

10004599 - NCG

Access and participation plan 2024-25 to 2027-28

Introduction and strategic aim

NCG is a national college group comprising seven further education colleges - Carlisle College, Kidderminster College, Lewisham College, Newcastle College where we have our University Centre, Southwark College and West Lancashire College, and Newcastle Sixth Form College.

Our higher education provision is delivered by three colleges - Carlisle College delivering to 4% of our students, Kidderminster College delivering to 1% of our students and Newcastle College (University Centre) where 91% of our students' study. We also currently have a collaborative partnership with Organisational Learning Centre (OLC) who deliver to 4% of our students.

Over the last four years we have had an of average 2036 full time and 385 part time students per academic year. As Newcastle College University Centre delivers 91% of our awards, the demographic and characterisation of our students closely matches that of Newcastle City which is comprised of 75% White British and 25% Asian, black, mixed or other heritages, and 54.3% of residents who live in the most deprived areas as identified by Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 1 and 2.

We are an ambitious organisation with a unique proposition that embraces both the further and higher education sectors, delivered across a national footprint. Our mission is to deliver exceptional education to create transformative opportunities for individuals that will also strengthen the prosperity of their local communities.

We firmly believe that every individual, regardless of their background, should have equality of opportunity to access, succeed in, and progress beyond higher education to fulfil their potential. This is evident in our guiding principles for higher education, which support every decision we make, and insist that we must widen access to and success in higher education.

It is our belief that education is a powerful tool that breaks down barriers, uplifts communities, and transforms lives. By providing exceptional education we strive to empower individuals from all backgrounds to overcome societal and economic challenges, ultimately enabling social mobility. We understand that education is not just about acquiring knowledge but also about equipping individuals with the skills, confidence, and opportunities to thrive in the world, often through gainful employment.

We understand that ensuring equal opportunities extends beyond admission. It encompasses providing the necessary support and resources to help every student reach their full potential. We are proud of our commitment to provide comprehensive academic and pastoral support services, financial assistance programmes, mentoring, and tailored interventions to address individual needs. By doing so, we strive to bridge the gaps in inequality, ensuring that no student is left behind on their educational journey.

We are the only college group in England with indefinite taught degree awarding powers. By combining the strengths of a further education college group with the authority to confer degrees, we create a powerful platform for underrepresented groups to access higher education. We are dedicated to removing the obstacles that have historically hindered the education of individuals from the communities we serve, ensuring that they have equal opportunity to embark on an educational journey that will unlock their potential.

We understand the importance of embracing the diversification agenda set by the Office for Students (OfS). Our diverse offer includes Certificates in Higher Education, Foundation Degrees, one year Top-Ups, Apprenticeships, and Higher Technical Qualifications which support the diversification agenda by offering alternative pathways to higher education that cater to a broader range of students. These programs not only provide academic rigor but also emphasise practical application, preparing students for the demands of the ever changing job market.

Our programmes blend academic study with workplace style experience to offer a unique opportunity for students to gain valuable hands-on skills while working towards a recognised and valuable higher education qualification. Our qualifications equip students with specialised knowledge, behaviours and skills, ensuring their readiness for technical and vocational careers.

We are committed to eliminating barriers and reducing inequalities that may hinder the progress and attainment of underrepresented groups. We create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that celebrates diversity, promotes social mobility, and embraces the unique strengths and perspectives of each student; as captured within our mission and strategic objectives.

Our strategic approach to equality of opportunity encompasses several key initiatives:

1. **Widening access:** We actively work to remove barriers to entry by reaching out to underrepresented groups and providing tailored support, guidance, and information. We collaborate with schools, community organisations, and other stakeholders to ensure that potential students are aware of the opportunities available to them and have the necessary resources to make informed decisions about their educational journey.
2. **Tailored support and interventions:** We recognise that every student has unique strengths, challenges, and aspirations. We therefore provide comprehensive academic support services, mentoring programs, and targeted interventions to address individual needs. Our aim is to ensure that every student receives the support and guidance necessary to succeed academically and personally.
3. **Financial support:** We recognise that financial constraints can be a significant barrier to accessing and succeeding in higher education. Therefore, we offer a range of scholarships, bursaries, and hardship funds to support students from underrepresented backgrounds and those with immediate financial difficulty. Our aim is to ensure that no student is deterred from pursuing their educational aspirations by financial limitations.
4. **Partnerships and collaboration:** We actively collaborate with employers, industry professionals, and collaborative partners to create meaningful opportunities for our students. By forging strong partnerships, we provide access to work placements and industry-relevant experiences that enhance employability and create pathways to successful careers.
5. **Inclusive learning environment:** We foster an inclusive and welcoming learning environment where all students feel valued, respected, and supported. We promote diversity and equality through inclusive teaching practices, student support services, and a commitment to addressing individual needs. We actively engage in promoting awareness, understanding, and celebration of different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives.

NCG proves our dedication to creating a level playing field where all individuals, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education, through these strategic initiatives, underpinned by our values.

Risks to equality of opportunity

NCG risks to equality of opportunity

Utilising the access and participation dashboard (provided by the Office for Students), our internal data analysis, and the equality of opportunity risk register (EORR) we have identified the following risks to opportunity for students across NCG. This section addresses what we believe to be the biggest risk to equality of opportunity for students at NCG. Within annex A, Assessment of Performance you will find detailed analysis of all stages of the student lifecycle, both NCG data and an institutional response to the EORR for each stage.

We are focussing this 2024-28 access and participation plan on the two attainment objectives which we believe are the greatest risks to equality of opportunity at NCG.

Objective 1

Our analysis highlights that over the last aggregated four years, comparing attainment of students from Asian, black, mixed, or other heritages to white students on our full-time first-degree programmes, there has been a 24.3% gap in achieving a 1st or 2:1 degree classification. The confidence interval indicates an upper limit of 28% and a lower limit of 20.6% for this gap. This presents one of our greatest risks to equality of opportunity and has been included in this plan as a principal objective. Notably, the national picture for the same timeframe is 11.3%.

Reviewing the student body of our Asian, black, mixed and other heritage students from 2018-19 to 2022-23 we see the following:

- Full time Health contributes to 26% of the overall delivery to this cohort of students. Within this curriculum area 80% are female, and 89% of these females are mature.
- Full time Business contributes to 19% of the overall delivery. Male students make up 57% of the population and 90% of this cohort are mature.
- No other full time curriculum delivers to over 10% of the overall cohort.
- Part time accounts for 10% of all delivery to this student group and is evenly spread in very small numbers across 13 curriculum areas.

Using 2022-23 as the baseline for personal data collection for this cohort of students our analysis highlights:

- 43% are the first in family to study at a higher level.
- 70% are students whose first language isn't English.
- 3% have accessed counselling support for mental health and wellbeing.
- 20% have accessed additional employability support.
- 63% have to work either part or full time to support themselves.
- 20% have caring responsibilities.
- 45% have parental responsibilities.

We are using this data to inform our intervention strategy and activities.

Further analysis of the data shows there is a specific attainment gap of 35.2% when comparing black students to white students in obtaining a 1st or 2:1 on our full-time first-degree programmes. The confidence interval reveals an upper limit of 41.2% and a lower limit of 29.2%. The national picture for the same timeframe and four year aggregate is 20.2%.

Although data for four of the six years analysed was suppressed, it is noteworthy that there was a 11.2% increase in the last two years, and we are therefore including this as a secondary objective within our plan.

Reviewing the student body of our black students from 2018-19 to 2022-23 we see the following:

- Full time Health contributes to 39% of the overall delivery. Within this curriculum area 98% are female, and 77% of these females are mature.
- Full time Business contributes to 23% of the overall delivery. Male students make up 58% of the population and 96% of this cohort are mature.
- No other full time curriculum delivers to over 10% of the overall cohort.
- Part time accounts for 12% of all delivery to this student group and is evenly spread in very small numbers across 11 curriculum areas.

Using 2022-23 as the baseline for personal data collection for this cohort of students our analysis highlights:

- 43% of our black students are the first in their family to study at a higher level.
- 29% have accessed counselling services to support their mental health and wellbeing.
- 36% have accessed additional employability support.
- 79% have had trouble paying their utility bills.
- 57% have to work to support their studies.
- 21% have caring responsibilities.
- 57% have parental responsibilities.

We are using this data to inform our intervention strategy and activities.

Objective 2

Our data analysis shows that over the past four years, when comparing students from areas of most deprivation (IMD quintiles 1 and 2) to those from areas of least deprivation (quintiles 3 to 5), there exists a 19.7% gap in achieving a 1st or 2:1 on our full-time first-degree programmes. The confidence interval indicates an upper limit of 24% and a lower limit of 15.5% for this gap. This presents one of our greatest risks to equality of opportunity and has been included in this plan as a principal objective. Notably, the national picture for the same timeframe is 17%.

Our analysis of student enrolment data shows that students from areas of high deprivation (IMD quintiles 1 and 2), which equates to 58% of our student body, are distributed relatively evenly across our 27 curriculum areas: Health 18%, Digital Arts 11% and Music 10%.

Using 2022-23 as the baseline for personal data collection for this cohort of students our analysis highlights:

- 55% are the first in their family to study at a higher level.
- 15% have accessed additional academic support.
- 16% have accessed library resources.
- 3% have accessed counselling services to support mental health and wellbeing.
- 3% have accessed additional employability support.
- 43% indicate the cost of traveling to campus has been a pressure for them.
- 33% indicate the price of food has been a pressure for them.
- 66% have to work either part or full time to support their studies.

- 37% have parental responsibilities.

We are using this data to inform our intervention strategy and activities.

Further analysis of the data over the past four years shows there is a specific attainment gap of 11.3% between male students from areas of most deprivation (IMD quintiles 1 and 2) when compared to males from areas of least deprivation (IMD quintiles 3 to 5) in obtaining a 1st or 2:1 on our full-time first-degree programmes. The confidence interval reveals an upper limit of 15.5% and a lower limit of 7.1% for this gap. The sector gap over the same timeframe is 15.9%.

When analysing our data, we find that the gap over a two-year period aggregates to 13.2%; we are therefore including this as a secondary objective within our plan.

Our analysis of student enrolment data shows that there are six curriculum areas which currently deliver to 10% or more of our male students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles 1 and 2); these are Digital Technologies (13%), Music and Performing Arts (13%), Aviation (12%), Sport (11%), Digital Arts (10%), and Engineering (10%).

Using 2022-23 as the baseline for personal data collection for this cohort of students our analysis highlights:

- 67% are the first in their family to study at a higher level.
- 13% have accessed counselling services to support mental health and wellbeing.
- 13% have accessed additional employability support.
- 50% indicate the cost of traveling to campus has been a pressure for them.
- 33% indicate the price of food has been a pressure for them.
- 80% have to work either part or full time to support their studies.
- 20% have caring responsibilities.

This vital granular level analysis of our cohort has helped inform the intervention strategy and activities within this access and participation plan.

Equality of opportunity risk register

We have identified that significant numbers of students within our target groups have parental or caring responsibilities outside of their study. With increasing costs of living pressure we know that more of our students within these groups need either full or part time work to survive. Our intervention strategies outline how we will support students in this area.

We also found that students from our most deprived areas face distinct barriers to achievement, including long-term poverty, multi-generational unemployment and negative school experiences, all of which contribute to disengagement from learning, a lack of confidence and limited aspirations.

Taking these risks into consideration, our access and participation plan outlines how we will attempt to reduce and eliminate these by offering targeted and impactful interventions which will enable students to overcome barriers to their learning and achieve their full potential.

We know that to support students from these groups we must have targeted academic and personal support to ensure higher continuation, completion and attainment levels. Our intervention strategy outlines our approach to maximising student outcomes from these target groups.

How we will further supporting sector-wide risks.

Supporting schools to raise pre-16 attainment.

Given that this is central to our NCG mission of social mobility, we are working to raise the attainment levels of those who have not achieved good passes at level 2 by the age of 16 through our Northeast Uni Connect partnerships. The work of our Education Partnership team supports pre-16 attainment through, among other things, hosting visits to college campus of pre-16 pupils to raise aspirations; careers fayres in schools; parent information sessions covering attainment requirements for post 16 pathways; and delivering careers-based workshops where pupils apply theory to practice. While typically these activities are group based, we are responsive to the diverse needs of pre-16s and host 1-1 and small group sessions.

Our colleges provide focussed learning pathways that raise pre-16 attainment levels for students who are now over 16. We offer vocational programmes and specialised subject-focused programmes that cater to a diverse range of student interests. By embracing different learning styles and offering a broader curriculum, we raise the aspirations of students who may not have thrived in traditional school settings.

Additionally, our colleges play a vital role in facilitating the transition to higher education for our students. By supporting those who have not achieved their desired GCSE results, we help them develop the necessary skills and qualifications to pursue their desired pathways.

As the largest Further Education College Group in England, entering a significant number of students for GCSE exams, we play a significant role in supporting the Office for Students' (OfS) mission of raising pre-16 attainment in England.

Across our institution our English and Maths strategy is designed to maximise students' achievement, support progression and support development of life skills and employment potential. All staff are expected to 'demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting and developing English and Maths skills whatever the specialist subject or vocational area'.

Looking at GCSE English and Maths in isolation we have entered students studying at our colleges for 9,634 examinations from 2019-20 to date. The success rates in these examinations are ahead of the national picture as shown by our most recent statistics from 2021-22:

Table 2. GCSE exam entries across NCG colleges, NCG success rates and national success rates

Qualification type	2021-22	NCG success rate 2021-22 %	National success rate 2021-22 %
GCSE Maths	1,166	79.1	78.5
GCSE English	938	81.1	80.3

How we will expand and promote diverse and flexible pathways and provision

We are committed to continuously diversifying our provision of higher education qualifications to ensure equality of opportunity and complement our access and participation aims, objectives, and targets. We recognise the importance of offering a broad range of courses that cater to the diverse needs, backgrounds, and aspirations of our student population.

Over the life of our access and participation plan we will be increasing the number of higher technical qualifications, transferrable credit bearing modules and degree apprenticeships that we offer. We have several integrated degree apprenticeships validated. As an example, our Creative Digital Design apprenticeship has a blended delivery model that provides flexibility for those in work to upskill from wherever they are based in England.

Working in collaboration with business and public sector agencies, NCG has co-created a 13-week credit bearing Cert CE (Certificate in Continuing Education) programme to train students in basic coding skills with the sole purpose of securing employment in the Newcastle city region's 'tech sector', thus also supporting local digital economy growth. The programme is accessible to all, encouraging applicants from non-technology sectors who may be considering career change. Importantly, this course is endorsed by technology employers who have contributed to course content and expectations of skills capabilities. Applicants who complete the training will be employment ready and have a foundation for ongoing learning. We are committed to expanding this practice of co-creation and collaboration across areas of national strategic importance, opening pathways of employment to a diverse, non-traditional / underrepresented population at higher education, for whom a traditional 3-year undergraduate programme does not meet their needs.

NCG is involved in an on-going process to secure HTQ status (Higher Technical Qualifications) for our Foundation Degree programmes. HTQs are driven by a commitment to equality of opportunity and inclusivity. By offering courses that address skills gaps, target underrepresented groups, and cater to individual aspirations, these programmes empower students to thrive in their chosen fields. This approach aligns with our access and participation aims, objectives, and targets, ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to access high-quality technical education and succeed in their careers.

We currently (as of June 2023) have six NCG awards which carry the prestigious HTQ kitemark. Our proactive engagement with the higher technical education (levels 4 and 5) agenda is reflected in the approval register¹ where each cycle contains an NCG award. As an institution we are committed to higher technical education with modules of NCG HTQ designed to maximise the benefit to students seeking upskilling, reskilling and retraining through the LLE (Lifelong Loan Entitlement). This is further amplified with NCG's full tertiary offer with alignment of short adult education funded provision with an LLE funded module.

How we will improve the mental health of our students

At NCG we have full team of trained mental health first aiders who are available on a rota basis to support students in distress. All learning mentors and SEND advisers are trained so they can provide support to their students. In addition, all support staff have undertaken post 16 autism training, so they are able to effectively support autistic students in maintaining good mental health.

NCG has a suicide safer policy in place to ensure procedures are in place to support students where there is risk of harm. An on-site safeguarding team is also available to work alongside other support teams, including a dedicated wellbeing team, who can provide immediate support to students and staff where their mental health concerns are more severe.

Our OfS funded and award-winning mental health and wellbeing digital project improved the mental health of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds through digital innovation. The project included three core strands, (1) online recourses, (2) student fellows and (3) Twilight student counselling service.

Analysing the success of the project and with funding finishing in August 2023 we identified that the Twilight student counselling service had most impact. Twilight is a free online counselling service delivered by our HE Counselling students, and is available for HE students at Newcastle,

¹ [Approved Higher Technical Qualifications / Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#)

Kidderminster, Carlisle colleges. We saw a 54% growth in use between years one and two of the project.

Twilight's success has three elements. Firstly, its peer-to-peer support, which is valuable because of shared experiences and understanding. Peer support is often informal and omits traditional professional-client power dynamics. When surveyed, students who had received counselling through Twilight said:

"I like the confidentiality and the 1:1 setting. I also liked that my counsellor was also a student at the college as it makes things a bit more relatable" (Student A, 2023)

"It's easy to access and it's not judgemental" (Student B, 2023).

A second factor of Twilight's success is due to its remote properties. Twilight is flexible around constraints such as studies, employment, and caring responsibilities. Twilight also differs from traditional counselling by allowing students to attend more than the average eight sessions. This allows the student clients and counsellors to build trust and a positive relationship without time pressure. The as-and-when fluidity supports students where an 8-week commitment, as seen in the NHS IAPT, does not.

Lastly, Twilight benefits our BSc Counselling Skills students. Providing student counsellors with experience in online counselling is also a 'zero cost' placement for the student. Normally students are required to pay for their supervision themselves as supervision is a requirement of all counsellors those who are trainees and qualified.

Twilight covers the cost of supervision, thus saving students money and allowing them to receive supervision more regularly. This is a tool we will be using going forward to further support the mental health of our students.

Objectives

We have two principal objectives within this plan. Each has a secondary objective.

Objective one is to eliminate gaps in attainment between students from Asian, black, mixed and other heritages and white students. Secondary to this we are targeting the elimination of an ethnicity degree awarding gap between black and white students.

Objective two is to eliminate gaps in attainment between students from the most deprived areas, as identified by IMD quintiles 1 and 2, and students from the least deprived areas, as identified by IMD quintiles 3 to 5. Secondary to this we are targeting the elimination of an attainment gap between males from the most deprived areas, as identified by IMD quintiles 1 and 2, and males from the least deprived areas, as identified by IMD quintiles 3 to 5.

Whilst our ultimate aim is to eliminate these gaps in inequality, we acknowledge that this will take longer than the life of this plan as outlined in the fees, investment and targets spreadsheet. Our institutional strategy is to 2030, it is to this timeline we are aiming to eliminate these gaps.

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Intervention strategy 1: Enhanced Support and Access Pathways: Black, Asian, mixed and other heritage students

Objectives and targets

Objective one is to eliminate gaps in attainment between students from Asian, black, mixed and other heritages and white students. Secondary to this we are targeting the elimination of an ethnicity degree awarding gap between black and white students. (PTS_1 & PTS_2)

Risks to equality of opportunity

This intervention strategy addresses the risks that Asian, black, mixed and other heritage students will not experience equality of opportunity in relation to sufficient academic support, sufficient personal support, cost pressures, and progression from higher education.

Intervention strategy 1 – Enhanced Support and Access Pathways

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
<p>(a) Student Support and Development</p> <p>Provide bespoke support workshops and online training packages for target students from level 3, in the following areas:</p> <p>Academic skills. New activity.</p> <p>English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for HE students where English as a second or other language. New activity.</p> <p>Digital literacy skills to support studies and accessing resources. New Activity.</p> <p>All students within the ‘Enhanced Support and Access Pathways: Black, Asian, mixed and other heritage’ target groups will be offered the academic skills and digital literacy workshops.</p> <p>Students who have English as a second or other language will be given access to the English for Academic Purposes workshops and resources.</p>	<p>Staffing costs for workshops.</p> <p>Costs for online resources.</p> <p>Academic planners.</p> <p>Staff training.</p> <p><i>Cost: £110k</i></p>	<p>Intermediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved cognitive and metacognitive outcomes. • Improved motivation and engagement in learning. • Improved self-perceptions about belonging, academic abilities and confidence in academic practice, digital literacy and English proficiency. • Improved module / assessment grades. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved completion and attainment rates for target students. • Improved continuation rates for target students. 	<p>No</p>

<p>(b) Academic Coaches</p> <p>Train Academic Coaches to support second language speakers of English by funding them to complete attend a part-time CELTA course. New Activity.</p>	<p>Funding for staff to gain CELTA qualification including staff time.</p> <p><i>Cost: £95k</i></p>	<p>Intermediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Coaches skilled in supporting second language speakers of English in an academic context. • Increased staff confidence and preparedness for supporting target students. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Coaches accredited with CELTA course. 	<p>No</p>
<p>(c) Foundation Programme</p> <p>Expand curriculum offer to include a foundation year to embed and develop academic support skills in preparation for higher education study. New activity.</p>	<p>Staffing costs to deliver foundation year course.</p> <p>Resources related to running of new course.</p>	<p>Intermediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and delivery of a Foundation Year, incorporating embedded academic skills. • Improved cognitive and metacognitive outcomes. • Improved motivation and engagement in learning. • Improved self-perceptions about belonging, academic abilities and confidence. • Improved module / assessment grades. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved completion and attainment rates for target students. 	<p>No</p>

	<i>Cost: £600k</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved continuation rates for target students. 	
<p>(d) Industry Insights</p> <p>Employers, entrepreneurs and guest speakers of Asian, black, mixed or other heritages will be invited to speak to students about their own learning and employment journeys. Existing activity.</p> <p>All students within the ‘Enhanced Support and Access Pathways: Black, Asian, mixed and other heritage’ target group will be given access to this intervention.</p>	<p>Funding for internal events and travel/time of guests.</p> <p><i>Cost: £20k</i></p>	<p>Intermediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased knowledge and capacity relating to career and employability skills. Increased level of professional networks and contacts. Increased knowledge and understanding of the labour market, professional standards and competencies. Improved self-perceptions about career and employability capacities, readiness and confidence. Improved motivation and engagement in learning. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved attainment rates for target students. Improved progression rates for target students. 	No
<p>(e) Parent and Carer Support</p> <p>Develop study opportunities and support for students who are parents and/or carers. New activity.</p>	<p>Staffing costs.</p> <p>Estate costs.</p>	<p>Intermediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved self-perceptions about belonging, academic abilities and confidence. Improved student emotional and mental wellbeing. 	Yes IS2

<p>All students within the 'Enhanced Support and Access Pathways: Black, Asian, mixed and other heritage' target group who are parents and/or carers will be given access to this intervention.</p>	<p>Resources and materials for workshops.</p> <p><i>Cost: £160k</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved module / assessment grades. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved completion and attainment rates for target students. • Improved continuation rates for target students. 	
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Evidence base and rationale:

We have analysed course data (see annex A), consulted with students (see student consultation section), and conducted a literature review (see annex B). Our literature review evidences our approach to tailor support to the needs of individuals and collective identities, specifically engaging students with developing their study skills around key areas such as academic writing, digital literacy and strengthening the use of English as a second language. The development of an inclusive curriculum and a sense of belonging is important when engaging students from non-white ethnicities. An inclusive approach can facilitate the raising of aspirations and create opportunities for meaningful progression. Foundation years provide an important route for students who may not meet traditional entry requirements as it allows students from diverse backgrounds, including those from disadvantaged or non-traditional educational pathways, to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in their chosen degree programme.

Evaluation

We intend to evaluate each activity within this intervention strategy to generate OfS Type 1 and Type 2 standards of evidence to establish whether they lead to the intended outcomes. We will evaluate each individual activity but will not evaluate the overall Strategy. We will start the strategy in the 2024-25 academic year, and we intend to disseminate relevant interim findings every year.

Intervention Strategy 1 Outcomes	Methods of evaluation Types 1, 2, 3 Standards of Evidence (OfS) denoted as T1, T2, T3.
<p>Intermediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved cognitive and metacognitive outcomes.• Improved motivation and engagement in learning. Improved self-perceptions about belonging, academic abilities and confidence in academic practice, digital literacy and English proficiency.• Improved module / assessment grades.• Increased knowledge and capacity relating to career and employability skills.• Increased level of professional networks and contacts.• Increased knowledge and understanding of the labour market, professional standards and competencies.• Improved self-perceptions about career and employability capacities, readiness and confidence.• Improved motivation and engagement in learning. <p>Outcomes:</p>	<p>Process Evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Enhanced) Theory of Change models.• Data Analysis: Number and % of students engaging in activities and % with target characteristics (T1).• Output analysis: Number of sessions run (T1). Some post-activity polls gathering student experience and perceptions of engagement in activities (T2).• Annual end-of-year Staff Survey exploring whether training was appropriate and effective, and to explore challenges (T1). <p>Impact Evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baseline and annual student survey questions exploring perceptions and confidence in respect of:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ academic skills○ belonging and emotional and mental wellbeing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved completion and attainment rates for target students. • Improved continuation rates for target students. Improved progression rates for target students. <p><u>Non-student focused Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Coaches skilled in supporting second language speakers of English in an academic context. • Increased staff confidence and preparedness for supporting target students. • Design and delivery of a Foundation Year, incorporating embedded academic skills. • Academic Coaches accredited with CELTA course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ career development and management / employability skills and professional networks (T2). • 3-5 student focus groups at minimum every two years from 2024-25, to explore key themes from polls and surveys (T2). • Data Analysis: continuation and completion rates by target groups (T2). • Data Analysis: module attainment and attainment (degree outcome) by target students (T2). • Data analysis: progression into employment and into highly skilled employment or post-graduate study pathways for target students (T2). • If possible: Comparative analysis of outcomes (continuation, completion, attainment) between students who have engaged with new support and those who have not (T2 and T3).
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Intervention strategy 2: Enhanced Support to Address Disadvantage.

Objectives and targets

Objective two is to eliminate gaps in attainment between students from the most deprived areas, as identified by IMD quintiles 1 and 2, and students from the least deprived areas, as identified by IMD quintiles 3 to 5. Secondary to this we are targeting the elimination of an attainment gap between males from the most deprived areas, as identified by IMD quintiles 1 and 2, and males from the least deprived areas, as identified by IMD quintiles 3 to 5. (PTS_3 & PTS_4)

Risks to equality of opportunity

This intervention strategy addresses the risks that students from the most deprived areas (IMD quintiles 1 and 2) will not experience equality of opportunity in relation to: sufficient academic support, sufficient personal support, mental health, cost pressures.

Intervention strategy 2 – Enhanced Support to Address Disadvantage

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
<p>(a) Targeted Support Workshops</p> <p>Delivery of a range of targeted support workshops with dedicated members of the academic and support teams. New activity.</p> <p>There are two strands of this Activity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Workshops focusing on the development of academic skills and mindset. Content is likely to broadly include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic skills development and practice (e.g. essay writing, referencing, note taking, time management) • Development of cognitive and metacognitive skills • Understanding and responding to assessment criteria and expectations • Locating, evaluating, synthesising and adapting to new forms of knowledge. 	<p>Cost of academic support staff.</p> <p>Resources for workshops.</p> <p><i>Cost: £100k</i></p>	<p>Intermediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved cognitive and metacognitive outcomes. • Improved motivation and engagement in learning. • Improved self-perceptions about academic abilities and confidence. • Improved student emotional and mental wellbeing. • Improved module / assessment grades. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved continuation rates for target students. • Improved completion and attainment rates for target students. 	<p>Yes IS1</p>

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
<p>2. Workshops focusing on emotional wellbeing and development. Content is likely to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience, perseverance • Confidence • Conflict and dispute resolution • Mindfulness • Coping strategies • Mental health awareness and care • Communication <p>Sessions will be embedded in, co- and extra-curricular. Students, academic specialists, and support staff will collaborate on provision.</p> <p>All students within the ‘Enhanced Support to Address Disadvantage’ target group will be offered this intervention.</p>			
<p>(b) Mentor Scheme</p> <p>Student mentorship scheme: Level 6 students from deprived areas will mentor target students on Level 4 programmes. New activity.</p>	<p>Staff member to oversee scheme.</p> <p>Training sessions for mentors.</p> <p>Student mentor payments.</p>	<p>As above, and:</p> <p>Intermediate outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved student sense of belonging. 	<p>No</p>

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
<p>Students within the ‘Enhanced Support to Address Disadvantage’ target group who are studying on a Level 4 programme will be offered this intervention.</p>	<p>Cost: £40k</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved connections and engagement between students, particularly amongst target groups. 	
<p>(c) Transition Summer School</p> <p>Summer school transition programme, offering new students the opportunity to meet staff and learn more about their courses and available support. Existing activity.</p> <p>All students within the ‘Enhanced Support to Address Disadvantage’ target group will be offered this intervention.</p>	<p>Staffing to run programme.</p> <p>Resources for programme.</p> <p>Advertising and marketing.</p> <p>Cost:£118k</p>	<p>Intermediate outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved motivation and engagement in learning. Improved self-perceptions about academic abilities and confidence. Improved sense of belonging in HE. Increased knowledge and awareness of HE and study at NCG. Improved connections and engagement (communities) as between students and students; students and staff. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved continuation rates for target students. Improved completion and attainment rates for target students. 	<p>Yes IS1</p>
<p>(d) Addressing Hardship</p>	<p>Cost of travel passes.</p>	<p>Intermediate Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student’s physiological needs met. 	<p>No</p>

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
<p>Students from deprived areas to be offered subsidised, affordable food; travel support; and, late opening of warm study spaces, giving students space to study away from distraction of personal commitments. New activity.</p> <p>All students within the 'Enhanced Support to Address Disadvantage' target group will be offered this intervention.</p>	<p>Cost of meal subsidy.</p> <p>Cost of utilities.</p> <p><i>Cost: £2,400,000</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced financial pressures/ anxiety. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved continuation rates for target students. 	

Evidence base and rationale:

We have analysed course data (see annex A), consulted with students (see student consultation section), and conducted a literature review (see annex B). Our literature review provides a rationale and evidence for our approach within this strategy. The literature review highlights the negative impact of poverty on educational performance, which was supported by our student survey group who highlighted that cost-of-living pressures can and do have an impact on their ability to study higher education and achieve the desired outcomes.

The evidence points towards deprived children being more likely to feel anxious and unconfident about school and this can impact their desire to transition into higher education summer, therefore supporting our activity with summer school transition programmes. We will then build on this by using peer mentoring to raise aspirations of level 4 students. This is also supported by the literature.

Lastly, the review of literature highlights the need to improve opportunities for the development of emotional stability, confidence, and resilience for those students from areas of high deprivation, and the importance of supporting students to develop emotional intelligence skills and coping strategies. The rationale for the inclusion of this within our strategy activities is well supported.

Evaluation

Intervention Strategy 2 Outcomes	Methods of evaluation Types 1, 2, 3 Standards of Evidence (OfS) denoted as T1, T2, T3.
Intermediate outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved cognitive and metacognitive outcomes. • Improved motivation and engagement in learning. • Improved self-perceptions about academic abilities and confidence. • Improved student sense of belonging. • Improved student emotional and mental wellbeing. • Increased knowledge and awareness of HE and study at NCG. • Improved connections/ engagement (communities) as between students and students; students and staff. • Student's physiological needs met. • Reduced financial pressures/ anxiety. • Improved module / assessment grades. 	Process Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Enhanced) Theory of Change models. • Data Analysis: Number and % of students engaging in activities and % with target characteristics (T1). • Output analysis: Number of sessions run across activities (T1). Some post-activity polls gathering student experience and perceptions of engagement in activities (T2). • Annual end-of-year Staff and Mentor Surveys exploring whether training was appropriate and effective, and to explore challenges (T1). Impact Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline and annual student survey questions exploring perceptions and confidence in respect of workshop topics/ focus areas. • 3-5 student focus groups at minimum every two years from 2024-25, to explore key themes from polls and surveys (T2).

<p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved continuation rates for target students. • Improved completion and attainment rates for target students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Analysis: continuation and completion rates by target groups (T2). • Data Analysis: module attainment and attainment (degree outcome) by target students (T2). • Data analysis: progression into employment and into highly skilled employment or post-graduate study pathways for target students (T2).
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The following table summaries our intended publication plan and dissemination of findings for both Intervention Strategies.

<p>Summary of publication plan</p>	
<p>When evaluation findings will be shared and the format that they will take</p>	
<p>Format of findings</p>	<p>When findings will be shared</p>
<p>We will produce an annual summary progress and review report, which will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide insights on the effectiveness and progress of relevant activities in this Strategy based on the achievement of intended outcomes. 2. Capture learning and insights that inform practice improvements and any appropriate changes and developments. <p>Highlights and themes from this report will be shared online, for example through our website / SEER website.</p>	<p>Progress ‘highlights’ will be shared annually</p>
<p>We will produce an ‘Evaluation To Date’ or an ‘End of Project’ Report (whichever is relevant) capturing all evaluation and findings, disseminated online via our website and the SEER website, and via channels mentioned below where appropriate.</p>	<p>4 years on from Plan commencement (Autumn/Winter 2028) and/or at the conclusion of projects</p>
<p>We will also contribute at conferences and through workshop and events hosted by networks such as SEER and Independent Higher Education (IHE).</p>	<p>At minimum every 2 years, starting from 2025-26</p>
<p>We will contribute to other calls for evidence, such as through TASO</p>	<p>As they arise, at minimum every 2 years.</p>

Whole provider approach

One of our guiding principles is 'widening access to, and success in, higher study'. To that end addressing risks to equality of opportunity is rooted in our HE Mission, 'enabling social mobility and economic prosperity through exceptional higher education'. This plan has been aligned with our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion work. Working to address risks to equality of opportunity for all of our students is embedded in both our Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging policy, and our Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging strategy (both available on our website alongside our EDIB annual report).

To ensure a credible whole provider approach, we will provide updates and evaluation of progress at meetings across our deliberative structure; this includes our HE Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee, HE Academic Board (which includes our CEO and Executive Lead for HE), and HE Governance Committee. We will continue to report on equality of opportunity in our annual review. In addition, updates and progress will be integrated into our Student Partnership and Engagement Committee. This committee is co-chaired by students and provides opportunity for collaboration and making informed decisions which are student centred. We have a sub-group of this committee, Project360, which will help ensure our approaches, policies and procedures take equality issues into account. Our Project360 brings together typically underrepresented, hard-to-reach students to guide and develop our institutional understanding of the breadth of our HE student experience and is helping reduce risks to equality of opportunity.

As an institution we pay due regard to the Equality Act 2010 and all related matters. Equality and Diversity training forms an integral part of all staff induction, and the training is refreshed by staff every 2 years (as a minimum). We take a full lifecycle approach to supporting our HE students from pre-entry, where we deliver summer schools and academic writing workshops, to post graduation, where we continue to offer access to our employability team up to 3 years after graduating. For on programme students, an example of work on inclusion has been the implementation of our inclusive assessment strategy, which has led to each level of every programme having an assessment choice. Students can choose, typically from two assessment tools, how they complete a module assessment. This has helped to reduce barriers to assessment and support 'participation' in higher education.

Student consultation

We consulted with our current student body in the creation of this access and participation plan. Following our review of the greatest risks to equality of opportunity we carried out two surveys, both targeted at current Asian, black, mixed and other heritage students, and students from areas of high deprivation. We also held several focus groups with current students.

In survey one titled 'Student Support', students were asked about the support services they engage with during their studies, their family history in terms of university study, extra-curricular activities, mental health support and cost of living pressures that have impacted their studies. These results informed discussions with our student working group and the development of our intervention strategies.

Survey two entitled 'Access and Participation Plan: Intervention Strategies', focussed on students' thoughts and opinions on the proposed intervention strategies. Using a Likert scale, students were asked how much they agree or disagree with several statements regarding the intervention

strategies. Students were also asked how likely, given the option, they would be to engage with the proposed activities if it were to increase their attainment. The results of the survey were very positive, with the majority of students stating that the proposed interventions were both useful and that they would access them.

Following on from the surveys we conducted several focus groups with students from the target groups to gain their insight and opinion into the proposed strategies and activities. These focus groups were carried out with students from our Fellowship and Student Representative programmes as they are the most active members of our student body in terms of their engagement with student voice mechanisms. The focus groups gathered the opinions of these students in terms of perceived strengths and weaknesses, as well as canvassing student opinion as to how the interventions can be developed, delivered and evaluated. The focus groups were invaluable in terms of understanding student needs and allowed us to shape the direction of the strategies and activities in line with student responses.

Going forward we have identified several areas where students can get involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of the access and participation work. We will recruit 'Widening Participation Fellows' directly from the intervention groups to be the voice of their programme. They will engage with students by gathering feedback on how the interventions are working and any issues/concerns that have arisen.

These fellows will liaise closely with the Research and Student Engagement (RSE) team who will oversee the running of the interventions. The 'Widening Participation Fellows' will engage in regular meetings with the RSE team to discuss how the interventions are working.

The 'Widening Participation Fellows' will also sit on our Student Partnership and Engagement Committee (SPEC). This committee allows students and staff to come together as equal partners to shape and develop key points of action, recognising the importance of student voice and empowers students to improve HE provision across NCG.

Following the SPEC meetings, the 'Widening Participation Fellows' and other members of the SPEC will write student voice papers that will be delivered to the senior leadership team at our Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee, Quality and Standards, and Academic Board meetings. Information, changes and directives will then be disseminated to students participating in the interventions, with the aim of closing the feedback loop.

The wider student body will be informed on a regular basis of how the interventions are running and what impact they are having through our 'Together We Changed' poster campaigns and feedback days, and through our 'Byte for Bite' student voice mechanism.

Students from the target groups will also be represented in our '360 project'. This project aims to promote inclusion on all NCG Campuses to break down barriers to learning and ensure psychological safety of all students. This project exists to support continuation, completion and progression, and to enhance the experience for all of our students, but particularly those with protected characteristics. The project currently has representation from disabled, LGBTQ+, and Asian, black, mixed and other heritage students, and we will be broadening the scope of the membership to include representation from students from areas of deprivation.

Evaluation of the plan

We will be engaged in an ongoing monitoring and evaluation of our intervention strategies, and will continuously reflect on and respond to evaluation findings to improve and develop our practices.

Strategic context for evaluation

Evaluation and research are part of our 'whole institution' approach to access and participation. Our academic team contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of targets, intervention strategies and activities in this plan through supporting and inputting on the range of evaluation measures. Our data team have skills in ensuring data capture is appropriate for the required monitoring and evaluation outputs, including designing new reports and processes to capture, collate and extract data for various evaluation and research questions. We also draw on the skills of staff responsible for the delivery of the activities in this plan, and our student representatives, to effectively incorporate evaluation.

In our previous assessment of our current context for evaluation, using the OfS evaluation self-assessment tool, we are 'emerging' across all areas. We have some foundations in place, but will continue to develop our practices, including embedding evaluation into activity design and delivery and ensuring feedback cycles into improving practice. Therefore, as we build our cross-institution capacities for effective evaluation and the application of findings to improve practice, staff and student representatives will be supported with relevant training in Theory of Change and evaluation methods, provided through our membership to SEER (Specialist Evidence, Evaluation and Research) service, which commenced in 2023-24.

Students are important in this work and we will work in partnership with our representatives on the design and implementation of evaluation and research, particularly where this pertains to current students.

SEER provides us with the evaluation and research expertise we need to deliver our commitments in these areas. We will actively participate in this network, which provides us with opportunities to be part of collaborative research and evaluation projects as well as learning and sharing practice with other members and external stakeholders. SEER hosts an annual Symposium and regular workshops, roundtables and 'learning lunches' throughout the year, as well as providing us with opportunities to showcase our practice and insights. We will also engage with TASO and other relevant organisations in calls for evidence, conferences and events, and training.

Activity design

As detailed in the strategic measures section of this plan, evaluation has been established at the start. We have built effective evaluation practice into our strategies by establishing a range of evaluation attached to the individual activities that contribute towards the overall objective of each strategy. We can therefore build up an understanding of which activities are 'working', and which are not. We have taken a Theory of Change approach to the development of our intervention strategies, identifying clear intended outcomes (intermediate and end) and a supporting evidence base that has informed our activity development and challenged assumptions. With the help of SEER, we will continue to review, develop, and strengthen our Theories of Change (ToC), adding to our evidence base as our evaluation findings emerge and developing enhanced activity-level ToCs where required.

Evaluation design

We have collaborated with SEER and drawn from OfS and TASO toolkits and guidance on effective evaluation approaches. We have considered how the outcomes of activities can be evaluated credibly, particularly as our context as a small and specialist provider means that we are likely to be dealing with small cohorts. Employing mixed method approaches is particularly important, as we will need to rely on qualitative data to support our understanding, or fill gaps, in quantitative data. We will triangulate findings where possible and seek to deepen our insights through qualitative methods. Given the developmental stage of our evaluation practice, the majority of our evaluations are type 1 (narrative), and type 2 (empirical enquiry) of the OfS 'Standards of Evidence'. We have however noted that we will explore and consider where type 3 evaluation could be implemented in future.

We have also considered our college based context and, where appropriate, will trial more creative evaluation instruments (as methods in surveying, focus groups and interviews). This may help to mitigate the issue of survey fatigue, which is a significant issue for effective evaluation and is compounded in small cohorts where the same students are more likely to be subjects of multiple evaluation and research projects. We will continue to be cognisant of this in collection of feedback, and have aligned our evaluation and measures across our activities to enable us to minimise the number of collection points, where possible and appropriate.

Our evaluation approach, data collection and analysis have been formulated on the intended outcomes and objectives of our activities. Where appropriate and possible, we will consider and employ validated scales to our evaluation practices. We have also considered evaluation that spans process and impact, to provide comprehensive understanding of how our activities are working. We will explore, with SEER, further research projects in relation to our activities and our ambition to better understand the experiences and challenges of target students and issues of equality of opportunity.

Implementing our evaluation plan

We will collaborate internally across our team and with our strategic partners to deliver our evaluation plan. We will be guided by our students in respect of effective implementation of this plan.

Our evaluation process will comply with ethical practices and policies. In collecting, storing and analysing data, we comply with legal requirements relating to data protection and safeguarding. As noted above, we have become members of the Specialist Evidence, Evaluation and Research (SEER) service, with whom we will work in partnership to deliver our evaluation plan. A Data Sharing Agreement has also been established. SEER provides us with opportunities to collaborate on various evaluation and research items, including for example the evaluation of the impact of financial support, using the OfS toolkit.

The design of our evaluation has been strongly informed by intended and projected standardised outcomes being adopted by SEER across its membership base, which not only increases efficiencies but also provides opportunities to increase the sample size and evaluation, helping to mitigate the issue of small datasets. SEER incorporates and draws on TASO guidance on best practices for evaluations with small cohorts (small n).

As a smaller provider we are also well placed to respond with agility to interim findings and emerging data. We are accordingly responsive in flexing our activity to help to keep us on track to achieve our objectives and targets, and continuously improve our practice.

The following table provides a timeline of intended progress in building evaluation capabilities and capacity.

Academic Year	Activity to Develop and Strengthen Evaluation
2024-25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish membership of Specialist Evidence, Evaluation and Research (SEER). • Review of OfS evaluation self-assessment tool and identify areas of current evaluation practice, including strengths and areas for development. • Attend SEER annual symposium. • Explore TASO opportunities for developing evaluation activity. • Embed evaluation into activity design and delivery and ensure feedback cycles lead to improving practice. • Plan approaches for capturing 'type 3' evidence.
2025-26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build our cross-institution capacities for effective evaluation. • Staff and student representatives will be supported with relevant training in Theory of Change and evaluation methods. • Trial more creative evaluation instruments to capture 'type 3' evidence. • Attend SEER annual symposium. • Explore TASO opportunities for developing evaluation activity. • Seek opportunities to develop a community of practice and learning partnerships with outside organisations.
2026-27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review evaluation activity and develop further opportunities for type 3' evidence. • Attend SEER annual symposium. • Explore TASO opportunities for developing evaluation activity. • Develop communities of practice and learning partnerships with outside organisations. • Explore opportunities to share and disseminate APP strategy evaluations.
2027-28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review evaluation activity. • Evaluate access and participation plan. • Attend SEER annual symposium. • Explore TASO opportunities for developing evaluation activity. • Explore opportunities to share and disseminate APP strategy evaluations.

Learning from and disseminating findings

We are committed to sharing our learning and findings internally, with our partners, within our close networks and with the broader sector, to develop stronger and an increased volume of evidence about what works and what can be improved. We are pleased to help to grow the evidence base for equality of opportunity in higher education and we will submit evaluation outputs to OfS's repository of evidence as appropriate.

In Section 4 we have set out our publishing plan, which includes publishing findings on interim and longer term outcomes through a range of channels. In developing the format of our communications, we will consider creative and visual methods, and different audiences / purposes. We will ensure that our findings are open access.

Our SEER membership and partnership with SEER in developing and delivering our evaluation plan provides us with access to academic experts in evaluation, including in the access and participation space and broader teaching and learning arena. These staff are involved in design, delivery and analysis.

NCG is also a member of the Mixed Economy Group (MEG) and Association of Colleges (AoC), through which we can share and present findings where appropriate. We will actively contribute to conferences, network events and publications. Where appropriate we will draw on existing networks to collaborate and engage with similar organisations. We also look forward to sharing our findings and our developing thinking with other small specialist institutions and SEER members, and to collaborating on the development of effective practice for this particular part of the sector.

Internally, developing a community of practice (staff and students) regarding access and participation will help to facilitate improvements to sharing of findings from evaluation, and subsequent improvements to practice. Shared practice across the institution allows for review and feedback on evaluation findings and reports, and discussion about the improvements that could be made. More broadly, evaluation findings related to access and participation work will inform other agendas and practice, such as programme review and revalidation, communications and recruitment strategies and community engagement. We will publish the findings of our evaluation activities on our website and on our VLE (Virtual Learning Environment).

Governance arrangements

HE Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for monitoring the implementation of this Plan. As part of the monitoring and reporting process we have an Access and Participation steering group, which reports into HE Learning Teaching and Enhancement committee for regular management of the actions within the plan. The steering group is chaired by the Academic Registrar and will include students and appropriate members of staff across NCG alongside a representative from SEER. This group will oversee the implementation, monitoring, review and evaluation of the Access and Participation Plan, advise on contemporary research, and make reports and recommendations to the HE Academic Board (via HE Learning Teaching and Enhancement committee); including highlighting risk and making any necessary changes to the Access & Participation Plan, if necessary. If the group finds that progress towards the objectives set out in this plan is not being achieved or is going backwards, it may recommend to HE Academic Board to increase investment levels.

We will evaluate full impact across the four years of this plan, with interim reports annually at the end of each academic year (October). Evaluation reports will be presented at our HE Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee, HE Academic Board, and HE Governance Committee. All meetings have student representation. Access and participation annual progress reports will be available on our website.

Provision of information to students

Our access and participation plan, fees, financial support, and any associated cost details will be available on the NCG website, with links to information provided on the separate college websites.

Students will be provided with information about the college financial support they are entitled to once they make an application and at the point of enrolment and induction. This will include the eligibility criteria and set out the level of financial support for students offered in each year of their studies. The information will also be provided in the offer a student receives and will also be available on the relevant college website.

All students studying within a college of NCG are eligible for a bursary. The value depends on their household income as means tested by the Student Loans Company. Students with a household income of less than £25,000 are entitled to £1,000, all other students are entitled to £400. All students studying at a college of NCG are eligible to apply for hardship funds.

We have an engagement bursary available for students who study at an NCG college and live within the most deprived areas of England, as identified by the indices of multiple deprivation quintiles 1 and 2 and have a household income as means tested by the Student Loans Company of less than £25,000. This bursary provides a weekly travel pass and meal allowance for the days students are studying at our colleges. The value of the travel pass is dependent on where they live, and the meal allowance is worth £4.50 per day.

Hardship funds are available for students in immediate hardship. There is no set value for this fund and is dependent on student need and the level of hardship fund left available at the time of application. All students studying at a college of NCG are eligible to apply for hardship funds.

Lastly, we offer a wide range of scholarships with targeted support for those identified as the least likely to study a degree, based on the OfS criteria for widening participation meaning we have scholarships available for students from black, Asian and minority ethnic heritages; disabled students; women in STEM; care leavers; young carers; students estranged from their families; refugees; asylum seekers; students from military families and students from gypsy, Roma and traveller communities.

These scholarships are in the form of fee waivers and can be applied for through college websites. If a student is successful in their application for a scholarship, they will receive at least 50% reduction in their fees; refugees and asylum seekers will have 100% fee reduction. All students studying at a college of NCG, who meet the criteria are eligible to apply for these scholarship opportunities.

All students studying an NCG award with a partner institution (i.e. not an NCG college) are excluded from these bursaries with NCG directly, but instead may be eligible for financial support depending on their circumstances via our partner institutions.

Annex A: Assessment of performance

Within this annex we identify risks to the equality of opportunity across each stage of the student lifecycle at NCG. To complete this analysis, we have used the following data sources:

- OfS Access and Participation Data Dashboard.
- OfS Access and Participation Individualised Files.
- OfS Size and Shape of our Provision Workbook.
- OfS Student Outcomes Data Dashboard.
- OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR).
- NOMIS (Census 2021).
- Internal Student Data - ILR data Internal Support Survey Data (2023).
- Internal Student Satisfaction Survey (2023) National Student Survey Data (2022).

What is not included within this annexed assessment of performance is information on what we consider to be the biggest risk to the equality of opportunity as this is outlined clearly within the access and participation plan itself.

Our student population is unlike the majority of higher education institutions in England, we have:

- Significantly more students from the most deprived areas of England as identified by Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 1 and 2 when compared to the sector. Our cohort averages at 58% from these quintiles, which is 27% above the sector average.
- Significantly more students from the lowest wards of participation using the TUNDRA Middle-layer Super Output Area (MSOA) measure when compared to the sector. Our cohort averages at 46% from these wards, which is 23% above the sector average.
- 60% of students who have qualifications on entry which are either BTECs (below DDM), HE Access awards, or they are mature students with few known qualifications. This is 100% more than the sector average.
- Significantly more mature students when compared to the sector with 54% being mature students (21+ at point of entry), which is 28% above sector average.
- Significantly more students declaring a disability than the sector with 21% declaring a disability, which is 6% above sector average.

Assessment of performance

Access

Through an analysis of our internal student data and utilising the OfS access and participation data dashboard we know that the ethnic diversity of our cohort closely matches that of Newcastle City as reported in the 2021 census. NCG has a student cohort which consists of 72% white students and 28% of students who are Asian, black, mixed or other heritage whilst Newcastle has a population that is 75% white and 25% who are Asian, black, mixed or other heritage.

Our student body contains a higher number of mature students when compared to the sector (54%), and the students who are least likely to attend our institution are those who are from the highest wards of participation and the least deprived areas of England as identified by IMD quintiles 3-4.

As a result of this we do not consider inequality in student access to be one of the greatest risks to address within this plan.

Equality of opportunity risk register

In reviewing the equality of opportunity risk register for this stage in the student lifecycle we are confident our information and guidance is clear, and we have teams dedicated to providing clear and accurate information for all progressing in-reach students and any new out-reach students. This includes our 'future me' team, central support team as well as the programme teams (in both FE and HE) who work with the students progressing from and into higher education, ensuring a supportive transition is enforced via a robust handover procedure.

We deliver a diverse range of qualifications including one-year certificates of higher education, two-year foundation degrees, integrated degree apprenticeships, three-year undergraduate programmes and one-year undergraduate top ups across both full and part time delivery modes. We truly believe that students wishing to study with us are not limited to course type or duration.

As an institution whose student body has the characteristics which are least likely to enter English higher education, we already address the national risk relating to a student's perception of being unable to enter higher education.

Whilst we do not believe that we have risks relating to inequality of access opportunity, this plan does outline measures we will take that improve students' knowledge and skills prior to entry, because we know this may have a detrimental impact on their on-course success and ultimately attainment, which is an area of focus for our access and participation plan.

To support the elimination of gaps in student attainment we intend to focus on the development and improvement of digital literacy for student groups who contribute to our ethnicity degree awarding gap, as outlined within our access and participation plan.

On course

On course risks are separated into the following sections: Continuation, Completion, and Attainment.

Continuation

Our dataset highlights the following student characteristics as having the greatest risk to equality in relation to student continuation across NCG:

1. On all undergraduate programmes the continuation rates between white student and those that are of Asian, black, mixed or other heritage (four-year aggregate full time 2.2% and part time 16.4%).
2. On all undergraduate programmes the continuation rates between white students and those that are black (four-year aggregate full time 1.7% and part time 13.8%).
3. On full time programmes the continuation rates between students from the most deprived wards of England when compared to those from the least deprived wards using IMD on full time all undergraduate programmes (year 6 a 13.2% increase compared to year 5 to a 9.8% gap).
4. A continuation rate age gap between Mature and Young students on all undergraduate programmes (four-year aggregate full time 8.7%, part time 9.1%).

Firstly, with regards to a risk to equality for student continuation on our programmes who are either black, or from Asian, black, mixed or other heritages when compared to white, we see that the largest gaps are on our part time provision where the volume of students with these characteristics are incredibly small whilst our full-time data demonstrates a marginal gap.

We have also identified risks to equality of continuation in the most recent year between students from the most deprived quintiles (IMD 1 and 2) and those from the least deprived quintiles (IMD 3 to 5) in full time all undergraduate programmes.

Our approach within this plan is to focus on improving attainment levels among these two student groupings (Ethnicity groupings and students from the most deprived areas and IMD). It is our belief that the clearly defined intervention strategies within our access and participation plan will lead to improved attainment and by this we can indirectly mitigate the risks associated with unequal continuation rates. This approach acknowledges the potential correlation between increased attainment and a subsequent reduction in continuation gaps.

Finally, we have identified risks to equality of opportunity for mature students when compared to young, with a full-time gap of 8.7% and a part time gap of 9.1%. Similarly, to the ethnicity gap the cohort size of students on our part time provision is negligible and therefore will not be included within this access and participation plan. We are also not including age as an area of focus for this access and participation plan due to the intervention activities within our institution which target this student grouping. Specifically, our NCG Academic Support Team (AST), comprises of six Academic Support Coaches and an overall Coordinator. This team was formed in 2017, and, in providing opportunities for differentiated and comprehensive support to all our students across NCG, has been one of the enablers for NCGs outstanding continuation rates to date. This team has an additional focus on our younger students from September 2023 where we expect the continuation gap to decrease between these two student groups outside of this access and participation plan.

Completion

Our dataset highlights the following student characteristics as having the greatest risk to equality in relation to student completion across NCG:

- On all undergraduate apprenticeship programmes for students with the following characteristics:
 - Young compared to mature (four-year aggregate 7.9%).
 - No known disability compared to disabled (four-year aggregate 15.2%).
 - White compared to students from Asian, black, mixed and other heritages (four-year aggregate 8.3%).
 - Males compared to females (four-year aggregate 16.7%).
 - Students from the wards of least deprivation compared to those from the most deprived areas (four-year aggregate 9.4%).
- On full time all undergraduate programmes white students compared to black (four-year aggregate 8.4%).
- On part time programmes students white students when compared to those of Asian, black, mixed and other heritage (two-year aggregate 16.7%).
- On part time programmes male students from the lowest wards of participation compared to females from those wards (four-year aggregate 17.7%).

When analysing our apprenticeship programmes, we have identified several risks to equality. Firstly, in equality for young students when compared to their mature counterparts. Secondly, students without disabilities are less likely to successfully complete a programme compared to their disabled peers. Thirdly, male students face a risk to equality when compared to their female counterparts across all undergraduate apprenticeship programmes. Lastly, white students exhibit the lowest completion rates when compared to Asian, black, mixed, or other heritage students.

The following table provides an overview of our apprenticeship cohort size between 2018-19 and 2021-22. Whilst expanding apprenticeship provision aligns with our strategic objectives and the diversification into higher education drive set by the OfS, the current low cohort size on these programmes does not allow us to establish meaningful targets or undertake effective activities to address gaps at this time.

Table 1. NCG Apprentice data / head count of student characteristic

NCG Apprentice data / head count of student characteristic	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22
Young	23	24	25	64
Mature	17	18	16	49
Disabled	9	11	9	10
No disability	31	30	32	103
White	40	38	35	104
Asian, black, mixed or other heritages	0	5	6	9
Male	30	23	21	53
Female	10	18	20	60
Total apprentices	40	41	41	113
Total as a % of NCG student body	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	4.4%

Our analysis highlights gaps in equality of completion for small student groups within our part time programmes. Specifically, we have identified a risk to equality between white students and Asian, black, mixed and other heritage students. Additionally, there is a notable disparity between males and females from low participation wards (as identified by POLAR4). However, given that these cohorts consist of fewer than one hundred students over a four-year period, we have decided this is not our greatest risk to equality and is not being directly addressed within this access and participation plan.

It is crucial to emphasise that while these areas of inequality for students on programme types with smaller cohort sizes are not explicitly addressed within our plan, we remain committed to monitoring these areas. If cohort sizes increase in the future to levels that permit focussed action we will address these disparities to ensure equal opportunities and outcomes for all students.

Attainment

We are focussing our 2024-28 access and participation plan on student attainment as identified within our access and participation plan.

Equality of opportunity risk register

We have identified that significant numbers of students within our target groups have parental or caring responsibilities outside of their study. With increasing costs of living pressure we know that more of our students within these groups need either full or part time work to survive. Our intervention strategies outline how we will support students in this area.

We also found that students from our most deprived areas face distinct barriers to achievement, including long-term poverty, multi-generational unemployment and negative school experiences, all of which contribute to disengagement from learning, a lack of confidence and limited aspirations.

Taking these risks into consideration, our access and participation plan outlines how we will attempt to reduce and eliminate these by offering targeted and impactful interventions which will enable students to overcome barriers to their learning and achieve their full potential.

We know that to support students from these groups we must have targeted academic and personal support to ensure higher continuation, completion and attainment levels. Our intervention strategy outlines our approach to maximising student outcomes from these target groups.

Progression

The OfS data dashboard update as at the 6 July 2023 we feel our progression data does not demonstrate the greatest risk to equality of opportunity for students studying with us. Largely our data has several years which are unreportable due to the small sizes of student groups meaning the data is suppressed. Where we have gaps highlighted, for example on all undergraduate programmes for students from the least deprived wards when compared to those from the least, the statistical uncertainty of the gap being significant or not is too great for us to have full confidence in identifying areas of inequality within this category. As such will not be focusing this access and participation plan in this area.

Should future datasets highlight areas of inequality which we have high levels of statistical confidence in we will look to include these within our plan.

Equality of opportunity risk register

We are committed to reducing the inequalities which can create disadvantage as students progress from higher education. We employ a careers and employability team which supports progression into meaningful employment, by providing tailored workshops or personalised 1:1s on career planning, preparing a CVs and covering letter, searching and applying for jobs, preparing for interviews, networking, and starting up a business. This support is offered to all our graduates and our alumni for up to 3 years after graduation.

Our ethnicity degree awarding gap intervention strategy details how we plan to utilise a culturally diverse range of business and community leaders to provide guest seminars and lectures to raise aspirations of the targeted students and provide insight into suitable graduate level careers and progressions.

Fees, investments and targets 2024-25 to 2027-28

Provider name: NCG

Provider UKPRN: 10004599

Summary of 2024-25 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflation statement:

Subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations we will increase fees each year using RPI-X

Table 3b - Full-time course fee levels for 2024-25 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	9250
Foundation degree		N/A	9250
Foundation year/Year 0	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND		N/A	9250
CertHE/DipHE		N/A	9250
Postgraduate ITT		N/A	9250
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 3b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2024-25

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	OLC (Europe) Limited	10021609	9250
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 4b - Part-time course fee levels for 2024-25 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	4625
Foundation degree		N/A	4625
Foundation year/Year 0	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND		N/A	4625
CertHE/DipHE		N/A	4625
Postgraduate ITT		N/A	4625
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2024-25

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	*	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

**Fees, investments and targets
2024-25 to 2027-28**

Provider name: NCG

Provider UKPRN: 10004599

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	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£306,000	£313,000	£321,000	£328,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£2,463,000	£2,506,000	£2,550,000	£2,595,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£94,000	£96,000	£98,000	£100,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£109,000	£112,000	£116,000	£119,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£197,000	£201,000	£205,000	£209,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Access activity investment	Total access investment (£)	£306,000	£313,000	£321,000	£328,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment (as % of HFI)	5.9%	5.9%	5.9%	5.9%
Access activity investment	Total access investment funded from HFI (£)	£221,000	£227,000	£233,000	£239,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£2,153,000	£2,196,000	£2,240,000	£2,285,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£270,000	£270,000	£270,000	£270,000
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£40,000	£40,000	£40,000	£40,000
Financial support investment	Total financial support investment (£)	£2,463,000	£2,506,000	£2,550,000	£2,595,000
Financial support investment	Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)	47.3%	47.2%	47.1%	47.0%
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£94,000	£96,000	£98,000	£100,000
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%

