



University of
Southampton



Access and Participation Plan 2024-25 to 2027-28



For a fairer future

A Message from Southampton's Executive Director of Student Life

At the University of Southampton, widening participation and social mobility are fundamental to our mission. We believe talent exists in all communities, and universities must enable all students to access opportunity, succeed and progress into fulfilling futures.

Two years into our Access and Participation Plan (APP), this report presents outcomes from six evidence-informed strategies across the student lifecycle. It demonstrates how targeted investment, collaboration, student

co-creation and rigorous evaluation are supporting our students to achieve their fullest potential: raising primary-school numeracy, improving Black students' experiences and outcomes, strengthening Autistic students' belonging, and supporting progression into graduate employment and further study.

As we enter the plan's second half, we are proud of this progress while recognising that more remains to be done.

The evidence and learning presented here will shape our priorities, strengthen delivery and scale effective practice, reinforcing our accountability for sustained improvements in access, student success and progression. I thank the staff, students and partners whose expertise, commitment and collaboration made this progress possible and remain essential to achieving our ambitions over the next two years.

Gino Graziano, Executive Director of Student Life

Table of Contents

Introductions

- [An Introduction to Our APP \(p. 3\).](#)
- [Intervention Strategies 1-3 \(p. 4\).](#)
- [Intervention Strategies 4-6 \(p. 5\).](#)

IS1 Project Reports

- [Books & Stories, Shapes & Numbers \(pp. 6-7\).](#)
- [Reading Buddies \(p. 8\).](#)
- [Learn with US Transition \(p. 9\).](#)
- [Ignite Your Journey \(p. 10\).](#)

IS2 Project Reports

- [Peer Assisted Learning \(p. 11\).](#)
- [Embedded Skills \(p. 12\).](#)
- [Ignite Your Success \(p. 13\).](#)
- [Undergraduate Bursary \(p. 14\).](#)

IS3 Project Reports

- [Transition Day for Autistic Students \(p. 15\).](#)
- [Autism Matters \(p. 16\).](#)

- [Inclusive Support Ambassadors \(p. 17\).](#)
- [Autism Awareness Training \(p. 18\).](#)

IS4 Project Reports

- [Working Together for Mental Health \(p. 19\).](#)
- [Building a Rich Picture \(p. 20\).](#)
- [Building Staff Capability \(p. 21\).](#)

IS5 Project Reports

- [The Awarding Gap Project \(pp. 22-23\).](#)

IS6 Project Reports

- [Career Vision Plus \(p. 24\).](#)
- [My Generation Career Coaching \(p. 25\).](#)

Reflections & Resources

- [Lessons at Two Years In \(p. 26\).](#)
- [Supporting Information \(p. 27\).](#)
- [With Thanks to Our Authors \(p. 28\).](#)

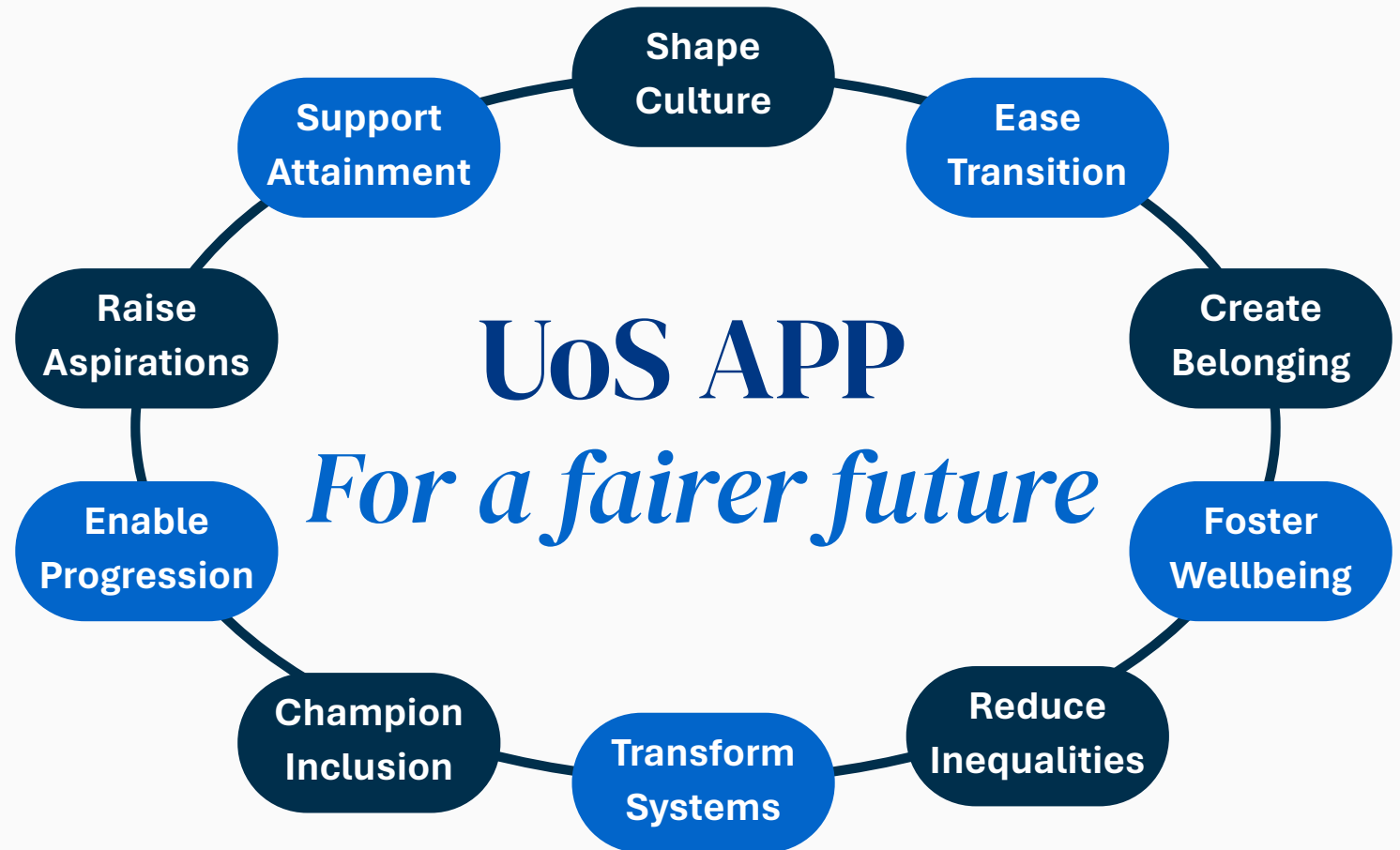
An Introduction to Our APP

The University of Southampton's commitment to a fairer future

At the University of Southampton, we strive to inspire excellence, achieve the remarkable and build a fair and inclusive world.

This commitment is reflected in our Access and Participation Plan (APP), which identifies the barriers that can affect educational opportunity and outcomes and sets out our plan to address them, working closely with students, schools and communities.

Our APP outlines nine key risks to equality of opportunity and the six intervention strategies we have implemented to address them, including targeted activities and robust evaluation to understand impact and drive improvement.



Access



Success



Progression

Intervention Strategies 1-3

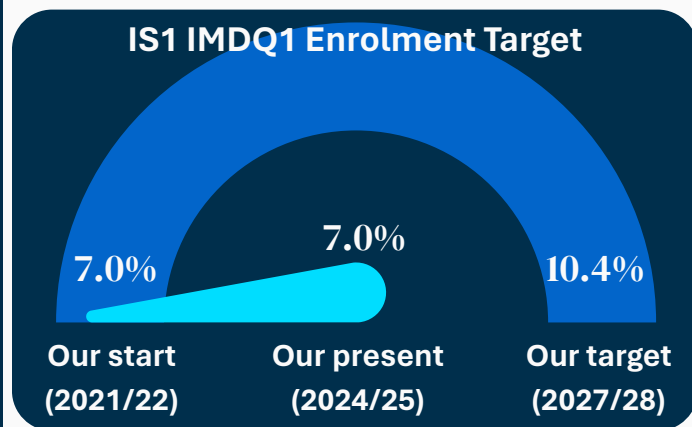
Supporting attainment and leveling the playing field

Intervention Strategy 1 (IS1)

Addressing inequalities in access linked to socio-economic disadvantage, this strategy combines local and national attainment raising in schools, transition to university support and application-to-enrolment conversion activities. By supporting learners to achieve the grades for a Russell Group university and demystifying the hidden curriculum, we aim to increase the proportion of underrepresented students studying at Southampton. Whilst we have seen an increase in students from IMDQ1 areas (54%), further work is needed to meet our target.

2027/28 targets

- **IMDQ1 entrants:** increase from 7.0% to 10.4%
- **FSM entrants:** increase from 9.0% to 14.6%

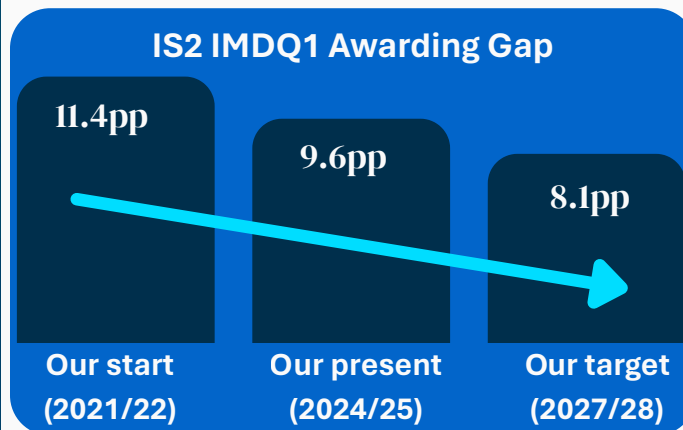


Intervention Strategy 2 (IS2)

Supporting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to stay, succeed and thrive, this strategy combines academic, financial, pastoral and peer support. Our interventions are designed to improve continuation, belonging and academic self-efficacy, while reducing persistent awarding gaps present across the institution. Insight from our evaluation led to increases in our bursary and the growth of our flagship Ignite Southampton programme to work with a greater number of students over the next two years.

2027/28 targets

- **IMDQ1 vs Q5 awarding gap:** reduce from 11.4 to 8.1pp
- **FSM awarding gap:** reduce from 8.7 to 5.0pp

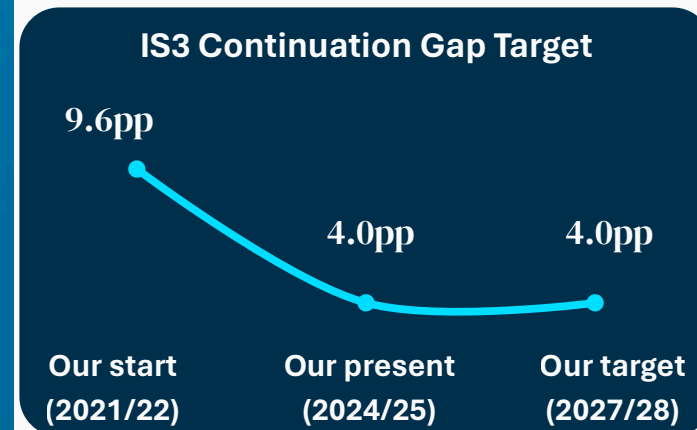


Intervention Strategy 3 (IS3)

Creating an environment where Autistic students can flourish is at the heart of this strategy. Through enhanced transition support, peer mentoring, social opportunities and staff training, it aims to improve the quality of support available while also enhancing belonging, wellbeing and continuation outcomes. Developed in partnership, this work is having a measurable difference to students, with our target already met. While small numbers make this data volatile, it remains a positive sign of the strategy's impact so far.

2027/28 target

- **Continuation gap between students with a social and/or communication impairment:** reduce from 9.6 to 4.0pp



Intervention Strategies 4-6

Pursuing equity both at university and beyond

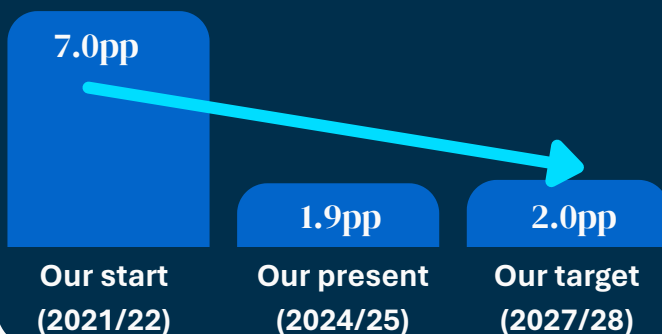
Intervention Strategy 4 (IS4)

Supporting good mental health is essential to student success, and for those with a diagnosed condition, targeted activity is needed to allow effective inclusion. This strategy strengthens our embedded wellbeing focused work and centres partnership with clinical services, and staff training to improve awareness, early identification and effective support. This work is helping more students continue and succeed in their studies as well as ensure staff are aware of their role to create and maintain inclusive services.

2027/28 target

- **Continuation gap for students with a diagnosed mental health condition:** reduce from 7.1 to 2.0pp

IS4 Continuation Gap Target



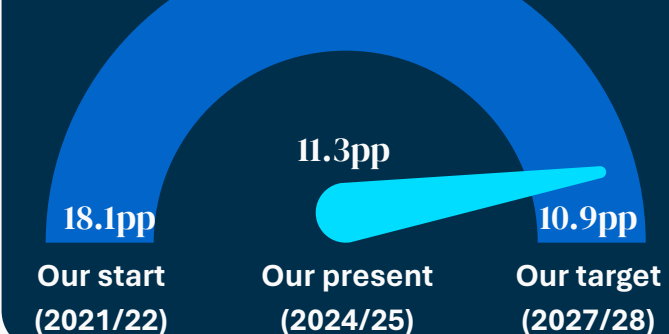
Intervention Strategy 5 (IS5)

Removing disparities in student outcomes requires more than individual support, and the persistent awarding gap between Black and white students remains a focus. This strategy focuses on community, curriculum and culture centering student leadership. Our Awarding Gap Panel lead initiatives that drive change, while a review of assessment practice helps identify and address awarding gaps through inclusive curricula. We are proud the gap has narrowed, but work is needed to address experiences that contribute to awarding differences.

2027/28 target

- **Black-White awarding gap:** reduce from 18.1 to 10.9pp

IS5 Awarding Gap Target



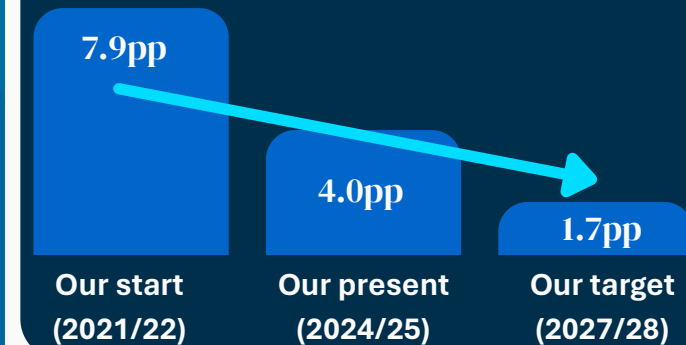
Intervention Strategy 6 (IS6)

Talent alone does not guarantee equal access to graduate opportunities. The activities in this strategy help students from lower socio-economic backgrounds develop the networks, experiences and graduate capital needed to secure graduate-level employment or progress to further study. Through networking, application, interview support, mentoring and internships, this strategy aims to support students in achieving their goals for their future. This work also supports culture change, increasing the diversity of those in academia.

2027/28 targets

- **IMDQ1 progression gap:** reduce to 3.7pp
- **FSM progression gap:** reduce to 1.4pp

IS6 Progression Gap Target



Books & Stories, Shapes & Numbers

Tackling educational disadvantage through small group tutoring

Closing the gap early

There are persistent attainment gaps in Maths and English SATs grades between students facing disadvantage and their peers¹. In 2025, 55.8% of Southampton pupils achieved the expected standard in Reading and Maths; 5.4% below the England national performance².

We therefore deliver two 10-week group tutoring programmes³ for Year 5 and 6 pupils in 11 local primary schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for FSM and living in IMDQ1 postcodes:

- **Books & Stories**, a reading programme taught by Student Ambassadors.
- **Shapes & Numbers**, a maths programme taught by UoS staff. Working with 367 pupils whose reading age or maths attainment was below expectations, we aimed to boost self-esteem, confidence, and academic skills.

11
local primary
schools

367
children

Books & Stories

The National Literacy Trust highlights that a positive attitude towards reading is an important contributor to reading competence. Books & Stories aims to foster enjoyment of reading by providing fun, supportive and socially meaningful reading experiences delivered by enthusiastic role models.

Pre/post-programme pupil surveys showed a **2.55 point increase** in reading for pleasure. Ambassadors frequently reported pupils reading aloud more willingly and confidently, with some reading more expressively. Teacher feedback reinforced this.

“ They also got a lot more proactive when not understanding words [...] checking the dictionary, asking, and helping each other. ”
Ambassador (2026)

However, the impact of reading attitude on attainment is strongly influenced by reading amount⁴. Moving forward, we will introduce a reading journal to monitor reading outside of sessions. They will also encourage pupils to record new vocabulary and reflect on progress.

Pre/post-programme reading tests showed that pupils whose reading level was well below expectations at the outset improved more frequently than stronger readers, with **73%** improving over the programme.

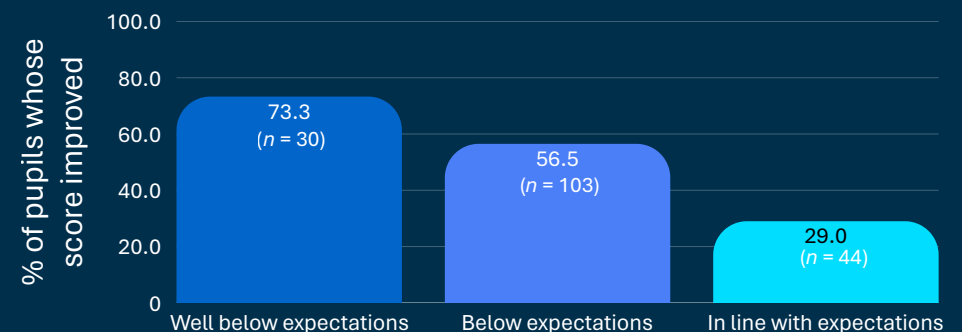
As the programme is designed to support pupils who would benefit most from additional reading support, the smaller rates of improvement observed among stronger readers (29%) are not unexpected. To help all pupils make progress, we will enhance Ambassador training so they feel confident adapting activities and providing appropriate challenge.

71% of teachers and 87% of ambassadors observed improvements in reading ability

From the six key comprehension skills assessed, we saw the largest effects on **vocabulary**. Smaller effects were seen in other skills (e.g., predict and infer), but we noted that the tests measure skills unevenly, which could be skewing the findings. To better capture progress across all aspects of reading, we will refine our assessment tools.

“ I feel they have developed a greater love for reading and enjoyment in discussing what they have read. ”
Teacher (2026)

Improvement in reading score based on pre-programme reading level



Books & Stories pre-programme reading level

Books & Stories, Shapes & Numbers

Tackling educational disadvantage through small group tutoring

Shapes & Numbers

Pupils are more likely to engage with and persist in maths when they see it as useful, relevant and something they can succeed in. All tutoring sessions are thematically linked to Southampton degree programmes to give a sense of real world maths applications, while small group settings enable individual feedback, helping to build confidence and skills.

Pre/post-programme pupil surveys and teacher feedback show improved attitudes towards maths.

+2.8 average increase in self-reported attitude to maths learning

100% of teachers agreed that they observed an increase in positive attitudes towards maths

Teachers reported that pupils were participating more in their maths lessons, and showed greater resilience.

Maths test scores improved significantly following programme participation; pupils starting with lower Maths skills tended to show the largest improvements at post-test.

Pre-test category	n	Mean gain (pp)	% Pupils improved
Well below expectations	129	11.8	90.7
Below expectations	15	7.3	73.33
In line with expectations	1	3	100

Which Maths Skills Improved Most?



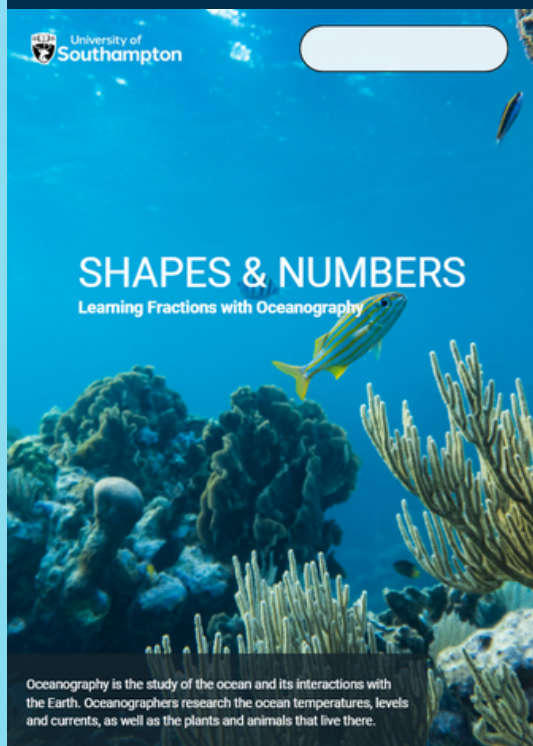
As the chart above shows, encouraging improvements were seen across almost all maths topics.

The size of these improvements varied between topics and year groups. Year 6 generally showed larger improvements than Year 5, while Fractions and Percentages and Calculation M&D (Year 5) and Algebra (Year 6) showed consistently strong improvements across the two programme years.

“ [I have seen] *increased willingness to tackle problems and ability to relate skills to real-life contexts.*

Teacher (2026)

For 2026, we will continue to build our resources bank, including props and videos, to further promote interactive learning and highlight more real-world applications of maths, including new booklets linked to Film and Game Design.



Reading Buddies

Building stronger readers with secondary schools

The reading gap

The Education Policy Institute reported that the GCSE English and Maths disadvantage gap widened to 19 months in 2025¹. Locally, only 38.9% of Southampton pupils achieved a grade 5 or above in both English and Maths², suggesting that many young people may leave school without the literacy skills needed to make informed life decisions, or to meet grade requirements for higher education.

Local focus on reading

Since 2024, 144 Year 7 students from Southampton secondary schools have participated in Reading Buddies, attending up to 16 half-hour guided reading sessions in small groups (1:3) with university students³ (Buddies). It aims to:

- Improve reading comprehension
- Increase reading confidence
- Promote more positive attitudes towards reading

Reading attitudes

75% of Buddies agreed that they observed an increase in self-esteem in relation to reading and **69%** agreed they that observed more positive attitudes towards reading.

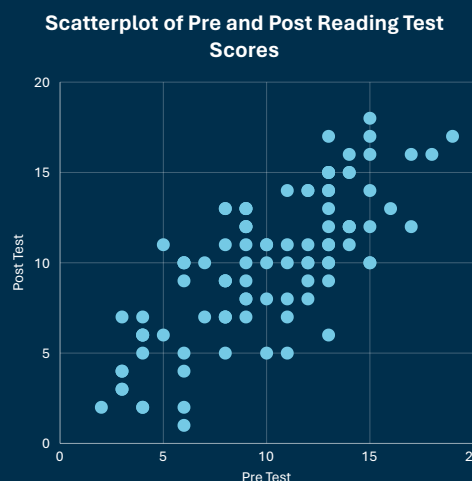
“ [I have observed] Pupils feeling more confident reading aloud in class [and] pupils wanting to take their reading books home to finish them. Literacy Lead ”

Reading comprehension

Pre/post-programme reading tests assess six comprehension skills including vocabulary, summarising and inference. The table shows that while some reading scores increased, more decreased, levelling the mean difference to 0. No significant change to comprehension was found.

Mean Difference in Score	0.051
Score Increases	44
No Change	8
Score Decreases	46

The trend shown on the scatterplot below, which shows the relationship between pre/post-programme reading test scores, reinforces the limited change overall: essentially, most reading scores remained fairly stable across the programme.



One limitation of this data is that 32% of participants did not take part in both tests, either due to consent or attendance on test days.

However, this is contradicted by classroom observations: **100%** of school partners and **75%** of Buddies observed an increase in pupils' reading ability, and identified concrete examples of improved skills and behaviours. The disparity could implicate the test itself or the test environment as a challenge in measuring programme impact.

Improving alignment

Reading Buddies boosts confidence and attitudes towards reading, which may support learning across the curriculum and beyond⁴. However, test data does not reflect observed improvements in comprehension. Reading tests measure six key skills; but programme design may mean that only two (vocabulary and predict) are regularly practiced, and these account for only 6 of 21 marks.

Observations and ambassador consultation will examine alignment between delivery, training and testing. Reading logs will also be introduced to capture progress and help pupils reflect on their journeys.

Learn with US Transition

Preparing students for higher education through the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)



Building academic skills and confidence

Learn with US Transition (LwUST) is a national attainment-raising outreach programme

supporting students undertaking the EPQ, a Level 3 qualification in which students undertake an independent research project. The EPQ develops research, critical enquiry⁵ and self-regulated learning skills relevant to university study⁶, with UoS data showing stronger degree outcomes and smaller awarding gaps among IMD Q1 students with an EPQ than

5,605
total student
interactions
in 2025/26

among those without. LwUST builds on this evidence to support access and success in Higher Education (HE). LwUST combines academic and research skills workshops, campus visits, student 1:1s and teacher professional development to support students through the EPQ and transition to HE.

“ [LwUST] felt like a safety net... to make sure that I was doing what I should be doing. ”
Teacher participant (2026)

80%

agreed they knew what studying at university would be like*

Preparing for university

LwUST provides more intensive, sustained support to centres with high proportions of disadvantaged students**, with selected partner centres taking part in longitudinal evaluation. In 2025/26, matched pre- and post-programme surveys showed improved **knowledge of HE** ($n = 30$). The proportion who agreed they understood what studying at university would be like increased from **37%** before the LwUST programme to **80%** afterwards, suggesting students finished the programme with a clearer understanding of what to expect from HE study.

Enhancing EPQ delivery

LwUST also complements teachers' EPQ delivery through additional expertise, resources and student activities. Teachers valued our external input for reinforcing their teaching and providing a university perspective. The programme's bespoke approach, tailored to their centre's needs and level of EPQ experience, also helped build confidence in teachers' delivery.

Next steps

We will compare participants' Key Stage 5 results with their expected attainment to evaluate the programme's potential contribution to improved outcomes.

Bringing University to Life: Campus Research Days

In 2025/26, we welcomed **697 students** from **39 schools and colleges**, to our campus. Students experienced university-style learning, accessing library resources to develop their EPQ research, alongside opportunities to experience university life.

Feedback suggests that these experiences can help students see themselves as capable of succeeding at university.

“ I know uni is for me now... I liked the lifestyle of uni when I went on the trip. ”

LwUST student (2026)

*by the end of the LwUST programme

**Disadvantaged students defined as those living in IMD Quintile 1 and/or previously eligible for FSM.

Ignite Your Journey

Preparing students for study at a research-intensive university

Supporting HE journeys

Ignite Your Journey (IYJ) is a multi-intervention programme for Year 12–13 students to boost knowledge, confidence and readiness for higher education(HE)^{7,8}. In 2025/26, 96 students took part in online learning modules, virtual Q&As, e-mentoring, and an on-campus transition event.

“ I have found the programme helpful for improving my personal skills and my transition from A-levels to university because it's such a big jump.

IYJ Participant (2025)



Free-text survey responses highlighted stronger academic preparedness, with 41 references to developing research, referencing, time management and workload planning skills. Focus groups with former IYJ participants reinforced these findings, highlighting the value of early exposure to university expectations.

Understanding of student life and opportunities increased by **42pp**, reflected in 50 comments describing clearer expectations of university study and the benefits of hearing from current students.

Awareness of funding options and application processes rose from 34% to 98% (**+56pp**), while confidence in managing money for university rose from 34% to **82%**.

Growing in confidence

Pre/post-programme survey data showed a **58pp** increase in knowing what to expect when studying at a research-intensive university, with awareness of differences between college and HE study reaching 100% (**+22pp**).

→ An increased understanding of expectations at university

→ Increased connection with peers in similar situations

→ Development of key skills for research-intensive study



Sense of belonging increased from 60% to **80%** supported by multiple opportunities to connect with peers from similar backgrounds and shared experiences across the programme.

962
hours
delivered

Increased conversion

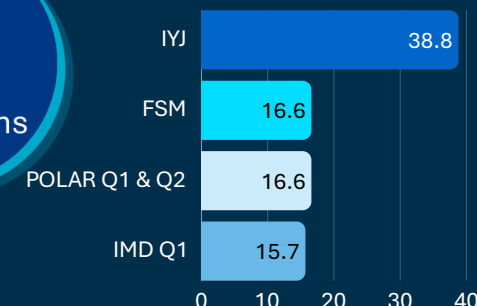
Alongside improving preparedness for HE, IYJ aims to increase applications to and enrolments at the University of Southampton among under-represented groups.

From 2024-25 participants, **82.7%** applied, far exceeding the 60% target. Of those applicants, 89.6% received a contextual offer, and 43.3% of offer holders enrolled at the University in September 2025.

89
UCAS
applications

These outcomes are notably higher than conversion rates among comparator groups, including applicants from IMD Q1, FSM, and POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 backgrounds.

UCAS Application to Enrolment %



IYJ will therefore offer 150 places next year, enabling more students to access information, guidance and peer connections for a successful transition to Southampton. Our Sutton Trust Summer School will become a key recruitment route for IYJ, providing sustained engagement as students navigate their HE journeys.

Find out more

 [Ignite Your Journey](#)

 [Case Studies](#)

Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL)

Timely, tangible and trustworthy support from students for students

Building academic communities

Transitioning from school to university is exciting, but can also feel socially and academically daunting⁹.

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) connects new students with trained Peer Leaders who are current senior students on the same course during the first six weeks of termtime.

Combining structured content with lived experience in a staff-free setting, Leaders help to smooth transition by providing accessible academic and pastoral guidance, normalising help seeking and signposting further support.

“I found out my group is more interested towards academic topics, so I incorporated them using kahoot quizzes and reviewing bibliography exercises.”

Peer leader

PAL SUBJECTS 2023/24 - 2025/26:
Education, Politics and International Relations (PAIR) and Psychology

PAL improves continuation and awarding¹⁰ by helping students to form vital peer connections, develop critical thinking and raise their cultural awareness¹¹. These benefits may not be immediately obvious to students but can shape their experience and later satisfaction¹².

1300+

students with access

180+

hours support in 2025-26

Boosting confidence

Our pre- and post-programme surveys ($n = 523$) show positive outcomes for attendees, including improvements in:

- Sense of belonging: 81.2% (+7pp)
- Confidence to succeed: 89% (+17pp)
- Academic confidence: 80.2% (+7pp)

Peer Leaders also benefit¹², reporting improved confidence and increased communication and leadership skills.



“Got the opportunity to meet new people, socialise and got very useful advice on topics I had previously not considered.”

PAL attendee

Module outcomes

Varying levels of PAL engagement and small sample sizes in some targeted groups created challenges in consistently assessing PAL's impact on module attainment:

- In **Psychology**: the IMD Q1-Q5 module gap was significantly smaller than in two comparator modules ($p=0.003$)
- In **Education**: students attending one or more sessions achieved higher average marks in core modules than non-attendees
- In **PAIR**: 88% attended at least one session but small sample sizes limited assessment of differential outcomes

A more flexible PAL model

To avoid a deficit narrative, PAL is offered as an optional, timetabled service to all students in subjects which have high continuation and/or awarding gaps among IMDQ1 and previous FSM students.

However, low engagement means the potential benefits that we have seen among attendees are not fully realised.

To boost engagement, we will offer a more flexible and accessible PAL, adding online sessions for a wider range of students.

We're also adopting a more student-centred approach to evaluation by embedding reflection within sessions, helping students to recognise progress, strengthen reflective skills, and take greater ownership of their learning.

Find out more

[More on Peer Learning](#)

[2025 evaluation report](#)

Embedded Skills

Transforming teaching and student learning

Unequal access to skills

Students from underrepresented backgrounds are less likely to use academic skills support services, such as drop-ins or bookable 1-2-1's¹³. This can then lead to lower grades. To rectify this, we embedded academic skills training directly into regular, timetabled teaching, making it an essential part of module learning for all students¹⁴.

Peer feedback

Working with academic teaching staff, we developed peer feedback exercises that focussed on core subject-specific skills¹⁵. These included writing, analysing large data sets, and data visualisation. Students completed a task then, using focussed questions and a set structure for their feedback, responded to peers' work in class¹⁶.

Subject areas

→ Engineering Foundation Year

→ English Literature (Y1 and Y3)

→ Geography and Environmental Science (Y1)

Improved skills

Across surveys, interviews and focus groups, staff and students reported an increase in confidence across a range academic skills, including referencing, using resources and understanding what quality writing looks like. Around half of students surveyed thought peer feedback helped them get better grades.

“ I think mandatory peer review...is really helpful. Not only did this experience improve my academic skills, but it was also great at forcing me to start my assignment early as well as understanding what directions I should further research. ”

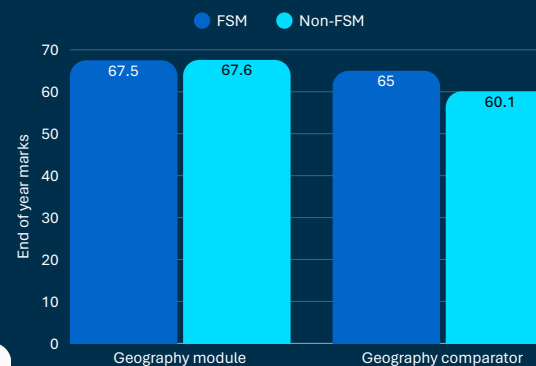
Student participant (23/24)

3

faculties



End-of-year module grades from the Geography module and its comparator module for FSM and non-FSM students



From skills to attainment

All students with access to embedded sessions generally received higher module scores than students in comparator or past modules. While all modules saw smaller module awarding gaps between IMD Q1 and Q5, small student numbers in targeted groups meant most changes were not statistically significant, except for the Geography Module Intervention.

Positive improvements in attainment scores were maintained in subsequent years across all modules, suggesting module leads

716
students

retained programme knowledge for future cohorts.

“ There was definitely an improvement in the quality of the assessments compared to the previous year...the quality of writing was much better... I would put it down to peer reviews. ”

Staff member (24/25)

Academic collaboration

As intervention module gaps were smaller than comparators, and qualitative feedback from both staff and students was positive overall*, the embedded model acts as a good blueprint from which to expand the programme across other modules. This process relies on reciprocal collaboration between our Academic Skills Team and teaching academics to ensure its success.

Through expansion we will be better situated to reach greater numbers of students, those who are most likely to benefit from this more equitable approach, whilst increasing our data sets to ensure that each iteration draws on the strongest foundation.

*Full methodological details and findings can be found in the final report [here](#).

Ignite Your Success

Igniting student success and leadership

Opening doors to success

Ignite Your Success (IYS) is a three-year programme, currently supporting **179 students**. By combining financial, social, pastoral, academic, and careers support, it aims to support reducing the awarding gap for students from IMD Q1 postcodes or who previously received FSM, while strengthening belonging, confidence and leadership development¹⁷.

Growing skills and confidence

We are currently conducting a Contribution Analysis to explore whether and how the programme contributes to leadership development, using a structured, step-by-step iterative process to build evidence of impact¹⁸.

Early findings have highlighted how specific Ignite activities facilitate development of leadership skills:

“Ignite has equipped me with the communication and teamwork skills to be able to lead a group through opportunities such as mentoring. Being (...) a mentor and mentee has equipped me with teaching skills, and allows me to seek leadership advice.”



Boosting engagement

Following low engagement with optional programme activities, we piloted a **minimum engagement expectation** of 3 events per semester for our first years this academic year.

This was set during our first in-person event and reiterated via check-in emails across the year for those who were not meeting the minimum. Compared to 2024/25, we have seen an increase in engagement by:

- **88%** among first years
- **57%** across all years.

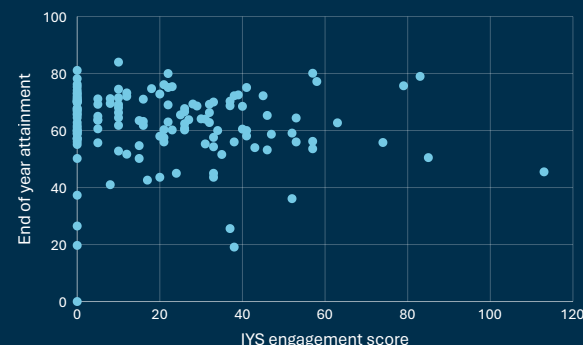
Testing assumptions

In 2025/26, **88%** of graduating IYS students achieved a 1/2:1 degree outcome, compared with 79% of Southampton students from IMDQ1 postcodes*. However, it is unclear whether, or how much, engagement in the programme could account for this relationship.

We therefore conducted a Dosage Response Analysis, which examines whether there is a relationship between engagement with the IYS programme and academic outcomes.

Findings have not yet shown a relationship between higher programme engagement and better academic outcomes:

Relationship between IYS engagement and end of year grade



“I think the internship will be really helpful [in] improving these skills and in future position myself into some leadership roles.”

However, a limitation of this analysis is that it provides a snapshot of the 25/26 academic year. Although engagement with the programme has increased, this has been heavily concentrated within our first-year cohort; therefore, we are yet to see the full impact of this as they progress.

We are addressing this through continuing to embed minimum engagement expectations as students progress into second year, so we can then more robustly assess any correlation between engagement and academic outcomes.

585
points of
engagement
this academic
year

98%
of 1st year
students
engaged

*Data from 2024/24[3]

Undergraduate Bursary

Not being priced out of higher education

Investing in student success

Money should never determine whether a student can thrive at university. Yet for many students from lower-income households, financial pressures can create barriers to academic success and full participation in university life¹⁹. The Undergraduate bursary provides non-repayable, targeted financial support to reduce financial hardship, enabling greater engagement with academic studies and wider university experiences, ultimately improving continuation rates²⁰ and degree outcomes²¹.

Responding to rising living costs

Our previous [bursary evaluation](#) highlighted that the impact of financial pressures was felt most acutely by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This led to the expansion and enhancement of our bursary provision. For undergraduates joining us in September 2025, we increased the number of students who could receive a bursary by raising the maximum household income, meaning **423** more students benefit.

423
more students
benefitting

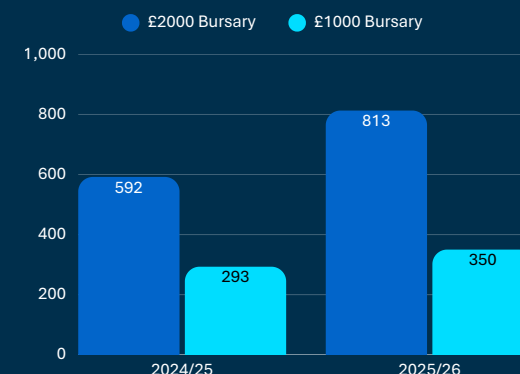
We also increased the threshold for those in the lowest household income range, and have made the bursary available to medicine students in their clinical years.

Does more money matter?

Students who joined us before 2025 receive a slightly different bursary award, creating a valuable opportunity to truly understand the bursary's impact by comparing outcomes for students with similar financial backgrounds who receive different levels of financial support.

how financial support shapes academic engagement, social participation and wellbeing, helping us understand not just whether the bursary makes a difference, but how and why.

Bursary recipients by year and amount

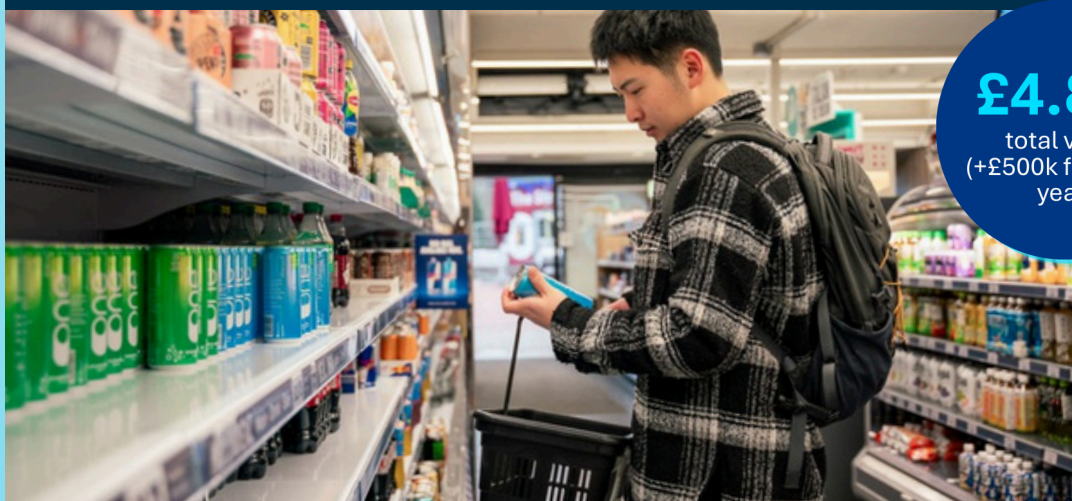


Making sure our support works

Our data collection and analysis is underway. Over the next two years, we will keep building evidence on how our bursary affects our students. This will ensure our offer remains responsive to students' needs, supporting all students to engage fully in the university experiences they choose.

We will also examine the outcomes of students who narrowly miss out on the bursary and explore whether factors such as subject of study and Free School Meals status influence outcomes. Alongside these more tangible outcomes, we need to understand the real, lived experiences of financial support. Upcoming focus groups with bursary recipients will provide insights into

£4.8m
total value
(+£500k from last
year)



Transition Day for Autistic Students

Supporting a successful transition to university

Navigating change

Transitioning to a novel university environment can feel overwhelming for some Autistic students²². Early transition events can increase awareness and uptake of support services, which are linked to continuation and academic success^{23,24}.



44
students
attended

Our bespoke Transition Day helps prospective Autistic students feel confident, informed, and supported before starting university. In a sensory-considerate environment, students and their supporters can meet key staff, learn about available support, explore the campus, and hear from current Autistic students.

Feeling university ready

Findings from 25 pre- and post-surveys indicate positive shifts across all measures, with a greater percentage of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt confident and prepared for university, and less anxious.

Crucially, students reported a greater familiarity with the support available: even if they do not currently expect to use it, they know where to turn when challenges arise.

“All very supportive, thank you! Staff and ambassadors were friendly, easy to talk to and understood serious disability needs.”
2025 student participants

Sense of belonging was high before the event but still moderately increased, particularly in students' ability to envision themselves as part of the university community. Attendees left with a stronger sense that the University and its staff are knowledgeable, supportive, and there to help them succeed.

Percentage of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing

Measure	Pre	Post	Change (pp)
Feeling confident	44%	91%	+47
Feeling excited	48%	95%	+47
Feeling prepared	81%	88%	+6
Feeling anxious	88%	42%	-47
Feeling overwhelmed	58%	35%	-23
Familiarity with support	44%	96%	+51
Likely to access support	63%	92%	+29

In response to participant feedback, next year's Transition Day will offer more opportunities for peer connection and additional support around developing routines.

Beyond transition...?

We will continue to follow attendees' journeys, exploring how they progress through university and their wider student experience.

3
in-person
events

+51pp
awareness
of support



Autism Matters

A positivist, neuroaffirming workshop and social event series for Autistic students

Establishing community

As public and professional awareness of Autism has increased in recent years, the numbers of Autistic students entering UK HEIs has too. Between the years of 2014-15 to 2024-25, UK HEIs have seen an increase of **281.6%** in disclosures of an Autism diagnosis²⁵.

“*I feel like this workshop gives me more insight into who I am and how I function as an Autistic person, as well as more advice and tools into managing an aspect of myself that I didn't even know I had to begin with.*”

Managing Burnout Attendee ”

Autistic students nationally have reported challenges in accessing university environments, citing barriers such as the sensory environment, pre-existing educational disillusionment, co-occurring mental and physical conditions, and social isolation²⁶, which can lead to reduced graduation and employment prospects²⁷.

Autism Matters (AM) is a workshop and social event series which blends the latest Autism informed research with support strategies and connection opportunities to improve the Autistic experience of university.

AM aims to create a space where attendees feel comfortable in their Autistic self; implement support strategies alongside other Autistic peers and establish an Autistic community at UoS. Workshops delivered throughout the 25-26 academic year included: Managing Autistic Burnout, Autism and women, LGBTQIA+ and AuDHD.

Improving insights

Switching from online feedback forms to short, paper forms yielded a **500%** increase in responses this academic year (102 vs 17 forms). This provides a much richer understanding of the programme and confidence that the findings reflect all attendees' experiences.

70
unique
attendeeds

“Autism Matters is my social life...”

The overall usefulness of the workshops was rated as **4.56/5**, with most students recommending AM to others. Most felt that the location was suitable from a sensory perspective.

Three themes were identified from free-text responses, highlighting AM's value and informing its development: 'Workshop feedback', 'Establishing an Autistic Community' and 'The Autistic Experience'.

“*Autism Matters is my social life, it gives me a chance to meet other students and interact. I struggle to make friends and interact with people outside of these sessions.*”

Social Session Attendee

20
sessions
held

40hrs
contact time

Attendees found the workshops and socials helped develop a sense of community at UoS and that the workshops were grounded in robust, Autistic affirming interventions and research. They felt the workshops facilitated conceptualising their Autistic self through peer discussion and the unique shared experience of being Autistic.



AM will include three new workshops for 26-27: Managing Perfectionism, AT Software and Navigating Group Work. Off-campus events will also be introduced, and evaluation findings will be published academically to share practice across the sector.

Inclusive Support Ambassadors

Fostering connection and inclusivity through peer to peer support

Peer to peer support

Our trained Inclusive Support Ambassadors are current university students who offer support to disabled peers through up to 6 1:1 peer mentoring sessions. Through coaching and signposting, ISAs help students navigate academic and social challenges such as social isolation, establishing relationships and communicating support needs, while building supportive networks^{28,29}.

79

1:1 meetings
2025/26

Accessible evaluation

Mentees complete surveys before (51) and after (11) their sessions. Designed specifically with Autistic adults in mind³⁰, these include free-text, tick-box and scale questions with clear explanatory prompts. The forms measured students' self-reported skills, confidence, attitudes and sense of belonging, helping to support goal setting, identify accessibility needs and show evidence of change.

65%

of ISA
recipients
were Autistic

Despite low participation in post-programme evaluations, the findings provide a positive early indication of impact, with measures on organisation, wellbeing management, study skills, and people skills all shifting from neutral (4.9-6.5 / 10) to positive (6.9 – 8.6 / 10).

One individual's rating of their people skills and ability to feel part of the community jumped from 5 to **10/10**. Post-programme survey responses (along with workshop attendee data*) across 7 key measures are shown below.

“ [My ISA] was a great help and very supportive. She helped me integrate into student life.

Programme Participant, 2026 ”

The ISA perspective

Seven (out of 25) ISAs and one mentee* gave feedback through creative evaluation tasks (e.g. an ISA journey map using expressive animal stickers). Participants felt the informal atmosphere helped them to engage, reflect deeply, and avoid ‘people pleasing’ in their responses. This evaluation approach will be expanded to generate richer mentee insights.

Most ISAs experienced similar outcomes to mentees through mentoring, with benefits to their:

- Knowledge of disability (100%)
- Knowledge of uni support (100%)
- Study skills (66.7%)
- Organisational skills (66.7%)

Around half also felt that being an ISA boosted their confidence.

“ They had a lot of the knowledge - just needed help piecing things together. ”
2025/26 ISA

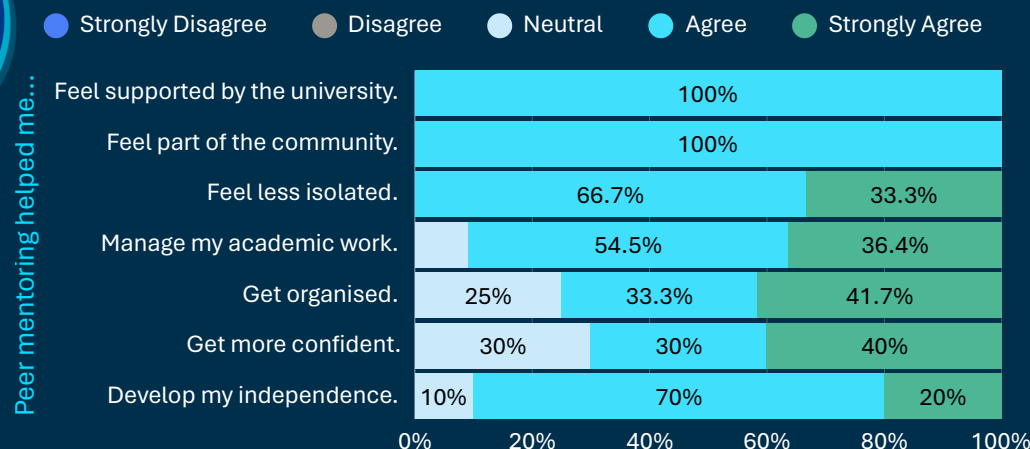
As around half of ISAs are Autistic themselves, it is encouraging that mentors also gain knowledge, skills and experiences that will support their own student journeys^{28,29}. In this way, the ISA programme helps develop a wider community of informed, empathetic peers who can better understand, advocate for, and support Autistic students and themselves.

Accessible support

Reducing barriers to accessing support has increased ISA uptake from **45%** to **75%**, with students now able to view ISA profiles and sign up without committing to dates.

Post-Programme Responses from Students

Aggregated survey and creative workshop data (n=12)



Autism Awareness Training

Closing the confidence gap in supporting autistic students

Addressing a need

Autistic students are more likely to thrive in higher education when staff understand neurodiversity and can provide effective support. However, staff confidence in supporting Autistic students is inconsistent³¹⁻³³

Co-developed with neurodivergent staff and students, the Autism Awareness programme comprises a live online workshop and toolkit. These aim to improve staff knowledge and confidence in supporting Autistic students.

A shared commitment

Since its launch in April 2025, the Autism Training Toolkit has been accessed by **310** users and three online workshops were delivered, engaging **93** staff participants from 14 departments.

A diverse mix of academic and professional services staff attended, demonstrating institution-wide commitment to inclusive practice and shared responsibility for supporting Autistic students.



Survey data showed substantial improvements in staff confidence across all measured areas. The largest increase was in knowledge of support and signposting, with agreement levels rising by **67.7%** following workshop attendance.

“ *I now feel like I can support my autistic students more effectively.* ”
2025 workshop participant

From learning to practice

Participants reported greater confidence in communication strategies, increased awareness of support services, and a stronger understanding of inclusive teaching.

→ Improved use of identity-first language and communication strategies

→ Adoption of inclusive, ‘small but meaningful’ teaching adjustments

Staff described making practical changes such as improving teaching material accessibility, offering flexible engagement options, and adapting communication and scheduling. These adjustments benefit all students, not only Autistic learners.

Follow-up feedback indicated sustained impact on communication, confidence in identifying support needs, and ability to respond effectively in unexpected situations.

310
toolkit
users

Building on success

Codeveloped training can rapidly improve staff confidence and awareness in supporting Autistic students while promoting inclusive approaches that benefit all learners.

93
workshop
attendees

Ongoing delivery and evaluation will help sustain these gains and inform future practice.

Positive Change Across Seven Dimensions Following Our Workshop

Area	Pre (%)	Post (%)	Change
Understanding of autism	38.0	90.7	+52.7
Awareness of student experiences	40.2	97.7	+57.5
Knowledge of support/signposting	20.7	88.4	+67.7
Recognising need for support	31.5	79.1	+47.6
Identity-first language confidence	28.3	86.0	+57.7
Communication adjustments	26.1	83.7	+57.6
Awareness of staff resources	33.7	90.7	+57.0

Working Together for Mental Health

Creating seamless pathways for students to access mental health support

Meeting complex needs

Over the past decade, the proportion of UK students disclosing a mental health condition has risen from less than **1% to 5.8%**³⁴. At Southampton, **5.2%** of students currently disclose a mental health condition. However, disclosures alone do not reflect the full demand for support, as many students experience mental health difficulties without a diagnosis or choose not to disclose them³⁵.

Student mental health challenges often require support from multiple services, yet separate referral processes, communication routes and organisational priorities can make care difficult to coordinate, increasing the risk that students experience fragmented support or fall between services³⁶.

227
students
supported

Better together

Our University Wellbeing team works in partnership with the University Health Service and local

NHS Trust, with each partner bringing distinct expertise.

- The University provides early identification, wellbeing support, governance and funding
- The University Health Service strengthens links with primary care
- Through an NHS Mental Health Practitioner, students benefit directly through therapeutic interventions or one-off consultations and indirectly through support to Wellbeing Practitioners in navigating pathways to the most appropriate specialist support

Together, partners have developed a joined-up pathway based on prevention, coordinated care and a "no wrong door" approach. Students can quickly access specialist clinical support via their university environment, reducing the risk of difficulties escalating. Wellbeing practitioners benefit from expert consultation when supporting students with complex needs.



“ Partnership working has improved access to timely mental health support and strengthened integration between university and NHS services, benefiting both students and staff.

Primary care matron, Enhanced Mental Health Primary Care Team (HIOW NHS foundation trust) ”

Providing bespoke care

The partnership has evolved significantly. Initially focused on group interventions, evaluation found that students engaged more readily with personalised support.

In response, the model was redesigned around individual interventions, consultation and care

coordination, moving beyond a referral arrangement towards an integrated system in which NHS expertise is embedded within university support.

From care to continuation

During 2025-26, **227 students** were recorded as benefiting directly or indirectly from the model. Alongside successes, partners have worked to overcome differences in data systems and organisational culture.

Over the next 12 months, evaluation will explore how engagement with the service relates to continuation outcomes and student wellbeing.

Building a Rich Picture

Understanding why students seek our support

Improving data capture

Understanding what students need is the first step in providing the right support. During 2025-26, the Student Wellbeing service supported **4893 unique students**, while also strengthening how we collect, use and learn from data about student mental health and wellbeing.

A review of existing information highlighted gaps in our understanding of students' mental health needs and the wider factors affecting wellbeing. In response, a new **Student Wellbeing Request Form** has been introduced, to help us build a richer picture of student need, demand and emerging priorities.

Assuring quality

We also introduced a new **Quality Assurance Framework**, which incorporates improved ways of learning from practice including case reviews, case closure summaries and service audits.

Since May, 75 service audits have been completed, helping identify what's working well, where support can be strengthened, and areas where additional staff training may be needed.

Nurture-U

Insights from the UKRI-funded Nurture-U study added to this picture. Drawing on data from **14,000 students** across six universities, including more than 2,300 Southampton students, the study highlighted emerging challenges such as eco-anxiety and gambling-related harms.

Findings informed a University Harm Reduction Training Plan and refreshed Drugs and Alcohol Policy, while also validating many strengths of Southampton's wellbeing support.

4893
students
supported in
2025/26

→ Improved institutional understanding of our students' needs



Building Staff Capability

Supporting staff to support students



Embedding practice

By equipping staff with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support students effectively, we can help ensure students receive timely, compassionate and consistent support throughout their university journey. Recognising the vital role staff play in the student experience, we have developed a range of resources and training programmes, informed by the Advance HE Competency Framework and sector best practice³⁷.

Our mandatory training module, ***Identifying and Responding to Mental Health Concerns***, is now delivered through a central platform, making it easier to access and monitor engagement across departments. A revised Personal Academic Tutor framework has also informed a new training programme, co-developed with the Centre for Higher Education Practice,

embedding student mental health and wellbeing within practice through consistency and clarity of approach.

Practical actions

Guidance for staff on supporting disabled students has also been expanded, with practical advice on inclusive practice, reasonable adjustments and responding effectively to student concerns.

Together, these developments are helping create a more informed, confident and supportive University community for those experiencing mental health difficulties.

Over the next 12 months, our priority will be to interrogate the insights emerging from our data capture to develop new and review existing training and resources, whilst evaluating the impact of those developed this year.

→ Ensuring consistency of approach across the student journey

→ Developing a compassionate community

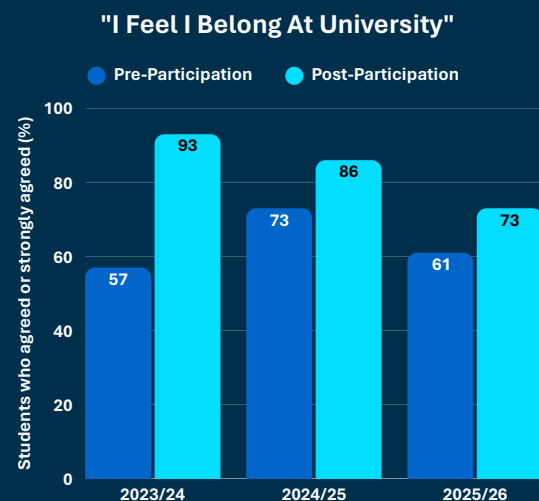
The Awarding Gap Project

Empowering student communities through meaningful co-creation

Community and belonging

Building trust between students and staff is essential for making meaningful institutional change^{38,39}. The Awarding Gap Project (AGP) established a panel of Black student consultants, creating a dedicated student-led, staff-supported space which amplifies Black student voices strengthens community connections and improves student experiences.

The panel's outputs are rooted in our Three C framework: Community, Culture and Curriculum, with Community promoting belonging and authentic connection for students.



Black Fresher's Guide

The Black Fresher's Guide is designed and adapted by current AGP students to welcome new and returning students from Black and other ethnic backgrounds as they navigate their Southampton journeys. The guide is a staple during welcome festivities, with **1,000+** copies distributed across our campuses, facilities and halls of residence.



Bridging the Gap podcast

'Bridging the Gap' is a student curated podcast that explores a range of topics such as social mobility, Black student experiences and racial equity. In three seasons, students have shared with a global audience their passion for what matters. With a **4.5/5** star average rating on Spotify, episodes have included an overview of the project, political awareness and the experiences across the afro-caribbean diaspora.

Events

AGP community-building events draw in **150+** attendees throughout the year. A notable success this year was our TEDx-style showcase "AGPx" which featured a series of talks by students.

"I've gained experience in many different things that I wouldn't have got if I wasn't on the project."

AGP Member

Evaluation

Since 2021/22 Panel membership has grown from eight to 31. Pre/post-programme surveys show improved sense of belonging and positivity about university experiences (+31%), rooted in the community they build and shared experiences.

31%
increase in
positivity
score

"I have definitely gained a lot of confidence [...] I've also felt a greater sense of belonging and purpose within the university."

AGP Member

The AGP enables members to upskill, enact change and directly build bridges with other students. The autonomy and student voice amplification create an inclusive and welcoming space for Black heritage students to build up themselves as students, young professionals and people.

Following student feedback, future work will focus on building local and national communities that champion student self-advocacy, extending the project's impact while retaining co-design at its core.



The Awarding Gap Project

Using curriculum engagement to create equitable learning environments



→ Better understanding of Black students' lived experiences

→ Higher confidence discussing race equity in learning spaces

→ Increased student confidence engaging with staff

Culture change

Creating more equitable learning experiences for students begins with shared understanding and open dialogue. Where these are lacking, staff may be less equipped to recognise and address the systemic issues that contribute to differential experiences^{40,41}.

“*[I appreciated the] genuine engagement with and from AGP students who spoke from a considered and obviously well informed perspective.*”
Staff Workshop Attendee

In 2025/26 we piloted a student-led training intervention for academic staff. These interactive workshops, both co-created and facilitated by AGP students, are designed to amplify underrepresented student voices but also empower academic staff to proactively consider how they can improve the learning and teaching experience for all students. Attendees included 16 members of staff, representing all five faculties.

Staff reported better understanding of current Black students' lived experiences through first-hand testimonies, which contextualised

the quantitative data insights with real life examples. The workshops' structured dialogue increased their confidence in discussing race equity with colleagues as well.

The workshops empowered staff to recognise students' intersectional identities and consider active listening as a form of inclusive practice in learning spaces. Student facilitators also expressed how delivering workshops increased their confidence engaging with staff.

“*Before going into it I was nervous because I didn't really know how it was going to go down [...] but after I felt really good! I think it went pretty well and [...] the audience was receptive.*”
Student Facilitator

This evaluation is part of a wider participatory case study on awarding gaps: collaborating with Black students to create, deliver and evaluate the workshops, foregrounding their own experiences

as designers and facilitators, alongside participants' outcomes. Further workshops are planned to meet wider demand in 2026-27.

Equity and assessment

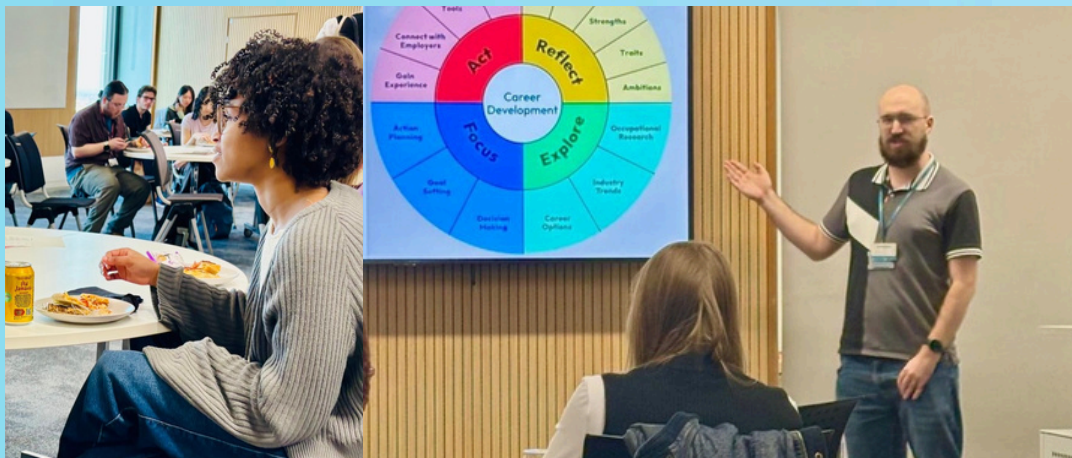
The Equity & Assessment project is a piece of research investigating awarding gaps across undergraduate courses under the Advancing Assessment Strategic Major Project.

Perspectives on assessment and feedback processes were gathered through interviews and focus groups aimed at understanding the lived experiences of Black students and students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds (IMDQ1, FSM).

Findings indicate that students both seek and value greater transparency in assessment and feedback delivery. They also highlight a need for further research into the design and implementation of appropriate and targeted academic support for students: this should be done in collaboration with students to build academic confidence. These findings are currently being used to inform the design and delivery of Southampton's new Assessment Load Framework.

Career Vision Plus

Supporting progression into graduate outcomes



“The workshops were incredibly useful in teaching me how to search for jobs and also draft successful applications. The job market is so very tough right now and the skills I learnt were invaluable in helping me secure a role. **2024/2025 CVP student**”

social, and identity resources that support graduate success. CVP students showed increases across all five domains, with the largest in Social Capital, indicating stronger professional networks, greater confidence engaging with employers, and increased awareness of career opportunities.

that observed among the wider IMD Q1 student population, (a key target group for the intervention) during the same period.

Positive early graduate destinations

Early graduate tracking suggests that many CVP graduates are progressing into positive destinations. Among graduates who could be contacted or identified through public professional profiles, 86.3% of the 2023/24 cohort and 81.0% of the 2024/25 cohort progressed into employment or further study. Graduates secured opportunities across sectors including finance, healthcare, public services and professional services.

CAREER VISION PLUS

52%
increase in
career-
readiness

240
students
worked with
since October
2024

Talent is everywhere, opportunity is not

Career Vision Plus (CVP) engaged 240 penultimate and final-year students from underrepresented backgrounds across 2024/25 and 2025/26, including first-generation students, those eligible for Free School Meals, students with disabilities, Black and minoritised ethnic students, and those from higher-deprivation areas. Through careers guidance, internships,

networking, coaching, and employer engagement, CVP supports progression^{42,43} and now incorporates postgraduate support previously delivered through the Vice Chancellor's Progression Scheme.

Building networks, confidence and career-readiness

Southampton's Career Readiness Test⁴⁴ measures confidence across five Graduate Capital domains: human, cultural, psychological,

A stronger sense of career direction

Career Registration indicates improved career planning among final-year CVP participants, with the proportion reporting they had reached a 'compete or sorted' stage increasing from 6.3% in the 2023/24 pilot year to **58.8%** in 2025/26, an increase of 52.5 percentage points. This improvement was greater than

Support for progression into postgraduate study (previously the Vice Chancellor's Progression Scheme) will be embedded within CVP through 1:1 and group coaching.

Find out more

 [2024 evaluation report](#)

My Generation Career Coaching

Supporting first-generation students to action career ambitions and navigate their futures with confidence

Career coaching to meet students' needs

First-generation students often navigate complex higher education systems without the family experience of university that can inform academic and career decision-making⁴⁵. Additional opportunities to build networks, explore career pathways and access tailored guidance can support their success⁴⁶.

“ I have become more motivated and have a better idea as to what my career goals are and how I can achieve them. ”
2025 participant

Now in its 8th year, My Generation Career Coaching (MGCC) provides personalised, sustained support via up to six coaching sessions tailored to their goals, from career exploration and identifying opportunities to application and interview support. Participants also receive a £200 bursary to reduce financial barriers to career development. By developing their confidence and facilitating career-



enhancing experiences, we aim to support students to progress into graduate-level opportunities.

Building confidence for future career success

In 2025, 43 students joined the year-long programme. Throughout the year, these participants self-assessed their progress across five career-enhancing markers; results

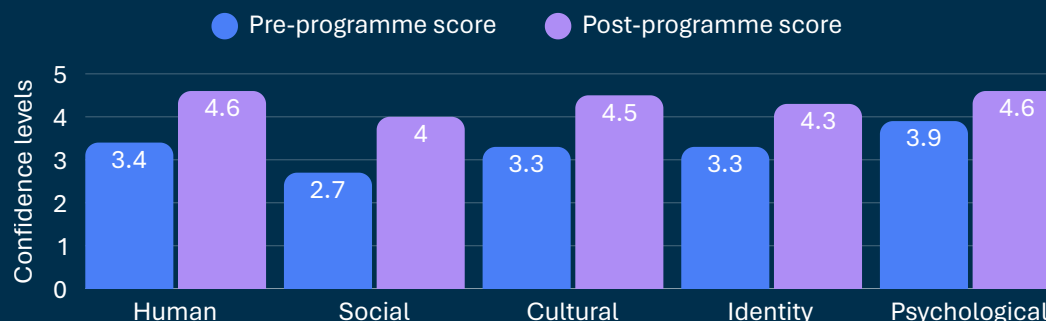
show consistent gains in career-readiness skills:

- **Career Vision** scores increased from 3.7 to 4.5 on average (+22%), indicating greater clarity about post-university aspirations and the steps to achieve them.
- **Career Activism** scores rose from 3.6 to 4.6 (+28%), reflecting increased confidence in seeking out information and opportunities to support their goals.

Making connections that count

Students also complete the Career Readiness Test⁴⁴ at the start and end of the programme, measuring change across five capitals.

Pre- and post-programme Graduate Capital scores



Results show growth across all areas, with **Social Capital**, relating to networks and connections that support career opportunities, increasing from 2.7 to 4.0 on average (+48%).

“ My coach was amazing and made me feel incredibly safe to talk about the vulnerable parts of job seeking, I felt incredibly supported to make the right decisions for myself in terms of my career. I also like the gentle guidance to keep on top of my actions. ”
2025 participant

Graduate Outcomes data shows 78% of MGCC students progressed into graduate level roles over the last four years, including positions at the Met Office, Deloitte, Virgin Media and KPMG. While this sits only slightly below the 80% average for all non-participating students*, it reflects the ongoing need for work to address progression gaps.

Find out more

[Graduate Capital Model](#)

*excluding Medicine and Health Sciences

Lessons at Two Years In

How evaluation of the APP is shaping our practice at Southampton

Igniting change

Higher education continues to face financial pressure, changing patterns of student engagement and growing challenges across schools and colleges, including mental health, attendance and increasing numbers of young people not in education, employment or training. In this context, widening participation remains central to Southampton's mission.

We are proud that more students from IMDQ1 areas are choosing Southampton, in part due to our pre-arrival programmes contributing to academic confidence and readiness for higher education; however, more is needed.

Building on this progress, we will expand Ignite Southampton, triple the Year 13 cohort and establish a progressive pathway from secondary school to enrolment. Along with expanding our work to raise attainment from primary to post-16, this will help more young people



access our university and make the choices right for them.

Planning for this is underway and lessons learnt through our intervention strategies are informing next steps. This will enable us to support more students through key transitions, with tailored opportunities to develop academic and research skills, build community and navigate the hidden curriculum of higher education.

Improving outcomes

The awarding gap between Black and white students has reduced as have the continuation gaps for students with a communication or social impairment and those with a diagnosed mental health condition. It is too early to attribute these changes to individual programmes, but emerging evidence confirms programme strengths and points to the need for sharper targeting and stronger longitudinal analysis.

Participation remains uneven across some activities. However, evidence from Ignite Your Success and Autism Matters shows the value of purposeful programme design and student partnership. Through mentoring, co-design and staff training, students develop confidence, employability and metacognitive skills while contributing to positive change for peers, colleagues and the wider University. We are now exploring how to extend these opportunities.

Strengthening our whole provider approach

Lasting improvement also depends on colleagues across academic and professional services working together to reflect on and adapt practice. Mental Health Awareness Training and Racial Literacy Workshops enable staff to learn directly from students and expert practitioners and apply that learning within university systems and spaces. As both programmes expand, we will evaluate how these changes are experienced by students.

Supporting Information

Key terms and references

Key term definitions

Awarding gap: The difference in final degree outcomes between student groups.

Continuation: Tracks whether students are still studying at a set time after starting their course.

Free School Meals (FSM): A school meal provided to young people from low income families.

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD): A postcode-based measure of socioeconomic differences. Quintile 1 (Q1) are the most deprived areas; Q5 are the least deprived

Progression: Movement from higher education into graduate employment, postgraduate study or other positive destinations.

Widening Participation: Activities and interventions to improve access, success and progression for underrepresented groups.

References

1. Gov UK (2025) 'Compare School and College Performance'
2. Southampton Data Observatory (2025) 'Education Outcomes'
3. Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2021b). 'Small group tuition toolkit'
4. Xiao (2023) *Power and Education*, 15(3), 341-361
5. Cripps et al. (2018). *Research for All*, 2(2), 323-334
6. Stephenson & Isaacs (2019). *The Curriculum Journal*, 30(4), 392-421
7. Burgess et al. (2021). *Heliyon*, 7(7)
8. The Access Project (2021). 'The Access Project: Impact Report'
9. Summers et al. (2023). *Assessment & Evaluation in HE*, 48(1), 56-66
10. Advance HE (2017) 'Flipped learning'
11. Tenenbaum (2020). *Journal of Educational Psych*, 112(7), 1303-1319
12. Bocoş et al. (2024). *J. Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, 8(2), p.2859
13. Goldingay et al. (2014). *Int. J. the First Year in HE*, 5(1), 43-53
14. Gunn et al. (2011). *J. Uni Teaching and Learning Practice*, 8(1), 70-80
15. McWilliams & Allan (2014). *J. Uni Teaching & Learning Practice*, 11(3)
16. Yalch et al. (2019). *Psychology Learning & Teaching*, 18, 317-325
17. Rosch & Collins (2017). *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 155, 9-19
18. Befani & Mayne (2014). *IDS Bulletin*, 45(6), 17-36.
19. Zhang & Yang (2020). 'The effects of employment on... academic performance'
20. Burchell (2023). 'Bursaries Research and Impact Evaluation'
21. Murphy & Wyness (2016). 'Testing Means Testing Aid'
22. National Autistic Society. (2023). 'Education and Autism: Barriers to Access'
23. Safer et al. (2020). *J Postsecondary Ed. and Disability*, 33(1), 5-21.
24. Lei et al. (2020) *J. Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(7), 2397-2411
25. HESA (2025). <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-15>
26. Irvine & MacLeod (2022). *Good Autism Practice*, 23(1), 49-59.
27. Chown et al. (2018). *J. Further & Higher Educ.*, 42(6), 837-854.
28. Gurbuz et al. (2019). *J. Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49(2), 617-631
29. Gillespie-Lynch et al. (2022). *Autism*, 26(5), 1082-1094
30. Waisman et al. (2023). *Autism*, 27(2), 356-370
31. Cage et al. (2020) *J. Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50, 2484-2498
32. Morris et al. (2022) *J. Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 11(3)
33. Nicolaidis et al. (2020) *Autism in Adulthood*. 2020;2(1):61-76
34. Lewis & Siebahl (2025) 'Student Mental Health in England'
35. UUK (2022) 'NHS-University Partnerships'
36. UUK (2018) 'Minding Our Future'
37. Advance HE (2025) 'Competency Framework for Responding to Students in Distress'
38. UUK, & NUS. (2019). 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities'
39. McConnell et al. (2025) *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal*, 7(1)
40. Smith, M. (2021). 'Facilitating anti-racist curriculum conversations'.
41. Mountford-Zimdars et al. (2015). 'Causes of differences in student outcomes. HEFCE.'
42. Pasero, H. (2023). 'Supporting 'First in Family' Students' (*Chapter 21*)
43. Pasero, H (2016) 'Talkin' 'bout first generation'
44. Tomlinson et al. (2021). 'Graduate Capital & Career Readiness Framework.'
45. The Bridge Group (2017). 'Social Mobility and University Careers Services'
46. Reid & Kelestyn (2022). *Br. J. Guidance & Counselling*

With Thanks to Our Authors

Recognising the collective effort behind delivering, evaluating and improving these projects

The projects featured in this report are delivered by staff who bring expertise, creativity and genuine care for students in all they do. Alongside on-the-ground delivery, these practitioners have embraced evaluation as part of their work, using their programme knowledge, professional insight and rich contextual understanding to learn, improve and enhance the support they provide.

This has been made possible, in large part, by Florence Harvey, who has steered us through this APP period with encouragement, insight and unwavering support. Her commitment to staff, students and widening participation keeps this work a central institutional priority and drives change. Thank you also to Dr Heather Mozley, whose enthusiasm and evaluation knowledge has forever changed how we think about our work and the impact we make.

We would also like to thank the thousands of students, staff and partners in schools and colleges

who have engaged with evaluation activities. By sharing their experiences, insights and feedback, they have helped us understand what is working, where improvements are needed, and how we can continue creating opportunities for students to thrive.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to Dr Alice Stinetof for the design, formatting and visual flair of these reports, which have turned our evaluation findings into engaging, accessible stories.

Intervention Strategy 1

Books & Stories, Shapes & Numbers, Reading Buddies

- Sophie Grady
- Chantelle Veneroso
- Ella Gordon-Banks
- Charlotte McGuinness

Ignite Your Journey

- Emma Woozeer
- Liam Gifford

Learn with US Transition

- Katrina Lueddeke
- Becky Naylor-Teece
- Lily Bissell

Intervention Strategy 2

Peer Assisted Learning

- Emma Mansfield
- Damini Sharma

Embedded Academic Skills

- Alison Daniell
- Laura Lister
- Felicity Flynn

Ignite Your Success

- Carla Wiggs
- Jess Smith
- Savanna Cutts
- Adele Tidball

Undergraduate Bursary Scheme

- Kirsty Coombs
- Adrian Dolby

Intervention Strategy 3

Transition Day for Autistic Students

- Erin Copeland

Autism Matters

- Rob Joliffe

Inclusive Support Ambassadors

- Gemma Turner

Autism Awareness Toolkit

- Anna McCann
- Beth Coombes

Intervention Strategy 4

Working Together for Mental Health, Building a Rich Picture, Building Staff Capability

- Helen Rowland
- Victoria Bowman

Intervention Strategy 5

Awarding Gap Projects

- Chido Chipato
- Toluwa Atilade

Equity & Assessment:

- Alan Manley

Intervention Strategy 6

Career Vision Plus

- Heather Pasero

My Generation

- Anna Salter

