

# Delivering a fresh approach to access and participation

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# Summary

The challenges to education brought about by the pandemic provide an opportunity to take a fresh look at how universities in England can best deliver on access and participation and accelerate education recovery. With John Blake due to start as the new Director for Fair Access and Participation at the Office for Students (OfS) in early 2022, we believe now is the time to both take lessons forward from the current access and participation plan (APP) process, and to think innovatively about ways to drive social mobility in the years ahead.

We have spoken to university members to gather ideas for how to deliver a new approach to widening access with both students and local and regional need at its heart. A collection of case studies showcasing how universities can best deliver on access and participation and accelerate education recovery is included.

[VIEW THE CASE STUDIES ON PAGE 6](#)

# Resetting the approach to access and participation plans

We believe that:

## **Taking a longer-term, strategic approach is key to delivering on priorities**

The five-year focus of APPs has led to a more strategic approach to social mobility in universities. It has helped unlock longer-term commitments to addressing structural barriers to opportunity and student success, ensuring that access and participation priorities are not going to shift when work has only just got underway.

## **The APP process could be improved in several ways**

For example, the process could be improved by reducing bureaucracy (particularly around annual impact reporting) and making the process more student-focused and place-focused, with targets that are most appropriate to a university's local challenges.

## **A fresh approach should be shaped by lessons learned during the first round of APPs**

Although it will take some time for current APPs to show results, positive developments in recent years should be incorporated. This includes the shift towards judging success based on outcomes rather than inputs or activities, and the increased investment in evaluation.

# Post-pandemic recovery

Universities' commitment to driving equality of opportunity has only increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Universities stand ready to play a major role in both educational recovery and equipping individuals with the skills needed by employers now and in the future.

This will be achieved through:

## **Extending universities' support for the state school sector to accelerate education recovery**

Universities will build on the diverse range of university–school partnerships that exist currently. Evidence points to some important initiatives that could contribute to raising attainment and aspirations, including:

- one-to-one tutoring focused on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds
- spreading best practice for university sponsorship of schools
- greater support for disadvantaged pupils in primary schools
- supporting schools and colleges to maximise opportunities for students studying T Levels through better advice and guidance

## **Putting 'place' at the heart of a future approach**

Universities will focus more on levelling up their local areas by collaborating with regional actors to address specific local needs, eg more social workers or teachers. This will require government support through:

- extending investment in opportunity areas as drivers of change locally
- ensuring the Lifelong Loan Entitlement policy complements access and participation priorities

## **Giving more weight to further promoting student success**

Universities will go further in their support for student transitions into higher education to boost preparedness, improve belonging and ensure student wellbeing is at the heart of induction programmes. This will include commitments to tackle differential experiences on campus, a focus on employability, and universities working with employers to support a diversification of their graduate intake.

## **Stepping up efforts to identify what works**

We will go further in our role in identifying and sharing impactful practice among universities and identifying gaps. This will require government support through:

- working with the OfS to target funds towards what works
- supporting a long-term sustainable footing for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO)
- meaningful engagement with the sector ahead of regulatory and funding changes

# Case studies

Universities have extensive structures, partnerships and programmes in place to support university access, participation and success for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The challenges brought about by the pandemic provide an opportunity to look again at how universities can best deliver on access and participation and accelerate education recovery.

The following case studies highlight just some of the examples of what universities are doing to:

- support the state school sector and accelerate education recovery
- take a local approach to access and participation, prioritising levelling up and solving local and regional social mobility challenges
- enhance efforts on successful participation and student employment outcomes

Each case study is labelled under one or more of the following four themes it relates to:

Raising school attainment

Solving local challenges

Supporting participation and retention

Boosting employment outcomes

## Aston University: Undergraduate peer mentoring for all students

Boosting employment outcomes Supporting participation and retention

Aston offers a variety of mentoring schemes to provide opportunities for students, alumni and professionals to support the Aston student community, develop transferable skills, expand networks and share experiences. Undergraduate students can engage in mentoring activities at every stage of their learning journey:

- All new students are matched with a second or final year mentor from their degree programme to share knowledge and ease transition into university life.
- Second year students can mentor a first-year student or receive mentoring from a work placement or a final year student.
- Students on a work placement can mentor a second-year student online, sharing tips and advice on the placement search experience, and/or be mentored online by a final year student.
- Final-year students can mentor a second-year or mentor a student on placement online, as well as receive mentoring from a graduate on the Graduate Mentoring Programme.
- Students from any year can be matched to a mentor from the year above to give them an insight into future years of study and what to expect.



## Bournemouth University: Reading attainment raising intervention for local year 6 pupils

Raising school attainment Solving local challenges Boosting employment outcomes

Books & Stories is a 10-week reading attainment raising intervention for local year 6 pupils at seven target schools, delivered by Bournemouth University's Schools Liaison Team and supported by student ambassadors. It aims to support learners to develop specific literacy skills, including improvements in their reading fluency and comprehension, and developing their vocabulary. An Access Reading Test was used to identify the pupils most in need of additional support.

Between October 2019 and January 2020, 10 weekly one-hour reading sessions were delivered in school to each group, with a total of 70 students. At the end of the programme, participants completed a second Access Reading Test along with two short surveys about their attitudes to reading.

- 58 participants (83%) completed both reading assessments and attended most sessions.
- Among these 58 participants, the average reading age increased from 8 years and 7 months to 9 years and 6 months.
- Reading ages increased for exactly two thirds of participating pupils (67%).
- Reading ages increased by over two years or more for over a third of participating pupils (38%).

## University of Bradford: Paid graduate internships with local employers

Solving local challenges Boosting employment outcomes

The Bradford Graduate Internship Programme matches local organisations with recent Bradford graduates for a 10-week paid internship. The programme offers graduates a stepping stone between university and their first job, with the opportunity to develop their employability skills, work experience and CV. Graduates grow in confidence as they work on real projects and gain an insight into a particular sector or industry.

## University of Brighton: Multi-academy trust and local learning network working together to raise school attainment

Raising school attainment Solving local challenges Boosting employment outcomes

The University of Brighton Academies Trust is made up of 15 Sussex-based infant, primary and secondary academies. By working together, Brighton has delivered strategic support and helped these academies overcome practical problems on school improvement, wellbeing, safeguarding and staff recruitment, as well as promoting professional development and raising aspirations through the sharing of services and expertise. The university has also worked with schools and colleges in widening participation. In the last three years, the university has delivered around 570 outreach activities to over 100 local schools and colleges.

The university also hosts the Sussex Learning Network (SLN), a local strategic partnership network of higher and further education providers, Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and independent training providers in Sussex and Surrey. It delivers projects which enable all learners to participate in and progress through higher level education. Through innovative joint working, the network develops new curriculum, provides access to lifelong learning, and seeks to improve policy and practice across the sector. SLN manages the OfS Uni Connect Programme across Sussex, a project which connects those in higher education with local employment opportunities.



## University of Bristol: Tuition and transition support for local post-16 students

Raising school attainment Solving local challenges

Supporting participation and retention

The [Bristol Scholars scheme](#) targets local post-16 students studying in the city of Bristol. The scheme is open to all of Bristol's 25 schools or colleges with post-16 provision. Through the scheme, headteachers are asked to identify students who they believe have the potential to succeed academically, but whose grades are unlikely, for a range of reasons, to meet standard entry requirements. Each school can nominate up to five Year 12 students who take part in a tailored outreach programme, including visits to the university and free private academic tuition.

These activities are designed to empower Bristol Scholars to succeed at post-16 education and therefore enable them to progress to study with Bristol. The scholars receive a guaranteed tailored offer for undergraduate study at the university. Support is ongoing through the transition to university as they study, to ensure they have the best chance possible to excel on their chosen undergraduate programme. From the 2017 pilot cohort:

- 76% were the first in their family to progress to higher education
- 57% are entitled to the post-16 bursary
- 40% were part of the Free School Meals cohort
- 7% were young carers

## Canterbury Christ Church University: Graduate-level careers training programme with local employers

Solving local challenges Boosting employment outcomes

[GradForce](#) is a project funded by the OfS, created to help maximise both students' access to jobs in Kent and Medway and their employability. The project focuses on underrepresented student groups to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to transition into graduate-level employment. The programme is open to final year undergraduates, postgraduates, unemployed recent alumnus or recent graduates currently working in a non-graduate level role. Students undertake the *Get Hired!* training programme, which supports preparation for graduate recruitment, helping students to know what to expect, understand their strengths and enable a growth mindset. Students gain access to exclusive [GradForce](#) graduate-level jobs in Kent.

## City, University of London: Maths and English student tutoring scheme

Raising school attainment Solving local challenges Boosting employment outcomes

City, University of London is a joint sponsor of the City of London Academy Islington, which formally opened in September 2008. The Academy is an 11–19 school with a higher than average proportion of students receiving special educational needs (SEN) support and free school meals. City offers a range of partnership activities with the academy, including a tutoring project to raise attainment in Maths and English for 9–18-year-olds. City students work as paid tutors to support pupils' learning, confidence and skills development. Tutoring takes place in school or online on a weekly basis from November to May.

City also provide enhanced support to primary schools in close geographical proximity to the university. Attainment-raising activities include:

- Small group tutoring in key stage 2 Maths and English provided by City student tutors – 85–90% of tutored students achieve school-set aim of 1 to 2 level grade improvement.
- Subject-specific enrichment days on campus for key stage 2 students, which has produced significant benefits in behaviour and achievement in class.
- A week-long Summer School Programme for confidence and core skills development for select students who require additional support – evaluation has shown this has had a positive impact on aspiration and attainment.
- Specialist support in music and science through the use of City facilities and expertise.



## Durham University: STEM tutoring at local schools for underrepresented students

Raising school attainment Solving local challenges

Supporting participation and retention

In March 2021, Durham University launched Levelling Up, a new programme to open access to STEM subjects for students across the local region and beyond. Levelling Up aims to encourage and support students who are traditionally underrepresented in areas such as Chemistry, Maths and Physics to apply to study at a top university in the future.

They will be supported with academic tutoring and mentoring, working with undergraduates and staff from across the Faculty of Science as they prepare for their A Levels. The first cohort of over 100 Year 12 students will gain an insight into how studying STEM subjects could benefit them in their later career. All eligible students who complete the programme will be guaranteed an offer to study at Durham University.

## University of Kent: Graduate teacher training scheme at University of Kent Academies Trust

Raising school attainment Solving local challenges Boosting employment outcomes

The University of Kent Academies Trust (UKAT) was established on 1 September 2017. There are currently two secondary schools within the Trust. The university works closely with both schools in the trust to devise and deliver a range of interventions to help raise attainment across the trust, as well as help students make informed choices about their future, and support their progression to higher education should they wish to do so.

The university also runs a Graduate Secondary Teaching Scheme (GSTS), which provides students with an opportunity to continue their academic studies, while working towards a teaching qualification at one of the sponsored schools. Successful candidates are funded on a part-time basis to work towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) at a UKAT school, while also studying for a master's or PhD part-time. Being current university students, these future teachers are ideally placed to enthuse students about progression into higher education, as well as their subjects of study. They are also able to bring findings from cutting-edge research into the classroom.

## King's College London: Attainment raising programme with local secondary schools

Raising school attainment Solving local challenges

King's Scholars is a multi-intervention, attainment-focused programme for pupils in Years 7–9 ran by King's College London's Widening Participation Department. It is delivered in partnership with eight local state schools and focuses on teaching metacognitive skills.

Over the course of a three-year period, participants learn to use a range of metacognition techniques, while engaging with activities on university and career pathways. A key part of the programme is its teacher steering group. This provides a mechanism to obtain regular insight and feedback from the schools, ensuring the delivery of the programme is truly collaborative.

Qualitative research conducted by the Behavioural Insights Team shows that participants apply the metacognitive skills they learn to their homework, exam revision and schoolwork. It also shows a positive impact on self-efficacy, with improved participant confidence.

## University of Manchester: Graduate-level jobs programme in Greater Manchester

Solving local challenges Boosting employment outcomes

Manchester Graduate Talent (MGT) helps source paid graduate-level jobs for University of Manchester students graduating in 2021. Graduate roles are available at a range of organisations based in Greater Manchester, from start-ups to multi-national firms, in addition to many roles within the university. The programme continued to run throughout the pandemic and further roles will be available this academic year.

Many MGT roles are within small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), which can provide excellent commercial experience from which graduates can build their careers. The programme aims to help graduates to use the skills they developed at university and build their professional network to fast track their career.

## Nottingham Trent University (NTU): Data analytics to support student engagement and retention

### Supporting participation and retention

In 2013/14, NTU implemented a learning analytics platform ([StREAM from Solutionpath](#)) to quickly detect concerns about students' engagement with their courses. The platform shows students, their tutors and other support staff an overview of each student's engagement, and generates early warning alerts when students are most at risk of disengaging. Since Summer 2020, the university has trialled using a calling and contact centre to improve the alerts process. Early indications show successes in raising student engagement after the contact has been made.

## University of Southampton: Transition programme developing post-16 student research skills

### Supporting participation and retention

The [Learn with US Transition Programme](#) is an award-winning outreach initiative established in 2009, working with 16–18-year-olds in schools and colleges across the UK to help develop their research and academic skills and support their transition into higher education. The programme offers an insight into research-led education by providing a range of taster lectures and research skills workshops, while simultaneously equipping students to prepare for undertaking new forms of assessment. The project aims to make the teaching of research skills more tangible and interactive by engaging with students as they undertake their own research, usually by completing a level three research project, such as the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).

The programme facilitates the taught skills element of the EPQ by delivering a range of lectures, workshops, one-to-one research supervision, library visits and online resources, offering support to students undertaking the qualification and, crucially, also to staff delivering it. In 2018/2019, the team recorded 300 interactions with over 150 partner schools and colleges, working with upwards of 10,000 students. University data has shown that students who arrive at Southampton with an EPQ outperform their counterparts in all measures.

## University of Sussex: Student co-creation programme to improve student experience and engagement

Boosting employment outcomes Supporting participation and retention

The Connector Programme sees students and staff working as equal partners, learning, innovating and co-creating together to improve the student experience at Sussex. This programme, which is funded by the OfS, identifies areas of work which would benefit from a co-creative approach between students and staff across the university, from embedding technology in learning to increasing student engagement with schools and services. Student and staff Connectors have equal input and responsibility, working together on key areas to find solutions which truly reflect the needs and wants of the community.

The Connector Programme supports the Sussex 2025 Strategic Framework as an essential aspect of Learn to Transform, and is funded by the university's Access and Participation Plan. It promotes a collaborative, inclusive and student-centred approach, with Connectors positioned to make meaningful contributions to the development of the university, while gaining the skills and knowledge to succeed during and after university.



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