East Sussex College Group (ESCG)

UKPRN 10002923

Access and participation plan 2025-26 to 2028-29

Introduction and strategic aim

This Access and Participation Plan (APP) articulates the College's commitment to improving equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups who access our provision within our regions. This commitment will improve and enhance access, success, and positive progression from our higher education. The College welcomes the Office for Students (OfS) publication of the Access and Participation Dataset, which has provided a vital source of institutional data and sector benchmarking to enable a thorough assessment of our performance. We are using the OfS data alongside our own, and intend to keep doing so for analysis, review, and evaluation throughout the life of the APP. The plan has been developed using guidance provided by the OfS, including regulatory notices and webinars.

We have also included statutory requirements to ensure we promote and support equality, diversity, and inclusion in the design of our plan. We have also ensured engagement from student representatives; top-level commitment from the College Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and consultation between curriculum, admissions, and recruitment colleagues. The plan has been reviewed by members of the HE and Quality teams and the governing body, and we have ensured alignment with the Institutional Quality Strategy. In addition, our intentions draw upon contributions and support from our university partnerships.

The structure of our plan adheres to the OfS template and is presented as follows:

- Assessment of our performance – We demonstrate, using OfS and internal data on student access, continuation, completion, achievement, and progression for target student groups, how the organisation identifies trends and key issues that need to be addressed including risks to equal opportunity.
- Strategic aims and objectives – We demonstrate how our targets for student access and participation, including key areas for more rigorous interventions based on our assessment of performance, has strong connectivity with our HE strategic aims and objectives.
- Strategic measures – This section articulates our key interventions for achieving the stated aims and objectives and provides details of our approach to student consultation, engagement, and evaluation. Supporting information on targets and investment is provided in the appendix.

Our Strategic Plan

The Executive and Governing Body of ESCG is committed to ensuring the College's offer, which includes HE, meets the skills needs of the locality. The College is a key collaborator, in conjunction with a number of colleges within the region, in the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) which aims to support the priorities of the Region's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), by supporting more people into quality jobs close to home, addressing skills gaps across key sectors including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, logistics, and construction.

Excerpt from the college strategic plan for 2021-2024[1]

ESC has a strong and long-standing history of delivering higher level education. Higher level qualifications are a critical element of our growth strategy that will ensure each campus develops courses to support economic growth and complement our wider specialisation work on each campus, offering local people local progression routes by providing pathways for all Level 3 learners.

Our higher education 2021-2024 (during 2024/5) strategy covers four of our wider strategic priorities, the key objectives summarised below:

Curriculum & Quality We will gain assurance from the Quality Assurance Agency, maintain our conditions of registration with the OfS and develop new Level 4 and above vocational and technical courses linked to emerging campus specialisms and local skills needs.

Finance & Growth We will increase income from higher education courses validated by University of East Anglia and Pearson by 20% and ensure that our HE offer is marketed internationally to increase student numbers.

Engagement & Communication We will renew our HE specific marketing and recruitment processes to reach more potential students in Sussex and meet our widening participation targets increasing student numbers from disadvantaged wards, those leaving care and our ethnic minority communities.

People & Culture We will revise our initial teacher training route to become an apprenticeship pathway and agree an effective continuing professional development programme for HE staff, including access to post-graduate training and the effective use of staff time on scholarly activity.

The College Group

East Sussex College Group is one of the largest colleges in the Southeast of England serving over 12,000 students each year. It has a c.£50 million annual turnover and supports 5,000 young people and 10,000 adult students, employs 1,200 staff, and plays a vital educational role in regenerating the communities it serves. It came into existence in 2018 with the merger of Sussex Coast College and Sussex Downs College. We now have campuses along the Sussex coast in Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Newhaven, and Ore[2] and work closely with our partner, School of Information Risk Management, based in Ilford, Essex.

The college offers over 300 courses from Entry Level to Level 3, FE, apprenticeships, and our Higher Education university level courses. Our HE provisions average around 700 students each year of which around 50% study in East Sussex.

We offer a range of degree level courses in four overarching areas: the Arts, Healthcare, Engineering & Construction, Business and Education. These are predominately 2-year full-time foundation degrees, 3-year degrees, 1 year top-up degrees, and 2 year Higher National Diplomas. We also have a small number of higher apprenticeships in Engineering.

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[1] escg.ac.uk/docs/governance/escg-strategic-plan/
[2] escg.ac.uk
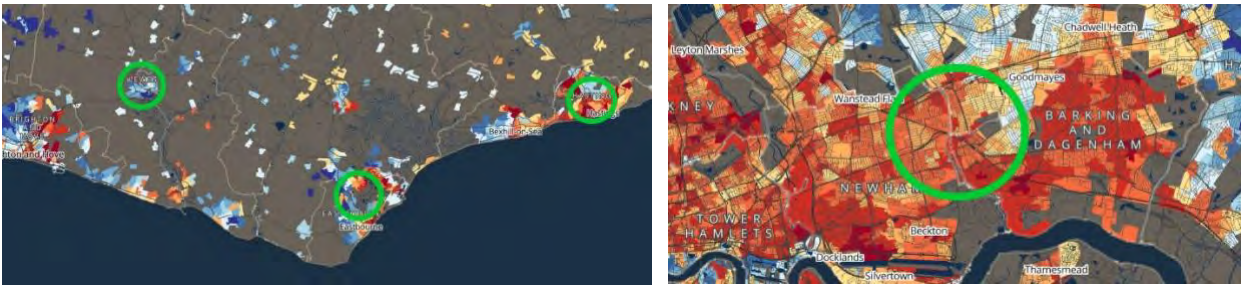
The maps above show the area where our students predominantly live, from our furthest western East Sussex campus Lewes, close to Brighton, to Hastings in the East, and Ilford in Redbridge. Over 95% of all students are commuter students who live in a radius up to 25 miles around these areas. The coloured IMD data shows areas of deprivation.

Access and Participation Plan 2020-25

In evaluating or 2020-25 APP, we can see that we have made satisfactory progress. We have invested significantly in our HE provisions in the past two years, specifically staffing, infrastructure and innovative technologies.

As a result, our National Student Survey (NSS) scores have steadily increased[3]. Our headline of 94.6% students' satisfaction rating, compared to a benchmark of 91.7%, shows we have a lot of our quality assurance processes firmly in place. We have increased access to Polar 4 Quintile 1&2 students who now make up 50% or applications and have doubled our percentage of mature students. However, in the same period we have recruited 17% fewer students who report a disability, and our completion rate remains consistent at 86%.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The College has considered the risks of equality of opportunity detailed in the EORR. To do this we have looked at internal and external data. Our internal data comes from our applications, progression data, bursary and hardship loans, student boards and focus groups as well as records showing student access to well-being and academic support and staff feedback.

Our external data comes from OfS, NSS, Graduate Outcomes, Uni Connect, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Skills Improvement Plans.

Being a small HE provider, some of our data sets are too small for meaningful analysis. Due to the data supressing methods used by OfS, some of our data particularly for areas like Attainment and Completion, show measurements of zero. The data can also appear to give us significant gaps in our risks, but when numbers are small, each student can have vast statistical impact. Therefore, we must look more to our own internal data.

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[3] NSS https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/national-student-survey-data/provider-level-dashboard/

After analysis of our available data, we have identified and selected the following relevant risks from the OFS EORR.

Selected Risks from EORR	Student groups identified by data likely to be affected by this risk	Evidence of risk, for some or all these student groups
R1 Knowledge and skills Students may not have equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto higher education courses that match their expectations and ambitions.	Students who are: • first of their family to attend university • have a declared disability. • in receipt of Free School Meals. • in the lower TUNDRA and POLAR quintiles. • live in the lowest quintiles ABSC and IMD. • male students (access). • care leavers and/or estranged students.	Gaps in access, continuation, completion, attainment, and progression data. Need for embedded internal progression and outreach programme.
R2 Information and guidance Students may not have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, or to make informed choices about their higher education options.	Students who are: • first of their family to attend university. • have a declared disability, including mental health. • in receipt of Free School Meals. • in the lower TUNDRA and POLAR quintiles. • live in the lowest quintiles ABSC and IMD. • care leavers and/or estranged students	Gaps in access, continuation, completion, attainment, and progression data. Need for embedded internal progression and outreach programme.
R3 Perception of higher education Students may not feel able to apply to higher education, or certain types of providers within higher education, despite being qualified.	Students who are: • first of their family to attend university. • have a declared disability, including mental health. • in receipt of Free School Meals. • in the lower TUNDRA and POLAR quintiles. • live in the lowest quintiles ABSC and IMD. • male students (continuation/completion) • care leavers and/or estranged students.	Gaps in access, continuation, completion, attainment, and progression data. Need for embedded internal progression and outreach programme.
R5 Limited choice of course type and delivery Students may not have equal opportunity to access a sufficiently wide variety of higher education course types.	Students who are: • first of their family to attend university. • have a declared disability, including mental health. • in receipt of Free School Meals. • in the lower TUNDRA and POLAR quintiles. • live in the lowest quintiles ABSC and IMD. • male students (continuation/completion). • adult carers. • care leavers and/or estranged students.	Gaps in access, continuation, completion, attainment, and progression data. Need for embedded internal progression and outreach programme.

R6. Insufficient academic support Students may not receive sufficient personalised academic support to achieve a positive outcome.	Students who are: • from ethnic minority backgrounds. • first of their family to attend university. • have a declared disability, including mental health. • previously in receipt of Free School Meals. • in the lower TUNDRA and POLAR quintiles. • live in the lowest quintiles ABSC and IMD. • male students (continuation/completion). • adult carers. • mature students. • care leavers and/or estranged students.	Gaps in continuation, completion, attainment, and progression data. Need for embedded internal progression and outreach programme. Internal academic data. Student voice.
R7 Insufficient personal support Students may not receive sufficient personalised non-academic support or have sufficient access to extracurricular activities to achieve a positive outcome.	Students who are: • from ethnic minority backgrounds. • first of their family to attend university. • have a declared disability, including mental health. • previously in receipt of Free School Meals. • in the lower TUNDRA and POLAR quintiles. • live in the lowest quintiles ABSC and IMD. • male students (continuation/completion). • mature students. • adult carers. • care leavers and/or estranged students.	Gaps in continuation, completion, attainment, and progression data. Internal well-being data. Student voice.
R8 Mental Health Students may not experience an environment that is conducive to good mental health and wellbeing.	• from ethnic minority backgrounds. • have a declared disability, including mental health. • in the lower TUNDRA and POLAR quintiles. • live in the lowest quintiles ABSC and IMD. • male students (continuation/completion). • adult carers. • care leavers and/or estranged students.	Gaps in continuation, completion, attainment, and progression data. Internal well-being data. Student voice.
R9 Ongoing impacts of coronavirus Students may be affected by the ongoing consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.	• have a declared disability, including mental health. • in the lower TUNDRA and POLAR quintiles. • live in the lowest quintiles ABSC and IMD. • adult carers. • care leavers and/or estranged students.	Internal well-being data. Student voice.
R10 Cost pressures	• have a declared disability, including mental health.	Gaps in continuation, completion,

Increases in cost pressures may affect a student's ability to complete their course or obtain a good grade.	• previously in receipt of Free School Meals. • in the lower TUNDRA and POLAR quintiles. • live in the lowest quintiles ABSC and IMD. • mature students. • adult carers. • care leavers and/or estranged students. • Counselling students have additional costs associated with the course	attainment, and progression data. Internal well-being and bursary data. Student voice.

From our data and this list, we have identified the student characteristics most at risk from equality of opportunities at ESC and created our own list.

R1: Young students from areas of deprivation. With our provision situated in or close to areas of deprivation, there are large numbers of prospective young students who receive free school meals, are care-leavers, are estranged young people, have households on benefits and/or could potentially be the first of their family to attend university. There is often a perception that university is not for them and may lack the confidence and information to apply to university level courses. Covering EORR risks 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

R2: Mature students and mature male students Our mature students often tell us they are carers for adult family and can struggle to access traditional university courses. Once on a course they are at higher risk of non-continuation due to lack of academic skills, costs of care, costs of additional specific Counselling course requirements, personal support, etc. Our mature male students have a much lower continuation rate than others. The risk here is that they are left out of the job market and unable to obtain the skills required for meaningful work. Covering EORR risks 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

R3: Disabled students Our numbers of applications and enrolments from students with a disability have been declining since covid. From our data we have seen that disabled students are at higher risk of non-continuation due to costs such as travel and accommodation and personal support. Covering EORR risks 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

R4: Mental Health Poor mental health following COVID years has affected many people which in turn can lead to poor motivation and low self-confidence. Poor mental health can particularly affect students with disabilities, from a low household income, LGBGTQ+, mature students, and those with care experience. The risk here is that many people feel leaving home and going to traditional universities is not achievable, they struggle keeping up with their studies and can often lead to low attainment, continuation, and completion. Covering EORR risks 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

R5: Minority groups Across the student lifecycle from access to progression there is a risk that some groups may feel higher education is not for them due to their protected characteristics, such

as people from minority and ethnic backgrounds, including those with protected characteristics and those from Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller backgrounds. Covering EORR risks 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Objectives

O1: Reduce the access gap between disadvantaged young students and mature students by maintaining access to mature student and increasing access to young, disadvantaged students. Increase the percentage of under 25s by 2% per year.

To mitigate the risk of low access and participation from disadvantaged young students in our local communities, we aim to increase awareness, confidence, and university applications among prospective students from areas of deprivation surrounding our main campuses, with a particular focus on those receiving free school meals, from households on benefits, or potential first-generation university attendees along with access to higher education for young care leavers and estranged young people by providing comprehensive support, information, and tailored pathways to university-level courses. We will do this whilst maintaining mature access.

O2: To increase the continuation completion, attainment and progression rates for mature students who are adult carers and mature males. Reduce the gap between mature and young completers by 1% per year.

To mitigate risks for mature students, including with adult caring duties, and additional costs for Counselling students. across the student lifecycle we aim to address academic and well-being challenges to ensure they feel supported. Our male mature students, and mature student who are adult carers are particularly at risk.

O3: Reduce the access and continuation gap between students with reported disabilities and those with no reported disabilities by improving access and continuation for students with reported disabilities. Increase access to reduce the gap by 2% each year and reduce the continuation gap by 1% each year.

To mitigate risks for our disabled student across the student lifecycle we aim to addresses the key elements of the risk such as, access issues for students with disabilities, higher risk of non-continuation due to costs and lack of personal support, the potential for these students to be excluded from the job market.

O4: Increase access and monitor the gaps in continuation and completion for students with declared mental health conditions and ensure the four-year average continuation and completion rates do not decrease for students with declared mental health conditions. Increase the rate of completion by 1% each year.

This will address the key elements of the risk including, poor mental health following the COVID-19 pandemic, impact on motivation and self-confidence, specific vulnerable groups affected (students with disabilities, low-income backgrounds, LGBTQ+, mature students, and those with care experience), challenges of transitioning to traditional university settings, risk of low attainment, continuation, and completion rates. We aim to improve mental health support and create an inclusive learning environment that enhances motivation, self-confidence, and academic success for students with mental health concerns, thereby increasing continuation, attainment, and completion rates.

O5: Reduce the gaps in attainment and graduate progression between students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and other students by improving outcomes for students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds consistently across all ethnicities. Reduce the 2% gap to 0% over the lifetime of the plan.

This objective aims to increase awareness and accessibility of higher education among underrepresented groups, combat stereotypes and misconceptions about who "belongs" in higher education, create a more diverse and inclusive university culture, provide targeted support to address specific barriers faced by different communities. We will foster an inclusive higher education environment that actively promotes and supports participation from all ethnic and social backgrounds, ensuring equal opportunities and representation across diverse communities.

Intervention Strategies and Expected Outcomes

When preparing the intervention strategies, the following factors were into account.

Financial Barriers	- High tuition costs and living expenses. - Limited access to scholarships or financial aid. - Hidden costs (commuting, textbooks, equipment, field trips).
Academic Preparation Gaps	- Disparities in quality of primary, secondary, and tertiary education. - Lack of preparation for university in schools, particularly disadvantaged ones. - Limited access to additional academic support.
Information and Guidance Deficits	- Lack of awareness about university options and application processes. - First-generation students lacking familial knowledge about higher education.
Cultural and Social Barriers	- Perception that university is "not for people like me." - Lack of role models from similar backgrounds in higher education. - Cultural attitudes that may not prioritise higher education.
Geographic Limitations	- Distance from higher education institutions. - Limited transportation options. - Reluctance to leave support networks in home communities.
Technology and Resource Gaps	Limited access and/or skills when using computers or internet for online applications, research, and study.
Mental Health and Well-being	- Higher stress levels due to financial pressures, family, and caring responsibilities. - Limited access to mental health support services. - Imposter syndrome or feelings of not belonging or fitting in.
Systemic and Institutional Barriers	- Lack of support systems for retention once enrolled. - Limited flexibility in programme structures for students with work or adult caring responsibilities.

Our interventions and expected outcomes are underpinned by a Theory of Change methodology focusing on an evidenced based and data-driven approach. This will support us to meet our targets by providing a clear framework to map out the inputs activities and outputs needed to achieve the desired impact, with identification of immediate outcomes needed to meet final goals and embedding evaluation of impact at the outset.

We have adapted templates from TASO[4] and have set out examples of interventions below and in Annex B.

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[4] Pre-entry Mapping Outcomes and Activities Tool (MOAT) - TASO

Risk	R1: PTA_1		
Objective 1	**Reduce the access gap between disadvantaged young students and mature students by maintaining access to mature students and increasing access to young, disadvantaged students.** Our objective is to increase awareness, confidence, and university applications among young prospective students from areas of deprivation surrounding our main campuses, whist maintaining access to mature students. Our target is to increase applications from young students within a 10-mile radius of our most deprived campuses due to larger numbers of potential students in Quintiles 1 and 2.		
Process			Impact
Activity	Input	Outcome	Method(s) of evaluation including type of evidence
Activity 1, outreach We plan a range of aspiration building activities over the next 4 years to include open days, campus visits, external talks, and open events at local community projects libraries and schools in deprived areas. We will work collaboratively with Uni Connect to support their programmes and develop new ones. Develop programme of internal progression workshops, and tasters, to foster stronger links and collaborations with FE.	The HE operations team accompanied by the school liaison team and Student Union will undertake outreach activities. HE staff to host FE staff and students to workshops, taster sessions, and guest lecturers. Annual investment £5000	We will set specific, measurable goals for increased applications and enrolments from these groups. Develop stronger partnerships with local schools and Uni Connect to create direct pathways to university enrolment. Continue to develop clear pathways for FE progression to HE courses.	Measured though pre and post event surveys [Type 2] Measured through surveys with pupils engaging in multiple events and compared to baseline data gathered during initial activity [Type 2] Measured through Year 11 engagement with target schools [Type 2] Anecdotal feedback from participants [Type 1] Measured through increased internal progression rates [Type 2]
Activity 2, marketing communications Develop and distribute informative materials (brochures, videos) highlighting success stories and case	Together with the marketing team HE will develop a range of marketing materials to appeal to a varied audience. To include digital, to be used on our website and social media; audio, to be used on	Develop a collection of guides to support applications. Created targeted campaigns on social media and local radio.	Question on application form, "where did you hear about us" [Type 1] Data collected from social media interaction [Type 2]

| studies of students from similar backgrounds.

Develop a user-friendly online guide explaining the application process step-by-step.

Engage with local media to share success stories of students from the target demographic. | local radio; and print to be distributed locally.

Use existing student body to champion us through social media.

Annual investment £9000 | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Activity 3 Peer mentoring support** Implement a mentoring program pairing current university students from similar backgrounds with new students.

Offer workshops in local schools to help students and parents navigate the application process. | Working with our Students' Union and HE mentors we will identify and train student mentors who can be paired up with new students.

HE staff and HE admissions team can deliver workshops to support students and parents with applications and the interview process.

Annual investment £3000 | Create a student mentor scheme.

Deliver a series of workshops to explain the process of applying to higher education. | Evaluation through qualitative surveys [Type 2]

Teacher and student feedback. [Type 1] |
| **Activity 4 Bursaries Offer** Targeted financial support for students from low-income households, promoted internally and through the school liaison team, Uni Connect and tailored communications to parents/carers (Existing, with increased targeting to schools with a high proportion of FSM eligible pupils). | Staff time and financial investment

Annual investment: Part of the current bursary £85,000 | Improved access to higher education for students from low-income backgrounds through the financial support available – and awareness of this (students, parents/carers, and schools). | Evaluation of the impact of student financial support packages using annual student surveys using the OfS financial support evaluation toolkit or similar [Type 2]

Additional student feedback from focus groups and authentic student voice activities [Type 2] |

Risk	R2: PTA_2, PTS_1, PTP_1		
Objective 2	**To increase the continuation completion, attainment and progression rates for mature students who are adult carers and mature males.** This objective addresses the key elements of the risk such as, access issues for mature students with adult caring duties, higher risk of non-continuation due to academic challenges and care costs, and the potential for these students to be excluded from the job market. we aim to address academic and well-being challenges to ensure they feel supported. Our male mature students, and mature student who are adult carers are particularly at risk.		
Process			Impact
Activity	Input	Outcome	Method(s) of evaluation including type of evidence
Activity 1 Flexible learning options: Links to R3 activity 1 Provide asynchronous learning materials and recorded lectures. Allow part-time study options where possible. Provide modular learning.	Adaptive practice from all staff. Course development to allow for modular delivery. Annual investment: £2000	A range of comprehensive online learning materials for each course offered. Flexible learning options for students with some courses offering part time options, evening, and weekend classes. Modular provision to allow students to pick up studies when suitable to them.	Evaluation of the impact of flexible learning and support packages using annual student surveys [Type 2]
Activity 2 Academic peer support: Develop a mentoring program pairing mature students with peers. Offer specialised study skills workshops tailored to mature learners. Provide flexible options and times for support from HE mentors.	Identifying student mentors and providing training. Extending our study skills programme to provide extra support for mature students returning to study. Provide online mentoring for evening or weekend classes.	Creating a student mentor scheme. A comprehensive study skills programme for mature students. A flexible booking system for mentor support with mature students. A range of support workshops directed at mature students.	Evaluation of the impact of flexible learning and support packages using annual student surveys [Type 2] Measured through increased continuation, completion, and progression rates for mature male students [Type 2]

Provide stress management and work-life balance workshops.	Work with our student experience team to create a range of support workshops. Annual investment: £4000	A range of support workshops directed at male students.	
Activity 3 Financial assistance for care costs: Establish bursary category for students with adult caring responsibilities. Offer hardship fund for unexpected care-related expenses.	Adaptive practice from all staff and financial investment. Developing partnerships with local childcare providers. Annual investment: Bursary and Hardship fund £85,000	Improved access to higher education for mature students with caring responsibilities through the financial support available.	Evaluation of the impact of mature student financial support packages using annual student surveys using the OfS financial support evaluation toolkit or similar [Type 2] Additional student feedback from focus groups and authentic student voice activities [Type 2]

Risk	R3: PTA_3 PTS_2		
Objective 3	**Reduce the access and continuation gap between students with reported disabilities and those with no reported disabilities by improving access and continuation for students with reported disabilities.** Across the student lifecycle we aim to addresses the key elements of the risk such as, access issues for students with disabilities, higher risk of non-continuation due to costs and lack of personal support, the potential for these students to be excluded from the job market.		
Process			Impact
Activity	Input	Outcome	Method(s) of evaluation including type of evidence
Activity 1 Flexible learning options: Links to R2 activity 1 Ensure reasonable adjustments are made. Provide asynchronous learning materials and recorded lectures.	Work with our validating and accreditation partners to ensure all reasonable adjustments are made in a timely manner in line with legislation. Adaptive practice from all staff.	A range of comprehensive online learning materials for each course offered. Flexible learning options for students with some courses offering part time options, evening, and weekend classes.	Evaluation of the impact of flexible learning and support packages using annual student surveys [Type 2]

Allow part-time study options where possible. Provide modular learning.	Course development to allow for modular delivery. Annual investment: £2000	Modular provision to allow students to pick up studies when suitable to them.	
Activity 2 Academic/pastoral support: Start support pre-entry. Provide flexible options and times for support from HE mentors. Provide stress management and work-life balance workshops.	Introduce students to well-being team when student has accepted offer of place. Provide online mentoring for evening or weekend classes. Work with our student experience team to create a range of support workshops. Annual investment: £4000	Students are supported before the enrol. A flexible booking system for mentor support with disabled students. A range of support workshops directed at disabled students both before and on-course.	Evaluation of the impact of support using annual student surveys [Type 2]
Activity 3 Peer training and support: Provide training workshops for students to increase understanding of disabled issues.	Work with all students to increase understanding of disabilities. Annual investment: £2000	Increased peer support provides enhanced wellbeing to support continuation.	Data for continuation and completion rates for disabled students to increase [Type 2]
Activity 4 Encourage applications for DSA: Encourages students to apply for DSA. Offer hardship fund for unexpected expenses.	Adaptive practice from staff.	Improved access to higher education for disabled students through the financial support available.	Evaluation of the impact of disabled student financial support packages using annual student surveys and the OfS financial support evaluation toolkit or similar [Type 2] Additional student feedback from focus groups and authentic student voice activities [Type 2]

Risk	R4: PTA_3, PTS_3		
Objective 4	**Increase access and reduce the gaps in continuation and completion for students with declared mental health conditions and with none and ensure the four-year average continuation and completion rates do not decrease for students with declared mental health conditions.** This will address the key elements of the risk including, poor mental health following the COVID-19 pandemic, impact on motivation and self-confidence, specific vulnerable groups affected (students with disabilities, low-income backgrounds, LGBTQ+, mature students, and those with care experience), challenges of transitioning to traditional university settings, risk of low attainment, continuation, and completion rates. We aim to improve mental health support and create an inclusive learning environment that enhances motivation, self-confidence, and academic success for students with mental health concerns, thereby increasing continuation, attainment, and completion.		
Process			Impact
Activity	Input	Outcome	Method(s) of evaluation including type of evidence
Activity 1 Inclusive learning environment: Develop a mental health training program for all staff to increase awareness. Ensure course materials and case study examples represent diverse perspectives. Create safe spaces for various student groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ resource centre).	Training for HE staff. Following training staff to implement change in course materials. Work with our ALS team to include HE students in all initiatives regarding safe spaces and resources for vulnerable student groups. Create case studies about students with mental health issues and how they overcame them. Annual investment: £3000	Trained staff who can provide a non-bias approach to all students. Course materials that reflect diverse perspectives. Safe spaces for vulnerable student groups. Case studies for internal and external promotions.	Anecdotal feedback from participants [Type 1] Feedback from NSS and inhouse surveys [Type 2] Measured through increased continuation, completion, and progression rates for mature male students [Type 2]
Activity 2 Wellbeing initiatives: Implement a wellbeing programme for physical and mental health.	HE experience co-ordinators to arrange wellbeing program with talks and workshops from appropriate outside agencies.	A program of events, talks and workshops to be help throughout the year for all students to attend.	Annual tracking of changes in progression for these groups using internal data and the Office for Students dashboard [Type 2]

Offer stress management and resilience-building workshops. Promote work-life balance through time management training.	Annual investment: £5000		Feedback from NSS and inhouse surveys [Type 2]
Activity 3 Mental health tracking: Annually survey students about their mental health experiences and needs Monitor continuation, attainment, and completion rates for different student groups. Establish a diverse HE Student board to provide ongoing feedback. Regularly review and update policies and programmes based on collected data.	Course leaders to monitor retention, attainment, and completion through mid-year and full year course reporting. Student union to recruit and run HE Student board. HE management to review policies and courses. Annual investment: £2000	In-house student survey to reflect NSS which will provide us with individual course data for groups too small for NSS reporting. Clear course feedback on all students journeys with anecdotal evidence regarding challenges for various student groups. Direct student feedback. Up to date policies and courses reflecting student feedback.	Evaluation of impact with annual student surveys [Type 2] Annual tracking of changes in retention and continuation, completion and attainment for these groups using internal data and the Office for Students dashboard [Type 2] Additional student feedback from focus groups and student voice activities [Type 2]

Risk	R5: PTP_1, PTS_5
Objective 5	**Reduce the gaps in attainment and graduate progression between students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and other students by improving outcomes for students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds consistently across all ethnicities.** This objective aims to increase awareness and accessibility of higher education among underrepresented groups, combat stereotypes and misconceptions about who "belongs" in higher education, create a more diverse and inclusive university culture, provide targeted support to address specific barriers faced by different communities. We will foster an inclusive higher education environment that actively promotes and supports participation from all ethnic and social backgrounds, ensuring equal opportunities and representation across diverse communities.

Process			Impact
Activity	Input	Outcome	Method(s) of evaluation including type of evidence
Activity 1 Student ambassador programs: Recruit students from diverse ethnic and other backgrounds to serve as ambassadors for the university. Organise internal and outreach events in underrepresented communities led by these ambassadors.	Working with our student's union and HE mentor we will identify and train student ambassadors who can work with local community groups. Annual investment: £6000	Create a student ambassadors' scheme. A series of events throughout the year to encourage applications from students with diverse ethnic backgrounds.	Anecdotal feedback from participants [Type 1] Monitoring and reporting from applications [Type 2]
Activity 2 Partnerships with community organisations: Collaborate with cultural centres, ethnic community organisations, and religious institutions. Offer information sessions and workshops in community settings.	HE managers and marketing to identify and work with diverse local groups to set up workshops and information sessions in the community. Annual investment: £4000	A relationship with several diverse community groups. A package of information and guidance leaflets to support applications from diverse ethnic groups in our community.	Anecdotal feedback from participants [Type 1] Monitoring and reporting from applications [Type 2]

Activity 3 Anti-racism and bias training: Implement mandatory anti-racism and unconscious bias training for staff. Offer ongoing workshops and discussions on topics related to race, ethnicity, and inclusion. Provide resources for addressing and reporting incidents of discrimination or bias.	As members of the Black FE Leadership Group, we will work with them and other groups to provide training. Create an online reporting system for students. Annual investment: £3000	A comprehensive training program for students and staff with ongoing workshops around race, ethnicity, and inclusion. A robust non-bias online reporting system with a quick response rate.	Anecdotal feedback from participants [Type 1] Evaluation of the impact of training packages using annual student surveys [Type 2] Online feedback form to close the loop with reporting [Type 1]

Whole provider approach

East Sussex College is dedicated to collaborating with local employment and education initiatives to fulfil its higher education (HE) responsibilities within the local economy. Our strategies aim to support local communities in achieving their Higher in Further Education goals.

We develop our educational offerings in partnership with employers, focusing on key sectors in East Sussex to address local skill needs. As an active member of Skills East Sussex, the county's Employment and Skills Board, we directly engage with employers through specialised task groups in Creative and Digital, Engineering, Computing and IT, Visitor Economy, and Healthcare sectors, all of which are LSIP priorities.

The college provides vocationally focused courses, positioning itself as a viable alternative to traditional universities. We facilitate internal progression from level 3 courses and have established pathways for both younger students and adults from the local community to access our HE programs. These pathways are tailored to meet the specific needs of each campus and its surrounding community.

ESCG are proud to attract students from diverse backgrounds, including those with protected characteristics, working professionals, and individuals from non-traditional HE backgrounds. Many of our students are experiencing HE for the first time, thanks to our strong connections with adult education and community sector providers who promote our FE and HE courses as aspirational and supportive of social mobility.

Our unique approach offers smaller class sizes, classroom-based instruction, and personalised support within a dedicated HE student environment. Combined with reduced fees and a supportive bursary system, we aim to encourage participation from students who might not typically pursue university education.

HE Aims

- We aim to ensure access to our Higher Education for all students, whatever their background.

- We aim to create an inclusive learning environment where all students have the support to continue with their studies, regardless of their background or current circumstances.

- We aim to eliminate barriers to further study or employment for all students, whatever challenges they face.

- We aim to offer high quality provision.

- We aim to ensure financial sustainability.

To achieve our strategic objectives and performance targets, we will rely on data-driven decision-making. Our commitment spans the entire student journey, from initial access through academic success to career progression. We have developed this plan through extensive collaboration, incorporating insights from various sources including college data, Higher Education Board discussions, course-level meetings, and student forums. We have also considered feedback from both internal and external student surveys, as well as our marketing strategies.

This comprehensive plan will be a crucial component of our Higher Education documentation and will be subject to review by the college's Governing body as part of their auditing process. In alignment with our overarching goals, we have pinpointed specific areas for enhancement that we believe will significantly impact our Higher Education offerings.

Strategic College Aims

East Sussex College Group has a clear overarching strategy in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as obliged under the Equality Act 2010.

1. **Commitment to Equality**: The college actively champions equality, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring these values are integrated into every aspect of our culture and operations for both staff and students.

2. **Inclusive Environment**: The college aims to create an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected, regardless of their background.

3. **Continuous Improvement**: The college is dedicated to continuously improving practices to support equality and diversity, making it a central part of our success strategy.

4. **Support and Resources**: The college provides various support and resources to ensure that all members of the college community can thrive in an inclusive setting.

We work with our community to raise and work on issues of equality and to promote the advantages of a diverse and mixed society. Our curriculum aims to develop in a manner that meets the needs of our community and the ability of our students to compete in the local, national, and international arena.

To cover the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010, we aim to:

● Ensure the development of a curriculum that enables all sections of our community to raise their aspirations and to achieve their maximum potential.

● Support learning programmes at appropriate and accessible levels for all potential learners, enabling progression.

● Promote equality, diversity and inclusion within the content and delivery of our learning programmes. Provide a learning and working environment, which is safe and free of bullying and harassment relating to all protected characteristics. Provide a learning environment, which is accessible to all.

● Work with local bodies, statutory and voluntary, to develop and provide a college which is central to our communities and their sustainability.

● Actively participate in the moves to promote and regenerate our communities as a place which welcomes people from diverse cultures, faiths and beliefs, and ways of living.

● Celebrate the achievements of individuals and groups who have assisted the progression to equality of opportunity.

● Aim to recruit, retain, and develop a workforce that reflects the diverse nature of the locality and employ the absolute best staff available to enable us to reach our aims.

● Use positive action to help meet the College targets.

● Ensure student representation is embedded at all levels of committee structures at the college and plays a vital role in the development and assurance of our HE offer.

Overcoming Barriers to Higher Education

Access Challenges:

Financial constraints pose a significant obstacle for many students pursuing higher education. To address this, our college has implemented several measures:

- Equitable fee structure benefiting all students.
- Bursary program for low-income, disadvantaged students.
- Year-round hardship loan availability.
- Collaboration with local groups and Leaving Care team for outreach.
- Targeted marketing to underrepresented groups.
- Uni Connect team focusing on students from POLAR4 Quintiles 1 and 2 and other marginalised groups.
- Dedicated schools liaison team promoting educational pathways from Foundation Level to Level 6.

Addressing Barriers to Success:

Many of our students are first-generation higher education learners. We have implemented strategies to support their success:

- Universal interview process to assess student suitability and identify potential obstacles.
- Adaptations for students with disabilities.
- Small class sizes and personalised instruction.
- Comprehensive pastoral care.
- Disability Student Allowance (DSA) application support.
- Access to HE Mentors for additional academic and well-being guidance.

Tackling Progression Challenges:

While our courses align with local employment needs, graduates may face limited job prospects, particularly in some areas. We are addressing this through:

- Strategic course offerings in areas identified by LSIPs.
- On-campus careers service for all students.
- Partnership with National Careers Service for broader resources.
- All HE courses have work-related modules, preparing for specific employments.

Quality Improvement Cycle

As part of our ongoing improvement efforts, we will annually review the effectiveness of:

- Internal progression and outreach work.
- Our marketing approach.
- Recruitment processes.
- Student support.

This review ensures these activities are completed and have the most significant impact on our enrolments and participation. This approach builds on our evaluation of activities in previous years

and will form the basis of our proposed evaluation approach to our HE Access and Participation Plan.

Curriculum Offer

Our student demographic primarily resides within a 25-mile radius of their campus. Through open days, internal events, outreach work, student feedback, and interviews, we have identified the following areas to support our targets:

1. **Curriculum Strategy**:

   - Ensure currency and suitability of our HE curriculum offer.
   - Provide multiple delivery options, including flexible modes of study suitable for non-traditional students.
   - Meet the needs of employers.

2. **Expansion of HE Offer**:

   - Address current and future skills needs of employers and local residents.
   - Align with local labour market intelligence.

3. **Alternative Routes**:

Continue exploring alternative routes to HE for our disadvantaged students.

Internal Progression and Outreach

The college actively engages in internal progression events and community outreach. It hosts open events and taster sessions and conducts school visits, including Year 11, 12, and 13 students, to introduce HE options. It has strong links with schools and sixth form colleges and provides campus tours, and ongoing communication and support to prospective students, their families, and educators. To broaden its reach, the college participates in UCAS fairs, highlighting its higher education programs to a wider range of young people in the region. All campuses have busy social media accounts. Additionally, the college sets up targeted information stands at community events, to help attract a broad variety of students to our HE courses.

Student consultation

We have set up student consultation groups with our HE Academic and Wellbeing Lead and Students' Union, to gather student opinion on matters such as accessibility, attainment, and success for specific groups of students. These focused meetings have helped us to gain understanding from our current students about issues that might affect them and prevent them achieving their aims. Cost of living, and the additional mandatory costs our Counselling student face, was the most prevalent theme in 2024.

We have also undertaken focus groups from our FE college students and student reps from Level 3 courses, to gain their views. These student progress to universities locally and further afield. The emerging theme from this group was lack of understanding about the options open to them.

We have also consulted our students about this APP. It was the subject of a student focus group as part of the initial stages, and feedback was positive.

Moving forwards, we will continue to develop our student focus groups with both prospective students and our own, to monitor and evaluate student engagement. In addition, we will form an APP Steering Group to regularly monitor and evaluate this plan.

- **APP Steering Group:** A steering group, to include our HE Student Union, HE mentors and HE academic officers alongside our HE managers and academic staff, who will meet regularly to review progress against all objectives in this plan. Through these discussions, the group will identify themes or areas for a 'deeper dive,' which will each form the subject of a thematic Student Voices Workshop.

- **HE Student Board**: Our HE Student board will have an APP section where we provide updates and evaluations and invite our HE student course representatives aiming to feed forward the voices of students including those who identify with the characteristic or demographic under discussion. Outcomes from this Board will be reported back into the APP Steering Group to inform our ongoing actions, as well as our evaluation and monitoring approach.

Evaluation of the plan

This section outlines the evaluation framework for our intervention strategies. Our evaluation processes are built into the intervention strategies and are based on the OFS three types of evaluation, Type 1 Narrative, Type 2 Empirical Enquiry, Type 3 Causality. Please see tables R1 & 3, R2, R4, R5.

Improving evaluation quality and quantity for our access and participation plan from 2025/26 onward is a strategic priority. As an HE in FE provider, we have small groups, with small and sometimes suppressed external data. Because of this, we are taking the approach of our current plan setting a baseline for us to work from. The data collected from the first year of intervention strategies will be used as benchmarks for the following years. This data will be qualitive and quantitative, ensuring accuracy with statistics, and depth with student, staff, and stakeholder feedback.

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

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

1. Providing coherent explanations for our actions and their rationale

2. Ensuring our claims are research and data based.

3. Demonstrating that our interventions are associated with beneficial results, particularly when comparing outcomes for activity participants to relevant comparator groups.

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

Given the nature of our inclusive and targeted activities, we will evaluate individual components within each intervention strategy rather than assessing entire strategies as a whole.

The Plan's monitoring and evaluation will be integrated into the daily responsibilities of all teaching staff. Evidence supporting evaluations will primarily be reported to the College's APP Steering Group, the HE Student Board and HE Academic Boards.

This evaluation will outline activities undertaken and progress made on each target and intervention, as published in the Fees, investments, and targets document. A detailed evaluation summary of intervention activities will be published annually on the College's website.

Provision of information to students

Through our social media campaigns and targeted communications with prospective students, applicants, offer holders and current students, we ensure that students are well informed about our HE strategies and financial support available. This information is also available in printed materials such as the prospectus. These are shared at recruitment and outreach events and referenced at presentations at higher education fairs, open days, focused advice sessions and applicant events.

Bursary and Hardship fund

Our current bursary currently pays up to a maximum £500 per student if they fall into one or more of issued categories. Our plans for our 2025-26 bursary include eligibility categories for:

- household income is below £28,000 per year (all students except Counselling).
- household income is below £34,000 per year (Counselling students).
- minority ethnicity, or from Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller backgrounds.
- permanent home address is in an under-represented area in Higher education (POLAR 4 Quintile 1 or 2 area).
- in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance or be in the process of applying for DSA.
- are an adult carer in receipt of a Carer's Allowance.
- have been in receipt of FSM.
- are a care leaver or estranged student.

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

Within this plan, we have added categories to include allowances for care providers, students who received FSM, care leavers and estranged students, and students who are training to be Counsellors. This will be implemented over the life of the plan.

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

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

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

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD2019) list our campus neighbourhoods in rank order with Hastings being 13th most deprived area in the country, Eastbourne 106th, Redbridge 160st, Lewes 195th out of the 318 boroughs.

| Local Authority District name (2019)	IMD - Rank of average rank
Hastings	13
Eastbourne	106
Redbridge	160
Lewes	194
Total boroughs	318

ESCG describes itself as a Widening Participation institution. The Hastings campus is situated as 13th within the UK's most socio-economically disadvantaged communities, and Eastbourne also has large areas of deprivation, synonymous with many coastal towns around the UK.

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

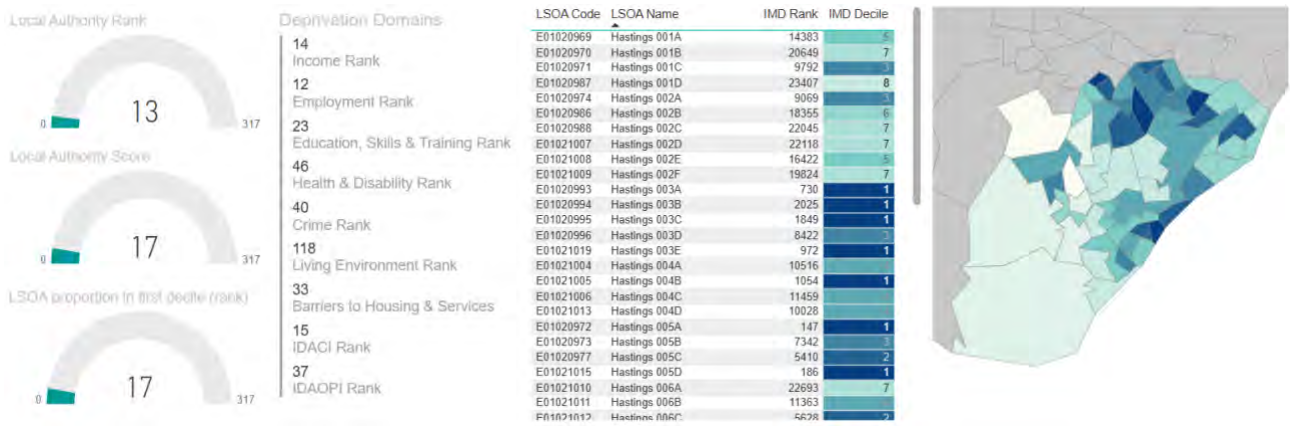|	TUNDRA MSOA	TUNDR LSOA	POLAR 4	Adult HE 2011
Hastings, TN34 1BA	Quintile 1	Quintile 1	Quintile 1	Quintile 3
Eastbourne, BN21 2UF	Quintile 5	Quintile 4	Quintile 2	Quintile 4
Ilford, IG1 2DR	Quintile 5	Quintile 5	Quintile 5	Quintile 4
Lewes, BN7 1PA	Quintile 5	Quintile 5	Quintile 5	Quintile 5

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

In addition, our current student profiles show how we are already meeting some of our targets in providing access to these groups of students.
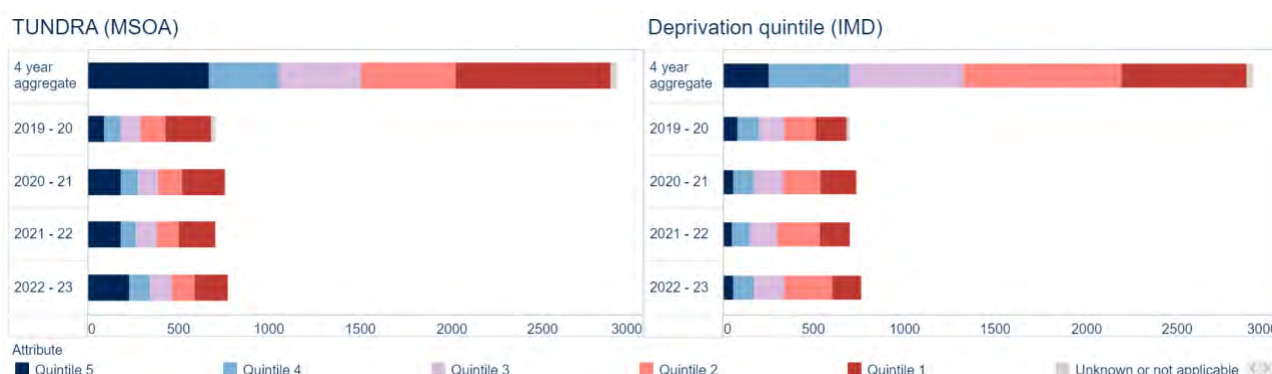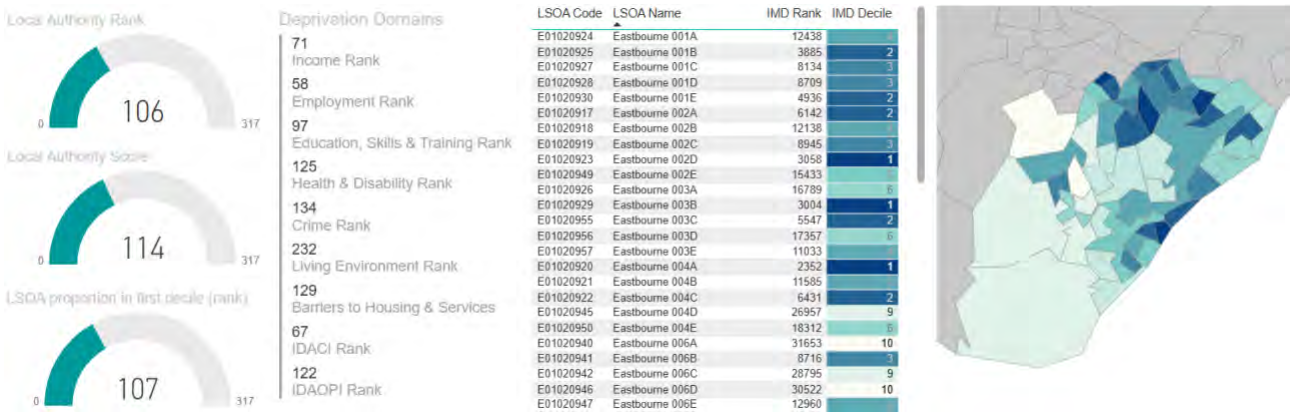

This shows a significant proportion of all our students are living in quintiles 1 and 2. The following are infographics showing the Indices of Deprivation locations surrounding our main student campuses in the Southeast of England.
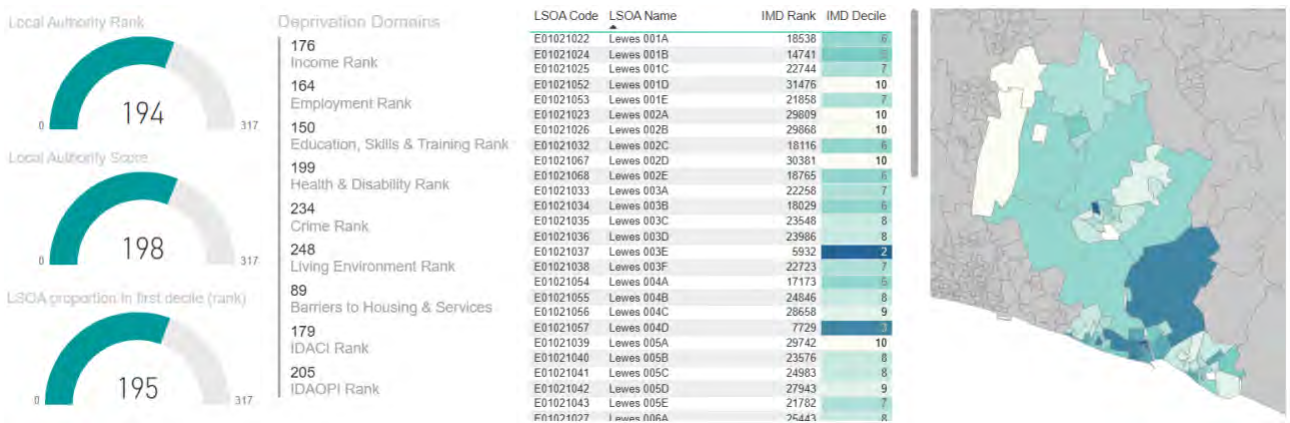
Hastings is ranked 13 most deprived local authority in the country, and 12th for employment and 23rd for Education, Skills, and Training.
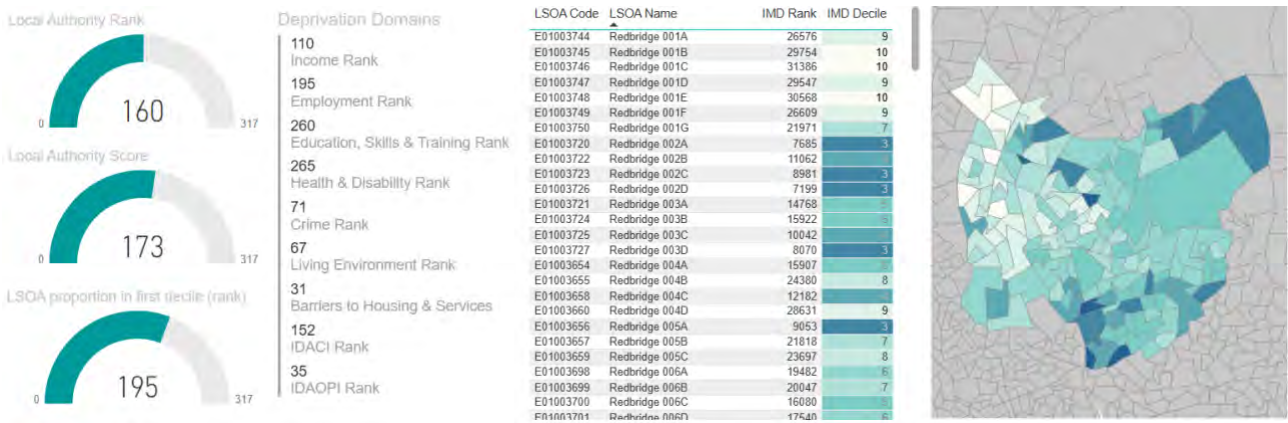
Local Authority Rank: 13
Local Authority Score: 17
LSOA proportion in first decile (rank): 17

Deprivation Domains
- 14 Income Rank
- 12 Employment Rank
- 23 Education, Skills & Training Rank
- 46 Health & Disability Rank
- 40 Crime Rank
- 118 Living Environment Rank
- 33 Barriers to Housing & Services
- 15 IDACI Rank
- 37 IDAOPI Rank

LSOA Code	LSOA Name	IMD Rank	IMD Decile
E01020969	Hastings 001A	14383	5
E01020970	Hastings 001B	20649	7
E01020971	Hastings 001C	9792	3
E01020987	Hastings 001D	23407	8
E01020974	Hastings 002A	9069	3
E01020986	Hastings 002B	18355	6
E01020988	Hastings 002C	22045	7
E01021007	Hastings 002D	22118	7
E01021008	Hastings 002E	16422	5
E01021009	Hastings 002F	19824	7
E01020993	Hastings 003A	730	1
E01020994	Hastings 003B	2025	1
E01020995	Hastings 003C	1849	1
E01020996	Hastings 003D	8422	3
E01021019	Hastings 003E	972	1
E01021004	Hastings 004A	10516	3
E01021005	Hastings 004B	1054	1
E01021006	Hastings 004C	11459	4
E01021013	Hastings 004D	10028	4
E01020972	Hastings 005A	147	1
E01020973	Hastings 005B	7342	3
E01020977	Hastings 005C	5410	2
E01021015	Hastings 005D	186	1
E01021010	Hastings 006A	22693	7
E01021011	Hastings 006B	11363	4
E01021012	Hastings 006C	5628	2

Eastbourne is ranked 71st most deprived local authority and 58th for employment, 97th for Education, Skills, and Training.

Local Authority Rank: 106
Local Authority Score: 114
LSOA proportion in first decile (rank): 107

Deprivation Domains
- 71 Income Rank
- 58 Employment Rank
- 97 Education, Skills & Training Rank
- 125 Health & Disability Rank
- 134 Crime Rank
- 232 Living Environment Rank
- 129 Barriers to Housing & Services
- 67 IDACI Rank
- 122 IDAOPI Rank

LSOA Code	LSOA Name	IMD Rank	IMD Decile
E01020924	Eastbourne 001A	12438	4
E01020925	Eastbourne 001B	3885	2
E01020927	Eastbourne 001C	8134	3
E01020928	Eastbourne 001D	8709	3
E01020930	Eastbourne 001E	4936	2
E01020917	Eastbourne 002A	6142	2
E01020918	Eastbourne 002B	12138	4
E01020919	Eastbourne 002C	8945	3
E01020923	Eastbourne 002D	3058	1
E01020949	Eastbourne 002E	15433	5
E01020926	Eastbourne 003A	16789	6
E01020929	Eastbourne 003B	3004	1
E01020955	Eastbourne 003C	5547	2
E01020956	Eastbourne 003D	17357	6
E01020957	Eastbourne 003E	11033	4
E01020920	Eastbourne 004A	2352	1
E01020921	Eastbourne 004B	11585	4
E01020922	Eastbourne 004C	6431	2
E01020945	Eastbourne 004D	26957	9
E01020950	Eastbourne 004E	18312	6
E01020940	Eastbourne 006A	31653	10
E01020941	Eastbourne 006B	8716	3
E01020942	Eastbourne 006C	28795	9
E01020946	Eastbourne 006D	30522	10
E01020947	Eastbourne 006E	12960	4

Lewes ranked 194th most deprived local authority and 164th for employment, 150th for Education, Skills, and Training.

Local Authority Rank: 194
Local Authority Score: 198
LSOA proportion in first decile (rank): 195

Deprivation Domains
- 176 Income Rank
- 164 Employment Rank
- 150 Education, Skills & Training Rank
- 199 Health & Disability Rank
- 234 Crime Rank
- 248 Living Environment Rank
- 89 Barriers to Housing & Services
- 179 IDACI Rank
- 205 IDAOPI Rank

| LSOA Code	LSOA Name	IMD Rank	IMD Decile
E01021022	Lewes 001A	18538	6
E01021024	Lewes 001B	14741	5
E01021025	Lewes 001C	22744	7
E01021052	Lewes 001D	31476	10
E01021053	Lewes 001E	21858	7
E01021023	Lewes 002A	29809	10
E01021026	Lewes 002B	29868	10
E01021032	Lewes 002C	18116	6
E01021067	Lewes 002D	30381	10
E01021068	Lewes 002E	18765	6
E01021033	Lewes 003A	22258	7
E01021034	Lewes 003B	18029	6
E01021035	Lewes 003C	23548	8
E01021036	Lewes 003D	23986	8
E01021037	Lewes 003E	5932	2
E01021038	Lewes 003F	22723	7
E01021054	Lewes 004A	17173	5
E01021055	Lewes 004B	24846	8
E01021056	Lewes 004C	28658	9
E01021057	Lewes 004D	7729	3
E01021039	Lewes 005A	29742	10
E01021040	Lewes 005B	23576	8
E01021041	Lewes 005C	24983	8
E01021042	Lewes 005D	27943	9
E01021043	Lewes 005E	21782	7
E01021027	Lewes 006A	25443	8

Redbridge 160th most deprived local authority and 195th for employment, 260th for Education, Skills, and Training.

LSOA Code	LSOA Name	IMD Rank	IMD Decile
E01003744	Redbridge 001A	26576	9
E01003745	Redbridge 001B	29754	10
E01003746	Redbridge 001C	31386	10
E01003747	Redbridge 001D	29547	9
E01003748	Redbridge 001E	30568	10
E01003749	Redbridge 001F	26609	9
E01003750	Redbridge 001G	21971	7
E01003720	Redbridge 002A	7685	3
E01003722	Redbridge 002B	11062	
E01003723	Redbridge 002C	8981	3
E01003726	Redbridge 002D	7199	3
E01003721	Redbridge 003A	14768	
E01003724	Redbridge 003B	15922	
E01003725	Redbridge 003C	10042	
E01003727	Redbridge 003D	8070	3
E01003654	Redbridge 004A	15907	
E01003655	Redbridge 004B	24380	8
E01003658	Redbridge 004C	12182	
E01003660	Redbridge 004D	28631	9
E01003656	Redbridge 005A	9053	3
E01003657	Redbridge 005B	21818	7
E01003659	Redbridge 005C	23697	8
E01003698	Redbridge 006A	19482	6
E01003699	Redbridge 006B	20047	7
E01003700	Redbridge 006C	16080	
E01003701	Redbridge 006D	17540	

These locations show a breadth of deprivation, and although our data is presented as one set of figures, there are vast differences between the campus areas and the students that they attract. However, our plan covers all our students and the mitigations the interventions address, will benefit all students, whichever campus they attend.

Access data
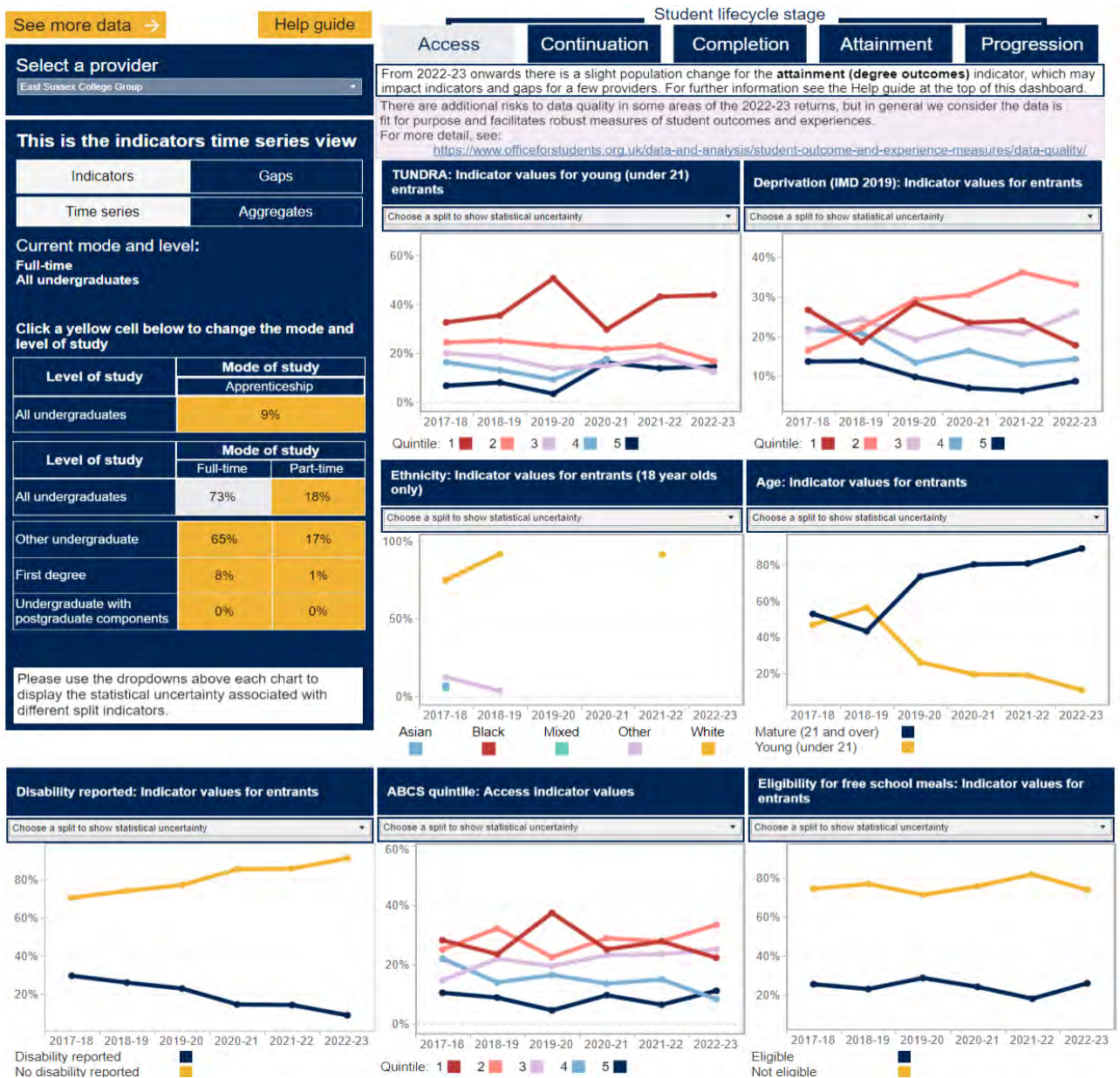
Our age indicator values show how we have doubled our intake of over-21-year-olds in the past 5 years. This is positive in terms of reaching out to non-traditional groups, but we now need to increase access to our under-21-year-olds. Nationally 71% of HE students are under 21, and we attract 11%.

Nearly 50% of our students are over 31 as this 4-year data from 2019-20 to 2022-23 shows, meaning they are likely to have adult caring responsibilities which can impact their ability to study.

Student or course characteristic	Attribute	Full-time undergraduates	Part-time undergraduates	Apprenticeship undergraduates	Full-time postgraduates	Part-time postgraduates	Apprenticeship postgraduates
Age on entry	Under 21 years	22.9%	22.4%	13.7%	[N/A]	[N/A]	[N/A]
	21 to 30 years	27.5%	27.9%	33.0%	[N/A]	[N/A]	[N/A]
	Under 25 years	[N/A]	[N/A]	[N/A]	54.8%	16.9%	[DPL]
	25 to 30 years	[N/A]	[N/A]	[N/A]	[DPL]	22.9%	[DPL]
	31 years and over	49.6%	49.8%	53.3%	38.7%	60.2%	[DPL]

Our data for Disability reports show that during the same period the proportion of students accessing our courses with a declared disability has reduced. Our findings suggest that this may be due to an increase in mature students who are either undiagnosed or do not wish to declare any disability.
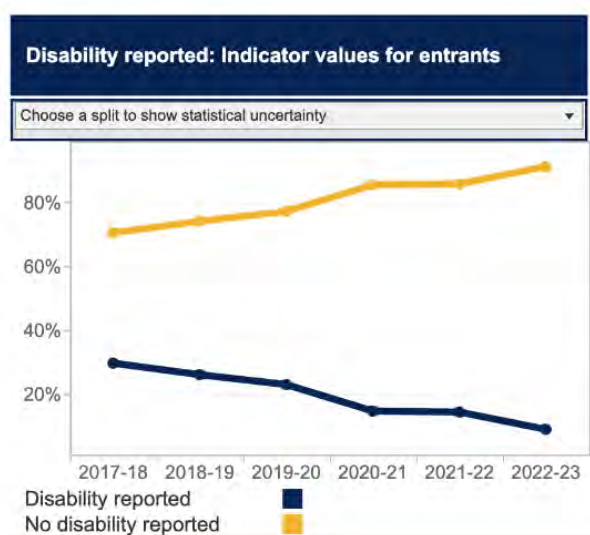
ESC Disability declared on enrolment 2023/24
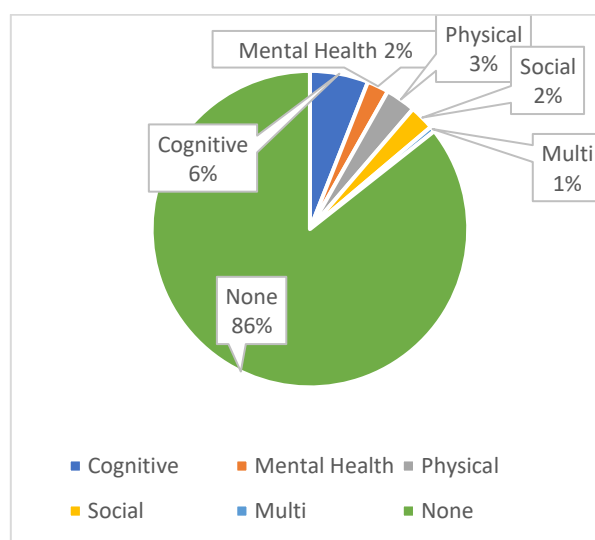
ESC Disability declared 2023/24.

Our internal data for 2023/4 shows 14% of our students have a declared disability and 2% of these declare their mental health as a disability. Nationally, the figure for all providers is 4.5%.[6] As 1 in 6 of the UK population will declare a mental health concern in any given week[7], and OfS data suggested that students are significantly more anxious than the general population of Great Britain[8], we recognise that making our courses accessible to all with mental health issues, and all disabilities, is a priority.

Our Associations Between Characteristics of Students (ABCS) quintile data, below, shows a post-covid drop in Quintile 1 (least likely to access HE) and an increase in Quintile 5 (most likely to access HE) for ABCS. Our percentage of students with Eligibility for FSM has increased slightly. Our internal mechanism for measuring FSM is minimal and is on the action plans for improving data collection.

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

Student or course characteristic	Attribute	Full-time undergraduates	Part-time undergraduates	Apprenticeship undergraduates	Full-time postgraduates	Part-time postgraduates	Apprenticeship postgraduates
Eligibility for free school meals	Eligible	160	30	[DP]	[N/A]	[N/A]	[N/A]
	Not eligible	420	100	60	[N/A]	[N/A]	[N/A]

ABCS quintile: Access indicator values

Choose a split to show statistical uncertainty

Quintile: 1 2 3 4 5

Eligibility for free school meals: Indicator values for entrants

Choose a split to show statistical uncertainty

Eligible / Not eligible
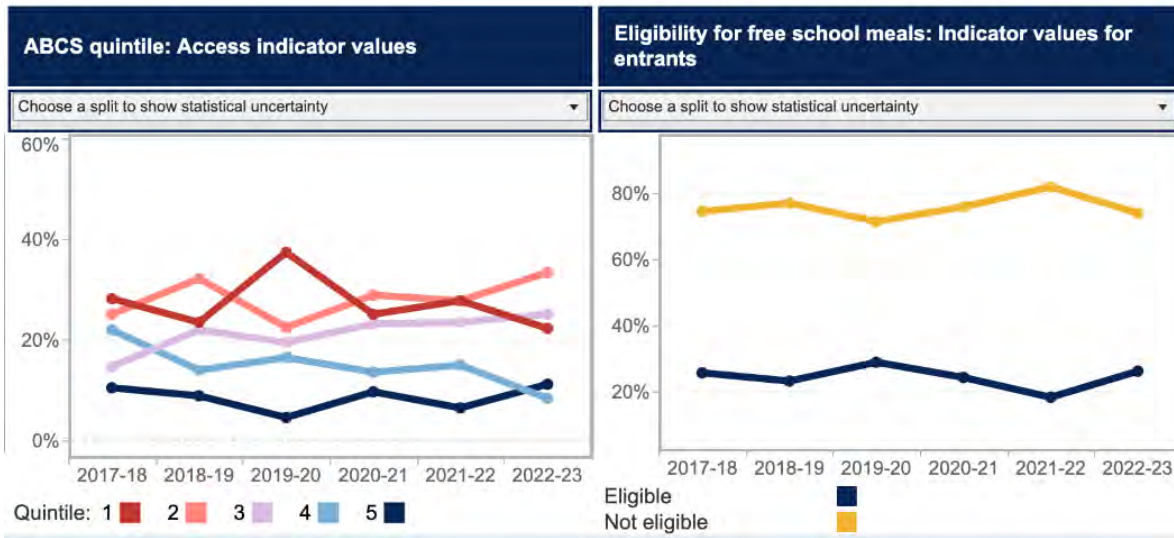
Nationwide, 24.6% of school children are eligible for FSM, and 18% study at HE level. This table shows over 4 years that 38% of our full-time students were eligible, over double the national level. Data to track students eligible for free school meals is relatively new, so our mature students, who make the majority of our HE students, cannot be measured in this way.

Continuation data

2023/4	Mode		Address					Disability							Ethnicity					Sex	
% of total	FT	PT	Quintile 1	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5	Disability	Mental Health	Cognitive	Physical	Social	Multi	None	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	Male	Female
Access % of total	92	8	23	34	22	14	7	15	2	6	3	6	1	86	94	3	2	1	1	44	56
% of non-continued	8	4	15	37	29	14	5	15	2	<1	6	5	<1	85	92	5	0	1	1	56	46

For continuation data, we have looked at students who withdraw from their studies during the year as percentage of students who start the year. Our internal data shows 57% of our students live in Quintiles 1&2, but when we look at non-continuation rates, 52% of them are from these areas. 56% of student are Quintile 2&3 but these make up 66% of non-continuers. Physically disabled students are 3% of our intake but 6% do not continue.

Data is extremely small for our ethnic minority students, but there is a small indication that Asian students withdraw at a greater percentage rate than they enrol, but not enough to focus on one ethnicity.

14% of our students did not continue during 2023/24. When looking at the 5-year data, the non-continuation rate of males is consistently higher than that of females and that the male 51+ age group is the one most at risk.

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Non-continuation rate	14%	11%	7%	15%	14%
Continuation rate	86%	89%	93%	85%	86%
Non-continuation rate Male	15%	15%	9%	18%	17%
Non-continuation rate Female	14%	9%	7%	13%	11%

	U21	26-30	31-40	41-50	51+
% Male access	62 15%	117 30%	124 31%	76 19%	22 5%
% Male non-continuation	12 18%	25 20%	14 10%	15 18%	8 34%

Our data also shows our Continuation dropped post-covid after a brief peak when students were able to repeat the year. This drop is in line with All Providers data, though the recovery has been quicker as a small provider. However, our continuation for Under 21s falls below the All-Providers average.
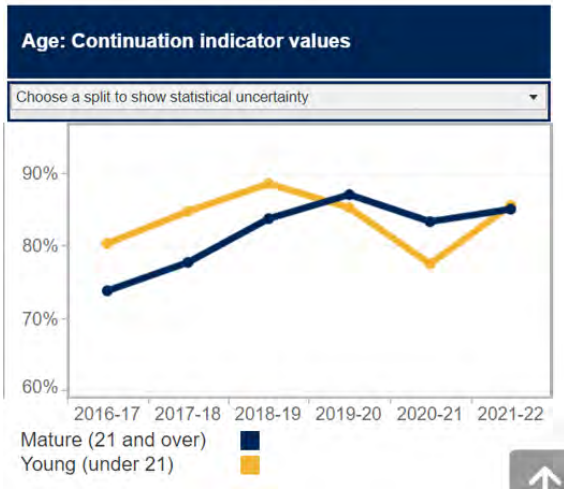
ESCHE Students continuation
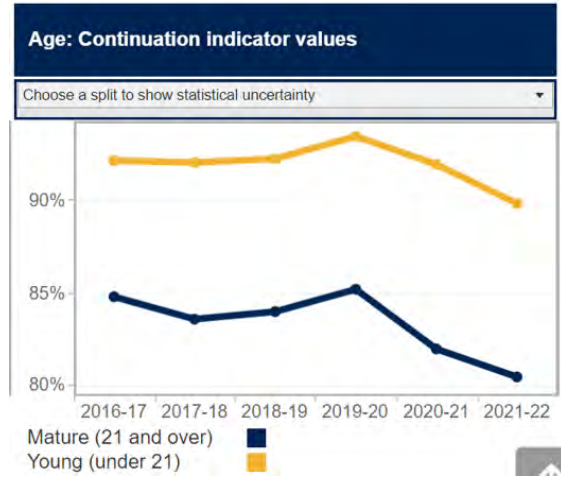
All Providers continuation

We can also see that our continuation values for students with Disabilities declared has made recovery, but for these students, is still not to the level of All Providers. In addition, the 7% gap between students with and without a disability is much greater than the 0.2% gap from All Providers.
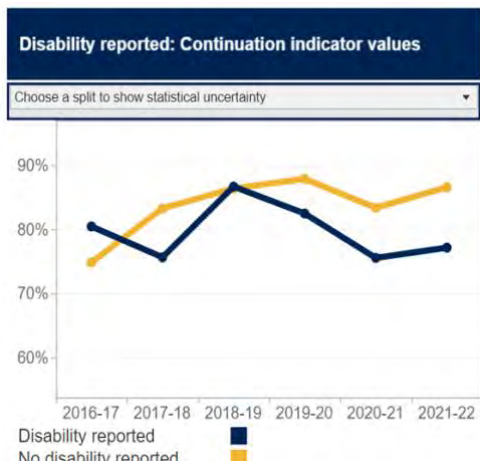
ESC HE Students continuation with Disability reported
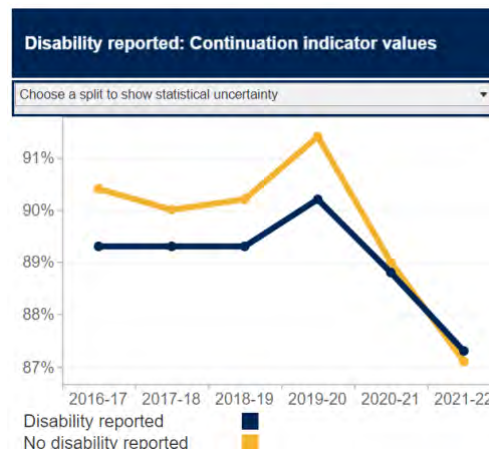
All Providers Students continuation with Disability reported

Continuation indicator values for: Overall
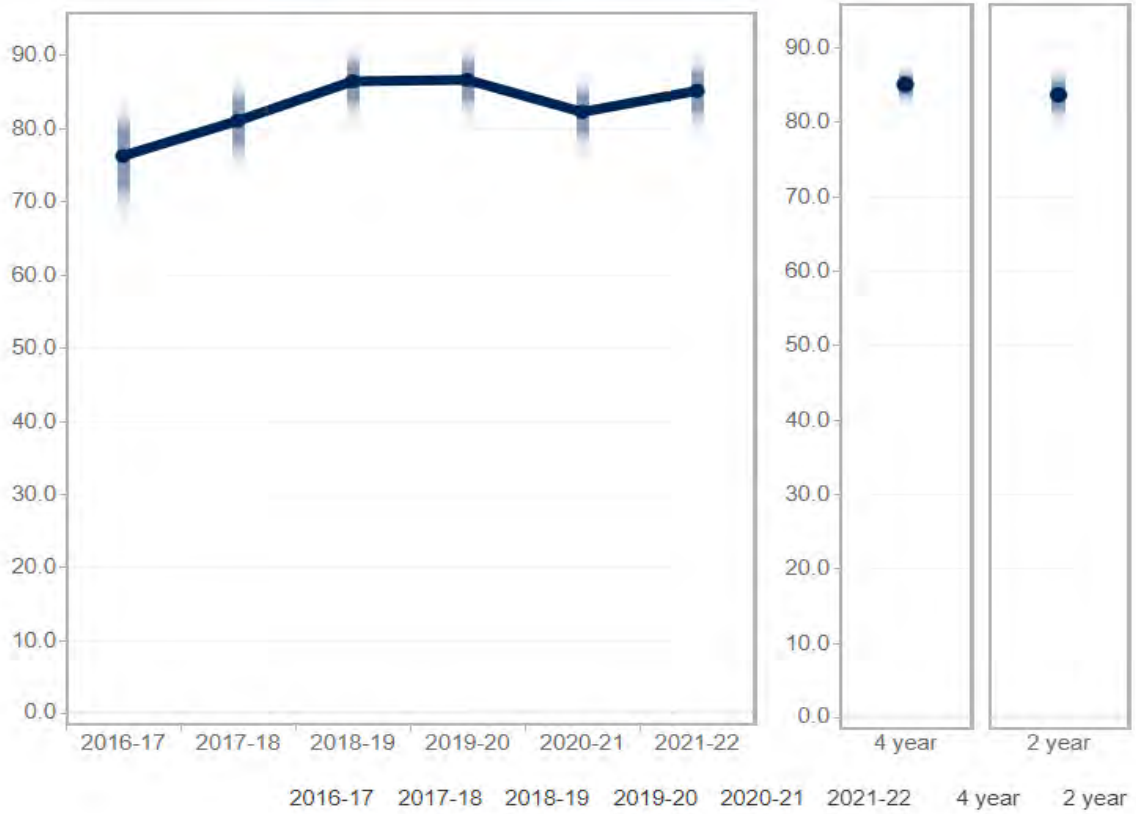
Overall our continuation rate is increasing positively post covid.

Completion data
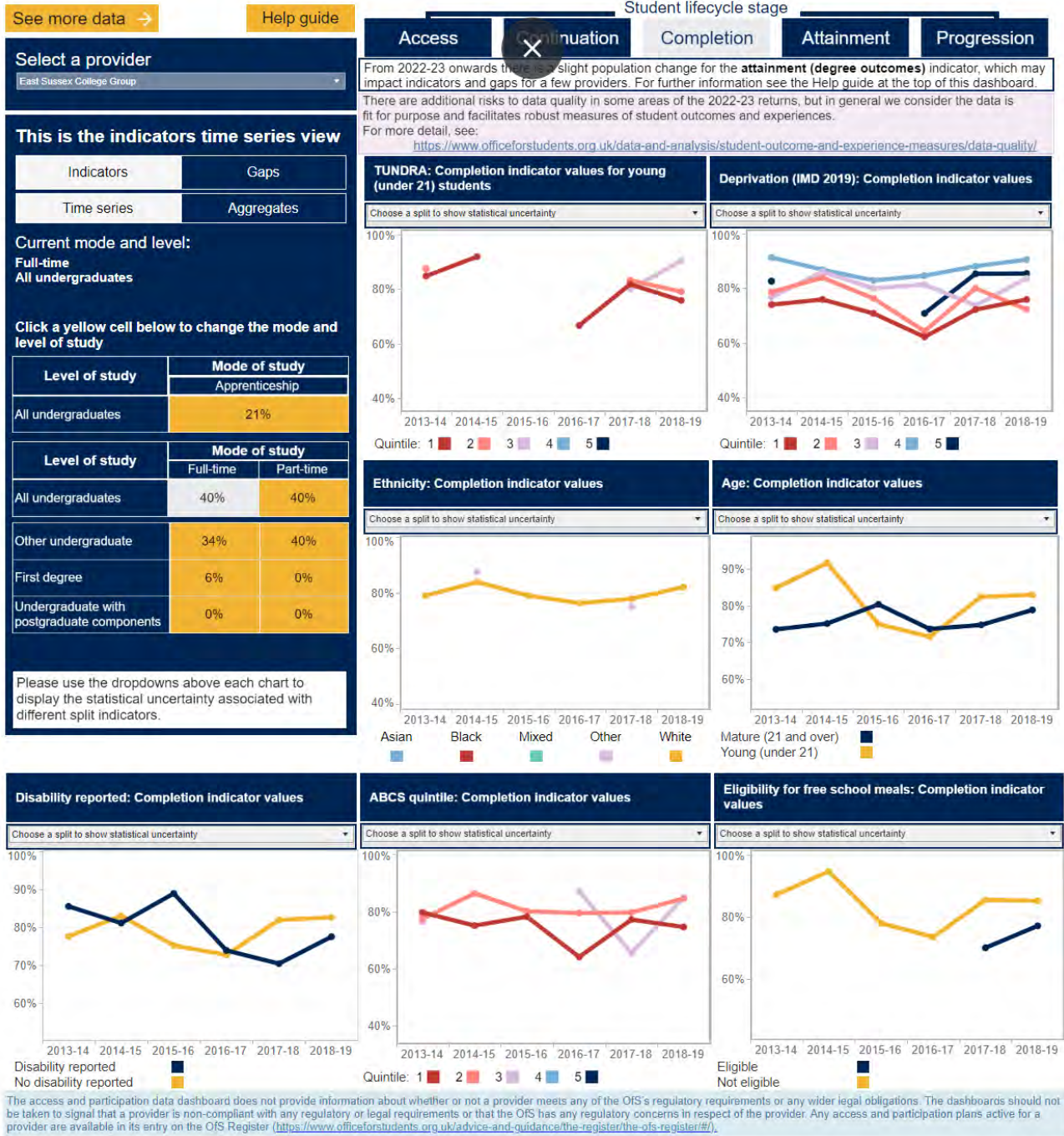
Our data up to 2019 shows that 81% of students were completing all their yearly study intentions within 13 calendar months of the start of their year. We will expect to see arise when Covid19 interruptions to study are included.

We also know that some of our students need a little longer when outside factors, such as completing the necessary mandatory work placement hours, can be beyond a student's control. However, when comparing some of our rate to All Providers, we can see that we lag 7% points behind the average for student with declared disabilities.

ESC HE Students completion with Disability reported

All Providers Disability reported data
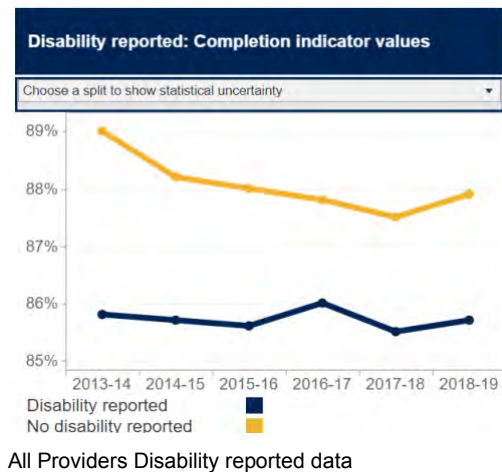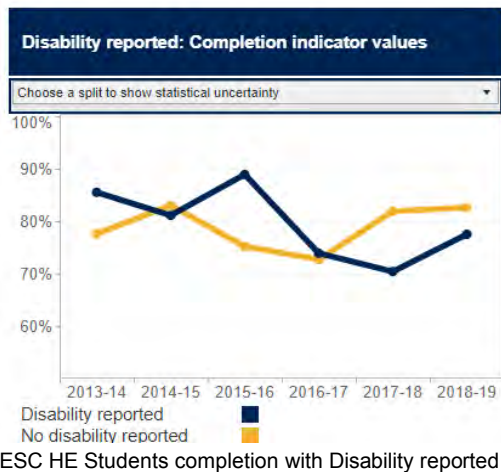
Overall, our data was 81% in 2019, with All Providers percentage of student who complete their studies in HE being 87.9%.

Completion indicator values for: Overall

Attainment data

Due to our small numbers and data suppressing used by OfS, there is little useful data on the access and participation dashboard. Additionally, our attainment data varies during the year as students complete their courses in June, October, February, and May, so care must be taken to check data at relevant times of the year. Therefore, we have used our internal data, exam board statistics, to measure attainment more accurately.
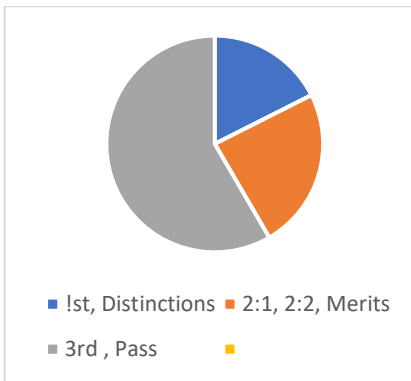
Attainment inc Sub-contractors 2023/24
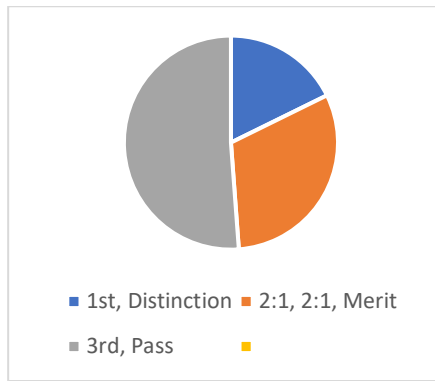
Attainment inc Sub-contractors 2022/23
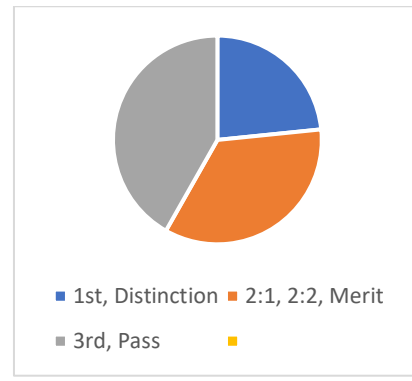
Attainment inc Sub-contractors 2021/22

Our internal data shows that as the proportion of sub-contracted students has increased, so has the proportion of total low grades with Pass being the dominant grade awarded at Level 5 HND.

Attainment from Lewes, Eastbourne, Hastings & Ore Campus 2023/24

Attainment from partners 2023/24
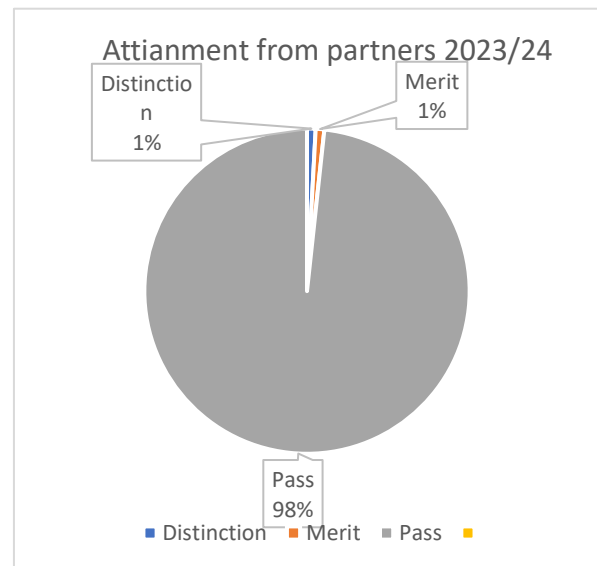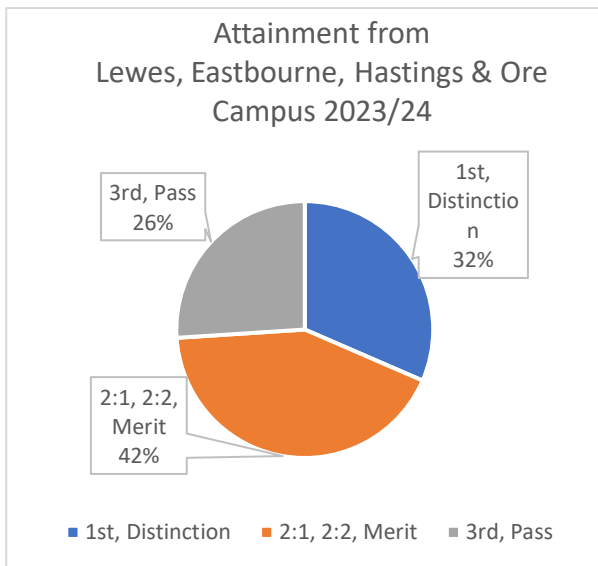
There is a 72%-point gap between our ESC pass rate and our partners. We are collaborating closely with our partners, and the awarding organisations, to bring equality of opportunity to these students.
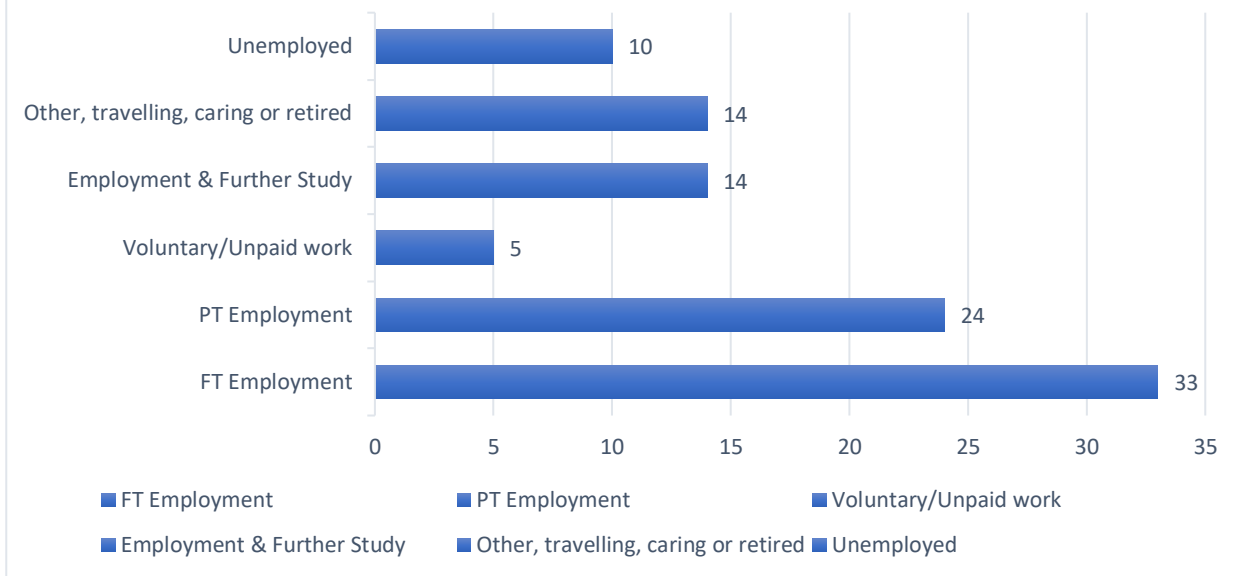
Progression data from OfS Dashboard

We can see from our patchy Graduate Outcomes data that, 15 months after graduating 10% of our students who attained their qualifications are unemployed, against a national figure of 4.4%. This is partly due to the numbers of mature students who chose to undertake degree study as leisure pursuit rather than for employment purposes.
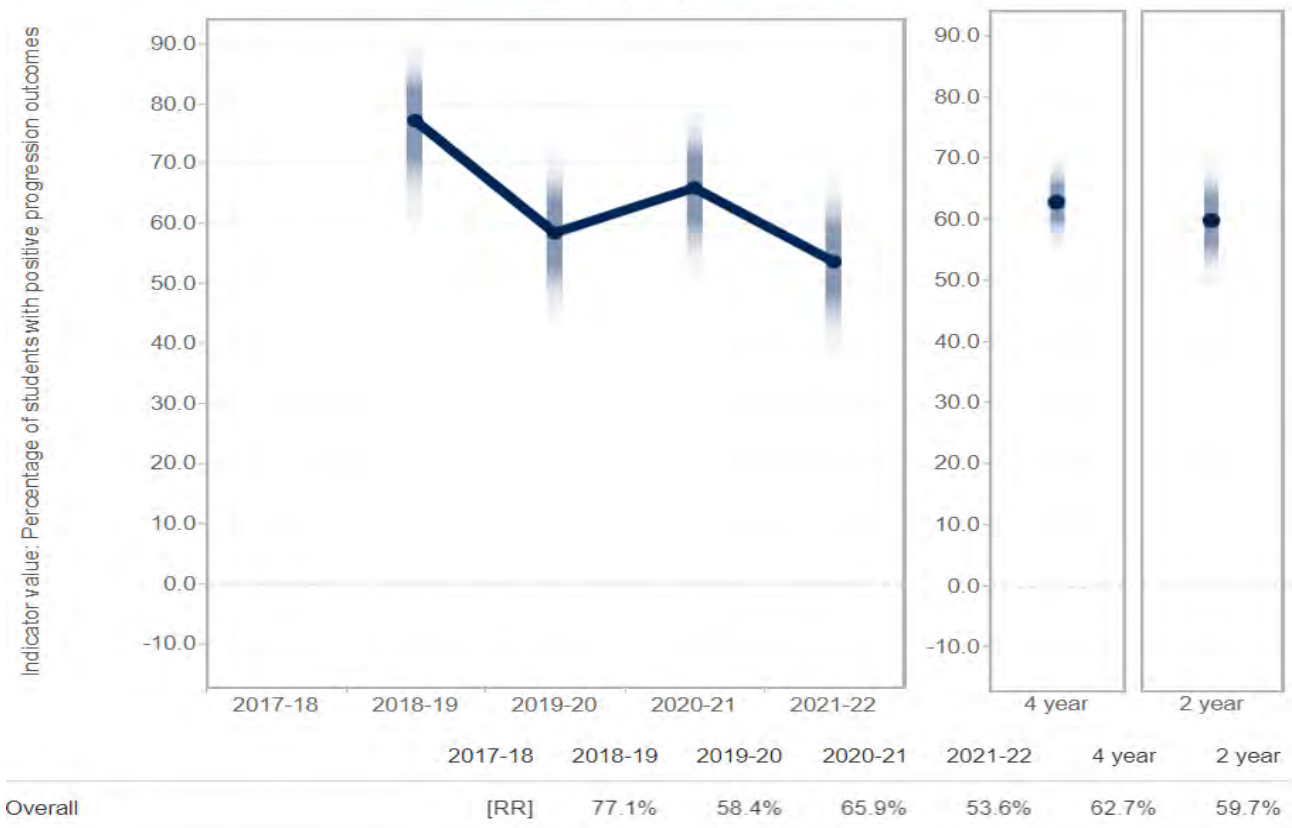
However, we are addressing this; all our courses have work based modules each year to ensure student graduates are prepared for the workplace.

% employment or other destinations 2021/22

Destination	Value
Unemployed	10
Other, travelling, caring or retired	14
Employment & Further Study	14
Voluntary/Unpaid work	5
PT Employment	24
FT Employment	33

Legend: FT Employment, PT Employment, Voluntary/Unpaid work, Employment & Further Study, Other, travelling, caring or retired, Unemployed
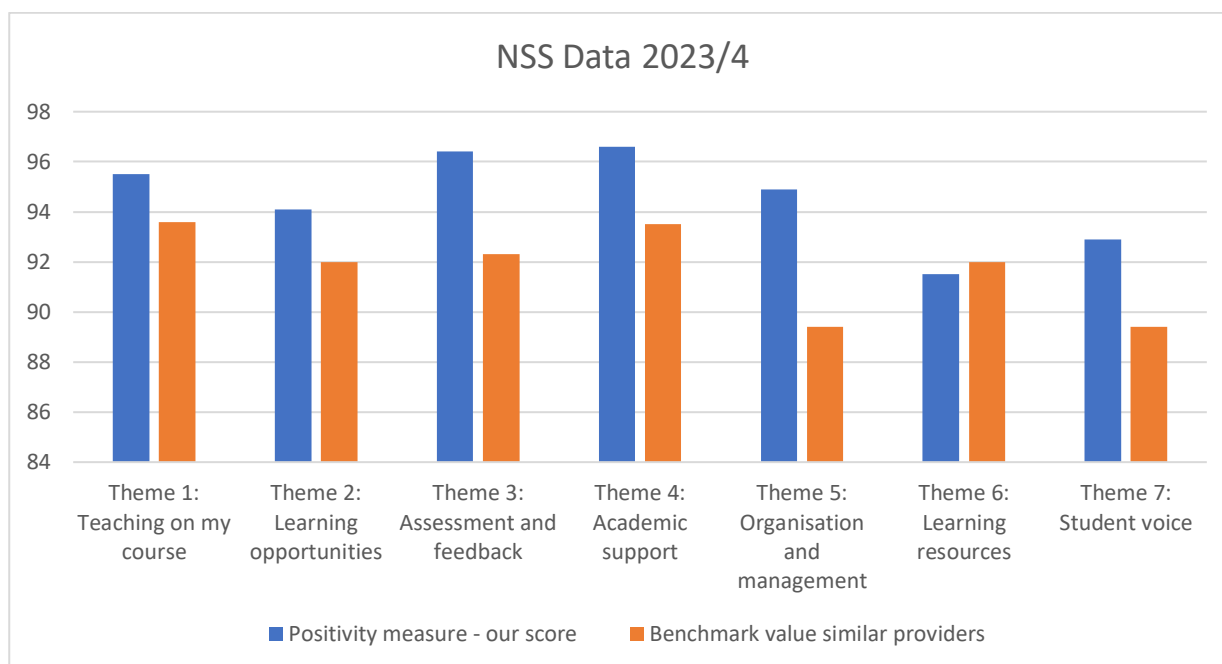
We can see our percentage of students with positive progression outcomes has fallen over the past four years period, to 53% but data sets are too small to identify specific student characteristics with certainty. However, we know form internal and national data that mature students and males find transition to employment hardest, so they are the focus of this risk.

Indicator values for progression into professional or managerial employment, further study or other positive outcomes: Overall

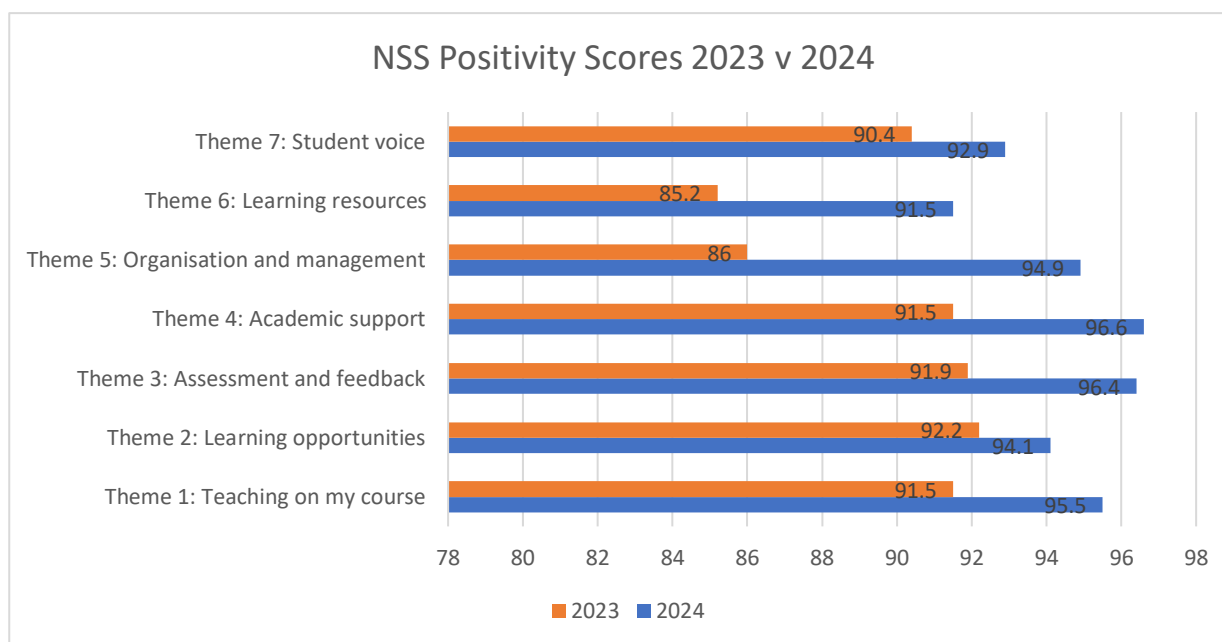*Y-axis: Indicator value: Percentage of students with positive progression outcomes*

		2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	4 year	2 year
Overall	[RR]	77.1%	58.4%	65.9%	53.6%	62.7%	59.7%

National Student Survey Data

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

NSS Data 2023/4

(Bar chart showing Positivity measure - our score (blue) vs Benchmark value similar providers (orange) across seven themes)

- Theme 1: Teaching on my course
- Theme 2: Learning opportunities
- Theme 3: Assessment and feedback
- Theme 4: Academic support
- Theme 5: Organisation and management
- Theme 6: Learning resources
- Theme 7: Student voice

Legend: Positivity measure - our score ■ (blue) | Benchmark value similar providers ■ (orange)

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

NSS Positivity Scores 2023 v 2024

Theme	2023	2024
Theme 7: Student voice	90.4	92.9
Theme 6: Learning resources	85.2	91.5
Theme 5: Organisation and management	86	94.9
Theme 4: Academic support	91.5	96.6
Theme 3: Assessment and feedback	91.9	96.4
Theme 2: Learning opportunities	92.2	94.1
Theme 1: Teaching on my course	91.5	95.5

Legend: ■ 2023 | ■ 2024

Bursaries and hardship fund.

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

ESCG Bursary 2019 - 2024   % students awarded
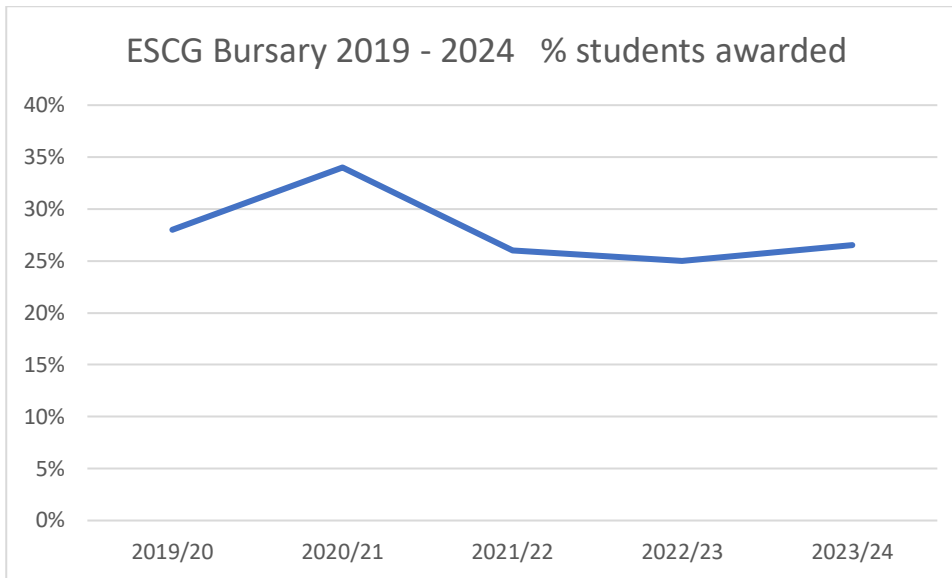
We have a high uptake; last year, 26.5% of our students were awarded a bursary from between £200 and £500 depending on what categories they qualified for. A recent survey by ONS, *Cost of living and higher education students in England, summary statistics by sex: 30 January to 13 February 2023*, indicated that from their sample, 23% of university students had applied for a bursary, so our figures demonstrate our targeting and messaging around the bursaries is working.

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

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

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

Our ethnic minority students are claiming their bursaries as 14% of bursaries are awarded against this category, against a 7% access rate, but only 50% is awarded to Quintile 1&2, compared to 55% intake.
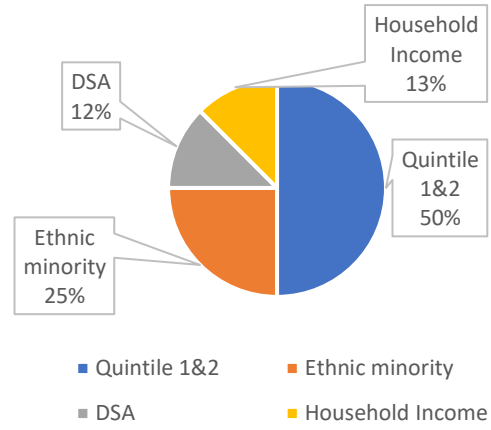
ESC Bursary & Hardship	Bursary Category		Hardship Fund Category	
	Ethnic Minority	POLAR Quintile 1&2	Ethnic Minority	POLAR Quintile 1&2
2023/24 % of total Access	7%	55%	7%	55%
2023/24 % of total Awards	14%	38%	25%	50%

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

ESC 2023/24 Bursary Awards

- Quintile 1&2 38%
- Ethnic minority 14%
- DSA 3%
- Household Income 45%
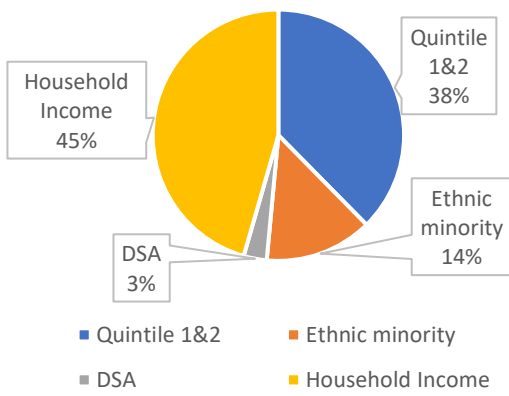
ESC 2023/24 Hardship Fund Awards

- Household Income 13%
- Quintile 1&2 50%
- Ethnic minority 25%
- DSA 12%

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.

Intervention Strategy Tools

We have used a range of sources which have informed our data search and initial development of our strategies. We have used TASO's Theory of Change methodology to inform our interventions and expected outcomes.
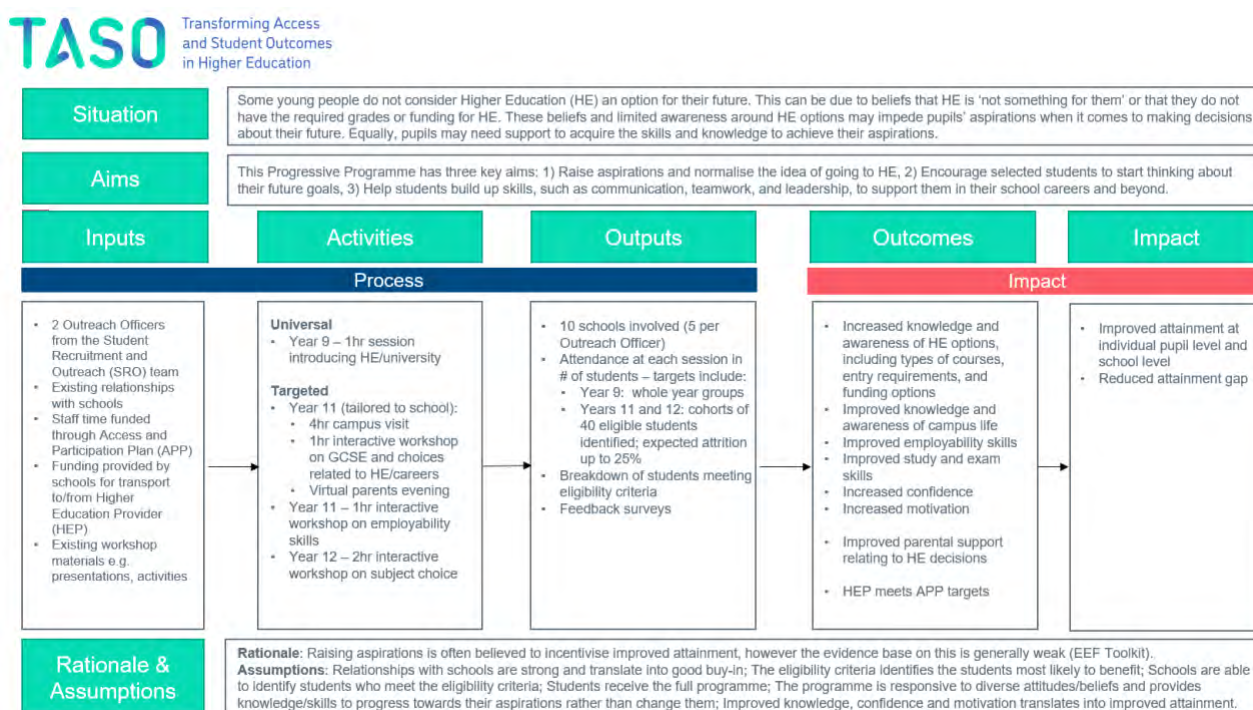
TASO's Evidence Toolkit summarises the existing evidence on approaches to widening participation and student success for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. The suggested interventions make a substantial proportion of our interventions in our objectives. We will continue to use this to evaluate the impact of the relevant interventions.

We have used the OfS Standards of Evidence and self-assessment tool to evaluate standards we need to use when evaluating our work and progress. We have also used the *'How to evaluate and implement a whole provider approach'* report[9] to help ensure effective practise across our whole organisation.

Additional resources

We have used a vast range of sources to inform our plans, most usefully the tools on the OfS site, and accompanying research-based documents. Some of the additional resources are listed here.

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[9] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/evaluation/whole-provider-approach/

We have used AdvanceHE Mental Health toolkit[10] to look deeper into how we can achieve our targets for mental health. We have also used their *What Works: Student retention and success change programme*[11] as training for our staff for them to be better informed about how to retain students on their courses.

AdvanceHE's '*Creating inclusive environments for disabled students*'[12] has been valuable when looking at access and continuation for disabled students. TASO's '*What works to reduce equality gaps for disabled students*' and '*Supporting disabled students: mapping reasonable adjustments and transition support*' and '*Promoting self-advocacy for disabled students (post-entry)*' have helped inform our proposed interventions.

For supporting our ethnic minority background student targets, we have looked at UCLs resources including '*Creating inclusive Curriculum for BAME students*'[13] and OfS's '*How do student outcomes vary by ethnicity?*'[14] We are affiliated to the Black Leadership Group and we have attended their training to inform our management and delivery of our courses.

We have looked at peer coaching research including Peter Collier's '*How Peer Mentoring Can Help Universities Promote Student Success in a Post-COVID19 Pandemic World*[15]', and TASO'S '*Mentoring, counselling, coaching and role models (post-entry).*'[16] as well as the Open University's *Engaging students in peer-coaching*'[17]

For additional information about gender gaps in continuation and attainment, we have used HEPI's *Mind the gap: gender differences in higher education*[18] and their '*Boys to Men: The underachievement of young men in higher education – and how to start tackling it*'[19]

Additionally, Association of College's '*Opportunity England Mental Health*'[20] and '*How to work with Communities who are under-represented in FE & HE*'[21] have been useful as an HE provider in an FE institution. The HE Team regularly attends the AoC's South HE Forum, and Higher Education Conferences to hear policy updates and be involved in sector initiatives and training. Articles such as '*How to cultivate a research culture in your college*'[22] are good reminders of how to successfully undertake university processes in a college environment.

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[10] https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/curricula-development/education-mental-health-toolkit#ToolkitOverview

[11] https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/student-retention-and-success/what-works-student-retention-and-success-change-programme

[12] https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/creating-inclusive-environment/disabled-people

[13] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/publications/2020/apr/creating-inclusive-curriculum-bame-students

[14] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/differences-in-student-outcomes/ethnicity/

[15] How Peer Mentoring Can Help Universities Promote Student Success in a Post-COVID19 Pandemic World

[16] https://taso.org.uk/intervention/mentoring-counselling-role-models-post-entry/

[17] https://community.open.ac.uk/engaging-students-in-peer-coaching

[18] https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/03/07/mind-the-gap-gender-differences-in-higher-education/

[19] chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Boys-to-Men.pdf

[20] Opportunity-England-Mental-Health_2024-06-12-102423_acay.pdf (d4hfzltwt4wv7.cloudfront.net)

[21] How to work with communities who are… | Association of Colleges (aoc.co.uk)

[22] How to cultivate a research culture in your… | Association of Colleges (aoc.co.uk)

Annex C: Targets, Investment and Fees