

# Widening Access and Participation – support for under-represented student groups in Higher Education

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Edge Hill  
University



# Aims

What is widening access and widening participation?

Who we support and why

Our support offer

Working with you

TOC workshop

How we can help you

Q&A

# What is Widening Participation?



# What is ‘Widening Participation’?

The terms “widening access” and “widening participation” refer to the activity undertaken by institutions to develop and support the aspirations and attainment of students from different social groups who **may not normally consider higher education as an option** or are **under-represented** within higher education.

## EHU Widening Access and Student Success Team:

**Widening Access:** Providing pre-entry advice and guidance to students and supporters and delivery of targeted outreach programmes and activities

**Fastrack and Equivalencies:** Preparation for HE access programme, Level 2 equivalency study and examinations

**Student Success:** On-course support programmes and activities, Student Advisory Panels



# Who do we support?

- Students who are or have been eligible for **pupil premium funding/Ever6 free school meals or 16-19 bursary**
- Students who have studied **BTEC** qualifications\*
- Students from **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups**
- **Care-experienced and Estranged Students (CEES)**
- Students from **low participation neighbourhoods** (where very few people go on to higher education)
- Students who are the **first in their generation** to go to university
- Students who have **caring responsibilities and/or parental responsibilities**
- Students **living with a disability** or mental health condition
- Individuals who are **returning to learning** as mature students
- Students who have **refugee status** or are **seeking asylum**
- Students from **military families** or are **military leavers**
- Students with **criminal convictions**
- **Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman and Boatman** students

What percentage of students at Edge Hill have at least one widening participation characteristic?

77%

# A snapshot of our student body

- **48%** come with BTEC, Access or **alternative qualifications** rather than A levels
- **47.7%** come from household with **intermediate or routine/manual occupations**
- **49.7%** come from the **highest area of deprivation**
- **43%** (of those who know) are the **first in their family** to come to university
- **27.8%** come from the **lowest areas of higher education participation**
- **18.4%** have been eligible for **free school meals**
- **17.4%** have a reported **disability**
- **29%** are **mature students** (over the age of 21 when they begin their studies)
- **2.4%** have shared that they are **care experienced** or **estranged** from their family
- **9.5%** are **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic** students



# Why Widening Participation?



# Access and Participation Plans (APP)

HEIs are required to have an Access and Participation Plan to be a registered institution

2018

2017

September 2024

Introduction of the OfS  
as the sector regulator

New APP comes into force for Edge  
Hill (September 2025 for most other  
HEIs)

## Access

Providing students with the  
right support they may need  
to enter Higher Education.

## Success

Ensuring that students can  
continue with their studies,  
complete their degree, and  
achieve their potential.

## Progression

Supports students to  
achieve their goals for  
further study and their  
career.

# Access and Participation Plans

## Equality of Opportunity Risk Register:

12 'risks', e.g:

Mental health

Perception of Higher Education

Cost pressures

## Evidence and Data Informed:

OfS data dashboard & universities own internal data

## Intervention Strategies:

Actions providers will take to challenge risks to equality of opportunity and the outcomes they expect to achieve

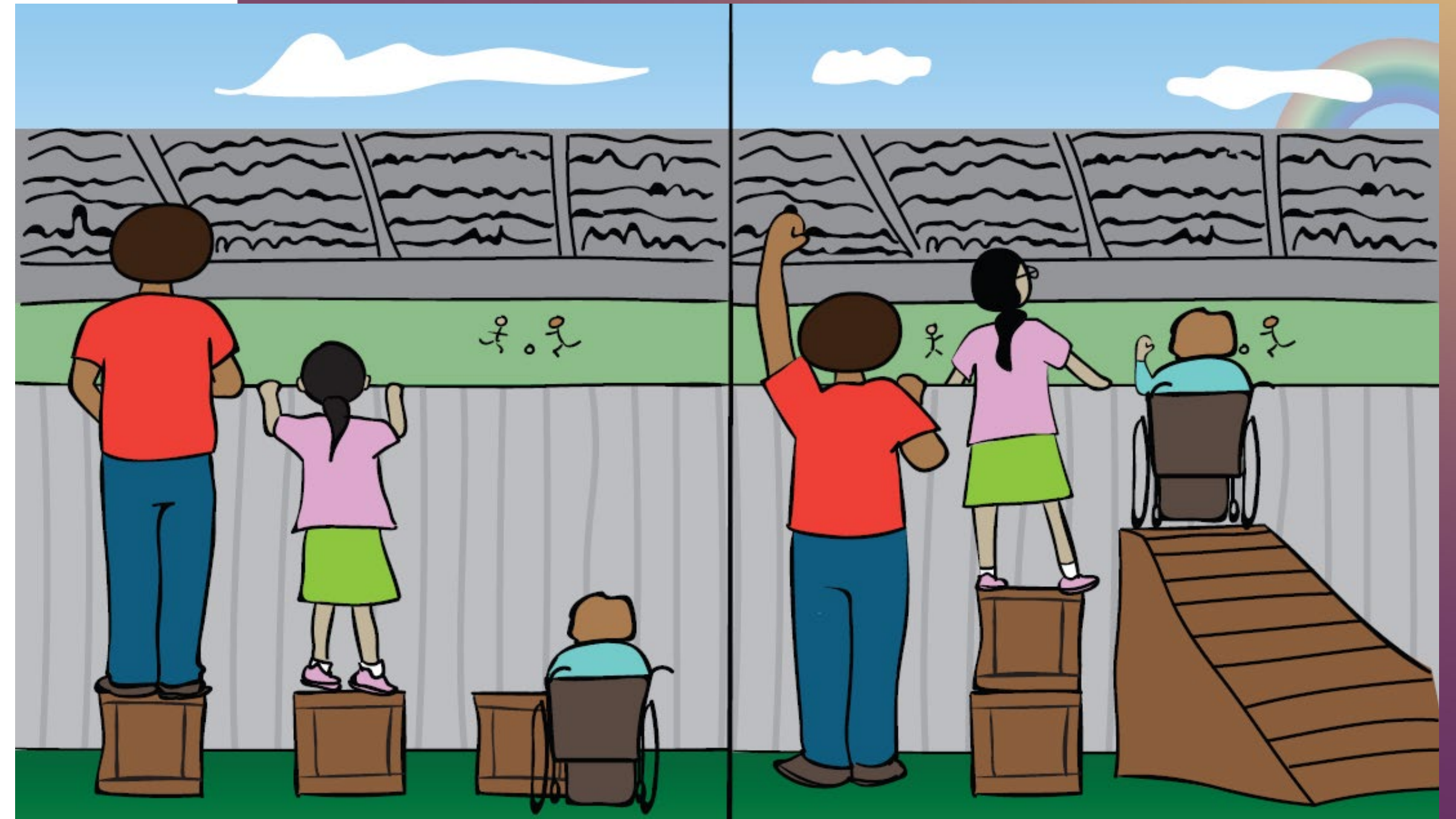


# Equality vs Equity

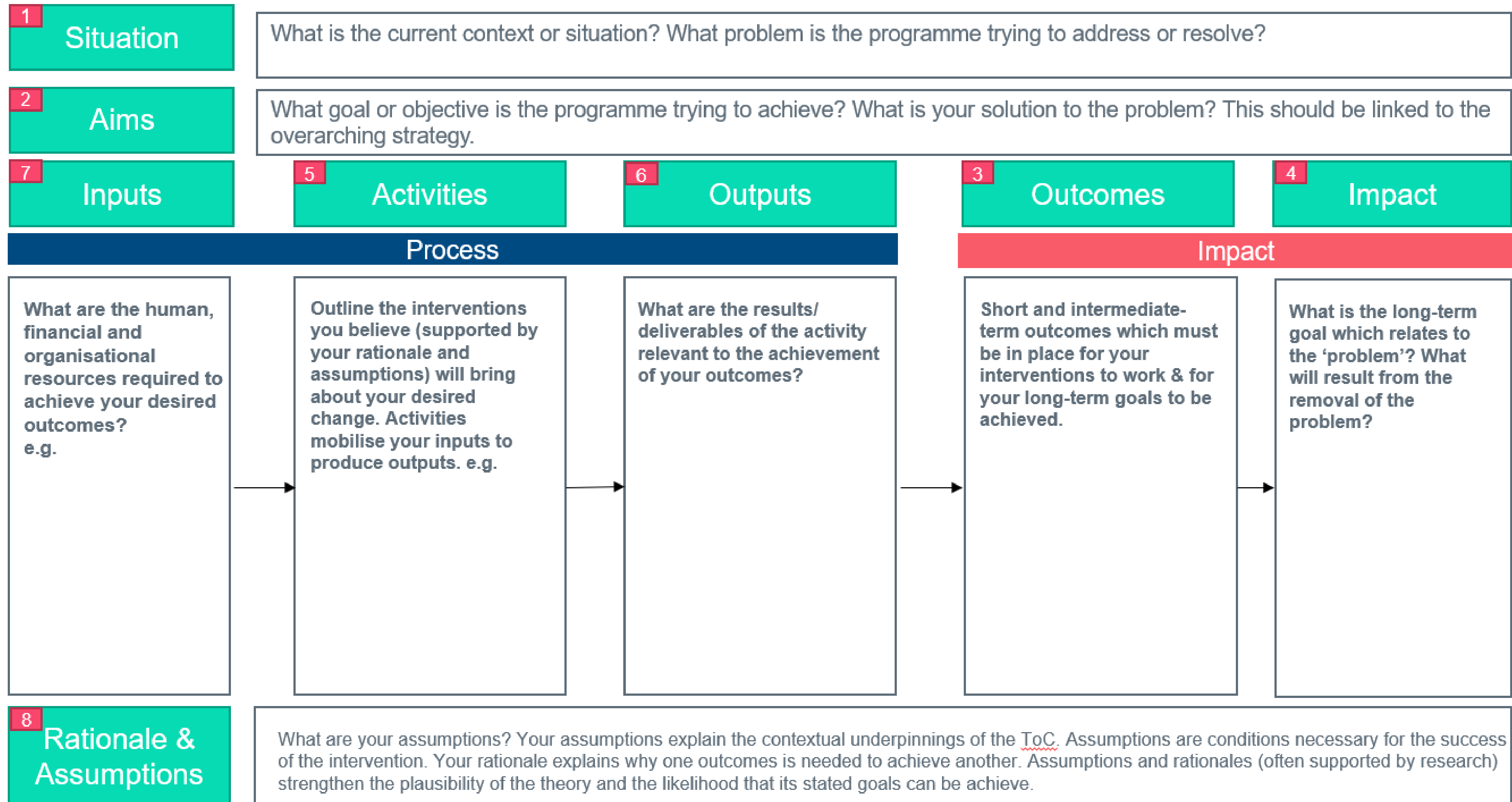
## Positive Action

Steps that HEIs and colleges can take to encourage people from different groups in order to overcome historic disadvantage

**Q:** How do you think we do this?



# Theory of Change

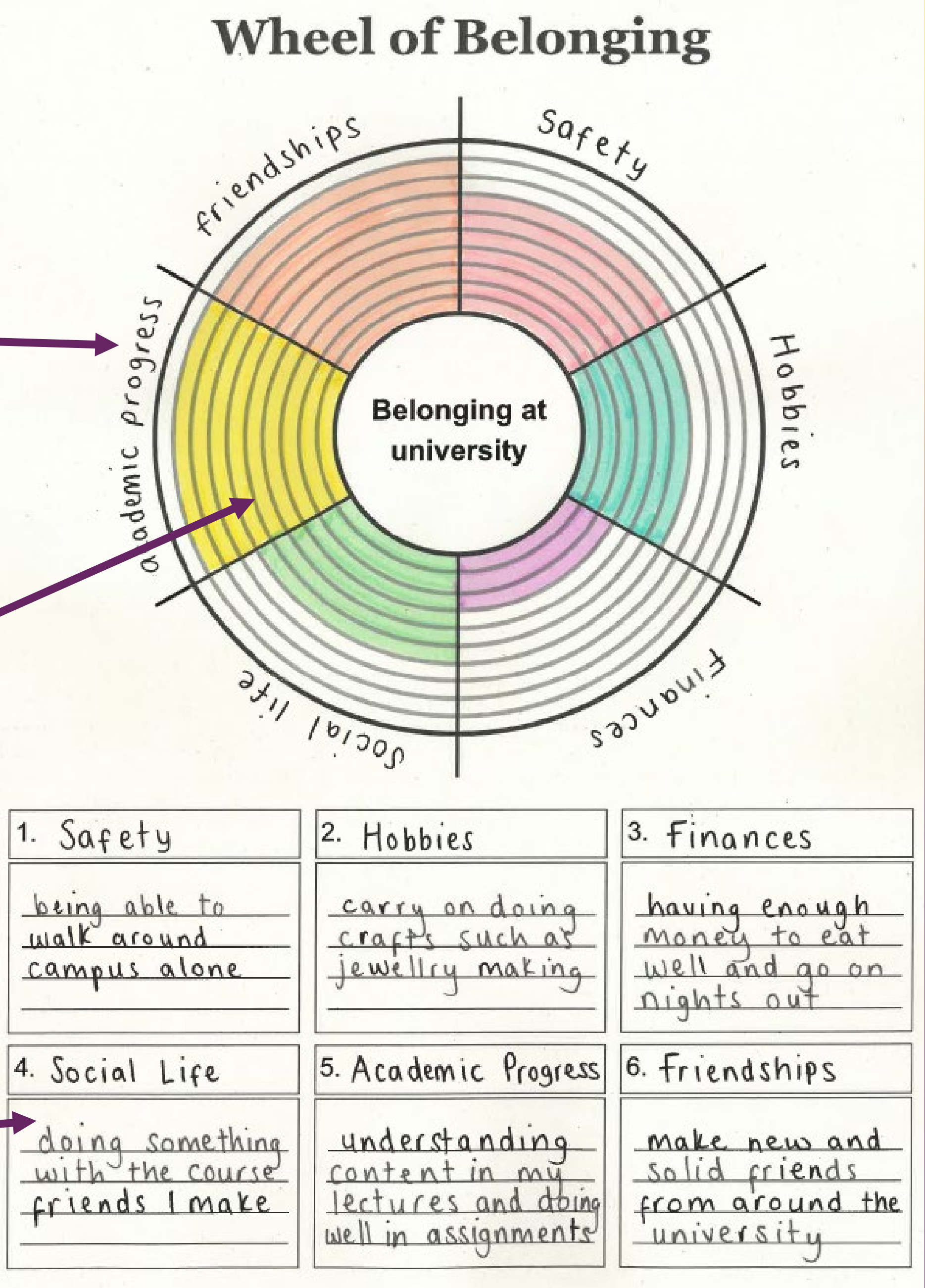


# Wheel of Belonging

Choose the 6 most important things that, at 100%, would make you feel like you belong at university.

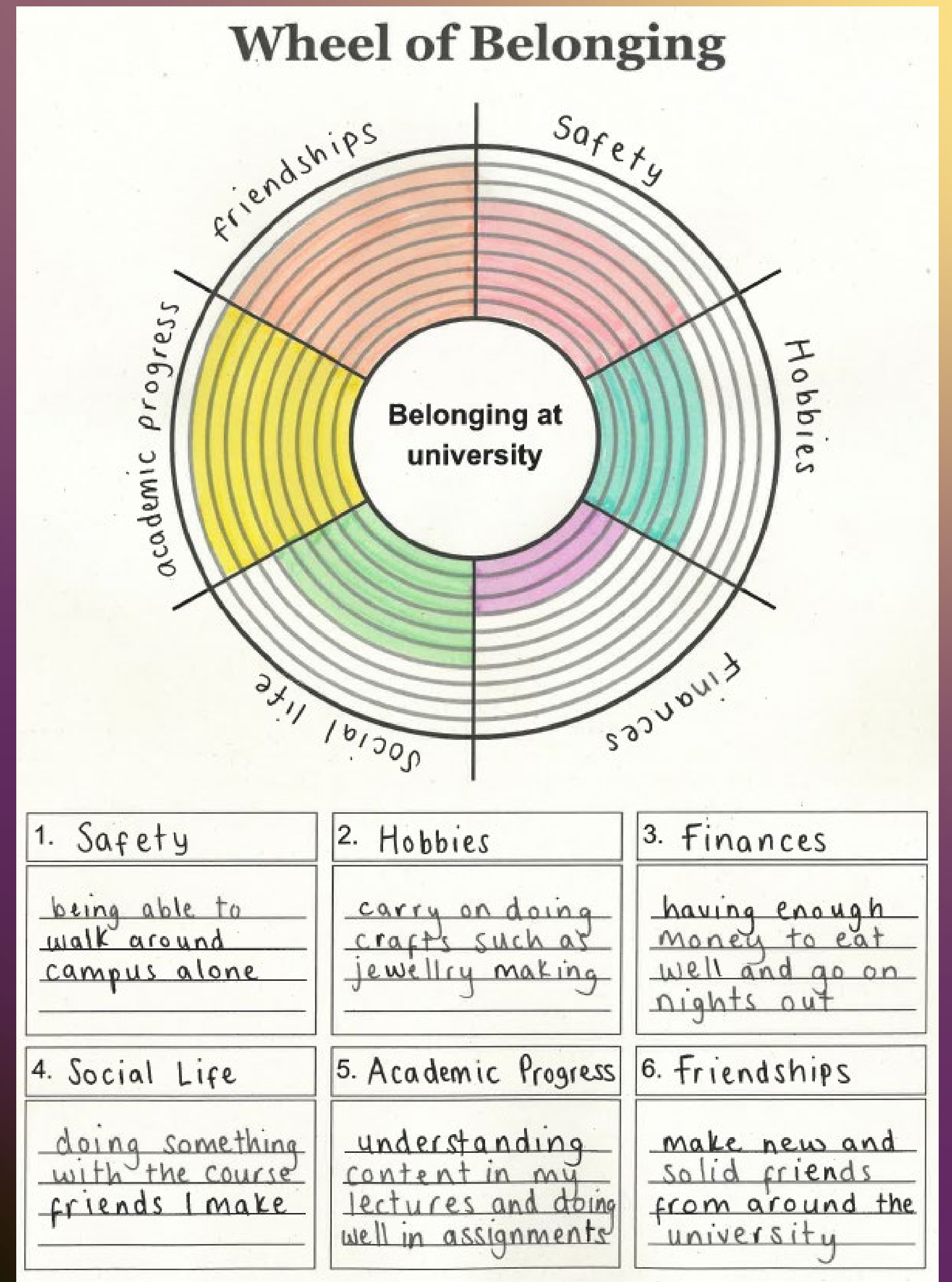
Rank how confident you feel about each topic in the relevant segments.

Describe what each topic means for you.



# Wheel of Belonging

How do you think your Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students would respond to the activity?

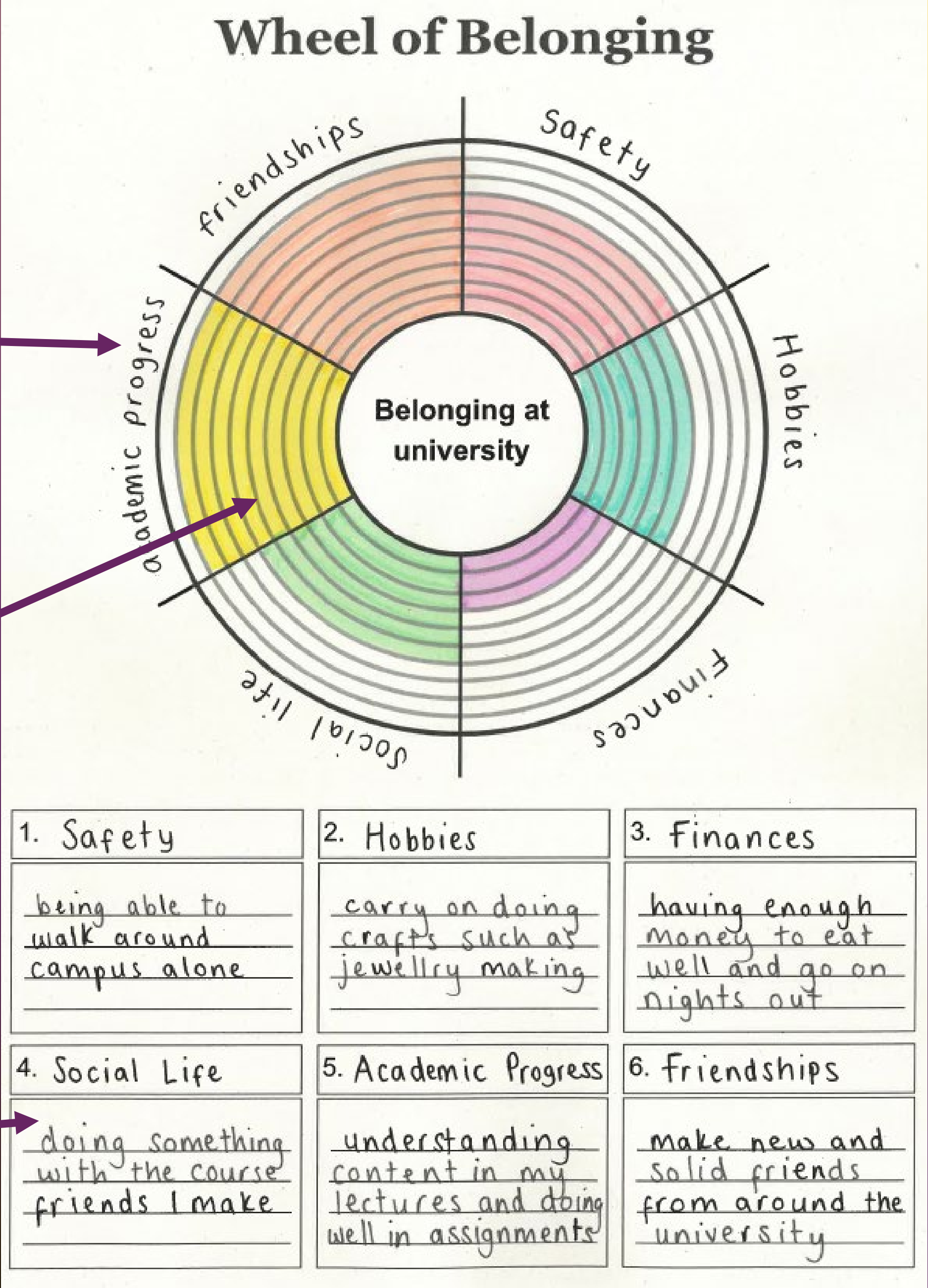


# Wheel of Belonging

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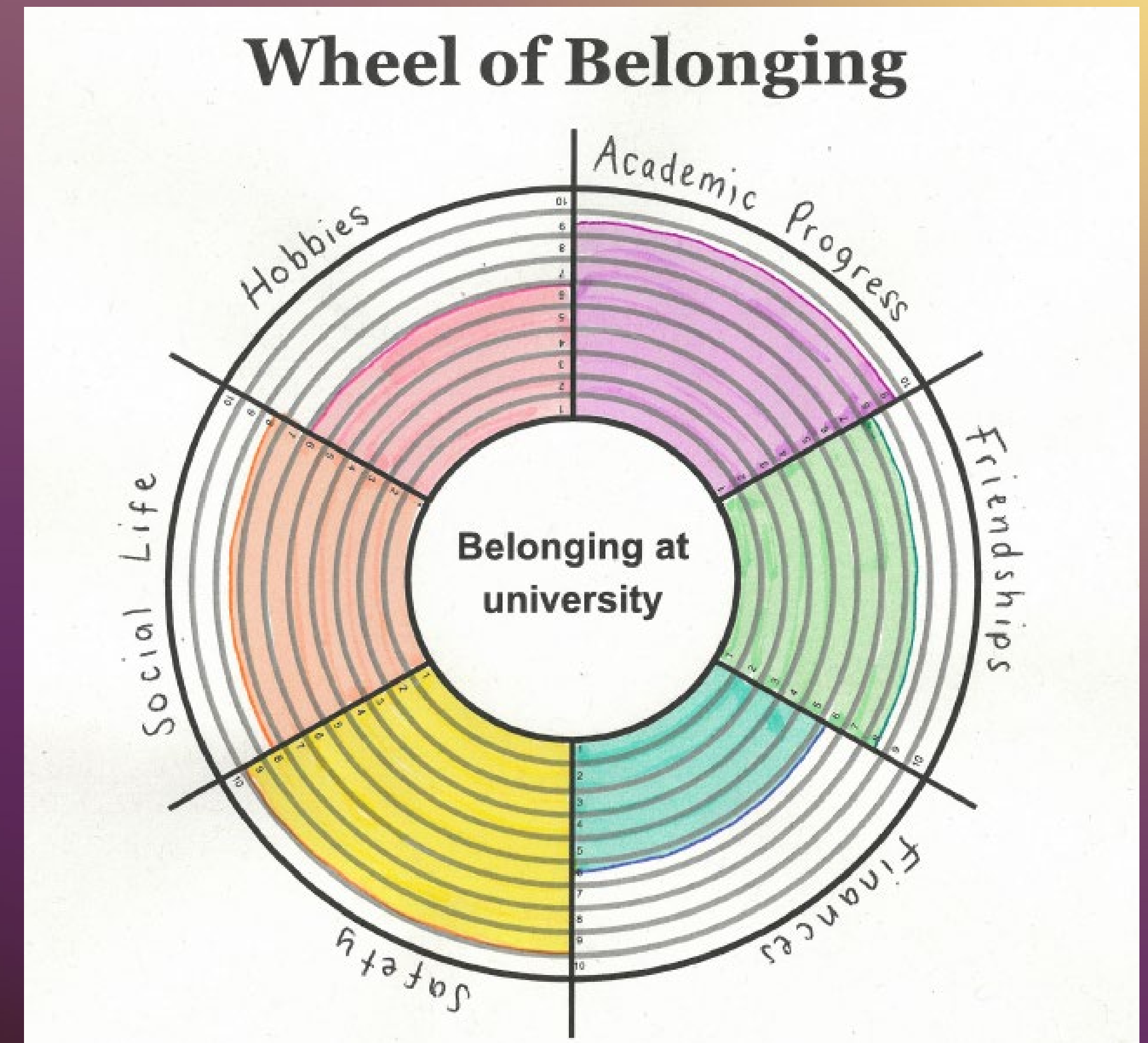
# What do students feel?

Top factors for students' sense of belonging:

Aspect of university	% of students who included this aspect on their wheel	Average confidence in this aspect
Academic Progress	80%	8.6 out of 10
Friendships	76%	7.4 out of 10
Finances	66%	5.2 out of 10
Safety	63%	8.9 out of 10
Hobbies	49%	5.9 out of 10
Social Life	41%	7.3 out of 10

Students also value:

- Personal development
- Faith
- Self care
- Relationships



# What do students mean?

## Academic Progress

**“To succeed with my studies”**  
“Doing well”  
**“How I’m doing in exams/assignments”**  
“To be able to learn and improve”  
**“The whole reason you go to HE is to get a degree and get a job”**  
“Meeting deadlines and being organised”  
**“Not worrying about failing”**  
“Developing my skills linked to my course”  
**“Get your degree and not be burnt out”**  
“How supported I feel in any academics”  
**“Seeing my hard work”**  
“Understanding content in my lectures”  
“Enjoying what I’m learning”

## Friendships

**“Feel like you fit in and belong”**  
“People I enjoy spending time with”  
**“To belong you need to fit in and find your group”**  
“Having people to talk to about everyday life”  
**“Having people to talk to/socialise with outside of work”**  
“They can be the deciding factor of being accepted”  
**“The people close to you whom you trust”**  
“People to have fun with”  
**“Be able to go on study dates and get support”**  
“Finding like minded people”

## Finances

**“I need a sustainable amount of money”**  
“How to budget the money I have overall”  
**“I want to have enough money to enjoy life”**  
“Being able to comfortable fund wants and needs”  
**“No debt please ☹”**  
“Boarding fees”  
**“Controlling how much I spend”**  
“Be able to eat daily and buy study equipment”  
**“Stress less about money”**

## Safety

**“Secure”**  
“Feeling safe”  
**“Having a good room that I can relax and study in”**  
“Feeling protected”  
**“How I feel going out, fear of being harmed?”**  
“Being about to worry less about dangers outside”  
**“I would like to be able to navigate around uni safely when I’m alone or with friends”**  
“Feel taken care of”  
**“Being able to walk around campus within feeling like something bad will happen”**  
“Being able to be alone at night”  
**“To feel safe in my ethnicity, gender and social class”**

## Hobbies

**“Keep you busy”**  
“Having something to do”  
**“Listening to music, going shopping, making sure I have time for myself”**  
“Having time to do hobbies like art”  
**“Enjoying things outside of school”**  
“Reading, expanding the mind or playing games”  
**“Tennis and reading”**  
“Find interests that help me grow as a person”  
**“Carry on cycling and painting”**  
“Activities that makes me laugh and things I enjoy”  
**“To feel safe in my ethnicity, gender and social class”**

## Social Life

**“Keep you busy”**  
“Having something to do”  
**“Listening to music, going shopping, making sure I have time for myself”**  
“Having time to do hobbies like art”  
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**“To feel safe in my ethnicity, gender and social class”**

# Dedicated support activity

- **Diversity Access Programme** (for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students)
- **Ignite Access Programme** (for students previously eligible for **Free School Meals\***)
- **Care-experienced and estranged students'** holistic package (CEES students)
- **Parents, carers and supporters' activity** (CEES, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority)
- **Uni Connect collaborative activity**, e.g. Discover Your Potential, Empower Academy, Pre-16 Tutoring, Future Writers, Raising Attainment activity, Re-settlers Events
- **Thrive programme** (for transition and first year on-course support)



# Standard support activity

- Support on researching and applying for HE and student finance, e.g. advising on courses and entry requirements, reviewing personal statements, mock interviews
- Assisting students to participate in any dedicated outreach activities that we offer
- Financial and pastoral support for students attending Edge Hill University Open Days and Offer Holder days
- Supporting students during results day, especially during the Clearing and/or confirmation processes
- Aiding students in their transition to Edge Hill once they have been made an offer to study with us



# Thrive Programme – activities

- Enhanced transition and on-course support for first-year UG students from backgrounds that are under-represented at university.

Aims to;

- support equality of opportunity
  - help all students to get the most out of their university experience.
  - help students prepare for and settle into university life
  - increase awareness of, and access to, the wide range of support services across the University
  - support students to meet and make friendships with other students who may have a similar lived experience
  - increase students' confidence in their ability to succeed
- 
- Eligibility
- 
- 4 main components;
  - pre-arrival online sessions / on-course social support / optional 1:1 coaching conversations / SOF Funded Career Opportunities

# Thrive Programme – activities

Informed by Student Voice / data

Via our Student Advisory Panel WP students were consulted on;

Name / Programme of Activities / Timing / Promotion / Marketing and more!

Changes made as a direct result of student feedback;

- Changes to length / timing of pre-entry online sessions
- Incorporation of clearing students
- Enhancements to coaching conversations offer
- Changes to social programme

# Signposting to support teams

- **Inclusion Team:** Supports students with Autism, mental health, sensory impairment, mobility difficulties and medical conditions, (eg epilepsy, diabetes, heart condition, severe asthma)
- **SpLD, (Specific Learning Differences) Support Team:** Support team for students who have Specific Learning Differences such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and ADHD
- **Student Support Team:** Supporting all students, especially students who are underrepresented in higher education such as Care Experienced and Estranged Students (CEES), transgender students and young adult carers
- **Money Advice Team:** Guidance on all money-related matters including student funding and personal finances
- **Careers:** Helps students develop their employability and find work opportunities
- **Faith and Community:** Offer pastoral and faith support through the Chaplaincy Service to people of all faiths and none
- **Wellbeing and Counselling Team:** Support students who may feel overwhelmed, stressed, anxious, or low in mood

# Working with you and your students

## Getting involved:

Keep in touch with your main contacts

Utilising internal data – who do you need to support?

Responding to newsletters / registering your interest

EHU webpage



# How we can help you

- Professional Development – Postgraduate taught courses and online information sessions
- Supporting student success stories and destinations
- Activities contributing to your institutional statutory commitments or action plans for target student groups
- Working together to engage with supporters and the community



# Questions?

**Widening Access and Student Success  
Team:**

[wass@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:wass@edgehill.ac.uk)

**Get involved:**

Take part in our focus groups for staff and students

**Programmes running for 2025/26:**

Express your interest



Expand your  
**opportunities**  
with Edge Hill

[EHU.AC.UK/DISCOVER](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/discover)