

University Centre Somerset, part of Bridgwater & Taunton College

Summary of 2020-21 to 2024-25 Access and Participation Plan

What is an Access and Participation Plan?

Access and Participation Plans set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from Higher Education (university level courses).

You can see the full access and participation plan for University Centre Somerset, which is part of Bridgwater & Taunton College at [UCS \(somerset.ac.uk\)](https://www.somerset.ac.uk).

See pages 1-13 of the full plan

Key points

The focus of our Access and Participation Plan is in three areas. The first is on increasing and maintaining applications from specific groups of people who do not tend to go into Higher Education (HE). The second is ensuring that those who enrol with us complete their studies and that they have every opportunity to achieve well. The third is that our graduates find employment.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) puts areas into categories based on how deprived or not they are. Nationally, people from deprived areas (as identified through the IMD), are less likely to enter university level courses than people from very affluent areas. At University Centre Somerset (UCS), we aim to support and encourage those from deprived areas to enter HE to help address this balance. We have therefore set a target linked to this aim.

Our second priority also aims to improve the picture nationally within the HE sector. The national data shows that those students who come from postcodes where not many people enter higher education, are more likely to leave their course than others. Disabled students (including people with disabilities, mental health conditions or learning difficulties) are also more likely to leave their course than other students who are not facing these additional challenges. The data also shows that disabled students are less likely to achieve the highest grades. At UCS we consider it is important that we meet all our students' needs, as far as we are able, including our disabled students' individual needs. We wish to play our part in improving this national picture. We have therefore set targets related to supporting disabled students to achieve their goals. We provide considerable support to enable all students to stay on programme and to be successful in their studies and our activities for disabled students form part of this approach.

Thirdly, there is a national focus to ensure that disabled students are able to find highly skilled jobs because of the course they have studied. UCS is working to facilitate all students to successfully enter careers in their chosen sector area and has therefore set a target related to supporting this aim.

Not only has UCS set targets related to the key areas of focus outlined above, but is also committed to:

- maintain a high percentage of students from areas where people do not usually go into HE
- monitor and support students from all ethnic backgrounds to achieve high level grades
- support students who live in deprived areas to continue with their studies.

Fees we charge

See page 29 of the full plan

In September 2022 at University Centre Somerset the highest fees we charge are for our nursing degrees which are £9,250pa for full time students. The majority of our courses cost £7,800pa for full time students.

The highest fees we charge for part time students are £5,800pa for part time students on the Foundation Degree Early Childhood Education and Care studying a two-year course over three years (due to the extra embedded content and visits needed during extended placements). The majority of Foundation Degrees cost £5200 for part time students over three years.

You can see a full list of fees for our courses at University Centre Somerset at [UCS \(somerset.ac.uk\)](https://www.somerset.ac.uk)

See pages 15-16 of the full plan

Financial help available

We offer financial support to students from underrepresented groups. This helps students access Higher Education and to continue studying until they complete their course. The support includes:

- **HE Diagnostic Support Fund** of £250 - to provide financial support for eligible students to have a full diagnostic assessment carried out by the College
- **DSA Technology Support Fund** of £200 – to provide support for eligible students towards the cost of higher specification equipment as identified by their Technical Needs Assessment (TNA)
- **HE Bursary Fund** of up to £600 – A means tested bursary to support those with a household income of £25,000 or less with costs directly related to their studies.

Information for students

See page 28 of the full plan

Prospective students receive information on fees and financial support at in-person events, such as our open days as well as through the website or direct enquiry to UCS.

Current students receive information about fees and financial support through induction talks, via signposting by their tutor, through the website and by information provided in response to enquiries.

What we are aiming to achieve

See pages 18-22 of the full plan

Our overall aims are to support students to access Higher Education, to create an environment in which students can achieve their full potential and that they can graduate to continue with further study or to start careers in their chosen sector.

We have identified the following areas on which to focus our efforts by 2024-25:

- **Full time students from deprived areas** - Reduce the gap between full time students who enter higher education from deprived areas and others to 4 percentage points (pp)
- **Part time students from deprived areas** - Reduce the gap between part time students who enter higher education from deprived areas and others to 8pp
- **Disabled students** - Reduce the difference in those obtaining higher level degree classifications between disabled and non-disabled students such that there is no difference
- **Full time disabled students** - Reduce the gap in students continuing with their studies between full time disabled students and non-disabled students to 3pp
- **Part time disabled students** - Reduce the gap in students continuing with their studies between part time disabled students and non-disabled students to 3pp
- **Students from low participation neighbourhoods** - Reduce the gap in students continuing their studies between those who live in postcodes where less people usually go into higher education (low participation neighbourhoods) and those from high participation neighbourhoods to 4pp
- **Disabled students** - Reduce the difference in progression into highly skilled employment or further study between disabled and non-disabled students such that there is no difference

What we are doing to achieve our aims

See pages 18-22 of the full plan

We take many actions to achieve our aims and these can be seen on pages 18 to 22 of our full plan. However, the key programmes of activity are:

1. **Sponsoring the Bridgwater & Taunton College Multi Academy Trust** to support Governance, pre-16 attainment and aspirations in the schools that are part of the Trust.
2. **Working with external partners**, such as Next Steps South West (our local Uni Connect project), third sector partners and other bodies as appropriate, to raise attainment and improve access to higher education from underrepresented groups.
3. **Offering accessible courses that meet employer needs** such as the availability of part time routes; delivery concentrated in two or two and a half days a week or less to allow for other commitments; block release delivery to meet certain employer/student needs; lower UCAS tariff entry points at Foundation Degree level; courses that have been designed in consultation with employers and in consideration of Occupational Standards to meet employer needs. This is to provide good employment prospects; development of Degree Apprenticeships.
4. **Focused tutorials** to support students' individual needs and to engage students in their own development of personal, social, academic and professional skills.
5. **HEADStart** (Higher Education Academic Development) Study Skills sessions.
6. **Effective Teaching Learning and Assessment** that incorporates appropriate e-learning and assistive technologies, considers 'lean assessment' and takes account of additional learning support needs of students. This also includes providing feedback to students that feeds forward to support their development for the next assessment and enables them to understand how to get higher grades.
7. **Development of the UCS Advantage** to support employability of UCS graduates.
8. **Financial Support** for eligible students.

How students can get involved

See pages 22-27 of the full plan

We worked with the Students' Union and student representatives to gather student input into the design of our Access and Participation Plan. The HE Student President and key student reps are involved in reviewing the plan and its implementation.

To provide feedback, students can contact the HE Student President directly or email the Head of HE via the central HE Team HE@btc.ac.uk

To become involved in this work, contact the Head of HE via the central HE Team HE@btc.ac.uk

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved

See pages 25-27 of the full plan

Our programmes of activity are informed by the best available evidence about what works for students. We will collect data and feedback to evaluate:

- The eight programmes outlined above
- The impact on achieving our overall aims of widening participation, ensuring an inclusive environment that supports students to continue to the end of their studies, achieve their full potential and progress into highly skilled employment or further study.

Contact details for further information

You can contact Pauline Osborne, Head of Higher Education through the HE Team: HE@btc.ac.uk for further information.