New College Swindon 10004579

Access and participation plan 2022-23 to 2026-27

1. Assessment of performance

The provision of further education in the town of Swindon is long standing and dates back to 1843, when technical education classes for employees were started by the Great Western Railway Company. Since then, it has undergone many changes, the most recent of which resulted in the merger of the two existing colleges in Swindon to become New College Swindon in August 2020. New College Swindon has two main campuses approximately 2 miles apart, the North Star campus is near the town centre and the other, at Queens Drive, is to the east of the town. Higher education is currently delivered across both campuses and has been part of the education offer since the late 1990's. The College predominantly serves the local communities in and around Swindon. The College also works with two subcontracting partners based in London to deliver higher education courses, David Game and CECOS International. In 2020-21, around 1300 students studied on programmes of Higher Education as students of New College Swindon: approximately 250 taught on the Swindon Campuses, 840 at David Game and 110 at CECOS. We also have a small amount of franchised provision with University of Gloucestershire, Oxford Brookes University and Bath Spa University, totalling approximately 150 students. Over the next 5 years, this profile of students will change significantly. After the 2020-21 academic year, we will no longer partner with David Game for new students starting as they now have their own OfS registration. We will considerably expand our Swindon based provision through the opening in September 2021 of the Swindon and Wiltshire Institute of Technology (IoT) and we will continue to develop our relationship with CECOS. This change in the mix of provision makes interpreting and drawing conclusions on existing data and forecasting the data for the next five years a real challenge. We recognise that this may necessitate a rewrite of the plan within three or four years but this will be determined as we progress through the plan assessing our progress towards the targets set and the analysis of the data as it evolves.

We are committed to raising aspiration and encouraging student's participation in Higher Education. This is a key objective for the local area given that Swindon was designated a 'cold spot' by HEFCE in 2014 and there has been limited improvement since. New College Swindon is committed to working in partnership with the University of Gloucestershire to harness the strengths of each organisation for the benefit of higher education and training in Swindon through the creation of an Institute of Technology (IoT) located in Swindon. The IoT will focus on facilitating the development of higher-level skills in students, which in turn, supports the development of economic growth of Swindon and the local area. The curriculum mix is focussed on Higher and Degree Level Apprenticeships, Degrees, Foundation Degrees, Higher National Diplomas/certificates and some year zero development courses, to enable students to access and progress in the pathways available. This development should see the numbers of students studying higher level courses at the New College Swindon home sites grow significantly over the life of this Access and Participation Plan, though a significant number of these will be higher and degree apprenticeships. These routes into higher level study support our access and participation aims and objectives by removing some of the barriers that certain groups experience for example cost, the ability to study locally and to 'earn while they learn'. For this reason, much of the discussion will be Swindon focussed but the plan will also apply to our students who are based in London.

When analysing the information from the Access and Participation Data Dashboard it is difficult to ascertain exactly how much the London based David Game College provision actually skews the data.

We do know that the local areas in which the subcontractors are based do not have the same access and participation issues that are apparent in Swindon and, as David Game is the largest contributor to the data and they will not be going forward, any conclusions and proposals must be thought about carefully.

Throughout the plan we have analysed the numbers of directly funded students using the access and participation data dashboard published for New College Swindon (OfS APDD Mar 2021). We have also used our own internal datasets such as the Individual Learner Record return (ILR), but often the relatively small cohort size results in the data not showing statistical significance or having low confidence rates particularly when intersections of disadvantage are considered. It is difficult to be secure in drawing conclusions, however, trends and proportions are indicative and used in our self-assessment.

## 1.1 Higher Education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

Access

1.1.1   The majority of students attending New College Swindon sites in Swindon for higher education are from the immediate surrounding area. Data from our ILR return (October 2020) indicates that 73% are from a Swindon postcode. The majority are from SN1, SN2, SN3, SN5 and SN25 codes, many of these codes are areas of low young participation and Adult HE 2011 – those adults without a HE qualification in the 2011 census (OfS website 2020).

1.1.2   When reviewing the wider data, entrants from POLAR4 Q1 were proportionately higher for full time undergraduates than the sector in the last 5 years, an aggregate of 25% against a sector aggregate of 12%, though our own figure reflects a decline over the last few years. The aggregate of the last 5 years of students who came from Q1 and 2 is 46% against a sector aggregate of 27.7%, indicating that we do well in attracting students from areas of low participation. When examining POLAR4 in more granular detail, we can also observe that more Swindon postcodes are included in Uni Connect targets due to GCSE performance overall, than those included due to low participation or adult HE qualification being targeted. This correlates with the current information on lower-than-average GCSE attainment in the Swindon area, though this is now improving.

1.1.3   It is also a key point to identify that although the data for POLAR4 is crucial in closing participation gaps, and identifies gaps amongst higher tariff providers, the college also attracts a significant number of mature students (21 and over) including those studying part-time, for whom this level of data is not captured. We know that many of these students live and work in the local area in Swindon (as mentioned in 1.1.1) and we believe these to be representational of the wider cohort, with many living in low participation area postcodes.

1.1.4   Parental education is also an influencing factor for entry to higher education and can influence both aspiration and motivation to participate in higher education. The Swindon area has benefitted from high employment in recent years, and this coupled with areas of deprivation means that many parents may also encourage their young people into work, to supplement family income. In Swindon we have POLAR4 data which shows that three postcode areas are within Quintiles 1-3 in the Adult HE qualification category. Anecdotally we know from pastoral tutorial contact with our students, that many are the first in their family to participate in Higher Education, however currently we do not record this consistently for the entire population and so

cannot monitor how this affects access for all HE entrants at New College Swindon. For academic year 2022/23 onwards, we aim to capture this information as part of an enhanced data set, at the point of enrolment.

1.1.5   Swindon has eight Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOA's) which fall within the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods according to IMD data. A further eleven Swindon neighbourhoods (LSOA's) are within the 20% most deprived. Analysis of the Education, Skills and Training Domain for Swindon, which measures the lack of attainment and skills in the local population, indicates that 24 Swindon LSOAs are in the 10% most deprived LSOAs nationally for children and young people and 18 Swindon LSOAs for adults. 13 Swindon LSOAs are in the 10% most deprived LSOAs nationally for both sub domains (Swindon JSNA 2019).

1.1.6   When analysing the IMD data (APDD Mar 2021) for full time students as an aggregate of the last 5 years we are significantly ahead of the sector for recruiting to Quintiles 2 and 3. 74% of our students come from Quintiles 1 to 3, the most deprived quintiles, compared to only 60% in the rest of the sector. For part time students there is a very much different picture with the majority of students coming from Q4 and Q5.


IMD Comparison vs Secter - 5 yr Aggregate
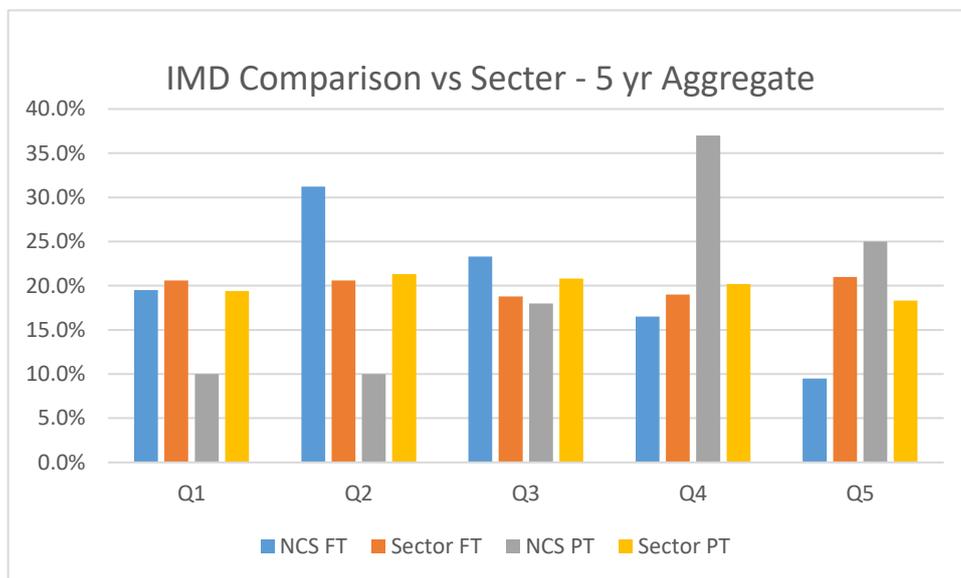
1.1.7   We know that IMD uses a range of data domains, the highest proportion of which is income and employment deprivation. Our understanding of this in relation to our population is that most of our students, young or mature are working in lower paid, lower skilled jobs alongside their study. Attracting more young students to study here from Q1 will largely depend on the attraction and relevance of our curriculum offer, as analysis of the offer against age range shows us that our age range can fluctuate from year to year accordingly, this may change focus again with the introduction of the Institute of Technology.

1.1.8   Our part-time HNC offer attracts predominantly those already in employment with some industry experience, who are employer sponsored and upskilling for promotion or wage increases. It would appear that these students are coming from areas with less deprivation; however as it is relatively small numbers of students, one or two students' difference can cause a quite notable fluctuation in the data. We need to consider how we can work with employers to encourage wider participation but do not feel that at this stage this is worthy of a specific target. As proportions of part time students potentially rise with the change in provision planned for the IoT we will need to identify if this is an area of concern, therefore whilst we will monitor the data annually a formal review will take place in academic year 23/24.

Success

Non-continuation

1.1.9 The Access and Participation data reveals that continuation is fairly even across the quintiles for full time students however for part time students there is more fluctuation within the quintiles and a gap of 3 percentage points between Q5 and Q1 and 11 percentage points between Q4 and Q1. These gaps are not statistically significant and may be attributable to the smaller number of students in the part time cohort, with each student contributing a greater percentage but this is something that we will want to monitor going forward to check that it is not a systemic issue. Currently you are less likely to continue if you are a part time student from quintile 1 compared to a full time student from quintile 1 and this may mean that we need to focus greater support on these individuals to support them with their continuation and subsequent achievement.

IMD Continuation rate within each quintile -5 year aggregate, full time and part time students
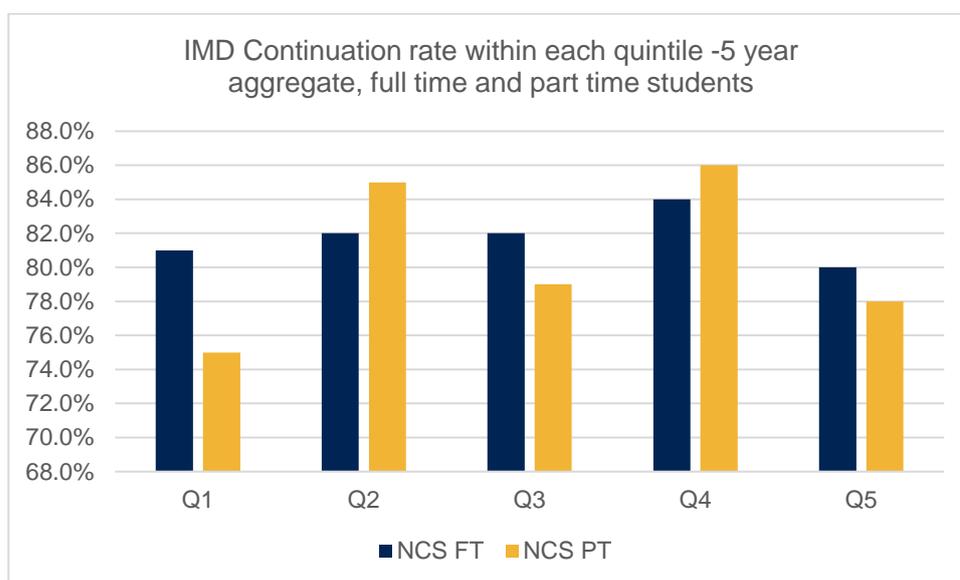
Attainment

1.1.10 We did not have any degree courses completing until the close of 2018/19 and this one degree would have been the only students, so there is no data for this section provided in the OfS APDD (2021), as analysis would lead to data protection issues. Our own attainment data covering the range of programmes is not currently split by the full range of deprivation factors but the data we have suggests that those in POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 are more likely to achieve a high grade ('good degree or merit or higher on a HND/C) than those in Q3 –Q5. We hope to have this data refined further to be able to monitor changes in it more closely by academic year 2021/22.

Progression to employment or further study

1.1.7 There is limited data available with which to draw conclusions, the APP Data is suppressed and the Graduate Outcomes data that exists is representing a small number of students which when split further by a particular characteristic, results in the analysis lacking meaning. We expect to build a more accurate picture of what is happening as this data builds and becomes available, we suggest that 2023/4 will be first time we will have three full years of data from which to try and draw some valid conclusions about our performance in this area.

1.2 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students

Access

1.2.1 The proportion of white students at New College Swindon compared to the sector average has been high for the last 5 years for both full time and part time student cohorts. With an aggregate proportion of 86.2% white students compared to a sector average 68.4% for full time students over the last 3 years and 91% compared to 85.6% for part time students, it is clear that there is under representation of students from BAME groups. The APDD does not identify the gaps in participation by BAME students as significant for all splits. The part time data consists only of provision that is located in Swindon, the proportion of the local population which identified as white was 85% in the 2011 census, thus the college proportions are in excess of this and therefore this must be an area for targeted focus in the actions identified within this plan. The David Game cohort is more ethnically diverse than the Swindon based cohorts, though it is still predominantly 'white other' with many of their students of Eastern European heritage. This further highlights the need to target this as an area for scrutiny. When one attempts to disaggregate the BAME data further, because of the low overall numbers of students, the data tends to be suppressed due to data protection issues. It is clear that the proportion of students studying with us from ethnic groups is not representative and has declined significantly (36%) over the last 5 years for full time students and has remained relatively static for part time students.

Success

Non-continuation

1.2.2 Continuation of full-time students from a BAME background is lower than that of white students; the data is suppressed for part time students. Over the last 5 years, the rate for white students is an aggregate of 83.8%. This is behind the sector aggregate of 91.2% by 7.4%. For Black students, our aggregate rate for the data available is 78% compared to a sector rate of 85.1% (gap 7.1%) and for Asian students 74% against a sector rate of 90.4% (gap 16.4%). For the combined category of ABMO (Asian, Black, Mixed and other) full time students, the college average is 76% compared to the sector average of 83.2% across the last five years. The sector gap between white and ABMO students is 3.0% and ours is 8.0%. Whilst the APP data set is not showing these as statistically significant gaps, it is our belief that this is not good enough and hence one of our targets must be to monitor this and understand why this is occurring and to work to reduce and then eliminate the gap.

Attainment

1.2.3 Within our own provision, we only had one-degree course completing for the first time in 2018/19, with only 10 completers, so there is no data for this section provided in the OfS APDD (2020). Examination of our own data (2018/19 and 2019/20) for this course indicates that the students were predominantly white British, therefore there is no evidence available to determine the impact of ethnicity on attainment for this course. When examining achievement more widely, our own dataset is not fully complete with the grade profiles recorded for all achievers but the data that exists does not appear to have any significant differences attributed to ethnicity. We will continue to build our internal dataset to allow closer monitoring of this and will reassess at the end of academic year 2022/23 to check for any issues.

1.2.4   There is limited data available with which to draw conclusions, the APP Data is suppressed and the Graduate outcomes data that exists is representing a very small number of students which when split further by a particular characteristic, results in the analysis lacking meaning. We expect to build a more accurate picture of what is happening as this data builds. We will see the effect of the increased volume of students in the last few years from David Game becoming part of this dataset and fuller data will become available, we suggest that 2023/4 will be first time we will have 3 full years of data of a significant volume from which to try and draw some valid conclusions.

1.3 Mature students

Access

1.3.1   We have a significant gap in the number of young under 21 entrants to higher education and the number of mature students. Our proportion of young to mature students as an aggregate over the last 5 years was 18.7% young and 81.3% mature for full time study compared to the sector 71.5% young and 28.5% mature and 25% young (sector 12.5%) and 75% (sector 87.5%) mature for part time study.
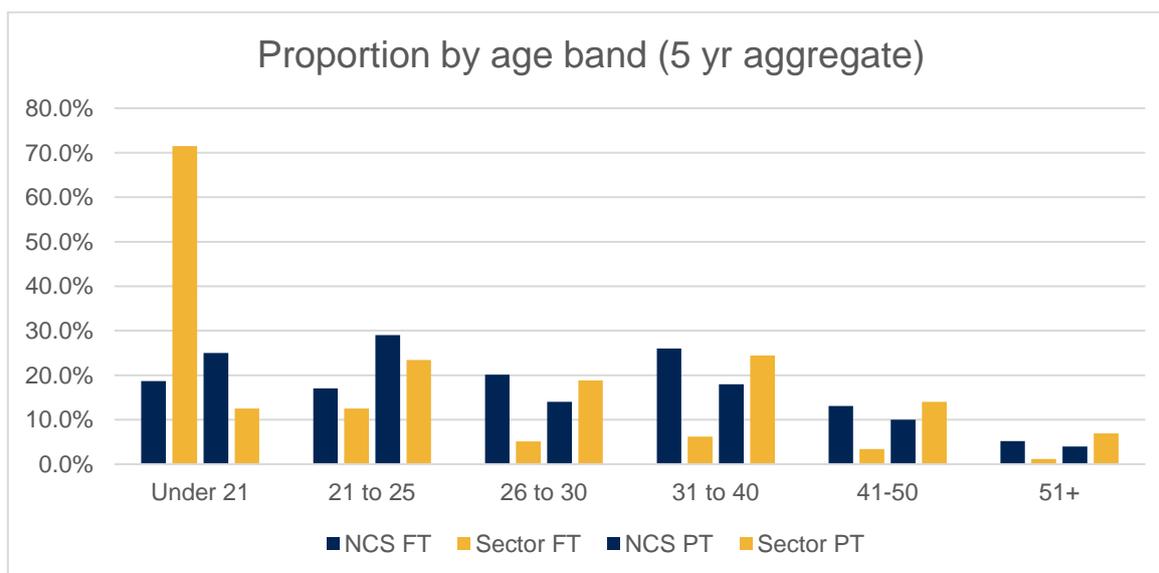
1.3.2   The above sector number of students that are 21 and over studying with New College Swindon is as a positive for the College, as we know that mature students are generally underrepresented in the sector. We do want to continue to attract mature students and would expect this to continue with the introduction of the IoT. As Swindon is an area of low participation for students under 21, and this has been the case for many years, we see attracting individuals back into college when they are ready and feel able to study at a higher level to be incredibly important to the area in terms of moving people into higher skilled roles. This is a key target area in terms of widening participation; given the skills shortages experienced by many employers in Swindon, those changing career or upskilling are a fundamental part of addressing this issue.

1.3.3   We acknowledge that we could do better with the number of young (under 21) year students accessing higher education, particularly at the Swindon sites. Whilst we accept that many young

people will choose to go to a university to experience living on campus, we have plans to expand our higher education offer, through the IoT and the inclusion of more STEM courses, which we believe will attract more young students. We know from local information, that Swindon has low aspiration, but high employment and so young people can find work rather than continuing to study, all of which leads to a much lower participation rate than the national picture. As this is not an OfS area of priority we will not be setting it as a target within this plan, but we will be working internally to make sure that the numbers of young students increase because it is important to the Swindon area.

1.3.4 Given that we are expanding our HE offer over the next five years and beyond, we need to see how we can better promote and increase progression within the College from FE into HE. This progression rate is low compared to the numbers of students studying at level three in the FE cohort.
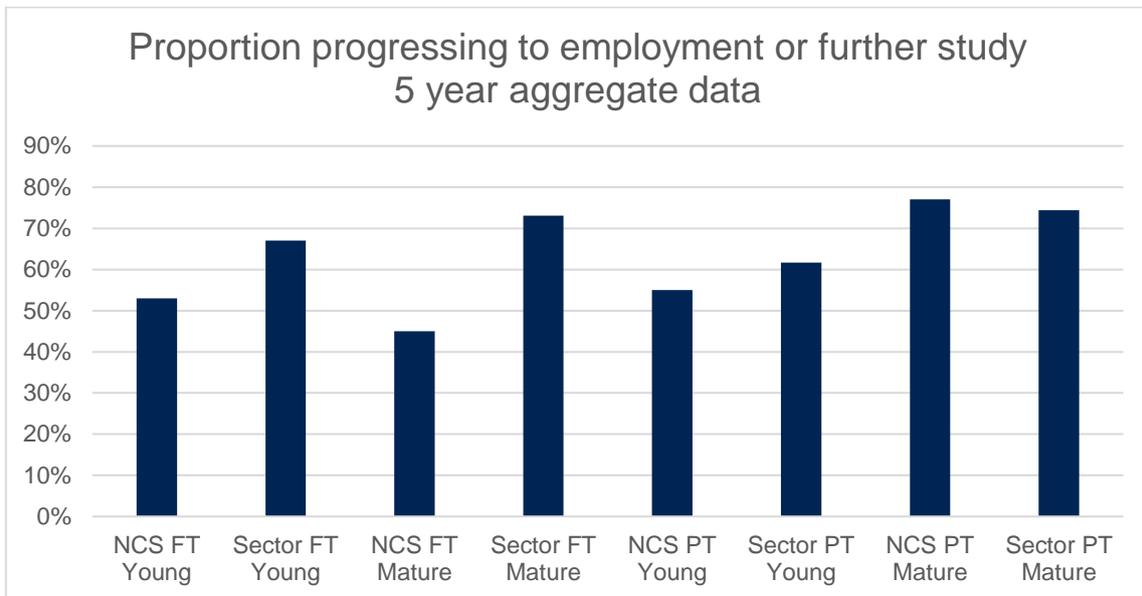
Success

Non-continuation

1.3.5 Continuation for our mature students is good. Over the last 3 years the rate is at sector benchmark for full time students at 84% and exceeds the sector benchmark for part time students. For part time students it was 83% compared to the sector rate of 64.1%. For our young students the rate of continuation is slightly better than the sector for part time students (74.1% vs 70%), but significantly behind the sector rate for full time students with a rate of 78%, which is 14.3% below. This needs attention, however as this is not a priority area for the OfS we will not set a target in this plan but will have it as an action in our HE improvement plan.

Attainment

1.3.6 As mentioned previously, we only have the one course contributing to the attainment category in its true definition. In 2018/19, mature students outperformed their younger counterparts in attaining a 'good' degree and in 2019/20 there is no significant difference, this may have been impacted by the pandemic with the younger students performing better in an online environment. Our own wider dataset indicates there is no significant difference between rate of achievement between young and mature students. The dataset is not fully complete with the grade profiles recorded for all achievers. The data that exists does appear to suggest that young students have a higher grade attainment than the mature students. Further analysis reveals that the rate of attainment of higher grades within the London based students is lower than the Swindon based students. These students are more likely to be over 21 and are often working in a second language so this may account for the difference, however without a full dataset, it would be unwise to specifically target this at this stage. We will continue to build our internal dataset to allow closer monitoring of this and will reassess at the end of academic year 2022/23 to check for any issues.

Progression to employment or further study

1.3.7 The APP Data (2021) is suppressed for some years due to either low numbers or the DLHE data not reaching the required response rate however; aggregate data reveals that there are differences between the progression to employment or further study of mature students and young students for full time students.

Proportion progressing to employment or further study
5 year aggregate data

| Category	Value
NCS FT Young	~53%
Sector FT Young	~67%
NCS FT Mature	~45%
Sector FT Mature	~73%
NCS PT Young	~55%
Sector PT Young	~61%
NCS PT Mature	~77%
Sector PT Mature	~74%

These differences are explained to some extent as the full time mature cohort is a small volume of students, and prior to 2016-17 there was no subcontracted provision in London. The students were predominantly local, and for example, there were courses that recruited a number of mature students who were retired and therefore unlikely to progress their career and move on to further study as they were studying for personal development and interest, rather than the purpose of career enhancement. We need to watch this data over the next few years as the volume rises and check to see if the differences genuinely exist. We propose to formally review this data mid plan during the 2023/24 academic year and determine if the data identifies the need for any actions.

1.4 Disabled students

Access

1.4.1 The proportion of the student population that have declared a disability fluctuates year on year, but for both full time and part time students it is consistently below the proportions seen within the sector. The APP data (Mar 2021) is not showing this as a gap with a statistical significance, however it is a concern. When you extract the old Swindon College data and examine it, it shows the proportion of FT disabled students was in every year greater than the sector. Clearly there are more students in the New College Swindon dataset and therefore it will skew the combined data. The weight of students in the New College Swindon dataset is from the London based David Game provision, this cohort has a high proportion of economic migrants from Eastern Europe. As these students are purposefully travelling for work and study, they may be less likely to declare a disability. They are also less likely for cultural reasons to disclose a disability. It seems that this is disproportionately skewing the data as examination of the full-time data for Swindon based students suggests that when the cohort is locally recruited the proportion of students is much more in line with the sector norm. That said, it is acknowledged that the sector norm is still an under representation of individuals with a disability and therefore we need to address both the full time and part time gap within our targets.

Proportion of students with/without a disability compared to the sector - 5 year aggregate
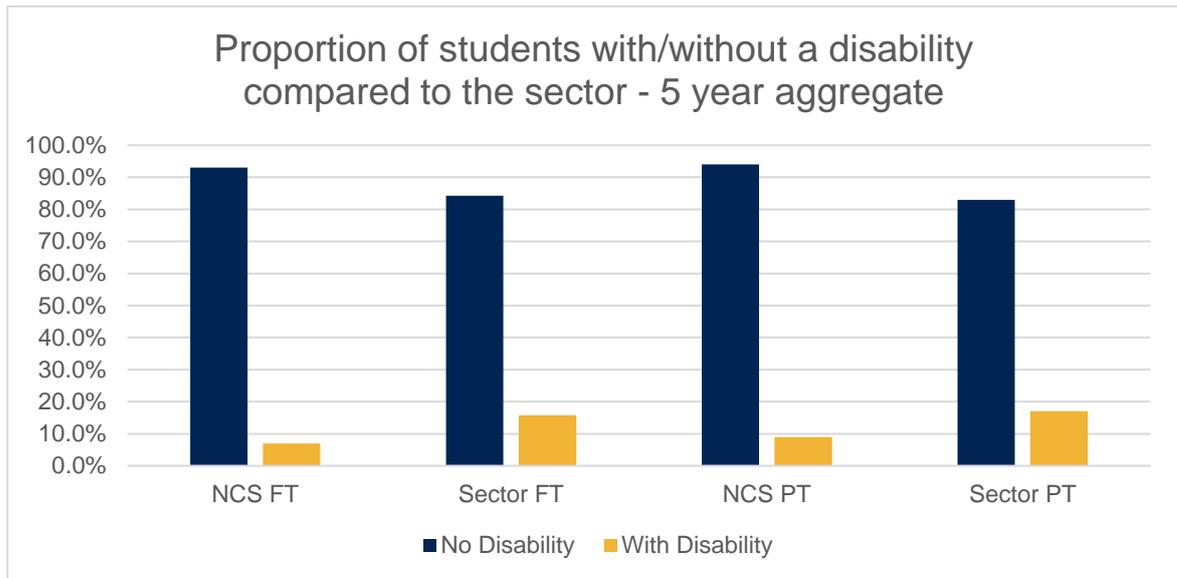
1.4.2 When you examine the data for APDD (2021) for mental health as a disability type, it is showing that the proportion is either suppressed or more latterly less than 1% of the student population. This feels contrary to our day-to-day experience. We know from feedback from our tutors and through analysis of our mitigating circumstances submissions, that in reality the number of students who are reporting mental health issues on entry to the college is lower than is the actual case, many only come to light at times of additional pressure both in their personal lives and academically. We need to focus on ensuring that students feel comfortable with this disclosure and that of other disabilities so that we can appropriately support them during their studies before they get into a crisis.

Success

Non-continuation

1.4.3 The APP data demonstrates that full time students with no disability have a continuation rate 3% higher than those with a disability; this is when reviewing a 5-year aggregate of the data. A gap of 10% is observable in year 5 of the data, suggesting that possibly the gap is widening rapidly, however the cohort of students is less than thirty meaning that 1 or 2 students can cause a fluctuation particularly when there is rounding of data. The gap is not statistically significant. The data for part time students is suppressed for data protection issues thus a judgement cannot be made. Where further splits by specific disability type have returned data for an aggregate of 5 years the proportion of students continuing is higher than the college rates more generally. So for example, students with a Cognitive and Learning disability have a continuation rate of 90% and students with a Sensory, medical or physical impairment a rate of 85% compared with the college rate of 82.1% for those without a disability and 79% with a disability. At this stage, the data trend is not sufficiently strong enough to suggest the need for a specific target. We feel that the improved measures we plan for access for disabled students, particularly the support in the transition onto the course will resolve any potential issue however; we will monitor the data yearly to check to see if the situation requires further intervention or a specific target.

Attainment

1.4.4   Our internal data is currently split by those with or without a learning difficulty or disabilities/a health problem only. This data suggests (though it is not a full dataset) that those who have declared a learning difficulty or disability/a health problem achieve a high grade ('good' degree or merit or higher on HND/C) at a rate of 57.5% compared to a rate of 52.7% for those without a difficulty.

Progression to employment or further study

1.4.5   The data set for progression is very small, though it is showing a gap of 20% between those with or without a disability; this figure is not statistically significant. We need to watch this data over the next few years as the volume rises and check to see if the difference genuinely exists. We propose to formally review this data mid plan during the 2024/25 academic year and determine if the data identifies the need for any actions.

1.5   Care Experienced

Access

1.5.1   The data on care-experienced students is not collated by the OfS APDD or New College Swindon. We know from our own FE community that we have not had many care leavers' progress from our FE cohort into our HE cohort, but we do not know if a care leaver has come from elsewhere or returned to education later, and so would not be identified as such. It is our intention to try to collect this data commencing in academic year 2021/22, as we know that this group experience significant barriers to accessing higher education such as lower school attainment, lack of positive role models, low aspiration, concerns about the costs associated with higher education and a lack of information and advice when applying.

Success

1.5.2   We have no data/significant numbers to examine this attribute among our population but intend to start to monitor and assess this as soon as our data collection is in place.

Non-continuation

1.5.3   We have no data/significant numbers to examine this attribute among our population but intend to start to monitor and assess this as soon as our data collection is in place.

Attainment

1.5.4   We have no data/significant numbers to examine this attribute among our population but intend to start to monitor and assess this as soon as our data collection is in place.

Progression to employment or further study

1.5.5   We have no data/significant numbers to examine this attribute among our population but intend to start to monitor and assess this as soon as our data collection is in place.

1.6 Intersections of disadvantage

Overall, the available data is very patchy and inconsistent. Whilst there are some insignificant gaps in intersectional data, we have examined these, and we believe measures which we have included will address the main targeted gaps of disadvantage in characteristics and in doing so improve any previously apparent disadvantage within splits. In future years as numbers grow, this will help, as some data may no longer be suppressed and therefore allow analysis that is more meaningful. In the meanwhile, we will continue to develop the reporting capacity of the newly merged institution to ensure that our own internal data is able to analyse intersections.

1.7 Other groups who experience barriers in Higher Education

1.7.1. Children from Military families – Wiltshire has a significant military population, although this is located in the south of the county, it is within a reasonable travel distance to Swindon. Given that this is an underrepresented group in higher education, they should be a part of our wider access and outreach work.

1.7.2 Over the next 5 years, with the introduction of the Institute of Technology at the college, the suite of courses offered will be focussed on Engineering, Computing and other STEM subjects. The participation rate of females on our current courses in these areas, has improved from 6% to approximately 13% over the last 2 years however it is still low compared with a sector rate of approximately 17% (HESA 2018/19). Therefore, encouraging women into STEM courses is also an area we have identified as a focus for future access and outreach work.

1.7.3 In Swindon only 9% of children with Free School Meals Eligibility enter HE at 19 compared to 18% nationally (JSNA 2019). Although our own proportion of learners with eligibility for free school meals accessing higher education is behind the sector, there appears to be a drop of 6% over the last 5 years. The inclusion of the London cohort may have an impact on this reduction, and we acknowledge that improving our own internal data sets will enable us to disaggregate by campus location and monitor changes in access and participation for students with this characteristic in the future.

1.7.4 Most of the research surrounding carers and their access to higher education is focussed on young carers; however, we know that many of our mature students with caring responsibilities also have barriers to their access to and participation in further study. Given the profile of our student population, it is important that we are aware of the barriers faced by this group of students such as balancing caring responsibilities alongside their study commitments and a high prevalence of mental health issues. We need to ensure that we offer flexible academic and well-being support, make it clear what financial support is available and how to access it.

2. Strategic aims and objectives

2.1 Target groups

In response to the analysis of performance, consideration of the national key performance measures and gaps both nationally and here at New College Swindon, the target groups for this access and participation plan are:

- Access of BAME students
- Access of Disabled Students
- Access of students from specific underrepresented groups, specifically: care experienced, carers, those who have access to free school meals, Women studying STEM subjects and those from military families.
- Success (continuation) of BAME students specifically those from an ABMO background.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

The New College Swindon vision is:

'To be a great college and create better lives through learning'

To achieve this, we have set out seven strategic themes in our Strategic plan for the period 2021 to 2026:

1) Great teaching, learning, and progression
2) An innovative, relevant, and responsive curriculum
3) Great digital and physical learning environments
4) Meeting employers' and customers' needs
5) At the heart of our community
6) Financial sustainability enabling re-investment
7) A great place to work

Each of these strategic themes have a series of public facing statements which exemplify what we wish to achieve by 2026, internally there are specific targets to which we have committed as a college community. Whilst these all contribute to aspects of the plan in their own way, some particular items directly link the overall strategic intent of the entire college to the aims and objectives of this plan. For example, under 'Great teaching, learning and progression' there are commitments to develop high progression rates for students to Higher Education, provide a fully inclusive curriculum and provide outstanding support for students. Within item 5, 'At the heart of the community 'there is a clear intent to establish strong strategic partnerships with external stakeholders, work collaboratively with schools and other providers to ensure great progression for students, embed inclusivity and diversity into all that we do and champion social mobility – all are key to this access and participation plan.

Our strategic aims in this plan focus predominantly on the access and continuation phases of the student lifecycle, specifically:

Aim one - **To develop a college wide approach to access and participation to ensure that we consider all stages of the student lifecycle within the strategies and interventions planned**.

Key objectives to achieve this aim:

a) By September 2022, further develop student engagement via focus groups of under-represented students and inclusion of Access and participation in all student engagement channels to support evaluation of the Access and Participation Plan.
b) By July 2022 embed the APP into the meeting structure of the college

c) By November 2021 share with students and staff the financial investment identified in the APP, which is necessary to realise our ambitions by 2025-26.
d) During academic year 2021/22 further embed the course monitoring process into the Quality Cycle and ensure programme leaders have access to the evidence required to improve student outcomes
e) By academic year 2022/23 strengthen the CPD opportunities for staff engaged in the evaluation of strategies and impacts.
f) To ensure that necessary data is collected to enable robust internal analysis at each stage of the student lifecycle by 2022/23, building on the work already undertaken in academic year 2020/21 to create the framework for data collection and reporting.

Aim Two – Ensure that access to higher level study is available to all regardless of their background or protected characteristic.

Key objectives to achieve this aim:

a) To increase the proportion of BAME students by 2024/25,
b) To increase the proportion of students with a disability by 2026/27
c) To develop initial data collection and monitoring mechanisms to identify the numbers of care experienced, carers, those who are eligible for free school meals and women into STEM subjects recruited to college programmes by September 2022
d) To increase the numbers of students applying to and gaining a place at the college from the underrepresented groups identified in objective c) by 2026/27.
e) By 2022 recruit HE student ambassadors who represent the student characteristics of the current and future student community to support internal and external access and participation work
f) To review the curriculum offer each year to ensure that a range of routes into higher-level study are available (e.g. FT study, PT study and apprenticeships) that may better appeal to and support students who have barriers to their participation.

Aim Three – To support all students to achieve their full potential by ensuring that there is early identification of any gaps in continuation and attainment, ensuring these are fully understood, and effective actions are taken to eliminate them and improve overall performance over the life of this plan.

Key objectives to achieve this aim:

a) To ensure that the rate of continuation is improved for all students but particularly full time students from an ABMO background by 2025/26
b) Continually review curriculum and any extra-curricular approaches targeting attainment with student focus groups and academic staff to ensure success – ongoing but minimum of yearly
c) Monitor data for the emergence of any success barriers throughout the duration of this plan ensuring that as we work with a more diverse student group, we meet the needs of the students and enable strong continuation and attainment – ongoing until 2026/27

Aim Four – Support students into higher skilled jobs or further study by embedding employability and the development of graduate capital at all stages of their programme

a) To ensure we are clear that there are no gaps in progression into highly skilled employment for any disadvantaged groups by 2024/25.
b) To ensure that student progression to employment or further study is improved and exceeds sector benchmarks for all categories of students by 2027/28
c) By July 2022 recruit graduate ambassadors or identify appropriate case studies to act as role models for their peers who represent the student characteristics of the current and future student community.

The New College Swindon access and participation targets are:

a) To increase the proportion of BAME students from our aggregate of the last 5 years of 13.8% of full time students to at least 17% by 2024-25 and then we will reset the target based on updated local data and our new position ensuring that the proportion of BAME students meets or exceeds the local BAME profile (PTA_1)

b) To increase the proportion of BAME students from our 5-year aggregate of 9% of PT students to at least 15% by 2024-25 and then aim to maintain the proportion at least in line with the local Swindon BAME profile (PTA_2)

c) To increase full time disabled student's participation from 7% (Mar 21 baseline data – 5 yr. Agg.) to 12% in 2024-25 and 17% or greater in 2026-27 (PTA_3)

d) To increase part time disabled student's participation from 9% (Mar 21 baseline data – 5 yr. Agg.) to 14% in 2024-25 and 19% or greater in 2026-27 (PTA_4)

e) We will increase the application rates into higher education for students from the following underrepresented groups: Care experienced; Carers, Women into STEM subjects, Military families and those in receipt of free school meals. Our current target is:

   We will increase the application rates into higher education for students who have interacted with at least one outreach activity or marketing event at the college and are from one of the above under-represented groups. We do not have any baseline data for this and therefore our first target is to secure our own baseline data (2022-2024) for reporting in 2024-25 and then identify an ambitious increase above that baseline.

f) To reduce the gap in continuation rate between full time ABMO students and full time white students from a baseline figure of 8% to 3% in 2024-25 and less than 1% in 2026-27 (PTS_1)

g) To ensure there are no significant gaps in student progression to employment or further study irrespective of student background. We do not have any robust baseline data for this and therefore our first target is to secure a baseline dataset in 2022-23, identify any issues and set appropriate targets for 2023-24 and beyond.

Strategic measures

3.1 Whole provider strategic approach

Overview

3.1.1   Our strategic plan for 2021-2026 in terms of higher education is focussed on the development of an Institute of Technology (IoT) in partnership with the University of Gloucestershire and employers, improving the participation rate into higher-level study in Swindon and balancing, more evenly, the number of locally based students compared to London based students. The specific KPI identified around the IoT is to increase higher level STEM recruitment to approximately 1000 students by 2026. This number includes the advanced, higher and degree apprenticeships and some franchised provision but ultimately this should result in the numbers of students on our higher education courses based in Swindon that are counted in this plan, at least doubling over the life of this plan. Whilst this may present challenges, we have planned carefully the changes required for this greater volume and are committed to ensuring that we continue to be an inclusive learning community which supports widening participation and social mobility, whilst also meeting the higher-level skills needs of the local area. Our partnership with CECOs will develop further with numbers planned to peak in 2024/25, this work is important to us as it is allowing many students, from a variety of backgrounds an opportunity to study with us.

3.1.2   We want everyone to be treated with respect and feel comfortable at the college no matter where they study, who they are, how they identify and what characteristics they feel are important in their identity. We want everyone to have equal opportunities and be able to achieve the best possible outcome whilst they are here, because of the inclusive culture we adopt in both our learning and teaching practice and our support services. We see this plan as a key driver, in ensuring we continue to deliver these aims and improve our practice where necessary. Our Equalising Opportunities, Celebrating Diversity Policy, was updated in October 2020 and it outlines our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and explains how we monitor and report on equality data and details the responsibilities of individuals. This policy is supported by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Committee, whose remit is to consider all college wide EDI matters. This group will work closely with the Access and Participation Group whose aims and functions are described below.

3.1.3   There are a number of other policies and approaches that underpin our commitment to inclusivity and equality across all stages of the student lifecycle. This includes the Admissions, Information and Guidance Policy, Additional Support Policy, Customer Charter, Fitness to Study Policy, Academic Regulations, Mitigating Circumstances Policy, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, Accessibility Statement and the Careers Policy. In addition, key strategies including:

a)   Higher Education Strategy - The College developed a higher education strategy in 2021 aimed at delivering growth in provision and equality of experience and opportunity for all students. The strategy aligns to the access and participation plan, aims and objectives, and forms part of the key performance indicators for the section. It is also linked to the staff CPD, ensuring all staff are engaged in the process and work together to achieve our ambitions

b)   Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment – the college is committed to continual improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Through the self-assessment process, which analyses all student data, programme committee and student feedback. From this, specific themes are identified and form a focus for improvement. For example, we have recently been working on the quality of the feedback given to students; examining how this supports better attainment. Sharing of good practice takes place in the regular CPD slots for staff.

c)   Apprenticeships Strategy – this strategy is currently under review, but its focus will be on the development of further appropriate apprenticeship routes, to meet the needs of the local area and national priorities. It will cover apprenticeships from Level 2 to Degree level and closely links to the needs identified for the IoT.

3.1.3   To date, with our relatively small cohort size, we have managed to absorb our widening of participation and monitoring of student performance within our Student Services and Higher Education Departments. Given the growth in numbers projected and the higher level of monitoring and intervention required, it seems that it is now the time to introduce an Access and Participation group, to oversee the work we do in this area and ensure that the developments required are made and the objectives targeted are monitored in a timely fashion.

3.1.4   The Access and Participation Group would be responsible for the development and monitoring of College's Access and Participation work. Using a theory of change model, it will reflect on and evaluate our approach to widening participation and the closing of gaps between underrepresented groups and their peers across the student lifecycle, specifically it will:

- Ensure the whole college community is engaged in the commitments made and activities proposed in the Access and Participation Plan and build on the current ethos of inclusivity.
- Evaluate effectively the College's targets and milestones with respect to widening participation.
- Ensure robust systems are in place to collect and review data on all aspects of the student's lifecycle to include access, attainment, continuation and progression, identifying key strengths and areas for development.
- Understand best practice in the sector regarding access and participation and ensure that this is, where feasible, mirrored in our own practice.

3.1.5   The Vice Principal HE and Curriculum will Chair the access and participation group and it will meet at least three times a year. All key stakeholders would have representation, including opportunity for student involvement. This includes the Wellbeing, Additional learning support, Student Engagement, Student Support, Marketing and Schools Liaison, Careers team and academic teams, including CECOS colleagues. The group will produce an annual written report which will be reviewed and scrutinised by the Higher Education Academic Board of Studies, prior to being submitted to the Principalship Team, and then to Governors for approval before the annual submission to the OfS. Task and Finish sub-groups would be utilised, as needed, to inject resource into specific projects and/or bring about swifter progress. Examples of a sub-group would include a Data Set Development and Analysis Group or a Student Support Group. The group will commence in the academic year of 2021-22 and its effectiveness will be reviewed yearly, to ensure that it is properly monitoring the implementation of the access and participation plan.

3.1.6   We also work closely with the University of Gloucestershire, Oxford Brookes University and Bath Spa University to deliver some franchised provision and we have developing relationships with the University of Gloucestershire, through the IoT developments. We will ensure that we share our plan with these partners and work in conjunction with them, to achieve the aims in their own Access and Participation plans.

Data

3.1.7   It is clear from the self-assessment process that there is a need to improve our data capturing and reporting processes, in order to be able to evaluate and monitor the impact of the work that we do to support access and participation. Evidence suggests (Universities UK, 2019) that having a clear understanding of diversity characteristics and how your organisation compares to sector norms, helps foster better levels of inclusive behaviour. Our data capture is not robust enough as it stands and therefore it is important that we have a specific objective, to ensure that we are clear about our student's specific characteristics and how well they access and participate in HE at New College Swindon. We believe our current system has the capability to capture the information required. We must ensure that we align the data captured across the organisation and invest in the development of a suite of reports, to ensure that everybody in the organisation has easy access to information on how well we are doing with our access and participation agenda.

Activities to Support the Targets in the plan.

3.1.8   Below is a summary table of the proposed key interventions at each stage of the lifecycle and the methods of evaluation suggested. The Effective practice in access and participation information, found on the Office for Student's website and associated resources, have informed our choice of activities. The use of multiple interventions or what is termed a 'black box approach' to widening participation is not uncommon. Robinson and Salvestrini (2020) suggest there is some evidence that such interventions can be effective in raising aspirations and interest for higher education participation, particularly with specific underrepresented groups (low income, care experienced, disadvantaged) but more rigorous evaluation is needed of the individual components to identify which aspects result in actual enrolments. Our relative inexperience of targeted widening participation activities to date means that we are not sure exactly what will work well for us in our specific context. We have used the evidence available to identify a number of strategies to support each of our target groups and will use the evaluation phase to hone our approach when we have a better understanding of what is effective for our specific context.

Access Phase				
Target	**Inputs**	**Anticipated outputs**	**Measurement**	**Method of Evaluation**
PTA 1 and PTA 2 - Increase the proportion of BAME students	Marketing / outreach team to engage with local community groups and employers Utilise HE staff, students and Alumni with BAME characteristics as role models in outreach activities Promotion of financial support available Focus groups with BAME students	Increasing applications and enrolments from target group Increasing bespoke engagement to raise aspirations of learners within target group Reduction in gap in access between BAME and White students A better understanding of the distinction between groups	Evaluation of the impact of outreach activities with regards to target group Annual report of outreach activities to be created clearly identifying any needs for improvement Robust collection and analysis of data Qualitative information which will inform changes in engagement with target group	Analysis of data regarding: 1) The outputs from the outreach activity 2) Analysis of college application data compared to UCAS end of cycle data and OfS data dashboard 3) Intervention impact by the HE O&T Officer 4) Recruitment levels of BAME students to all types of higher level programmes OfS financial support evaluation toolkit (survey and focus groups) to determine the impact of bursary support.

	Development of degree and higher apprenticeships that allow alternative access routes Recruitment of HE outreach and transition officer	Development of alternative routes in higher level study compared the traditional undergraduate group More holistic approach to support in the recruitment and transition into study phases		

PTA 3 and PTA 4 - Increase the proportion of Disabled students	Marketing / outreach team to engage with local schools, community groups and employers
	
	Utilise disabled students and Alumni as role models in outreach activities
	
	Promotion of financial support available
	
	Focus groups with disabled students
	
	Improved website information and signposting of support available for disabled students, including the importance of early communication of needs
	
	Recruitment of HE outreach and transition officer
		Increasing applications and enrolments from target group
		
		Increasing bespoke engagement to raise aspirations of learners within target group
		
		Reduction in gap in access between disabled and non-disabled students
		
		Improved understanding of strategies that support students successfully
		
		Better understanding by students of the excellent support framework available to them at the college
		
		A more holistic approach to support in the recruitment and
			Evaluation of the impact of outreach activities with regards to target group
			
			Annual report of outreach activities to be created clearly identifying any needs for improvement
			
			Robust collection and analysis of data
			
			Qualitative information which will inform changes in engagement with target group
			
			Clear identification and communication of changes made to support disabled students and reduce barriers
				Analysis of data regarding:
				    1) the outputs from the outreach activity
				    2) analysis of college application data compared to UCAS end of cycle data and OfS data dashboard
				    3) Intervention impact by the HE O&T Officer
				    4) Recruitment levels of disabled students to all types of higher level programmes
				
				OfS financial support evaluation toolkit (survey and focus groups) to determine the impact of bursary support.

	Increased focus on inclusive practice to include a review of availability of assistive technology, inclusive learning and assessment practice and accessibility plans of buildings, including student input and analysis, Wellbeing services and college support functions wraparound	transition into study phases to bust barriers Further reduction in potential barriers Support for mental health issues readily available		

Increased application rates of Care experienced, Carers, Women into STEM subjects, Military families and those in receipt of free school meals	Marketing / outreach team to engage with local schools, local authorities, community groups and employers, specific focussed events e.g. STEM workshops, summer schools to raise attainment and aspiration
	
	Promotion of financial support available
	
	Focussed internal progression activities, including UCAS and student finance support
	
	Improved website information and signposting of support available
		Increasing applications and enrolments from target groups
		
		Increasing bespoke engagement to raise aspirations of learners within target group
		
		Increase in applications of target groups
		
		Improved understanding of strategies that support students successfully.
		
		Better understanding by students of the excellent
			Evaluation of the impact of outreach activities with regards to target group
			
			Annual report of outreach activities to be created clearly, identifying any needs for improvement
			
			Robust collection and analysis of data
			
			Qualitative information which will inform changes in engagement with target groups
				Development of base data available and subsequent analysis of:
				  1) the outputs from the outreach activity
				  2) analysis of college application data compared to UCAS end of cycle data and national datasets
				  3) Intervention impact by the HE O&T Officer
				  4) Recruitment levels of stated groups of underrepresented students to all types of higher level programmes
				  5) Internal progression data and access to UCAS support

	Recruitment of HE outreach and transition officer

Utilise HE staff, students and Alumni from the target groups as role models in outreach activities and as mentors on programme | support framework available to them at the college.

A more holistic approach to support in the recruitment and transition into study phases to bust barriers | | OfS financial support evaluation toolkit (survey and focus groups) to determine the impact of bursary support |
| **Success - Continuation** | | | | |
| PTS 1 Decrease the gap into continuation rate for ABMO students compared to white students | Further research into reasons for non-continuation of this cohort at NCS

Study skills support package

Personal tutor interventions

Actions from Progress reviews/Exam boards/PAR analysis – early intervention tools.

HE Outreach and Transitions Officer support

Staff CPD regarding cultural expectations | Clearer understanding of reasons for previous data patterns

Early support to access the skills and confidence needed to be successful on programmes

Early identification of issues and implementation of supportive interventions

Increased capacity to monitor and intervene

Increased understanding of cultural needs of students and proactive support to help students continue their studies | Research outcomes published and relevant actions, required to deliver change, are identified

Retention/Continuation rates are increased

Qualitative information, which will inform improved understanding and greater flexibility with students. | OfS financial support evaluation toolkit (survey and focus groups) to determine the impact of bursary support

Analysis of data in year to include:
  1) Attendance
  2) Retention
  3) Progress
  4) Collation of impactful interventions

Annual analysis of overall continuation rate.

Staff CPD survey |

	Review Curriculum, teaching and learning practices to consider inclusive practice strengths and weaknesses and take appropriate action Promotion of financial support available	Action plan of desirable changes identified and worked towards Reduce financial barriers that may lead to dropout		
Progression Phase				
All students	Employability skills, placements, work experience and careers advice Programmes designed for Employability and development of Graduate Capital CPD for staff Continue to obtain employer/ sector input on new programme developments Use of graduate ambassadors as Case studies, role models and mentors	Greater availability of support for students to develop their graduate skills and experience Increased awareness and focus for students on the development of the skills needed to be successful Focussed at all stages of the lifecycle on future progression plans Courses offered directly meet the needs of the local areas, enabling better opportunity for progression into roles offered Increased aspiration as students see others successes	Qualitative and quantitative analysis of services provided Student engagement with resources and student forum to identify strengths and developments required. Staff CPD survey on changes made to practice and impact. Feedback from employers on suitability of candidates	Analysis of data regarding: 1) Participation in activities 2) Progression rates and destinations 3) Employer feedback 4) Impact of staff CPD

3.1.9　In order to improve our outreach work beyond that which we do with our HE partners, we propose that we add a post of HE Outreach and Transitions Officer to our establishment, which will hold responsibility for working with our local community to raise participation in Higher Education, particularly for those specifically targeted in our plan. This post would also have a role to play in supporting the transition of students into courses. They would settle them and deal with any barriers that may arise during the transition phase (e.g. financial issues, claiming Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)). They would also signpost support services such as student support services, counsellors, library staff, study support etc. to help reduce anxiety or other concerns, which may result in students' not starting or very early drop out. The post would also work with the existing school's liaison team to help plan events to work with pre 16 students and community groups, to raise aspiration to access higher levels of study. There are various sources, which indicate that targeted pastoral support for students from underrepresented groups, supports their access to and continuation in higher education (NNECL 2021, Carers Trust 2015, UCAS 2019, and Service Children's Progression Alliance 2020, Stevenson et al 2020, Young carers 2014). The plan is that this post is in place by 1ˢᵗ August 2022 at the latest.

3.1.10　On reflection, during the writing of this plan, we have identified that there are many sources of support and help in place for students, that we do not signpost well enough on our website, to reassure students who may have barriers to entry. For example, we do not have information about being a young carer, care experienced or how we can support with mental health needs. Students from underrepresented groups may be unsure about the costs and benefits of going on to study at a higher level, so a greater quality of information available may provide sufficient reassurance to encourage someone to apply or seek further information. Robinson and Salvestrini (2020) however do make the point that the information and guidance needs to be of high quality, targeted to appropriate groups and where possible personalised. We will resolve the quality of written information available as we build our new permanent website for the merged institution, in the academic year of 21/22; the HE Outreach and Transitions Officer would also contribute to the quality of the IAG given to the groups identified in the plan and be able to tailor the advice to individual needs.

3.1.11　We will also offer some bursaries from academic year 2022/23 aimed particularly at students with low household incomes and from the targeted underrepresented groups. Research suggests that financial support may affect student decisions to access and continue with HE, with some groups of students less willing to take on debt to support their studies; for example, those from lower socio-economic groups, those on lower incomes, those planning to live at home and ethnic minorities (Pollard et al 2019). For this reason, our financial support packages focus upon alleviating hardship and supporting care experienced, carers, disabled students and those with a previous history of having access to free school meals, to be able to improve or maintain their attendance, get the support that they need, remove stress caused by financial uncertainty and thus support them to continue successfully with their higher education course.

Type	Eligibility	Level of Financial support	Purpose
HE Diagnostic Support Fund	Studying an undergraduate programme (not franchised provision or an apprenticeship) Completed Dyslexia Adult Screening Test (DAST) with HE Study Support Officer (HESSO) or appropriate evidence of need from a relevant professional.	£350 grant towards the cost of the diagnostic test required for DSA Assessment	To help students to access HE and appropriate support mechanisms for study
HE Bursary – Low income	Students who are from households earning less than £25000. Studying an undergraduate programme (not franchised provision or an apprenticeship) Available for each year of study Initial grant instalment paid after the first payment of student fees and subsequently on confirmation of satisfactory attendance for terms 2 and 3. Students must be in receipt of a full maintenance loan from the Student Loan Company.	£750 per year of programme or pro rata on a part time programme Paid in 3 termly instalments.	To support students from low-income backgrounds with costs directly related to their studies – this group is likely to be inclusive of other target groups such as those from Disabled, BAME and those on FSM
HE Bursary – Care Experienced	All students disclosed as having Experience of care. Local Authority notification of status will be required. Studying an undergraduate programme (not franchised provision or an apprenticeship) Bursary to all eligible care leavers regardless of their year of study. Bursary not available in conjunction with low-income household's bursary.	£1000 per year of programme or pro rata on a part time programme	To support and encourage students from care experienced backgrounds with access to studies, and associated costs to support them during their studies.

| HE Bursary - Carers | All students in receipt of carer's allowance, evidence required.

Studying an undergraduate programme (not franchised provision or an apprenticeship).

Bursary to all eligible carers regardless of their year of study.

Bursary not available in conjunction with low-income household's bursary | £1000 per year of programme or pro rata on a part time programme | To support students who are carers with associated/additional costs, to support them with access to study and attendance. |
|---|---|---|---|
| HE Hardship Fund | All students who can evidence an acute episode of hardship which could affect their ability to continue with their studies.

Available to all eligible applicants until funds are exhausted. | Case by case determination but not likely to exceed £250. | To alleviate financial crisis, reduce impact on their studies, and improve attendance and continuation. |

Details of these support packages will be on our website and included to all students as part of the 'Offer pack' that is sent out alongside other important information, at the point when the college confirms an offer of a place to study here.

3.1.12 The curriculum has been carefully planned, we have embedded some CPD courses, access courses and year 0 courses. These are designed to raise confidence, allowing students to access the subject areas, understand the demands of those areas and develop the necessary skills to bring success on the higher level programmes. This is particularly important in supporting those who perhaps do not have the traditional entry qualifications to access the provision, or those who are re-skilling and need a base level of knowledge and skills before proceeding along a new career path. Additionally, the focus in the IoT curriculum on higher and degree apprenticeships will also enable those who wish to upskill the opportunity to do so, without financial strain or the need to take a loan, which can be a psychological barrier for some people. The pandemic has also accelerated our ability to offer online and blended learning opportunities, which we have observed can support better participation by some groups or support gaps in their ability to attend and so we will continue to develop our capacity to deliver courses by these methods.

A focus is required within the college to achieve better progression from some of our level 3 full time and apprenticeship provision into higher education generally, but specifically into some of our programmes. For example, we have a significant volume of Level 3 Engineering Apprentices and Level 3 full time students but very few progress to HE, even fewer progress internally.

3.1.13   The College will develop specific outreach activities to support the underrepresented groups identified in the plan. We will engage with local organisations who support military families and work with them to overcome some of the barriers faced by this group and raise aspiration to participate in higher education, this route to engagement is suggested as effective by the Service Children's Progression Alliance (2020). For example, SSAFA Wiltshire, the local borough and county councils, The British Legion, as well as schools in the area where we know there is a high proportion of children from military families attending, and work with all schools to identify children who fall into this category. Anthony and Edgar (2020) report that outreach participants from a disadvantaged background who attend an on campus outreach are more likely to attend HE, so this intervention should benefit all our target groups. Over the last few years, we have offered a 'Women in Engineering' Day to local school children, to raise interest and awareness of the types of roles available and the skills and attributes required to be successful in these careers. We will build on this work but also extend it to see if we can work with local employers and the local community, to encourage women to retrain or upskill into such roles. Research by Burgess et al (2018) suggests that role models can be successfully used to raise aspiration to study at a higher level. Robinson and Salvestrini (2020) conclude, in their review of the literature, that there is good evidence that the use of role models and mentors can successfully raise aspiration and confidence in underrepresented groups and encourage them to apply, however there is a lack of evidence in the UK that this leads to actual enrolments. We feel the use of role models, combined with the HE Outreach and Transitions Officer should make an effective intervention but we will monitor the effectiveness closely, as we progress through the plan. Lawson et al (2019) identified that STEM summer schools can improve confidence to progress to higher education in these areas. Lei et al (2018) suggest that summer schools can also support students with a disability to transition from school to HE, by reducing anxieties around making the next step but recognise that further study is needed to ensure that this results in a greater volume of applications when compared to not having the intervention.

3.1.14   Carers face very specific issues including lack of sleep, pressure to stay at home thus experiencing interruptions in their study, financial pressures due to limitations in household income and increased anxiety. We do not currently have any specific support for carers in HE, however we do have a support structure for our FE students which could be extended. This involves access to special activities and advice on local support available to support them through their studies. Some relatively simple changes to existing processes can be implemented to support continuation and attainment; for example, tailoring advice about mitigating circumstances, recorded lectures accessible online and more detail on our website about the support available and how to access it (Carers Trust 2015). A student mentor can be assigned and this group would be a particular focus of the new post of HE Outreach and Transitions Officer, as introduced in 3.1.8, particularly in the transition phase, helping them to break down any barriers that emerge. Timely access to a consistent, named, knowledgeable point of contact and holistic support services can support carers with access to, and to be successful on their courses (Young Carers 2014). There will also be the opportunity for financial support as detailed above.

3.1.15   We will continue to contribute to collaborative outreach, predominantly through our role as associate partner of Study Higher as part of the Uni Connect programme. The College is committed to supporting the aims and related targets of Study Higher in the Swindon area through involvement in the Swindon Outreach Group. This group is bringing together key stakeholders from the region, to gain understanding of the landscape of educational

disadvantage, and high-level skills needs, with particular focus on students who share multiple characteristics shown to result in gaps in progression into higher education.

The Swindon Outreach Group will work together to establish activities and initiatives to support access, progression and success, providing careers advice and outreach activities tailored to providers need. The college is a member of a subgroup, recently formed, to develop collaborative work in supporting care experienced/LAC within the region. We will continue to work in partnership to support these aims and supplement with our own specific initiatives as developed by the Access and Participation group.

3.1.16   During the self-assessment phase, we have identified that disability, particularly mental health was being under reported by our students. We are aware that students with mental health conditions are at greater risk of not continuing or being as successful, and we are often not recognising their needs until there is a crisis point. We need to encourage disclosure and openness around mental health needs so that we can support them through mental health challenges, helping them to thrive and succeed. We will adopt the Step Change framework to review our practices by the end of 2022 and ensure that we have embedded good mental health practices across all college activities. We have already invested in training for academic staff in recognising and supporting mental health needs and in a support platform for students which enables 24/7 access to support. The OfS Insight - Beyond the Bare Minimum (Oct 2019) advises that providers need to do more to understand inclusive practice and ensure that there is a whole institution approach to it. The approach taken should be informed by student feedback and embedded clearly into both policy and practice, therefore a key input with this target group is to review our practice, supported by our students and act on the outcomes of the review. The value of the other strategies chosen for this group such as role models, outreach activities, financial support, IAG has already been demonstrated in previous sections.

3.1.17   Although it is not statistically significant the gap in continuation between white students and students from Asian, Black, Mixed or Other backgrounds is greater than that of the sector. We should be doing better, as the quality of the teaching and learning is good, and the smaller average group size should allow for additional focus and support for each individual with the wrap around support services supplementing this in times of need. Stevenson (2012) and Smith (2016) both report that increased support for BAME students throughout the student cycle is needed to improve retention and continuation on courses. Stevenson (2012) also recommends that preparedness for study is also a factor that contributes to increased continuation and attainment hence our decision to include a study skills support package in our planned interventions. Smith (2016) states that a comprehensive approach is required to increase retention of BAME students so we will have closer monitoring of student progress through increased personal tutor interaction, with early intervention as needed for individuals and groups; we will do this through our Predicted Achievement Rate (PAR), Progress Reviews and Exam board processes effective from September 2021. We feel that the additional staff resource (HE Outreach and Transition Officer) who will support students' transition into the HE environment, will also strengthen continuation. What is not apparent in the data captured is whether there is significant drop out between enrolment and the census. This is when those who are most vulnerable may not continue as they do not have access to relevant resources to overcome barriers that arise, and those barriers can become too much causing them to choose not to continue, however they may not show at all in the data. To increase both the access to HE and continuation within HE of BAME individuals we need to be able to foster a sense of

belonging (NUS 2016). To do this effectively we need to build good relationships with all students, set clear expectations, embed cultural awareness into our teaching, ensure our teaching and learning practice is always inclusive and not taught through a 'white lens' (Smith 2016), hence the inclusion of strategies such as Staff CPD and a review of curriculum are included in our plans.

3.1.18   Confidence and cultural capital are important factors in the achievement of highly skilled employment. The local area has high employment and low aspiration thus although many of our students are able to find employment once completing their studies, they are not progressing into higher skilled jobs as far as we can identify in the data available to us and our tacit knowledge of our student progression. We need to focus on improving their confidence and belief that they have the skills, knowledge and behaviours that will enable them to achieve in highly skilled employment. We have already committed to increase our careers service capacity to help with advice and support for those who need it. When reviewing and designing programmes, we emphasise the importance of working with local businesses on 'live briefs', encouraging work experience and raising the number of other opportunities to engage directly with business. When more carefully planned and managed this will support students to feel more confident and allow them to see how they fit into the industry they are aspiring to be part of. The increased number of employer contacts and their involvement in programmes resulting from the IoT project will also help raise aspiration and awareness of opportunities to progress.

3.1.19   Research supports the view that graduate capital and graduate employability are linked (Tomlinson 2017). Development of the five graduate capital pillars; social, psychological, human, identity and cultural, is key to enabling students, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, to develop the skills and attributes required to access employment successfully and realise their full potential. We know that within our cohort overall, both confidence and aspiration are low; however there is not one solution to this problem which will suit all. We have a mixture of full time students who may have little experience of employment and part time students and apprentices who are working, have greater awareness of their respective industries and are seeking development opportunities because of their studies. A more targeted approach is required with the full time students to facilitate development of their graduate capital, through providing opportunities to engage in high quality work placements. A student resource will be developed in the form of a blended learning module, This will raise awareness of the skills and attributes required to be successful and will allow students to reflect personally on their current strengths and where areas for development exist. It will also identify potential strategies and actions to help develop graduates to be better prepared for employment. Although the majority of our part-time students are already in their chosen field of work, the same blended learning tool could be used to help them evaluate their current performance and identify gaps to work on, which can help them progress in their industry. One-to-one coaching, mentoring or practical workshops and careers advice can then support the engagement with the module.

3.1.20   We will actively monitor the progression into higher skilled employment or further study for all our students by collating this information at programme level in the course annual self-assessment. We believe that as a combined institution our data will become more robust and give us more detail on whether there are any gaps in progression. We will aim to increase the proportion of all students that progress into higher skilled employment or further study. We will consult with representative student groups on the barriers they face with their progression aims and how we can support them to overcome any barriers.

3.2 Student consultation

3.2.1   All existing students (those studying in Academic year 2020/21) were sent the Access and Participation plan via email and asked to comment on it via an electronic survey response mechanism. This consultation yielded a response rate of almost 5%. For the access phase, the consultation identified that there are areas of information that we need to make clearer and more accessible to our students during our advice and guidance and via our website. These comments related to support with studies, but also items on a practical level, such as early release of timetables to help with other responsibilities, for example caring and childcare. Whilst we had already identified that not all our information was easily navigable, this gave us further insight into the items that are important to students when ensuring that their needs are met in the access phase. The introduction of a HE Outreach and Transition Officer was well supported, with 78.57% of respondents agreeing that it would have helped them. The consultation has revealed that this post needs a skill set that enables them to recognise and deal with financial and mental health support needs and has capacity to invest some 1 to 1 time with those that need it. Further 1 to 1 time with academic staff was also mentioned; however, this can be incorporated into the programme hours in most cases.

For the progression phase, it was clear from the consultation that students had little awareness of the current careers service on offer. They also added some other useful suggestions regarding making students aware of the careers service during induction and distributing a regular jobs bulletin. There was clear support for the blended learning module to aid the development of graduate capital, with 50% agreeing it would benefit them. However, some students expressed a preference that this be available in a face-to-face format rather than just blended learning (31%). Because of this feedback, we have recognised the need for more face-to-face input and will consider how this can be accommodated.

3.2.2   The College has a robust and well-developed student engagement programme that offers the opportunity to contribute to development of the HE experience including access and participation matters. Each group has a Student Representative (REP). They are invited to programme committee meetings where they can contribute to discussions about the teaching, learning and assessment, and the organisation of the course. Individual module feedback summaries are also discussed at the programme committee to identify good practice and areas for further development. The REPs also lead the twice-yearly student experience forums (SEF). During the SEF process, students will have the opportunity to discuss topics related to the access and participation of our students. Further feedback opportunities exist via the internal college surveys and the NSS. The induction survey will specifically explore items in relation to accessing study at the college to allow us to remedy items raised quickly before the start of the next recruitment cycle.

There is close analysis of the feedback received and we strive to close the feedback loop by ensuring that curriculum managers' report back to student groups on items raised to show what we have done, propose to do or why we are not able to do something. We plan to build on this engagement work further and, alongside other student feedback channels, intend to facilitate regular 'Access and Participation focus groups' during the 2022/23 academic year, with students from our target groups to monitor, evaluate and, where needed, refine our activities across the entire student lifecycle. Involving our own students in the development of the student experience has been central to our approach for a number of years and we intend to continue to engage our students fully in the development, implementation and evaluation of future Access

and Participation Plan activity. We would like to develop a team of HE student ambassadors to work with us to evaluate and develop our internal and external liaison activities. The Access and Participation Group will include at least one student representative. This person will represent the student body bringing the views of the students' groups and will have the opportunity to help develop the plan and understand the progress towards the key aims and objectives within it. In order to ensure that student representatives and ambassadors are able to engage and make meaningful contributions, they will participate in equality, diversity and inclusion training prior to commencement of their participation in feedback cycles. If required training will also extend to data interpretation.

3.3.1 Evaluation strategy

We have used the OfS self-evaluation toolkit to inform our evaluation strategy. This self-assessment tool has helped us to reflect on proposed areas of practice and to highlight what practices still require further development at our organisation. Currently our assessment classifies as 'emerging' across all aspects of evaluation. We have not previously held an access and participation plan, so our evaluation strategy is very much still emerging and yet to be fully tested. We are committed to the development of robust evaluation methods, our proposed evaluation is predominantly 'narrative based', which we feel is appropriate and proportionate to our volume of HE provision. This will evolve and develop through the course of the plan by:

a) Increasing the involvement of all staff engaged in access and participation activities to ensure there is shared understanding of our objectives, programme design and the cycle of evaluation required – this will commence in academic year 2021/22 to ensure that activities funded by the plan can be evaluated effectively from the start of the plan in 2022/23.

b) Developing the knowledge and understanding of evaluation through staff CPD sessions during academic year 2021/22

c) Investing in additional HE administrative capacity to support the HE Manager to lead on evaluation activities, fund further development of the management information systems and analysis so that data are fit for purpose and agile in responding to changing needs should they occur and are easily accessible, and for funding staff CPD requirements.

d) Reflect on and review strategic measures and activities using the cycle of evaluation, including quantitative and qualitative analysis (see diagram below) – ongoing through the life of the plan. The diagram below outlines the cyclical nature of our evaluation strategy.
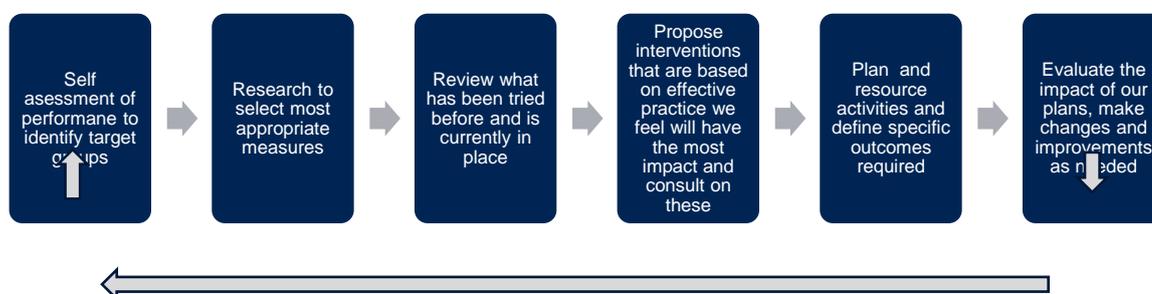
3.3.2 Strategic context

The Access and Participation Plan group will provide a specific forum to evaluate the activities selected for the college's work in this area, however there are other channels to provide support

and challenge for example the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Support Committee which monitors and reports on such matters more widely as a college. There is an established meetings structure and access and participation will be a standing item in all meetings. The Access and Participation Group will report directly into HE Academic Board of Studies, Principalship and the Governing Body structures at set points in the year, to ensure that there is transparency around the progress being made with the plan. Within the Governing Body we are seeking to strengthen our expertise in higher education, and this will help ensure wider perspective and challenge are applied to the evaluation of the plan. The evaluation of the plan requires a whole college approach and expertise from specialists within the college will be required, for example, from the data, Marketing and Student Liaison, Admissions, Academic departments (staff and students), Additional Learning Support teams. Oxford Brookes University propose to include partnership colleges, including New College Swindon, in developing an evaluation tool, and we will collaborate on this, and work with the University of Gloucestershire to share good practice.

3.3.3   Programme design

To plan our access and participation plan interventions/measures we will use an evidence-based approach. Our programme design will be informed by the most recent best practice in the sector, being mindful of our context at all times. We acknowledge that we may need different strategies for the students located in the Swindon area compared to the London based students and will work closely with our partner CECOS to identify the most appropriate activities.

For each of the activities outlined in section 3.1.8, an initiative proposal form will be completed before activity commences. This will include details on the objectives to be achieved as well as targets for the number of each type of activity, and when they will occur. It will also capture the evidence and research used to inform the planned activity and the precise evaluation activities that will be deployed. These will be approved at the Access and Participation group meetings and be used by the group to determine the success of the initiative once it is complete. In essence, through this process, each initiative will have a clear theory of change developed and through analysis and evaluation of the results; we will draw conclusions about the specific initiative's success and contribution towards the main targets outlined in this plan.

3.3.4   Evaluation design and implementation

No one activity or intervention will result in the achievement of the overall target(s) in isolation. In some cases, the change in the data may not be seen for some time, so although for each targeted objective there are clear data outcomes and milestones that have been identified, and these will be evaluated against the data sets at the required milestones, to check achievement of or work towards the target, other evaluation approaches are also needed. It is proposed that Developmental Evaluation is used. Patton (2010) would suggest this as an appropriate method as the area that is being evaluated (in this case the impact of access and participation initiatives and activities) is complex and is characterised by multiple interacting and interdependent elements in which there is no overall control. Further strengths of this method are that it allows innovation and adaptation as the complex environment changes, it gives rapid, immediate feedback that can be used for further learning, and it is open to creative and agile thinking, yet

is able to accommodate evidence-based perspectives (Patton, 2006). We feel this approach is both proportionate to our context and experience of access and participation to date.

Each proposed 'initiative' will have an associated theory of change model plotted prior to its implementation which is approved by the Access and Participation Group, specific evaluation points will also be agreed. Once the 'initiative' reaches an evaluation point, the group will look at all the available data and information and consider whether the initiative is developing in the way that was desired and proposed and whether any changes to the strategy are required. These will be recorded, and the next iteration will be undertaken until the next review point and so on, until the initiative is closed and/or the initial target is met. At such time the group will periodically monitor and review to ensure the target is maintained.

The OfS financial support evaluation toolkit (survey and focus groups) will be used to determine the impact of bursary and other items of financial support.

3.3.5 Learning to shape improvements

The evaluation approach chosen naturally allows us to learn from the activities and initiatives that we are proposing to offer. Our current planned approach is new and developing. It will enable us to record and track changes to the proposals and the subsequent impacts as we progress through our plan, ensuring a level of flexibility and the ability to learn from our successes and failures, thus building our experience and confidence in delivering the targets we have committed to in the plan. We have targeted some money to support the research and evaluation activity, this is higher in the first 2 years to enable us to build the systems and capacity to implement an effective system. These monies will focus on further developing the management information departments' capacity to deliver the data required, HE administrative support, staff training and staff time for research. Our existing research ethics processes will be used to support approval of access and participation evaluations and risk assessments will be used.

3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

The progress against the plan will be an agenda item on every Access and Participation Group agenda. After each meeting, the VP HE and Curriculum will update the Principalship team and the Governing body via the Curriculum and Quality sub group in the HE update which forms part of every meeting, the minutes of these meetings are approved by the full Governing body at the next available meeting. A full written report on the progress made in each academic year will be produced alongside the annual HE report to Governors. This report will summarise the iterations made to the activities planned and demonstrate the success of and learning made against each activity, along with details of the monetary investment and its impact. Should the findings from our evaluation activities, and tracking of our targets, show that progress against the delivery of this Plan is worsening or flat lining against milestones, the Access and Participation Group will instigate a review which will draw on our evidence and evaluation work. The review would result in an evidence based action plan. The action taken would be proportionate to the poor progress identified.

Provision of information to students

4.1.1. The College's Access and Participation Plan will be placed on the College website and made available on the College intranet. The College will ensure that all applicants have access to the relevant information they need to make informed decisions about applying to become a student at New College Swindon.

4.1.2. The College is committed to supporting students to be aware of, and ensuring they receive, the financial support they are entitled to for the duration of their studies. This relies on students agreeing to share their financial information with us. The detail of the financial support for students is outlined in 3.1.11. Details of these support packages will be on our website, social media, communicated at interview and included to all students as part of the 'Offer pack' that is sent out alongside other important information at the point when the college confirms an offer of a place to study here.

4.1.3. Information for prospective students is available from a range of sources: the College prospectus, websites and on our UCAS profiles. Information on fees and finance is also accessible at college open days and evenings and during interviews where these are held. Trained staff are available to answer questions about financial support, our HE office and academic staff are also able to sign post students to other sources of help.

4.1.4. We commit to ensure that we provide timely and accurate information to UCAS and the Student Loans Company so that they can populate their course databases in good time to inform applicants.

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5. Appendix

The OfS will append the following items from the fees and targets and investment documents when an Access and Participation Plan is published:

1. Targets (tables 2a, 2b and 2c in the targets and investment plan)

2. Investment summary (tables 4a and 4b in the targets and investment plan)

3. Fee summary (table 4a and 4b in the fee information document)

21 Dec 2021 -Approval of access and participation plan and change to fee limit
The higher statutory fee limit will apply to qualifying courses for any academic year commencing on or after 1 August 2022.
This change in fee limit will be recorded in the OfS's Register of English higher education providers which you can find at https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/theregister/the-ofs-register/.