student Partners will be established as a paid student role to support the design, delivery and evaluation our APP projects. Student Partners will collaborate with colleagues to cocreate solutions to challenges and ensure student voice is embedded in projects and policy.</p>                    | <p>0.2 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> | <p>Improved student belonging</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p> <p>Improved student completion</p>              | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> <p>IS7: IMD progression gap</p> |

#### **4.14. Evaluation of intervention strategy 3 (IS3)**

#### **4.15. Summary of evidence base and rationale**

4.15.1. We have conducted a literature review and assessed internal and sector wide data, alongside engaging with student groups on the rationale and design of each intervention strategy. An overview of our institutional Evaluation Framework and approach is listed in Evaluation of the plan (See Section 7). More detailed information outlining the evidence base and rationale for IS3 can be viewed in Annex B.

4.15.2. Research indicates that students' completion is related to a range of personal and group level factors. Further, that completion is related to course as well as university level factors. Sensitivity and care must therefore be taken in 'policy borrowing' within and across providers. Several of the activities under this intervention will be rolled out across different academic schools as evidence of their value accumulating over the APP cycle, recognising that what works in one area may have less (or more) impact elsewhere. The analysis is underpinned by a Bordieuan view of capital: human, social and financial, which is well developed in the sector and is used by larger consortia such as NERUPI<sup>8</sup> (Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions). It should be noted that this intervention strategy, on completion, relates clearly to intervention strategy 7, reducing the progression gap for the same group of students. We would therefore expect positive impact on completion to effect progression as well.

Drawing on the evidence base the strategy will:

- Make greater use of real-time information about individual students.
- Support to overcome under preparation for HE.
- Support accelerated integration into university life.
- Ameliorate some financial pressures.
- Support greater involvement in staff-student consultation processes.

#### **4.16. Evaluation of activities**

4.16.1. The strands of activity will be assessed in relation to their Theory of Change model drawing on data from key stakeholders and our internal data. Monitoring evaluations will inform the development of the strand over the APP period (See Section 7: Evaluation of the plan for more detailed information).

4.16.2. As part of IS3 we will conduct enhanced evaluations of the below activities, meeting as a minimum Type 2 (empirical enquiry) requirements:

- IS3.6: Student Mentoring programme
- IS3.7: Early assessment and formative feedback

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<sup>8</sup> <https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/8780/1/8780.pdf>



#### 4.17. Intervention strategy 4 (IS4): reduce the completion gap between disabled and non-disabled students from 4.8% in 2021/22 to 1.5% by 2028/29 (PTS\_2)

**Primary target:** Reduce the completion gap between disabled and non-disabled students from 4.8% in 2021/22 to 1.5% by 2028/29 (PTS\_2)

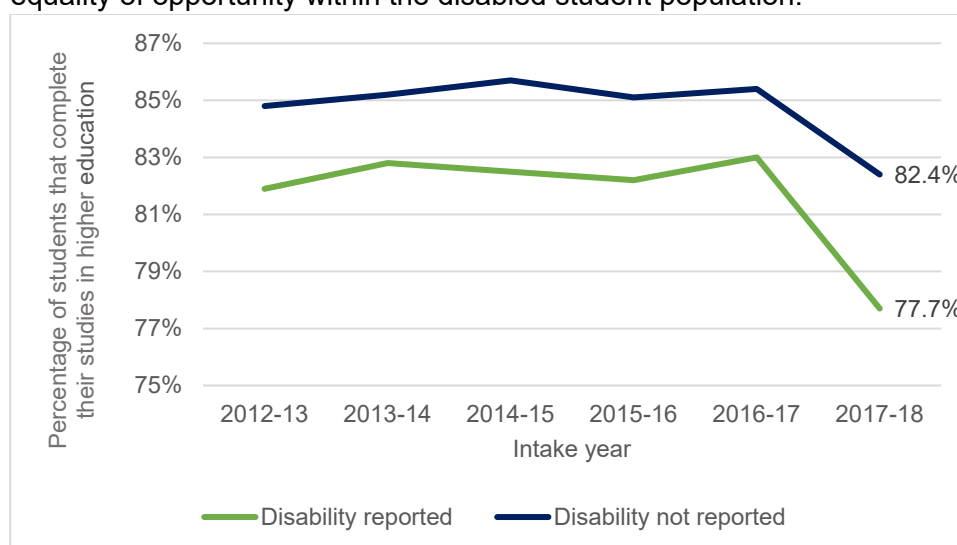
**Related targets:** Mental health, IMD completion gap (PTS\_1), age continuation gap (PTS\_3), Black and White awarding gap (PTS\_4), IMD progression gap (PTP\_1)

#### 4.18. Risks to equality of opportunity

4.18.1. The most recent set of outcome data highlights a negative trend relating to the completion gap for students with disabilities, which has increased to 4.8%. Despite previous years' improvements, the completion rate for the 2017/18 disabled intake experienced a sharp decline, dropping from 83% to 77.7% (See Graph 2). Analysis by disability type reveals that students with mental health conditions, alongside those with social or communication impairments, or multiple impairments, exhibit markedly lower completion rates compared to their peers.

4.18.2. Moreover, there has been a significant surge in disclosures of mental health conditions, affecting a larger cohort of students compared to other disability types. Disability distribution across IMD quintiles also reveals disparities, with a notable proportion of disclosures originating from IMD Q1, indicating potential socioeconomic influences. Additionally, mature students constitute a significant portion of disability disclosures, suggesting specific challenges for this demographic. Despite these trends, a substantial number of disabled students are currently not engaging with offered support services, indicating a perceived lack of awareness of personal support.

4.18.3. The disability completion gap, coupled with the surge in mental health disclosures, presents significant risks to equality of opportunity. We have linked these to the risks of **Insufficient Personal Support (Risk 7)**, **Mental Health (Risk 8)** and **Cost Pressures (Risk 10)**, which could be exacerbating these challenges, as evidenced by the lack of engagement with support services. Addressing these issues is crucial to fostering a positive student experience and promoting successful completion of studies, thereby mitigating risks to equality of opportunity within the disabled student population.



4.18.4. Graph 2: completion indicators (2012/13 – 2017/18 entrants) by disability reported and no disability reported for UG, UK domiciled students at the University of Central Lancashire

| Activity  | Description  | Inputs              | Outcomes   | Cross intervention strategy   |
|---|--|---------------------|--|---|
| IS4.1<br><br>Assigned Disability Advisor<br><br>(Existing Activity)   | Each applicant who discloses a disability is assigned a Disability Advisor to assist with reasonable adjustments, support, and Disabled Students' Allowances. Disability Advisors ensure our disabled students have access to support to enable them to thrive in their studies and university life.   | 8.8 FTE             | Engagement with support services<br><br>Improved student belonging<br><br>Improved student continuation<br><br>Improved student completion | IS3: mental health, IMD completion<br><br>IS5: age continuation gap     |
| IS4.2<br><br>Student Wellbeing Ambassadors<br><br>(Existing Activity) | Student Wellbeing Ambassadors receive specialist training to provide individualised support to disabled students to ensure they can fully access the curriculum and extra-curricular activity. This includes mobility support, orientation, note taking and accompanying students to societies. Student Wellbeing Ambassadors support transition by engaging with prospective students during the applicant journey. | Student staff costs | Engagement with support services<br><br>Improved student belonging<br><br>Improved student completion                                      | IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap<br><br>IS5: age continuation gap |

|   |   |                         |   |  |
|---|---|-------------------------|---|--|
| <p>IS4.3</p> <p>Student Transition and Residential programme</p> <p>(Enhanced Existing Activity)</p>                                  | <p>The Student Transition and Residential Programme (STAR) offers online, and in-person student led pre-arrival activities and events for offer holders declaring a disability. The programme provides an orientation to key services and aspects of HE that could be overwhelming. The programme provides an opportunity to engage with offer holders so that we can better understand their disability related needs and implement adjustments accordingly.</p>   | <p>Event costs</p>      | <p>Improved attendance and engagement in induction events</p> <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved student belonging</p> | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p>                                 |
| <p>IS4.4</p> <p>Education Psychologist Assessments</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p>   | <p>To provide access to Education Psychologist Assessments for specific learning difficulty diagnosis, required for access to reasonable adjustments and Disabled Students' Allowances.</p>   | <p>Assessment costs</p> | <p>Decreased mitigating circumstances applications</p> <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved student completion</p>       | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS7: IMD progression gap</p> |
| <p>IS4.5</p> <p>Online training programme: Designing for diverse learners and creating accessible resources</p> <p>(New Activity)</p> | <p>In addition to a range disability-specific training modules, the project aims to produce simple guidelines to support best practice in learning material design. The module covers important considerations when creating accessible digital resources and has been developed to be relevant to both academic and professional services colleagues. The module highlights simple changes that can have a transformational impact on the experiences of our students, colleagues and wider communities.</p> | <p>0.1 FTE</p>          | <p>Improved student belonging</p> <p>Improved student satisfaction measures</p> <p>Improved student completion</p>                      | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS7: IMD progression gap</p> |

|  |   |                               |  |  |
|--|---|-------------------------------|--|--|
| <p>IS4.6</p> <p>Data informed targeting</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>                          | <p>Reporting improvements to provide an enhanced understanding of engagement with Student Services' mental health and wellbeing support. Providing the ability to identify potential challenges so timely, targeted, academic school and course-based activities can be implemented to support students' continuation, completion and progression.</p>  | <p>0.1 FTE</p>                | <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved student completion</p> | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> |
| <p>IS4.7</p> <p>Enhanced disability and neurodiversity screening</p> <p>(New Activity)</p> | <p>As part of our induction provision, we will implement a digital screening tool. The digital tool will identify traits of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia, and social or communication impairments. This will enable colleagues to provide early intervention and support without the need for lengthy formal assessments and medical evidence.</p> <p>This activity will be piloted in our School of Business and School of Engineering and Computing where disability declarations and engagement are low with specialist support services. The activity will be implemented in additional academic schools if evaluation suggests a positive impact on student outcomes.</p> | <p>Software licence costs</p> | <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved student completion</p> | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> |

#### **4.19. Evaluation of intervention strategy 4 (IS4)**

#### **4.20. Summary of evidence base and rationale**

4.20.1. We have conducted a literature review and assessed internal and sector wide data, alongside engaging with student groups on the rationale and design of each intervention strategy. An overview of our institutional Evaluation Framework and approach is listed in Evaluation of the plan (See Section 7). More detailed information outlining the evidence base and rationale for IS4 can be viewed in Annex B.

4.20.2. Students declaring a disability are supported by a dedicated team in Student Services with specialist knowledge, access to a range of resources and influence in developing broader university policy. A recent TASO funded evaluation of the Student Wellbeing Ambassadors Programme<sup>9</sup> showed its value in supporting students declaring a disability and the Ambassadors themselves. Reflecting a belief that inclusive pedagogy is good for all, the specific strategy to reduce the disability completion gap builds on other activities in this APP directed towards all students.

Drawing on the evidence base, the strategy will:

- Support transition into the University.
- Enable students to be able to show their strengths.
- Ensuring appropriate and individually tailored support.

#### **4.21. Evaluation of activities**

4.21.1. The strands of activity will be assessed in relation to their Theory of Change model drawing on data from key stakeholders and our internal data. Monitoring evaluations will inform the development of the strand over the APP period (See Section 7: Evaluation of the plan for more detailed information).

4.21.2. As part of IS4 we will conduct enhanced evaluations of the below activities, meeting as a minimum Type 2 (empirical enquiry) requirements:

- IS4.1: Assigned Disability Advisor
- IS4.5: Online training programme: Designing for diverse learners and creating accessible resources

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<sup>9</sup> [TASO, 2023. Efficacy Pilot Evaluation Report University of Central Lancashire's Student Wellbeing Ambassadors Programme](#)



#### 4.22. Intervention strategy 5 (IS5): reduce the continuation gap between young and mature students from 8.2% in 2021/22 to 4% by 2028/29 (PTS\_3)

**Primary target:** Reduce the continuation gap between young and mature students from 8.2% in 2021/22 to 4% by 2028/29 (PTS\_3)

**Related targets:** Mental health, IMD completion (PTS\_1), disability completion gap (PTS\_2), Black and White awarding gap (PTS\_4), IMD progression gap (PTP\_1)

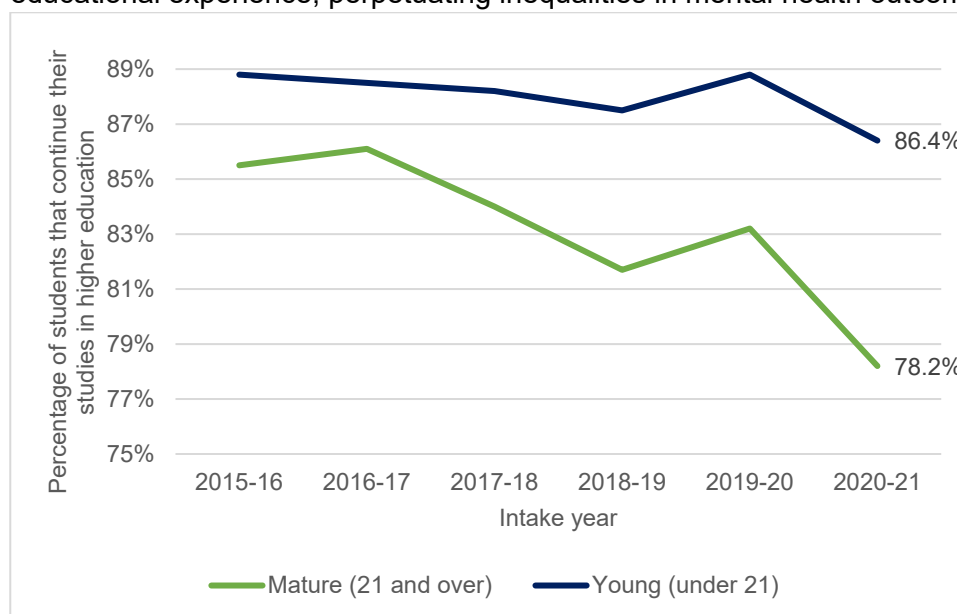
#### 4.23. Risks to equality of opportunity

4.23.1. Mature students face significant barriers to equality of opportunity, reflecting broader national trends outlined in a House of Commons Library briefing paper (See Annex A). These students, who often balance academic pursuits with personal responsibilities, exhibit lower continuation and completion rates compared to their younger counterparts. The primary indication of risk here is the growing gap in student continuation rates between younger and mature students, with the latter constituting a significant proportion of our student population. Disaggregated data highlights intersections with other characteristics, such as disability and socioeconomic status, further exacerbating disparities.

#### 4.23.2. Insufficient Academic Support (Risk 6) and Insufficient Personal Support (Risk 7):

Mature students, many of whom have been out of the education system for several years, face challenges transitioning into HE. Negative trends in continuation and completion rates underscore the need for comprehensive academic and personal support systems. Insufficient support in these areas can hinder their adaptation to the academic environment and exacerbate personal responsibilities and financial constraints, jeopardising their academic success and wellbeing.

4.23.3. **Mental Health (Risk 8):** Mature students are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges, as they navigate academic pursuits alongside personal responsibilities. The disproportionate representation of mature students within mental health disclosures emphasises the critical need for enhanced and accessible mental health support. Insufficient support in this area undermines their academic performance and overall educational experience, perpetuating inequalities in mental health outcomes.



4.23.4. Graph 3: age continuation indicators (2015/16 – 2020/21 entrants) for all UG, UK domiciled students at the University of Central Lancashire

| Activity   | Description   | Inputs  | Outcomes  | Cross intervention strategy   |
|--|---|---------|---|---|
| IS5.1<br><br>Timetabling project to simplify and condense timetable<br><br>(New Activity)        | An institutional project to offer a simplified and condensed student timetable, typically requiring students to be on campus for two or three fixed days per week. As part of our timetabling project, we will pilot a new approach to our current semester structure and consider opportunities which facilitate studying in a more flexible way. We expect timetabling improvements to particularly benefit mature students with balancing study and personal commitments and align with our WP mission to support individuals to upskill and reskill over their working lives. | 0.4 FTE | Decreased mitigating circumstances applications<br><br>Improved student satisfaction measures<br><br>Improved student continuation<br><br>Improved student completion | IS3: mental health, IMD completion<br><br>IS4: disability completion gap<br><br>IS6: Black and White awarding gap                                 |
| IS5.2<br><br>Curriculum transformation project to improve module structure<br><br>(New Activity) | In conjunction with our timetabling project (IS5.1), we will undertake a curriculum transformation project. We will pilot a new block teaching approach where students will typically study one module in focus, rather than several modules concurrently. In readiness for the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, we will embed flexibility in programme design to enable students to join or pause their progression towards a qualification and have greater ownership over module choice.   | 0.4 FTE | Improved student continuation<br><br>Improved student satisfaction measures<br><br>Improved student continuation<br><br>Improved good degree outcomes                 | IS3: mental health, IMD completion<br><br>IS4: disability completion gap<br><br>IS6: Black and White awarding gap<br><br>IS7: IMD progression gap |

|   |  |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <p>IS5.3</p> <p>Return to Study programme</p> <p>(Enhanced Existing Activity)</p> | <p>Our Return to Study programme supports mature students to access HE. The programme includes study skills guidance and subject-specific preparatory content. Successful completion of the programme provides access to Year 0 or Year 1 of a degree course. We will enhance our Return to Study programme to sustain support after enrolment in Semester 1 as part of an extended induction approach. Additional support will include an online Essay Route Map programme to guide students through their early assignments.</p> | <p>0.2 FTE</p>                            | <p>Improved student belonging</p> <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p>  | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion</p> <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> <p>IS7: IMD progression gap</p>           |
| <p>IS5.4</p> <p>Retention calling project</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>               | <p>Using a peer to peer coaching approach, we will employ higher year students to call all new UG students in Semester 1 to assist their transition and inform them of wider university support services. Phone calls will be delivered at a mid-point in Semester 1. This activity will be delivered to all new students. We expect a particularly positive impact on mature students as internal data demonstrates they are more likely to engage with mental health support services in Semester 1.</p>                         | <p>0.1 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> | <p>Referrals to support services</p> <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p> | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |

|  |   |                |   |  |
|--|---|----------------|---|--|
| <p>IS5.5</p> <p>Academic skills development team</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p>                | <p>Our academic skills development team provide academic support to students across all courses to build academic skills and confidence, with high participation from mature students in tutorials and workshops. Working in partnership with teaching colleagues, our academic skills development team embed best practice within the curriculum to promote an inclusive approach and deliver specialist course specific workshops.</p>  | <p>2.4 FTE</p> | <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved student completion</p> <p>Improved good degree outcomes</p>   | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p>                                       |
| <p>IS5.6</p> <p>Technology and digital skills training</p> <p>(Enhanced Existing Activity)</p> | <p>Using our significant digital expertise to deliver technology and digital skills training for students. Training will be made available to all students, but we expect the most significant benefit for mature students as the provision will be integrated into the Return to Study programme (IS5.3). In addition, our Library Team offer access to multiple study spaces and dedicated subject librarians to encourage independent learning enabled by technology.</p>                            | <p>0.5 FTE</p> | <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p>   | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> <p>IS7: IMD progression gap</p>       |
| <p>IS5.7</p> <p>Interrupted students project</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p>                    | <p>A programme of workshops for students interrupting from their studies including study skills refresher training and confidence building to encourage students to return and complete their course, equipping them with the skills to succeed when resuming their studies.</p> <p>This will be piloted in our Nursing courses, which have a large mature student population. The activity will be implemented in additional courses if evaluation suggests a positive impact on student outcomes.</p> | <p>0.1 FTE</p> | <p>Decreased interruptions leading to withdrawals</p> <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p> <p>Improved student completion</p> | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |

#### **4.24. Evaluation of intervention strategy 5 (IS5)**

#### **4.25. Summary of evidence base and rationale**

4.25.1. We have conducted a literature review and assessed internal and sector wide data, alongside engaging with student groups on the rationale and design of each intervention strategy. An overview of our institutional Evaluation Framework and approach is listed in Evaluation of the plan (See Section 7). More detailed information outlining the evidence base and rationale for IS5 can be viewed in Annex B.

4.25.2. Whilst mature students experience many of the same issues as younger students, due to a range of specific factors they tend to experience some of these more intensely such as financial pressures and mental health issues. These experiences differentially impact on students' decisions to discontinue. Our data, however, shows that *if* mature students continue, they have high rates of progression into graduate employment. The focus of this strategy is therefore specifically to aid transition into a stable study-life balance and student identity. It is underpinned by research literature on transitions and developing a sense of belonging.

Drawing on the evidence based, this strategy will:

- Ensure successful transition into HE.
- Enable belonging.
- Provide support that ameliorates the influence of mature students' additional commitments.

#### **4.26. Evaluation of activities**

4.26.1. The strands of activity will be assessed in relation to their Theory of Change model drawing on data from key stakeholders and our internal data. Monitoring evaluations will inform the development of the strand over the APP period (See Section 7: Evaluation of the plan for more detailed information).

4.26.2. As part of IS5 we will conduct enhanced evaluations of the below activities, meeting as a minimum Type 2 (empirical enquiry) requirements and the intention of meeting Type 3 (causality) for IS5.4:

- IS5.3: Return to Study programme
- IS5.4: Retention calling project

#### 4.27. Intervention strategy 6 (IS6): reduce the awarding gap between Black and White students from 24% in 2021/22 to 12% by 2028/29 (PTS\_4)

**Primary target:** Reduce the awarding gap between Black and White students from 24% in 2021/22 to 12% by 2028/29 (PTS\_4)

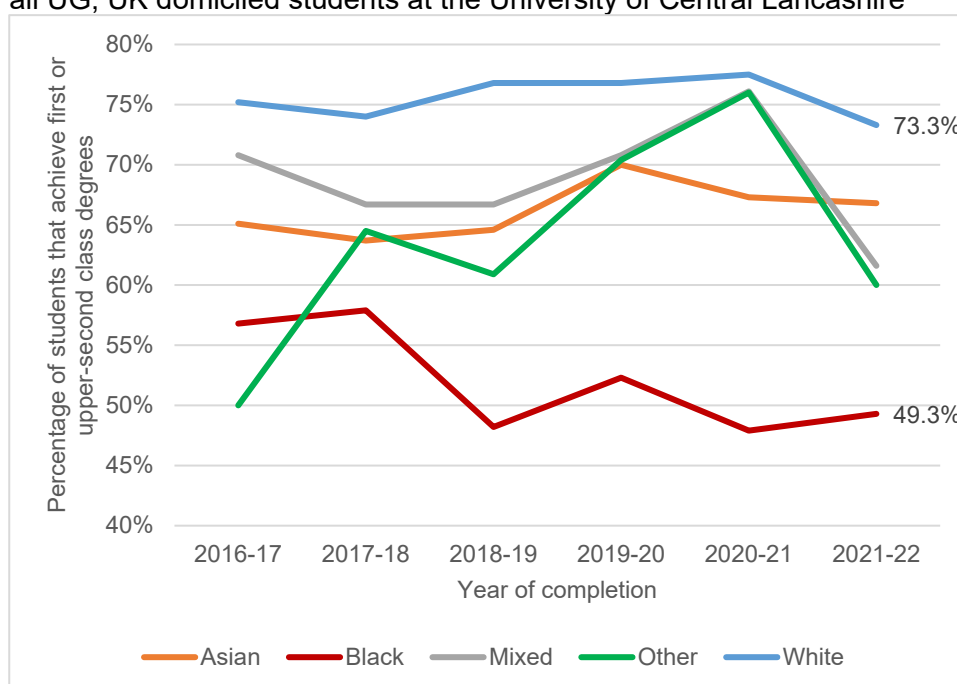
**Related targets:** Mental health, IMD completion gap (PTS\_1), disability completion gap (PTS\_2), age continuation gap (PTS\_3), IMD progression gap (PTP\_1)

#### 4.28. Risks to equality of opportunity

4.28.1. The University's Black and White awarding gap, currently at 24%, presents a significant challenge to achieving equality of opportunity (See Graph 4). Despite a slight improvement from 29.6% in 2020/21 to 24% in 2021/22, our institutional gap remains larger than the sector average. Data analysis reveals several factors contribute to this gap, including socioeconomic background, prior academic attainment, and entry qualifications. For instance, a substantial proportion of Black students are from deprived backgrounds, with 34% in IMD Q1 and 44.9% eligible for FSM. Additionally, 78.7% of Black students enter the University through alternative routes such as BTEC qualifications, indicating diverse educational pathways. Internal research conducted by our Strategic Data Team further highlights the complex interaction of factors affecting awarding, with entry qualifications and tariff points playing a significant role. Notably, the largest Black cohort at our university is within the School of Nursing and Midwifery, where outcomes significantly impact the overall awarding gap (See Annex A).

4.28.2. **Insufficient Academic Support (Risk 6) and Insufficient Personal Support (Risk 7):** the persistent awarding gap at both institutional and academic school level indicates a lack of adequate academic and personal support for Black students, hindering their academic success. **Mental Health (Risk 8):** while not as evident as with other demographic groups, there is an intersection between mental health risks and Black students, as indicated by the inclusion of mental health in the EORR.

4.29. Graph 4: ethnicity awarding rates (2016/17 – 2021/22) between White and other ethnic groups for all UG, UK domiciled students at the University of Central Lancashire



| Activity   | Description   | Inputs  | Outcomes   | Cross intervention strategy   |
|--|---|---------|--|---|
| IS6.1<br><br>Create an inclusive environment for colleagues and students<br><br>(Enhanced Existing Activity) | As part of our whole provider approach to race equality demonstrated in our upcoming Race Equality Charter submission in 2024, we commit to creating an inclusive environment for all students. We will improve reporting procedures to address discrimination and introduce training and development to increase trust. We will assess our Academic Appeals Policy and consider best practice relating to bias or perception of bias as grounds of appeal.   | 0.3 FTE | Improved racial literacy for colleagues<br><br>Decreased student complaints<br><br>Improved good degree outcomes         | IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap<br><br>IS4: disability completion gap<br><br>IS5: age continuation gap |
| IS6.2<br><br>Recruitment and development of a diverse staff population<br><br>(Enhanced Existing Activity)   | As part of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion commitments, we will recruit and develop a staff profile that better reflects the student profile and where staff have the knowledge, cultural intelligence, and capabilities to meet the needs of our diverse student population with a particular focus on minoritised ethnic students. We will improve our recruitment practices and invest in leadership development at all levels in the organisational hierarchy, with a particular focus on diversifying senior leadership positions to provide role models representative of our student population. | 0.1 FTE | Improved racial literacy for colleagues<br><br>Increased diversity in staff profile<br><br>Improved good degree outcomes | IS3: mental health, IMD completion<br><br>IS4: disability completion gap<br><br>IS7: IMD progression gap      |



|  |   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <p>IS6.3</p> <p>Targeted student belonging project</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>                         | <p>In partnership with the Students' Union and the new Student Partner role (IS3.9), collaborate with Black students to cocreate the development of a new student belonging project. The project will support transition to HE, familiarisation with university support services and building a peer network.</p> | <p>0.5 FTE</p> <p>Student events</p> <p>Partner organisations</p> | <p>Improved student belonging</p> <p>Improved student satisfaction measures</p> <p>Improved good degree outcomes</p>  | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p>                                   |
| <p>IS6.4</p> <p>Course review process</p> <p>(Enhanced Existing Activity)</p>                        | <p>Enhance the University's course review process to provide the tools required to enable effective and efficient consideration of APP priorities at academic school and course level.</p>  | <p>0.1 FTE</p>  | <p>Improved student continuation</p> <p>Improved good degree outcomes</p> <p>Improved student completion</p>  | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS7: IMD progression gap</p>           |
| <p>IS6.5</p> <p>Curriculum Framework improvements linked to inclusion</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p> | <p>In addition to the Curriculum Framework improvements linked to mental health (IS3.4), continued support linked to curriculum development and design for course teams and teaching staff building on the core Curriculum Framework pedagogic design principle of inclusion.</p>                                 | <p>0.2 FTE</p>  | <p>Improved attendance and engagement in course provision</p> <p>Engagement with support services</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p> <p>Improved student completion</p> | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion</p> <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> |

|   |  |                |   |  |
|---|--|----------------|---|--|
| <p>IS6.6</p> <p>Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment Health Check</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>            | <p>Introduction of an inclusive curriculum and assessment health check designed to support teaching colleagues in developing curriculum and module assessments. This tool is a practical resource to help colleagues integrate inclusivity into their teaching and offer insights on designing modules and assessments that cater to diverse learning needs.</p>   | <p>0.3 FTE</p> | <p>Improved module performance</p> <p>Improved student belonging</p> <p>Improved student satisfaction measures</p>        | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> |
| <p>IS6.7</p> <p>First assessment submission project</p> <p>(Enhanced Existing Activity)</p>           | <p>Academic colleagues to implement a range of strategies to enable students to submit assessments on first submission and proactively engage with the students to offer guidance before reassessments.</p> <p>This activity will be piloted in our Nursing courses, which have a large Black student population and significant awarding gap. The activity will be implemented in additional courses if evaluation suggests a positive impact on student outcomes.</p>  | <p>0.2 FTE</p> | <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved module performance</p> <p>Improved first submission rates</p> | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> |
| <p>IS6.8</p> <p>Introducing nudge principles in our communications approach</p> <p>(New Activity)</p> | <p>In conjunction with IS6.9, we will investigate enhancements to student communications using nudge principles to improve confidence in preparation for upcoming assessments and participation in academic support activities.</p> <p>This activity will be piloted in our School of Business, which has a significant Black student population and significant awarding gap. The activity will be implemented in additional academic schools if evaluation suggests a positive impact on student outcomes.</p> | <p>0.2 FTE</p> | <p>Improved module performance</p> <p>Improved good degree outcomes</p>   | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> |

|   |  |  |   |  |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p>IS6.9</p> <p>Improving students' understanding of degree classifications</p> <p>(New Activity)</p> | <p>Alongside an institutional project to simplify academic regulations and develop student friendly versions of key documentation, we will equip students to better understand degree classifications, their current progress, and the required performance to achieve different degree classifications.</p> <p>This activity will be piloted in our School of Nursing and Midwifery, which has a large Black student population and significant awarding gap. The activity will be implemented in additional academic schools if evaluation suggests a positive impact on student outcomes.</p> | <p>0.1 FTE</p>   | <p>Improved module performance</p> <p>Improved good degree outcomes</p>                                   | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS7: IMD progression gap</p> |
| <p>IS6.10</p> <p>Targeted placement mentoring</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>                               | <p>Aligned with our institutional Student Mentoring programme (IS3.6), a targeted mentoring pilot project will support Black students in preparation for study placements. Mentors will be allocated to provide academic and pastoral placement support on an individual basis to improve placement outcomes.</p> <p>This activity will be piloted in our Social Work course, which has a significant Black student population. The activity will be implemented in additional courses if evaluation suggests a positive impact on student outcomes.</p>   | <p>0.4 FTE</p> <p>Student staff costs</p> <p>Training and expenses for mentors</p> | <p>Improved student belonging</p> <p>Improved placement outcomes</p> <p>Improved student continuation</p> | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS7: IMD progression gap</p>     |

#### **4.30. Evaluation of intervention strategy 6 (IS6)**

#### **4.31. Summary of evidence base and rationale**

- 4.31.1. We have conducted a literature review and assessed internal and sector wide data, alongside engaging with student groups on the rationale and design of each intervention strategy. An overview of our institutional Evaluation Framework and approach is listed in Evaluation of the plan (See Section 7). More detailed information outlining the evidence base and rationale for IS6 can be viewed in Annex B.
- 4.31.2. Our evidence shows that the University's Black and White awarding gaps are due to a range of contributing factors. Black students are represented in higher proportions in particular degree courses such as Nursing and this national pattern is mirrored at the University<sup>10</sup>. Internal data shows a significant intersectionality between Black students and those from IMD Q1, who are overrepresented in referrals to the Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing service. Literature suggests that Black students lack of belonging presents an awarding risk. Closely related to mitigating this risk, is ensuring fair representation in the curricula (content, delivery, and assessment), and the staffing base, across all courses.
- 4.31.3. The above evidence indicates several characteristics of our Black students are shared with other targets groups within this APP such that this strategic intervention is designed to work in tandem with IS3 (mental health, IMD completion gap), IS5 (age continuation gap) and IS7 (IMD progression gap). We anticipate that these interventions will contribute positively to reducing our Black and White awarding gap in providing support across the student lifecycle.

Drawing on the evidence base the strategy will:

- Improve academic support.
- Enable students to deploy personal support.
- Support those dealing with mental health issues.
- Support students' dealing with cost pressures.

#### **4.32. Evaluation of activities**

- 4.32.1. The strands of activity will be assessed in relation to their Theory of Change model drawing on data from key stakeholders and our internal data. Monitoring evaluations will inform the development of the strand over the APP period (See Section 7: Evaluation of the plan for more detailed information).
- 4.32.2. As part of IS6 we will conduct enhanced evaluations of the below activities, meeting as a minimum Type 2 (empirical enquiry) requirements and the intention of meeting Type 3 (causality) for IS6.8:
- IS6.3: Targeted student belonging project
  - IS6.8: Embedding nudge principles in our communications approach and assignment periods

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<sup>10</sup> [UCAS \(2021\) Next steps: who are the future nurses](#)

#### 4.33. Intervention strategy 7 (IS7): reduce the progression gap between those from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 12.1% in 2021/22 to 6% by 2028/29 (PTP\_1)

**Primary target:** Reduce the progression gap between those from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 12.1% in 2021/22 to 6% by 2028/29

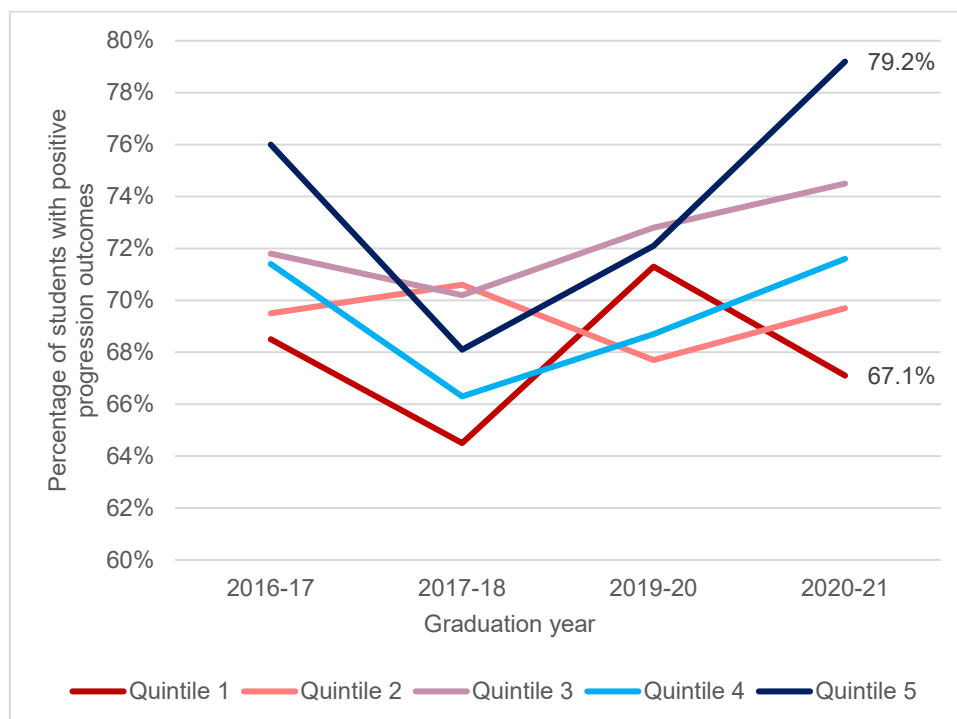
**Related targets:** Mental health, IMD completion gap (PTS\_1), disability completion gap (PTS\_2), age continuation gap (PTS\_3), Black and White awarding gap (PTS\_4)

#### 4.34. Risks to equality of opportunity

4.34.1. The IMD progression gap at the University, which has seen a recent increase to 12.1% (See Graph 5), indicates a risk to equality of opportunity, which we have linked to a wide range of risk factors. This widening gap between IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 graduates achieving highly skilled employment or further study suggests that students from more deprived backgrounds face barriers to accessing opportunities for career advancement and economic mobility.

4.34.2. In addition to **Progression from Higher Education (Risk 12)**, we have linked this gap to risks which are present earlier in the student lifecycle: **Insufficient Academic Support (Risk 6)** and **Insufficient Personal Support (Risk 7)**, **Mental Health (Risk 8)** and **Cost Pressures (Risk 10)**. Each of these risks could exacerbate the challenges that IMD Q1 students face in progressing to an outcome they consider to be a positive reflection of their HE experience. In addition, the low progression rates for IMD Q1 students underscore the systemic nature of this risk, perpetuating socioeconomic inequalities and limiting the ability of these students to achieve positive outcomes in HE and beyond.

#### 4.35. Graph 5: progression rates (2016/17 – 2020/21) by deprivation (IMD quintiles) for all UG, UK domiciled students at the University of Central Lancashire



| Activity  | Description  | Inputs   | Outcomes  | Cross intervention strategy   |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| IS7.1<br>Student Working Lives Project<br>(New Activity)  | Implementation of a Student Working Lives Project to provide support to students to secure part-time employment to ease cost of living pressures. We will embed changes to support students working part-time including clearer timetabling to manage employment and caring responsibilities around study commitments. In addition, we will assist students in securing higher quality part-time employment to better equip them for the transition to graduate level employment.  | 2.8 FTE<br><br>Student staff costs<br><br>Software licence costs | Improved student satisfaction measures<br><br>Improved student continuation<br><br>Improved graduate outcomes | IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap<br><br>IS4: disability completion gap<br><br>IS5: age continuation gap |
| IS7.2<br>Graduate Transitions programme and ongoing careers support<br>(Enhanced Existing Activity) | To develop our existing Graduate with Confidence programme which incorporates a range of employability and enterprise workshops by integrating a graduate contact centre into the programme. Thus, establishing a talent pool of graduates that continue to benefit after graduation from ongoing careers coaching and are informed of graduate level job vacancies. In addition, students are encouraged to consider postgraduate study through exposure to live research projects. We deliver an Undergraduate Research Internship Programme which provides 10 week, paid, research positions to promote research career pathways. | 0.2 FTE  | Improved graduate outcomes  |   |

|   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| <p>IS7.3</p> <p>Beyond Ambitions programme - Achieve, Belong, Succeed</p> <p>(Enhanced Existing Activity)</p> | <p>In alignment with the First Year Achievement Programme (IS3.3), a programme of work based learning activities to develop the career goals, confidence, and employability of students from under-represented backgrounds. The programme will offer both individual and group support and include careers guidance, employability sessions and access to paid work and volunteering opportunities.</p> | <p>0.6 FTE</p> <p>Staff development and training.</p> <p>AGCAS and Enterprise Association Membership</p> <p>Travel</p> | <p>Improved student completion</p> <p>Improved good degree outcomes</p> <p>Improved graduate outcomes</p>     | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion gap</p> <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |
| <p>IS7.4</p> <p>Work based learning framework and support</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>                           | <p>Implementation of a work based learning framework to improve career readiness and provision of subjective specific support to prepare students for their practice placements. The framework will ensure consistent quality assurance and compliance across all placement activity to strengthen the student experience.</p>  | <p>0.2 FTE</p>   | <p>Improved placement outcomes</p> <p>Improved good degree outcomes</p> <p>Improved graduate outcomes</p>     | <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p>  |
| <p>IS7.5</p> <p>Work based learning fund</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>  | <p>A means tested fund to support students with the costs associated with undertaking work based learning who otherwise would find it difficult to participate due to financial constraints.</p>  | <p>Work based learning fund</p>  | <p>Increased placement participation</p> <p>Improved student completion</p> <p>Improved graduate outcomes</p> | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p>   |

|   |  |                |   |   |
|---|--|----------------|---|---|
| <p>IS7.6</p> <p>Placement matching service</p> <p>(New Activity)</p>                          | <p>Increased partnership working with employers and alumni to grow placement opportunities for students, supported by development activities to better equip students for maximising the benefits of undertaking a placement.</p>  | <p>2 FTE</p>   | <p>Increased placement participation</p> <p>Improved good degree outcomes</p> <p>Improved graduate outcomes</p>                 | <p>IS4: disability completion gap</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p>     |
| <p>IS7.7</p> <p>Global Leadership Development Programme (GLDP)</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p> | <p>The GLDP is a peer led project with students trained by our Centre for Volunteering and Community Leadership to facilitate a range of activities. Students enhance their leadership skills and capabilities to generate positive change in their local communities and wider society.</p> | <p>0.4 FTE</p> | <p>Engagement in volunteering</p> <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved graduate outcomes</p>             | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p>  |
| <p>IS7.8</p> <p>The Elevate Programme</p> <p>(Existing Activity)</p>                          | <p>An employability development programme designed to support students to develop skills for graduate success. The programme includes four key sessions focused on growth mindset, resilience, career planning and the skills of negotiation and persuasion.</p>                             | <p>0.1FTE</p>  | <p>Improved student satisfaction measures</p> <p>Improved academic skills (self-efficacy)</p> <p>Improved graduate outcomes</p> | <p>IS3: mental health, IMD completion</p> <p>IS5: age continuation gap</p> <p>IS6: Black and White awarding gap</p> |



#### **4.36. Evaluation of intervention strategy 7 (IS7)**

#### **4.37. Summary of evidence base and rationale**

4.37.1. We have conducted a literature review and assessed internal and sector wide data, alongside engaging with student groups on the rationale and design of each intervention strategy. An overview of our institutional Evaluation Framework and approach is listed in Evaluation of the plan (See Section 7). More detailed information outlining the evidence base and rationale for IS7 can be viewed in Annex B.

4.37.2. This intervention strategy builds on IS3, and over the full APP cycle, we expect to see the effect on students who have benefited from IS3. It is unclear in the literature what the combined impacts at institutional level will be. In theory, it is plausible that supporting students currently more likely to withdraw to complete might negatively affect both good outcomes and progression data. We will continue to monitor this in reviewing evaluation evidence from IS3 and IS7.

4.37.3. The nature of the University is that there are two distinct routes to progression. A significant number of graduates progress into vocationally related roles e.g., in healthcare and require support to ensure they are resourced for career progression. The other group require increased careers guidance to explore potentially valuable careers. We are also aware that many of our students and graduates have significant commitments to family and place.

Drawing on the evidence base, this strategy will:

- Provide targeted information, advice and guidance.
- Improve placement opportunities.
- Enhance students' transversal skills.
- Enhance their career development skills.
- Provide some financial assistance related to placements and job hunting.

#### **4.38. Evaluation of activities**

4.38.1. The strands of activity will be assessed in relation to their Theory of Change model drawing on data from key stakeholders and our internal data. Monitoring evaluations will inform the development of the strand over the APP period (See Section 7: Evaluation of the plan for more detailed information).

4.38.2. As part of IS7 we will conduct enhanced evaluations of the below activities, meeting as a minimum Type 2 (empirical enquiry) requirements:

- IS7.1: Student Working Lives project
- IS7.7: Global Leadership Development Programme

## 5. Whole provider approach

- 5.1. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and Teaching) is the institutional strategic lead for the APP. The APP Steering Group oversees the successful development, implementation and evaluation of our APP. The APP Steering Group membership includes leadership colleagues from professional services, academic schools, Students' Union colleagues and elected student officers. The APP Steering Group provide assurances to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and the Students and Teaching Committee. Both committees are central to the University governance structure and report into the Academic Board. In addition, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and Teaching) produces annual reports for the University Board to outline progress against our APP targets and highlight strategic priorities.
- 5.2. Led by our Strategic Data Team, we continue to improve our capability to monitor impact by tracking the progress of our APP targets. In addition, we monitor students engagement in specific support programmes or in receipt of financial support to better understand any differentials across the student lifecycle. For example:
  - 5.2.1. We monitor annually the continuation of students from HE courses offered through partner organisations to level 6 top-up courses at the University and progression of students from the foundation year courses.
  - 5.2.2. We use institutional data to identify aspects of under-representation within the access, success, and progression stages of the student lifecycle to inform our strategy and actions.
  - 5.2.3. Alongside oversight from the APP Steering Group, delivery of individual projects and targets is monitored by our annual institutional strategic planning cycle.
- 5.3. As stated in our strategic plan, we have given the APP great prominence and visibility. It is crucial to university planning and decision making. By embedding the above governance and planning structure, the University delivers a whole provider approach to our APP development, implementation and evaluation.
- 5.4. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy
- 5.5. One of the four pillars of 'Belonging at the University', our EDI statement launched in January 2022, is 'Learner Outcomes: Reducing the gaps relating to recruitment, progression, awards, and graduate outcomes among our learners'. To track progress in reducing these gaps, annual updates on our EDI Scorecard (a range of institutional EDI metrics) are provided to EDI Committee, including awarding gaps and graduate outcome gaps for UK domiciled students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds and for disabled students. Our EDI Scorecard is also included in the EDI Annual Report, reported to EDI Committee, Academic Board and University Board and published externally. These institutional EDI metrics are currently being reviewed to develop strategic EDI KPIs, which will be based on the significant data analysis and self-assessments carried out as part of our Race Equality Charter (REC) work alongside the development of this APP. Regular reports are also provided to EDI Committee on progress with delivering the Belonging at the University statement, with all academic schools reporting termly to provide assurance of how the Belonging at the University statement and EDI is embedded.

- 5.6. During 2023-24, we have been developing a whole provider approach to race equality, as part of our REC submission. Our REC action plan has been developed following data analysis, surveys and focus groups, insights from our Global Race Centre for Equality and through cross-university working groups to address key race equality priorities for colleagues and students. One of our REC working groups has considered the Black and White awarding gap (PTS\_4) and actions have been developed to evolve our current EDI approach and embed a sustainable EDI infrastructure, with actions relating to intersectional analysis, equality impact assessments and annual action planning with schools and services. This service and school level action planning will support the implementation of university wide EDI-related work, including REC, University Mental Health Charter (UMHC) and APP. As we implement our REC action plan and APP, we will be developing a strategic EDI colleague development plan to integrate key knowledge and skills relating to the REC, UMHC and APP into mandatory training and leadership development. Our REC work runs alongside a wider programme of work and membership of several EDI-related charter marks and accreditations, including those relating to our APP priorities such as the Disabled Student Commitment to support the completion of disabled students (PTS\_2). To deliver this we embed provisions which enable students to access learning equally, for example we have a team of fully qualified British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters to support deaf students. In addition, we intend to increase use of our lecture capture recording tools to improve accessibility for students.
- 5.7. In 2023-24, we reviewed our approach to equality impact assessments (EIA) to update the existing form and guidance and to identify ways to integrate EIA into existing processes and procedures. This work ensures that we are meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and that EDI considerations are incorporated when we plan, develop and carry out our functions. We will continue to develop this approach, considering how we embed EDI into the development of a new organisational change process for the University.
- 5.8. Partnership working
- 5.9. We take a holistic approach to access and WP with effective partnership working as a central part of this. It is core within our overarching strategies to make HE accessible to all and to serve the communities in which we are located. The University is the lead institution for the Lancashire Uni Connect, Future U, and supports the Cumbria Uni Connect partnership. We collaborate with Uni Connect partners to support widening access for under-represented groups across our region.
- 5.10. We partner with schools and third-sector organisations to deliver our access activity and an integral part of our WP programme is our School University Network. This involves close partnership working with a group of primary and secondary schools to deliver a progressive and sustained programme, which meets the careers IAG needs of our partner schools. We also work in close partnership with several charities and public bodies on our subject-specialist outreach centres. We partner with the Royal Institution of Great Britain to manage a Young Scientist Centre, where we offer a range of STEM-related workshops. In addition, in partnership with STEM sector specialists, we lead the Lancashire Science Festival biennially which attracts over 10,000 visitors. The festival has a high proportion of visitors from areas of high deprivation (IMD) and our research<sup>11</sup> shows that the festival positively impacts parents' attitudes towards HE and STEM. We work in partnership with third sector organisations to deliver our mentoring programmes, collaborating to

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<sup>11</sup> Canovan, C., & Luck, C. (2018). Seeing for yourself : how 'ambient information' shapes parental attitudes to higher education. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 20(4), 148–168

bring together their expertise in training and delivery methods, with our programme design and students.

5.11. Diverse pathways and collaborative activity

5.12. **Degree apprenticeships:** Apprenticeships are an integral part of our university strategy and we have been a trailblazer in apprenticeships since 2017, experiencing substantial growth with a portfolio of 30 standards across seven academic schools. We have approximately 2,200 apprentices and aim to grow this number to 3,000 by 2028, with a particular focus in health, digital, and engineering courses. Our growth in apprenticeships aligns with our APP and addresses equality of opportunity Risk 5 (limited choice of course type and delivery mode) and supports growth in crucial employment sectors. We recognise the risks in equality of opportunity for young people accessing apprenticeships, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They may not have the necessary information to successfully apply for degree apprenticeships (Risk 2: knowledge and skills) or perceive that degree apprenticeships are not a viable route despite being qualified (Risk 3: perception of higher education). To address these risks, we improve access through effective advice and guidance embedded within our outreach activity. We were awarded funding for apprenticeship provision through the OfS wave 2 funding round in 2024, and we have allocated additional resource to increase engagement with pupils and provide information about how to access degree apprenticeships. We are striving to make apprenticeships more accessible for all, delivering a range of events and initiatives that support employers offering degree apprenticeships to engage with potential applicants. We will expand our pioneering Apprenticeship Matching Service (AMS), a free matchmaking platform and programme of events to support employers in recruiting promising talent. The AMS offer stands out in its mission to diversify apprenticeship learners, particularly those under 21, guiding them from vacancy development to appointment (Risk 3: application success rates). The AMS is crucial in supporting small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) when competing with larger regional companies for talent.

5.13. **Collaborative activity:** We have a long and successful history of working collaboratively to extend educational opportunity within the region. Widening access to HE is the major driver behind our extensive collaborative arrangements with further education colleges and other partner organisations. Through this partnership model, we provide flexible learning options in several different locations, creating provision that is highly accessible as well as opportunities for under-represented groups to benefit from HE. We will work across our partner network through our Partnerships Forum to support the achievement of our APP targets, in particular our targets linked to continuation (PTS\_3) and completion (PTS\_1 and PTS\_2). We will utilise our Partnerships Forum to regularly share best practice and report on evaluation findings to ensure appropriate evidence led interventions are implemented to deliver progress.

5.14. **Fair admissions:** We have a contextualised admissions policy, which considers applicants' individual circumstances. We currently use postcode indicators (POLAR4, IMD, IDACI and EST) and care-leaver status as our contextualised admission criteria. Applicants who meet the criteria are eligible for an offer reduction of 8 UCAS points. We are exploring whether the criteria can be expanded and applied to other under-represented student groups in HE, however, this is subject to availability of data to inform implementation at the point of offer. We also provide foundation entry routes to many of our courses, enabling alternative entry pathways for students.

#### 5.15. Financial support and targeted support for under-represented students

- 5.16. We provide targeted financial support to students from low income households and a range of tailored support packages to enable students from under-represented groups to complete their studies. The following services are specific to our non-partner students, but many partner providers offer tailored packages or charge reduced fees which are communicated clearly to current and prospective students. We use our online engagement platform, Achieve, to distribute our institutional bursaries, scholarships and hardship payments. Using our efficient online engagement platform, students can access funds quickly when they are in need and the platform provides a rich data source so we can understand the quantity of funds being utilised.
- 5.17. **Students from low income households:** from September 2025, students whose main household has an annual income of less than £25,000 a year will be entitled to a financial bursary. The bursary is £500 for each year of study, except the final undergraduate year, which is £750.
- 5.18. **Care leavers:** we are committed to the Care Leaver Covenant and have developed a comprehensive offer which supports care leavers throughout their HE journey. We offer a dedicated point of contact for advice and support, access to study support, careers guidance and a personalised care leaver plan. We include waivers on deposits for university-owned accommodation and offer year-round contracts for students who may not have alternative accommodation during vacations and provide a bursary of £1000 per year of study.
- 5.19. **Estranged students:** we prioritise financial support for students estranged from their families and have a dedicated point of contact for advice and support, who works with each student to create a personalised estranged student plan. We offer a designated bursary of £1000 per student in line with the support we offer to care leavers.
- 5.20. **Student carers:** we recognise carers as those who care, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support. We provide student carers with a named contact and a personalised carers plan that covers both academic and pastoral support throughout their time at the University and targeted financial support of a minimum of £500 per year of study.
- 5.21. Our Hardship Fund provides targeted financial support to priority student groups and emergency support to students who experience unexpected financial difficulties, including students who cannot work due to illness or those facing homelessness or eviction. In addition, our Harris Bursary Fund supports students at risk of withdrawal due to financial concerns to continue their studies through the provision of IT equipment, supermarket vouchers and book vouchers.
- 5.22. We hold the Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award, recognising the support we provide to **students from military backgrounds**. Colleagues work closely with military families to advise on education opportunities for all members of the family. They advise and guide service families on school moves and work with local schools to inform and raise awareness.
- 5.23. We are proud to have been recognised as a University of Sanctuary in 2024. We provide a Sanctuary Scholarship to support refugees and asylum seekers who do not have access to

student finance support. To support students' success, we also offer dedicated academic and wellbeing support, language tuition, and personal development sessions.

## **6. Student consultation**

### **6.1. APP development and delivery**

6.2. We actively engage students in the development and delivery of our Access and Participation provision. We work in close partnership with the Students' Union, and elected student officers and Students' Union colleagues are members of the APP Steering Group which oversees all aspects of our APP governance, strategy and evaluation. In the development of our APP, we have aligned planning with our upcoming institutional UMHC and REC applications. We have undertaken institution wide surveys and focus groups to inform the charter mark applications and the development of intervention strategies. Student consultation in the development of the APP has enabled us to better understand the experiences of specific groups at different stages of the student lifecycle, and how to address risks to equality of opportunity that these students face. There have been opportunities throughout the design of our APP for students and Students' Union colleagues to share their feedback and suggest improvements. The student consultation led to the identification of key themes related to risks to equality of opportunity, including opportunities to build peer networks to provide a sense of belonging and improved return to study and transition programmes for mature students. As a result of our consultation, emerging themes have been included in the development of the intervention strategies.

6.3. To embed student engagement in our APP projects, we will create a new paid Student Partner Role (IS3.9) to inform the design and delivery of intervention strategies to ensure our provision remains relevant and impactful. We will target recruitment of the Student Partner positions to student demographics linked to our APP priorities such as mature students and commuter students. Throughout the implementation of our APP, we will utilise Student Partners to support effective monitoring and evaluation of activities.

### **6.4. Institutional approach to student partnership**

6.5. We are committed to a student partnership approach and all students are introduced to our Student Charter when they enrol. The Student Charter was created in partnership with Students' Union, and we commit to engaging students in institutional planning and:

- Actively listening to feedback and responding promptly to improve the student experience.
- Encouraging students to give feedback – highlighting issues, praise, and ideas, to support ongoing improvements and sharing of good practice.

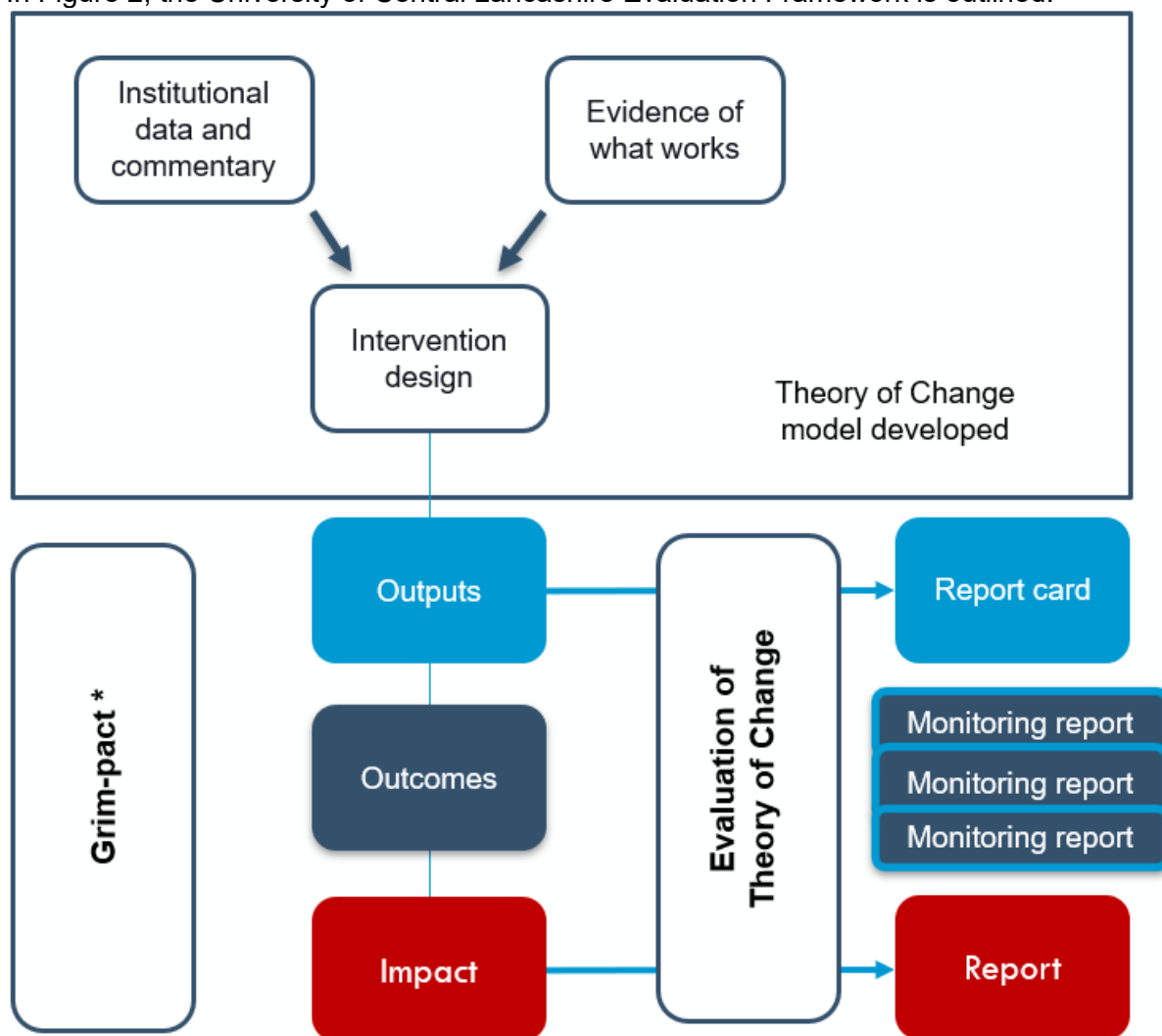
6.6. Our institutional student partnership approach is underpinned by a Student Feedback Framework which ensures the University is aware of issues impacting students and enables them to be resolved quickly to prevent barriers to learning. Our Student Feedback Framework encompasses feedback forums, module evaluation questionnaires and the University's Student Voice platform Unitu. This system gives students the ability to ask questions and provide instant feedback and enables the University to deliver improvements. In addition, we actively seek out the views of disabled students through the Disabled Students' Forum to ensure our university is inclusive.

6.7. The Students' Union are equal partners in the Student Feedback Framework with student academic representative roles playing a vital role in management of Unitu and student feedback meetings. Previous examples of responding to emerging student feedback have included creating additional prayer spaces across campus, providing free food on campus during examination periods and adapting assessment approaches.

## 7. Evaluation of the plan

7.1. Our APP is informed by emerging evidence of what works for under-represented students, and we are committed to enhancing our evaluation practice to deliver provision that is most impactful for our students. We have effective governance and oversight of evaluation for APP provision and will monitor and drive improved evaluation practice across the University through our APP Steering Group. Our Head of Evaluation is member of the APP Steering Group and provides the strategic expertise for our evaluation approach, overseen by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and Teaching). The responsibilities of our Head of Evaluation align with the University's Centre for Collaborative Learning as the Centre's purpose is to connect people, pedagogy, and practice by identifying and disseminating emerging evidence and best practice. The Head of Evaluation is co-convenor of the Academic Practice Network of the Society for Research in Higher Education. The Director of Student Achievement Services is a member of TASO's 'Gaps in the Student Experience' working group providing guidance and reviewing current evidence on research themes. As such both regularly engage with researchers and evaluators in other HE providers. We have recently undertaken significant pieces of work in partnership with TASO and an independent evaluator from the University of Cambridge; we will continue to actively seek opportunities to engage with TASO.

7.2. In Figure 2, the University of Central Lancashire Evaluation Framework is outlined:



\*Negative outcomes



### **7.3. Evaluation self-assessment**

- 7.4. Completion of the evaluation self-assessment tool shows a varied picture across the University's areas of activity, and the tool's dimensions with some aspects emerging and others well embedded. Access areas of activity have a stronger track record, sustained processes of evaluation and engagement with the wider sector through Uni Connect. This is supported by a dedicated evaluation team aligned to access activities. Evaluation of participation activities has been strengthened through the appointment of a new Director of Student Achievement Services and the extension of the role of the Higher Education Research and Development Lead to include the University's Head of Evaluation. These strategic developments have ensured that staff involved in APP activities have been trained in the use of Theory of Change models and exploring supporting evidence for proposed interventions. Further workshops are planned to run concurrently with the development of the APP including formulation of individual evaluation plans. A strategic approach has been developed to support colleagues in developing evaluations skills appropriate to their APP activity. The strategic developments will ensure that structures and processes are in place to enable colleagues to learn from evaluations throughout the APP cycle. Our Strategic Data Team provide clear and detailed analysis of student data at the appropriate level and make this available to colleagues.
- 7.5. Alongside specific APP evaluation activity, we will be conducting evaluation activity in relation to the REC and UMHC. These activities will feed into the APP evaluation process and will be assessed as emerging to embedded. The University will annually assess its performance using the evaluation self-assessment tool and monitor the implementation of the strategic plan for evaluation.

### **7.6. Process**

- 7.7. Led by the Head of Evaluation, all Steering Group colleagues are responsible for embedding evaluation as a central pillar of project planning and implementation. Colleagues have a clear understanding of the importance of effective evaluation and are clear of the expectations placed upon them. Colleagues involved in leading APP activity have attended a series of workshops on developing evaluation using the resources provided by TASO supplemented with internally developed resources. Each strand of APP activity has been designed based on scrutiny of the University's student outcomes data in the light of national trends and a review of best practice in the sector. Theory of Change models for each activity have been developed following the TASO templates. The activity evaluator and lead then meet with a member of the Evaluation Team in the Centre for Collaborative Learning to agree Theory of Change models and the timeline and process for data collection and analysis. These Theory of Change models and agreed data collection and analysis plans are stored centrally. We aim to develop Type 2 (empirical enquiry)<sup>12</sup> evidence for all APP related activities recognising that Type 3 (causality) evidence is methodologically difficult except in some limited contexts. The depth and extent of evidence gathered will depend on the size and originality of the APP activity: larger projects with more originality will receive a higher level of attention and evaluation support. All evaluation plans will be subject to ethical review and approval by one of the University's research ethics panels. All evaluations will be designed to be sensitive to negative outcomes (grimpacts) emerging from APP activity as well as positive outcomes and impact (See Figure 2). We have developed specific ethical processes for APP evaluations where Type 1 (narrative) or Type 2 (empirical enquiry) evidence is collected. Activities collecting Type 3 (causality) evidence will be subjected to a higher ethical review due to increased potential risk.

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<sup>12</sup> [Standards of evidence and evaluation self-assessment tool - Office for Students](#)

- 7.8. At each stage data will be collected from key stakeholders. We use Microsoft Forms as a primary survey data collection tool, as well as short session evaluation instruments to monitor the ongoing impact of activities. Focus group and individual interviews are also conducted at regular points during an intervention cycle to evaluate implementation and process in more detail. As noted, each APP activity will have identified what data will be collected and when. This will ensure collection of high-quality data and its manageable detailed analysis.
- 7.9. For pre-entry activity, we have an Access Evaluation Map (See Annex B) underpinned by research evidence. This is used by the outreach team to measure whether interventions have achieved the intended short-term and immediate outcomes. For our sustained and progressive programmes, we measure changes in attitudes and intentions toward HE, and track longitudinally in relation to intervention participation. We measure HE progression rates from young people we have engaged through tracking using HEAT. For our School University Network (SUN) Partnership programme, we evaluate the impact of having a sustained programme by surveying attitudes toward HE with students in partner schools each year and monitoring changes in attitudes and activity participation. We intend to use attitude data collected from on-campus visits from non-partner schools as a control group to compare attitudes from the SUN students. We will explore using participation in the activities in IS2 (which have no cross-over with IS2) as a control group for assessing whether we achieve more intermediate outcomes linked to improved attainment through our activities.

#### **7.10. Minimum standards of publishing**

- 7.11. All APP related activities will complete short process evaluations which will include a summary of the Theory of Change model, an account of activities and initial outputs. Monitoring evaluations will also be conducted and published depending on the timescale and extent of the particular activity. All strands of APP activity will be subject to a final evaluation of impact. Process evaluations and impact evaluations will be published on an external website annually. Implementation and process evaluations will be conducted during the first year of each project and the first reports will be published between July 2026 and December 2026. The site will also publish a selection of monitoring evaluation reports where appropriate. We will also engage with regional and national organisations to disseminate significant evaluation findings and learn from best practice. We are seeking to enhance our well-established evaluation culture at the University. The University has a financial commitment to ensuring that colleagues can attend national conferences and events to disseminate evaluation findings as well as ensure that they are informed of the best evidence emerging from across the field.

## 8. Provision of information to students

- 8.1. We are committed to publishing clear and accessible information to current and prospective students on all aspects of their course and the financial expectations and have produced a summary document which is available on our website. The University works to ensure compliance with consumer law requirements and Competition and Markets Authority Guidance. Students of all types are provided with detailed information with respect to fees, additional costs, and the financial support packages we offer. We also provide fee repayment examples based on future salary levels.
- 8.2. Applicants are provided with the following information as part of their formal offer:
  - 8.2.1. The cost per year of the programme, as well as the course duration and total course cost (in addition to a caveat re. potential inflationary increases during subsequent years of study) within the offer letter which is emailed to students.
  - 8.2.2. A Terms and Conditions document which provides a summary of the student policies and any changes that have been made since the last academic year and details conditions of offer and cancellation arrangements. It also provides links to our Tuition Fees policy which sets out the terms on which the tuition fees and any deposits are payable to the University, the impact of continuous absence on tuition fees and the sanctions the University may impose if the fees are not paid which could include termination of enrolment, withdrawing its services and/or the right to use the University's facilities.
  - 8.2.3. A Standard Additional Costs document which provides details of standard optional additional costs (relating to the course, indicative living costs, or other one-off items).
  - 8.2.4. A model cancellation form.
- 8.3. Our website provides a clear landing page that contains all our student contract information, with a summary of the policies applicable to students and links to each relevant policy including Terms and Conditions, Student Handbook, Tuition Fees and Complaints Procedures. Our webpages also provide detailed advice regarding budgeting, including information on bank accounts, benefits, council tax, income tax, debt advice and tips. Information on how to make secure online payments to the University is also provided, together with FAQs.
- 8.4. We communicate through the following channels: 'Fees and Funding' and 'Cost of Living Support Hub' pages on our website; talks and publications at Open Days and Offer Holder Days, and on or off campus events; pre-entry information mailings and electronic communications to applicants and enquirers; public engagement events; leaflets and guidance information in public places; staff advising students at recruitment fairs and open days or working with under-represented groups through a wide range of outreach activities.
- 8.5. We are also committed to providing timely, accurate information to UCAS and the Student Loans Company so they can populate their course databases in good time to inform applicants. We will publish our approved APP prominently on our website in a way that is easily accessible to both current and prospective students.

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

- 9.1. To understand our current performance and determine the potential risks to equality of opportunity which are most relevant to our context, we conducted an assessment of student characteristic group performance by analysing the available OfS student outcomes data alongside several internal data resources.
- 9.2. In evaluating our current performance and prioritising areas for improvement, we utilised the OfS Access and Participation dashboard to conduct a comprehensive gap analysis across the key indicators of risk corresponding to different stages of the student lifecycle: access, continuation, completion, awarding, and progression. We devised a method for assessing gaps and assigning RAG (Red/Amber/Green) ratings to areas across the student lifecycle that are in most need of intervention. Table 2 below presents the latest gap data for each stage, comparing rates for the University against sector level performance. The RAG rating matrix allows us to highlight the most significant gaps.
- 9.3. Table 2: University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) performance and sector comparison for all UG, UK domiciled students across the student lifecycle

|                                   |  |                       |                      |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------|----------------------|
| UCLan gap: RAG rate               | Below 5% gap                             | 5-10% gap             | Above 10% gap        |
| UCLan gap vs sector gap: RAG rate | Negative difference (better than sector) | Small difference 0-2% | Large difference 2%+ |

|  | <u>Access</u> | <u>Continuation</u> | <u>Completion</u> | <u>Awarding</u> | <u>Progression</u> |
|--|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| TUNDRA <sup>13</sup> : UCLan gap                 | 7.6%          | -0.9%               | 3.6%              | 3.1%            | 5.7%               |
| TUNDRA: sector gap                               | 18.0%         | 3.7%                | 4.9%              | 6.4%            | 6.7%               |
| TUNDRA: UCLan gap/sector gap                     | -10.4%        | -4.6%               | -1.3%             | -3.3%           | -1.0%              |
| Deprivation (IMD 2019): UCLan gap                | -28.5%        | 3.6%                | 7.0%              | 12.9%           | 12.1%              |
| Deprivation (IMD 2019): sector gap               | -3.2%         | 9.1%                | 10.7%             | 17.8%           | 10.8%              |
| Deprivation (IMD 2019): UCLan gap/sector gap     | -25.3%        | -5.5%               | -3.7%             | -4.9%           | 1.30%              |
| Ethnicity: Black and White: UCLan gap            |               | -1.7%               | -0.9%             | 24.0%           | -6.5%              |
| Ethnicity: Black and White: sector gap           |               | 5.8%                | 7.8%              | 20.0%           | 3.6%               |
| Ethnicity: Black and White: UCLan gap/sector gap |               | -7.5%               | -8.7%             | 4.0%            | -10.1%             |
| Ethnicity: Asian and White: UCLan gap            |               | -1.1%               | -1.8%             | 6.5%            | 7.5%               |

<sup>13</sup> About the TUNDRA area-based measures data - Office for Students

|  |       |       |       |       |        |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Ethnicity: Asian and White: sector gap           |       | 5.8%  | 7.8%  | 8.4%  | 2.9%   |
| Ethnicity: Asian and White: UCLan gap/sector gap |       | -2.5% | -3.5% | -1.9% | 4.6%   |
| Age: UCLan gap                                   |       | 8.2%  | 4.3%  | 2.6%  | -8.5%  |
| Age: sector gap                                  |       | 9.8%  | 10.4% | 9.4%  | 2.8%   |
| Age: UCLan gap/sector gap                        |       | -1.6% | -6.1% | -6.8% | -11.3% |
| Disability: UCLan gap                            |       | 1.4%  | 4.8%  | -2.3% | 1.8%   |
| Disability: sector gap                           |       | 0.2%  | 2.0%  | -0.5% | 2.1%   |
| Disability: UCLan gap/sector gap                 |       | -1.6% | 2.8%  | -1.8% | -0.3%  |
| Free School Meals: UCLan gap                     |       | 1.9%  | 6.4%  | 6.5%  | 9.4%   |
| Free School Meals: sector gap                    |       | 5.2%  | 8.2%  | 12.3% | 6.8%   |
| Free School Meals: UCLan gap/sector gap          |       | -3.3% | -1.8% | -5.8% | 2.6%   |
| ABCS: UCLan gap                                  | 20.0% | 11.6% | 17.1% |       | 19.8%  |
| ABCS: sector gap                                 | 27.8% | 14.8% | 23.7% |       | 17.3%  |
| ABCS: UCLan gap/sector gap                       | -7.8% | -3.2% | -6.6% |       | 2.5%   |

- 9.4. We regard the Association Between Characteristics of Students (ABCS) measure as a barometer for assessing the overall effectiveness of the plan. In utilising the underlying dataset to understand the intersectionality of student characteristics, we have chosen to strategically focus on specific interventions related to discrete groups that consider deprivation, disability, age, and ethnicity, rather than the broader intersectional metric.
- 9.5. ABCS serves as a contextual framework, enhancing our understanding of our institution's overall performance, which currently indicates smaller gaps for Access, Continuation and Completion when compared with the sector average. As we progress toward the outlined objectives, we anticipate a reduction in ABCS gaps across all identified stages of the student lifecycle.
- 9.6. This exercise has allowed us to define objectives within the following domains:
- Socioeconomic factors
  - Ethnicity, with a particular focus on addressing the Black and White awarding gap
  - Mature students
  - Disability and mental health

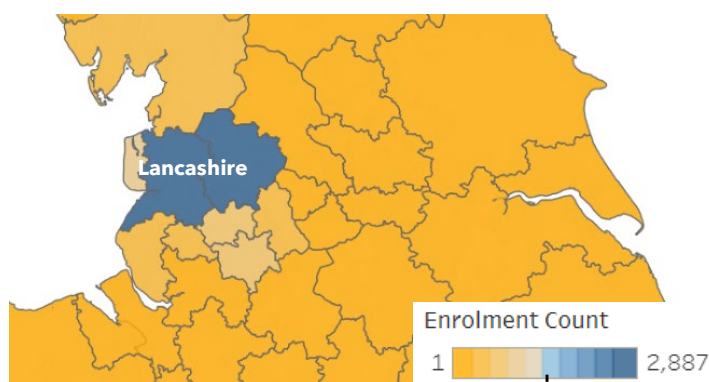
- 9.7. Following this exercise, the analysis of dashboard data was complemented by an examination of disaggregated data sourced internally. This included data at the level of schools and courses, outcomes related to student support services such as Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing, as well as financial assistance such as hardship funds and bursaries.
- 9.8. We incorporated external data sources into our process, with a specific focus on the levels of local deprivation and pre-16 attainment among pupils from IMD Q1 neighbourhoods across Lancashire. This emphasis aligns with our mission to transform lives by addressing under-representation in HE, facilitating broader access to advanced learning, and fostering social mobility.
- 9.9. Furthermore, we explored the intersections of student characteristics to gain an intersectional perspective of the student population, enhancing our understanding of the University's context and associated risks. This process directed our attention towards prioritising the objectives set out in Section 3.

### 9.10. Access: socioeconomic factors (PTA\_1 and PTA\_2)

9.10.1. In our approach to defining economic disadvantage outlined in the OfS definition of students from low income households, we have selected free school meals (FSM) eligibility on access related risks, and IMD Q1 and IMD Q2 for the remaining stages of the student lifecycle. The reason for this distinction pertains to the availability and trustworthiness of the data sources used. The parliamentary briefing paper "Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England<sup>14</sup>" presents a clear case for addressing deprivation as the national data clearly shows higher risk of non-continuation for IMD Q1 students, as well as poorer outcomes across attainment, and progression to highly skilled employment or higher study. This pattern can be clearly seen in our data.

9.10.2. The University primarily enrolls students from the local area, encompassing the PR, BB, and FY postcodes. The deprivation landscape of Lancashire<sup>15</sup> reflects a multifaceted interplay of economic, social, and geographical factors, contributing to regional disparities. While Lancashire boasts diversity with its mix of urban and rural areas, specific pockets face pronounced deprivation characterised by lower income and elevated unemployment rates.

9.10.3. In Figure 3, the University of Central Lancashire enrolment by locality (2023/24) for UG, UK domiciled students is outlined:



9.10.4. Notably, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Preston, along with Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool unitary authorities, sit within the most deprived 10% in England on the local

<sup>14</sup> [Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [2019 deprivation analysis - Lancashire County Council](#)

extent measure, which shows the proportion of the population living in the most deprived LSOAs (Lower layer Super Output Areas) in the country. Burnley and Hyndburn, along with Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool unitary authorities, are also in the most deprived 10% in England on the local concentration measure, the population weighted average of the ranks of a district's most deprived LSOAs that contain exactly 10% of the local authority district's population. Lancashire County Council's key findings from the Indices of Deprivation 2019<sup>16</sup>, also found that every local authority area in Lancashire, apart from Preston, became more educationally deprived between 2015 and 2019.

9.10.5. The strong correlation between deprivation and educational outcomes highlights the persistent need for targeted interventions to improve access to HE for pupils in disadvantaged areas. Extensive research consistently shows how socioeconomic factors profoundly affect academic achievement. Reports such as the OECD's Equity in Education<sup>17</sup> and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's studies on poverty<sup>18</sup> underscore the persistent disparities in educational attainment associated with socioeconomic status. Additionally, analysis from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)<sup>19</sup> demonstrate ongoing, persisting gaps in educational attainment between pupils from deprived backgrounds and their more affluent peers once they reach university. Addressing these socioeconomic barriers is essential for promoting greater equity in access to HE.

9.10.6. **Knowledge and Skills (Risk 1) and Information and Guidance (Risk 2): pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely progress into higher education. 25.7% of FSM pupils compared to 48.2% of non-FSM pupils, a gap of 22.5%.** Whilst the gap between those eligible for FSM and the wider population is smaller in Lancashire than the national average, there remains a large gap and the overall progression rates for both the wider population and the pupils eligible for FSM is lower than the national average.

## 9.11. Success and Progression: IMD continuation gap (PTS\_1) and IMD progression gap (PTP\_1)

9.11.1. The University's IMD progression gap had been steadily decreasing, reaching it's lowest point in 2020/21 at 0.7%. Since then we have seen a sharp rise in the gap, with the most recent figures showing a 12.1% gap. Between 2019-20 and 2020-21, IMD Q1 students were the only quintile who did not see an improvement in the progression rate, reducing from 71.3% to 67.1%.

9.11.2. The previously referenced parliamentary briefing paper, "Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England," underscores disparities in achievements between students hailing from areas of higher deprivation and their more affluent counterparts. This is evidenced by the correlation between deprivation and the awarding of first or upper second-class degrees, as well as progression to highly skilled employment or further study. The 2023 TASO report titled 'The Value of Higher Education: Rapid Evidence Review and Initial Data Analysis'<sup>20</sup> provides evidence that graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds earn less than their non-disadvantaged counterparts, with one study estimating that this earnings

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<sup>16</sup> [The English Indices of Deprivation, 2019 – key findings for the Lancashire-12 and Lancashire-14 areas](#)

<sup>17</sup> [OECD | Equity in education: The foundation for a more resilient future](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Child poverty | Joseph Rowntree Foundation \(jrf.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Degree attainment by socioeconomic background: UK, 2017/18 to 2020/21 | HESA](#)

<sup>20</sup> [TASO \(2023\) The value of higher education](#)

gap is approximately 10%, even when controlling for other factors, such as the specific university attended. Contributing factors to this gap include a reduced number of job applications, lack of familial connections, and limited financial support for job hunting.

9.11.3. Analysis from the Graduate Outcomes survey reveals that graduates from IMD Q1 backgrounds exhibit a propensity to remain local to the University upon completion of their studies. Notably, 45% of IMD Q1 graduates from 2018/19-2020/21 secured employment within a 25 km radius of their campus of study. The UPP Foundation's report, *Social Mobility and University Careers Services*<sup>21</sup> sheds light on why graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds often opt to stay local rather than pursuing opportunities in areas with higher earning potential. Factors such as strong local ties and familiarity with their home region contribute to this trend. Moreover, Lancashire graduates face earnings disparities due to regional dynamics, with high-paying jobs concentrated in major cities often further afield. Regional wage disparities are a persisting factor in this picture<sup>22</sup>.

9.11.4. Financial constraints, local affiliations, and career preferences often influence graduates to remain in the region, potentially limiting their earning prospects. Additionally, the costs associated with relocating to a new area, including accommodation and living expenses, further hinder opportunities for these graduates, depending on their field of study. The report emphasises the crucial role played by university career services in supporting these students as they transition into the workforce. Ultimately, deprivation continues to serve as the primary determinant of success, driving gaps across continuation, awarding, and progression. Notably, where disparities intersect with other student characteristic groups, such as Black students, there is often a significant overlap with deprivation.

**9.11.5. Insufficient Academic Support (Risk 6) and Insufficient Personal Support (Risk 7):**

We have attributed these interconnected risks to socioeconomic factors due to lower levels of prior attainment, and the completion and progression gaps related to deprivation. However, there are other data points which have informed this decision. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023 dashboard<sup>23</sup> illustrates gaps in student experience positivity against benchmark between IMD Q1 and Q2 and IMD Q3, Q4 and Q5 in several of the National Student Survey (NSS) metrics relating to teaching, assessment, and academic support (See Graph 6).

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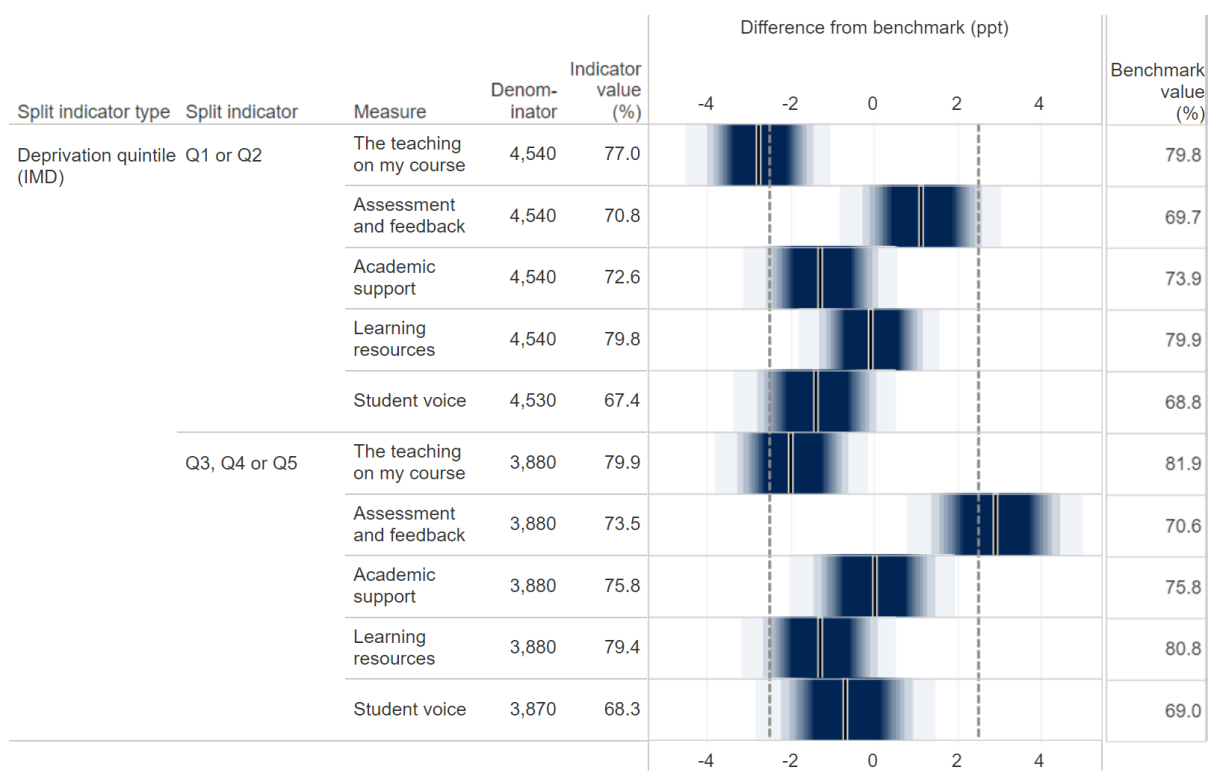
<sup>21</sup> [Social Mobility and University Careers Services - A report by the Bridge Group Funded by the UPP Foundation](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Average earnings by age and region - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> [TEF data dashboard: Data dashboard - Office for Students](#)



9.11.6. Graph 6: University of Central Lancashire Teaching Excellence Framework 2023 measures for UG, UK domiciled students



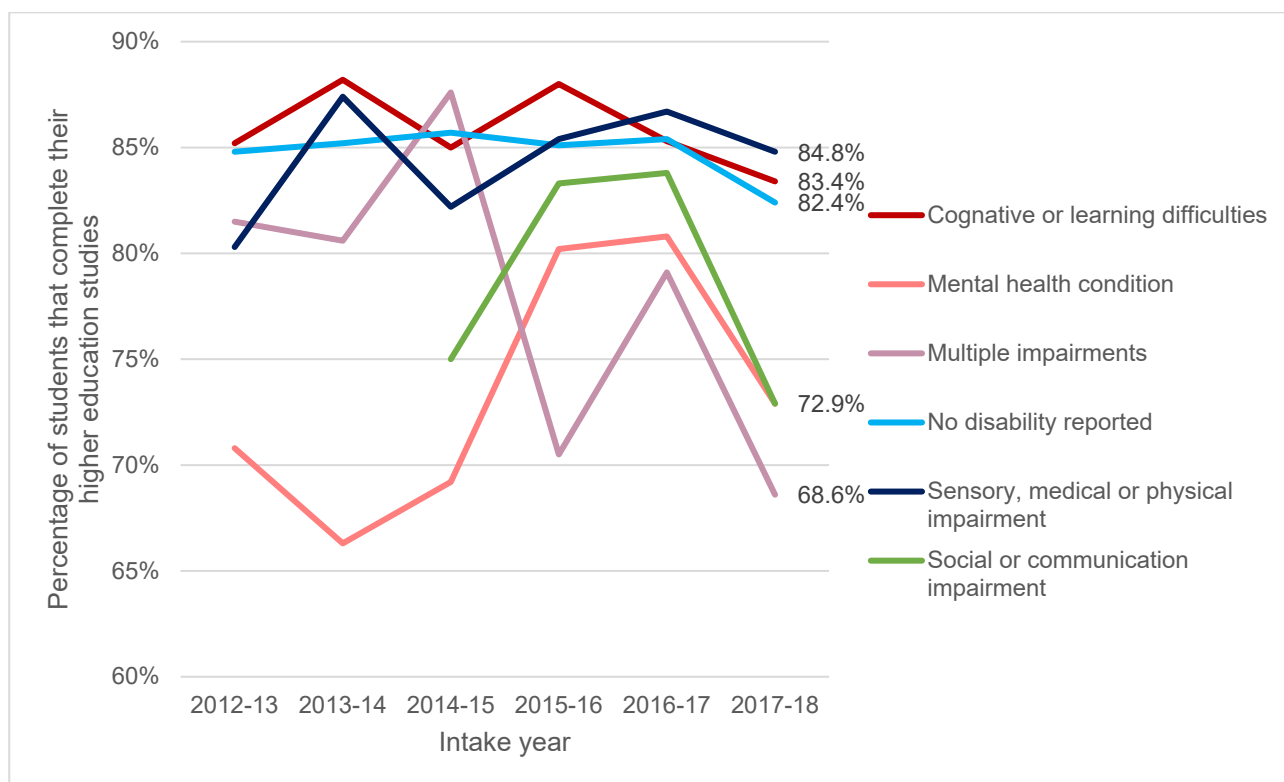
9.11.7. **Mental Health (Risk 8):** IMD Q1 students represented 41.3% of referrals to our Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing service in 2022/23 – they also have the highest percentage of students not engaging with support after having been referred – this is concerning as our data indicates that students who engage with our support have been shown to have a higher chance of going on to a positive outcome (continuation and completion). Anxiety, depression and stress are the top presenting issues for IMD Q1 students.

9.11.8. **Cost Pressures (Risk 10):** Cost pressures are unsurprisingly connected to deprivation. In 2022/23 IMD Q1 students accounted for 41% of our bursary spending budget, and IMD Q2 student accounted for 24%. As stated in the indications of risk as defined within the EORR, cost pressures are clearly linked to mental health.

**9.12. Success: disability completion gap (PTS\_2)**

9.12.1. Recent data highlights a concerning trend regarding the completion gap for students with disabilities, with a notable increase to 4.8%. While this gap had been decreasing in previous years, the completion rate for the 2017/18 disabled intake experienced a steep decline, dropping from 83% to 77.7%. Delving deeper into the data by disability type reveals that students with multiple disabilities (68.6%), social or communication impairments, and mental health conditions (both 72.9%) are underperforming compared to those without declared disabilities (82.4%).

9.12.2. Graph 7: completion indicators (2012/13 – 2017/18 entrants) split by disability type for UG, UK domiciled students at the University of Central Lancashire



9.12.3. The data clearly indicates that students with mental health conditions exhibit lower completion rates compared to all other groups, except for students with multiple impairments. Notably, disclosures of mental health conditions have surged in recent years, encompassing a substantially larger intake of students (270 in 2021/22) compared to disclosures of social or communication impairments (50). The largest group, however, consists of students with multiple impairments, with a significant increase in disclosures (340 in 2021/22). This upward trend in disability disclosures is consistent across all disability types at the University, surpassing sector-wide increases. Our access rates reveal that 23.7% of students disclosed a disability prior to enrolment, notably higher than the sector's average of 17.4%.

9.12.4. Disability distribution across IMD quintiles reveals disparities, with the highest proportion of disclosures (32%) originating from IMD Q1. This trend extends to mental health disclosures, with 33% stemming from IMD Q1 students. Mature students also show significant overlap, constituting 73% of disability disclosures in 2022/23. Likewise, 72% of mental health disclosures and 89% of physical or mobility impairments are mature students.

9.12.5. In 2022/23, 55% of referrals to our Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing service were students with disclosed disabilities. Our data also suggests a substantial proportion of disabled students are commuters, although this information remains incomplete. A pressing concern for the University is the lack of student engagement with offered support services. In 2022/23, 41% of students who disclosed a disability did not pursue DSA adjustment or utilise our support services. However, it is noteworthy that over the past three years,

students with disabilities achieved a higher awarding rate of 70.1% compared to 67.7% for students without disclosed disabilities.

- 9.12.6. **Insufficient Personal Support (Risk 7):** The disability completion gap underscores a clear indication of risk. The "Impact of the Pandemic on Disabled Students and Recommended Measures<sup>24</sup>" report by Disabled Students UK underscores the urgent need for heightened support for disabled students in the post-pandemic era to ensure their effective continuation and completion of studies. We acknowledge this need within our context, particularly amidst the noticeable surge in disability disclosures. Furthermore, the lack of engagement with previously offered support services remains a concern. We are committed to ongoing investigation to address this issue, facilitating timely support for disabled students to foster a positive student experience and successful completion of their studies with us.
- 9.12.7. **Mental Health (Risk 8):** Mental health poses a clear risk within our disabled cohort, given the heightened level of disclosures of mental health conditions and the recent decline in completion rates for this specific group. The proportion of referrals to our Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing service originating from disabled students also underscores mental health as a significant risk to equality of opportunity within this cohort.

### 9.13. Success: age continuation gap (PTS\_3)

- 9.13.1. The 2021 House of Commons Library briefing paper *Mature Students in England*<sup>25</sup> highlights the national trend that mature UG students are more likely to drop out of their course and are less likely to graduate with a first or upper second-class degree. The report states that *"mature students are not a homogeneous group and will often have more complex needs than 18-year-olds coming straight from school. They are more likely to have caring responsibilities, come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, be disabled, or be from Black or minority ethnic groups. They are also more likely to react to negative financial pressures (such as the prospect of repaying tuition fees, or economic recession) by deciding not to enter higher education."*
- 9.13.2. The data indicates that this is especially true for our student population. In recent years, we have observed a notable trend emerging: a growing gap in student continuation rates between younger (21 and under) and mature students (22 and over). This gap became particularly evident in 2020-21, where the continuation rate for mature students dropped from 83.2% to 78.2%, alongside a decrease in the completion rate from 84.2% to 79%.
- 9.13.3. The demographic landscape at the University reflects this trend, especially in its access profile for the academic year 2021/22. Mature students represent a significant proportion in access profile, accounting for 37.3% of the student population in 2021/22, exceeding the sector average of 29%. Because of this it is important for us to understand the intersections with other student characteristics. Disaggregating the intake into age brackets reveals a varied picture. While the continuation rates for mature students differ across age groups, there's a general trend of resilience among older cohorts. Notably, students aged 51 and over exhibit the highest continuation rate at 83.3%, while those aged 31-40 show the lowest rate at 76.5%.
- 9.13.4. Furthermore, mature students demonstrate a substantial overlap with disabled students. In the academic year 2022/23, they accounted for 73% of disability disclosures. This trend

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<sup>24</sup> [Impact of the Pandemic on Disabled Students and Recommended Measures: Disabled Students UK](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Mature higher education students in England: House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

extends to specific disability categories, with mature students representing 72% of mental health disclosures and a striking 89% of physical or mobility impairments.

9.13.5. In terms of socioeconomic status, the University's mature student population is diverse. In 2022/23, out of the total 14,269 mature students enrolled, a significant proportion resided in areas of higher deprivation. Specifically, 27.5% of mature students fell into the most deprived quintile (IMD Q1), while 18.8% were in the second most deprived quintile (IMD Q2). Furthermore, a small subset of mature students identified as carers (397), 62.4% sit within IMD Q1 and Q2. In addition, many of these mature students, particularly carers, are commuters. However, the available data on commuting status is incomplete, making it challenging to fully assess the extent of this demographic characteristic.

**9.13.6. Insufficient Academic Support (Risk 6) and Insufficient Personal Support (Risk 7):**

Mature students at the University often face significant challenges as they navigate the transition into HE. Many of these students have not been in education for several years, making the adjustment particularly daunting. The data reveals concerning trends in continuation and completion rates among mature students, highlighting the need for comprehensive academic and personal support systems. Insufficient support can hinder their ability to adapt to the academic environment, manage personal responsibilities such as caring duties or financial constraints, and cope with the demands of HE. Tailored support mechanisms are crucial to address the diverse needs of mature students and ensure they receive the assistance required to thrive academically and personally.

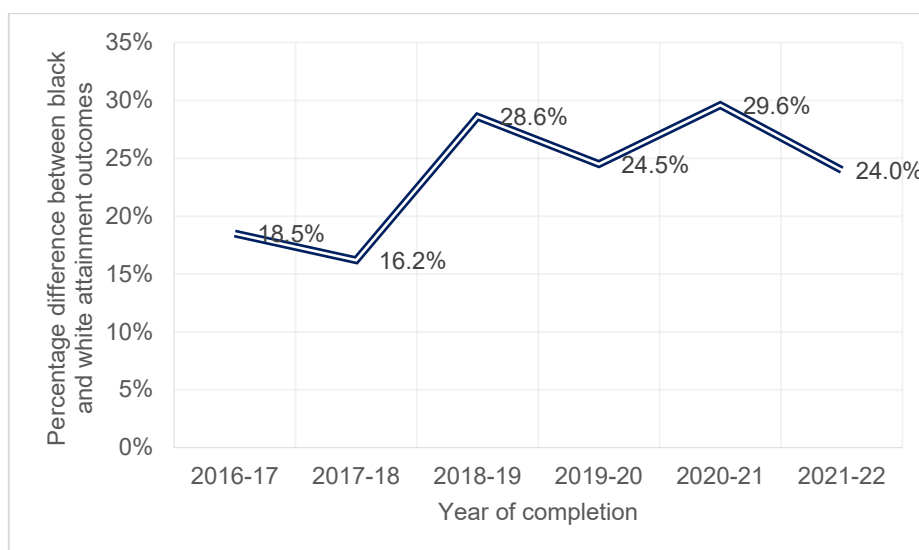
9.13.7. **Mental Health (Risk 8):** Our mature students can face specific mental health challenges as they balance academic pursuits with personal responsibilities and potential financial strains. The data underscores a disproportionate representation of mature students in mental health disclosures, indicating a critical need for enhanced and accessible mental health support. Juggling these responsibilities after being out of the education system for an extended period can amplify stressors and trigger mental health issues. Insufficient support in this area not only jeopardises the mental wellbeing of mature students but also undermines their academic performance and overall educational experience.

9.13.8. **Cost Pressures (Risk 10):** The socioeconomic diversity within our mature student population highlights the financial pressures that many will face when accessing HE. With a significant proportion residing in areas of higher deprivation, mature students may encounter additional barriers related to tuition fees, living expenses, and other associated costs. Having been potentially out of the education system for many years, entering HE can pose financial challenges for mature students. Insufficient financial support and resources can further exacerbate these challenges, potentially deterring mature students from pursuing or continuing their education.

## **9.14. Success: Black and White awarding gap (PTS\_4)**

9.14.1. At 24%, the Black and White awarding gap is the largest gap we are addressing within this plan. The most recent data shows a slight improvement in this gap, dropping from 29.6% in 2020/21 to 24% in 2021/22, whilst in the same timeframe the sector gap increased from 18.3% to 20%. However, the University's gap remains larger than the sector, and a significant priority for us to focus on.

9.14.2. Graph 8: the University of Central Lancashire Black and White awarding gap (2016/17 – 2021/22) for all UG, UK domiciled students



9.14.3. In analysing data relating to the Black cohort at the University, there are several important factors which add context to this gap. There are notable overlaps between Black students and other student characteristics which are associated with poorer academic outcomes. Completion data from the OfS, which covers students who started at the University between 2015 and 2017, highlights that of the Black students who began studying with us during this time:

- 34% were IMD Q1, and 22% were IMD Q2
- 44.9% were eligible for free school meals at Key Stage 4
- 78.7% did not have A-Levels, but held alternative qualifications such as a BTEC
- 49.5% of this cohort were mature students and 29.6% were over 30

9.14.4. Our Strategic Data Team conducted internal research on the Black and White awarding gap in 2021 to ascertain whether the interaction of the statistically significant factors which affect awarding helps establish the unexplained award gap between Black and White students. Four years of Student qualifiers data was used between 2017/18 and 2020/21 for full-time, first-degree UK domiciled students. The average awards gap for all qualifiers between 2017/18 and 2020/21 was **23.9%** between Black and White students. This is reduced if we look at qualifiers who come in with 120 tariff points or more to **17.6%** (See Table 3).

9.14.5. Table 3: Black and White awarding gap split by tariff points and entry qualifications

| Tariff Points and Entry Qualifications            | Ethnicity | 1st/2:1 |       | Black and White awarding gap |
|---|-----------|---------|-------|------------------------------|
|   |           | %       | No.   |                              |
| 120 points or more                                | White     | 77.2%   | 2,278 | <b>17.6%</b>                 |
|   | Black     | 59.6%   | 56    |                              |
| Less than 120 points                              | White     | 76.4%   | 3,335 | <b>23.0%</b>                 |
|   | Black     | 53.4%   | 164   |                              |
| A Levels and similar                              | White     | 84.9%   | 3,460 | <b>16.2%</b>                 |
|   | Black     | 68.7%   | 103   |                              |
| BTEC diplomas and other vocational qualifications | White     | 69.5%   | 2,320 | <b>23.5%</b>                 |
|   | Black     | 46.0%   | 91    |                              |

9.14.6. The award gap for qualifiers who came in with BTEC diplomas and other vocational qualifications at 23.5% is much higher than those who came in with A levels and similar qualifications.

9.14.7. However, if we control for the factors that had the biggest impact on awarding, entry qualifications and tariff points, students with BTEC diplomas and other vocational qualifications were less likely to attain a 1<sup>st</sup> or a 2:1 (See Table 4). For students who entered with 120 tariff points or more, the awarding gap difference between Black and White students narrows to 19.9% compared to 8.2% if they came in with A-level or similar qualifications. Even with the highest achieving students (120 points or more and A levels and similar) there is still a gap of 8.2%. 19.9% of the awarding gap between Black and White students can be explained by entry qualification and tariff points, leaving an unexplained gap of 4%.

9.14.8. Table 4: Black and White awarding gap split first by tariff points, then entry qualifications

| Tariff Points        | Entry Qualifications                              | Ethnicity | 1st/2:1 |       | Black and White awarding gap |
|----------------------|---|-----------|---------|-------|------------------------------|
|                      |   |           | %       | No.   |                              |
| 120 points or more   | A Levels and similar                              | White     | 87.0%   | 1,489 | 8.2%                         |
|                      |   | Black     | 78.8%   | 26    |                              |
|                      | BTEC diplomas and other vocational qualifications | White     | 69.3%   | 1,276 | 19.9%                        |
|                      |   | Black     | 49.4%   | 42    |                              |
| Less than 120 points | A Levels and similar                              | White     | 83.3%   | 1,971 | 17.5%                        |
|                      |   | Black     | 65.8%   | 77    |                              |
|                      | BTEC diplomas and other vocational qualifications | White     | 69.6%   | 1,044 | 26.2%                        |
|                      |   | Black     | 43.4%   | 49    |                              |

9.14.9. **Awarding gap differentials in academic schools (Nursing and Midwifery):** The largest Black student cohort at the University is in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, and as such the outcomes within the School significantly affect our institutional Black and White awarding gap. From 2019/20 to 2021/22, the School had 831 Black students, which equates to 34.4% of the University's UG Black cohort. 78% of the School's Black students are female. 91.8% of the School's Black students are mature (over 21). The aggregate good honours rate over the three years is 30.7% for Black students, compared to 56.3% for White students. However, the good honours rate has been decreasing, from 34.5% in 2019/20 to 23.9% in 2021/22. This aligns with the national trend for Black and White awarding gaps in nursing<sup>26</sup> and midwifery<sup>27</sup>.

9.14.10. **Insufficient Academic Support (Risk 6) and Insufficient Personal Support (Risk 7):** The clear indication for these interconnected risks is the persistent awarding gap, which exists at an institutional level, but is also prominent in certain schools where comparison against peers is more relevant.

9.14.11. **Mental Health (Risk 8):** Whilst the indications for mental health as a risk are not as evident as they are with IMD Q1 students, it has been included here due to the notable overlap with that demographic group. The EORR has mental health included as one of the likely risks that Black students will face, although more investigation is needed in this area.

9.14.12. **Cost Pressures (Risk 10):** Even though the bursary spend for Black students is representative of the size of their cohort within the student population, the overlap with IMD Q1 and students who were eligible for free school meals at Key Stage 4 makes it advisable for this to be included as a risk.

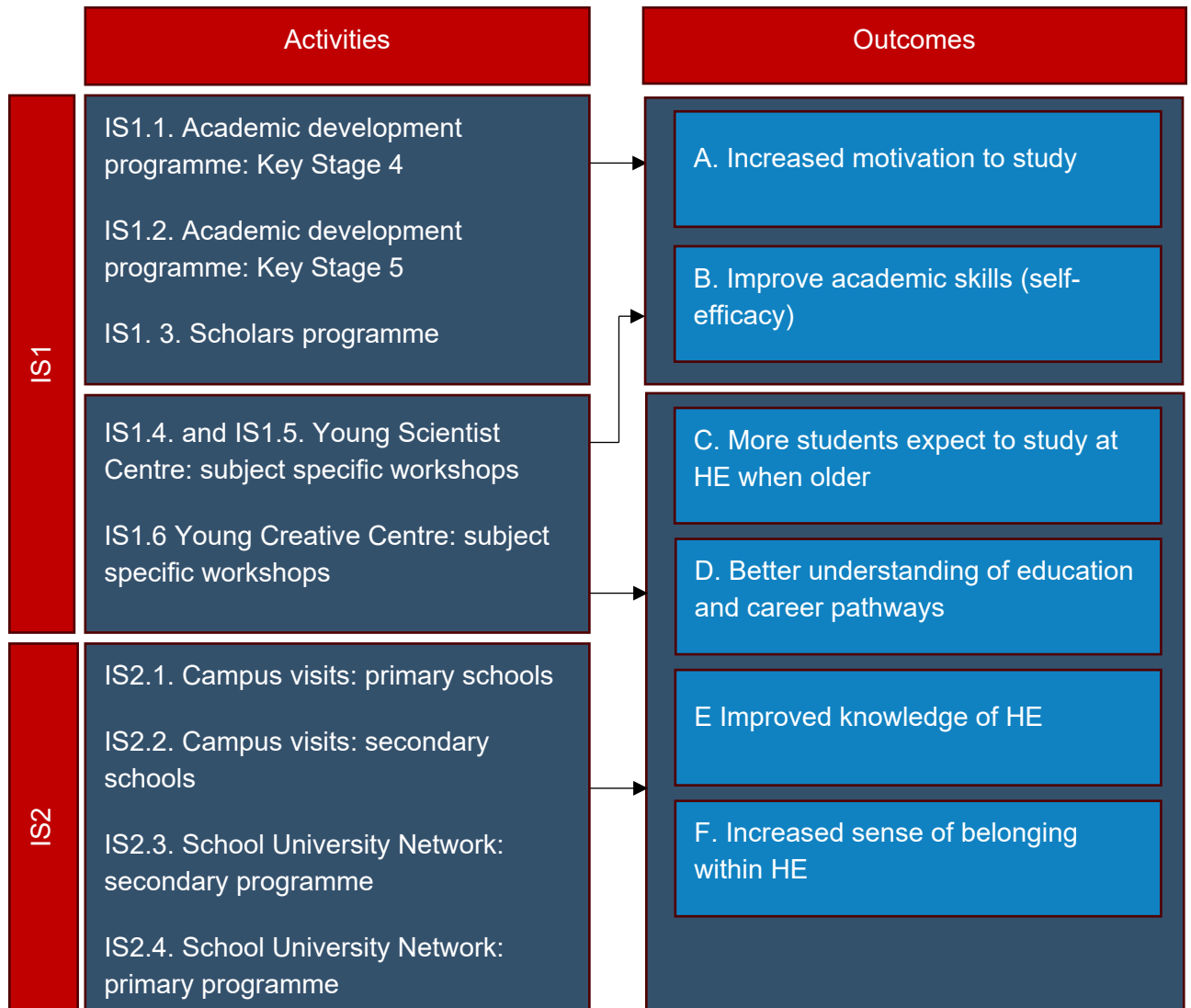
<sup>26</sup> NT Journal Club - Supporting minority ethnic student nurses at university and in practice

<sup>27</sup> BJM - The experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic student midwives at a UK university

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

**10.1. Intervention strategy 1 (IS1): increase percentage of IMD Q1 pre-16 pupils reporting improved academic self-efficacy (PTA\_1) and Intervention strategy 2 (IS2): increase percentage of IMD Q1 pre-16 pupils reporting improved attitudes towards HE (PTA\_2)**

10.1.1 In Figure 4, the University’s Access Evaluation Map outlines how activities in our access intervention strategies (IS1 and IS2) are mapped to outcomes:



10.1.2 Each outcome is linked to measures, detailed in Table 5, which we use to evaluate our access activities to assess whether outcomes are achieved.

10.1.3. Table 5: Access Evaluation Outcomes and Measures

| Outcome  | Measure  |
|--|--|
| A. Increased motivation to study                     | A1 Increased motivation to engage with school/college study <sup>28 29</sup>                     |
| B. Improve academic skills (self-efficacy)           | B1 Academic learning during intervention <sup>30 31</sup>  |
|  | B2 Improved study skills <sup>31</sup>   |
|  | B3 Improved meta-cognitive skills <sup>31 32</sup>   |
| C. Students expect to study at HE when older         | C1 Increased intention to study at university <sup>33 34 35</sup>                                |
| D. Better understanding of education-career pathways | D1 Increase knowledge of which HE courses may be of interest <sup>35 36 37 38 39</sup>           |
|  | D2 Understand relevance of school subjects for education and career pathways <sup>28 39 40</sup> |
|  | D3 Understanding of education-career pathway <sup>39 40</sup>                                    |
|  | D4 Increased knowledge of routes to HE <sup>37 38</sup>  |
|  | D5 Increased understanding of how university is relevant <sup>34 35 39 41</sup>                  |
| E Improved knowledge of HE                           | E1 Familiarity with University <sup>34 36 38 42 43</sup>   |
|  | E2 Increased understanding of student experience <sup>34 41 43 44</sup>                          |
| F. Increased sense of belonging within HE            | F1 Feeling of belonging <sup>35 39 39 43</sup>   |
|  | F2 Understand how you might fit into university culture <sup>34 41 43</sup>                      |

## 10.2 Intervention strategy 3 (IS3): embed a whole university approach that prioritises mental health and wellbeing for all students, measured by reducing the completion gap between

<sup>28</sup> Hanson, J., & Neary, S. (2020). The Gatsby benchmarks and social mobility: impacts to date. IAEVG Conference Proceedings Career Guidance for Inclusive Society.

<sup>29</sup> Aro, T., Viholainen, H., Koponen, T., Peura, P., Räikkönen, E., Salmi, P., Sorvo, R., & Aro, M. (2018). Can reading fluency and self-efficacy of reading fluency be enhanced with an intervention targeting the sources of self-efficacy? *Learning and Individual Differences*, 67, 53–66.

<sup>30</sup> Office for Students. (2022). *Attainment-raising: A toolkit*. Office for Students.

<sup>31</sup> TASO. (2022). *Typology of attainment-raising activities conducted by HEPs: Rapid Evidence Review*.

<sup>32</sup> Education Endowment Foundation. (2022). *Teaching and Learning Toolkit*. Education Endowment Foundation.

<sup>33</sup> Hannon, C., Faas, D., & O'Sullivan, K. (2017). Widening the educational capabilities of socio-economically disadvantaged students through a model of social and cultural capital development. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(6), 1225–1245.

<sup>34</sup> Ravulo, J., Said, S., Micsko, J., & Purchase, G. (2020). Social value and its impact through widening participation: A review of four programs working with primary, secondary & higher education students. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 6(1), 1722307.

<sup>35</sup> Canovan, C., McDonald, R., & Fallon, N. (2021). Hidden speech, private thoughts: a case study in peer conversation and educational choice. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 23(1).

<sup>36</sup> Brennan, J., Cochrane, A., Lebeau, Y., & Williams, R. (2018). Universities and Social Disadvantage. In *The University in its Place* (Issue 2007, pp. 105–123).

<sup>37</sup> CFE Research, & Hughes, D. (2017). *User insight research into post-16 choices*.

<sup>38</sup> Patel, R., & Bowes, L. (2021). *Third independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships: A summary of the local impact evidence to date for the Office for Students*. www.cfe.org.uk

<sup>39</sup> Canovan, C., & Walsh, R. (2020). A space to study: expectations and aspirations toward science among a low-participation cohort. *Journal of Science Communication*, 17(2).

<sup>40</sup> Sandhu, J., Bowes, L., Hansel, M., & Tazzyman, S. (2020). *An independent review of evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships: A report for the Office for Students on the findings from the second call for local evaluation evidence*

<sup>41</sup> Bowes, L., Evans, J., Nathwani, T., Birkin, G., Boyd, A., Holmes, C., Thomas, L., & Jones, S. (2015). *Understanding progression into higher education for disadvantaged and under-represented groups*.

<sup>42</sup> Rissman, B., Carrington, S., & Bland, D. (2013). Widening participation in university learning. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 10(1), 2.

<sup>43</sup> Canovan, C., & Alcock, J. (2024). Who controls the remote? Examining the motivations of WP practitioners towards online provision using Expectancy-Value Theory. In print at *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*

<sup>44</sup> Slack, K., Mangan, J., Hughes, A., & Davies, P. (2014). "Hot", "cold" and "warm" information and higher education decision-making. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(2), 204–223



## those from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 7% in 2021/22 to 3.5% by 2028/29 (PTS\_1)

10.2.1 IMD Q1 students can experience additional mental health pressures<sup>45</sup>, often concerned with integration into university life<sup>46</sup>. Further, key correlates with poor mental health<sup>47</sup> are more often experienced by IMD Q1 students and fear of stigmatisation has long been known to deter students from seeking support<sup>48</sup>. We are committed to addressing mental health issues and tackling the pre-cursors of poor mental health especially amongst IMD Q1 students. This is the focus of this intervention strategy.

10.2.2 Although the University continues to analyse group level data, research confirms that the use of real-time information about individual students is highly significant in supporting student in general and those at risk of underperforming in particular<sup>49,50,51</sup>. There is also evidence that IMD Q1 students come less well prepared to HE<sup>52,53,54</sup>. Whilst we have programmes in place to deal with some elements of this pre-entry, further work is required when students enter the University. There is also some evidence that IMD Q1 students find integration into university life more difficult<sup>55,56,57,58,59</sup>. We recognise that some elements of this are less problematic at the University compared to other HE providers, given our relatively high levels of IMD Q1 and Q2 students, nevertheless students who are commuting or mature students do seem to find integration more difficult. Clearly, IMD Q1 students face financial pressures and our strategy seeks to alleviate some course related financial burdens<sup>60,12,61,9</sup>. We further recognise that for some students the need to gain paid employment and other real-life pressures impact significantly on their ability to complete their programmes of study. Whilst retaining a commitment to fairness and integrity, our strategy identifies ways to support students to mitigate the effects of these inequalities<sup>62,63</sup>. Finally, we recognise that students from IMD Q1 backgrounds, for many of the reasons set out above, do not engage in staff-student consultation processes (internal data). There perspectives are therefore not always represented in the development of courses and programmes of work.

<sup>45</sup> Cullinan, J., Walsh, S. & Flannery, D. (2020). Socioeconomic Disparities in Unmet Need for Student Mental Health Services in Higher Education. *Applied Health Economics and Health Policy* 18, 223–235

<sup>46</sup> Rubin, M., Evans, O., McGuffog, R. (2019). Social Class Differences in Social Integration at University: Implications for Academic Outcomes and Mental Health. In: Jetten, J., Peters, K. (eds) *The Social Psychology of Inequality*. Springer, Cham.

<sup>47</sup> Sampson, S., Priestley, M., Dodd, A.L., Broglia, E., Wykes, T., Robotham, D., Tyrrell, K., Vega, M.O. and Byrom, N.C. (2022). Key questions: research priorities for student mental health. *British Journal of Psychology Open*, 8(e90), 1–7

<sup>48</sup> Martin, J.M. (2010) Stigma and student mental health in higher education, *Higher Education Research and Development*, 29:3, 259–274

<sup>49</sup> Fladd, L., Heacock, L., Hill-Kelley, J., Lawton, J., Pechac, S., Devora, S. and Woodruff, A. 2021. *Knowing Our Students: Understanding & Designing for Success. A Guidebook for Institutional Leaders. Achieving the Dream.*

<sup>50</sup> Zimmerman, E. 2019. *What Can Real-Time Data Analytics Do for Higher Education?*. EdTech

<sup>51</sup> Awwad, D. 2022. *Data analytics to target student support and address problems early*. Times Higher Education

<sup>52</sup> WECD, 2020. *Evaluation of the OfS Addressing Barriers to Student Success Programme*. Office for Students

<sup>53</sup> Trowler, V. 2020. *University study is designed for the privileged – students from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer*. The Conversation.

<sup>54</sup> Pitman, T., Trinidad, S., Devlin, M., Harvey, A., Brett, M. and McKay, J., 2016. *Pathways to higher education: The efficacy of enabling and sub-bachelor pathways for disadvantaged students*.

<sup>55</sup> Blake, S., Capper, G. And Jackson, A. 2022. *Building Belonging in Higher Education Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach*. Pearson/WorkHE

<sup>56</sup> Cook, M.C. and Brabner, R. 2024b. *The cost of learning crisis is creating new threats to students' futures*. WorkHE

<sup>57</sup> Dickinson, J. 2024. *Students need to feel more connected – to both the campus and each other*. WorkHE

<sup>58</sup> Rifesser, J., Puntill, D., Borelli, E. 2023. *(Un)doing Home: Exploring Home-Making and Identity -- An Example of a Project in a London Higher Education Classroom*. London Review of Education, 21(1)

<sup>59</sup> James, M. J. 2023. *Improving Student Success through Sense of Belonging: A Look at the Diverse Learning Environment Survey*. Spotlight Report Brief. Trellis

<sup>60</sup> Adams, R. 2022. *Thousands of UK students face financial hardship as costs rise*. Guardian (10th October)

<sup>61</sup> Mosse, T. 2023. *How is the cost of living affecting university students?* Complete University Guide

<sup>62</sup> Kintrea, K., St Clair, R. and Houston, M. 2022. *The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>63</sup> Zacharias, N. and Ajjawi R. 2020. *When students fail, many do nothing about it. Here's how unis can help them get back on track*. The Conversation.

10.2.3 The Enhanced Personal Tutor Framework (IS3.1) and the use of Engagement Analytics (IS3.2) will allow for a higher scrutiny of individual students' information and embed processes for this information to be acted upon in a timely manner. Several activities centre on the principle of early intervention (IS3.5 and IS3.7) recognising the range of difficulties students face in successfully transitioning into university life and meeting higher academic demands. Activities will support academic preparedness alongside wider social and cultural transition, and we recognise the potential of Student Mentors (IS3.6) to support transition due to the significance of friendship groups within and across courses for students' sense of belonging. Building belonging informs our activities in partnership with the Students Union and the creation of a new Student Partner Role (IS3.9) to increase student involvement in the design and delivery of interventions.

### **10.3 Intervention strategy 4 (IS4): reduce the completion gap between disabled and non-disabled students from 4.8% in 2021/22 to 1.5% by 2028/29 (PTS\_2)**

10.3.1 The strategy is underpinned with an asset-based approach<sup>64,65,66,67,68,69</sup> to students who declare a disability, establishing ways to ensure that the University can support the skills and abilities the student brings to their programme of study<sup>70,71,72</sup>. There are three strands: transitioning into the University, establishing what a student needs to show their strengths, and ensuring appropriate support as needed.

10.3.2 The University has invested in a range of programmes to support students as they transition. The Student Transition and Residential (STAR) Programme (IS4.2) supports students prior to starting university. Alongside this, the Student Wellbeing Ambassadors (IS4.3) prove a constant support through STAR into the first few months of university life.

10.3.3 The identification of any additional support needs is key to ensuring students are not disadvantaged across the student experience. Where appropriate Education Psychologist Assessments will be conducted to assess individual students' needs. All students with a declared disability will be assigned a dedicated Disability Advisor to help them mediate both university and external support systems. This will ensure that reasonable adjustments can be made for the outset of a students' study. These provisions will ensure that each student has the resources necessary to succeed. The strategy will be supported by more universal provisions including the development of resources to enhance teaching staff's provision of inclusive learning environments (IS4.5).

### **10.4 Intervention strategy 5 (IS5): reduce the continuation gap between young and mature students from 8.2% in 2021/22 to 4% by 2028/29 (PTS\_3)**

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<sup>64</sup> Cage, E., Jones, E., Ryan, G., Hughes, G. and Spanner, L. 2021. Student mental health and transitions into, through and out of university: student and staff perspectives. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 45(8)

<sup>65</sup> Clouder, L., Karakus, M., Cinotti, A., Ferreyra, M.V., Fierros, G.A. and Rojo, P. 2020. Neurodiversity in higher education: a narrative synthesis. *Higher Education* 80

<sup>66</sup> Moriña, A. and Biagiotti, G. 2022. Academic success factors in university students with disabilities: a systematic review. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 37(5)

<sup>67</sup> TASO, n.d. Reasonable adjustments (or accommodations) for disabled students

<sup>68</sup> TASO, 2024. Supporting disabled students: Mapping reasonable adjustments and transition support.

<sup>69</sup> Taylor, M., Baskett, M. and Wren, C. 2010. Managing the transition to university for disabled students. *Education + Training*, 52(2).

<sup>70</sup> Safer, A., Farmer, L., and Song, B. 2020. 'Quantifying difficulties of university students with disabilities', *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 33(1), 5-21.

<sup>71</sup> Kim, M.M. and Kutscher, E.L. 2021. College Students with Disabilities: Factors Influencing Growth in Academic Ability and Confidence. *Research in Higher Education*, 62

<sup>72</sup> TASO, 2023. What Works to Reduce Equality Gaps for Disabled Students? London: TASO.

- 10.4.1 Mature students arrive at university with a wide range of skills, life experiences and community support<sup>73,74</sup>. They are also more likely to arrive with a diverse range of potential barriers to succeeding<sup>75,76</sup>, a situation common in other western societies<sup>77</sup>. These include more personal commitments<sup>78</sup> and more problematic prior education experiences<sup>79,80</sup>. There will often have been a gap in their education, and they arrive without up-to-date study skills or digital skills<sup>81</sup>. Our support strategies are, therefore, built around: ensuring successful transition into HE<sup>82</sup>, ensuring belonging<sup>83,84,85,86,87</sup> and continued support that recognises and ameliorates the influence of their additional commitments.
- 10.4.2 We will investigate and propose changes to university practice to meet the needs of students with a range of other commitments. Whilst this responds to the needs of a variety of students, it is particularly significant for mature students, who we recognise often have more complex commitments. The timetabling project (IS5.1) and the curriculum transformation project (IS5.2) will redesign the structure of teaching. The timetabling project will look at reducing the number of days of timetabled teaching, allowing mature students to actively balance academic and personal commitments. The curriculum transformation project will pilot a block teaching structure, which has been found to support students to focus and manage their studies in a more coherent way.
- 10.4.3 Synthesising and building on existing student support provision, the Return to Study programme (IS5.3) will develop the University's offer to mature students and ensure they are well placed to complete level 4 work. Alongside the Return to Study programme, mature students will be supported by work targeted at specific areas of difficulty for mature students – improving their digital literacy (IS5.6) and developing their broader academic skills (IS5.5). In addition to other projects improving students' transition, mature students will benefit from the retention calling project (IS5.4) which specifically enables mature students to understand and make use of the University's various support schemes. Recognising that it is more common for mature students to need to interrupt their studies and that this has a negative influence on their completion, the Interrupted Students Project will provide support for interrupting students to prepare for their return (IS5.7).

## 10.5 Intervention strategy 6 (IS6): reduce the awarding gap between Black and White students from 24% in 2021/22 to 12% by 2028/29 (PTS\_4)

<sup>73</sup> [Fragoso, A., Gonçalves, T., Ribeiro, C.M., Monteiro, R., Quintas, H., Joana Bago, J., Fonseca, H.M.A.C And Santos, L. 2013 The transition of mature students to higher education: Challenging traditional concepts? Studies in the Education of Adults, 45 \(1\)](#)

<sup>74</sup> [Mishra, S. 2020. Social networks, social capital, social support and academic success in higher education: A systematic review with a special focus on 'underrepresented' students](#)

<sup>75</sup> [OfS 2021. Improving opportunity and choice for mature students. Insights 9](#)

<sup>76</sup> [Gongadze, S., Styrnol, M. and Hume, S. 2021. Supporting access and student success for mature learners. TASO](#)

<sup>77</sup> [Indecon 2021. Study Of Mature Student Participation in Higher Education. Higher Education Authority](#)

<sup>78</sup> [Butcher, J. 2020. Unheard: the voices of part-time adult learners. Higher Education Policy Institute.](#)

<sup>79</sup> [Million Plus 2018. Forgotten Learners: building a system that works for mature students.](#)

<sup>80</sup> [Office for Students briefing n.d. Mature and part-time students.](#)

<sup>81</sup> [Staddon, R.V. 2020. Bringing technology to the mature classroom: age differences in use and attitudes. International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education 17\(11\)](#)

<sup>82</sup> [Aina, C., Baici, E., Casalone, G. and Pastore, F. 2022. The determinants of university dropout: A review of the socio-economic literature. Socio-Economic Planning Sciences, 79](#)

<sup>83</sup> [Blake, S., Capper, G. and Jackson, A. 2022. Building Belonging in Higher Education Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach. Pearson/WonkHE](#)

<sup>84</sup> [Cibyl and WonkHE, 2024. Belong \[online\] \[https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2024/03/Wonkhe-Live\\\_Belong-data\\\_Livia-Scott.pdf\]\(https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2024/03/Wonkhe-Live\_Belong-data\_Livia-Scott.pdf\)](#)

<sup>85</sup> [Hodgson, R. 2024. Time to go back to basics on belonging. \[online\] <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/time-to-go-back-to-basics-on-belonging/>](#)

<sup>86</sup> [Naughton, C., Garden, C., and Smith, N.W. 2024. Student Belonging Good Practice Guide. RAISE Network](#)

<sup>87</sup> [West, J. 2024. Belonging: why it is the next step on the equity, diversity and inclusion ladder. Times Higher Education](#)

- 10.5.1. Our approach to addressing the Black and White awarding gap acknowledges the multifaceted nature of the issue, attributing it to factors both internal and external to the University<sup>88 89</sup>. This plan seeks to bridge the gap between learners and the academy through an integrated approach, drawing from insights provided by national policy researchers. This involves collaboration with students and staff to co-create interventions tailored to the diverse experiences of students across different locales within the institution.
- 10.5.2. The data analysis presented in Annex A highlights the significant Black and White awarding gap, along with associated factors such as entry qualifications, which are a strong indicator of outcomes<sup>90</sup>. The plan also recognises intersectional issues such as deprivation and mental health challenges, which are widely recognised as important drivers of outcomes<sup>91</sup>. IS6 tackles the risk factors of insufficient academic and personal support, mental health, cost pressures, and progression barriers. It aligns with other strategic initiatives targeting various student groups, aiming for comprehensive support across the student lifecycle.
- 10.5.3. IS6 activities are divided into two main approaches: "Bringing the Learners Closer to the Academy" and "Bringing the Academy Closer to the Learners." The former emphasises inclusive activities (IS6.1, IS6.2, IS6.3) to support students in assessment preparation (IS6.7), nudges (IS6.8), and improving understanding of degree classifications (IS6.9)<sup>92 93</sup>. The latter (IS6.4 to IS6.7) aims to foster a sense of belonging through representation in the curriculum, culture, and community<sup>94 95</sup>. Activities include improving reporting procedures, diversifying staff recruitment and promoting inclusivity in curriculum design.
- 10.5.4. Acknowledging concerns about power differences and equity-focused teaching, IS6 also provides placement mentors for Social Work students to address specific awarding gaps<sup>96</sup><sup>97</sup>. Overall, we have sought to address systemic inequalities, promote inclusivity, and improve racial literacy within the institution. These efforts are seen as benefiting all students and contributing to a more equitable educational environment.

## 10.6 Intervention strategy 7 (IS7): reduce the progression gap between those from IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 12.1% in 2021/22 to 6% by 2028/29 (PTP\_1)

- 10.6.1 Research suggests an earning gap of approximately 10% between students from the most disadvantaged and the most advantaged backgrounds<sup>98</sup>, though the reason for this is

<sup>88</sup> Andrews et. al., (2023) *Approaches to addressing the ethnicity degree awarding gap: contextualising the landscape and developing a typology*. TASO

<sup>89</sup> *Racially diverse and inclusive communities* (universitiesuk.ac.uk)

<sup>90</sup> Holford, A. (2017) *Students with BTECs do worse at university- here's how we close the gap*. The Guardian

<sup>91</sup> Stevenson et. al., (2019) *Understanding and overcoming the challenges of targeting students from under-represented and disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds: report for the Office for Students*.

<sup>92</sup> Foster, E., & Siddle, R. (2020). *The effectiveness of learning analytics for identifying at-risk students in higher education. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*

<sup>93</sup> Iliescu et. al., (2019) *It's not Black and White – the multiple factors explaining university attainment gaps between ethnicities*

<sup>94</sup> Arday, 2018, 2018: *Understanding Mental Health: What Are the Issues for Black and Ethnic Minority Students at University?*

<sup>95</sup> Dost, G., & Mazzoli Smith, L. (2023). *Understanding higher education students' sense of belonging: a qualitative meta-ethnographic analysis. Journal of Further and Higher Education*

<sup>96</sup> Caffrey, B., & Fruin, H. (2019). *An exploration of issues affecting the assessment of social work students on practice placement in England*

<sup>97</sup> Caffrey, A. et al. (2023) 'Student nurses' experiences of discrimination and racism on work placements: What can higher education institutions do?', *Nurse education today*, 131, pp. 105980–105980.

<sup>98</sup> TASO 2023. *The value of higher education*

unclear. Some evidence suggests reasonable features such as family commitments and place attraction limit graduates' flexibility and geographic mobility<sup>99,100</sup>. This strategy supports graduates to pursue their aspirations in all aspects of their lives.

10.6.2 Given the paucity of high-quality evidence in supporting graduates' progression, we draw our key principles from other work on supporting aspirations and our own internal evidence. Information, advice and guidance (IAG) seems to make a significant contribution to young people's educational trajectories<sup>101,102</sup>, although there is a lack of evidence in this area. However, disadvantaged students tend to have limited access to IAG through informal networks and so any effect is likely to be higher for such students. For example, occupational choice is highly correlated with parental occupation<sup>103</sup>. Further, improvements to the placement opportunities available will give students additional IAG as well as relevant experience, both are important in developing their future careers<sup>104,105</sup>. As well as IAG, IMD Q1 students often enter graduate employment with lower recognisable transversal skills<sup>106</sup> and career development skills<sup>107</sup>. Finally, transitioning into paid employment brings additional costs and financial assistance which can enable IMD Q1 students to achieve better progression outcomes (internal data).

10.6.3 The Student Working Lives project (IS7.1) will improve the quality of part time employment students with many students currently undertaking low quality employment which is not linked to their studies<sup>108</sup>. Alongside this, the placement matching service (IS7.6) will increase the supply of appropriate placements and maximise their potential to help a student build their experience of work based learning<sup>109</sup>. Research informed teaching and real-world learning are key pedagogic design principles for all our courses to support graduate progression. The Graduate Transitions Programme (IS7.2) will continue to advise graduates as they move into employment to provide structured guidance in securing graduate level positions.<sup>110,111</sup> The Global Leadership Development programme (IS7.7) and the Elevate programme (IS7.8) will support the development of a range of transversal skills valued by employers which can be evidenced by students.

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<sup>99</sup> Donnelly, M and Gamsu, S 2018. 'Home and away': Social, Ethnic and Spatial Inequalities in Student Mobility. The Sutton Trust  
<sup>100</sup> University of Edinburgh 2018. Thematic Review 2017-18: Mature Students and Student Parents and Carers Final Report.

<sup>101</sup> TASSO n.d. Information, advice and guidance for employment and employability (post-HE)

<sup>102</sup> Gilworth, B. and Cobb, F. 2017. Where are you right now? Using careers registration to support employability in higher education. HEA Surveys Conference

<sup>103</sup> Bello, S.L. & Morchio, I. 2022. Like father, like son: Occupational choice, intergenerational persistence and misallocation. *Quantitative Economics*, 13(2)

<sup>104</sup> Abbott, N. 2019. Why are some students unable to access work placements?

<sup>105</sup> Voice, A., Hirst, A., Krauss, T., and Turkenburg-van Diepen, M. 2020. Work-based learning and students' career readiness.

<sup>106</sup> Winterbotham, M., Kik, G., Selner, S. and Whittaker, S. 2020. Employer Skills Survey 2019: Summary report. Government Social Research

<sup>107</sup> Shury, J., Vivian, D., Turner, C. and Downing, C. 2017. Planning for success: Graduates' career planning and its effect on graduate outcomes. Government Social Research

<sup>108</sup> Wright, A., Wilding, M., Lawler, M. and Hoole, L. 2024. Student Working Lives: Understanding student experiences of working while studying. Institute for Research into Organisations, Work and Employment (UCLan)

<sup>109</sup> Kerrigan, M., Manktelow, A. and Simmons, E. 2018. Sandwich placements: negating the socioeconomic effect on graduate prospects. *Widening Participation & Lifelong Learning*, 20 (4)

<sup>110</sup> Handshake 2024. Early talent career influences in the AI age.

<sup>111</sup> Perera, M.A.D., Fernandes, T. and Prekerthi, P. 2018. Career Readiness: A Survey on Effectiveness of Learning Employability Skills at University Level. *International Journal of Engineering Technologies and Management Research*, 5(11)

**Annex C: Targets, investment and fees**