

Widening Access and Student Success Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28

FOREWORD



At Edge Hill University, widening access and student success is in our DNA.

When we first opened our doors in 1885, as a women-only college, we became the first place in the country where women were able to train to teach without having an affiliation to the church. Now, 140 years later, supporting students from all backgrounds remains core to what we do. Each year we attract and support a diverse student body, with over 70% of our undergraduate students being from backgrounds typically under-represented within higher education.

We have strong foundations to build upon, but there is more that needs to be done. At Edge Hill, and across the higher education sector, there remain gaps in successful student outcomes, with systemic issues disproportionately impacting upon some student groups. We know, for example, that barriers create awarding gaps for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students compared to their White counterparts, and continuation and attainment gaps for students from low-income households persist. Whilst the vast majority of students achieve their goals, our aim is to ensure that every student, regardless of their personal characteristics or background, has an equal chance of success. Through this strategy, our ambition is to be a place where students from all backgrounds feel they belong, are supported to succeed academically, and have the knowledge and opportunities to achieve their potential.

This strategy focuses our efforts on the areas that need our attention most, and sets out the collaborative, shared targets we must work on together over the next four years. It is the responsibility of all of us who work for the University, across all departments, to work together to ensure that our ambition is achieved.

Lynda Brady

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and University Secretary

This Widening Access and Student Success Strategy brings to life our Access and Participation Plan (APP), clearly articulating our areas of priority for the next four years, and how we will measure our success in supporting students at risk of equality of opportunity to thrive at Edge Hill University.

APPs are regulatory documents that set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for undergraduate UK/home students from student groups statistically less likely to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education. Universities are required to have an Office for Students (OfS) approved APP, and to take all reasonable steps to comply with the plan as a condition of registration. APPs detail the intervention strategies and activities that providers will make to address risks to equality of opportunity, the targets they have set, and how they will measure and evaluate their impact.

The OfS have created an Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, which lists the 13 characteristics of students most likely to face risks to their equality of opportunity within higher education. At the time of writing this strategy, the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register includes the following characteristics. If a student identifies with one or more of these characteristics, they are often referred to as being from an 'underrepresented', or a 'widening participation' (WP) student group.

- Students from low income households (including students eligible for free school meals)
- Students who are the first in the family to study at university
- Disabled students
- Mature students (aged 21 or over on entry to an undergraduate degree)
- Students from certain ethnic groups
- Students with particular religious beliefs
- Care Experienced students
- Estranged students
- Young carers
- Service Children
- Commuter students
- LGBT+ students
- Students with parental responsibility

Importantly, this strategy does not capture the breadth of work we do as a university to support students from WP groups into and through higher education. The extent of the work we do in this area is vast, with the theme of opportunity for all being threaded through academic and student support teams. Instead, this strategy focuses upon our risks to equality of opportunity across the student lifecycle for particular WP student groups, as identified through rigorous data analysis, enabling us to focus our efforts upon the areas we can have most impact. Throughout the lifespan of this strategy, we will remain responsive and flexible to student need and the wider policy context.

Therefore, this strategy articulates our approach to delivering support for students most at risk of equality of opportunity at Edge Hill University, as outlined in our APP for 2024/25 to 2027/28, which was approved by the OfS in October 2023¹. Our local data indicates that our areas of focus must be supporting students eligible for free school meals, students who studied BTEC qualifications, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students, care leaver students, and students from deprived areas.

An operational plan sits beneath this strategy, and an annual impact report of all Widening Access and Student Success work delivered by the University will be produced.

¹Edge Hill University's OfS approved APP is available here: https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/document/access-participation-plan

The Widening Access and Student Success policy landscape

The Widening Access and Student Success policy landscape has undergone significant changes in recent years. At Edge Hill, we have been alert to these changes, the needs of our students, and have enhanced our offer accordingly. We will continue to be responsive to the opportunities and challenges of working in a changing sector throughout the life of this strategy.

- In 2017, the Office for Students (OfS) became the **new sector regulator**, stating that their 'ambition is that future generations should have equal opportunities to access and succeed in higher education, and to achieve successful and rewarding careers'. Since 2018, universities must have an OfS approved APP to be a registered institution. With this change in regulator came an enhanced focus upon the student success of WP student groups (their continuation, attainment, and progression) in addition to their access.
- In 2019, the creation of Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO), a Widening Access and Student Success focused 'What Works?' centre funded by the OfS signalled the beginning of a significant emphasis on evidence informed practice, and rigorous evaluation when supporting WP students.
- We continue to attract a diverse range of students, but gaps in student success exist at Edge Hill, and across the sector, with systemic issues disproportionately impacting upon some student groups. For example, the UK home student Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic awarding gap is a sector wide issue. In 2020/21 in England, the gap between the percentage of White students and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students awarded a first or a 2:1 was 8.8%. With a wider gap of 18.4% between White students and Black students².



- But Access and Student Success work has gained momentum, with increased regulation has come a more strategic and collaborative approach to sector wide and institutional gaps in equality of opportunity. Enhanced data availability, opportunities for sharing evaluation findings, and effective practice across the sector has boosted and broadened understandings of why this work is so important.
- In April 2023, a new approach to access and participation was delivered in Regulatory Notice 1 from OfS. This set out new requirements to meet the conditions of registration. We were required to identify the risks to equality of opportunity across the student lifecycle to our students, to develop a set of action plans of research and evidence informed activities to tackle each risk, and a set of numerical targets to measure our success.

²https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/features/closing-gap-three-years

Our vision: a whole university approach to access and student success

Our vision is to contribute to a fair and transparent sector, where all those with potential have parity of access and success within Higher Education.

Much of this work is led or co-ordinated by our Widening Access and Student Success team, who play a significant role in driving and delivering this strategy. However, this is a cross-institutional strategy that requires the collaboration of colleagues across the University for us to succeed. A whole University approach to supporting all students across the student lifecycle will be crucial to our success.

The student life cycle is a model used to describe a student's experience as they progress through higher education. Within the context of the Access and Participation Plan, the student lifecycle is made up of three stages:



Access (pre-entry)

Access activity focuses on providing students with the right support they may need to enter Higher Education.



Success (on course)

Success activity focuses upon ensuring that students can continue with their studies, complete their degree, and achieve their academic potential.



Progression

(on course and post-graduation)
Progression activity supports students to achieve their goals for

further study and their

career.

Using this model, we consider our students' experience holistically, and aspire to have a consistent and robust system of support in place for all students, at all stages of their higher education experience. This approach is particularly important for students who identify with WP characteristics, who may face additional barriers or require additional support as they progress into and through Higher Education.

Being part of Thrive gives you comfort to know that there is a network and system which has been created to help you and your needs, and you're not alone with what you are struggling with."

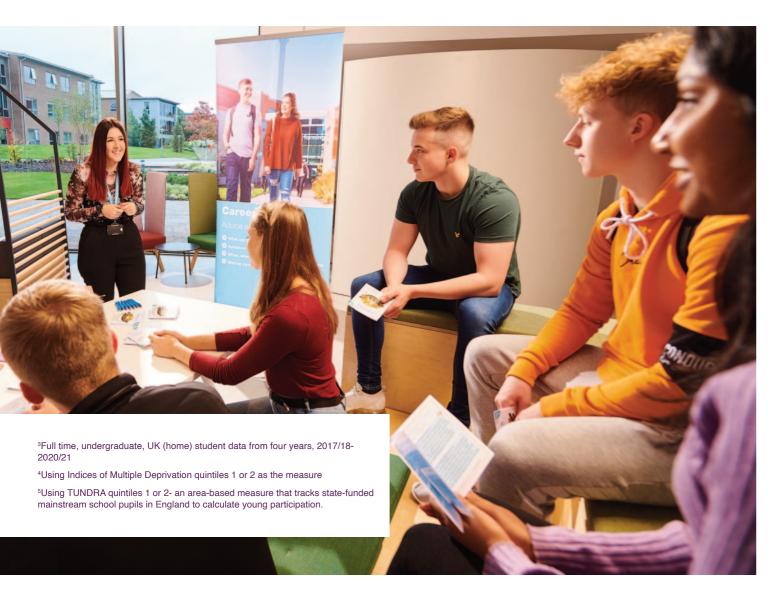
A student from our WP on course support programme, Thrive.

Our strong starting point

We have a strong track record in attracting and supporting a diverse student body, with over 70% of our undergraduate student body being from backgrounds typically under-represented within higher education.

To give an indication of this³;

- 48% come with BTEC, Access or alternative Level 3 qualifications rather than A levels
- 47.7% come from households with intermediate or routine/manual occupations
- 49.7% come from the highest areas of deprivation⁴
- 43% (of those who know) are the first in their family to go to University
- 27.8% come from the lowest areas of higher education participation⁵
- 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 undergraduate studies)
- 2.4% have shared they are care experienced or estranged



We take the access and student success of all students seriously, and we begin this strategy from a strong starting point:

- In 2021 we established a central Widening Access and Student Success team, who lead on the development, coordination, delivery and evaluation of support for WP students across the university, taking a student lifecycle approach across access, success and progression.
- We have a senior leadership team committed to widening access and student success and have governance structures in place to ensure strategic oversight of this work across the University.
- We have committed to a range of covenants and pledges to support care experienced and estranged students.







- March 2024
- We have established partnerships and longstanding programmes to support with our pre-entry widening access commitments; Tackling the Blues Programme, our three collaborative outreach Uni-Connect partnerships across Merseyside, Lancashire, and Cumbria, our Fastrack Preparation for Higher Education Programme, currently in its 24th year of delivery, our work with several local authorities to support care experienced learners into Higher Education, and our Medical School's commitment to enabling fair access.
- We have a range of student support services that provide advice, guidance, and support to our diverse student body, for example our Inclusion Team, Specific Learning Differences Team, Student Support Team, Money Advice Team, Mental Well-Being, Faith and Community and more.
- We established a Northwest WP Research and Evaluation Group in 2018, and a Northwest Student Success Group in 2023, both of which have members from across the region, enabling us to share, learn and respond to effective practice.
- We have an ambitious Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy which aims to be a beacon of example to the sector.
- Our Student Advisory Panel initiative designed to enable the genuine engagement, collaboration and gathering of student voice with WP student groups is now in its fourth year of delivery and was awarded the Social Mobility Award at the Educate North Awards in 2023.

Although we have strong foundations to build upon, we are not immune to the barriers and challenges faced by students who identify with WP student characteristics, and we have risks to equality of opportunity that we must address.



All the staff were amazing and provided great support and activities over my first year at university."

A student from our WP on course support programme, Thrive.

Our Widening Access and Student Success Strategy at a glance

Our APP sets out our commitments to students where we have identified there is risk to their equality of opportunity.

The risks to equality of opportunity identified in our APP are relevant to our local context, informed by the OfS access and participation data dashboard, OfS' Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, our own internal data, and insights from our students.

Our APP commitments span the three pillars of the student lifecycle of access, success and progression. The fourth pillar of 'enablers' has been added to this strategy (and does not feature within our OfS approved APP), this pillar focuses upon the factors that will contribute to the successful delivery of our strategy.

Edge Hill University will be a place where students from all backgrounds feel they belong, are supported to succeed academically, and have the knowledge and opportunities to find and achieve their success.



Access

Prospective students from a range of backgrounds are supported and encouraged to study at Edge Hill University, they see our university as a place they would belong and are supported to gain a place on the right course.



Success

continuation, completion, and attainment

All students feel they belong at the University, have an exceptional student experience, are supported to thrive on their course, and to reach their full academic potential.



Progression

All students and graduates have the knowledge and opportunities to find and achieve their success.



Enablers

Our culture, people, data, evaluation, and insight mechanisms support an inclusive approach to access, success and progression.



Our Student Advisory
Panel have committed
to support this strategy,
Panel members
co-produced the
following statement
of support:

We pledge our support to this strategy, to use our authentic collective voice to work alongside the Widening Access and Student Success Team to help foster an inclusive and supportive student experience. Our work aims to advocate for non-traditional student experiences, supporting students to achieve their full academic and personal potential, to revamp the road from pre-entry to graduation and beyond, for all."

Pillar 1: Access

Prospective students from a range of backgrounds are supported and encouraged to study at Edge Hill University, they see our university as a place they would belong and are supported to gain a place on the right course.

We will focus on sustained and evidence-based outreach and delivering diverse pathways into Higher Education.

- Delivering our Fastrack programme a free, intensive, seven-week preparation for Higher Education programme for adults.
- Delivering alternative pathways into Higher Education, including providing an integrated Foundation Year to Medicine programme for students from WP student groups.
- Delivering our centrally led Widening Access
 Programmes and activity to students and their
 supporters (with a particular focus upon supporting
 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students, students
 eligible for free school meals and care experienced and
 estranged students).

We will collaborate with our established partners to deliver effective projects, programmes and training.

- Working with our established Uni-connect partnerships to deliver an academic tutoring programme to pupils across Lancashire and Cumbria, and collaborative support across Merseyside for care experienced and estranged students.
- Delivering our Tackling the Blues early intervention extended programme, which supports children and young people 6-16 who are experiencing or at risk of developing mental illness.
- Offering bespoke Continuing Professional Development (CPD), delivering our Special Educational Needs Coordination programme (SENCo), Masters courses, and expertise in beach and forest schooling through our Faculty of Education.

We will provide varied activities and events for schools and colleges.

- Offering tailored attainment raising campus visits with our Faculty of Education Partnerships Team for school aged pupils, exploring a range of subjects.
- Through our Education Liaison team, working with sixth forms and colleges across the UK, providing information, advice and guidance to students regarding progression and transition to Higher Education.



Pillar 2: Success

(continuation, completion, and attainment)

All students feel they belong at the University, have an exceptional student experience, are supported to thrive on their course, and to reach their full academic potential.

We will tailor our support for students who identify with WP characteristics, offering enhanced opportunities to support smooth academic transitions that are relevant to the subject, and encourages fuller participation in university life.

- Delivering and expanding our Thrive programme, our holistic on-course support programme for WP students in their first year of undergraduate study.
- Working with student support teams to deliver support to all students, ensuring we're meeting the needs of WP student groups.
- Promoting engagement with Student Life and extracurricular activities and opportunities.
- Providing additional application and interview support to WP students for paid work opportunities at the University.

We will provide enhanced support and opportunities for student groups where awarding gaps have been identified.

- Delivering a tailored academic skills module for applicants who have studied BTECs prior to commencing their undergraduate studies.
- Providing enhanced training to nominated academic leads regarding students who have studied BTECs, and Care Experienced and Estranged students.
- Providing research internship opportunities for students from WP student groups to work alongside established researchers.

We will enhance our personal tutoring model to further support students who identify with WP characteristics.

- Providing a well-planned, monitored and evaluated personal tutor system which increases students' sense of belonging, cohort identity, personal development and academic success.
- Constructing a Supporting Staff to Support Students toolkit on BTECs.
- Providing enhanced training regarding students who studied BTECs, and Care Experienced and Estranged students to personal academic tutors.

We will provide enhanced support for Care Experienced and Estranged (CEES) students.

- Ensuring staff supporting CEES students pastorally are provided with appropriate training.
- Collaborating with the Students' Union, forming a Students' Union society for Care Experienced Students, initially run by staff until a committee can be formed.
- Facilitating an annual listening exercise between a member of the Executive Team and our current CEES students.

Pillar 3: Progression

All students and graduates have the knowledge and opportunities to find and achieve their success.

We will provide an enhanced careers guidance offer for WP students.

- Providing longer in-depth appointments with specially trained colleagues, underpinned by tailored communications and promotion of support to WP students to boost engagement.
- Having a dedicated member of careers staff to work with WP students, providing enhanced 1:1 support in sourcing part-time work, preparing for interview and career preparations.
- Communicating with specific groups of students based on demographic information to send targeted emails to better support students and highlight opportunities.

We will provide a financial support fund to enable students to engage in activities which enhance their employability, develop transferable skills, and build confidence.

- Actively promoting our Student Opportunity Fund to WP student groups with tailored communications and targeting.
- Organising and promoting events with a particular WP focus such as our Diverse Voice Alumni Panel series.



Pillar 4: Enablers

To enable this strategy to be delivered, our culture, people, data, evaluation, and insight mechanisms must support an inclusive approach to access, success and progression.

We will instil a culture that prioritises the access and student success of all students.

- Supporting colleagues to ensure that APP action planning at a local level is integrated and connected with other institutional priorities and plans.
- Ensuring that effective practice and recommended actions to support our students is shared with colleagues across the institution, encouraging teams to innovate and evaluate new initiatives of support.
- Working towards additional sector commitments and charters that strive to enhance and improve the experience for all our students, for example the Disabled Student Commitment and the University Mental Health Charter.
- Committing to ongoing work with specialist external partners to develop the physical and digital accessibility experiences of all students.
- Committing to delivering a culturally inclusive and equitable curriculum.

We will support our staff to deliver the stretching commitments in this strategy.

- Retaining and nurturing a more diverse workforce, who bring a wealth of experience, expertise, and knowledge.
- Enhancing the knowledge and expertise needed to deliver innovative learning and teaching of the highest quality.
- Providing staff training and resources to support inclusive policy design and practice.
- Providing bespoke staff training and workshops on Widening Access and Student Success to support teams to develop their own local plans.

We will ensure the effective use of data to understand our students and their diverse needs.

- Utilising and enhancing institutional data to enable us to identify and respond to WP student data in a timely way.
- Promoting, raising awareness and increasing the usage of APP data available internally via our APP Data Dashboard in Tableau.
- Ensuring that new systems and processes include WP data, to enable the effective monitoring and targeting of support.
- Seeking to increase our awareness and ability to identify our care leaver and care experienced students, as well as estranged students who we feel often have as much, if not greater, need for additional targeted support.

We will listen to our students, and evaluate our work effectively, to ensure improved outcomes and that student voice is at the heart of what we do.

- Further embedding our approach to evaluating access and success work, supporting colleagues with their programme and activity planning and evaluations, taking a theory of change approach.
- Engaging with internal research networks and responding to calls for evidence and opportunities to share our best practice via internal and external networks, conferences and in academic journals.
- Continuing to host our Student Advisory Panel initiative, to provide opportunities for students to feedback on various services, functions and procedures across the University. As well as the opportunity to collaborate and co-produce new and innovative activity.

How will we know we've succeeded?

This 'ideal' student journey map was co-produced with our Student Advisory Panel who explored what they would want to know, feel and experience at each stage of their journey if we successfully achieve the aims of this strategy.

Access

Succes

- Sustained outreach and engagement with Edge Hill prior to arrival, with the opportunity to hear from a range of current students and alumni about their varied lived experiences.
- Access to a range of in person and virtual events, focusing on both the academic (course content, assessment methods) and the social (the different ways to be part of the Edge Hill community) aspects of university, to help foster a sense of belonging.
- Easily accessible and clearly communicated advice on the support available at university, both the wider support offer, and the bespoke support available to WP student groups.

- Tailored pre-arrival academic support for students, focusing upon demystifying university, academic skills such as referencing, and combatting imposter syndrome.
- Able to participate fully in induction, with a wide range of events being available across different days and times, so students can take part regardless of their background or other commitments.
- Streamlined and tailored communication of the academic support, social opportunities, financial support, and other support available, particularly around key 'pressure points'.

- Bespoke support for student groups is available, where it is needed, and is communicated sensitively.
- Transition between academic years is possible without unnecessary barriers which can unfairly disadvantage some student groups.
- Celebrating the diverse university community with a wide variety of social events available throughout the year.
- Culturally inclusive and equitable curriculum.
- Accessible and inclusive teaching and learning.

- Targeted and enhanced employability support for current students and graduates.
- Clear routes to postgraduate study and support to apply.
- Authentic and relevant alumni interactions.
- Opportunities for relevant paid work experience and placements.
- Students are supported financially to access career enhancing experiences through the Student Opportunity Fund.

Progression

Meeting other students like me and sharing experiences... has been very empowering."

Student Advisory Panel member

What does success look like? Our targets and measures of success

Intervention strategy

- 1. Reduce the gap in completion between those who have been eligible for **free school meals** and those who have not.
- Reduce the gap in completion, attainment, and progression between those from the most deprived areas (IMD Q1⁷) and those from the least deprived areas (IMD Q5)

- 3. Reduce the gap in continuation and attainment between those who have studied a **BTEC** and those who have studied an A-Level. We will also monitor the performance of T Level students as numbers grow in coming years.
- 4. Reduce attainment gap between those who have **care experience** and those who do not.
- 5. Increase the proportion of **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students** and to decrease the gap in attainment between our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students and our White students.

APP Target(s) 6

- Reduce the gap in completion between those who have been eligible for free school meals and those who have not from 6.6% for 2017/18 entrants to 4.5% for 2024/25 entrants.
- Reduce gap in completion between those from IMD Q1 & IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 8.6% for 2017/18 entrants to 4.3% for 2024/25 entrants.
- Reduce gap in attainment between those from IMD Q1 & IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 11.8% for those awarded in 2021/22 to 8.2% for those awarded in 2027/28
- Reduce gap in progression between those from IMD Q1 & IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 3.3% for those who graduated in 2019/20 to 2.1% for those graduating in 2026/27
- Reduce gap in continuation between those who have studied BTEC and those who have studied A-Levels from 6.6% for 2020/21 entrants to 4.3% for 2026/27 entrants
- Reduce gap in attainment between those who have studied BTEC and those who have studied A-Levels from 23.9% for those awarded in 2021/22 to 18.9% for those awarded in 2027/28
- Reduce gap in attainment between care experienced and non-care experienced students from 18.7% for those awarded in 2021/22 to 14.7% for those awarded in 2027/28
- Increase the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students from 8.8% of entrants in 2021/22 to 11.2% of entrants in 2027/28
- Decrease the gap in attainment between Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students, and White Students from 8.9% for those awarded in 2021/22 to 5.9% for those awarded in 2027/28

⁶See Appendix 1 for the APP Targets annual milestones
⁷The Index of Multiple Deprivation, commonly known as the IMD, is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England. IMD is measured in quintiles. IMD 1 indicates the most deprived areas, IMD 5 indicates the least deprived areas;For more information see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.ukmedia/5dfb3d7ce5274a3432700cf3/loD2019_FAQ_v4.pdf

Governance

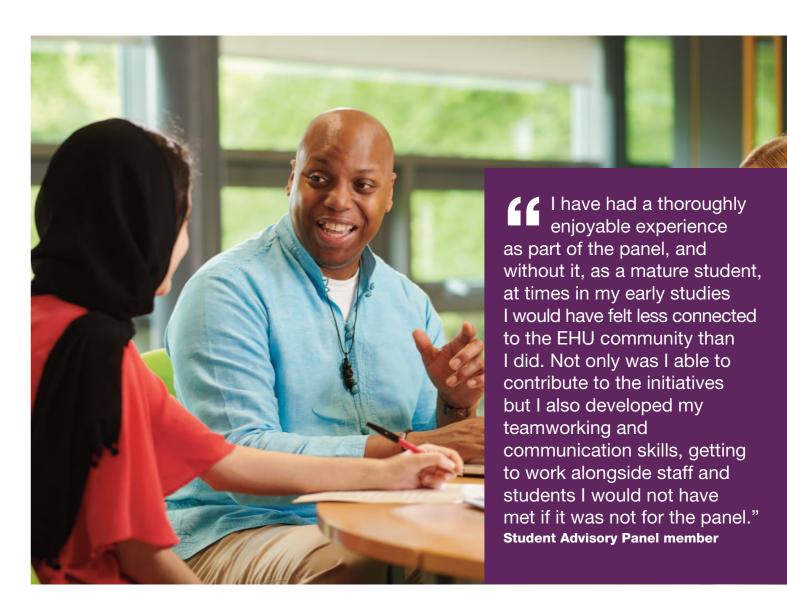
We will drive this strategy through the relevant Committees and the Board of Governors to ensure there is visibility and accountability for our progress against the commitments and targets outlined. This strategy is supported by the University's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Steering Group and has a presence at the Employability Sub-Committee.

Governance Structure

Board of Governors

Student Experience Sub-Committee

Access and Participation Steering Group



Appendix 1: APP Targets- annual milestones

APP Target		Baseline data (% and year)	Year 1 24/25 annual milestone	Year 2 25/26 annual milestone	Year 3 26/27 annual milestone	Year 4 27/28 annual milestone
1	Reduce the gap in completion between those who have been eligible for free school meals and those who have not from 6.6% for 2017/18 entrants to 4.5% for 2024/25 entrants.	6.6% (17/18)	6.1%	5.6%	5%	4.5%
2	Reduce gap in completion between those from IMD Q1 & IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 8.6% for 2017/18 entrants to 4.3% for 2024/25 entrants.	8.6% (17/18)	7.5%	6.5%	5.4%	4.3%
3	Reduce gap in attainment between those from IMD Q1 & IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 11.8% for those awarded in 2021/22 to 8.2% for those awarded in 2027/28	11.8% (21/22)	10.9%	10%	9.1%	8.2%
4	Reduce gap in progression between those from IMD Q1 & IMD Q5 neighbourhoods from 3.3% for those who graduated in 2019/20 to 2.1% for those graduating in 2026/27	3.3% (19/20)	3%	2.7%	2.4%	2.1%
5	Reduce gap in continuation between those who have studied BTEC and those who have studied A-Levels from 6.6% for 2020/21 entrants to 4.3% for 2026/27 entrants	6.6% (20/21)	6%	5.4%	4.8%	4.3%
6	Reduce gap in attainment between those who have studied BTEC and those who have studied A-Levels from 23.9% for those awarded in 2021/22 to 18.9% for those awarded in 2027/28	23.9% (21/22)	22.2%	21%	19.8%	18.9%
7	Reduce gap in attainment between care experienced and non-care experienced students from 18.7% for those awarded in 2021/22 to 14.7% for those awarded in 2027/28	18.7% (21/22	17.7%	16.7%	15.7%	14.7%
8	Increase the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students from 8.8% of entrants in 2021/22 to 11.2% of entrants in 2027/28	8.8% (21/22)	9.4%	10%	10.6%	11.2%
9	Decrease the gap in attainment between Black , Asian and Minority Ethnic Students, and White Students from 8.9% for those awarded in 2021/22 to 5.9% for those awarded in 2027/28	8.9% (21/22)	8.1%	7.2%	6.6%	5.9%





Edge Hill University St Helens Road Ormskirk Lancashire L39 4QP United Kingdom











