

## Summary of 2024-25 to 2027-28 Access and Participation Plan

An Access and Participation Plan (APP) sets out how higher education providers ensure everyone, no matter their background, can gain places at and succeed on university courses, as well as getting good employment or progress to further study after they leave.

The commitment in our APP will improve and enhance access, success, and positive progression to, during, and from our university courses. This document is a summary and our full Access and Participation Plan is here ([URL to be inserted](#))

### **Risks to equality of opportunity**

To make sure we built a strong plan to tackle the gaps in our data for students from some groups, we carried out a college wide consultation with our higher education staff and students. This consultation allowed us to identify key risks to equality of opportunity which we think students from those groups might face at ESC.

Our ten key risks as shown in our data are:

1. Lack of knowledge and skills to be able to apply for university courses.
2. Lack of access to information and guidance to be able to make informed choices about university courses.
3. Perceptions about the types of students who apply to university courses.
4. Limited access to a variety of course types.
5. Lack of personalised academic support.
6. Lack of non-academic support and activities.
7. Poor mental health.
8. Ongoing pandemic effects.
9. Rising costs affecting course completion.

We also looked at our data which tracks students' progress from initial enquiry, through to interview, enrolment, course, outcome and progression. It shows the following student characteristics most at risk from equality of opportunities at ESC:

1. Young students from areas of deprivation: These students often face financial challenges and may lack confidence and information about university opportunities. They may have received free school meals in the past, or be young carers
2. Mature students and mature male students: They often have caregiving responsibilities and struggle with academic skills and personal support, leading to higher non-continuation rates.
3. Disabled students: these students may face physical and mental barriers to university courses, with higher risks of non-continuation due to costs and support needs.
4. Students with poor mental health: Post-COVID mental health issues, particularly among students with disabilities, low income, LGBTQ+, mature students, and those with care experience.
5. Minority groups: Students from minority and ethnic backgrounds, including Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller communities, may feel higher education is not for them due to their protected characteristics.

## **Our objectives**

Having looked at this data we have identified the following objectives;

1. To reduce the access gap between disadvantaged young students and mature students by increasing access for young, disadvantaged students while maintaining mature student access.
2. Increase continuation, completion, attainment, and progression rates for mature students, especially those who are adult carers and mature males.
3. Reduce the access and continuation gap between students with reported disabilities and those without by improving continuation for students with disabilities.
4. Increase access and monitor gaps in continuation and completion for students with declared mental health conditions.
5. Reduce gaps in attainment and graduate progression between students from minoritised ethnic and other backgrounds and other students

These objectives focus on increasing access, support, and success for various at-risk student groups to ensure equal opportunities and representation.

## **Interventions**

To achieve our aims, we have compiled intervention strategies to support students who might be facing risk at various stages of their student journey to include;

- an inclusive application process where we considering applicants' wider skills and experience.
- establish HE Student Ambassadors to support aspirational internal progression workshops, and outreach work, in schools, cultural centres, ethnic community organisations, and religious institutions and community spaces
- implement a mentoring program pairing current university students from similar backgrounds, including age, with new students and peers.
- work with Uni Connect to support their programmes
- targeted financial support for students from low-income households, with adult caring responsibilities, from diverse ethnic and other backgrounds, or who have a physical or mental health disability,
- Publish informative case studies of students from similar backgrounds.
- Implement a wellbeing programme to include stress management and resilience-building workshops and study-life balance with time management training.
- Establish a diverse HE Student board to provide ongoing feedback. Monitor continuation, attainment, and completion rates for different student groups.
- Provide flexible and part-time options and modular learning where possible, and offer online or face-to-face, and times for support from HE mentors.
- Offer workshops on topics related to race, ethnicity, disability and inclusion. Provide resources for addressing and reporting incidents of discrimination or bias, sexual misconduct and harassment, and unconscious bias training for staff and students.

The full set of strategies can be found here [LINK](#)

### **Student involvement**

Students can get involved by becoming course reps and attend Course Level boards. The HE Student Board, who meet twice a year to feed back to HE management, and the APP will be a regular agenda item. Students can also become one of our HE Ambassadors or Student Mentors, and feedback directly to HE management and Student Union at any time.

Future students receive information on fees and financial support via our website and at in-person events, such as our open days or school visits. Current students receive information about fees and financial support available to them through our student portal, HelloHE, or via internal communications and campaigns.

### **Evaluation and monitoring**

We are setting up an APP 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

We will evaluate individual components of each intervention strategy rather than entire strategies. Monitoring and evaluation will be part of daily responsibilities for all teaching staff, with evidence reported to the College's APP Steering Group, HE Student Board, and HE Academic Boards. An annual summary of intervention activities will be published on the College's website.

### **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 we send timely letters to students and publish information on our student portal HelloHE.

### **Fees**

	ESC Degree	ESC HND	SIRM HND
Full-time	£8250	£5900	£7500
Part-time	£4125	£2975	

These fees may increase each year in line with inflation. Current students receive information about fees and the financial support available through our student portal, internal communications, campaigns and emails.