

University of Cambridge – Summary of 2020-21 to 2024-25 access and participation plan

What is an access and participation plan?

Access and participation plans set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. You can see the full access and participation plan for the University of Cambridge at <https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/access-and-participation-plans>

Key points

The main aim of our access and participation plan is to set out how we plan to achieve an intake that is reflective of UK society and provide equality of educational opportunity for all those who study at Cambridge.

We know that students from areas of low progression into higher education (POLAR) or areas of high deprivation (IMD) are currently underrepresented in our student cohort. Whilst we have been making progress on this, we know we need to continue delivering impactful outreach work and a fair admissions process in order to achieve our aims.

Although Cambridge has strong rates of success overall, we have found there is an “awarding gap”, which means that some groups of students are less likely than others to receive a 2:1 or 1st class degree. We use the term 'awarding gap' rather than 'attainment gap' to recognise that the issue is an institutional one, rather than to do with student capability.

Fees we charge

At the University of Cambridge, the tuition fee charged is currently:

- £9,250 for all undergraduate courses (for Home fee status students starting their first undergraduate degree).

Financial help available

We offer an extensive programme of financial support to help our students meet their living costs while at Cambridge, regardless of background. The support includes:

- **Cambridge Bursary Scheme** - Bursaries of up to £3,500 per year given to students with a household income of up to £62,215. You're automatically considered for a Cambridge Bursary if you're financially assessed by your student finance authority, so you don't need to apply separately.
 - Additional enhanced awards of up to £2,100 for students who live independently from their parents/carers.
 - Education Premium – an additional £1,000 per year for students who have been eligible for free school meals (or equivalent).
- **Department, Faculty and College awards** – in recognition of academic achievement.
- **College grants** – including book and equipment grants, travel grants, hardship grants and loans and supplementary bursaries for living costs.

Information for students

Prospective students can find out about the University through our online prospectus and undergraduate study website. There are specific support pages for disabled students, care leavers, estranged students, refugees, young carers, student parents and mature students.

Prospective students can also attend one of our many [events](#) which are held online and in-person. These include open access events as well as specific widening participation programmes.

Current students can find out about initiatives to support their wellbeing on our [Wellbeing website](#). The University is also developing resources for students from specific underrepresented groups, such as the [Black Advisory Hub](#), which has been set up to help build and support a diverse and inclusive community of students and staff.

What we are aiming to achieve from our access and participation plan

Our overall aim is to ensure that our student body is representative of society. We want all of our students to be able to access the same opportunities and quality of experience. Our students, regardless of background, should expect the same outcomes.

We have identified the following areas on which to focus our outreach work:

- **State Schools**
 - We are committed to admitting a higher proportion of our undergraduate students from UK state-sector schools and colleges, to a minimum of 69.1% by 2024/25 (actual of 71.8% for 2021 entry).
- **Areas with Low Participation in Higher Education (POLAR)**
 - POLAR4 is a measure of how likely young people are to participate in higher education across the UK. We are committed to admitting a higher proportion of students from the most under-represented areas in terms of progression to higher education, to a minimum of 7% from the lowest quintile and 16.6% from the lowest two quintiles by 2024/25 (actual of 5.3% and 15.4% respectively for 2021 entry).
- **Socioeconomic Status using Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)**
 - IMD is a measure of relative levels of deprivation. We are committed to admitting a higher proportion of students from the most deprived areas, to a minimum of 21.2% from the lowest two quintiles by 2024/25 (actual of 20.9% for 2021 entry).

There are many other target groups that we work with across our access programmes, including those in care or who are care experienced, and those who are eligible for Free School Meals.

Furthermore, we are committed to eliminating the **awarding gap**, which involves tackling attainment levels for certain groups of students. Despite continuation rates being very high at Cambridge (i.e. very few students 'drop out') we are also working to ensure all groups continue at the same rate. We have identified areas with the most progress required and are committed to:

- Eliminating the unexplained gap in degree outcomes between White and Black students by 2024-25.
- Eliminating the gap in degree outcomes between disabled and non-disabled students by 2024-25, with specific focus on students with mental health disabilities.
- Eliminating the gap in continuation rates between disabled and non-disabled students by 2024-25, with specific focus on students with mental health disabilities.

What we are doing to achieve our aims

On admissions, there are two key ways that we achieve our aims:

1. Engaging in impactful outreach work to maximise the pool of prospective students from all backgrounds

For example, our outreach work includes our [College Area Links](#) programme and the [University's HE+ programme](#) which develops strategic partnerships with schools across the UK. We also support underrepresented groups directly through schemes such as the [Sutton Trust Summer Schools for Year 12s](#).

We are also doing more to support students with attainment. We work with younger students through collaborative school programmes such as Insight in our local areas of Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and West Norfolk. Programmes such as STEM SMART work with Year 12s and 13s to develop a strong foundation of academic skills to prepare them for university-level teaching.

We know parents and supporters have a great impact on young people's progress in education which is why we have launched Parent Power Fenland. Parents will develop their skills in community organising and be empowered to make changes to support their children's future.

2. Delivering a fair and transparent admissions process which measures both ability and potential for academic success

Our admissions process makes extensive use of contextual data, and this continues to evolve as new information is made available to us (e.g. provision of information on Free School Meal recipients from 2022 onwards). This allows us to identify students who may have greater potential than their current attainment suggests.

Furthermore our fully funded Foundation Year programme starts in 2022 and will welcome around 50 students from under-represented backgrounds.

To improve student success outcomes and eliminate awarding gaps, we are looking to:

1. Eliminate awarding gaps and ensure teaching and learning focuses on inclusive practices

The Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL) leads on inclusive teaching, learning and assessment at the University. A suite of stand-alone resources have been developed to support staff in investigating, understanding and addressing awarding gaps; a consultation team provides focussed support for course teams. CCTL supports student-led research into perceptions of the causes of inequities; this research informs institutional efforts to eliminate awarding gaps and improve student success outcomes.

2. Adopt a University-wide Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

This aims to promote a greater understanding of the impact of poor mental health on academic performance. We will also check that existing support is high quality and available to all students.

How students can get involved

There are a range of student outreach initiatives which support our access work, such as the Cambridge SU Shadowing Scheme.

We work closely with the Student Union's Access, Education and Participation Officers and other student representatives, who attend committees where access and participation is discussed.

In 2022/23 we will be working closely with the Students' Union to explore the best ways to engage students to ensure a diverse range of student voices can feed into the University's decision-making processes around access and participation.

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved

Our access programmes are based on evidence of 'what works'. We first map out how our activities will lead to improved outcomes. We then collect data and feedback which helps us evaluate our activities and the impact on participants. We track participant outcomes over time and compare our programme outcomes using comparison groups.

We have drawn on sector research, as well as institutional research outlined above, to identify priorities and we encourage formative evaluation to be designed into initiatives from the start. We

share good practice through events, newsletters and briefings and draw on sector and institutional research and evaluation to develop services and improve processes.

Contact details for further information

To contact the widening participation team, you can email access@cao.cam.ac.uk