

University of Cumbria

Summary of 2024-25 to 2027-28 access and participation plan

What is an access and participation plan?

An access and participation plan sets out provisions that will be meaningful and effective in promoting equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups, as determined by the Office for Students. You can see the full access and participation plan for the University of Cumbria at www.cumbria.ac.uk/about/publications.

Key points

The University of Cumbria was established to widen participation in Cumbria and address high-level skills demands across our public services and industries. We have higher than national average proportions of students who are 21 and over, from areas with low participation in higher education, with disclosed disabilities and experiencing multiple causes of disadvantage.

Our programmes are designed to create opportunities for students to engage in lifelong learning through flexible routes into university. 54% of our students study on one of our campuses and our off-campus provision is either in a workplace setting or via distance learning.

We have identified the most significant indications of challenge to our prospective and current students through our assessment of performance. Our primary data sources are the [OfS access and participation dashboard](#), UCAS data and our staff and student consultation feedback.

Our targets focus on the following groups of students: underrepresented males, Black students, with a wider lens on ethnic minority students' success, mature students (aged 21 and over), care-leavers and students with a disclosed mental health condition within this plan.

See pages 1-8 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Fees we charge

Our entrant course fees for undergraduate UK-based students are subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations (£9790 for a Full Time student in 2026/27) and we will increase fees each year in line with inflation as permitted by the UK Government. Information on the current fees payable for other types of courses and for international students can be found on our [student finance pages](#).

Financial help available

The Cumbria Bursary is non-repayable financial support of £1,000 each year of study for full-time students and £500 for part time students per year of study. There are a limited number of awards due to funding, so not every eligible student will receive a bursary. Students do not complete an application but must consent to share their financial information with their Higher Education Institution and meet our eligibility criteria to be considered.

Eligibility criteria: Students must be entering their 1st year 'home' undergraduate qualifying course and be assessed by their funding provider as having a household income of £25,000 or less.

If more students meet the criteria than there are awards available, the bursary is allocated to students with the highest scores using a numerical point scoring process which impartially ranks eligible students.

Prioritisation criteria: the student's household income, the student has been deemed by the Student Loans Company to be a Care Leaver or estranged from their family, the student has declared a disability on their UCAS form, the student is from an area where not many people go into Higher Education. The information assessed by the Student Loans Company and collected through the University online registration process about students is used to create the scores.

Updates and information relating to our scholarships and bursaries can be found on our [student finance pages](#). See pages 37-38 of the access and participation plan for more information.

The Student Opportunity Fund was introduced in 2026 in consultation with the Access and Participation Student Advisory Panel. The Fund's purpose is to support students with low household income to access development opportunities both academic and extra-curricular to support their employability through professional and/or personal development, through grants of up to £500.

Eligibility criteria: Students must be a UK undergraduate and assessed by their funding provider as having a household income of £25,000 or less. Students can be in receipt of the Cumbria Bursary and be eligible for this fund. The fund is limited, so allocation will be prioritised using criteria if there are more applications than award available.

Prioritisation criteria: the student has been deemed by the Student Loans Company to be a Care Leaver or estranged from their family, the student has declared a disability on their UCAS form, the student has declared Black heritage.

Information for students

The University provides information for all prospective and current students on fees and financial support available through formal offer letters and our website and information. Advice and guidance are also given by our Outreach and Student Money Advice teams. The Student Enquiry Point is also a point of contact to the Money Advice team for any potential queries regarding fees and finance.

Information provided includes:

- The annual tuition fee for each programme alongside details of the basis of any inflationary increases that may be applied during the programme.
- Students are asked to read the Student Financial Regulations on our website prior to enrolment. They are updated annually and include information on how and when the University collects fees and how the University will respond if students are unable to make payments.
- Eligibility and prioritisation criteria for the Cumbria Bursary and the amount of the bursary for full-time and part-time students.

- Eligibility and prioritisation criteria for the Student Opportunity Fund and the amount of funds available.
- Course webpages provide students with detailed information about fees, additional costs, and the financial support packages we offer.

See pages 46-48 of the access and participation plan for more information.

What we are aiming to achieve

Overall, we aim for all our students to have equal opportunity to succeed at the University of Cumbria. To achieve this aim, our objectives and targets focus on student groups with characteristics where they do not currently experience equality of opportunity due to identified risks.

To support students before university application, we aim to enhance the literacy attainment of disadvantaged students in secondary school. We are working to increase the number of young, underrepresented males studying at the University of Cumbria and maintain the progress we have made in increasing students from minority ethnicities enrolling at NW campuses.

Once studying with us, we aim to increase the rate of students successfully transitioning from first year of study to their second year who are full-time Black British, part-time students aged 21 and over and full-time care leavers. We also aim to increase the rate of full-time students completing their courses disclosing a mental health condition.

Upon completing their courses, we aim to increase the rate of full-time underrepresented males achieving a 2.1 or 1st class degree outcome and maintain the progress we have made in closing the gap in attainment between full-time Black and Asian students.

Having made progress in closing the attainment gap between full-time Black and white students, we now aim to increase their progression outcomes over the course of this plan. See pages 9-11 of the access and participation plan for more information.

What we are doing to address keys risks to equality of opportunity

We have outlined intervention strategies which detail the activities we commit to delivering and evaluating over the course of this plan. We will review our strategies regularly through operational working groups of staff and students across the university who report to senior leaders across different teams in our Steering Group.

We continue to work collaboratively in our region with other universities and industry partners to tackle issues which we cannot resolve in isolation. See pages 12-39 of the access and participation plan for more information.

How students can get involved

From 2024, current students can express interest to take part in our [Student Advisory Panel](#), with funding allocated for their time and membership lasting a minimum of one academic year. The

Students' Union is represented on the Steering Group and represent our student community in developing our plan and monitoring progress.

Students can also contact the Strategic Lead directly to arrange a 'drop-in' slot to discuss our work. See pages 41-44 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved

We will use our overarching evaluation strategy to evaluate the impacts of each intervention strategy to monitor short, medium and long-term progress of the plan. Our evaluation strategy moves us from providing narrative evaluation to empirical evaluation with emerging findings expected from 2025.

We will also continue to work with our North-West research and evaluation group to share best practice. See pages 36-39 and 45-46 of the access and participation plan for more information. Where a measure of success is much lower for underrepresented students, some of our targets extend past the duration of this plan and may be continued in our next plan.

Contact details for further information: Please contact Fiona Curry, appstudentengagement@cumbria.ac.uk, 01228279350, for more information.