Solihull College & University Centre
Access and Participation Plan 2025-26 to 2028-29

1. Introduction and strategic aim

Solihull College and University Centre (SCUC) is a large further education (FE) college which delivers higher education (HE) at its main Blossomfield campus situated in the heart of Solihull, and at a second campus (Woodlands) in North Solihull. The College also has a third campus in Stratford-upon-Avon where no HE programmes are currently offered, although the potential for development is being explored. SCUC is also the lead college for the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Institute of Technology (GBSIoT), which brings together a partnership of local FE colleges, universities, and employers for the region.

SCUC delivers a wide range of further education courses and a smaller range of higher education courses to over 5,000 16- to 18-year-olds, and over 5,000 learners aged 19+. The average number of HE students over the last 3 years is 755. Higher education provision covers both prescribed (65.5%) and non-prescribed courses (34.5%), of which 75.4% are classroom-based and 24.6% are higher apprenticeships. 18.95% of the HE provision is franchised – these students are not included in the data for this Access Participation Plan, nor the non-prescribed courses. SCUC has two traditional 3-year degree programmes; most of the provision is at level 4 and 5, through Higher National and Foundation Degrees, HTQs, Higher Apprenticeships and one-year top-up courses at level 6.

1.1   College Mission and Vision

SCUC's mission statement is 'to be a reflective and progressive organisation which supports and inspires everyone to succeed'. The vision is to position SCUC 'as a confident, fully inclusive, forward-thinking organisation, with a strong reputation for innovation and excellence'. There are five strategic ambitions:

1. Deliver a high-quality curriculum that enhances the life opportunities of our learners, the inclusive growth of our communities, and the productivity of the employers with which we work.
2. Secure the future of our organisation in a fast-changing sector through careful and appropriate income diversification and growth.
3. Create a high-performing culture that attracts and retains the best people, is fully inclusive, and has a happy and proud workforce.
4. Deliver a considered but ambitious programme of investment underpinned by financial stability.
5. Net zero by 2030.

1.2   Local context

In 2023/24, 40.58% of our HE students resided in Birmingham, 7.59% in North Solihull, 20.68% from South Solihull, 5.5% from Warwickshire and 25.65% from areas outside of the immediate region. 41.1% of the HE students have backgrounds which can be classified as Widening Participation (WP). SCUC focuses its recruitment locally rather than nationally.

2. Risks to equality of opportunity

To identify key risks to equality of opportunity, SCUC has completed an analysis of performance using data from the Office for Students (OfS) APP dashboard, the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR), and the College's own internal data. The assessment of performance details can be seen in Annex A. Due to small cohort numbers, the statistical uncertainty is increased, and the EORR was utilised to consider whether students were likely to experience risk to equality of opportunity.

Table 1: Summary of Risks to Equality of Opportunity

Indication of Risk (IR)		Link to EORR
ACCESS		
IR1	Fewer young students in TUNDRA Q1 study at SCUC, compared to students from Q5.	The EORR suggests this indication of risk is caused by underlying sector-wide risks relating to knowledge and skills, information and guidance, perception of higher education, gaps in knowledge surrounding the financial and academic support available, application success rates and due to the small HE provision at SCUC, limited choice of course type and delivery mode.
CONTINUATION, COMPLETION & ATTAINMENT		
IR2	Part-time students living in IMD Q1 are more likely to withdraw from studying than part-time students living in Q5.	This is likely attributed to cost pressures, or insufficient academic or personal support.
IR3	Black and mixed ethnicity students do not continue their studies with the same frequency as white or Asian students, and Asian students have lower completion rate than students of other ethnicities.	Evidence suggests this is attributable to risks 6, 7 and 8 from the EORR (insufficient academic support, insufficient personal support, or mental ill health)
IR4	Students with a diagnosed mental health condition are less likely to continue their studies than students with other disabilities or with no disability.	Evidence suggests that experiencing mental ill health (risk 8 on the EORR) has an impact on on-course success.
IR5	Students eligible for FSM do not continue or complete their course at	Increase in cost pressures (risk 10) and therefore undertaking more part-time work

	the same rates as those who are not eligible for FSM.	alongside studying, may affect a student's ability to complete their course.
PROGRESSION		
IR6	Disabled students do not progress as successfully as non-disabled students, once they have completed their course.	The EORR suggests disabled students are more likely to experience this risk, but that it may also be impacted by local context. SCUC does not recruit nationally, and graduates tend to remain in the area, which may limit their employment possibilities.

2.1 **Other identified risks**

Data shows that mature students on higher apprenticeships have lower completion rates than younger students (<21 years). As these student numbers are so small, and there are so many factors beyond our control with this group, no intervention strategy has been planned, other than to monitor the completion rate of this group.

3. Objectives

Objective 1: SCUC aims to increase the number of young students from TUNDRA Q1&2 accessing higher education from 21.5% (2-year data) to 23.5% over the lifetime of this plan, by working with schools and our own internal cohort to address the perception of higher education, insufficient knowledge and skills, information and guidance.

Objective 2: SCUC aims to reduce the gap in continuation of studies for part-time students in IMD Q1 by 5pp over the life of the plan by improving initial advice and guidance, ensuring robust advice with regards to the forthcoming lifelong learning entitlement, ensuring equitable access to hardship funds, and providing increased access to academic, pastoral and mental health support.

Objective 3: SCUC aims to reduce the gap in continuation of studies between white and black/mixed ethnicity students by 1% per annum through working with schools and colleges to improve advice and guidance, improving access to academic, pastoral and mental health support, and creating an inclusive curriculum.

Objective 4: SCUC aims to reduce the gap in continuation of studies for those students with a mental health condition by 1% per annum through exploring barriers to accessing mental health support and improving the access to, and uptake of, mental health support. The college is not confident this gap can be fully closed, due to the nature of mental health conditions, but is committed to reducing the gap.

Objective 5: SCUC aims to reduce the gap in continuation and completion of studies between those students eligible for free school meals, and those that are not eligible, by 5pp over the life of the plan by working with schools and our own internal cohort to address the perception of higher education, insufficient knowledge and skills, enhance information and

guidance, ensuring equitable access to hardship funds, and providing increased access to academic, pastoral and mental health support and creating an inclusive curriculum.

Objective 6: SCUC aims to reduce the gap in progression between disabled and non-disabled students to 5pp over the life of the plan by removing barriers to mental health support, providing targeted employment support through referral to the WMCA Thrive into Work scheme, and working with employers to emphasise the benefits of an inclusive workforce.

4. Intervention strategies and expected outcomes.

Intervention strategy 1: This strategy will address indication of risk IR1; that fewer young students in TUNDRA Q1 study at SCUC, compared to students from Q5.

Objectives and targets: SCUC will increase the number of young students from TUNDRA Q1 & 2 accessing higher education from 20.4% (in 2021-22) to 25% by 2028-29 (Access target PTA_1)

Risks to equality of opportunity: Knowledge and skills, information and guidance, perception of higher education, application success rates, cost pressures

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Set up progression accords/compact agreements with secondary schools/6th forms in TUNDRA Q1,2 locations, which will guarantee an interview for applicants who meet both course entry criteria and widening participation criteria. Some progression accords may go further to guarantee a place, depending on the programme of prior study and course applied for.	Staff time required for contacting schools, drawing up progression accords. Creating appropriate marketing/educational material for pupils/parents/teachers Input from legal team for arrangement/sign-off of contracts. Agreement from Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Marketing team to use their contacts and get buy-in from schools.	Progression accords will exist with a range of partner schools/sixth form colleges in target areas. Parents, teachers and pupils are aware of what a progression accord is and its benefits. Increased applications from applicants from TUNDRA Q1 & 2 areas.	

Through collaboration with Uni Connect (Aim Higher West Midlands), participate in outreach activities which target school children in areas of low socio-economic status and low HE participation.	Staff time is required for planning and delivery of activities. Financial input for resources, extra staffing. Venue/rooming for events. Agreement from SLT and Heads of School in each curriculum area.	Short term: Pre-entry students will have increased knowledge of HE, how to apply, benefits of attending university. They will know more about the courses we offer at SCUC and the support available to them at university. Intermediate outcomes may be a change in the perception of higher education. Longer term outcomes will show increased applications and reduced withdrawals.	IS3
Pilot a student ambassador scheme – HE students to act as role models for further education students and schoolchildren, giving talks about university and carrying out academic mentoring. If sufficient uptake and a pilot is successful, extend to become paid positions in a peer-mentoring scheme, with undergraduates supporting internal level 2 students and/or small groups of schoolchildren and to raise attainment and aspirations.	Staff time for organising the pilot scheme, recruiting volunteer ambassadors; directing ambassadors on their role. Time for recruitment and training for mentors/ambassadors; organisation of internal mentoring first, and evaluation, before working with local schools. Time for evaluation of pilot scheme (potentially a student project). Marketing team to organise talks with schools. Financial investment if pilot is successful and paid positions are available for mentoring, (5 hrs per week, term time, for 10 ambassadors). DBS check.	Short term (2025/26) pilot scheme is underway; talks have been given to local schools; pilot of student ambassadors. Pre-entry students will have increased knowledge of HE, courses offered, benefits of university. Increased confidence and sense of belonging for ambassadors. Ambassadors will have worked with internal further education students. Medium term (26/27): Ambassador numbers increased, paid to mentor level 2 or level 3 students (small group sizes, <8) to help raise attainment and aspiration. Increases positive perception of HE amongst internal students. Paid positions mean impactful work and reduced cost pressures for students. Longer term (27-28): If internal piloting is successful, and ambassadors feel adequately experienced, offer service to schools in low participation areas for English/Maths/Science mentoring, raising aspiration and attainment.	IS3
Estimated costs £30k per year			

4.1.1   Summary of evidence base and rationale

Activities in this intervention are primarily aimed at eliminating EORR risk 1 (Knowledge and skills); Risk 2 (Information and guidance) and Risk 3 – Perception of Higher Education.

The TASO Mapping Outcomes and Activities Tool (MOAT) and Evidence Toolkit were both utilised as a guide for pre-entry outreach activities, and the strength of evidence for their impact was considered. A literature review for impact of pre-entry outreach activities has been carried out (see Annex B for full details); it is clear that a causal link exists between attainment and higher education entry, and evidence for positive outcomes from academic tutoring is strong.

Existing evidence for engagement with Uni Connect shows an increased chance of a successful university application (Burgess, Horton and Moores, 2021). One of the recommendations from the OfS' independent review of Uni Connect evidence is to 'utilise role moles that learners can relate to in the planning and delivery of interventions, such as mentoring' (OfS 2022). Self-assessment identified that the college currently partners with Aim Higher (West Midlands) but only as a recipient of their activities (for the Further Education students) rather than as a collaborator/active participant with an offering. The proposal is to develop taster events for Year 9/10 students, beginning with the Animal Welfare department as a pilot scheme, which would be attended by students from WP areas.

4.1.2 Evaluation

Activities in this intervention are underpinned by a theory of change and informed by evidence of similar interventions. They will be evaluated to provide Type 1 evidence (such as monitoring application records from under-represented groups, attendance figures for student ambassadors at marketing events). There will be opportunities to gather Type 2 evidence, primarily in the form of pre- and post-event surveys by the participants. We would aspire to create Type 3 evidence in the form of a longitudinal study/randomised control trial with mentored vs. non-mentored students, however we recognise that this is ambitious for such a small provider and likely not a realistic deliverable. More realistic is type 2 evidence gained through discussion/focus groups of students who received academic mentoring from undergraduates – for this, we will utilise Horton's Toolkit for Access and Participation Evaluation (TAPE). The toolkit includes measures of a pupil's HE expectations, HE knowledge, HE attitudes, academic confidence, and academic motivation. Since its creation, TAPE has been validated on circa 1000 pupils, in years 9-13.

All activities (and the strategy as a whole) will be monitored internally by the Access & Participation Plan Evaluation Group – a group which will be newly established for 2025/26, consisting of students, the Head of HE & Research and the Vice Principal of HR & Student Services - with the sole purpose of monitoring the strategies and evaluation of the plan. All findings will be published internally and externally in the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report.

Intervention strategy 2: This strategy will address indication of risk IR2; Part-time students living in IMD Q1 are more likely to withdraw from studying than part-time students living in Q5.

Objectives and targets: SCUC will reduce the gap in continuation of studies for part-time students from IMD Q1 by 5pp over the life of the plan (Success and Progression Target PTS_1)

Risks to equality of opportunity: cost pressures, insufficient personal support, insufficient academic support, mental health, information and guidance.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Provide an HE Bursary (means tested) to eligible students. Provide a HE Student Welfare Fund (non-means tested) Access to HE Bursary and HE Student Welfare Fund information will be made easier/more apparent to students, including information at the Access stage of student lifecycle.	Financial contribution of £1000 per eligible student. Financial input of £10k per year Link to student financial support to be placed on relevant Moodle pages, in addition to the Student Hub. Information about eligibility criteria to be made available on college web page. Include bursary criteria in initial advice and guidance for relevant courses.	Applicants and current students are aware of the existence of the fund, the eligibility criteria, how to apply, application requirements, and how it is distributed. Aware that part-time students are still eligible to apply.	IS1, IS5
Provide training/information to lecturers and course leaders about the student bursary eligibility criteria and welfare fund.	Head of HE to ensure all HE lecturers are aware of scheme and can give further information to students (training session to be recorded and made available to all staff). Provide regular updates to staff on budget spend.	All HE lecturers are aware of the HE bursary criteria and HE Welfare fund and can signpost students to the relevant member of student services team who will assist them with their application.	IS1, IS5

Raise threshold of household income for eligibility of bursary from £25k to £30k, in line with inflation and rise in wages.	Agreement from Director of Student Services and Frontline Student Services Manager. Financial input to cover raised threshold: underspend should cover year 1; £5k in year 2; £10k year 3 and 4	More students will be able to access the financial support. The full budget will be allocated each year (traditionally there has been an underspend on both HE Bursary and Welfare funds).	IS5
Increase offering to include modular delivery from 25/26 when LLE (Lifelong Learning Entitlement) comes into force; students can become even more 'part-time', and for shorter duration, allowing time to work to minimise cost pressures rather than whole course commitment.	Short to mid-term: Development and publication of LLE guidance Admissions support to set up systems and course codes. Longer term – consider a more flexible offering (online/blended or evenings) is viable.	Modular offering is available on courses from 2025/26; applicants are aware of LLE entitlement and infill onto full-time programmes.	IS5
Increased uptake of academic support (1): Further publicise the services of the Academic Skills Support tutor, and Academic Skills Moodle page, to part-time students; including availability of appointments over Teams – ensuring reach across all campuses.	Academic Skills tutor to email all part-time students to introduce self and services at start of academic year, with follow-up newsletter/tips at half-term. Provision of 'drop-in' group sessions at the start of term and/or online twilight sessions out of lesson times. Support to be made available to modular students accessing individual modules through LLE (Lifelong Learning Entitlement) from 25/26.	Part-time and modular students will be fully aware of the academic support available to them. Increased uptake of support by part-time students. Students are more confident in their academic skills, increasing sense of belonging and reduction in imposter syndrome.	IS3, IS4, IS5

Increased uptake of academic support (2): All students to complete a skills audit/self-efficacy exercise during first 3 weeks of term, identifying gaps in academic skills. Signposting to Skills Tutor to provide resources, recorded sessions or face to face tutorials to support with gaps.	Creation of academic skills audit by Skills tutor. Academic staff to disseminate and summarise responses, informing Academic Skills tutor of needs, highlighting part-time students. Students are directly emailed with offer of support.	Short term: Increased uptake of academic skills support by all students (including part time). Medium term: Increased confidence in ability and sense of belonging, leading to increased part-time student continuation rates.	IS3, IS4, IS5
Activities to increase a sense of belonging	See IS3	See IS3	IS3
Increase publicity for, and availability of, mental health support services as a means of increasing uptake.	See IS4	See IS4	IS4, IS5
Estimated investment: £8k per year (Bursary & hardship costed separately, in FIT document table C, but included in overall strategy costs in table 7b)			

4.2.1 Summary of evidence base and rationale

Historically, the full amount of money allocated for student bursaries has not been claimed. Student focus group feedback demonstrates that information surrounding the bursary eligibility and application process is poorly publicised (at induction only, and not reinforced at later points in the year). Similarly, the student hardship (welfare) fund has been under-utilised by learners. However, internal student consultation in preparation for the APP shows that students perceive Risk 10 (cost pressures) to be the biggest risk from the EORR.

The plan proposes that any student in the scope of this plan meeting the below criteria will be eligible for a £1000 bursary in their first year of study.

- Be studying for either an eligible full-time or part-time (first year only) HNC, HND, Foundation degree or Degree.
- Meet UK residency requirements
- Have a household income of less than £30,000 per year
- If on a part time programme, students must be studying at least 25% intensity of the full-time course.

The bursary is paid in three instalments and is administered through the Student Loans Company. The first payment of £340 is paid as soon as the application is approved, and the second and third payments of £330 are paid in the following January and April. Payments are subject to engagement with learning, i.e. with face-to-face lessons and the virtual learning environment.

The HE Welfare fund can be accessed by students but is not means tested. It is designed to cover one-off expenses that may otherwise prevent the student from continuing their course. Eligibility is based on a scoring system, worked out from expenditure and income. The amount provided to the student will be either £150, £250 or £350 based on the score obtained.

Part-time learners are likely to be working alongside their college course; and receiving a bursary would ease cost pressures. Increasing the threshold for the bursary to a household income under £30,000 reflects the national living and minimum wage increases in 2022, and the current cost of living increases. HEPI's 2023 Student Academic Experience Survey revealed that 55% of students are in paid employment, and 76% of students feel the cost-of-living crisis has impacted their study. A further survey by the Sutton Trust demonstrates that 30.9% of students have skipped lectures 'a few times' to do paid work, and 20.2% are working between 16 and 30 hours per week.

A lack of academic or personal support may also be contributing to the poor continuation rates of part-time students in IMD Q1. Since the last plan, the college has employed a full-time academic skills support tutor, available for one-to-one bookings. Student focus group participants agreed that they know about the support tutor but can be reticent to book an appointment (yet feedback from those that do utilise this service is positive). Taking a more proactive approach to support, with a targeted offer of support after a skills audit, was deemed to be a suitable strategy, although students said this support should be optional and not mandatory. In the student focus group, students acknowledged support was available but felt a session with the support tutor (rather than just an introduction to him) would be more beneficial. Student feedback from one Programme Quality Board meeting was that students need to choose between having a lunchbreak or seeing the support tutor (as they are timetabled all day, with no breaks) and hence the provision of pre-scheduled, online evening sessions at pertinent points in the academic year will take place – with a view to recording these for access at a later date.

4.2.2 Evaluation

Evidence generated by these activities will be type 1 (narrative) – information on retention rates of part-time learners; number of applicants for bursary will increase (relative to student numbers). The Academic Skills tutor will keep a record of appointments and where students fit into widening participation characteristics.

Impact of the bursary scheme will be evaluated via surveys or interviews with bursary recipients to determine the impact the bursary had on continuation of studies – this will generate type 2 qualitative evidence at individual level.

Impact of the academic support tutor will be evaluated via a longitudinal study comparing continuation rates/attainment of those that received support, compared with those that have not received support (type 2 evidence). All findings will be published internally and externally in the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report, and monitored by the Access and Participation Plan Evaluation Group.   Progress reports will be made at the tri annual HE Strategy meeting.

Intervention strategy 3: This intervention strategy will address indication of risk IR3; that Black and mixed ethnicity students do not continue their studies with the same frequency as white or Asian students, and Asian students have lower completion rate than students of other ethnicities.

Objectives and targets: Reduce the gap in continuation of studies between white and black/mixed ethnicity students by 1% per annum through working with schools and colleges to improve advice and guidance, improving uptake of academic, pastoral and mental health support. (Success and progression Target PTS_2)

Risks to equality of opportunity: insufficient personal support, insufficient academic support, mental health

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Activities to increase a sense of belonging as a HE student beginning with induction, plus further cross-course collaboration and activities to promote feeling part of the wider HE community.	Run a social activity at the start of term – staff time to organise and publicise, finance for event. Publicise and celebrate the race equality initiatives already being carried out at SCUC**.** Group lectures where obvious crossover between subjects exists – requires staff time for planning and coordination between groups. Creation of an online social space for each cohort, pre-entry, monitored by staff.	Social event takes place; students attend and develop a sense of belonging. Student will have raised awareness of the whole provider approach to race equity. Students attend lectures with opportunity to meet new peers; develop better sense of belonging. Students get to meet peer group and tutors (virtually) before enrolment and have opportunity to ask questions, reducing anxiety.	IS2, IS5
Improve uptake of academic support (1) and (2) with activity directed towards non-white students.	See IS2	See IS2	IS2, IS4, IS5

Create Student Ambassador programme, ambassadors working with marketing team to carry out outreach activities in areas with high proportion of BAME pupils. Recruit ambassadors from under-represented groups.	See IS1	See IS1	IS1
Improve pastoral support: Introduce a recording system for tutorials, to track support provided to higher education students. Increase number and mode of tutorials offered to at-risk students, including tutorials over Teams to improve attendance.	Staff time to set up higher education students on the existing tutorial software used by FE students **and** adapt for purpose. Training provided for staff on utilising system, expectations and requirements. At-risk students should receive minimum of one tutorial every half term. Other students should receive minimum one tutorial per term. (Financial input of increased staff time).	Staff will record tutorials on existing software package, leaving auditable trail of support offered to students	IS2, IS4, IS5
Staff training to enable production of more inclusive learning materials which better reflect the diverse cohort at SCUC, **including introducing an element of choice for assessment mode** where possible.	Staff time for development of training materials. In-house training and resource development time for academic staff.	Inclusive learning materials produced; students report an increased sense of belonging; increased continuation rates.	IS2, IS4, IS5
Estimated spend: £8000 per year (student ambassadors previously costed)			

4.3.1 Summary of evidence base and rationale

Student focus group discussions revealed that several students were anxious about joining university – would they fit in, would they make friends, would they cope, and would they belong. As a small HE provider, the college does not hold a Fresher's Week, nor have a Student Union social venue, and although students make friends within their own class, students felt there was not much opportunity to meet others in the wider university community. One student gave the example of a recent field trip that spanned two courses, and how she enjoyed making friends beyond her immediate class. Another student said that group lectures, where there is a cross-over in topics between courses, would also be a good idea – not only to get different perspectives from other tutors, but to meet new people. The Advance HE 'What Works?' (2012) report summarises evidence from several student success and retention projects and concludes that friendship and peer relationships help promote academic integration and belonging, helps to develop confidence in learners, increases motivation and provides a valuable source of support (which is often not recognised by the learner themselves).

Giving students an element of choice over how to meet learning outcomes creates a strong sense of an inclusive curriculum and sense of autonomy (Blake, Capper and Jackson, 2022). This was echoed very strongly in the student focus group, where students noted anxiety over presentations. They felt that being allowed to choose an assessment mode that worked to their strengths would empower them, give them autonomy, and reduce anxiety. However, students did also note that activities such as presentations are useful for self-development, but suggested adjustments such as doing the presentation just to a tutor (rather than peers) would be helpful.

4.3.2 Evaluation

The evaluation for activities in this strategy will produce type 1 (narrative) evidence, in the form of number of mental health support requests; interaction with academic support; number of withdrawals. Type 2 qualitative evidence may be generated through the bi-annual Programme Quality Board staff-student meetings; and well as post-intervention questionnaires for mental health support and academic support.

This strategy will be monitored by the Access and Participation Plan Evaluation Group; and will be reported at the tri annual HE Strategy meeting. Publication of evidence and evaluation will be internal and external, in the annual Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Report.

Intervention strategy 4: This strategy will address IR4; that students with a diagnosed mental health condition are less likely to continue their studies than students with other disabilities or with no disability (Success and progression target PTS_3)

Objectives and targets: To reduce the gap in continuation of studies for those students with a mental health condition by 1% per annum.

Risks to equality of opportunity: mental health, insufficient personal support, insufficient academic support

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Provide pre-entry DSA support to applicants to ensure support available at start of term.	Staff time x 3hrs per student	More students have DSA support available from the start of term, increasing continuation rates	
Increase publicity for, and availability of, mental health support services as a means of increasing uptake. Provide extended induction period where information about all support services is 'drip fed' to allow absorption of information. Mental Health support team to visit all higher education classes in the first 4 weeks of term, plus have a stand in the HE Centre during mental health awareness week. Investigate potential outsourcing MH support to provide 24/7 community online support, moderated by clinical professionals, or increase number of counsellors.	Teaching staff to allocate 30 mins of lesson time to mental health team to run a MH service induction. Financial input – either **subscription** to outsourced MH support platform **or** increased staffing.	Students' knowledge of mental health support available at college will increase; increased uptake of MH support; leading to increased continuation rates as students feel supported. Reduced waiting list time for face-to-face support at college.	IS5, IS2
Improve pastoral support: Increase number and mode of tutorials offered to at-risk students, especially in semester 2, including tutorials over Teams to improve attendance.	See IS3	See IS3	IS2, IS3

Staff training to enable production of more inclusive learning materials which better reflect the diverse cohort at SCUC, **including introducing an element of choice for assessment mode** where possible.	See IS3	See IS3	IS3, IS5
Improve uptake of academic support (1) and (2) with activity directed towards non-white students.	See IS2	See IS2	IS2, IS3, IS5
Activities to increase a sense of belonging as a HE student beginning with induction, plus further cross-course collaboration and activities to promote feeling part of the wider HE community.	See IS3	See IS3	IS3, IS5
Estimated investment: £8k per year			

4.4.1 Summary of evidence base and rationale

When surveyed about the risks on the EORR, students deemed mental health to be the second biggest risk to their success at college, second only to cost pressures, yet the mental health support service is not well-used by HE students, relative to the use by FE students. A further survey to investigate why there was poor uptake, was mainly answered by students who said they hadn't yet accessed the service; yet 45% of respondents either didn't know the service existed or didn't know how to access it. 20% of respondents said the 9-5, term-time only hours would be a barrier to accessing support; and when asked if mental health support was to be available in the evenings 55% said it would be very helpful, and 24-7 access was deemed to be very helpful by 64.1% of respondents. The '*Building Belonging in Higher Education*' report (Blake, Capper and Jackson, 2022) noted that 40% of students deemed themselves as having lower than average mental health, and that low mental health can lead to exclusion and low self-esteem. Only 52% of students with below average mental health said they felt they belonged at university, compared with 80% of students with average and above mental health. Poor mental health impacts on all aspects of university life and mental health support should be central to any strategy aimed at building a sense of belonging. For further evidence surrounding the impact of mental health on academic success, see the literature review in Annex B.

4.4.2 Evaluation

This strategy will be evaluated through number of students taking up pre-entry DSA support (type 1 evidence).

Increasing the provision of mental health support services will be evaluated through comparison of wait times for appointment before and after implementation (type 2 evidence) and if support is outsourced, through the uptake of this (type 1 evidence). Qualitative evaluation may also be provided through the bi-annual Programme Quality Board meetings, and satisfaction surveys for students who have used the service.

Increasing the awareness of the mental health support service can be evaluated through surveys, comparing the recent (May 2024) survey results with survey results post-interventions (type 2 evidence). Type 1 evidence can be generated through recording number of visits made by the team to classes during the first few weeks of term.

Creating more inclusive material, including assessment materials, will be evaluated through feedback from students at the Programme Quality Board meetings.

The strategy will be internally evaluated by the Access and Participation Plan Evaluation group; and findings shared internally at tri annual HE Strategy meetings. A summary of evaluation and impact will also be published in the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion annual report.

Intervention strategy 5:

Objectives and targets: SCUC aims to reduce the gap in continuation and completion of studies between those students eligible for free school meals, and those that are not eligible, by 5pp over the life of the plan (Success and Progression Target PTS_4).

Risks to equality of opportunity: cost pressures, insufficient personal support, insufficient academic support, mental health

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Increasing household income threshold for Student Bursary eligibility – from £25k to £30k, and no longer limited to first year students.	See IS2	More students are eligible for the bursary; reduction in financial pressures including second year students; increase in continuation rates.	IS2, IS4
Provide training/information to lecturers and course leaders about the student bursary eligibility criteria and welfare fund.	See IS2	Greater uptake of student bursary; less financial pressure for students and increase in continuation rate of students eligible for FSM.	IS2, IS4

Access to HE Bursary and HE Student Welfare Fund information will be made easier/more apparent to students, including information at the Access stage of student lifecycle.	See IS2	Students are aware of the existence of the fund, the eligibility criteria, how to apply, application requirements, and how it is distributed. Full fund is utilised each year.	
Increase publicity for, and availability of, mental health support services as a means of increasing uptake. Provide extended induction period where information about all support services is 'drip fed' to allow absorption of information. Mental Health support team to visit all higher education classes in the first 4 weeks of term, plus have a stand in the HE Centre during mental health awareness week. Increase MH support availability through outsourcing or further staffing.	See IS4	Students' knowledge of mental health support available at college will increase; increased uptake of MH support; leading to increased continuation rates as students feel supported. Reduced waiting list time for face-to-face support at college.	IS2, IS3, IS4
Increase offering to include modular delivery from 25/26 when LLE (Lifelong Learning Entitlement) comes into force; students can become even more 'part-time', and for shorter duration, allowing time to work to minimise cost pressures rather than whole course commitment.	See IS3	Students able to enrol more flexibly, taking fewer modules, allowing more opportunity for work and therefore reducing cost pressures; increase in continuation rate.	IS3
Increased uptake of academic support (1) and **(2) – see IS2**	See IS2	Short term: Increased uptake of academic skills support by FSM students. Medium term: Increased confidence in ability and sense of belonging, leading to increased FSM-student continuation rates.	IS2, IS3, IS4

Activities to increase a sense of belonging as a HE student beginning with induction, plus further cross-course collaboration and activities to promote feeling part of the wider HE community.	See IS3	Students that have a better sense of belonging will show improved mental health	IS3, IS4
Estimated cost: £8k per year (Bursary costed separately in Fees, Investments and Targets document)			

4.5.1 Summary of evidence base and rationale

Eligibility for FSM is used as an indication of low household income. The EORR suggests that pupils in receipt of FSM are likely to experience all 12 of the risks to equality of opportunity, not just cost pressures, hence many of the activities in this strategy are across other interventions, with the overarching aim of creating a sense of belonging, not only at course level but also within the wider university community. TASO's Rapid Review identifies the link between low socio-economic status and decreased continuation rates (Crawford, 2014); likewise, evidence exists that students from lower socio-economic areas are more likely to experience mental ill health (Benson-Egglenton, 2019, Ibrahim, Kelly and Glazebrook 2013). TASO's Evidence Toolkit also shows emerging evidence for the positive impact that financial support has on both attitudes and outcomes. The quantity of evidence to support the impact of retention and success programmes (such as developing study skills, building social interactions with peers and staff, and fostering belonging) is insufficient to declare a causal relationship, but it does show a positive correlation between engagement and retention. For detailed evidence surrounding how living in a low-income household affects academic success, and how a sense of belonging can promote academic success, see the literature review in Annex B.

4.5.2 Evaluation

Evidence generated by these activities will be type 1 (narrative) – information on retention rates of FSM-eligible learners; number of FSM-eligible applicants for bursary (relative to student numbers) will increase due to the increased threshold. Impact of the bursary scheme will be evaluated via discussions/interviews with bursary recipients to determine the impact the bursary had on continuation of studies – this will generate type 2 qualitative evidence at individual level.

Increasing the awareness of the mental health support service can be evaluated through surveys, comparing the recent (May 2024) survey results with survey results post-interventions (type 2 evidence). Type 1 evidence can be generated through recording number of visits made by the team to classes during the first few weeks of term.

Increasing the flexibility of course offerings, by allowing modular access when the LLE comes into effect in 25/26 will be evaluated by monitoring number of students on this offering and their retention rate, drawing comparisons with current part-time student retention rates.

The Academic Skills tutor will keep a record of appointments and where students fit into widening participation characteristics, to provide data on number of interactions with this service (type 1 evidence). Qualitative data regarding this service will be sought at Programme Quality Board meetings and Student Satisfaction surveys (type 2 evidence).

Activities to promote a sense of belonging will be evaluated through student settling-in surveys and end of year satisfaction surveys, as well as the bi-annual Programme Quality Board meetings.

Intervention strategy 6: This strategy will address IR6, that disabled students do not progress onto such successful outcomes as non-disabled students. **Objectives and targets:** SCUC aims to reduce the gap in progression between disabled and non-disabled students to 5pp over the life of the plan (Progression Target PTP_1)			
Risks to equality of opportunity: insufficient personal support, insufficient academic support, mental health			
Activity	**Inputs**	**Outcomes**	Cross intervention strategy?
Increase employability support for disabled students through encouraging self-referral to the WMCA's Thrive in Work scheme, which utilises The Shaw Trust to provide bespoke employability support, including a neurodivergent specialist pathway of support. Alternatively support disabled students to investigate supported internship programmes – utilise resources from National Development Team for Inclusion.	Staff training to raise awareness of the Shaw Trust and Thrive into Work Scheme. Tutors to assist disabled students to complete the self-referral. Staff training to raise awareness of external support organisations. Tutors to direct students with an education, health and care plan (EHC) to access supported internship resources from NDTi.	Staff are aware of Shaw Trust/Thrive into Work and can make referrals**.** Disabled/neurodiverse students are supported to complete the referral, leading to increased employability support. Neurodivergent students are more aware of the support available to assist them getting into work.	

Increase take-up of careers service support by HE students, especially by disabled students.	Personal tutors to remind students that the careers service support is available to them (and for 3 years post-graduation). Encourage booking one-to-one appointments. Course leaders to ensure careers talk is given to students 2-3 months prior to completion of studies; links provided to employer graduate schemes. Increased staff time from careers team required.	Greater uptake of individual career support by students; leading to enhanced job application success rates. All groups will be offered chance to attend a graduate-specific, subject specific careers talk, leading to increase knowledge surrounding job hunting and application processes.	
Work with local employers to investigate the appetite for a graduate work experience programme for disabled students (supported internships) supported by college staff.	Staff time to research practicalities of the scheme and consider potential numbers; time for contacting and recruitment of employers; dissemination of NDTi literature to explain benefits of graduate work placement to both parties; small scale pilot with employers.	Short term (25/26) Small scale pilot has taken place with unemployed alumni being offered supported work placement. Medium term: (26/27) Evaluation of impact of pilot project, decision on capacity to extend.	
Estimated cost: £6000 per year			

4.6.1 Summary of evidence base and rationale

Ramaiah & Robinson's (2022) report (*What works to reduce equality gaps in employment and employability?*) identified a small earnings gap of about £600 between disabled and non-disabled graduates – but that disabled graduates were less likely to be in employment than non-disabled graduates, and were more likely to be volunteering, caring, or other unpaid work. One of the recommendations from this report was to develop alumni or peer mentoring opportunities for disadvantaged and under-represented groups, including specific activities to support disabled students. There is 'strong evidence to support the impact of internships and sandwich courses on students' employment outcomes' including higher salary and lowered likelihood of unemployment 6

months post-graduation (*Ibid*). Evidence from Smith's (2017) systematic review concluded that programmes that use internships or similar job-simulation training were effective at supporting autistic students into employment. Mencap commissioned a report from the NDTi about work and learning disability. One of the recommendations to assist people with learning difficulties into work was increase the opportunities for supported internships. Further evidence is found in Irwin, Nordmann and Simms (2019) where they found employers favoured work experience undertaken outside of a degree programme over mandatory experience that was part of the degree.

The West Midlands Combined Authority's Employment and Skills Strategy for 2024-2027 also recognises the need for improved support and outcomes for people with disabilities. The strategy has four key pillars – the first is to "build strong and inclusive communities". One of the targets is to develop a universal support offering for those with health conditions, to support them into finding work and progress in employment, but also to work with businesses to understand the benefits of a diverse, inclusive and accessible workforce.

4.6.2 Evaluation

Increasing the uptake of support from the career team will be evaluated through Type 1 evidence - recording the number of interactions with the careers team at the college, and number of talks delivered. Type 2 evidence may be generated through questionnaires pre- and post-event about knowledge of job seeking and application success.

Piloting a graduate work experience programme would generate Type 2 evidence through questionnaires from both graduate participant and employer about their experiences. If the pilot scheme proves successful and there are sufficient employers who would participate in the scheme, then the college would aspire to generate type 3 evidence in the future, with participants being compared against non-participants – however, numbers are likely to be very small and this may be beyond the capacity of a small provider to deliver.

5. Whole provider approach

Solihull College & University Centre is a small provider of Higher Education, with just over 400 students (classroom based and higher apprentices) in scope of this plan, plus a further 75 on franchised provision. However, the College has over 5000 full-time 16-18 students, and 3500 part-time 19+ learners, studying across three campuses (Blossomfield in Solihull, Woodlands in North Solihull, and Stratford-upon-Avon campus).   The college operates a whole provider approach to widening participation, and has a culture where difference is respected, and diversity celebrated. The college mission statement is 'To be a reflective and progressive organisation which supports and inspires everyone to succeed'. The vision is 'to position Solihull College and University Centre as a confident, fully inclusive, forward-thinking organisation, with a strong reputation for innovation and excellence' and there are six guiding values – the 6th being 'Respectful: Welcoming others into our college community - we celebrate the difference and diversity. We value others and recognise that their thoughts and feelings are as important as our own'.

SCUC celebrates and values the diversity brought to its workforce by individuals and believes that SCUC benefits from engaging staff from a variety of backgrounds and abilities, thus allowing it to meet the needs of a diverse student population. SCUC will continue to treat all employees and

students with respect and dignity and seek to provide a positive working and learning environment free from discrimination, harassment or victimisation. This vision is articulated in the Equality Policy as well as in the events and activities undertaken across the college, including being a member of the Black Leadership Group and ensuring all staff have undertaken anti-racism training. The College is part of a collaborative group of 10 colleges, as part of Colleges West Midlands, creating a Racial Equality Steering group, to identify five workstreams dedicated to achieving equitable education and employment for all.

The College reviews and reports on its EDI targets and general duties under The Equality Act 2010 through its annual Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity Report .

Activities led by the Student Enrichment team reach out across the further and higher education community, including cultural celebrations, a range of awareness raising activities around mental health, disabilities, anti-racism, and LGBT+ inclusion. The Pride Club, for example, is organised alongside the LGBT+ student officers and the wider Enrichment team organise events for LGBT History Month, Trans day of Visibility and International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia.

Before submission, the Access and Participation Plan gained approval from the Accountable Officer (College Principal), Senior Leadership Team and the Board of Governors.

6. Student consultation

SCUC is keen to work with students to consult on the development and implementation of this plan.   Consultation has been managed through the Student Enrichment Team, principally via the HE Student Voice Officer. The Higher Education Student Governor also managed the Student Submission.

Initial consultation was carried out via a survey, open to both further and higher education students. This survey was accompanied by an introduction to the EORR, the 12 key risks to equality of opportunity, and the key findings from the college's analysis of performance. Participants were asked to identify the three risks they felt were most applicable to SCUC, three risks that were least applicable, and to rank the one risk they felt was most important. They were also invited at this point to contribute to further focus groups to follow up on the results of the initial consultation. The top three risks identified by students were cost pressures, mental health, and a limited course type/delivery mode.

The focus group was selected by inviting student representatives, the HE Student Voice officer, the HE Student Governor, and students who indicated they would be willing to participate from the survey who met widening participation criteria. We ensured that under-represented groups were represented on this panel, and that they had chance to provide us with insight into their lived experiences of inequality of opportunity. We also attempted to get a mix of students who had progressed internally from further education courses, students who entered directly to the University Centre, young and mature students, to ensure we had a wide range of student representation. The focus group asked students to suggest interventions that could be carried out, and to provide feedback if they thought proposed strategies would be credible, feasible and impactful.

Student focus group feedback on proposed intervention activities, and further suggestions, are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Feedback from students on proposed intervention strategies.

Proposed intervention	Student feedback
Progression accords with schools	Students agreed that had they been guaranteed an interview/place, it would have taken much of the anxiety out of applying a college course and would make made them more likely to apply.
Student Ambassador programmes	Students agreed that an ambassador nearer their own age or of their own ethnicity would make them more relatable and more 'believable' than an employee of the college. A mature student commented that ambassadors could also be mature students, to relate to the mature applicants that wish to retrain/upskill, and that we should work harder with community engagement as well as with schools.
Collaboration with Aim Higher West Midlands	All agreed that has they had the chance to attend events in year 9/10, this would have raised their aspirations and made them think ahead to university as a possibility
Academic mentoring schemes	Mentoring the FE students in the college or younger students at local schools – students agreed this would work, and would be a good experience for mentors, but that it should be a paid opportunity – feels this would be too much pressure for this to be voluntary.
Targeted outreach activities to schools in lower socio-economic areas, including parental engagement; targeted marketing in these areas.	A mix of opinions here – some thought we should market everywhere, not just in the target low participation areas. Due to small numbers of students in the focus group, we cannot express the views of individual students here, for risk of them being identified/ GDPR reasons.
Improve IAG to potential applicants, including advice on student bursary and HE Hardship fund.	In the focus group, the majority students were unaware of the eligibility criteria for the bursary and hardship fund, or how to apply. Students agreed that information should be publicly available, as this may be the difference in someone applying or not.
Provide pre-entry DSA support to applicants to ensure support available at start of term.	Due to small numbers of students in the focus group, we cannot express the views of individual students here, for risk of them being identified/ GDPR reasons.
Revised curriculum delivery model – to consider online,	There was no strong opinion on radical change to curriculum delivery models. Students said they liked face to face delivery but did appreciate constraints such as commute time and

blended, evening or block delivery etc.	costs. They appreciate the opportunity to attend face-to-face lectures online, should the need arise.
Staff training to create learning materials and assessments that are more inclusive and accessible.	One thing that many students felt would be a huge benefit was the flexible assessment mode – being able to choose whether they submit an essay, a presentation, a viva etc for the same learning outcome would enable them to utilise their strengths and manage workload better.
Revised induction process to include delivery of wider support services (student welfare, mental health support, academic skills support) and between-level induction – inviting students from the year above to share their 'top tips'. Induction activities to include skills audit/questionnaire about self-efficacy - followed up by small-group support sessions from Academic Support tutor	A few students felt their induction could have been better. Most were not directly given information about mental health support, or the student welfare fund. They were told about the academic skills tutor but felt that it would have been more beneficial to carry out a 'taught session' with the skills tutor. Students said induction could be longer, interspersed with lessons, as there is a lot of information to take in and remember otherwise. They felt that a skills audit would be good but subsequent support sessions to plug skills gaps should be optional and not mandatory.
Increasing Student Bursary criteria – from household income from £25k to £30k, and no longer limited to first year students.	All agreed this would be a useful strategy.
Increase personal, pastoral support for all students with the aim of reducing withdrawals. Prioritise support for at risk students.	Students felt that tutorial support began well but tailed off slowly throughout the year. Reminders about the support services at the start of semester 2 would be useful.
Peer mentoring schemes	Students this would be a useful strategy but suggested it should be a paid position.
Activities to increase a sense of belonging as a HE student.	Students agreed a social event at the start of the year would be a nice event, would allow them to meet people outside of their class. A recent cross-group field trip was praised as it allowed socialisation with other groups. Group lectures, where there is a cross-over in topics between courses, would also be a good idea – not only to get different perspectives from other tutors, but to meet new people.
Development of targeted careers resources for students	This was proposed as we have a progression gap between disabled and non-disabled students. However, all students

with a disability; refer students to The Shaw Trust.	agreed that they wanted more employability and careers advice (they had not asked for it, nor knew how to access it).

Further consultation was carried out (via a survey) to investigate the poor uptake of mental health support by higher education students. The Mental Health team had noticed that although the service was used very well by the further education students, higher education students were not accessing the service with the same frequency. Students were consulted to investigate the barriers to accessing the mental health support. Results showed that the majority of students (88%) were aware of the support available, but only 55% knew how to access the support. 12% were not aware of the support available. Most students said they hadn't felt the need to contact the mental health team, which somewhat conflicts with the responses to consultation about the risk register, where mental health was identified as the second biggest indication of risk. 5% of students said they had a counsellor or therapist outside of college. When asked if the 9-5 term-time only provision was a barrier to accessing support, 20% of students agreed it would be, but when asked if mental health support was to be available in the evenings 55% said it would be very helpful and 37.5% said it would be somewhat helpful. 24-7 access was deemed to be very helpful by 64.1% of respondents.

7. Evaluation of the plan

The OfS evaluation self-assessment tool was utilised to self-assess current evaluation strategies. The college scored as 'emerging' in all categories (strategic context, programme design, evaluation design, evaluation implementation and learning from evaluation), with lowest scores in the final two categories. In order to strengthen the evaluation of the plan's activities, the college will be developing an evaluation framework to map evaluation at regular intervals. A new appointment to the position of Head of HE & Research in 2024 has proposed an Access & Participation Evaluation Group, consisting of Student Representatives, the Head of HE, and a member of the of Senior Leadership Team; the APP Evaluation Group will meet three times per year to discuss and evaluate progress against the plan.

Information from APP Evaluation Group meetings will then be fed back to the Senior Leadership Team at the tri annual HE Strategy meetings. The Head of HE will also feedback on the evaluation of the plan to Governors in December each year.

Solihull College & University Centre is a founding member of the Research College Group, which was formed in 2020. The purpose of the group is to bring together FE organisations who lead in practitioner research, and any empirical evidence from the Student Ambassador project (or other APP activities) will be shared in this forum. We are also members of AdvanceHE and the Mixed Economy Group (a college based HE group) which has an Access and Participation Special Interest Group). The annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report is published on the college website, and from 2026/27 will include a summary evaluation of the activities undertaken as part of the plan.

As a small provider of HE, we are conscious of our staffing limitations regarding evaluation, but are committed to make improvements on the 'emerging' scores from the OfS self-assessment tool, and

our evaluation of the plan as a whole. As such, over the lifetime of the plan, the college will commit to:

- Forming an Access & Participation Plan Evaluation Group
- Create a formalised evaluation plan for the key activities.
- Improving evaluation design and implementation through guidance such as the OfS's Data use for Access and Participation and TASO's Impact Evaluation with Small Cohorts.
- Utilising verified evaluation tools such as the TAPE toolkit

8. Provision of information to students

The Access and Participation Plan for 2025-6-2028-9 will be published on the college website equality and diversity policy page. Course fees are made available in several places – on the college website (on individual course web pages, and a summary is attached to the APP as the Annual Fee Information), and on the individual course leaflets that are given to prospective applicants. Course leaflets also document any additional costs, such as personal protective equipment or mandatory trips. The Admissions team ensure UCAS receives course fee information in good time for this information to be published on their website. We comply with the guidance provided by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to ensure students are provided with upfront, clear and accurate information.

There are applicant open days throughout the year, (usually November, March and August) where prospective students are invited in to discuss not only the course with an academic member of staff, but Student Services staff and marketing are on hand to discuss fees, student finance, and other support available. During the interview stage, if an applicant has declared a disability, the HE Support Tutor will also attend the interview to provide further advice and guidance on DSA application.

Internal level 3 further education students are given a UCAS session which also includes costs involved in going to university, and the Admissions team and Careers team can advise and support learners with guidance on fees, applications for student finance and bursaries.

During induction, students are given further details about the eligibility criteria for the Hardship funds and student bursaries that are available, however for the new plan, we will also make this publicly available on our website to encourage potential applicants, as well as ensuring this is in the initial advice and guidance at the interview stage.

Current student bursary eligibility criteria are to have a household income <£25k and be on the first year of their full time or part-time course (planned to be raised to £30k). Bursaries of up to £1000 are paid to students in 3 instalments. The hardship fund is non-means tested and is awarded on a points scale system; more points result in a higher payment (payments vary from £150 - £350).

 A Higher Education Student Handbook is also provided to all students, which includes details about the bursary scheme and hardship fund, the Student Charter, equal opportunities, mental health support, and hyperlinks to relevant policies. Students not in scope of this plan, who are enrolled on a franchised course with a partner university, are directed to the financial support from the partner.

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

Methodology:

Analysis of Performance was carried out across all stages of the student lifecycle - Access (profiling who is entering our higher education courses); Continuation (are they continuing their studies); Completion (have they qualified from their studies); Attainment (looking at students achieving a 2:1 or higher) and Progress (what did they go on to do, are they in further study, professional employment or other positive outcomes, 15 months from the point of graduation). Student characteristics (area-based measures, ethnicity, age, disability, eligibility for free school meals, part-time of full time) were examined to identify if there are any gaps between student groups across the student lifecycle.

Small data sets meant that valid data was not available on several areas of the OfS Access & Participation dashboard; and others had a high level of statistical uncertainty. For this reason, 4-year aggregated data has been frequently used, alongside college own internal data (but again, this should be interpreted with care). Where possible, local context has been applied.

1. Area-based measures: TUNDRA/POLAR4 and IMD 2019

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1.1 **Access:** When compared with all English HE providers, SCUC recruits more students from TUNDRA Quintile 1 than the national average (Fig 1)
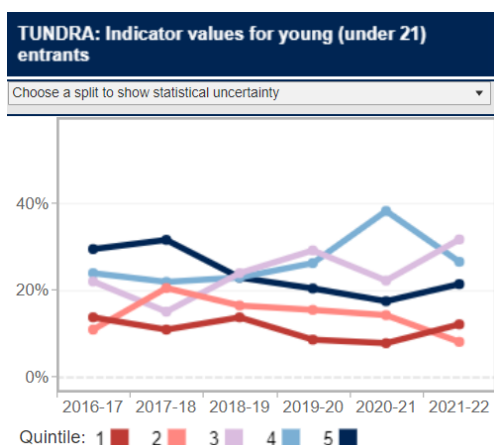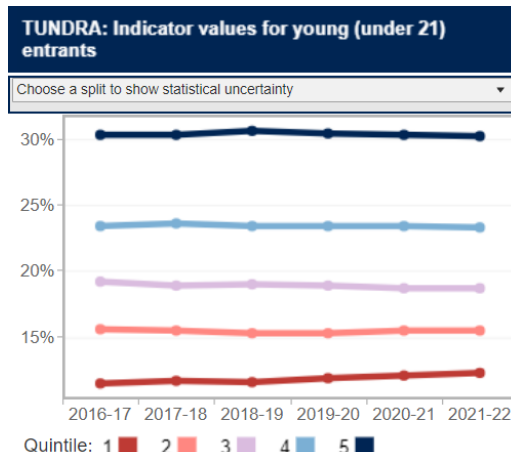
SCUC   **All registered English HE Providers**

Figure 1 TUNDRA values for entrants from SCUC (left) and nationally (right)

Although Solihull itself is not an area of deprivation, 40% of our HE students domicile in Birmingham which has many pockets of deprivation; likewise, 8% live in North Solihull, also an area of deprivation. The college's own internal data utilises POLAR4 as a measure, and reflects this, showing that 40% of students reside in POLAR4 Quintiles 1 and 2.

The 4-year aggregated data gap between TUNDRA Q5 and Q1 students is at 9.9pp, in comparison to 18.4pp nationally. Although a gap remains, SCUC has decreased this gap since 2016, from the high of 20pp in 2017-18 to 9.2pp in 2021-22 (figure 2). 🔲As TUNDRA only applies to young applicants, we must be mindful that our cohort is usually only 50% of young people.

Although only 50% of the cohort, and with the gap reduced in recent years, we felt this gap is still a significant indication of risk to equality of opportunity, and we have set an objective and targets for further intervention strategies to mitigate risks 1-5 of the EORR, as we considered the impact from these strategies would be high.
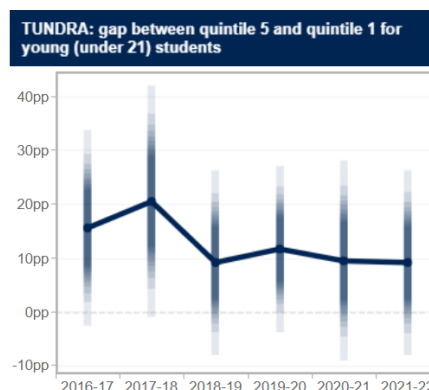

Figure 2: Access gaps from 2016-2022 between TUNDRA Quintiles

1.2 **Continuation** – comparison of continuation rates of Q5 students with those living in TUNDRA Q1 showed only a -0.3pp gap (4-year aggregated data, full time undergraduates); however, for part-time students this gap widened to 12.8pp and should therefore be considered an indication of risk. Likewise, IMD 2019 data also shows a marked gap of 21.77pp (4-year data) between continuation of Q5 part-time students compared with part-time Q1 students, and an objective and target has been set to mitigate this.

1.3 **Completion:** For full time study, the gap for completion of study (4-year aggregated data) between TUNDRA Q5 and Q1 is at -7.9pp; however, the IMD (2019) 4 year aggregate data shows a gap of +5.1pp, and 2 year data shows a gap of 17.6pp and should be considered an indication of risk. Comparing completion rates between broader IMD Q1&2 with Q3-5, the 2-year data shows a gap of 5.4pp. As both income and employment make up the largest proportion of the IMD domains, it is reasonable to infer that Risk 10 (Cost Pressures) of the EORR may apply.   College-held data for the previous 3 years reflects this and may indicate a higher level of risk for part time students in Q1/Q2 (see table 1); however, the statistical uncertainty with small cohort data still remains. Although franchised students are not counted within this data set, it should be noted that a full time Q1-2 students have lower completion rates than part time Q1-2 students (n=111 for 2022-23) – again highlighting low confidence levels of data interpretation.

POLAR4 Quintile	FT or PT	2022-23 % retained (n)	2021-22 % retained (n)	2020-21 % retained (n)
Q1-2	FT	96 (n=80)	88% (n=80)	84% (n=107)
Q1-2	PT	83 (n=64)	86% (n=102)	92% (n=117)
Q3-5	FT	96 (n=81)	88% (n=92)	92% (n=111)

Q3-5	PT	100 (n=81)	91% (n=214)	87% (n=240)

Table 3: Comparison of completion rates over 3-year period for full and part-time students residing in Quintiles 1-2 and 3-5

TUNDRA data is unavailable for part time students; IMD data (4-year aggregate) shows a 1.6pp gap between Q5 and Q1 for part-time students.

1.4 **Attainment:** No significant AP dashboard data available for full or part-time students; however locally held data for 'good grade' attainment over a three-year period is shown in table 3.

POLAR4 Quintile	% Good grades (1st, 2:1, Distinction or Merit) n=total number of all students (denominator)		
	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Q1-2	68.7% (n=64)	64.8% (n=74)	64% (n=72)
Q3-5	71.2% (n=80)	62.3% (n=130)	79.6% (n=108)

Table 4: Comparison of good grades between students from POLAR4 Quintiles 1-2, and Q3-5, over a three-year period

This data shows a relatively small gap between attainment levels for 2022-23 (2.5pp), and -2.5pp in 2021-22. The greatest difference (15.6pp) was in 2020-21 – however it must be noted that this was the year of several lockdowns and COVID restrictions, which undoubtedly had an impact on all students, but possibly the impact was more severe for those in Q1-2. Our student cohort is largely commuter students (i.e. they do not move to attend university), and anecdotally, students reported lack of access to computers as devices were being shared between siblings or parents working from home, and lack of private space to study.

1.5 **Progression**: No significant TUNDRA data available for full or part-time students; however, IMD 2019 data (4-year) shows a -2.2pp gap between Q5 and Q1 students, with a high proportion of statistical uncertainty distribution for the gap above 0 (40.6%).

2. Ethnicity

Very small data sets will here be problematic to analyse with any certainty, as can be seen from the graphs below, some years the data is insufficient.
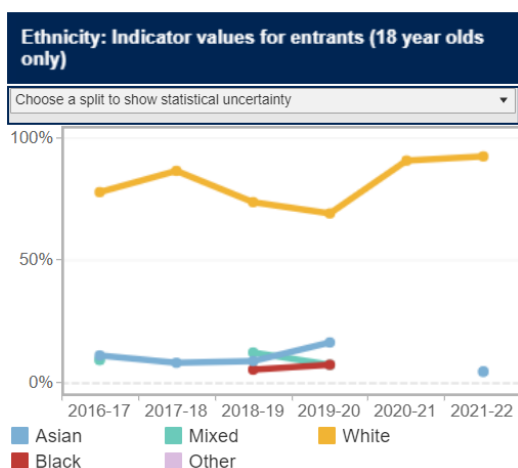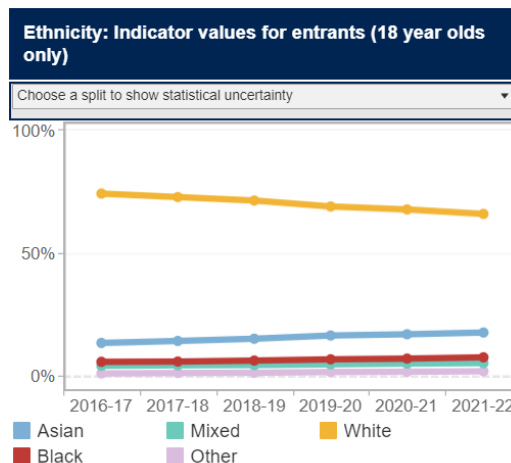
2.1 **Access**

Figure 3: Comparison of ethnicities of students entering higher education, at SCUC (left) and nationally (left)
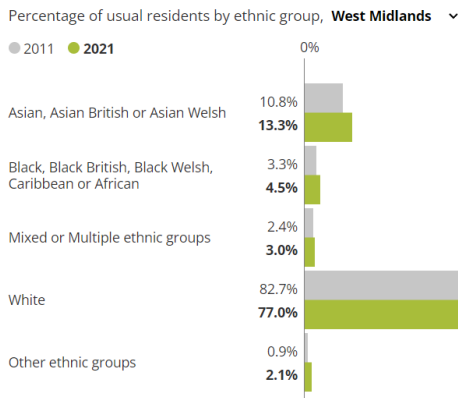
The small data sets for number of non-white students accessing HE at SCUC make any comparisons with national averages untenable. Locally held data provides a more detailed indication of the split of ethnicities accessing HE (table 3).

Ethnicity	2022/23 (Number of students)	2021/22 (number of students)	2020/21 (number of students)	Average %
Asian	45	60	74	13%
Black	19	18	24	4%
Mixed	21	18	29	5%
White	232	387	453	77%

Table 5: HE Student ethnicities at SCUC between 2020-2023

Data for 'other' ethnicities in Table 5 is too small to publish for GDPR reasons.

This aligns very closely to the 2021 census ethnicity statistics for the West Midlands (Figure 4) (of which Solihull is a part); but less so if we consider the data for Birmingham (Figure 5), where 40% of our HE students reside. This could therefore be an indicator of risk; especially as nationally non-white students are more likely to progress to university than their white peers. However, geographical context should also be taken into consideration – Birmingham has several large universities with a wide range of offerings, and SCUC is a small provider with a limited course choice, choosing not to compete directly with neighbouring universities. We recruit locally from the West Midlands and Warwickshire.

Percentage of usual residents by ethnic group, **West Midlands** ⌄

● 2011 ● **2021**

0%

Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh
10.8%
13.3%

Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African
3.3%
4.5%

Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
2.4%
3.0%

White
82.7%
77.0%

Other ethnic groups
0.9%
2.1%

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

Figure 4: Ethnicity of West Midlands population

Percentage of usual residents by ethnic group, Birmingham ⌄

● 2011 ● **2021**

0%

Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh
26.6%
31.0%

Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African
9.0%
11.0%

Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
4.4%
4.8%

White
57.9%
48.6%

Other ethnic groups
2.0%
4.5%
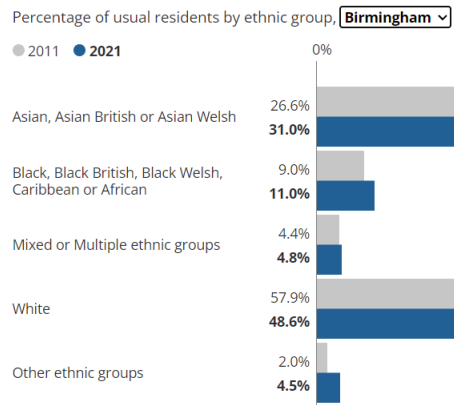
Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

Figure 5: Ethnicity of Birmingham population.

2.2 **Continuation**

Data is largely deficient for continuation; however,4-year aggregated data shows a clear gap between black and mixed ethnicity students and their white counterparts (Figure 6). Where 88% of white students continue their studies, a 6.6, 25.1 and 29.3pp difference was seen in Asian, Mixed and Black students respectively. Denominators for non-white students here are low (110, 40, 50) compared with 490 for white students, and this data should be treated with caution, however such a marked gap is clearly a risk indicator. In relation to the EORR, Black and mixed students are most likely to be affected by risks 2,3,4,6,7,8 and 12 and Asian students are most likely to experience risks 5,6,7, and 12; therefore, interventions should be put in place to mitigate these risks.
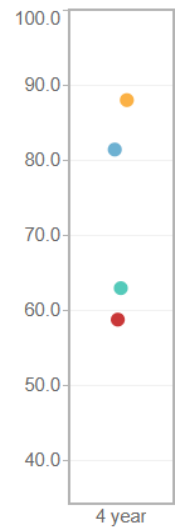

Figure 6: 4-year data to demonstrate continuation rates amongst different ethnicities.

Key
■ Asian
■ Black
■ Mixed
■ Other
■ White

2.3 Completion

Completion rates amongst students of different ethnicities do not show such a marked indication of risk, yet there are still gaps between white and non-white students. 4-year data shows 79.8% of white students complete their studies, with a 17.3pp difference for Asian students, 3.1pp for Black students, and 9.3pp difference for students with mixed ethnicity (no data for 'other').

Figure 7: 4-year aggregated data to demonstrate completion rates amongst different ethnicities.
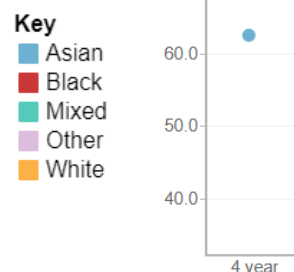
2.4 Attainment

Attainment data for student ethnicity is too deficient for all sub-groups; 4-year aggregated data shows positive attainment for Asian students (-7.6pp) compared to 72.4% for white students. Attainment relates to first degree cohorts, which make up 20% of the current cohort – the remaining 80% are studying sub-degrees (Foundation degrees and Higher National Certificates and Diplomas).

2.5 Progression

4-year data is again too low for most subgroups but shows positive progression for Asian students (-9.9pp compared to white counterparts).

3. Age

Mature students nationally make up a smaller proportion of HE students. In 201-22, the spilt was 71% and 29% respectively (OfS[1]). Mature students are likely to experience all risks on the EORR bar risk 9.

3.1 Access

The small provision, lack of halls of residence, and higher apprenticeship offer at SCUC all influence the age make-up of the cohort, when compared with national figures, as seen in figure 8 below. SCUC recruit a much higher proportion of mature learners. Confidence levels are much higher with this data; 4-year data shows young (under 21) students make up 52% of the cohort whilst mature (over 21) students make up 48%.
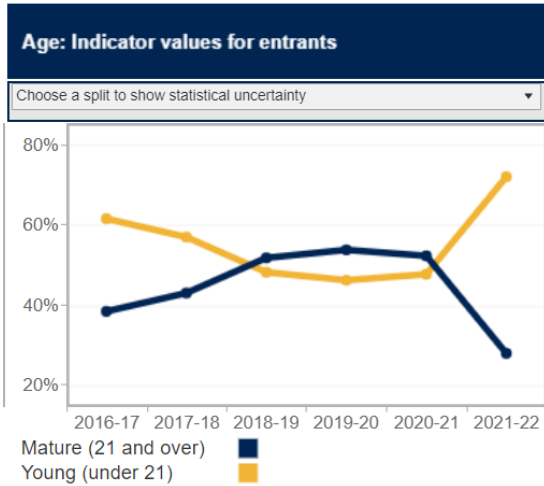
	SCUC	All registered English HE Providers
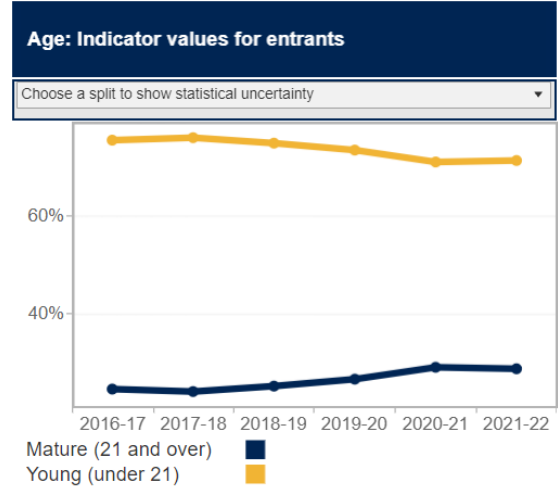
Figure 8: Proportion of young and mature entrants to SCUC (left) and nationally (right)

3.2 Continuation

Both 2- and 4-year aggregated data demonstrates a positive continuation rate for mature students when compared to younger peer group (-2.6pp and -4.9pp), as shown in figure 9. There is no indication of risk for continuation for mature learners.

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	4 year	2 year
Young (under 21) compared with mature (21 and over)	-6.7pp	0.7pp	3.4pp	-13.4pp	-1.1pp	-5.6pp	-4.9pp	-2.6pp

Change in gap from 2019-20 to 2020-21: -4.5pp

Figure 9: Continuation rates for mature students compared with young (under 21) students.

3.3 Completion

Completion rates for mature learners show a similar picture to completion, although AP-dashboard data is less recent (2012-2018; see figure 10). Mature students generally are more successful at completing their course than younger peers, and there is no indication of risk for mature learners.
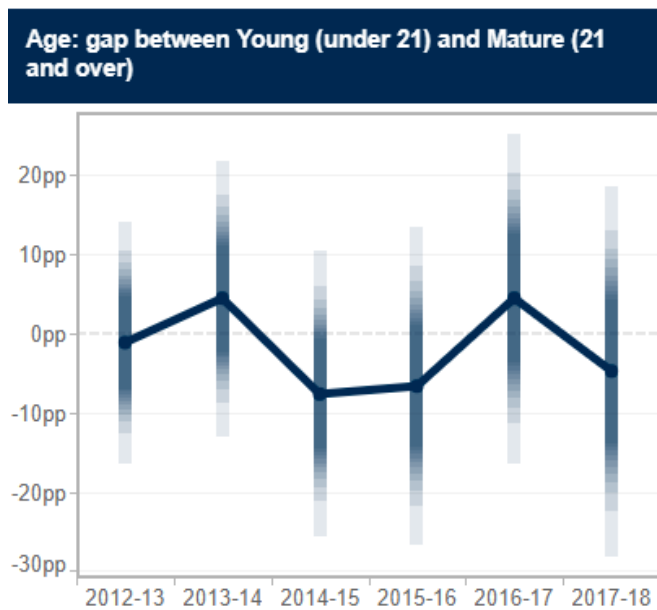
Figure 10: Gaps in completion rates between young and mature students.

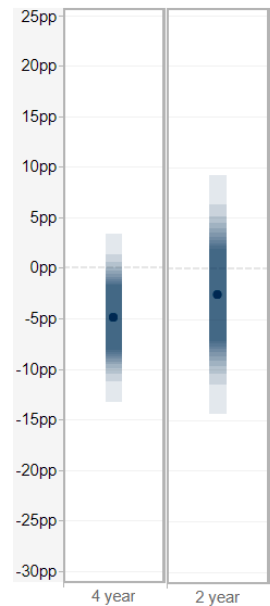However, if apprentices are considered, completion rates differ and there is a gap between apprenticeship completion of mature students and young students (4-year data shows a 9.2pp gap, 2-year data shows 14.1pp). Although mature apprentices make up a small proportion (6%) of the entire cohort, we should still monitor this group.

3.4 Attainment
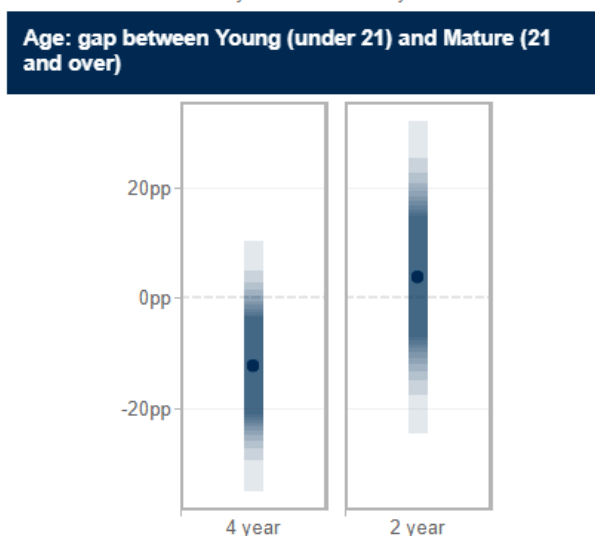
Attainment data for this population is insufficient but 4-year and 2-year aggregate data demonstrates a mixed picture. 4-year data shows a -12.3pp difference between young and mature students; but over 2 years there is a 3.8pp gap. Nationally, there is a 10pp gap between attainment of young and mature students, so this small gap, alongside the 4-year data, is not considered an indication of risk. Attainment also relates to first degree cohorts, which make up only 20% of the students at SCUC – the remaining 80% are studying sub-degrees (Foundation degrees and Higher National Certificates and Diplomas).

Figure 11: Attainment gaps between young and mature students at SCUC (2 year and 4 -year aggregated data)

3.5 Progression

Data indicates that mature students progress well at SCUC, and their outcomes are better than younger students. 4-year data shows a -20.7pp gap with their younger counterparts; 2-year data extends this gap to -27.7pp (figure 12).

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	4 year	2 year
Young (under 21) compared with mature (21 and over)	[low]	-12.5pp	-31.4pp	-24.7pp	-20.7pp	-27.7pp

Change in gap from 2019-20 to 2020-21: 6.7pp

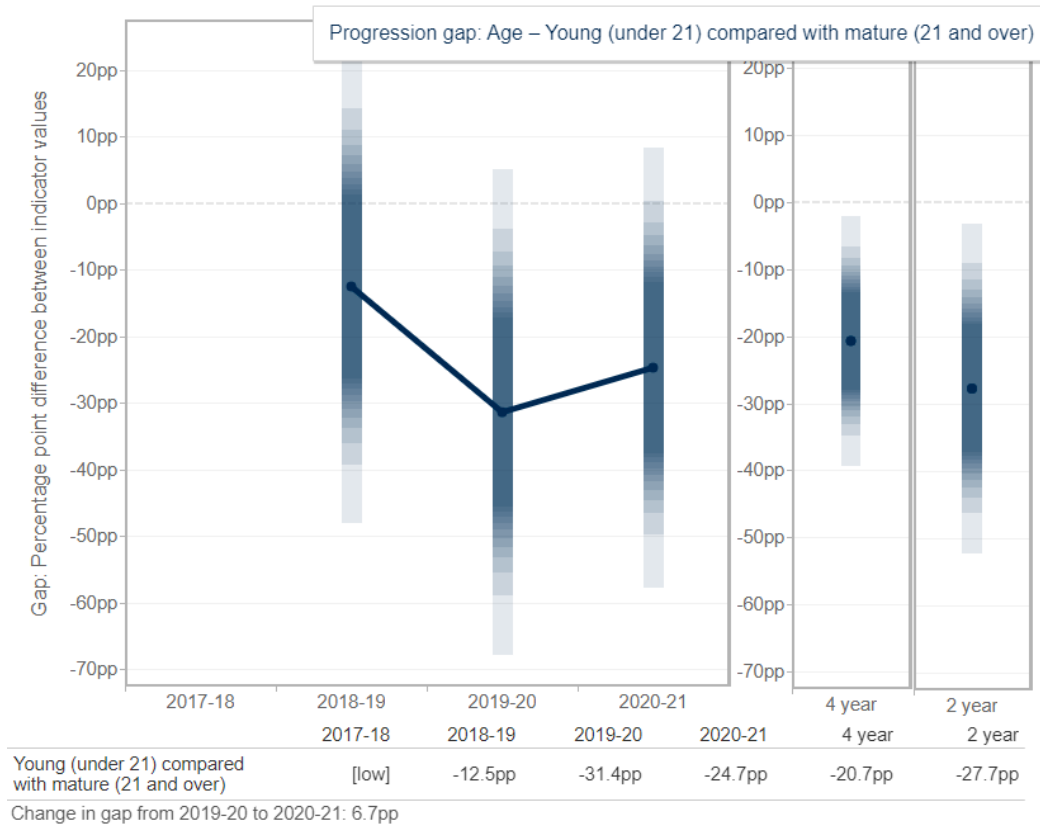*Figure 12: Progression gaps between young and mature students at SCUC.*

4. Disability

4.1 Access

SCUC recruits students with a declared disability similar to the national average (4-year figures of 16.2%, 2-year figures of 22% at SCUC, compared to 16.7% and 17.2% nationally). The APP 2020-21 – 24-25 set a target of 13%. Since 2018 the number of students with a declared disability has steadily increased from 11.5%.

4.2 **Continuation**

Continuation figures for disabled students vary with disability type. The 4-year data shows there is a small gap in continuation between disabled and non-disabled students (4.5pp) however when considering disability type, those students with cognitive or learning difficulties show very similar continuation rates to students with no learning difficulties (-1.3pp). The gap however increases when considering students with social or communication impairment (8.9pp). 4-year data shows that 75% of students with social or communication impairment continue with their course, but statistical uncertainty is high (Upper 75%Confidence interval = 83.2% Lower 75% CI =64.7%). This should be noted as an indicator of risk for this particular group, but interventions need not be on a college-wide basis but targeted supported for the very small number of students in this cohort.

When disaggregating disability data into disability type, data from the OfS AP-dashboard is unreportable, other than the above. Locally held 4-year data has identified the number of students who have withdrawn from their studies that declared a disability, and students with a declared mental health condition are at greater risk for continuation of their studies than others.

Disability	Average retention (4-year data 2019-2023)
No disability	91.25%
Learning difficulty	92.25%
Mental Health	79.25%
Other disability	87%
Physical disability	87.5%

Table 6: Average retention of students (2019 - 2023) by disability type (college-owned data).

4.3 **Completion**

Data for completion is rather historical (2012-2018); however, number of disabled students completing their course has increased by 4.5pp (4-year data to 2-year data). When compared to non-disabled students, disabled students are more likely to complete their course (see figure 13). This success may be due to the small group sizes and enhanced contact with lecturers and support staff that college-based higher education affords. This is also echoed in the TEF data, with full time disabled students reporting above benchmark for student experience measures.
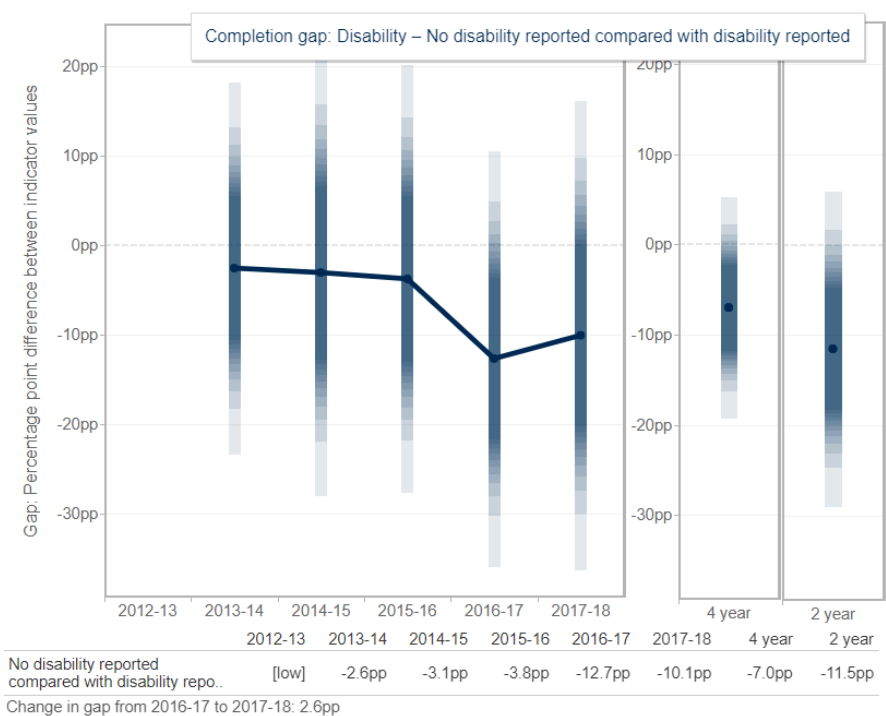
Figure 13: Completion of studies - gaps between students with a reported disability and those without a disability.

No disability reported compared with disability repo..	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	4 year	2 year
	[low]	-2.6pp	-3.1pp	-3.8pp	-12.7pp	-10.1pp	-7.0pp	-11.5pp

Change in gap from 2016-17 to 2017-18: 2.6pp

4.4 **Attainment**

Despite disabled students having strong completion rates compared to their non-disabled peers, attainment is not the same picture, but data here is so small, caution should be used. Attainment applies to first degree provision only, of which the provision at SCUC is 20%; the remainder of provision is to level 4 or 5.   There is however a 20.1pp gap in attainment of good degrees between non-disabled and disabled students (4-year data), and this is therefore an indication of risk that must be mitigated. Locally held 4-year data, which includes the sub-degree grades, shows a 15pp gap between disabled and non-disabled students with regard to achieving good degrees. This has not been included as a separate target, as across the plan there are activities to promote the uptake of academic support, which would include disabled students, and an intervention specifically for mental health support (students with a diagnosed mental health need fall under the banner of disabled students).

4.5 **Progression**

There is also a progression gap when comparing disabled students with non-disabled. 4year data shows a 12.3pp gap; 2-year data reduces this to 7.2pp, although statistical uncertainty is high. See figure 14 for detail.
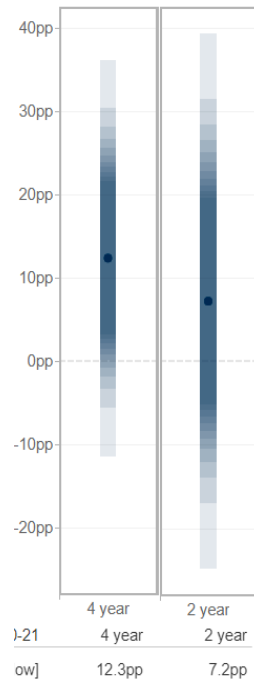
Figure 14:

Comparison of progression between disabled and non-disabled students at SCUC

5. Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)

Eligibility for FSM is used as an indicator of household income; students from low-income families are more likely to experience all 12 of the risks on the EORR.

5.1 **Access**

In line with the TUNDRA and POLAR4 data regarding home address, eligibility for free school meals follows a similar pattern. 27.5% of students recruited to SCUC were eligible for FSM compared to 19.2% as a national average (4-year aggregated data).

SCUC

All registered English HE Providers
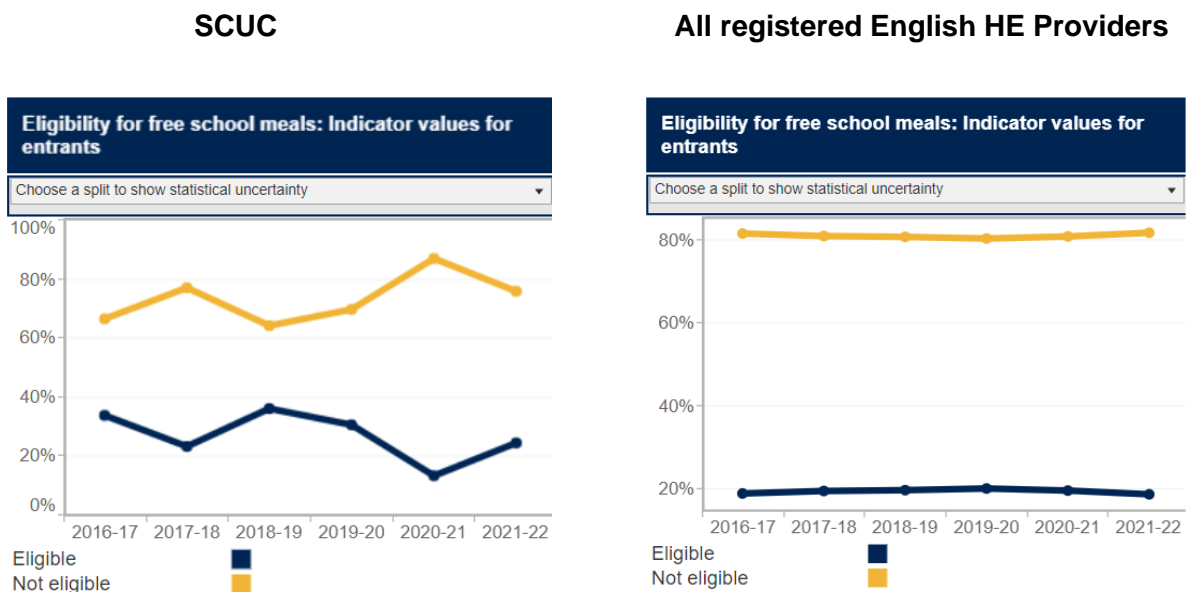
Figure 15: Entrants to SCUC who were eligible for free school meals (left) compared to national HE entrances (left).

5.2 Continuation

AP-dashboard data is limited and insufficient for comparisons over two of the last 6 years, but 4-year data suggests an 8.2pp gap between continuation rates for students eligible for FSMs, compared to those not eligible (see figure 16). However, this is historic data from 2012-2018 only. The college does not currently collect this data from its students and therefore no local, more recent data exists. Anecdotally, the expense of travelling into college is a barrier to some students.

Figure 16: Gap in continuation of study rates between students eligible for free school meals, compared to those not eligible for FSM.
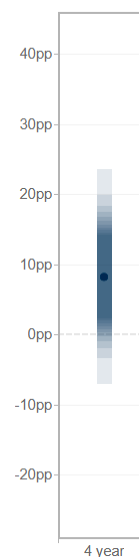
5.3 Completion

Both 4-year and 2-year data demonstrate a gap in completion for students eligible for FSM when compared to non-eligible counterparts (11.3pp and 16.7pp respectively). This mirrors the national statistics that FSM-eligible students have lower access, continuation, completion, attainment, and progression rates than those not eligible for FSM.

Figure 17: Completion gaps between students eligible and not eligible for FSM.
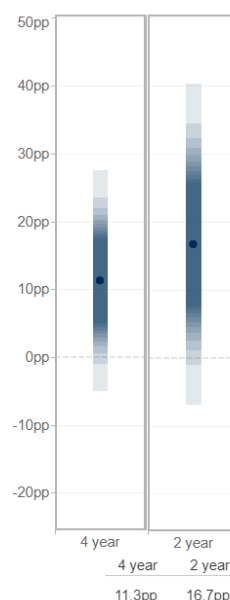
5.4 Attainment

Attainment data (even aggregated) is not available via the OfS AP-dashboard for this student characteristic, nor is data held locally.

5.5 Progression

4-year data demonstrates FSM students progress well, with a -18.3pp gap between them and their non-eligible peers.

6. Study Mode

6.1 Access

At the access stage of the student lifecycle, full-time students made up 49% of the cohort at SCUC; 31% are part time and 20% are apprentices.

6.2 Continuation

Locally held college data from 2018-2023 shows that part-time students are as likely to continue their studies than full time students (see table 7).

Table 7: Percentage of part-time and full-time students retained, academic years 2018-19 - 2022-23; college-owned data.

Percentage of students retained	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	4-year aggregate
Part time	92	93	89	90	92	91.2
Full time	96	89	88	88	96	91.4

However, when split with IMD 2019 data, comparing Q1 and 5 students, there is a 13.5pp gap between part time and full-time continuation and this should be seen as an indication of risk, with on-course support being put in place to minimise withdrawals. 4-year aggregated data, comparing part-time Q5 with Q1 students, shows a 21.7pp gap; compared to 8.2pp for full-time students.

6.3 Completion

4-year aggregated data shows that 78.4% of apprentices, complete their course compared to 76% of full time and 83% of part time. As noted in section 3.3 there is also a difference in completion rate between mature and young apprentices. There is a 13.9pp gap between completion for apprenticeships in IMD Quintiles 1&2 compared with Q3-5; but there is high statistical uncertainty here, and in the completion stage of the lifecycle, apprentices make up only 6% of the cohort.

In this stage of the student lifecycle, part-time students do not experience risk to equality of opportunity significantly differently to full-time students. When considering gaps between full-time and full-time students, with single split indicators (POLAR4, TUNDRA, IMD2019, Age, Disability, Ethnicity, Sex, FSM eligibility) over 4-year aggregated data, there are no significant gaps in completion between the two study modes. Data is generally too deficient to compare multiple split indicators.

6.4 **Attainment**

Attainment data (even aggregated) is not available via the OfS AP-dashboard for part-time students.   Overall attainment is showing as 90.2% for apprentices, but data is deficient when split with other indicators.

6.5 **Progression**

Small sample sizes mean that data here is unreliable. Data shows no risk for part-time students, or mature students, or those from IMD2019 quintiles. Data is unreportable for those with a disability, students eligible for FSM, or students of different ethnicity.

For students studying on a higher apprenticeship, data is unreportable for ethnicity, IMD2019, POLAR4, disability, and FSM. Data is available for age, showing just a 1pp gap, and hence no risk is noted here.

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.

A literature review was carried out to support the rationale and intervention strategies proposed across this plan. Interventions decided upon were informed not only by evidence but where we, as a small HE provider, felt capable we could deliver, and those that would be most impactful. TASO's Theory of Change template has been utilised to scaffold the theory of change (how we think the activities in the strategy will impact on the risks identified) and allowed us to identify assumptions within the strategy. The literature review also allowed to identify the existing evidence, much of which was represented in TASO's Evidence Toolkit.

Intervention Strategy 1 seeks to address the inequalities for young people from TUNDRA Quintiles 1 and 2 accessing higher education. The activities in this strategy include

- Progression Accords with target schools
- Participation with outreach activities with Aim Higher
- A Student Ambassador scheme, coaching and mentoring KS4 pupils to raise attainment.

Assumptions are made that schools will welcome the offer of a progression accord agreement; that Aim Higher has the capacity to accommodate our offer and there is sufficient interest from KS3 learners to attend outreach programmes; and finally, that sufficient numbers of students are interested in becoming student ambassadors and that department heads are able to timetable mentoring sessions for KS4 & KS5 students.

Progression accords (other known as progression agreements, or compact agreements) are a contract between a HE provider and a school/sixth form, whereby students who meet specific widening participation criteria, and have the minimum entry criteria, are guaranteed an interview for their chosen course (or sometimes even guaranteed a place). Progression accords are often focused on students that hold vocational level 3 qualifications (rather than A-levels); students studying vocational programmes are more likely to be from lower socio-economic groups than those taking A-levels (May, van der Sluis and Woodfield, 2012) and hence are an effective method of widening participation. Creating progression accords with schools in TUNDRA areas of low participation would have the same effect. May, van de Sluis and Woodfield (2012) also document how HE providers have monitored the student applications from their feeder schools, and found that students that signed up for courses based on a progression agreement had a reduced level of withdrawal from HE programmes. There is of course difficulty in monitoring the correlation and causality between progression agreements and applications (did the applicant only apply because of the progression agreement?); however, as an intervention strategy it remains a low-cost and viable option for a small provider and will foster a collaborative relationship with schools.

In their retrospective study, Burgess, Horton and Moores (2021) reviewed the impact of outreach activities on widening participation through data captured through the UniConnect programme, specifically AimHigher West Midlands. Key findings were that *any* interaction between students and AimHigher, no matter how limited, was associated with a 50% increased chance of getting a

place at university (even when factors such as sex, ethnicity and levels of deprivation had been accounted for). However, the type of activities, extent of the engagement, and combination of activity types all had an effect, with activities most strongly linked to UCAS acceptance being summer schools, campus visits and information and guidance.

Many universities are using student ambassadors as academic tutors. The theory of change for this method of academic tutoring can be a direct one, i.e. more knowledgeable, older students impart their knowledge on younger students, who in turn will reach higher levels of academic achievement. Anthony (2019) notes that student ambassadors are not trained teachers, and questions this theory of change, proposing that the theory of change is more likely to be an indirect one – the ambassador acts as a role model, providing psycho-social support to tutees, helping to raise confidence, self-efficacy, motivation and engagement – which in turn increases attainment. McDaniel and Besnoy's (2019) cross-age peer mentoring programme found a mean grade increase of 19% for the participants, as well as increased self-efficacy. Teachers of the mentees in this project reported students showed an increase in classwork grades, increased homework completion and grades, as well as improved behaviour and attitude towards schoolwork. McDaniel and Besnoy (2019) also noted the benefits of the programme to the mentor, allowing them to develop leadership skills. Hillier *et al* (2019) also found positive impacts of peer mentoring on students with a disability. Collier (2022) reviews the reasons why peer mentoring is a successful strategy for improving continuation and attainment – mentors are likely to be close in age to the mentee and provide mentees with personal connections to the university – this makes them relatable, trustworthy and increases the likelihood of mentor-mentees bonding. This relationship means the mentee trusts the advice from the mentor, which aids in their decision making. This all brings about a better sense of belonging to both mentors and mentees.

Intervention Strategy 2 seeks to address the gap in continuation rates between part-time students from IMD Q1 and Q5 areas. The activities in this strategy include:

- Providing a bursary for eligible students (existing activity)
- Increasing the threshold for maximum household income from £25k to £30k
- Activities to increase the uptake of academic support.
- Activities that help create a sense of belonging.

The theory of change that supports this makes assumptions that part-time students in Q1 are less financially secure and will meet the eligibility criteria for the bursary; and are likely to be completing paid work alongside their studies. There is also an assumption that part-time students from Q1 are not accessing support academic support, or as engaged with the university, with the same frequency as full-time students. The evidence based surround this intervention strategy also applies to **Intervention Strategy 5**, which aims to address the lower continuation rates of students eligible for free school meals (FSM). Assumptions in the theory of change for this strategy are that students eligible for FSM are less financially secure than peers who were not eligible for FSM and are completing paid work alongside their studies.

Moores and Burgess (2023) investigated the relationship between receipt of a scholarship and continuation rates of students. Their data suggested that scholarships improved retention, but mainly for those students with a low or intermediate household income. They discovered that

students from the lowest income households (<£25k) were five times more likely to withdraw than students without a scholarship. This is echoed in literature across other countries too, and advice is that scholarships are most impactful when issued on need rather than academic merit. However, OFFA's (2015) report indicated a less favourable outcome, finding that financial support did not have a positive impact on continuation (but also no detriment). Receiving a scholarship or bursary is not there to confer an advantage over peers, rather it is to 'level the playing field' for those students who are financially disadvantaged. Later work by the OfS (2020), which focused on the evaluation of financial support, suggested that bursaries *are* successful in supporting recipients to achieve the same outcomes as their more advantaged peers. The report found that bursary provision allowed students to reduce the amount of paid work they were completing alongside their studies; reduced anxiety and stress about money and reduced the need to borrow money. This in turn allowed bursary recipients to take a fuller part in social and society activities. Another finding was low awareness by students of the financial support they were entitled to – and this was echoed in the student focus group carried out at Solihull College & University Centre.

Intervention Strategy 3 and **Intervention Strategy 4** are continuation targets and have been developed with the overarching aim of increasing the sense of belonging of university students, and general engagement with the course and university community, with BAME students and students with poor mental health being the primary target groups. Hughes *et al* (2022) note that a whole institution approach is required to embed race equity – and although this is happening at Solihull College and University centre, it is not celebrated enough.

Blake, Capper and Jackson's 2022 report 'Building Belonging in Higher Education' identifies 'belonging' as being underpinned by four foundations: Connection, Inclusion, Support and Autonomy. The report identifies the link between being confident in academic skills bringing an increased sense of belonging. Those that were not confident in their academic skills, who felt they did not deserve to be at university (aka imposter syndrome) had a much higher sense that they did not belong (68% felt they did not belong, compared to 32% who did feel they belong). Academic support provision should be proactive, rather than reactive (we should not wait for a student to fail before support is offered – their confidence is already lost at this point). Hence the more pro-active approach for the new plan, to actively offer support based on a needs analysis, as well as more group support sessions to be offered. When considering autonomy as a foundation of belonging, Blake, Capper and Jackson identified that this manifests through students being given choice – whether a choice of modules, assignment briefs or assessment types, as well as co-creation of the curriculum. As a small provider with small class sizes, offering a choice of modules is not cost-effective, but a choice of assessment method is something that can be included as part of our intervention strategy. The student focus group held during the creation of the plan should strong support for this idea, with students saying how choice would also reduce their anxiety and stress levels, as well as empower them to work to their strengths.

The link between 'belonging' and continuation of studies has been well-documented in academic literature; and thus, activities to increase the sense of belonging have been threaded throughout this plan. Ritchie and Alcock (2024) suggest that building belonging hinges on trust – students should trust their academic staff, the professional services staff and their peers, which in turn will make them feel safe, supported and empowered. Thomas (2012) found that part-time students, mature students, and commuter students found it harder to make friends due to their external commitments, which would undoubtedly diminish their sense of belonging. The final report from the 'What Works?' project promotes early engagement of students, pre-entry, to facilitate students to build social relationships with current and new students and members of staff. Summers, Higson

and Moores (2021) also found that early measures of engagement (in the first 3 weeks of term) were predictive of future behaviour and future outcomes – those that engaged most highly at the start of the year were more likely to have higher marks than those with less engagement in the early weeks (even if initial high engagement levels decrease). Getting student engaged from the very beginning, or even pre-entry, is therefore an important facet of student success. A social online space for students to meet peers and academic staff will be made available, to facilitate these pre-entry discussions, and early engagement activities will take place.

Kerrigan and Manktelow (2021) explored the impact of extra-curricular activities (ECA) on students educational and occupational trajectories, at a UK university. The study defines ECA as anything that takes place outside of the timetabled classroom sessions, including activities related to academic skills and social events. This large-scale study (30,000 participants) did not claim to show *causal* associations between participation in ECA and student outcome but did show positive correlations between participation and improved student outcomes. Students with high participation rates were likely to achieve higher assessment scores, higher module pass rates and final degree classifications.

Jisc's (2017) case study of student engagement at Nottingham Trent university clearly demonstrated a positive relationship between the level of student engagement and continuation and attainment. Nottingham's Trent's own institutional research had indicated that up to a third of students had considered leaving at some point during their first year. These 'doubters' were less confident, less engaged, formed weaker relationships with peers and tutors, and were ultimately more likely to withdraw early. Further analysis demonstrated that levels of engagement were a better predictor of progression than background characteristics or entry qualifications.

With regards to mental health, there is a plethora of literature which confirms that a sense of belonging is conducive to good mental health. Students with poor mental health do not feel they belong as much as students with good mental health (Blake, Capper and Jackson, 2022). Hughes *et al* (2022) note the decades of research that demonstrates being socially connected is a basic human need and is vital for well-being, and that a sense of belonging can benefit wellbeing and protect against poor mental health. The learning environment should be psychologically safe to allow learners to make mistakes and to grow; classroom culture is crucial to student learning.

No one would argue that student mental health conditions are increasing and yet still under-reported. Like Solihull University Centre, the university at which Welsh and Regehr (2024) worked also had long waitlist for mental health support. One initiative they took was to use an online chatbot to support with mental health, as well an introducing a 24-hour multilingual counselling service. This service was most used late afternoon, evening and weekends – outside of normal working hours – and thereby allowed the university to provide timely support to their students. This underpins our strategy to provide 24-7 online mental health support to students.

Intervention strategy 6 aims to improve the outcomes of disabled learners, post-graduation. There is a paucity (near complete absence) of academic research in this area – although there is lots about widening participation for disabled students in higher education, research on how to enable the transition to employment is lacking. Cunnah (2015) suggests that disabled students are more likely to encounter positive identities in university settings than in work-based placements, feeling safer to identify as disabled in the familiar university environment, and are likely to feel more at risk of exclusion in a work-based setting. Although this longitudinal study was about the impact of the students' disability in a work placement, comparisons may be drawn into the

workplace. Some students, with 'hidden' disabilities such as Asperger's syndrome, autism and mental health issues, were reticent to allow disclosure of their disability to the workplace. On one occasion this led to the placement provider wanting to withdraw the placement offer, as they thought the participant was 'just a really bad student'. Stakeholders see disclosure of disability as key to enabling support in the workplace, but this study found that students still perceive the stigma around their disability and feel they will be viewed negatively.

Sobnath *et al* (2020) used HESA data and computer modelling to identify predictors of disability engagement post-graduation. They found that age, institution, degree outcome and disability type were key predictors of successful outcomes. Younger disabled students (18-19) had better outcomes than older ones; students attending Russell Group universities fared best; degree type also showed that 'other post-graduate' and 'other undergraduate' students fared well (other undergraduate meaning sub-degrees such as HND and Foundation Degrees, the bulk of the provision at Solihull). Industries most commonly entered into by students with disabilities included healthcare, business and public service professionals, as well as teaching and education professionals. Least common were skilled agricultural, construction and building trades.

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Fees, investments and targets
2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Solihull College and University Centre

Provider UKPRN: 10005946

Summary of 2025-26 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflation statement:

We will not raise fees annually for new entrants

Table 3b - Full-time course fee levels for 2025-26 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	Coventry validation	N/A	8500
First degree	Non-Coventry	N/A	7850
Foundation degree		N/A	7850
Foundation year/Year 0	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND		N/A	6500
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 3b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2025-26

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 4b - Part-time course fee levels for 2025-26 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	Coventry validation	N/A	4000
First degree	Non-Coventry	N/A	3925
Foundation degree		N/A	3925
Foundation year/Year 0	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND		N/A	3250
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2025-26

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Solihull College and University Centre

Provider UKPRN: 10005946

Investment summary

A provider is expected to submit information about its forecasted investment to achieve the objectives of its access and participation plan in respect of the following areas: access, financial support and research and evaluation. Note that this does not necessarily represent the total amount spent by a provider in these areas. Table 6b provides a summary of the forecasted investment, across the four academic years covered by the plan, and Table 6d gives a more detailed breakdown.

Notes about the data:

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Yellow shading indicates data that was calculated rather than input directly by the provider.

In Table 6d (under 'Breakdown'):

"Total access investment funded from HFI" refers to income from charging fees above the basic fee limit.

"Total access investment from other funding (as specified)" refers to other funding, including OfS funding (but excluding Uni Connect), other public funding and funding from other sources such as philanthropic giving and private sector sources and/or partners.

Table 6b - Investment summary

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£63,000	£63,000	£63,000	£63,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£55,000	£60,000	£65,000	£65,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£6,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£18,000	£18,000	£18,000	£18,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£45,000	£45,000	£45,000	£45,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (£)**	**£63,000**	**£63,000**	**£63,000**	**£63,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment (as % of HFI)*	19.4%	17.5%	15.8%	14.7%
Access activity investment	**Total access investment funded from HFI (£)**	**£63,000**	**£63,000**	**£63,000**	**£63,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)*	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£45,000	£50,000	£55,000	£55,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (£)**	**£55,000**	**£60,000**	**£65,000**	**£65,000**
Financial support investment	*Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)*	17.0%	16.7%	16.3%	15.2%
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£6,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000
Research and evaluation investment	*Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)*	1.9%	1.4%	1.3%	1.2%

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Solihull College and University Centre

Provider UKPRN: 10005946

Targets

Table 5b: Access and/or raising attainment targets

Aim [500 characters maximum]	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
SCUC will increase the number of young students from TUNDRA Q1&2 accessing higher education	PTA_1	Access	Tracking Underrepresentation by Area (TUNDRA)	TUNDRA quintile 1 and 2	TUNDRA quintile 5	12.2% of students are from Q1 and 8.2% are Q2 (combined 20.4%). There is a 9.2pp gap between Q1 and Q5 students, and 13.2pp between Q2 an Q5. Aim to increase combined Q1 & Q2 entry from 20.4% to 25%	Yes	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	20.4	21.6	22.8	24	25
	PTA_2														
	PTA_3														
	PTA_4														
	PTA_5														
	PTA_6														
	PTA_7														
	PTA_8														
	PTA_9														
	PTA_10														
	PTA_11														
	PTA_12														

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
Reduce the gap in continuation of studies for part-time students from IMD Q1 (compared to Q5) by 5pp over the life of the plan	PTS_1	Continuation	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1	IMD quintile 5	Part-time students from IMD Q1 are less likely to continue their studies than part-time Q5 students - there is a 21.7pp gap. Although there is still a gap between full-time IMD Q1 and Q5 students (8.2pp) part-time students are more at risk.	No	The access and participation dashboard	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	21.7	20.3	19	17.7	16.7
Reduce the gap in continuation of studies between white and black/mixed ethnicity students by 1% per annum	PTS_2	Continuation	Ethnicity	Not specified (please give detail in description)	White	Although small numbers will skew data, there is a large gap in continuation of studies when comparing mixed ethnicity and black students (25.1pp and 29.3pp respectively). 4 year aggregrate data has been used.	No	The access and participation dashboard	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	29.3	28.3	27.3	26.3	25.3
To reduce the gap in continuation of studies for those students with a mental health condition by 1% per annum.	PTS_3	Continuation	Reported disability	Mental health condition	No disability reported	OfS data was unreportable due to small cohort, but college owned data (4 year aggregate, 2019-2023) showed a 12pp gap in continuation between students with a mental health condition and those without.	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	12	11	10	9	8
To reduce the gap in continuation and completion of studies between those students eligible for free school meals, and those that are not eligible, by 5pp over the life of the plan	PTS_4	Continuation	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible	Not eligible	OfS 4-year data shows an 8.2pp gap in continuation rates, and 2-year data shows a 16.7pp gap in completion, when comparing students eligible for FSM with non-eligible students.	No	The access and participation dashboard	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	16.7	15.7	14.7	13.7	12.7
	PTS_5														
	PTS_6														
	PTS_7														
	PTS_8														
	PTS_9														
	PTS_10														
	PTS_11														
	PTS_12														

Table 5e: Progression targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone

											12.3	11.3	10.3	9.3	8.3
SCUC aims to reduce the gap in progression between disabled and non-disabled students to 5pp over the life of the plan	PTP_1	Progression	Reported disability	Disability reported	No disability reported	4-year aggregrate data shows as 12.3pp gap in succfessful progression outcomes between disabled and non-disabled students.	No	The access and participation dashboard	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	12.3	11.3	10.3	9.3	8.3
	PTP_2														
	PTP_3														
	PTP_4														
	PTP_5														
	PTP_6														
	PTP_7														
	PTP_8														
	PTP_9														
	PTP_10														
	PTP_11														
	PTP_12														