Activate Learning
Access and Participation Plan

2022-23 to 2026-27

Introduction

Activate Learning is a forward-thinking education group that has a vision to achieve far-reaching, progressive change and impact through learning.

The Activate Learning Group is comprised of secondary, further, and higher education, apprenticeship and workforce training, consultancy, international, commercial business, and social enterprise. Activate Learning is united by a common mission; **'To provide talent for business, transforming lives through our learning philosophy by empowering every learner to reach their full potential'.**[1]

The Activate Learning Group is on an ambitious mission to transform lives through learning by enabling opportunities, creating life chances, and generating prosperity for individuals and communities. In achieving this mission, Activate Learning is committed to advancing equality of opportunity, respecting, and celebrating difference, eliminating discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, and fostering good relations.

Higher education provision is located within the Colleges division of the Activate Learning Group, which comprises:

- Banbury and Bicester College
- Bracknell and Wokingham College
- City of Oxford College
- Guildford College
- Merrist Wood College
- Reading College

Activate Learning currently has partnership arrangements for its higher education provision with the following awarding organisations:

Organisation	Arrangement
Kingston University	Validated
Oxford Brookes University	Franchised
Pearson	Validated
University of Greenwich	Franchised/Validated*
University of Reading	Franchised

*This arrangement will be taught-out by the end of academic year 2023/24.

For the purposes of clarification, this Access and Participation Plan relates to those programmes for which Activate Learning receives direct funding and has authority to charge fees, including Higher National Certificates and Diplomas validated by Pearson in Business, Construction, Digital Technologies, Engineering and Sport and Exercise Science, Land-based Foundation and BSc Honours degrees at Merrist Wood College campus, which are delivered through a validated arrangement with Kingston University and the Foundation Degree in Counselling, which is currently delivered through a validated arrangement with the University of Greenwich.

The following Access and Participation Plan reviews progress made against the Plan for 2020/21 to 2024/25 and sets out how Activate Learning intends to improve equality of

[1] https://www.activatelearning.ac.uk/who-we-are/the-learning-philosophy/

opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education, from 2022/23 to 2026/27.

In summary, Activate Learning plans to distribute 40% of the higher fee income in each year of the plan to support underrepresented groups of HE students from 2022/23 to 2026/27

1. Assessment of performance

In preparing this Access and Participation Plan, Activate Learning has established its own higher education data which it committed to do in its previous plan enabling it to evaluate performance against all under-represented groups. It has also drawn on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data, including OfS Access and Participation data resources (OfS data dashboard), TEF metrics, HESA data, and feedback from student and staff focus groups.

As the data relates to all students studying on prescribed directly funded higher education programmes delivered by Activate Learning it excludes all sub-contracted provision franchised to Activate Learning Group through its collaborative arrangements with university partners.

Where OfS data is limited or not available due to small numbers (<10), and in order to provide a level of detailed analysis, Activate Learning Group has referred to its own data set enabling it to monitor, analyse, evaluate, and report upon the performance of all students from underrepresented groups, compared to their peers throughout the learner journey.

It should be noted that in light of the size of the student body encompassed by this plan small changes can and have had a significant percentage impact.

1.1. Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

1.1.1. Access

Group/Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
POLAR Q1	8.0%	21.0%	20.0%	30.0%	30.0%	+22.0pp
POLAR Q2	8.0%	5.0%	10.0%	15.0%	10.0%	+2.0pp
POLAR Q3	22.0%	14.0%	25.0%	15.0%	15.0%	-12.0pp
POLAR Q4	21.0%	16.0%	15.0%	15.0%	10.0%	-11.0pp
POLAR Q5	42.0%	43.0%	35.0%	20.0%	35.0%	-7.0pp

Activate Learning has evaluated access data with regards to POLAR4 for both full and part time students. Due to the low number of part time students, it is not possible to draw statistically reliable conclusions over the whole of the period 2015/16 to 2019/20. Activate Learning does though recognise that there was a statistically significant gap between part time students from POLAR4 Q1 and POLAR4 Q5 of 40pp in 2018/19 which reduced to 29pp in 2019/20. The majority of Activate Learning's higher education part time provision is in the form of 'closed' employer sponsored programmes. This provides limited scope for Activate Learning to directly address this gap as students are nominated by their employer.

Activate Learning is developing its part time offer and will continue to monitor the reducing gap through analysis of disaggregated data as student numbers increase and will establish a target should the trend towards closing the gap not continue.

Overall, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of students entering from POLAR4 Quintile 1 from 8.0% in 2015/16 to 30.0% in 2019/20, which compared with the declining proportion of POLAR4 Quintile 4 and POLAR4 Quintile 5 students still reveals a negative 11.0pp and 7.0pp difference respectively. This is primarily due to Activate Learning's strategy to deliver a curriculum model which attracts more mature work-based students who typically come from low participation neighbourhoods.

Group/ Year (All Students)	**Activate Learning**					**Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20**
	2015/16	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	
EIMD Q1	2.0%	3.0%	4.0%	7.0%	3.0%	+1.0pp
EIMD Q2	11.0%	9.0%	15.0%	13.0%	9.0%	-2.0pp
EIMD Q3	21.0%	13.0%	20.0%	18.0%	15.0%	-7.0pp
EIMD Q4	23.0%	26.0%	19.0%	22.0%	21.0%	-2.0pp
EIMD Q5	43.0%	50.0%	44.0%	40.0%	52.0%	+9.0pp

As with the data for POLAR4 it was not possible to establish any significant conclusions from the disaggregation of full and part time data due to the small number of part time students (<5 on average in each year referenced in the table above).

Recruitment from EIMD Quintile 1 has always represented the smallest population group with an average of c4.0% over the last five years. This reflects the catchment area of Activate Learning's directly funded HE provision which is primarily located in Surrey, which has no neighbourhood area classified in the most deprived 10% in England and our students have low travel to learn distances. Due to the very small population of EIMD Q1 students, our analysis has shown that through combining Q1 & Q2 populations the data is more statically reliable and therefore believe it appropriate to set a target within this plan to reduce the gap in access between students from EIMD Q1 and 2 against those from EIMD Q5.

In working towards increasing the proportion of EIMD Quntile 1 and 2 students, we have identified that one key enabler is curriculum design particularly in terms of the flexibility of access arrangements and overall affordability. Therefore, Activate Learning will during the life of this plan, commence the implementation of its revised inclusive curriculum to ensure that it further meets the needs of students from EIMD Q1 and Q2. Activate Learning does, in addition, give a commitment to review the target in light of evidence to ensure that any differences in access between students from EIMD Quantiles 1 and 2 and Quintile 5 are addressed and, when possible, establish appropriate disaggregated targets to address any gaps in access between students from EIMD Quintile 1 and EIMD Quintile 5.

Activate Learning consequently plans to set what it considers to be a stretching target to reduce the gap between EIMD Quintiles 1 and 2 and the proportion of students from EIMD Quintile 5 during the life of this plan:

- **To reduce the gap between the proportion of students from EIMD Quintiles 1 and 2 and those from EIMD Quintile 5 by 30pp by 2026/27. The residual gap will be 10pp.**

1.1.2. Continuation

Group/Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2014/15 to 2018/19
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
POLAR Q1	*84%*	*73%*	*85%*	*74%*	*93%*	+9pp
POLAR Q2	*77%*	*75%*	*73%*	*73%*	*94%*	+17pp
POLAR Q3	*76%*	*81%*	*80%*	*70%*	*89%*	+13pp
POLAR Q4	*86%*	*83%*	*87%*	*85%*	*84%*	-2pp
POLAR Q5	84%	85%	85%	*83%*	*92%*	+8pp

Activate Learning's HE data set of students in POLAR4 Q1 for 2018/19 indicates that there has been a significant improvement in continuation amongst students in POLAR4 Q1. Again, due to the size of the part time cohorts it was not possible to draw any meaningful conclusions from the disaggregation of the data. Indeed, given the overall small cohort size taking into account both full and part time students, Activate Learning is cautious in drawing any conclusions based on that data. Performance will consequently be subject to ongoing review.

Group/Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2014/15 to 2018/19
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
EIMD Q1	*ND*	*99%*	*88%*	*86%*	*100%*	+1pp*
EIMD Q2	70%	75%	*83%*	*100%*	*94%*	+24pp
EIMD Q3	75%	91%	80%	*80%*	*92%*	+17pp
EIMD Q4	82%	91%	80%	*87%*	90%	+8pp
EIMD Q5	78%	83%	84%	86%	85%	+7pp

*Difference shown compares 2015/16 to 2018/19 as no data available for 2014/15 due to small cohort size.

Due to the very small number of both full and part time students in EIMD Q1 OfS data is currently unavailable for all years, where data from the OfS data set is not available, data where possible, has been taken from Activate Learning's own HE data set; identified in italics in the above grid. However, as previously mentioned, the number of students in this cohort is very small and the proportion can therefore vary significantly due to the non-continuation of one student.

As a result, Activate Learning is cautious in drawing any robust conclusions from the underlying data. Activate Learning will continue to analyse reasons for withdrawals, undertaking student focus groups and monitoring the progress of students to ensure that actions are being taken to mitigate against avoidable withdrawals.

1.1.3. Attainment

Group/ Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
POLAR Q1	55%	32%	54%	34%	57%	+2pp
POLAR Q2	50%	53%	58%	63%	70%	+20pp
POLAR Q3	41%	57%	57%	57%	54%	+13pp
POLAR Q4	50%	53%	57%	50%	64%	+14PP
POLAR Q5	53%	56%	49%	66%	57%	+4pp

Group/ Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
EIMD Q1	43%	17%	50%	14%	36%	-7pp
EIMD Q2	40%	41%	44%	44%	50%	+10pp
EIMD Q3	55%	54%	61%	47%	64%	+9pp
EIMD Q4	58%	53%	64%	49%	68%	+10pp
EIMD Q5	56%	57%	46%	67%	61%	+5pp

In assessing attainment of students, less than 8.0% of directly funded provision is classified degree level with the remainder being foundation degrees, higher national diplomas and certificates. Therefore, in compiling our own data set we have defined high grades as 1st, 2:1, Distinction and Merit which has provided the opportunity to disaggregate the data by classification and compare performance between the least and most represented groups.

In light of the very small number of full and part time students (<20 on average per year over across the years referred to in the above table) in POLAR4 Q1 and EIMD Q1 the data provided is for all students. This has led to it not being possible to draw any meaningful conclusions from the analysis that has been undertaken.

Against that background and significant fluctuations in performance, Activate Learning has undertaken aggregation of the data across 2015/16 to 2019/20. This has indicated that there is a negative 10pp gap between attainment of all students in POLAR4 Q1 and POLAR4 Q5 (POLAR Q1 mean average attainment between 2015/16 and 2019/20 was 46.4% compared to 56.2% for students in POLAR Q5 over the same period).

Aggregation of attainment amongst students in EIMD Q1 indicates that there is a negative 25pp gap when compared to EIMD Q5. However, as previously mentioned, the number of students in this cohort is extremely small and the level of attainment can fluctuate significantly due to one student.

Activate Learning will continue to analyse reasons for withdrawals, grade profiles, undertake student focus groups, individual student feedback, and monitor the use of HE Study Support systems to identify specific reasons for non-attainment including where these might differ between full and part time students to ensure that the level of attainment continues and is further enhanced.

Taking the above into account, Activate Learning still considers it appropriate to set a target in this plan to reduce the attainment gap between EIMD Quintile 1 and EIMD Quintile 5 over the duration of this plan:

- **To reduce the attainment gap between students from EIMD Q1 and EIMD Q5 by 2026/27. The aggregate residual gap will be less than 5pp.**

1.1.4. Progression to highly skilled employment or higher-level study

Again, the small number of both full and part-time students in POLAR4 Q1 and EIMD Q1 groups has not been possible. However, analysis of internal data shows that on aggregate >40% of

students are employer sponsored and studying subjects such as Construction and Engineering, with all students remaining in employment upon completion of their studies. Additionally, a quarter of directly funded students are self-employed in Counselling related employment and indications from the pilot subject-level TEF results show that 83.5% of these students progress to highly skilled employment or higher study, which is 2.6% above benchmark.

In addition, a third of provision is land-based and evidence from focus groups conducted with students and staff has identified that one of the factors affecting progression to highly skilled employment relates to the fact that students tend to take longer than 6 months to find paid employment due to the highly competitive jobs market in the sector and often start their careers initially through voluntary, part-time, or work experience. Activate Learning has also identified that these students experience financial barriers in securing suitable work placements during their studies (200 hrs per year) which can therefore have a significant impact on their progression to employment or further study, as these work placements often result in securing employment.

Activate Learning recognises that the national response rates to the Graduate Outcomes Survey are c50% which presents issues around the statistically reliability of the data. That coupled with the proposed further changes to the survey, Activate Learning commits to undertake on an annual basis from 2021/22, its own graduate survey which will enable us to refine our own data set which will include, but not be limited to, the aggregation of data to identify more accurately the level of performance for both full and part time students.

1.2. Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

1.2.1. Access

Group/Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
Asian	4.0%	7.0%	3.0%	5.4%	5.9%	+1.9pp
Black	2.0%	3.0%	13.0%	3.9%	6.7%	+4.7pp
Mixed	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.3%	1.7%	-0.3pp
BAME	8.0%	12.0%	18.0%	11.6%	14.3%	+6.3pp

Due to the small number of part time students who declared themselves as BAME it has not been possible to disaggregate the data without potentially identifying individual students. The proportion of BAME students enrolled on higher education programmes at Activate Learning was 14.3% in 2019/20, which is above the ethnic mix within the Southeast, which was 8.7% (Census, 2011).

However, Activate Learning recognises there is further progress to be made in attracting more BAME students, and will therefore set a target to:

- **Increase the proportion of BAME students by 5pp by 2026/27.**

1.2.2. Continuation

Group/ Year (All students)		Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
BAME	Asian	*ND*	*82.0%*	*58.0%*	*63.0%*	*79.0%*	-3.0pp

	Black	*ND*	*69.2%*	*60.0%*	*80.0%*	*86.0%*	+17.0pp
	Total	*ND*	*77.1%*	*58.6%*	*69.2%*	*81.0%*	+3.9pp
White		78%	86.0%	80.0%	91.0%	84.0%	-2.0pp

Activate Learning has used its own data set to identify and compare the continuation rates of BAME students with those of White Students. Given the small cohort size including full and part time students, there have been significant fluctuations in the level of continuation. However, continuation rates for Asian students have been consistently below those for White students and have declined over time and were 5.0pp below those for White students in 2018/19. There has been an improvement in the continuation rates for Black students. In setting a target for improvement to increase the continuation rates for Asian students Activate Learning will seek to:

- **Eliminate the gap in continuation between Asian and White students by 2026/27.**

1.2.3. Attainment

Group/ Year (All students)		**Activate Learning**					**Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20**
		2015/16	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	
BAME	Asian	*50.0%*	*44.0%*	*86.0%*	*67.0%*	*61.0%*	+11.0pp
	Black	*20.0%*	*33.0%*	*40.0%*	*100%*	*25.0%*	+5.0pp
	Total	*43.0%*	*41.0%*	*59.0%*	*70.0%*	*43.0%*	-
White		55.0%	*54.0%*	50.0%	*55.0%*	*63.0%*	+8.0pp
Variance	Asian	-5.0pp	-10pp	+36pp	+12pp	-2.0pp	+3.0pp
	Black	-35pp	-21pp	-10pp	+45pp	-38pp	-3.0pp

Although there is limited data available in the OfS AP Data set for the attainment of BAME students. Activate Learning's own data set indicates the attainment rates for BAME students have increased by 11.0pp amongst Asian students between 2015/16 and 2019/20 such that they are in line with attainment rates for White Students. It has not been possible to disaggregate this data for full and part time students due to the small numbers involved.

In light of the small numbers involved, there have been significant fluctuations in levels of attainment and so it has not been possible to construct meaningful and robust analysis of attainment amongst BAME students. It will continue to be an objective within this plan to introduce measures to improve the attainment rates for BAME students enrolled on higher education programmes in line with the OfS Key Performance Measure. Therefore, Activate Learning will introduce a target to:

- **Eliminate the attainment gap between BAME and White students by 2026/27.**

1.2.4. Progression to highly-skilled employment or higher–level study

It has not been possible to assess the proportion of BAME students who progress onto highly skilled employment or further higher-level study due to very small numbers and the subsequent lack of available data. However, as mentioned previously, Activate Learning through its own destination survey will monitor and review the actions it is taking to ensure their currency in supporting students into highly skilled employment or higher-level study.

1.3. Mature Students

1.3.1. Access

Group/Year (All Students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
Mature	68.1%	63.7%	67.8%	61.0%	65.0%	-3.1pp
Young	31.9%	36.3%	32.2%	39.0%	35.0%	+3.1pp

Group/ Year Full-time	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
Mature	66.0%	59.0%	67.0%	69.0%	64.0%	-2.0pp
Young	34.0%	41.0%	33.0%	31.0%	36.0%	+2.0pp

The majority (64%) of full-time students studying higher education at Activate Learning are mature and seeking to upskill or retrain in their chosen career path. This is reflective of the Groups' strategy to increase provision that is directly related to meeting the needs of employers by providing qualifications, which are accessible, and sector recognised. As a result, over 40.0% of all higher education students studying at Activate Learning are now employer sponsored.

Group/ Year Part-time	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
Mature	82.0%	75.0%	72.0%	68.0%	56.0%	-26.0pp
Young	18.0%	25.0%	28.0%	32.0%	44.0%	+26.0pp

Although the majority of part-time students in the Group are mature there has been a significant 26.0pp reduction. This is in part due to an increase in the number of young students studying Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Diplomas (HNDs) through employer sponsorship.

1.3.2. Continuation

Group/ Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2014/15 to 2018/19
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
Mature	78.0%	87.0%	81.0%	87.0%	87.0%	+9.0pp
Young	77.0%	85.0%	74.0%	90.0%	80.0%	+3.0pp
Variance	+1.0pp	+2.0pp	+6.0pp	-3.0pp	+7.0pp	+2.6pp*

*The variance shown is the mean average over the 5-year reference period.

Our analysis from disaggregating the data between full-time and part-time on continuation there is no statistically reliable trend and in light of the overall performance Activate Learning does not propose to include a target within this plan. It is though committed to the ongoing analysis of continuation throughout the life of the plan and will introduce targets where appropriate.

1.3.3. Attainment

Group/ Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
Mature	50.0%	*59.0%*	*58.0%*	*60.0%*	*66.0%*	+16.0pp
Young	*49.0%*	*44.0%*	*42.0%*	*43.0%*	*51.0%*	+2.0pp
Variance	+1.0pp	+15.0pp	+16.0pp	+17.0pp	+15.0pp	+12.8pp*

*The variance shown is the mean average over the 5-year reference period.

From an examination of Activate Learning's own data set, attainment rates for mature students have increased above those for young students between 2015/16 and 2019/20. Activate Learning recognises the distinct needs of mature students and continues to make structural changes to delivery and assessment schedules and has increased the level of additional study support provided in order to increase attainment rates for all students. Activate Learning in conjunction with its student body will continue to review the level of support including monitoring the effectiveness of its communication and promotion.

1.3.4. Progression to highly-skilled employment or higher–level study

Group/ Year (All students)	Activate Leaning					Variance 2012/13 to 2016/17
	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	
Mature	70.0%	50.0%	64.0%	51,0%	73.0%	+3.0pp
Young	60.0%	49.0%	52,0%	50,0%	50.0%	-10.0pp
Variance	+10.0pp	+1.0pp	+12.0pp	+1.0pp	+23.0pp	+9.4pp*

* The variance shown is the mean average over the 5-year reference period

Progression rates for mature students to highly skilled employment or higher-level study have improved over the past 4 years and were consistently above those for young students. This is reflective of the increase in employer-led and sponsored provision where the vast majority of mature students are in employment throughout the course of their studies with many achieving a promotion or new job opportunity at the end of or shortly after completing their studies.

1.4. Disabled

1.4.1. Access

Group/ Year	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
Disabled (FT)	14.0%	26.0%	18.0%	27.0%	25.0%	+11.0pp
Disabled (PT)	12.0%	19.0%	9.0%	14.0%	7.0%	-5.0pp

Activate Learning continues to perform well in attracting students with a self-declared disability, particularly for full-time provision where we have consistently been above the sector for the last five years. We are committed to ensuring that our provision and the support we provide continues to be accessible and effective in meeting the individual learning needs of students.

Data on student disability is captured at three key stages: as part of the application process, upon enrolment and post-enrolment. This data is then disaggregated into separate categories

which enables the Group to track the access, continuation and attainment of students compared to their peers. However, due to the small number of students in many of the categories, Activate Learning intends to focus upon those areas which relate to the OfS strategic measures, such as mental health, Dyslexia, and other medical conditions such as epilepsy and asthma where numbers are more significant. By 2022/23, Activate Learning will have established an enhanced data set which will provide the ability to analyze these separate categories.

Whilst the initial profile of students with a declared disability on entry relates mainly to Dyslexia and other forms of specific learning difficulties (SpLD). This equates to less than 10% of those students who enroll annually. Further, there continues to be an increasing percentage of students who post-enrolment present new and additional complex needs, particularly mental health concerns related to confidence issues, stress, and emotional difficulties. Based upon the number of students who have received additional learning support since 2017/18, Activate Learning estimates that over 40% of students have an additional learning need, which is more than double the actual number who declared a disability on entry

1.4.2. Continuation

Group/ Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2014/15 to 2018/19
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
Disabled	77.0%	79.0%	85.0%	88.0%	90.0%	+13.0pp
Non-Disabled	78.0%	85.0%	76.0%	87.0%	81.0%	+3.0pp
Variance	-1.0pp	-6.0pp	+9.0pp	+2.0pp	+9.0pp	+2.8pp*

* The variance shown is the mean average over the 5-year reference period

In response to the increase in students with a declared disability, combined with those who are identified post-enrolment, Activate Learning took the decision in 2014/15 to adopt a fully inclusive approach to providing additional learning support to any student who requested it, without the need to provide any evidence. Results from the monitoring and evaluation of student outcomes from those who received additional learning support show that the increase in continuation rates since 2014/15 is largely attributable to the additional support provided particularly that provided on an individual basis.

1.4.3. Attainment

Group/ Year (All students)	Activate Learning					Variance 2015/16 to 2019/20
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	
Disabled	*41.0%*	*45.0%*	*48.0%*	*52.0%*	*49.0%*	+8.0pp
Non-Disabled	60.0%	*51.0%*	55.0%	*58.0%*	*65.0%*	+5.0pp
Variance	-19.0pp	-6.0pp	-7.0pp	-6.0pp	-16.0pp	-9.6pp

* The variance shown is the mean average over the 5-year reference period

The level of attainment of students who have declared a disability has been consistently below that of non-disabled students and so it is a target within this plan to increase the level of attainment of disabled students in support of the OfS Key Performance Measure.

- **Reduce the attainment gap between disabled and non-disabled students by 10pp by 2026/27. The residual gap will be 6pp.**

1.4.4. Progression to highly skilled employment and higher-level study

It has not been possible to assess the proportion of disabled students who progress to highly skilled employment or further higher-level study due to very small numbers and the subsequent lack of available data.

However, qualitative analysis coupled with a review of the pilot subject level TEF metrics for directly funded provision revealed that the land-based provision is below benchmark by 5.0%, and that this relates primarily to disabled students. Although not a target in this plan associated measures will be introduced to address the feedback from qualitative research.

1.5. Care Leavers

Activate Learning captures data on care leavers at the point of application and enrolment through a self-declaration process and uses this data to monitor and report on their progress throughout the learner journey The number of students who self-declare themselves as being a care leaver has been less than 1% (<5 students each year) over the last three years and therefore continues to be too low to facilitate any statistically significant analysis or to use as a target The “Moving on up: Pathways of care leavers and care experienced student into and through higher education”, published by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers estimated that in any given year there would be around 2,500 care leavers across the various undergraduate years. That indicates that <2% of higher education students are care leavers or care experienced students. Although it is noted that the ‘Moving on up... ‘report does not include students studying higher education in FE Colleges such as Activate Learning, it does indicate that Activate Learning is in line with the higher education sector nationally.

Similarly, the OfS also reported (April 2021) that the number of care leavers entering higher education in 2016/17 was less than 1% of the student body.

Care leavers will continue to be a key target group to engage with and we will continue to include data on care leavers in the monitoring and evaluation of other underrepresented groups (e.g., care leavers are more likely to be disabled and studying part-time), and if necessary, will include specific targets and interventions during the life of this plan.

1.6. Intersections of disadvantage

Using its own data set Activate Learning has analysed intersections of disadvantage for all of our underrepresented groups including gender, and age, gender and BAME and gender and POLAR4 Q4 and EIMD Q1, along with the mode of study to ensure that any significant gaps are identified with appropriate targets for our institution. This analysis was impacted by data in many instances being statistically unreliable as a result of the size of the cohort i.e. <10 students, when intersections of disadvantage were examined.

1.6.1. Access

One notable intersection identified relates to the number of BAME students who declared a disability on entry with on average 5.0% of disabled students categorising themselves as BAM This compares to c21% of higher education students in Activate Learning declaring a disability

between 2016/17 and 2019/20. The Papworth Trust reported in 2018[2] that 1 in 4 BAME adults reported as having a disability compared to 1 in 5 white adults and therefore Activate Learning's expectation is that a higher percentage of its BAME higher education students will declare as having a disability compared to white students. Actions to address this will be embedded within other initiatives to address the target to increase the proportion of BAME students including but not limited to, encouraging students where appropriate to declare a disability on entry.

1.6.2. Continuation

Activate Learning's further analysis has identified that there was on average a –13pp gap in continuation rates between female students from POLAR4 Q1 and male students from POLAR4 Q1 between 2016/17 and 2019/20. It will therefore be a target within this plan to eliminate that gap by 2026/27.

1.6.3. Attainment

Activate Learning's analysis did not identify any significant attainment gaps that need to be addressed either because no gap exists, or because the size of cohort makes the data unreliable.

1.6.4. Progression to highly skilled employment or higher-level study

Activate Learning's analysis did not identify any significant progression gaps that need to be addressed because the size of cohort makes the data unreliable.

1.7. Other groups who experience barriers in higher education

Activate Learning introduced measures in 2019/20 to capture data on estranged students as we had noted that an increasing number of estranged students were entering higher education who often lack the support of their wider family. This had been identified through mitigating circumstances applications and student focus groups.

The number of students who self-declare themselves as being estranged is too low to facilitate meaningful statistical analysis and would potentially identify specific individuals. To promote the level of self-declaration additional support and entitlements of estranged students has been introduced.

2. Strategic aims and objectives

2.1. Target groups

Activate Learning on the basis of the analysis undertaken has identified that the following underrepresented groups will be targeted at specific stages of their life cycle:

1. Male students from the least represented group (POLAR4 Q1): Continuation.
2. English IMD Q1: Access and attainment.
3. Black and Asian students: Access and attainment
4. Asian students: Continuation
5. Disabled students: Attainment

[2] https://www.papworthtrust.org.uk/about-us/publications/papworth-trust-disability-facts-and-figures-2018.pdf

Activate Learning will also monitor a number of areas where currently gaps are either small (with respect to our priority areas), where new gaps have emerged only very recently, or where data is unreliable due to very low numbers. On this basis we will monitor:

1. Progression for all underrepresented groups
2. Continuation for Black and Asian students at the intersection with age

Specific action plans will be developed and implemented where necessary.

2.2. Aims and Objectives

Activate Learning aims to support the access, success and progression of students from our local and regional communities, ensuring that our student body is representative of the communities that we serve. In setting out the strategic aims below we have focused on those areas we believe will make the most contribution to unexplained gaps at a national level, as well as those gaps which will support the achievement of our institutional strategic aims

2.2.1 Widening Access

- To reduce the gap between the proportion of students from EIMD Quintiles 1 and 2 and those from EIMD Quintile 5 by 30pp by 2026/27. The residual gap will be 10pp**.**
- To increase the proportion of BAME students by 5pp by 2026/27

2.2.2. Supporting Success

Continuation

- To eliminate the gap in continuation between Asian and White students by 2026/27.
- To eliminate the gap in continuation between male students from POLAR4 Q1 and Female students from POLAR4 Q1 by 2026/27.

Attainment

- To reduce the attainment gap between students from EIMD Q1 and EIMD Q5 by 2026/27. The aggregate residual gap will be less than 5pp
- To eliminate the attainment between BAME and White students by 2026/27.
- To reduce the attainment gap between disabled and non-disabled students by 10pp by 2026/27. The residual gap will be 6pp.

2.3. Aims and objectives

Activate Learning's overarching aim in relation to access and participation is to ensure a fair, transparent and consistent approach across all Colleges within the Group where all students with potential have equal access to higher education and receive appropriate support to enable them to succeed and fulfil their potential in a learning environment which is free from discrimination.

Activate Learning is committed to advancing equality of opportunity, respecting, and celebrating difference, eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and fostering good relations between all who work or learn at, or use the services of Activate Learning. This commitment is

embedded in the policies, procedures, and practices of the Group which are underpinned by its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and its mission, values, and learning philosophy.[3]

Over the lifetime of this plan, Activate Learning will focus on an evidence-based approach that will underpin our future planning. We will work closely with students to understand the barriers they face and get their input into designing effective ways to overcome them.

The following aims and objectives are mapped to the student lifecycle and identify measurable objectives that reflect the gaps we have identified as a result of the assessment of our performance.

Aim 1: Widening Access
We will continue to develop our approaches to widening access, so they encourage and support all groups in society to participate and succeed in higher education

Our objectives are:

a. Improve our understanding of the gaps in entry rates for BAME students to inform and evaluate the deliberate steps we will take to address them by the end of the academic year 2021/22
b. To further develop our curriculum offer, modes of delivery, and financial support to provide more flexible entry and progression routes by the beginning of the academic year 2022/23
c. Maintain our success in attracting and retaining disabled students and students from low participation neighbourhoods throughout the life of the plan.
d. Sustain our success in closing the access gap between POLAR Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 throughout the life of the plan.

Aim 2: Supporting Success
We will create a fully inclusive and supportive learning environment that tailors support to meet the academic and pastoral needs of all students, resulting in enhanced academic outcomes.

Our objectives are:

a. Undertake further internal research with BAME and Disabled students, in conjunction with examples of what works elsewhere, to understand what additional support measures we can put in place to better support their attainment of high grades by the end of the academic year 2021/22.
b. To reduce financial barriers to continuation through the provision of an HE Maintenace Bursary in each year of study and an HE Study Support Fund and Hardship Fund for underrepresented groups of students.
c. Sustain our progress in closing the attainment gap between Asian and White students throughout the life of the plan.

Aim 3: Progression
We will continue to provide all students with opportunities to progress their studies from level 4 to level 6 through a combination of internal progression routes and progression agreements with our University partners, which are based upon career pathways.

Our objectives are:

a. By the beginning of the academic year 2022/23 establish our own Alumni through which we will be able to provide more robust data and raise awareness to and promote, the Graduate

[3] https://www.activatelearning.ac.uk/who-we-are/corporate-governance/policies-and-procedures/

Outcomes Survey to inform our understanding of student destinations to employment and/or further study

b. Establish an annual Graduate Outcome Survey by the beginning of the academic year 2022/23 which will mirror the national survey providing an opportunity to monitor, report and compare Activate Learning's performance to the sector as a whole.
c. To work closely with our employers throughout the life of the plan, in the co-creation of curriculum, provision of work-based learning opportunities and evaluation of our employer-sponsored provision.

Aim 4: Operating Holistically
We will adopt a whole institutional approach across the student lifecycle which fully embeds our Access and Participation plan into existing activities across the Group.

Our objectives are:

a. Embed the strategic measures within our APP into other HE strategic and operational plans, policies and procedures across the Group by the beginning of the academic year 2022/23.
b. Develop new processes to engage with students from all backgrounds in informing and evaluating the effectiveness of our APP by the beginning of the academic year 2022/23.
c. Embed our APP objectives within our annual monitoring processes and within our Faculty, Academic Board and Governance reporting structures by the beginning of the academic year 2022/23.

Aspirations beyond 2026/27

Activate Learning' ambition is to eliminate all of the identified gaps, but we acknowledge that this will take us beyond the life of this plan. However, we remain committed to progressing this agenda throughout the period of this plan and beyond to 2030.

3.Strategic measures

3.1. Whole provider strategic approach

3.1.1. Overview

Activate Learning believes that higher education should be a transformational experience for students and is committed to ensuring that it provides a high quality, vocationally relevant learning experience for all students which enhances their opportunities for progression to employment and/or further study. This has consistently been >95%.

Activate Learning's ambition 'to provide talent for business and transform lives through our Learning Philosophy' is reinforced in the Group's vision for higher education:

To provide sustainable, high-quality provision, with a clear focus on student employability, widening participation and the quality of learning opportunities.

In adopting a whole provider approach, Activate Learning actively engages staff and students from across the organisation in formulating, supporting, and evaluating access and participation measures which cover the learner journey from pre-entry to progression to employment or further higher study.

With the support of Governors, Executive Directors and an organisation restructure of staff dedicated to supporting higher education students in Access, Success and Progression roles,

there will be more resources committed to the work that is required in order to close the gaps we have identified in this plan.

Staff representing Group services; IAG, learning resources, IT, careers, student welfare and study support are actively involved in supporting HE students throughout the learner journey, from pre-entry advice and guidance to supporting their academic and pastoral needs. Group services staff regularly attend HE programme committee meetings, which include student representatives, to discuss new developments and ways in which to continually enhance the services offered to students.

Outcomes from programme committees are collated and fed into the relevant faculty performance boards highlighting areas of good practice and areas for further improvement. Each faculty is also made aware of its performance on access, continuation, attainment, and progression in relation to other faculties, which facilitates the sharing of good practice and identification of any institutional factors that may be affecting access and participation.

Each Executive Director chairs their respective faculty quality improvement boards and are members of the HE Academic Board where they are joined by Group Service Directors to review the outcomes of programme, faculty, and Group-level performance, and in doing so, identify and agree key priorities to further enhance the access and participation of higher education students.

This cycle is repeated on a 6-weekly basis and provides an opportunity to identify areas for improvement, implement measures to improve outcomes and then monitor and evaluate the impact of those measures in order to inform best practice in the follow year.

This whole provider approach has led to several changes being made in order to widen access and participation and enhance the learning opportunities provided for students.

3.1.2. Inclusive Curriculum

Activate Learning has designed its curriculum to widen access and participation in meeting the specific needs of employers and students, and in so doing has established flexible modes of delivery to support their needs. This includes the provision of day-release, block-release and part-time (as well as full-time) modes of study. In addition, all subject areas provide progression routes from level 4 to level 6 with exit points (and recognised awards) at each stage. In addition, all programmes include a module or component of study skills which supports students in their transition to higher education. This is particularly beneficial for the increasing number of part-time mature students who may not have been in education for a long period of time.

3.1.3. Inclusive Access

Activate Learning has, and will continue to, put in place a range of measures to increase access to its higher education provision for all students who have the potential to benefit from studying at a higher level.

One of these measures is the appointment of a Schools Engagement Officer to focus on higher education provision working in partnership with the Group’s business engagement specialists and in collaboration with our HEON and NCOP partners.

Additionally, entry requirements are typically more flexible than for universities and an increasing number of students are accessing higher education through the accreditation of prior

learning or experience, which is evident in the high percentage (c.60%) of students who access higher education at Activate Learning with low or non-tariff entry qualifications. In assessing the suitability of applicants, Activate Learning adheres to its principle of 'Right student, Right course, whilst also ensuring that each applicant is interviewed and that an initial assessment of any additional learning needs is undertaken. Evidence from student feedback also supports the provision of a Maintenance Bursary combined with the availability of study support and hardship funding as positive ways in which to remove some of the financial barriers that prevent students from accessing, and continuing in, higher education.

3.1.4. Inclusive Learning environment

Activate Learning provides an appropriate learning environment where students are encouraged to take risks and learn from mistakes in a safe and supportive environment. An example of this is the investment the Group has made in designing the refurbishment of our estate which has included two new HE student centres which were co-designed with students to ensure it met their needs and removed any perceived barriers.

Beyond this, Activate Learning ensures that there are no artificial barriers to access and participation and takes deliberate steps to ensure that students are familiarised with the environment pre-entry and that opportunities for socialisation are planned within the first four weeks. Results from our annual induction survey regularly report in excess of 90% satisfaction and indicates that the experience students have helps provide a sense of belonging at an early stage and therefore positively contributes towards high retention and continuation rates.

Typical group sizes of 15-20 are maintained in order to provide a more personalised learning experience, which is something that students often comment positively upon. Activate Learning also has a digital education strategy to ensure that learning resources are provided in a dynamic online learning environment whereby students are able to engage with learning within and beyond the classroom

3.1.5. Inclusive Teaching and Learning Opportunities

Activate Learning's Learning Philosophy[4] is rooted in an understanding of how the brain, motivation and emotions work together to impact on learning. Teaching strategies and methods are designed to develop independent learning skills, enhance active listening and problem-solving skills, and develop the resilience to persevere and succeed. Collaborative learning is a core focus in developing students' learning and the Student-led Enhancement Projects (StEPs) fund provides opportunities for students to undertake self-initiated activities which will further enhance their learning and/or employment opportunities. A team of HE Study Support Tutors provide support to targeted groups of students as well as providing a fully inclusive service to any student who feels they need additional learning support. Collectively, our approach to inclusive teaching has helped to maintain high retention rates which are routinely in excess of 95% each year.

Further, Activate Learning has adopted a teaching intensive approach to timetabling to enable students to combine their studies with work and family commitments more effectively. Feedback indicates that this is highly valued by students.

[4] https://www.activatelearning.ac.uk/who-we-are/the-learning-philosophy/

Activate Learning has an internal staff development team (Applied Learning Foundation) that support academic and pedagogic development through the provision of CPD events delivered on a face-to-face basis or online for HE to ensure there is a dedicated HE focus. Recent examples include a conference about mental health, workshops on Access and Participation and sharing good practice on inclusive teaching, learning and assessment with university partners.

Activate Learning is also a member of the Research College Group supporting the development and embedding of a research informed culture which encompasses the sponsoring of two research projects linked to the gaps and targeted groups within this plan.

3.1.6. Inclusive Assessment

A wide variety of assessment methods have been designed and are being utilised to ensure that students develop both the academic knowledge and vocational skills for their chosen career pathway. Key developments in this area include the increasing number of 'live' projects sponsored by employers, the use of case studies which reflect the diversity of the student body and society in general, and assessments which enable students to draw upon their own experience. This is something that both students and External Examiners comment upon positively. In doing so, provision is also made for students to undertake alternative methods of assessment as appropriate in order to reduce the need for reasonable adjustments. Peer and self-assessment methods are also employed to develop students' lifelong skills in assessing and providing feedback to others as well as equipping them with the skills to self-assess and improve their own work.

A mitigating circumstances procedure also helps to support student progression and attainment where circumstances occur which are beyond the students' control.

3.1.7. Theory of Change

In determining its overarching strategic approach, Activate Learning is deploying a Theory of Change model (see appendix 1) to provide a framework upon which strategic aims and objectives can be established and the desired goals achieved through targeted inputs which are evaluated, and a robust assessment of the resulting outputs undertaken**.**

3.1.8. Alignment with other strategies

Activate Learning's mission to 'transform lives through learning'. To underpin that Activate Learning has developed a Learning Philosophy which is rooted in an understanding of how the brain, motivation and emotions work together to impact on learning. Activate Learning uses that knowledge to create learning environments which empower learners to become highly skilled, employable, and resilient, with the curiosity and persistence required to succeed

These aspirations have been further set down as commitments within Activate Learning's Equality and Diversity policy. Activate Learning is committed to advancing equality of opportunity, respecting, and celebrating difference, eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation and fostering good relations between all who work or learn at, or use the services of Activate Learning. We aim to create and maintain a working and learning environment in which all people have the opportunity to participate fully give of their best and achieve their full potential in a climate free from discrimination and/or harassment. We recognise that all have a right to equality of opportunity irrespective of race, disability, gender, gender reassignment, age,

nationality, sexual orientation, religion, or belief, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, or socio-economic status, background, or class. This underpins our approach to the development of our Access and Participation Plan.

To ensure full compliance with duties set out in the Equality Act 2010, an Equality Diversity and Inclusion Group has oversight of organisational performance. The Group is made up of representatives from the key areas across the organisation including the student body, to ensure a rigorous approach is taken to assess organisational performance, identify EDI objectives, implement improvements and report on the progress against objectives including those set out within the Access and Participation Plan.

Commitment to students

Activate Learning will:

- make clear our expectations and commitments to equality and diversity in our marketing and recruitment materials and events, during the learner and staff admissions processes and again during induction
- celebrate equality and diversity for example via Activate Learning posters, tutorial activities and celebratory events
- strive to provide an inclusive teaching and learning environment that is personalised to the individual and which takes account of individual need and cultural backgrounds
- embed equality and diversity within all aspects of the learner journey from curriculum planning through to marketing our provision, recruiting learners, oncourse teaching, learning, assessment tutorial and enrichment activities
- strive to provide support services for learners that meet diverse needs, including additional learning support (ALS) tailored to individual needs for learners who require ALS to support their learning and progression
- provide multiple learner voice opportunities for all learners to feed into the development of all aspects of the learner experience.

Roles and responsibilities

The governing body will:

- ensure that the college strategic plan has a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion
- receive and respond to staff feedback and to learner/staff monitoring reports
- agree relevant equality targets and monitor progress towards these

The senior management team will:

- take an active and visible lead in driving forward equality, diversity and inclusion
- oversee implementation of this plan
- ensure equality and diversity data is embedded within self-assessment reports and development plans
- agree equality targets with relevant managers

The equality, diversity and inclusion committee will:

- regularly seek out and respond to feedback from key stakeholder groups e.g., BAME, Wellbeing, Student Parliament, LGBTQ, Transgender.
- convene thematic groups to address issues relating to EDI and Access and Participation, set clear objectives, drive actions and report back through the committee
- review the APP annually - monitor its effectiveness and measure its impact
- produce the Annual Equality and Diversity Report
- Produce and approve the annual, Access and Participation Monitoring return
- oversee the implementation of any required developments

All staff will:

- attend regular training opportunities to ensure they understand the principles of this plan and the implications for their job role and responsibilities
- implement aspects of the plan in the course of their duties

All students will:

- treat everyone with respect and consideration, making them feel welcome
- behave carefully, avoiding swearing, using inappropriate language or saying hurtful or disrespectful things about other people
- report any concerns they have for themselves or others

3.2. Strategies to increase Access

Activate Learning will spend 10.0% of the higher fee income in each year of the plan on access activities designed to widen participation in higher education. This will include, but not be limited to expanding provision within the South-Central Institute of Technology in which Activate Learning is a delivery partner, and which aims to attract students from underrepresented groups. In addition, Activate Learning plans to further develop the IoT provision to widen access for mature students who are already in employment. This will encompass a combination of blended and online support that enables students to accumulate credits through the provision of short courses e.g. 30 credits. Activate Learning considers that this will support its actions to increase the number BAME accessing higher education and bridge the gap between students from EIMD Q1 and EIMD Q5 in higher education.

Further, Activate Learning will explore opportunities to further collaborate with other local providers and key stakeholders, including through the Study Higher NCOP Outreach Hub.

HE Maintenance Bursary

Our evaluation of the impact of financial support on access and continuation has indicated that students have benefitted from the provision of a HE Maintenance Bursary. Activate Learning considers that the provision of a HE Maintenance Bursary will also support its specific efforts to bridge the gap in access between students from EIMD Q1 and Q5,

A grant of £1000 (£500 for part time students) paid in two instalments (55% at the beginning of the academic year with the balance of 45% paid in April) subject to sufficient attendance and academic progress on the part of the student. To be eligible students will need to:

- Be eligible for funding as a home student.
- Be normally resident in the UK.

- Be in receipt of the full SFE maintenance loan.
- Have a family income of £25,000 or less; and,
- Be studying on a higher education programme in either a Land Based subject or Counselling.

Students will not need to apply for the HE Maintenance Bursary as they will receive it automatically if they meet the eligibility criteria, providing they have completed an income assessment as part of their student finance application, and given consent to share that information with Activate Learning.

Therefore. 5% of the higher fee income will be allocated in each year of the plan to maintenance bursaries for new students.

3.3. Strategies to increase Success

The primary focus of financial support measures will be to support students who may experience financial stress or challenges in completing their studies. However, targeted financial support linked to the priority groups will also be used.

Feedback from students has identified that they value the additional and targeted support and the positive impact it has had on their studies. Although the evaluation of continuation data has not indicated that there is any significant difference between those students who received a HE Maintenance Bursary compared to those who have not, qualitative feedback from students has consistently indicated that students value the provision of the HE Maintenance Bursary in each year of study, alleviating the pressure to either on paid or additional employment to support studies. We will therefore make the HE Maintenance Bursary available and make payment automatically, subject to confirmation of continued eligibility, to students in each year of study.

HE Study Support Fund

Feedback received from our student body has informed us that they benefit from the availability of a fund to provide them with access to financial support in meeting the specific additional costs of their course thereby addressing barriers to continuation and attainment. These costs may include but not limited to obtaining digital technology to aid remote/online study, material to support study i.e., research papers, equipment/material for coursework, travel arrangements for an event or project directly linked to their course of study i.e., field trips, off-site research or undertaking a dyslexia assessment.

This HE Study Support Fund will provide grants of up to £500 per application. Students will be able to submit up to two applications to the fund in each year of study.

As part of our inclusive approach all HE students at Activate Learning, regardless of their fee status will be able to apply for a HE Study Support Fund subject to the following criteria:

- Be enrolled on a recognised higher education programme delivered by Activate Learning
- Have no outstanding fees due
- Provide evidence of need relevant to their studies

- Be a student from a priority group e.g., low socio-economic status e.g., EIMD Quintiles1&2, low participation neighbourhood e.g., POLAR4 Quintile1, disabled or BAME

Therefore, Activate Learning will allocate 10% of the higher fee income in each year of the plan to bursaries for continuing students.

HE Hardship Fund

As a result of student feedback and to assist students who experience unexpected financial difficulties due to mitigating circumstances which could not have been predicted at the start of their studies, a hardship fund has been established. The Fund is a grant and therefore non-repayable, up to a maximum of £250. There is no limit to the number of applications that students can make in each academic year.

In determining the level of hardship funding awarded to students, priority will be given to the groups identified within this plan including:

• Students with children (particularly single parents)
• Disabled students (especially where the DSA allowances are unable to meet particular costs)
• Care leavers
• Carers
• Estranged students
• Homeless students

In order to be eligible for HE Hardship funding, students will need to satisfy the following criteria:

- Be enrolled on a recognised higher education programme delivered by Activate Learning
- Have no outstanding fees due
- Provide evidence of household income
- Provide evidence of financial commitments
- Be a student from a priority group e.g., low socio-economic background, low participation neighbourhood, disabled
- Provide evidence of urgent financial need.

Activate Learning will allocate 2.0% of the higher fee income in each year of the plan to Hardship funding.

3.4. Strategies to enhance Attainment

Activate Learning will also allocate 10% of higher fee income in each year of the plan to study support activities in respect of attainment targets for underrepresented groups including but not limited to those for disabled students and those with a BAME background. This will be instrumental in addressing the gap in attainment between disabled and non-disabled students, students from EIMD Q1 and Q5 as well as between BAME and White students.

3.5. Strategies to increase Progression

As a direct response to student consultation, Activate Learning has developed a model which consists of three key pathways for progression

1. Progression into employment: Activate Learning will continue to work directly with employers to engage them with the student body particularly in respect of ensuring that employer led projects form part of the curriculum model.
2. Progression into further study: Activate Learning has established a model where students will have more flexible access and progression from Level 4 through to Level 6 in partnership with its higher education partners.
3. Progression to employment combined with further study: Through the concept of a blended or fully online model of delivery Activate Learning will support students to combine employment with study to enhance their career opportunities.

3.6. Student consultation

Activate Learning has acted both formally and informally to ensure that students have been involved in the preparation of this plan and that the student voice is heard through each stage of the learner journey going forward.

In developing this plan, a representative group of students have been consulted through formal mechanisms as well as focus groups held specifically to gain student feedback and input to the plan. Issues raised through those processes highlighted areas of concern in respect of financial support, for example, students have welcomed the fact that bursaries are now provided in each year of study and the enhanced provision of study support.

Activate Learning recognises the challenge of consulting with a student body that is not only spread across seven separate campuses, but also located in three different counties. In addition, that body is also, predominantly made up of mature students which is recognised in the way the student consultative processes have been developed.

The Group has in place a formal student consultative process which has been used to inform the development of the Access and Participation plan and will inform the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the plan. This process includes:

• HE Student representatives for each programme.
• HE Student Ambassadors on each campus.
• Higher Education Learning Partnership/HE Student Ambassador Campus Forums.
• Programme Committees which are held once each term,

These are supported by informal mechanisms which include: focus groups to address particular issues and topics, social media (Facebook and Instagram), email and Activate Learning Group's virtual learning environment.

A number of initiatives/actions detailed within the plan are a direct outcome of the student consultation activities that have been undertaken to support the development of this plan and are addressing the two main themes arising from the consultations, namely cost of living and sense of belonging. In summary, these are:

- The provision of a HE Maintenance Bursary in each year of study, which aims to remove financial stress and some of the financial barriers both in terms of access to and continuation in higher education.
- The provision of a HE Study Support Fund to enable students to have access to a fund to enable them to access additional equipment, activities to underpin and enhance their studies including meeting additional costs in undertaking work experience.

- Targeted work with under-represented groups to enhance continuation and attainment (e.g., workshops to enhance study skills, personal development, and a wellbeing programme).
- Development of a dynamic 'Have Your Say' system enabling students to contribute their views to the review and development of policies and initiatives and indeed the plan itself

Activate Learning will also ensure that HE Student Representatives have access to relevant and appropriate training, including but not limited to equality, diversity and inclusion, the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and data interpretation.

To ensure the plan is continually monitored, evaluated, and enhanced, Access and Participation has been introduced as a core agenda item on all Staff/Higher Education Student forums including each of the Campus HE Forums.

3.7. Evaluation strategy

Activate Learning's approach to evaluation is underpinned by our Theory of Change model with its associated activities coordinated centrally by the Group's Higher Education Learning Partnerships (HELP) team working closely with students, the Institutional Effectiveness (IE) data team, student services and faculty staff. Our evaluation strategy ensures that our aims and objectives are established, progress is monitored, and assessment of impact undertaken.

Our APP targets, and progress towards meeting them, is reported through our new APP Dashboard. This enables us to measure the impact of our activities by understanding our progress towards closing the gaps we have identified to support our aims and objectives. It also provides us with the opportunity to re-evaluate our approaches should we identify that sufficient progress is not being made in any area.

Measures include:

- Embedding the APP Dashboard as a key data set which enables Activate Learning to effectively track and evaluate performance across the student lifecycle
- Adoption of a mixed methods approach that combines and triangulates qualitative and quantitative, primary, and secondary data, as appropriate, to ensure we have the knowledge required for robust and context specific evaluation.
- Further increasing our engagement with students through the inclusion of APP as an agenda item at all formal Staff and Student Consultative Committee and Programme Committee meetings to gain greater student input into our planning, monitoring, and evaluation of our plan.

3.8. Aims of our evaluation

The overall purpose of our evaluation work is to enable Activate Learning to meet its institutional objectives by developing a robust evidence base for the Group's widening participation activity. As such, the evaluation plan has the following aims:

1. To enable Activate Learning to evidence the impact of its widening participation activity in eliminating gaps for underrepresented groups of students.
2. To inform the development of widening participation interventions as a result of evaluating the impact of activities undertaken within Activate Learning.

3. To inform programme design to ensure that the needs of underrepresented groups are carefully considered and barriers to participation are designed out including with regards to assessment, timetabling and study support.
4. To align the evaluation of widening participation activity within Activate Learning's timelines for reporting and evaluation of higher education, in order to inform operational planning and internal/external reporting and thereby continuing to meet its conditions of Registration (A1 and A2).

In order to achieve these aims, the following objectives have been identified. While they are divided below into four work strands; data, finance, evaluation and evidence, and research, there will naturally by synergies and interdependencies between them.

Data

1. Conduct timely and effective analysis of evaluation data in order to facilitate detailed end of year reporting which enables continuous improvement of Access and Participation interventions and programme design.
2. Define baseline data and project KPIs for access and participation interventions that relate to the achievement of overall institutional targets.
3. Establish clear written processes for the collection and processing of data related to participants in access and participation interventions in order to comply with the requirements of GDPR and enhance our ability to conduct longer-term evaluation of impact.

Financial Support

1. Routinely monitor the dispersal of funds against all bursaries
2. Ensure that funding to support access for underrepresented groups is used appropriately
3. Utilise an online survey which will help Activate Learning understand the impact of the financial support. This survey will be followed up with various focus groups utilising participatory methods (e.g., photo voice), in which we will explore this impact in greater detail, using the OfS interview framework to structure our focus group.

Evidence and evaluation

1. Create tailored evaluation plans for all widening participation interventions at the project design stage through a process of Equality and APP Impact Assessments.
2. Align annual and ongoing evaluation of widening participation activity into Activate Learning's planning timeline, to ensure it informs the development of the curriculum and operational plans.
3. Report annually to the HE Academic Board on the impact of widening participation activity and identify any risks and mitigations associated with meeting the targets.
4. Utilise supplementary sector-level evidence when developing proposals for new widening participation interventions and programmes.
5. Expand the use of impact assessments across policies, curriculum/programme development and teaching, learning and assessment strategies, resulting in a greater understanding of the factors which affect the access, success, and progression of underrepresented groups.

Research

1. Conduct research which expands the Group's sector and institution-level knowledge of best practice to support evidence-based project design and evaluation.
2. Continue to engage actively in sector networks, conferences, and publications in order to maintain knowledge of best practice within the sector.

As part of the development of this Access and Participation Plan, Active Learning has implemented an evaluation strategy that will facilitate strategic oversight of the evaluation of the plan. Formal oversight of the evaluation of the plan rests with the Board of Governors who are supported in that activity by the HE Academic Board. Further, each Faculty has access and participation as an integral element of its regular performance monitoring, review and action planning process.

It is acknowledged that significant impact on the plans success in addressing gaps can be achieved at individual programme level. Consequently, to underpin the empirical evaluation of the plan a revised core data set at individual programme level will be created through the new APP Dashboard.

The APP Dashboard will be updated on a termly basis by the Higher Education Learning Partnerships (HELP) office within Activate Learning and disseminated through the formal performance review mechanisms within Activate Learning to individual programme teams. This dissemination will be undertaken by the HELP office through the provision of a narrative commentary and direct involvement in the review of performance. This facilitates the regular review of the plan, associated actions to ensure that it is a living document through its ongoing revision and updating. This activity will be informed by the Head of Quality Assurance (HE) who will also be accountable for highlighting and sharing good practice within the Group and from across the sector.

All initiatives delivered under the plan will be developed and delivered against clear objectives to ensure that the target audience is clearly identified, and impact measured.

Each intervention will have a tailored evaluation plan that takes account of specific outcomes and longer-term tracking. This will form part of an overarching reporting cycle, which will be designed to bring reporting in line with Activate Learning's existing planning timelines. The design of initiatives has and will draw upon learning from Activate Learning's partnerships and involvement with bodies such as the South-Central Institute of Technology, partner HEIs, the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) and the Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON) which Activate Learning are involved with. Activate Learning is committed to developing the partnership with the HEON embracing the shared objectives, targets, initiatives, and measures.

3.9. Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

The monitoring of progress against the aims, objectives and specific targets related to this Access and Participation plan will be undertaken using a range of mechanisms which will be employed at all levels of the organisation, from programme-level to Governing body. This is supported by the existence of an APP dashboard that facilitates the review of performance against each of the target groups at programme, faculty, and organisation level.

Activate Learning as established an Access and Participation Working Group to enable students to be directly involved in the monitoring, evaluation and review of its APP plan. That Group is informed by the APP dashboard.

Overall, the Director of Higher Education will be responsible for the monitoring of the plan and subsequent reporting to the OfS.

3.9.1. Programme-level monitoring

Programme committees occur regularly throughout the year and include student representation. These meetings are used to monitor, review, and evaluate the progress of students, quality of students learning opportunities and the development of the curriculum. Going forward, programme committees will also be required to consider any gaps in performance for underrepresented groups and their peers and to identify what actions, if necessary, are being taken to close them.

In addition, Assessment Boards will be integral to the identification of performance of underrepresented groups compared to their peers in providing summative data which will be considered and analysed through the Annual Programme Monitoring/Improvement Plan process.

3.9.2. Faculty-level

Each faculty has a 6-weekly quality improvement board which has is a standing agenda item within which performance against meeting our APP targets is discussed with remedial actions identified and agreed.

3.9.3. Group-level

The Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) meets every other month and is chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, and attended by Faculty Executive Directors, the Director of Higher Education, and the Academic Registrar for Higher Education. The HEAB has overall responsibility for assuring the standards, quality and enhancement of all regulated higher education provision delivered by Activate Learning and reports to the Governing body via the Group Executive Team.

The HEAB is responsible for reviewing and recommending approval of the Groups' Access and Participation Plan to the Group Executive Team who will have the authority to approve the plan on behalf of the Governing body prior to it being assessed by the Office for Students. The HEAB will also seek to include colleagues with expertise in widening participation to advise upon the development of the plan.

Activate Learning acknowledges its responsibility under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 for ensuring that the governing body is also responsible for overseeing the development of the access and participation plan and for monitoring its performance. This will be undertaken by providing updates to the governing body via the Group Executive Team.

The HEAB will receive an up-to-date version of the APP Dashboard report which will highlight the most significant gaps in performance for underrepresented groups, and detail the progress made and action being taken to address them.

4. Provision of information to students

Activate Learning will ensure, as it currently does, that information relating to fees and financial support, including bursaries and hardship funding, are made available to students in a number of formats including print and electronic and through a range of sources including Activate

Learning's website, UCAS, Student Loan Company, Activate Learning On-line (VLE), joining instructions (hard copy and email) and the higher education prospectus (hard copy and on-line). In addition, Activate Learning will ensure that all published information is accurate, clear, complete, accessible, and timely.

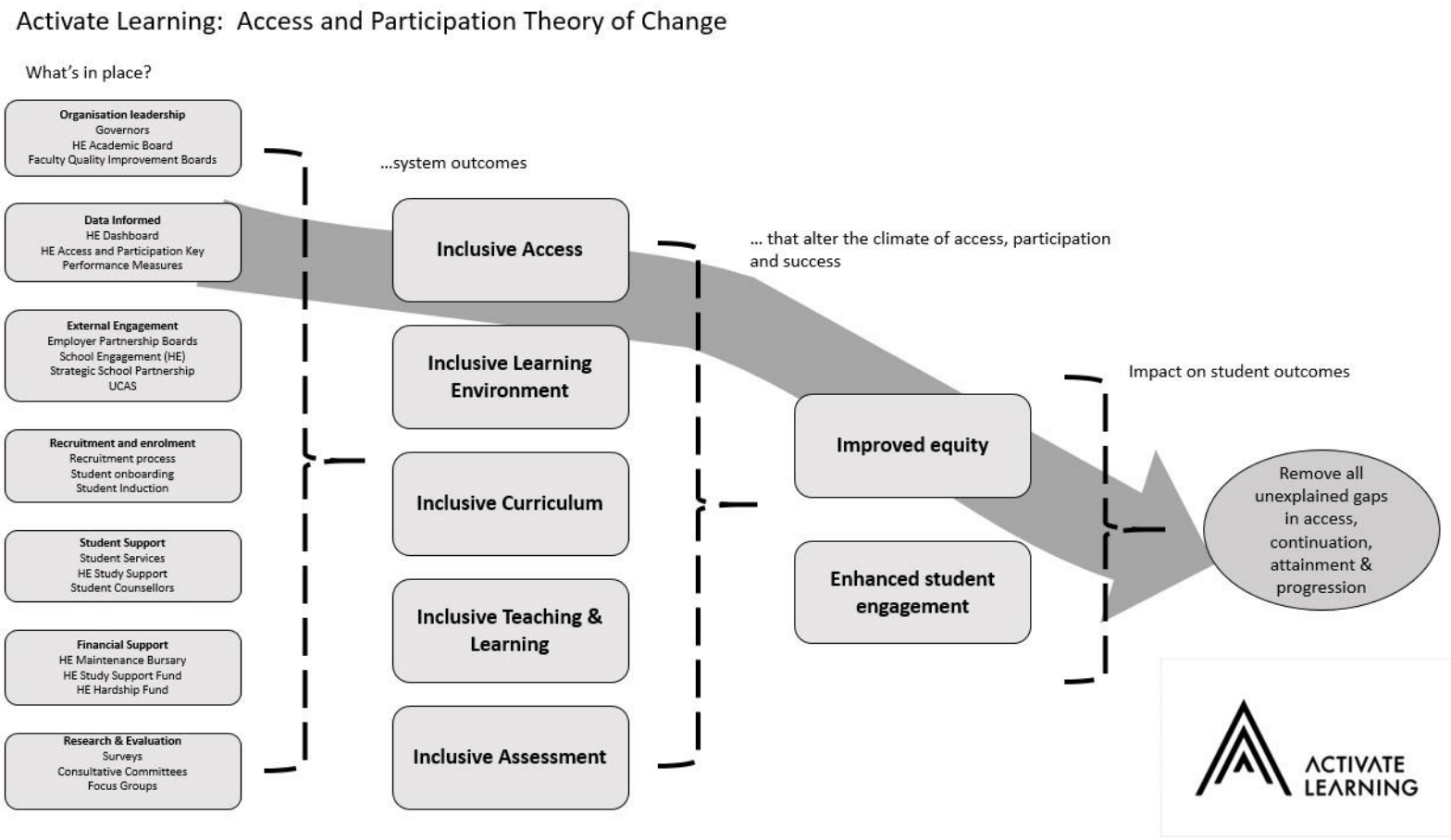
Activate Learning will also ensure that information relating to the publication of additional financial support is included in the Group's HE Information Policy and approval procedure and is reviewed and updated on a regular basis to ensure it remains current.

The process for applying for financial support, including eligibility criteria, will be clearly explained to both current and prospective students and will be published on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) site for current students and the Activate Learning website for prospective students. Activate Learning will also make it clear to existing and prospective students if it requires them to agree to sharing their financial information.

Tuition fee information is also provided to applicants in their 'Offer letter' which specifies the fees due for the duration of their programme, including any indication of fee increases and any additional costs that they may incur as a result of their studies. In addition, information relating to bursaries will also be included, where appropriate.

Activate Learning will also ensure that continuing students continue to receive the financial support that was advertised to them when they applied, which may be subject to any inflationary increases or decisions to increase the support offered.

Appendix 1.


Activate Learning: Access and Participation Theory of Change
What's in place?
Organisation leadership
Governors
HE Academic Board
Faculty Quality Improvement Boards
Data Informed
HE Dashboard
HE Access and Participation Key Performance Measures
External Engagement
Employer Partnership Boards
School Engagement (HE)
Strategic School Partnership
UCAS
Recruitment and enrolment
Recruitment process
Student onboarding
Student Induction
Student Support
Student Services
HE Study Support
Student Counsellors
Financial Support
HE Maintenance Bursary
HE Study Support Fund
HE Hardship Fund
Research & Evaluation
Surveys
Consultative Committees
Focus Groups
...system outcomes
Inclusive Access
Inclusive Learning Environment
Inclusive Curriculum
Inclusive Teaching & Learning
Inclusive Assessment
... that alter the climate of access, participation and success
Improved equity
Enhanced student engagement
Impact on student outcomes
Remove all unexplained gaps in access, continuation, attainment & progression
ACTIVATE LEARNING

Office for Students

Access and participation plan
Fee information 2022-23

Provider name: Activate Learning

Provider UKPRN: 10004927

Summary of 2022-23 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflationary statement:

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

Table 4a - Full-time course fee levels for 2022-23 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	Land-based	£8,000
Foundation degree	Land-based / Counselling	£8,000
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	Business / IT / Engineering	£6,165
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2022-23

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	Virtual Alliance Limited 10026108 - Sport and Exercise Science	£6,165
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4c - Part-time course fee levels for 2022-23 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£5,335
Foundation degree		£4,000
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND		£3,265
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2022-23

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

Office for Students

Targets and investment plan 2022-23 to 2026-27

Provider name: Activate Learning

Provider UKPRN: 10004927

Investment summary

The OfS requires providers to report on their planned investment in access, financial support and research and evaluation in their access and participation plan. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in student success and progression in the access and participation plans and therefore investment in these areas is not recorded here.

Note about the data:
The figures in Table 4a relate to all expenditure on activities and measures that support the ambitions set out in an access and participation plan, where they relate to access to higher education. The figures in Table 4b only relate to the expenditure on activities and measures that support the ambitions set out in an access and participation plan, where they relate to access to higher education which is funded by higher fee income. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Total access activity investment (£)	£34,865.00	£39,453.00	£41,288.00	£44,040.00	£47,710.00
Access (pre-16)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Access (post-16)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Access (adults and the community)	£34,865.00	£39,453.00	£41,288.00	£44,040.00	£47,710.00
Access (other)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Financial support (£)	£94,136.00	£106,521.00	£111,477.00	£118,908.00	£128,817.00
Research and evaluation (£)	£10,460.00	£11,836.00	£12,386.00	£13,212.00	£14,313.00

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Higher fee income (£HFI)	£348,650.00	£394,525.00	£412,875.00	£440,400.00	£477,100.00
Access investment	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%
Financial support	27.0%	27.0%	27.0%	27.0%	27.0%
Research and evaluation	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%
Total investment (as %HFI)	40.0%	40.0%	40.0%	40.0%	40.0%

Office for Students

Targets and investment plan 2022-23 to 2026-27

Provider name: Activate Learning

Provider UKPRN: 10004927

Targets

Table 2a - Access

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Underrepresented group (optional)	Comparator group (optional)	Description (500 character	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on how milestones/targets were calculated (500 characters maximum)
											2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	
Reduce the gap between IMD quntiles 1 and 2 and quintle 5	PTA_1	Socioeconomic	IMD quintile 1 and 2	IMD quintile 5	Reduce the gap between the proportion of students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 and those from IMD quintile 5 by 30pp	No	The access and participation dataset	2019-20	Percentage points	40	35	30	20	15	10	Data based upon both full and part-time directly funded/validated undergraduate student numbers. Where the data is not available from the Access and Participation data set it will be supplemented by Activate Learning's own HE data set.
Increase the proportion of BAME students	PTA_2	Ethnicity			Increase the proportion of BAME students by 5pp by 2026/27	No	The access and participation dataset	2019-20	Percentage	14.3%	15.0%	16.5%	17.0%	18.0%	19.3%	Data based upon full and part time undergraduate students numbers
	PTA_3															
	PTA_4															
	PTA_5															
	PTA_6															
	PTA_7															
	PTA_8															
	PTA_9															
	PTA_10															
	PTA_11															
	PTA_12															

Table 2b - Success

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Underrepresented group	Comparator group	Description (500 character	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on how milestones/targets were calculated (500 characters maximum)
											2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	
Increase the attainment rate for BAME students	PTS_1	Ethnicity	Mixed	White	Eliminate the attainment gap between BAME and White students by 2026/27	No	Other data source	2019-20	Percentage points	20	18	15	10	5	0	Using Activate Learning's own HE data set and given the range of qualification outcomes eg 1st, 2.1. Distinction and Merit.
Increase the continuation rates of BAME students	PTS_2	Ethnicity	Mixed	White	Eliminate the continuation gap between Asian and White students by 2026/27	No	Other data source	2018-19	Percentage points	5	5	5	4	3	0	Using Activate Learning's own data set.
Reduce the attainment gap between EIMD Q1 and EIMD Q5 students	PTS_3	Socioeconomic	IMD quintile 1	IMD quintile 5	Reduce the attainment gap between EIMD Q1 and EIMD Q5 students so that it is <5pp by 2026/27 when measured on an aggregate basis	No	Other data source	2018-19	Percentage points	25	20	20	15	10	5	Using Activate Learning's own HE data set and given the range of qualification outcomes eg 1st, 2.1, Distinction and Merit.
Increase the level of attainment of students who have declared a disability	PTS_4	Disabled	Students with disability	Students with no known disability	Reduce the attainment gap between non-disabled and disabled students by 10pp by 2026/27	No	Other data source	2019-20	Percentage points	16	15	14	10	8	6	Using Activate Learning's own HE data set and given the range of qualification outcomes eg 1st, 2.1, Distinction and Merit.
Eliminate the continuation gap between male and female students from POLAR Q1	PTS_5	Low participation neighbourhood (LPN)	POLAR quintile 1	POLAR quintile 1	Eliminate the continuation gap between Male students from POLAR Q1 and Female students from POLAR Q1 by 2026/27	No	Other data source	2019-20	Percentage points	17	12	12	10	5	0	Using Activate Learning's own data set.
	PTS_6															
	PTS_7															
	PTS_8															
	PTS_9															
	PTS_10															
	PTS_11															
	PTS_12															

Table 2c - Progression

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Underrepresented group (optional)	Comparator group (optional)	Description (500 character	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on how milestones/targets were calculated (500 characters maximum)
											2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	
	PTP_1															
	PTP_2															
	PTP_3															
	PTP_4															
	PTP_5															
	PTP_6															
	PTP_7															
	PTP_8															
	PTP_9															
	PTP_10															
	PTP_11															
	PTP_12															