York St John University
Access and Participation Plan 2025/26 to 2028/29

Introduction and strategic aim

York St John University (YSJU) is home to a supportive and diverse academic community with a proven commitment to social justice and a vocation for transforming lives through education. Through our education and research, we are a catalyst for change that creates a fairer future for all. We are proud that our values shape our practice. We are intellectually open, rigorous and curious. We promote fairness and challenge prejudice. We inspire and support each other to succeed.

We were founded in 1841 to train school teachers for under-resourced schools in impoverished communities, and YSJU has been committed to the social impact of education for almost two hundred years. We were awarded our university title in 2006 and, following a period of growth and diversification, are now a thriving, multi-disciplinary educational community, with campuses in York and London attended by over 12,000 students.

Our current Strategy 2026 has achieved its aims by placing students at the centre of all that we do. It has enabled us to focus our expertise, talents, and creativity to advance knowledge, promote understanding, and achieve educational outcomes for the benefit of all. It was underpinned by the four themes of our Learning, Teaching and Student Experience (LTSE) Strategy: education for transformation; inclusive education for all; education for the future; and education enabling success in the wider world. These strategic priorities were implemented through careful curation of the student experience. The aims of that strategy are largely complete. We are currently in the process of creating a new strategy with a resolute focus on increasing equality of opportunity, a commitment to partnership, and the social impact of the education we provide.

At YSJU, 56% of our students have one or more established APP demographic indicators that are significantly underrepresented in HE in England.[1] Current internal data for 2023/24 shows that 35% of our Home Undergraduate students are from IMD1 or IMD2 quintiles, 8.3% are from Asian, Black or Minoritised Other (ABMO) ethnic backgrounds, 41% identify as being first in family to attend HE, 30.9% disclose a disability, and 17.7% are mature entrants. We are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for students from underrepresented backgrounds to access, succeed in, and progress from HE. Our long history of widening participation means that we are well-placed to support our growing student body. No two students are alike, and at YSJU we celebrate the myriad differences and intersections that enrich our university community. In relation to the KPIs set out in our current APP, we note in the OfS dashboard for 2021/22:

- Increased access for UG mature students to 17.3% (above our 2024/25 APP target of 14%)
- Increased access for students from IMD1 areas to 19.36% from 16.84% the previous year
- The awarding gap[2] for disabled students eliminated well before our target or 2024/25
- The progression gap between ABMO and white students is currently 0.8pp.

Our commitment to equality of opportunity and to challenging injustice and prejudice are evidenced in our data-informed interventions. These identify and remove barriers to success and create opportunities for our students to achieve the outcomes they desire. We attribute the success of

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[1] 55.9% of students over 4-year aggregate access data from 2018/19 to 2021/22 – including age on entry, ethnicity, disability, IMD1, TUNDRA1, free school meals and socio-economic background. Excludes other characteristics noted as commitments in this plan (Military Service family, commuter students), or students with characteristics from our own institutional data who also receive specialist support – carers, care leavers, estranged students, and those with vocational qualifications only on entry.

[2] In line with emerging practice in the sector, we adopt the term 'awarding gap' to avoid the deficit modelling often implicit in the more common 'attainment gap'. You can find more information about our position in Annex B. However, to avoid confusion we use 'attainment' when referring to the EORR, and throughout Annex A, to use the same OfS' terminology.

increased numbers of students from underrepresented backgrounds to our Contextual Offer Scheme, our YSJ Scholarship Programme and the many successful outreach programmes designed and delivered by our Student Recruitment and Widening and Participation teams. The significant reduction in the disability awarding gap is attributable to our strong commitment to supporting disabled students throughout their journeys at YSJU, including systematic adoption of practice that is inclusive by design, and the creation of a wider range of supportive assessment practices.

Nonetheless, we recognise that progress has not yet been achieved in a number of areas. This submission includes specific interventions addressing the remaining widest gaps in access, continuation, completion, award, and progression. The interventions presented in this document are based on the 12 risks described in the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) and are designed to address the specific needs of each group. They draw on insights from our assessment of performance, alongside student and staff consultations, which have reinforced our sustained commitment to student success and solidified our institutional commitment to inclusive education and strong work on induction and transition into HE.

Risks to equality of opportunity

Based on our analysis of performance (Annex A), we have identified the following eight risks:

Risk 1: We are currently above our 2021/22 milestone of reaching 7% of UG UK-domiciled ABMO students. However, we have not yet reached our overall target of 10%. The EORR suggests low access rates are an indication that students may have less chance of acquiring the knowledge and skills needed for successful HE entry and less access to quality information about HE options and future career progression.

Risk 2: Students entering with BTEC and other vocational qualifications only experience continuation, completion, and awarding gaps compared with students with at least one A-level on entry. Nearly 40% have lived in areas of high deprivation, a third come from areas with low representation in HE, and a quarter are mature students. The EORR suggests low continuation, completion and attainment may be due to limited opportunities to develop relevant knowledge and skills as well as less access to the information and advice needed to successfully navigate HE and achieve success.

Risk 3: IMD quintile influences continuation, completion and award, and FSM eligibility influences continuation and progression rates. It also shows sustained progression gaps for TUNDRA1 students compared with TUNDRA5. The EORR suggests multiple reasons for this (all risks, apart from risks 3 and 4 – perception of HE and application success rates).

Risk 4: Ethnicity awarding gaps have been widening significantly for the past four years of available data. Disaggregated data shows that students from Black and Asian backgrounds may be at greater risk. The EORR suggests multiple reasons for this (all risks, apart from risks 3, 4 and 12 – perception of HE, application success rates and progression from HE).

Risk 5: Age on entry is a significant factor for continuation and completion rates. The EORR suggests mature students are likely to experience all risks. Internal qualitative data suggests mature students are less likely to access support services, and usually have other responsibilities (work, caring responsibilities, etc.) which may have an impact on their journey at YSJU.

Risk 6: Internal data analysis shows that more students are declaring mental health issues. In consultation with staff and students, mental health has been identified as an increasing risk for all students. The EORR suggests that students may experience mental ill health that makes it hard to cope with daily life, including studying. The EORR also recognises that these difficulties may be pre-existing (diagnosed or undiagnosed) and that students may not report mental health difficulties. However, the impact of this risk is wide-ranging spanning from on-course to progression stages.

Risk 7: The English Indices of Deprivation report (IoD2019) places the North Yorkshire Coast as one of the most deprived areas in the country. Whilst the City of York is one of the least deprived areas, there are specific areas within York amongst the most deprived in the country. The EORR suggests that students from low-income families, often living in areas of high deprivation, are exposed to all risks identified by the EORR. We remain committed to building strong partnerships with schools and other institutions working with young people in the region to raise pre-16 attainment and access to HE in York and North Yorkshire.

Risk 8: Housing costs are rising in York. Cost pressures may influence some students to commute rather than reside in or near York. The EORR suggests that commuter students may not receive sufficient academic and personal support and that cost pressures may affect their ability to complete their course and obtain a good grade. Our student consultation revealed that commuter students face challenges accessing support and developing a sense of community, as their time on campus is often limited. We remain committed to supporting commuter students throughout their journey.

Objectives

Based on the risks above, we have formulated six objectives and three commitments. While we set specific targets for all our objectives, our commitments are more general.

Objective 1 - To increase the proportion of UG UK-domiciled ABMO students at YSJU by 2030.
PTA_1: To increase the intake of UG UK-domiciled ABMO students to 12% by 2030.
Objective 2 - To reduce the awarding gap between students with at least one A-level and students with vocational qualifications only by 2030.
PTS_1: To reduce the continuation gap between students with at least one A-level and students with vocational qualifications only from 9.7pp (in 2020/21) to 4pp by 2030.
PTS_2: To reduce the completion gap between students with at least one A-level and students with vocational qualifications only from 6.8pp (in 2017/18) to 3pp by 2030.
PTS_3: To reduce the awarding gap between students with at least one A-level and students with vocational qualifications only from 10.7pp (2021/22) to 5pp by 2030.
Objective 3 - To reduce the FSM continuation gap, IMD continuation, completion and awarding gaps, and the TUNDRA progression gap by 2030.
PTS_4: To eliminate a statistically significant continuation gap between students previously eligible for FSM and students not eligible for FSM from 6.6pp (in 2020/21) by 2030.
PTS_5: To eliminate a statistically significant continuation gap between students from IMD1 and students from IMD5 from 4pp (in 2020/21) by 2030.
PTS_6: To eliminate a statistically significant completion gap between students from IMD1 and students from IMD5 from 4.6pp (2017-18) by 2030.
PTS_7: To reduce the awarding gap between students from IMD1 and IMD5 from 19.9pp to 10pp by 2030.
PTP_1: To reduce the progression gap between TUNDRA1 and TUNDRA5 students from 12.4pp (2020/21) to no more than 7pp by 2030.
Objective 4[3] - To reduce the University's ethnicity awarding gaps by 2030.
PTS_8: To reduce the awarding gap between Asian and white students from 20.3pp (2018/19 to 2021/22) to less than 10pp by 2030.
PTS_9: To reduce the awarding gap between Black and white students from 33.9pp (2018/19 to 2021/22) to less than 10pp by 2030.

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[3] Due to our small numbers of ABMO students, we chose to use aggregated data (last 4 years of available data) to calculate these targets.

Objective 5 - To reduce the continuation and completion gaps between young and mature students by 2030.
PTS_10: To eliminate the continuation gap between young and mature students from 5.9pp (in 2020/21) by 2030. **PTS_11:** To eliminate the completion gap between young and mature students from 4.5pp (in 2017/18) by 2030.
Objective 6 - To eliminate the continuation gap between students with a declared mental health condition and students without a declared mental health condition by 2030.
PTS_12: To eliminate a statistically significant continuation gap between students with a declared mental health condition and students without a declared mental health condition by 2030, from 6.6pp in 2020/21.
Commitment 1 (in response to risk 7) - Continue to build strong partnerships with schools to raise pre-16 attainment in York and North Yorkshire.
We remain committed to building on work with local schools in the following ways: - Continuing work with Inspiring Choices in low-attainment areas in York and North Yorkshire. - Continuing our outreach work with underrepresented groups in HE. - Working in partnership with the University of York on the project 'The Place'. - Ensure our Teacher Training programmes articulate impact on aspiration, in line with our APP objectives and targets.
Commitment 2 Ensure young people from military families have equality of opportunity to access and succeed at YSJU.
We remain committed to ensuring young people from military families have equality of opportunity to access and succeed at YSJU in the following ways: - Including applicants from military families in our Contextual Offer Scheme from 2025/26. - Collecting quantitative and qualitative information about the experiences of students from military families at YSJU to develop appropriate activities and interventions.
Commitment 3 (in response to risk 8) - Identify gaps and barriers faced by commuter students.
We remain committed to supporting our commuter students in the following way: - Collecting quantitative and qualitative information about the experiences of commuter students at YSJU and develop appropriate activities and interventions.

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Intervention strategy 1 (IS1): ABMO Access

Objectives and targets

Objective 1 – To increase the proportion of UG UK-domiciled ABMO students at YSJU by 2030.
PTA_1: To increase the intake of UG UK-domiciled ABMO students to 12% by 2030.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The EORR suggests that low access rates may be related to risk 1 (knowledge and skills) and risk 2 (insufficient information and guidance).

Related objectives and targets

Our intersectional analysis (Annex A) shows that, within our ABMO student population, there are high proportions of students who have also lived in areas of high deprivation and/or areas of low representation in HE, as well as students arriving at YSJU with vocational qualifications only. As such, IS1 also contributes to all targets under objectives 2 (Qualification on Entry), 3 (Socio Economic Background and Underrepresentation) and 4 (ABMO award).

Related risks to equality of opportunity

All relevant risks are listed in the **'**Risks to equality of opportunity' section above.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Targeted outreach activities	Outreach activities in partnership with organisations working with young people from ABMO backgrounds. We have two schemes in operation. Firstly, the Yay YSJ scheme in Bradford is aimed at Year 10 students. This scheme is run with assistance from the QED Foundation. Secondly, the Encompass scheme is aimed at aspiring Geography students and is run in partnership with the Black Geographers student-led organisation.	WP coordinator + student ambassadors + costs per activity. Sponsorship of annual events e.g. YAYA Awards (Yorkshire Asian Young Achievers).	Increased awareness and knowledge of HE. Improved skills to navigate HE system. Positive association with YSJU.	Intervention strategies 2, 3 and 4
YSJ Scholarships	YSJ ABMO Scholarship (for students with a household income below £42,000) - £800 per scholarship.	Staff to administer scholarships.	Increased numbers of UK-domiciled ABMO undergraduate students. Improved sense of belonging and success on course, such as improved continuation and completion.	
YSJ Scholarships Plus	Structured opportunities designed to enhance belonging, confidence and engagement (see Annex B).	Staff time to deliver activities (across the University).		
Offer and acceptance rates	We will continue to monitor offer rates and acceptance rates to identify trends and possible interventions.	Time from Admissions and Strategy and Planning teams.	More efficient conversion of our ABMO application base.	

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Continue to evaluate accessibility and attractiveness of promotional materials for ABMO applicants.	This will apply to the University website, prospectus, and other promotional materials and open days. We will continue to strategically promote our student ambassador scheme to ensure maximal diversity among our student ambassadors, who play a key part in promoting the University at internal and external recruitment events.	Time from Student Recruitment team and Marketing team.	Increased numbers of UK-domiciled ABMO undergraduate students.	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy - £981,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

According to TASO's Evidence Toolkit, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), activities can have a small positive effect on attitudes, aspirations and on HE participation. Although financial support (pre-entry), such as grants, bursaries, scholarships and fee-waivers show mixed results, our internal data shows that since we introduced our ABMO Scholarship, we have steadily increased the number of students from ABMO backgrounds. We remain confident that combining IAG activities with the ABMO Scholarship (including bespoke activities for ABMO students under the YSJU Scholarships Plus provision) will lead us to achieving our overall target of reaching 12% home ABMO undergraduate students by 2030. By increasing the numbers of ABMO students at YSJU, we hope to create a vibrant diverse community where ABMO students can thrive. Further information can be found in Annex B.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Targeted Information, Advice and Guidance activities	Increase awareness, knowledge and skills about HE.	Type 1 and Type 2	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)
YSJU Scholarships	Increase numbers on UK-domiciled ABMO undergraduate students. Improved sense of belonging and success on course.	Type 2	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)
YSJU Scholarships Plus		Type 2 and Type 3	Interim report at the end of semester 1 (2025/26 – 2028/29) – type 2 evidence Yearly report at the end of semester 2 – type 2 and type 3 evidence (if / when available)

Intervention strategy 2 (IS2): Qualifications on Entry

Objectives and targets

Objective 2 - To reduce the awarding gap between students with at least one A-level and student with vocational qualifications only by 2030.

PTS_1: To reduce the continuation gap between students with at least one A-level and students with vocational qualifications only from 9.7pp (in 2020/21) to 4pp by 2030.

PTS_2: To reduce the completion gap between students with at least one A-level and students with vocational qualifications only from 6.8pp (in 2017/18) to 3pp by 2030.

PTS_3: To reduce the awarding gap between students with at least one A-level and students with vocational qualifications only from 10.7pp (2021/22) to 5pp by 2030.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The EORR suggests that low attainment and low continuation and completion rates may be linked to risk 1 (knowledge and skills), risk 2 information and guidance), risk 5 (choice of course type), risk 6 (insufficient academic support), risk 7 (insufficient personal support), risk 8 (mental health), risk 9 (ongoing impacts of coronavirus), risk 10 (cost pressures) and risk 11 (capacity issues). Analysis of our data demonstrates statistically significant gaps for students entering HE with BTEC or other vocational qualifications only.

Related objectives and targets

Our intersectional analysis (Annex A) shows that, within our student population arriving at YSJU with vocational qualifications only, there are high proportions of students who also lived in areas of high deprivation and/or areas of low representation in HE, as well as ABMO students and mature students. As such, IS2 also contributes to all targets under objectives 3 (Socio Economic Background and Underrepresentation), 4 (ABMO award). and 5 (Age on Entry).

Related risks to equality of opportunity

All relevant risks are listed in the 'Risks to equality of opportunity' section above.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Review of Assessment Practices	Activities include: increasing use of authentic assessment; introduction of choice of assessment; reviewing criteria and guidance; reduction of assessment types contributing to awarding gaps; embedding new assessment descriptors; increased support and guidance.	Staff time.	Students feel more supported (academically). Reduction in awarding gap between students with vocational qualification only and students with A-levels.	Intervention strategies 3, 4 and 5
Enhanced and targeted assessment support	[new activity] Targeted sessions for students with vocational qualifications only.	Staff time to design and deliver bespoke sessions.	Students feel confident and well supported (academically). Students develop strong assessment literacies. Reduction in awarding gaps between students with vocational qualification only and students with A-levels.	
Vocational qualifications awareness initiative for staff	[new activity] Working in partnership with local FE providers to create training sessions and materials to raise awareness of the experience of students on Level 3 vocational qualifications.	Staff time to design and deliver.		Intervention strategies 3, 4 and 5
Bespoke pre-arrival and induction activities for students with vocational qualifications only	[new activity] Activities focussed on academic literacies and confidence.	Staff time to design and deliver.	Increased sense of belonging, academic confidence and self-efficacy. Increased awareness and uptake of academic support available for assessment, including study development, academic and module tutorials.	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy - £27,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

In line with trends across the wider sector, our analysis of internal data demonstrates statistically significant gaps for students who join us with BTEC or other vocational qualifications only. These differences are largely attributable to challenges in transition and differences in academic performance in modules. A full rationale for the activities detailed in this strategy is provided in Annex B.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Bespoke pre-arrival and induction activities	Increased sense of belonging Increased uptake of further support	Type 2	
Review of assessment practices	Reduction in awarding gap	Type 2	Report per semester (2025/26 – 2028/29)
Enhanced and targeted assessment support	Students feel more supported (academically) Reduction in awarding gaps	Type 2	
Vocational qualifications awareness initiative for staff			Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)

Intervention strategy 3 (IS3): Socioeconomic background and Underrepresentation

Objectives and targets

> **Objective 3 -** To reduce the FSM continuation gap, IMD continuation, completion and awarding gaps and the TUNDRA progression gap by 2030.
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> **PTS_4**: To eliminate a statistically significant continuation gap between students previously eligible for FSM and students not eligible for FSM from 6.6pp (in 2020/21) by 2030.
>
> **PTS_5**: To eliminate a statistically significant continuation gap between students from IMD1 and students from IMD5 from 4pp (in 2020/21) by 2030.
>
> **PTS_6:** To eliminate a statistically significant completion gap between students from IMD1 and students from IMD5 from 4.6pp (2017/18) by 2030.
>
> **PTS_7**: To reduce the awarding gap between students from IMD1 and IMD5 from 19.9pp to 10pp by 2030.
>
> **PTP_1**: To reduce the progression gap between TUNDRA1 and TUNDRA5 students from 12.4pp (2020/21) to no more than 7pp by 2030.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The EORR suggests that students from low-income households and from under-represented areas are one of the most vulnerable groups in HE, linking these students to all 12 risks in the EORR.

Related objectives and targets

Our intersectional analysis (Annex A) shows that, within our student population from low socio-economic backgrounds and/or areas with low representation in HE, there are high proportions of students arriving at YSJU with vocational qualifications only and high proportions of mature students. As such, IS3 also contributes to all targets under objectives 2 (Qualification on Entry), and 5 (Age on Entry). Our analysis also showed that over 60% of students from areas with low representation in HE (TUNDRA1&2) also lived in areas of high deprivation (IMD1&2) and nearly a quarter had received Free School Meals (FSM). We also expect the interventions outlined in this strategy to contribute to improvements in continuation and completion for TUNDRA.

Related risks to equality of opportunity

All relevant risks are listed in the 'Risks to equality of opportunity' section above.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Contextual Offer Scheme	Including applicants eligible for Free School Meals in our Contextual Offer Scheme from 2025/26 onwards.	Staff time Contextual Offer Scheme bursary.	Reduce the continuation gap between students previously eligible for FSM and students not eligible for FSM and between IMD1 and IMD5.	Intervention strategy 1
Additional course costs	[new activity] Monitor additional course costs (e.g. course specific resource costs, placement costs, uniform costs) and identify mitigations for students previously eligible for FSM, and IMD1 students.	Staff time (Academic Schools, library, placements team, global opportunities). Costs as %.	Reduce the continuation gap between students previously eligible for FSM and students not eligible for FSM and between IMD1 and IMD5.	Intervention strategies 2 and 5
Funding advice promoted via new Student Hub	[new activity] Creation of our new Student Hub: triaged guidance and a single location for enquiries will ensure efficient and effective access to financial support. Implementation of new Case Management System (CRM) to streamline processes associated with applications to the student hardship fund.	Costs of Student Hub CRM costs (%) and staff resources for implementation targeting student previously eligible for FSM.	Reduce the continuation gap between students previously eligible for FSM and students not eligible for FSM. To reduce the completion gap between students from IMD1 and IMD5.	
Targeted communications	[new activity] Promotion of support and opportunities available to IMD1 and FSM eligible students including paid employment, student support fund, study abroad opportunities, wellbeing, etc.	Staff time (delivered collaboratively as part of the Student Hub project). Handshake (%).	Increase of students from IMD1 and students previously eligible for FSM accessing student support services Reduce continuation and completion gaps for IMD1 and students previously eligible for FSM.	Intervention strategies 2 and 5
Financial education and training	[new activity] Enhanced provision / promotion of financial education and training via online partner.	Blackbullion annual licence fee.	Increased students' skills and confidence in managing money. Improved continuation and completion for students previously eligible for FSM.	

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
YSJ Scholarships Plus	Structured opportunities designed to enhance belonging, confidence and engagement (more information can be found in annex B).	Staff time to deliver activities (across the University).	Improved sense of belonging and success on course, such as improved continuation and completion. Reduce continuation, completion and awarding gaps.	
Targeted Graduate Internships	Develop transitional internships that support professional outcomes in areas of low participation in HE (TUNDRA1) or geographical mobility for TUNDRA1.	Staff time to coordinate and source opportunities. Funded internships/schemes.	Reduce the progression gap between TUNDRA1 and TUNDRA5.	Intervention strategy 5

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy - £2,937,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

The EORR suggests that students from low-income households are one of the most vulnerable groups in HE, linking these students to all 12 risks in the EORR. We found limited evidence of impact of our small low-income scholarship. At the same time, qualitative student feedback highlighted increased living costs and the desire for employment opportunities as concerns. This correlates with scholarly research and sector best practice, indicating that structured opportunities to enhance belonging, confidence, self-efficacy, graduate attributes and employability have potentially significant benefits for students.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Contextual Offer Scheme	Reduce the continuation gap between students previously eligible for FSM and students not eligible for FSM.	Type 2	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 2025/26 – 2028/29)
Additional course costs	Reduction of continuation gap for FSM eligible and non-eligible students.	Type 2	
Funding advice via new Student Hub	Reduction of continuation gap for FSM eligible and non-eligible students. Reduction in completion gap between IMD1 and IMD5 students.	Type 1 and Type 2 (incl. analysis of access to financial support via the new Students Hub).	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)
Targeted communications	Increase numbers of students accessing student support services.	Type 2	
Financial education and training	Increase skills and confidence in managing money.	Type 1 and 2	
YSJ Scholarships Plus	Improved sense of belonging and success on course, such as improved continuation and completion. Reduce continuation, completion and awarding gaps.	Type 1 and 2	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)
Targeted Graduate Internships	Reduce the progression gap between TUNDRA1 and TUNDRA5.	Type 1 and 2	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)

Intervention strategy 4 (IS4): ABMO Award

Objectives and targets

Objective 4[4] - To reduce the ethnicity awarding gaps by 2030.

PTS_8: To reduce the awarding gap between Asian and white students from 20.3pp (2018/19 to 2021/22) to less than 10pp.

PTS_9: To reduce the awarding gap between Black and white students from 33.9pp (2018/19 to 2021/22) to less than 10pp.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The EORR suggests that low attainment rates may be linked to risk 1 (knowledge and skills), risk 2 information and guidance), risk 5 (choice of course type), risk 6 (insufficient academic support), risk 7 (insufficient personal support), risk 8 (mental health), risk 9 (ongoing impacts of coronavirus), risk 10 (cost pressures) and risk 11 (capacity issues).

Related objectives and targets

Our intersectional analysis (Annex A) shows that, within our ABMO student population, there are also high proportions of students arriving at YSJU with vocational qualifications only, students from areas of high deprivation and/or low representation in HE, as well as mature students. As such, IS4 also contributes to all targets under objective 2 (qualification on entry), objective 3 (socio-economic background and under representation) and objective 5 (age on entry).

Related risks to equality of opportunity

All relevant risks are listed in the 'Risks to equality of opportunity' section above.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
YSJ Scholarships Plus	Structured opportunities designed to enhance belonging, confidence and engagement.	Staff time to deliver activities (across the University).	Improved sense of belonging and success on course. Reduce awarding gaps between Asian and white students and Black and white students.	Intervention strategies 1, 2, 3 and 5
Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Ambassadors scheme	Student-run events to amplify diverse student voices and engage students in events designed to enhance belonging, celebrate difference, and connect students and alumni.	Student Equality Diversity and Inclusion student ambassadors - REC budget £5k per year Staff time – co-ordination.	Enhanced sense of belonging, influence and self-efficacy leading to improved outcomes.	

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[4] Due to our small numbers of ABMO students, we chose to use aggregated data (last 4 years of available data) to calculate these targets.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Targeted communications	Promotion of support and opportunities available to ABMO students including: academic tutoring, study development, student support fund, study abroad opportunities, wellbeing, welfare, etc.	Staff time (delivered collaboratively as part of the Student Hub project).	Increase of ABMO students accessing Student Support Services. Reduce awarding gap between Asian and white students and Black and white students.	
Expansion in use of 'active learning' techniques	An increased range of flexible active learning techniques will be incorporated into programmes through the developing YSJU Pedagogy and the institution-wide assessment review.	Staff time Teaching Learning and Enhancement (TLE) time, staff workshops, development of supporting materials, community of practice to sustain pedagogic enhancements).	Increased sense of self-efficacy, belonging and agency in learning. Reduce awarding gaps between Asian and white students and Black and white students.	Intervention strategies 1, 2, 3 and 5
Review of Assessment Practices	Activities to include: increased use authentic assessment, introduction of choice of assessment and enhanced assessment criteria. Reform or reduction in use of assessment types contributing to awarding gaps. Workshops for course teams at re-/validation CPD events delivered as part of the Inclusive Education Framework.	Staff time to design and deliver activities (TLE).	Reduce awarding gaps between Asian and white students and Black and white students.	
Staff training under Race Equality Charter (REC)	Online training.	Staff time to develop and implement new training HR Organisational Development (HROD).	Staff are confident in understanding issues of racism and the nature of anti-racist teaching practice.	
Decolonising the curriculum and advocacy of anti-racist pedagogy and teaching practice.	Activities include: - workshops for course teams during validation and course enhancement processes - Scholarship Plus curriculum partners - Embedding YSJU Pedagogy including promotion of 'active learning' methods shown to positively impact awarding gaps - Positive action in staff recruitment enhances representation - IAmplify project.	Staff time – (TLE).	Staff are confident in understanding issues of racism and the nature of anti-racist teaching practice. ABMO students develop a strong sense of confidence, self-efficacy and influence on their courses.	Intervention strategies 1, 2, 3 and 5

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy - £2,382,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

At YSJU we recognise that the ethnicity awarding gap is widespread, persistent, and widening across the sector. Research shows that increasing representation at all levels of HE institutions, alongside collaborative work designed to enhance sense of belonging, are amongst the most effective counter actions. All activities under this intervention strategy complement actions under our Race Equality Charter (Bronze award) action plan and are designed to tackling isolation and lack of belonging amongst ABMO students, a key issue identified during our Race Equality Charter student survey. This survey also identified low levels of confidence in relation to academic and other support. Most of the activities under this intervention, such as staff training and continuing our important work on decolonising the curriculum, recognise the potential for all staff across the University to impact the ethnicity awarding gap. Analysis of internal data demonstrates certain assessment types are contributing disproportionately to awarding gaps. Sector research demonstrates that adopting more widespread 'active learning' techniques positively impacts continuation and awarding gaps.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
YSJU Scholarships Plus	Increased sense of belonging Reduction of awarding gaps.	Type 1 and 2 (answers to relevant questions in the REC student survey to be conducted in 2024/25 to be used as baseline)	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)
Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Ambassadors scheme	Increased sense of belonging.		
Targeted communications	Increased numbers of students accessing Student Support Services.	Type 2	
Expansion of 'active learning' techniques	Increased sense of self-efficacy, belonging and agency in learning. Reduced awarding gaps between Asian and white students and Black and white students.	Type 2	
Institution-wide review of assessment practices	Reform and reduction in the use of assessment types contributing to awarding gaps. Reduction in awarding gaps.	Type 2	
REC training	Increased staff confidence understanding racism and the nature of anti-racist pedagogy and practice.	Type 1 (REC staff survey to be conducted in 2025/26 to be used as baseline)	
Decolonising the curriculum	ABMO students have strong sense of confidence, self-efficacy and influence on their courses. ABMO students recognise themselves in relevant curricula.	Type 1 (REC student survey to be conducted in 2024/25 to be used as baseline)	

Intervention strategy 5 (IS5): Age on Entry

Objectives and targets

Objective 5 -To reduce the continuation and completion gaps between young and mature students by 2030.
Target 5.1: To eliminate the continuation gap between young and mature students by 2030. **Target 5.2:** To eliminate the completion gap between young and mature students by 2030.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The EORR suggests that low continuation and completion rates may be linked to risk 1 (knowledge and skills), risk 2 (information and guidance), risk 5 (choice of course type), risk 6 (insufficient academic support), risk 7 (insufficient personal support), risk 8 (mental health), risk 9 (ongoing impacts of coronavirus), risk 10 (cost pressures) and risk 11 (capacity issues).

Related objectives and targets

Our intersectional analysis (Annex A) shows that, within our mature student population, there are high proportions of students arriving at YSJU with vocational qualifications only, as well as students from areas of high deprivation and/or low representation in HE. As such, IS5 also contributes to all targets under objective 2 (Qualification on Entry) and objective 3 (Socio economic background and Underrepresentation).

Related risks to equality of opportunity

All relevant risks are listed in the 'Risks to equality of opportunity' section above.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Mature students' induction	Bespoke induction activities for mature students during Welcome Week.	Specialist Support role (FTE)	Increased sense of belonging for mature students. Improved continuation and completion of mature students.	Intervention strategies 2 and 3
One-to-one support	One-to-one advice, guidance and support is available for all mature students.		Increased academic literacies and confidence for mature students. Improved continuation and completion of mature students.	
Specialist Support drop-in	During the first month of each semester, specific social opportunities / drop-ins for mature students will be held on campus on a weekly basis.			
Mentoring platform	Access to a specialist mentoring platform.	Mentoring software platform. Staff resource to recruit, train, support and retain mentors.	Mature students have access to mentors and/or opportunities to be mentors. Improved continuation, completion and progression rates.	

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Mature Students Network	A dedicated network for mature students run in conjunction with our Students' Union (SU).	Specialist Support role Students' Union Societies and Volunteering Co-ordinator	Increased sense of belonging for mature students. Improved continuation and completion of mature students.	
Driving change in HE	Work with the Learning and Work Institute to develop and embed an organisational approach to working with carers in our student population. Currently,10% of our mature student population are carers and they make up 26% of our carer population.	Specialist Support role Learning and Work Institute representative.	Improved continuation and completion rates for mature carers.	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy - £47,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Our analysis of performance shows significant continuation and completion gaps between our young and mature students. At the end of 2022/23, we conducted a thorough review of our timetabling processes which resulted in more stability and reduced evening teaching previously designed specifically to benefit mature students, who are more likely to have caring responsibilities and longer commutes. All activities included in this intervention strategy build on our current work with mature students and are designed to increase a sense of belonging / community for students who may spend limited time on campus.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Mature students' induction	Increased sense of belonging for mature students.	Type 1	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)
	Improved continuation and completion of mature students.	Type 1 and 2	
One-to-one support	Increased academic literacies and confidence for mature students.	Type 1 and 2	
Specialist Support drop-in	Improved continuation and completion of mature students.	Type 1 and 2	
Mentoring Platform	Mature students have access to mentors and/or opportunities to be mentors. Improved continuation, completion and progression rates	Type 1 and 2	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)
Mature Students Network	Increased sense of belonging for mature students. Improved continuation and completion of mature students.	Type 1	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)
Driving Change in HE	Improved continuation and completion rates for mature carers.	Type 2	Final report on project completion

Intervention strategy 6 (IS6): Mental Health

Objectives and targets

Objective 6 (in response to risk 6) - To eliminate the continuation gap between students with a declared mental health condition and students without a declared mental health condition by 2030.

Target 6.1: To eliminate the continuation gap between students with a declared mental health condition and students without a declared mental health condition by 2030, from 6.6pp in 2020/21.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The EORR suggest that some students may be most at risk of experiencing mental ill health. These are: students from low-income households; disabled students; mature students; LGBTQ+ students, and care-experienced students. It suggests that students reporting a mental health condition may be more likely to experience risks 6 (insufficient academic support), 7 (insufficient personal support), 11 (capacity issues), and 12 (progression from HE).

Related objectives and targets

Our intersectional analysis (Annex A) shows that, within our student population with declared mental health conditions, there is a high proportion of students arriving with vocational qualifications only, students from areas of high deprivation and/or low representation in HE as well as mature students. As such, IS6 also contributes to all targets under objective 2 (Qualification on Entry), objective 3 (Socio economic background and Underrepresentation) and 5 (Age on Entry).

Related risks to equality of opportunity

All relevant risks are listed in the 'Risks to equality of opportunity' section above.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Building knowledge	[new activity] Explore and understand engagement and utilisation of wellbeing services.	Staff time (Wellbeing Team).	Clear understanding of service usage leading to targeted communications to groups not accessing the service.	Intervention strategies 2, 3 and 5
Triage via new Student Hub	[new activity] Wellbeing and Inclusion Complex Case Lead (incl. use of CMS to streamline support). Creation of new Student Hub: triaged guidance and single location for enquiries ensuring efficient and effective access to wellbeing services. Implementation of new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to streamline processes associated with self-referrals to the wellbeing service.	Staff time – Wellbeing and Inclusion Complex Case Lead. Costs of Student Hub. CRM costs (%) and staff resources for implementation.	Increased support for students declaring a mental health condition. Improved continuation and completion rates for students with a declared mental condition.	

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Enhanced staff training	Sessions for all student-facing staff on how to support students with mental health issues.	Staff time (Wellbeing).	Staff feel more confident in supporting students with a declared mental health condition and/or students disclosing a mental health issue.	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy - £473,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Our analysis of performance (Annex A) shows that students with a declared mental health condition contribute to continuation and completion gaps but simultaneously achieve positive outcomes for award and progression. Internal data analysis also shows that more students are declaring mental health issues, and in consultation with our staff and students, mental health has been identified as an increasing risk for all students.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Building knowledge	Clear understanding of service usage leading to targeted communications.	Type 1	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29) as part of the Annual Report on Student Wellbeing presented to the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.
Triage via new Student Hub	Improved continuation and completion rates for students with a declared mental condition.	Type 2	
Staff sessions	Increased staff confidence in supporting students with a declared mental condition and/or disclosing a mental health issue.	Type 1	

Intervention strategy 7 (IS7): Pre-16 Attainment

Commitment 1 (in response to risk 7) - To continue to build strong partnerships with schools to raise pre-16 attainment in York and North Yorkshire.

We remain committed to building on our established work with local schools by:
- Continuing to work with Inspiring Choices in low-attainment areas in York and North Yorkshire.
- Continuing our outreach work with underrepresented groups in HE.
- Working in partnership with the University of York on the project 'The Place' (please see further detail in Annex B).
- Ensure our Teacher Training programmes articulate impact on aspiration, in line with our APP objectives and targets.

Risks to equality of opportunity

National and regional data indicates that children from disadvantaged areas are less likely to attain GCSE grades associated with entry into HE. The OfS has articulated expectations that providers should identify interventions to address risks to fair access arising from gaps in knowledge, skills, attainment or aspiration.

Related objectives and targets

Many of the activities under this intervention take place in areas of high deprivation and/or low representation in HEs. As such, IS7 also contributes to all targets under objective 3 (Socio Economic Background and Underrepresentation).

Related risks to equality of opportunity

All relevant risks are listed in the 'Risks to equality of opportunity' section above.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
On Track Programme	A sustained and progressive programme for care-experienced young people in years 7-13. Engages 50 young people annually. Delivered in partnerships with Inspiring Choices and the four HE providers in the region.	YSJU academics (x2).	Improve knowledge and awareness of HE progression routes. Raising confidence and teaching new skills. Careers awareness.	Intervention strategy 3
Discipline specific projects	Projects focusing on Journalism, History and Drama. Engage approx. 100 students in years 10-11. Delivered in partnership with Inspiring Choices.	YSJU academics (x3) + 10 YSJU students.	Raising aspiration and improved perception of HE.	Intervention strategy 3
Primary Outreach Project	Continue to build strong partnerships with primary schools in and around York to deliver our Primary Outreach Project.	FTE 0.2 WP Coordinator. Overall budget to deliver activities.	Direct attainment raising e.g. Read with YSJU. Indirect attainment raising through a range of activities focused on skills to succeed - confidence, resilience, attitude to learning etc, or by engaging parents and carers.	Intervention strategy 3
Making Waves Project	Outreach project targeting pupils in schools on the North Yorkshire Coast.	FTE 0.5 WP Coordinator. Overall budget to deliver activities.	Indirect attainment raising through focusing on skills required to succeed – confidence, resilience, attitude to learning etc. Improved knowledge and awareness of HE and YSJ for participants. Debunk misconceptions about HE.	Intervention strategy 3
The Place	A collaborative learning centre, led by the University of York with support from anchor institutions from across York. YSJU activities include: - Initial Teacher Training Placements - Mental Health support - After school activities.	Staff time to coordinate initiatives - academic and WP team. Student Ambassadors	Improved SAT and GCSE scores (assessment data). Improved wellbeing amongst students. Improved academic confidence and resilience. Confidence in transition to secondary school.	Intervention strategy 3

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Initial Teacher Education (ITE)	- Aspiration raising assemblies with YSJU student teachers / ambassadors - Develop EDI training packages for YSJU student teachers / ambassadors	Staff time	Raising pre-16 attainment and aspiration in targeted schools (low-attainment areas).	Intervention strategy 3
Summer Schools	Run academically focussed residential summer schools for Year 10.	Staff time. Travel costs. Accommodation and catering costs.	Three days of focussed subject sessions increase subject knowledge and teach study skills. Aspiration raising among the cohort. Providing role models for participants among current YSJ students.	Intervention strategy 3

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy - £295,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

YSJU has a long track history of developing successful activities designed to raise attainment and aspiration by addressing knowledge and skills gaps, provide information and guidance, and promote positive perceptions of HE. A full rationale for activities is provided in Annex B.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
On Track Programme	Improve knowledge and awareness of HE progression routes.	Type 2 (delivered by Inspiring Choices including interviews with young people, school staff and HEAT tracking).	Annual Report with detailed analysis of evaluation. HESA data on HE progression for young people who are 'HE ready'.
Literacy Project	Increased motivation to succeed. Increased attainment self-efficacy.	Type 2 (delivered by Inspiring Choices including interviews with young people and school staff and HEAT tracking).	Annual Report with detailed analysis of evaluation. HESA data on HE progression for young people who are 'HE ready'.
Discipline - specific projects	Improved knowledge and awareness of HE progression routes.	Type 2 (delivered by Inspiring Choices including focus groups with young people, interviews with school staff and HEAT tracking).	Annual Report with detailed analysis of evaluation. HESA data on HE progression for young people who are 'HE ready'.
Primary Outreach	Improved pre-16 attainment. Increased knowledge / awareness of HE.	Type 1 and Type 2.	Yearly report (2025/26 – 2028/29).
Making Waves		Type 1 and Type 2.	
The Place	Improved SAT and GCSE scores. Improved wellbeing and confidence.	Type 1 and Type 2.	
Initial Teacher Education (ITE)	Improved pre-16 attainment and aspiration.	Type 1 and Type 2	Yearly report (2025/26 – 2028/29).

Intervention strategy 8 (IS8): Students from Military Service Families

Objectives and targets

> **Commitment 2 -** Ensure young people from military families have equality of opportunity to access and succeed at YSJU.
>
> We remain committed to ensuring young people from military families have equality of opportunity to access and succeed at YSJU in the following ways:
> - Including applicants from military families in our Contextual Offer Scheme from 2025/26.
> - Collecting quantitative and qualitative information about the experiences of students from military families at YSJU to develop appropriate activities / interventions.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The EORR suggests that young people from military families may be more likely to experience risk 1 (knowledge and skills) and risk 2 (information and guidance).

Related objectives and targets

None identified.

Related risks to equality of opportunity

All relevant risks are listed in the 'Risks to equality of opportunity' section above.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Military Service Children and Young People Programme	A progressive programme for military service children and young people in years 7-13. Engages 50 learners annually. Delivered in partnership with Inspiring Choices and YSJU.	0.2 FTE WP Coordinator. Activity costs split between Inspiring Choices and YSJU.	Increased numbers of applicants from military families. Increased offers to students from military families leading to increased access. Increased sense of belonging.	
YSJU Contextual Offer Scheme	[new activity] Addition of Service Children to the Contextual Offer Scheme.	Staff resources (funding support)		
Building knowledge	[new activity] Engage current students from military families to understand their experiences and develop initiatives accordingly.	Staff time (student support) to develop work with this group.	Increased insight into student experience to feed into interventions where appropriate.	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy - £243,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Current sector data on the impact of interventions to address risks to equality of opportunity is limited. We have identified initial interventions for access and on course support that we believe

will positively impact students from military service family backgrounds. By obtaining new information and engaging with current students, we intend to increase our understanding of the most effective interventions for this group. For more information, see Annex B.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Military Service Children and Young People Programme	Increased number of applicants Increased number of offers leading to increased access. Increased sense of belonging	Type 2	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)
YSJU Contextual Offer Scheme		Type 2	
Building knowledge	Increased insight into student experience	Type 1	

Intervention strategy 9 (IS9): Commuter Students

Objectives and targets

Commitment 3 (in response to risk 7) To identify gaps and barriers faced by commuter students.

We will collect quantitative and qualitative information about the experiences of commuter students at YSJU and develop appropriate activities / interventions.

Risks to equality of opportunity

The EORR suggests that commuter students may be more likely to experience risk 5 (choice of course type), risk 6 (insufficient academic support), risk 7 (insufficient personal support) and risk 10 (cost pressures).

Related objectives and targets

None identified.

Related risks to equality of opportunity

All relevant risks are listed in the 'Risks to equality of opportunity' section above.

Activity	Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention strategy?
Building knowledge	Direct engagement with commuter students (to collect qualitative data) to understand the day-to-day challenges that they face.	Staff time (Specialist Support) in conjunction with the SU.	Clear understanding of the barriers faced by commuter students. Development of appropriate support measures.	Intervention strategies 2 and 5
One-to-one support	Ensuring one-to-one advice, guidance and support is available for all commuter students.	Specialist Support role (FTE).		
Specialist Support drop-in	During the first month of each semester, specific social opportunities / drop-ins for commuter students will be held on campus on a weekly basis.			

Total cost of activities and evaluation for intervention strategy - £16,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

There is weak evidence in the sector that programmes of student support (post-entry) have a positive impact on commuter students. Variability in definitions of 'commuting' and differences of local context make comparisons across the sector of limited value. We therefore commit to building our knowledge of the challenges faced by commuter students at YSJU. For more information, see Annex B.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Building knowledge	Clear understanding of the barriers faced by commuter students. Development of appropriate support measures.	Type 1	
One-to-one support		Type 2	
Specialist Support drop-in		Type 2	Yearly report, at end of semester 2 (2025/26 – 2028/29)

Whole provider approach

Access and participation are core to our institutional mission, values and strategic priorities. In our last APP, we stated that one of our goals was to achieve a "whole institution" approach to widening assess and participation. Since 2020, we have developed and embedded a diverse range of activities across the whole University aimed at addressing risks to equality of opportunity. All interventions pay due regard to the Equality Act 2010. Our commitment to inclusivity and equality of opportunity is also demonstrated by our significant progress against major equality charter marks, including achieving Bronze awards for both Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter. Our APP supplies key objectives for our Learning, Teaching and Student Experience (LTSE) Strategy.

Our university-wide commitment is found throughout our committee and governance structures. Equality issues are identified on all committee papers and full Equality Impact Assessments are conducted on new or revised policies and procedures, as required. Our Academic Board and relevant sub-committees track progress on APP targets and expected outcomes. The Education Committee's standing agenda items include the annual LTSE Strategy action plan, which integrates key milestones in our APP. Our Strategic Portfolio Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor: Education, ensures that equality of opportunity and the reduction of inequalities in experience and outcomes are central considerations in the development and enhancement of our portfolio. Our portfolio is responsive to the needs of society and employers, a fact demonstrated by our recent expansions in Allied Health, and our range of degree apprenticeships. As a university committed to widening access, we have run a series of highly successful Foundation Years since 2017. The Board of Governors and relevant sub-committees (especially People Committee) receive regular updates on our APP progress and provide insight and leadership in the formulation of this plan and its implementation.

In 2022, we created the role of Programme Manager (Access, Attainment and Progression). This pivotal role sits within the Student Success and Learning Services directorate. The role was created to oversee the development, implementation and evaluation of current and future Access and Participation Plans. The Programme Manager supports the work of the APP Steering Group, which has representation from many different University departments and is chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor: Education. The Group meets quarterly and is responsible for monitoring progress against the performance targets outlined in our plan. It reviews financial support and makes recommendations to Academic Board and its sub-committees. It monitors and evaluates the success of initiatives intended to deliver the targets in the APP.

To ensure a fully collaborative approach in 2022/23, an APP Programme Board was created, reporting to the APP Steering Group. Like the APP Steering Group, the Programme Board has representation from all University departments, but is constituted mainly by staff members with direct involvement in the delivery of interventions throughout the student journey. In 2023/24, the Board reflected on the impact of current interventions. It proposed several enhancements to current practices and new and innovative ways to continue to support our students, particularly those students identified as most at risk. These have resulted in the intervention strategies contained in this plan.

We have a robust approach to academic quality and risk assessment, and APP indicators and risks form a significant part of our ongoing cycle of continuous improvement and quality enhancement. Our annual Programme Risk Review process generates School Portfolio Risk Profiles, which assess risk in terms of regulation, sustainability and quality of student experience. The data is used to create these risk profiles is drawn from the University's Portfolio Performance Dashboard which includes APP data at university and subject levels. This data used to inform Portfolio Performance and Risk meetings which are held at School level for any programmes identified as having areas of risk. Programme Risk Review reports (PRRs) are then completed for programmes with risk areas or for programmes with identified good practice. Programme Risk Review is overseen by our Quality and Standards Committee, chaired by the University Secretary and Registrar, and our Education Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor: Education. Subject action plans are then identified to address localised issues and ensure consistent implementation of the whole provider initiatives described in this section.

To ensure a cohesive data-informed approach to enhancing student experience and outcomes, we run ongoing programme boards with a focus on key aspects of the student lifecycle. Our Continuation Insights and Interventions Programme (CIIP) is designed to formalise all work pertaining to our efforts to tackle non-continuation and ensure it is prioritised across the University. The Programme is owned and sponsored by the Pro Vice Chancellor: Education with a dedicated Programme Manager from the Strategy and Projects Directorate to ensure that timelines are met, issues managed, and risks mitigated. The Programme commenced in February 2023 with the establishment of a Programme Board which meets monthly. These meetings inform quarterly Executive Board updates, which are delivered by the Pro Vice Chancellor: Education. The APP is regularly discussed at the Programme Board, so insights generated from current and future APP work can be shared and included in specific actions within any of the Programme's areas of work. This programmatic approach will be central to our implementation and evaluation of the interventions identified in this Access and Participation Plan (APP) and will be replicated for all aspects clustered under three themes making up a refreshed CIIP: 'Student Experience, Wellbeing and Belonging', 'Assessment, Attainment and Feedback' and 'Outcomes and Progression'.

During the writing of the new APP, staff and students were consulted through a series of APP sessions and ad-hoc meetings with the Students' Union, and specialist support student groups. As a result, a suggestion was put forward to create an APP Community of Practice with representation from both staff (academic and professional services) and students to share best practice and increase collaboration across the University. The APP Community of Practice will be instrumental in the evaluation of this plan.

A range of activities adopting a whole provider approach will support achievement of the objectives and targets listed in this plan. These include:

1. Contextual Offer Scheme

Our Contextual Offer Scheme enables us to consider academic potential alongside a diverse range of risk factors which have been shown to prevent students coming to university. It has performed well since its inception in 2018 and has been regularly reviewed. Currently, it encompasses consideration of key APP demographic indicators including IMD, age on entry, disability, and time spent in care. Combined with bespoke scholarships which are directly linked to the scheme, we have seen a steady increase in ABMO student enrolment numbers. We have also seen an encouraging flattening of the ratio between IMD1 an IMD5 quintiles, which can be attributed to the Contextual Offer Scheme as IMD is currently a major part of the Scheme. The project sits comfortably alongside other WP activities, such as summer schools, and specific work targeting

groups, such as young people who come from care backgrounds. Linked to our new APP objectives / targets, we are proud that from 2025/26 onwards, the Scheme will attribute points to students previously eligible for Free School Meals and students from military families.

2. YSJ Scholarships Plus

To further increase the positive impact of our scholarships, we are now creating an additional range of support and opportunities for scholarship recipients. To ensure that we do not create a deficit model, students will have guided choice on the elements that they consider would be most impactful for them. The offer includes a new YSJU Scholars Forum, Scholarship Curriculum Partners, EDI Ambassadors and a Scholarships Plus Network. It also includes opportunities for mentoring, internships, and targeted support for employability and further study. These are noted in the intervention strategies outlined above and described in Annex B.

3. Graduate Attributes

To ensure all students can acquire and articulate skills and attributes in high demand by employers, a refreshed set of YSJ Graduate Attributes were co-developed in 2021/22 with key stakeholders including, students, alumni, employers, and staff. This work revealed that employability depends on a complex interaction of the labour market, graduates' social capital, and the capabilities, skills, and personal attributes of each individual student. Our Graduate Attributes emphasise enterprise and professionalism as enablers of career success but also focus on ethical decision making, emotional intelligence, and developing a global perspective to align with our social justice mission. All students are provided with a new digital 'Employability Profile' when they join us, which allows them to track the development of these attributes, reflect on their experience, and develop career thinking across their student journey.

4. Work Related Experiential Learning (WREL)

To ensure meaningful engagement with employers and to aid the development of YSJU's Graduate Attributes, we have created an ambitious Work-Related Experiential Learning Framework (WREL) for YSJU, embedding engagement with employers through placements, live projects, and authentic learning activities across every level of every course. In this way we are actively embedding skills and attributes valued by employers for all students. The WREL Framework's design principles allow Schools and subject areas autonomy in designing WREL activities to ensure the activities are authentic to their disciplines, integrated, and meaningful to the degree programme and associated programme learning outcomes. WREL supports our students to develop aspiration and confidently navigate career opportunities whilst participating in experiences that contribute to future employment and success. By embedding employer engagement firmly in the curriculum, rather than situating it in extra-curricular activities that not everyone is able to attend, students from all backgrounds enjoy equal access to transformative opportunities.

5. Academic Support and Learner Analytics

Our learner analytics tool, Engage, was launched in 2019 with further enhancements being made following the Covid-19 pandemic. This tool is designed to inform personalised supportive conversations focused on student engagement data (attendance, VLE access, learning resource use, patterns of library use). The system allows staff to record and share notes from tutorial meetings and to keep track of students' developmental needs. Effective cross-referral from tutors to Wellbeing or other support services creates a cohesive and dialogic approach to student support across YSJU. We recognise mental health as a significant factor in student withdrawals, with timely intervention key to maintaining our excellent continuation and completion rates. A new Academic Tutorial Policy was created in 2022 which prioritised consistency of approach and extended the offer of both individual and group tutorials to all taught students.

Engage is also used to identify students with low engagement so that they can be contacted personally. The Student Retention Project was established in 2022/23 and aims to contact all Foundation and first year students with low engagement. In 2023/24, we started contacting students from at risk groups. The project will continue in 2024/25, and beyond, as we develop our use of Learning Analytics to improve continuation and completion rates for all students (beyond first year), particularly for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

6. Student Hub

The new Student Hub is designed to deliver a rapid-response student triage, support and information service that will reduce wait times, improve query resolution rates, and empower students to access self-service support. Developed in response to student feedback on challenges experienced accessing support distributed across more than 20 teams, our investigations found that students experience a support journey that is sometimes confusing, disjointed and time-consuming. The development of a new Student Hub, underpinned by a single Case Management System, will enhance student experience, increase students' awareness of the range of support available, and enable staff to gain a holistic view of student support needs.

7. Cost of Living Support

YSJU has introduced a range of measures to ease financial pressures on students and increase support throughout the academic year. We extended the Student Support Fund, from £188k in 2021/22 to £405k from 2022/23 onwards in response to the increased cost of living pressures. Subsidised catering and membership of sports and societies was also introduced to help support our students. In addition, we funded professional membership fees and DBS checks, introduced Period Dignity initiatives, and removed resit fees for all students.

8. Inclusive Education Framework

Our new Inclusive Education Framework (IEF) resulted from a collaborative, QAA-funded project between University of Hull, University of Derby, Keele University, Staffordshire University and YSJU. The IEF, together with its reflective questionnaires and supplementary toolkit, aims to empower staff and students to work together in building an inclusive curriculum in its truest sense. It takes a holistic, 'whole provider' approach, recognising that all members of a Higher Education Partner's (HEP's) community have a responsibility, as well as the skills and expertise, to practise in inclusive ways. This approach is demonstrated by the IEF's coverage of the following areas of work which go beyond what is traditionally understood as teaching and learning. It encompasses structures and processes, curriculum design and delivery, assessment and feedback, community and belonging, and articulates pathways to success.

The IEF was formally adopted by the University in 2023/24 after some piloting the previous year. It has been supported across the University by a series of CPD sessions available to academic and professional services staff. It has already been built into revalidation and course enhancement processes, with subject teams using the IEF to reflect on current practices and review where appropriate. Our professional recognition Fellowship schemes for staff have recently been reaccredited with Advance HE, bringing together the dimensions of the new Professional Standards Framework (PSF) 2023 with the IEF. The Framework will underpin our institution-wide assessment project in 2024/25, in which year we also plan to develop an anti-racism lens on the IEF in line with our strategic and APP priorities. There is APP representation on both the APP Steering Group and the IEF Working Group to ensure practices are aligned and positive outcomes delivered for all our students.

9. Mental Health

YSJU's Wellbeing and Welfare, and Disability and Inclusion services were reconfigured from the previous Student Access, Wellbeing and Support Service in August 2023. This was in response to students presenting with increasingly complex and diverse needs, and a growing proportion of students starting university with a disability (including mental ill health), a higher proportion of which are undisclosed. The new service structure ensures safe and effective assessment and management of risk, and dedicated management of complex cases. Led by a Head of Service who promotes a whole-University approach, the service works cross-institutionally with teams such as Teaching and Learning Enhancement to establish a co-ordinated approach to learning, teaching and support of students. More information can be found in Annex B.

Student consultation

At YSJU, we recognise students as active and equal partners in shaping their educational experience and the broader University community. We view student partnership as essential for fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility amongst students and staff, ultimately leading to the delivery of high-quality education and the flourishing of a supportive education community. Our Student Partnership Plus Policy (2023) articulates our principles of partnership and identifies expectations for regular, meaningful partnership and the structures and practices that enable it. During the preparation of this plan, student voice and experiences have been taken into consideration in two ways: indirectly, via established collaboration and engagement structures between the University and the SU established by our Student Partnership Plus Policy; and directly by engaging with key SU representatives about the new Access and Participation Plan.

We work in partnership to recruit and engage with Students' Union (SU) representatives who include academic course reps, Chairs of School, Liberation Officers and Sabbatical Officers. Our partnership and co-creation with the SU includes regular established collaboration and engagement, such as:

- The SU president is a member of the Board of Governors and SU Sabbatical Officers are full members of various Board of Governors sub-committees.

- The SU and Executive Board meet every six weeks, with chairing alternating between the Vice Chancellor and the SU Chief Executive. This has included regular updates on the progress of our creation of this submission.

- SU Sabbatical Officers co-chair committees and influence cross-University decision-making. For example, the SU President of Education is a Deputy Co-Chair of Education Committee, is a full member of the APP Steering Group, and is the Co-Chair of the Student Partnership Plus Steering Group.

- Liberation Officers and Chairs of School work with colleagues across the University to make important contributions to the University's commitment to social justice; for example, making leading contributions to the University's ongoing commitment to decolonisation of the curriculum.

- Chairs of School have a significant role in decision-making in Schools, including membership of School Quality Panels and Staff and Student Engagement Committees.

We work in partnership with students, including the Students' Council, on a variety of changes, projects and developments. Students shape our prioritisation of equality and diversity to ensure we are a genuinely inclusive community. For example, students have played a significant role in the development of our work relating to Athena Swan, the Race Equality Charter, our Trans-Inclusive Network, Black History Month, and our continuing work on Decolonisation and Race Equality.

Considering students' experience via established collaboration and engagement structures

As a full member of the APP Steering Group, the SU President of Education has been a key contributor at all stages of the development of this plan. The plan has also been shaped by discussion at Education Committee, where SU representatives had the opportunity to comment and provide feedback based on student voice and experiences. For example, the challenges faced by commuter students have been highlighted at several Education Committee meetings, which forms part of the rationale for commitment 3 to identify gaps and barriers faced by commuter students. Mental health was also highlighted as an area of concern by both staff and students at Education Committee meetings which made us change our initial more general commitment to mental health into a more structured objective (objective 6 – to eliminate the continuation and completion gaps between students with and without a declared mental health condition), and the inclusion of our whole-provider approach to mental health in the whole provider approach section of the new plan.

Direct engagement with key SU representatives about the new access and participation plan

Direct engagement with students was initiated by an introductory meeting between the Programme Manager (Access, Attainment and Progression) and the SU Student Voice Coordinator early in

2024. Following this initial meeting, an informal consultation meeting was arranged with SU Officers on 8 March. SU Officers and attending students were introduced to APP data and the main intervention strategies planned to address current gaps. Students highlighted the following points:

- Better communication about the student support and opportunities on offer to all students was needed.

- Better communication about Mental Health support provision and what it entails.

- Challenges faced by mature students.

As a result, several targeted communication activities have been added to specific intervention strategies. To support the APP Student Submission, the Programme Manager (Access, Attainment and Progression) met with the President of the SU. As a result, an MS Teams space was created where SU and relevant staff members could share relevant documents.

A second consultation session was conducted as part of the SU Societies Conference. The SU Societies and Volunteering Coordinator and the SU Student Voice Coordinator were instrumental in designing this activity which produced a range of valuable feedback from students. The session included a brief introduction to the proposed new APP objectives and intervention strategies. Students were then asked to share feedback using Mentimeter. Below is a summary of the feedback received:

- Overall, students agreed with the new APP objectives and the strategies put in place to address current gaps.

- Low-income scholarship may not be the most useful.

- More awareness from staff about vocational qualifications and early engagement with students with vocational qualifications only.

- Positive feedback about outreach work in schools.

- More support for mental health.

- More support for commuter students.

The session generated useful feedback that was subsequently discussed at APP Steering Group level. Several of the ideas put forward by students were incorporated in intervention plans, such as a bespoke pre-arrival and induction for students with vocational qualifications only, and staff awareness activities. Feedback about the low-income scholarship was in line with feedback received by scholarship recipients (Annex A). This feedback was instrumental in the review of our scholarship offer. One of the main outcomes of this session was the understanding that there is appetite for more structured ways for students to get involved in the ongoing implementation of the APP. Our Scholarships Plus intervention includes a range of paid and voluntary opportunities for students to co-create interventions. Adding APP engagement to the role descriptions of SU Officers' and embedding the voices of Liberation Officers in evaluations was also discussed as a possible way forward.

Evaluation of the plan

In recent years, our use of increasingly data-informed processes of continuous improvement have meant we are well-placed to ensure the robust evaluation of our new APP. Our increasing use of Learner Analytics has enabled us to identify and monitor students at risk. Our data-informed approach to continuation and completion has identified key risk points in the student journey, informing the interventions developed in this plan. Our use of an interconnected Case Management System will create efficient and effective means of collaborating across university structures.

We have used a Theory of Change methodology drawing on NERUPI and TASO materials to design the objectives, targets and interventions outlined in this plan. Our ongoing approach to evaluation will draw on TASO methodology and deploy the OfS evaluation self-assessment regularly to ensure we continue to embed good practice. To strengthen our evaluation activity

further, we are embedding Theory of Change across the University and are enabling all staff to use Theory of Change in their daily practices, particularly staff within our Student Success and Learning Services Directorate. To facilitate this, and following feedback during our APP sessions, we are creating an APP Community of Practice to create a shared space where staff (and eventually students) can share best practice and think collaboratively about new and innovative ways to support all students, particularly those most at risk. This Community of Practice will initially be framed by workshops to develop Enhanced Theories for Change. We are using TASO's resources and will create a bank of resources accessible to all staff, to build a consistent University-wide approach to evaluation of interventions.

All evaluation reports will be published internally on a dedicated intranet page. Our intention is to publish externally summary evaluation reports and key findings on the APP page of the YSJ website. Where findings are established, we are committed to publishing evaluation reports for new activities (these are clearly marked throughout the plan) linked to our six objectives. We also intend to share our findings at conferences (internal and external) and network meetings (e.g. NERUPI, HEAT). Evaluation findings related to activities delivered in partnership with other organisations will be published on their respective websites, and the relevant links will be provided on our APP page. Once the OfS establishes the repository proposed (RA6 para 208) we will adhere to OfS guidelines for submission of findings. Our evaluations may entail collaboration with other providers and/or the generation of academic insights. In some cases, we may also be able to share our evaluation findings through papers published in academic journals. However, it is not yet possible to identify which evaluation findings will be shared in this way. We are also working closely with our Student's Union to develop a space where activities, progress against targets, and evaluation findings are shared with students.

In 2024/25, the APP Programme Board will be reorganised to reflect the new plan: workstreams will be created covering each intervention strategy to ensure the evaluation plan for each intervention strategy is produced holistically rather than focusing on each activity. Although each activity will be evaluated separately, the interpretation of the results and identification of further actions will be made for the whole intervention strategy ensuring activities contribute to the relevant overall objective. While data collection will be the responsibility of staff delivering activities, analysis and interpretation will be produced using a matrix of staff from across the University (both academic and professional services) with the specific data analysis and research expertise needed for the evaluation of the plan. The oversight of the evaluation of intervention strategies will be incorporated into the three 'Insights and Interventions Programme Boards' mentioned above, covering 'Student Experience, Wellbeing and Belonging', 'Assessment, Attainment and Feedback', and 'Outcomes and Progression'. In turn, these will regularly report to Education Committee and Academic Board. Evaluating the APP will take place alongside current developments on Educational Gain, as described in our most recent TEF.

Provision of information to students

Pre-entry

We provide enquirers and applicants with clear information about fees and our financial support package at multiple points throughout their journey with us. Our Student Recruitment and Widening Participation team deliver information, advice and guidance around student finance, using Student Finance England (SFE) resources, to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is used.

The Student Funding Advice team is in attendance at all Open Days and Decision Days to provide advice and information on fees, SFE funding, financial support offered by the University, and budgeting.

Details of our current fees can be found on each individual course page on our website, ensuring applicants have this information from the moment they start to consider YSJU as their institution of choice. The course pages also include information about placement year funding, study abroad funding and additional course related costs.

When a student receives an offer for a place, they are at that point provided with the Student Terms and Conditions and the Student Financial Regulations. Both documents are also available on the website and along with our current and previous Access and Participation Plans. Applicants also receive several finance, funding and scholarship-specific e-mails as part of our wider conversion campaign, including information and guidance for students coming to us via UCAS Clearing.

Post-entry

Once enrolled, students can access the Student Funding Advice team through in person and online drop-ins throughout the year for information, advice and guidance on fees and financial support.

Our Student Funding Advice team manage and administer the Student Support Fund, which provides financial assistance to students facing unexpected financial difficulties. This fund is open to all students, is non-repayable, and eligibility is based on an income and expenditure assessment, with a maximum award of £2,000. Our new Student Hub will ensure student cases are swiftly triaged to specialist knowledge areas, such as Student Funding Advice.

We also offer access to Blackbullion, a financial wellbeing tool, for all students. This provides students with a learning platform covering topics such as budgeting, investments, and HE funding specific modules. Students registered for Blackbullion have access to a hub of support funds, scholarships and grants, allowing them to see at a glance funds offered by their own institution as well as those open to applicants and students across the UK.

Eligibility for Scholarships

In our 2020/25 APP, we listed a commitment to undertake an evaluation of the 'YSJU Aspire Bursary' scheme, and its intended impacts. This evaluation was completed using the OfS Financial Toolkit and the outcome was communicated back to the OfS in the 2019/20 Impact Report. The results showed a mixed picture in the Bursary's ability to support student continuation, indicating that it was partially effective in retaining students in-year for the first year of their studies but had no statistically significant effect on improving continuation rates into second year. Given the financial commitment involved in the scheme, the decision was made to discontinue the YSJU Aspire Bursary and replace it with the YSJU Scholarships.

There are four categories of YSJU Scholarship, each worth £800 per year of study. They are open to home, undergraduate students, both full and part-time. These categories and the eligibility criteria for each are:

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Scholarship	Students must identify as being in the ABMO population and have a residual family income of less than £42,000. This assessment is made as part of a student's funding application, and they do not need to provide any further information to us.
Care Leavers Scholarship	Students must be under the age of 25 and have been assessed as independent and recognised as a Care Leaver by SFE or an equivalent organisation.
Estranged Student Scholarship	Students must be under the age of 25 and have been assessed as independent and recognised as estranged by SFE or an equivalent organisation.
Contextual Offer Scheme Scholarship	Students must have received four points or more in the Contextual Offer Scheme. Note: this APP now incorporates Free School Meal recipients and students from military service families in the criteria for the Contextual Offer Scheme from 2025 entry.

Students cannot receive more than one of our scholarships and, if they are eligible for more than one, they will receive the award that is of the most benefit to them in terms of support or accessing further funding. Students do not need to apply for these scholarships; eligibility is taken from existing data that the University holds or has access to via SFE.

Annex A: Further information and analysis relating to the identification and prioritisation of key risks to equality of opportunity

Following the release of the latest APP data via the OfS Data Dashboards in March 2023, a high-level analysis was conducted against the APP targets set out in our current APP (2020/21 to 2024/25). The table below summarises our long-term strategic intentions for the target groups in our current APP.

Target Group	Current Baseline	2024/25 Target	2029/20 Goal
Access of BAME students	6.1%	10.0%	13.0%
Access of mature students	9.7%	14.0%	18.0%
Access of IMD1 students (shown as a ration of Q5 to Q1 students)	1.71 : 1	1.22 : 1	1 : 1
Attainment of POLAR4 Q1 students (shown as the percentage point gap between Q5 and Q1 students)	10.3	0	0
Attainment of IMD1 students (shown as the percentage point gap between Q5 and Q1 students)	6.2	0	0
Attainment of disabled students	6.2	0	0
Progression of BAME students	8.5	0	0
Progression of Care Leavers	Fuller data and analysis and ensuring that all Care Leavers have transition plans in place.		

Our initial high-level analysis shows significant progress on some of our targets and highlights our biggest challenges in relation to current targets. This has given us an initial idea of where our focus should be for the new APP. An overview of that analysis is shown in the visuals below. The dotted green line represents current APP targets, and the Red-Amber-Green rating represents challenging areas (🔴), some progress (🟡) and positive progress (🟢) respectively.

Access of ABMO students
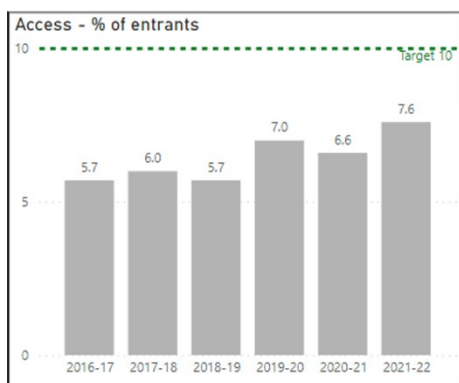
Access - % has increased this year to 7.6 and is at highest level for six years. However, we are still some way from 10% (by 2024/25). 🟡

Access of mature students
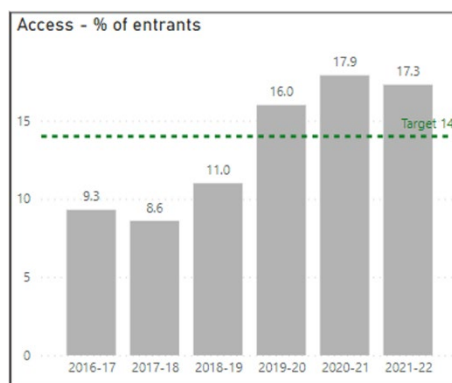
Access - % has dipped slightly but is still 17.3, 3.3pp above the target of 14 (by 2024/25). 🟢

Access gap between IMD1 and IMD5 students
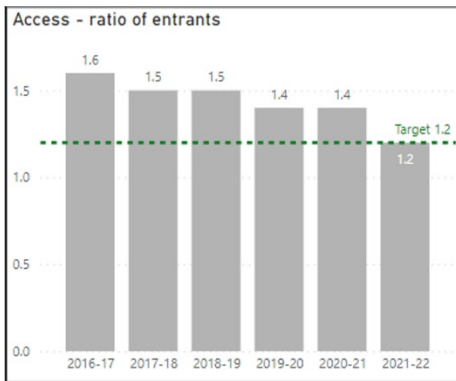
Access – ratio of entrants has dropped and is now in line with the target. 🟢

Attainment gap between IMD1 and IMD5 students

Attainment – Gap has increased to 19.9pp and sits at its highest level. 🔴

Progression gap between ABMO and white students

Progression – The gap is negative, so in favour of ABMO as opposed to white graduates. Although this is a positive result, our target is achieveing a 0 gap. 🟡

Attainment gap between of POLAR1 and POLAR5 students

Attainment – Gap has increased to 16.5pp and sits at its highest level. 🔴

Attainment gap between student with a reported disability and student with no reported disability

Attainment gap - progress against this is promising with the last three years being close to our target of 0. 🟢

The analysis above has enabled us to identify initial indications of risk to be considered in our new APP, namely:

- Percentage of new entrants from Asian, Black, Mixed and Other backgrounds.
- The attainment gaps between POLAR1 and POLAR5 students (now replaced by TUNDRA) and IMD1 and IMD5 students.

The next step in our analysis of performance was to consider the EORR and identify further indications of risk to be considered. The visuals below show the widest gaps identified in our analysis of performance to be considered in the new plan.

Completion gap between ABMO and white students
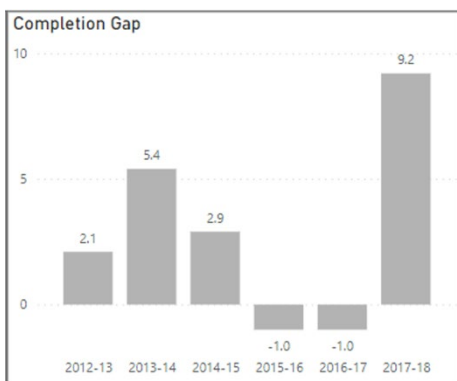
Gap has risen to 9.2pp, our largest value in the past six years of the dataset. 🔴

Attainment gap between ABMO and white students
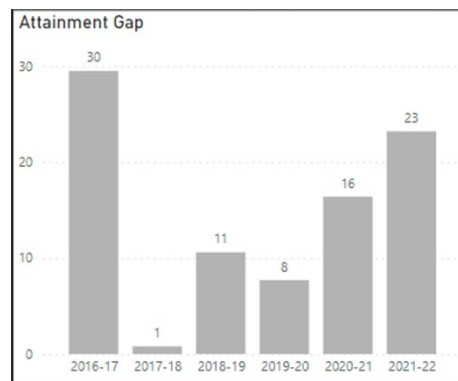
Gap has risen to 23pp. 🔴

Attainment gap between students previously eligible from FSM and students not eligible for FSM
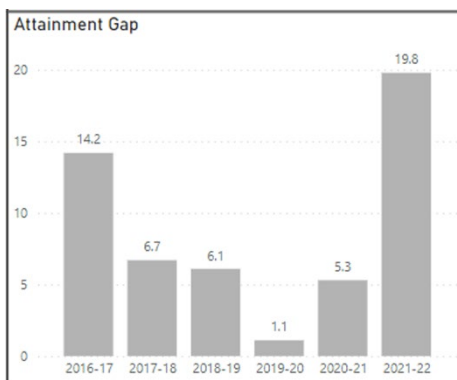
Gap has shot upwards to 19.8pp. 🔴

Progression gap between students previously eligible from FSM and students not eligible for FSM
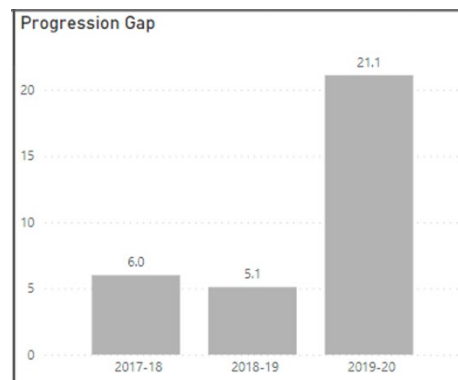
The gap is at 21.1pp which is the highest in the past three years. 🔴

This step of the analysis enabled us to identify two further areas of concern to be addressed on the new plan:

- The completion and attainment gaps between ABMO and white students.
- The attainment and progression gaps between FSM eligible and non-eligible students.

The next step in our analysis of performance was to complement analysis of OfS dashboards with use of internal data which we considered relevant for APP; such as gaps between students with

vocational qualifications only and students with at least one A-level. The visuals below identify further gaps to be considered in our plan:

Attainment gap between students with vocation qualifications only and students with at least one A-level

Attainment gap by Year
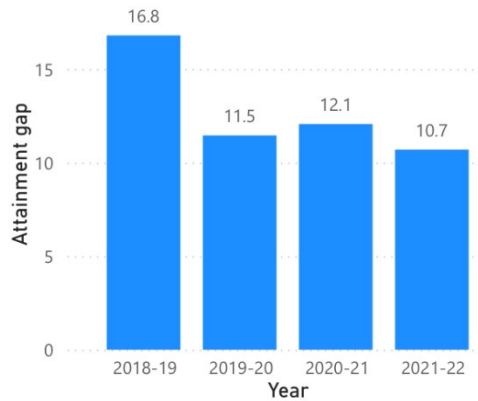
As part of our regular internal analysis of student attainment, we identified a persistent attainment gap for students entering YSJU with BTEC or other vocational qualifications only. In 2021/22, around 30% of our students who graduated that year arrived at YSJU with vocational qualifications only. The percentage of students arriving at YSJU with vocational qualifications only has been rising steadily, and in 2021/22, the percentage of entrants with vocational qualifications only rose to 36%.

Continuation gap between students with a declared mental health disability and no declared mental health disability
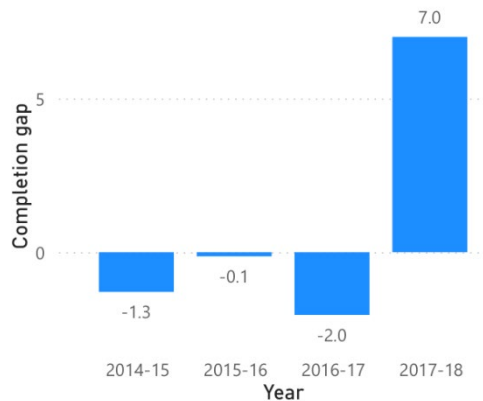
Continuation gap by Year
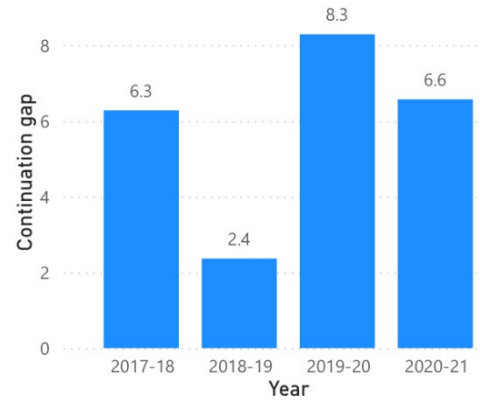
When disaggregating the data used to calculate our current continuation gap between students with a declared disability and students without a declared disability (3.8pp for 2020/21), we noticed this gap increases to 6.6pp when considering students with a declared mental health condition (n=175) and to 11.3pp for students with a declared social or communication impairment (n=33). For all other disability types, this gap is smaller. This suggests that having a mental health condition or a social or communication impairment can be a factor affecting continuation.

Completion gap between students with a declared mental health disability and no declared mental health disability

Completion gap by Year

When disaggregating the data used to calculate our current completion gap between students with a declared disability and students without a declared disability (1.6pp for 2017/18), we noticed this gap increases to 7.0 pp when considering students with a declared mental health condition (n=114). For all other disability types, this gap is much smaller. This suggests that having a mental health condition can be a factor affecting completion.
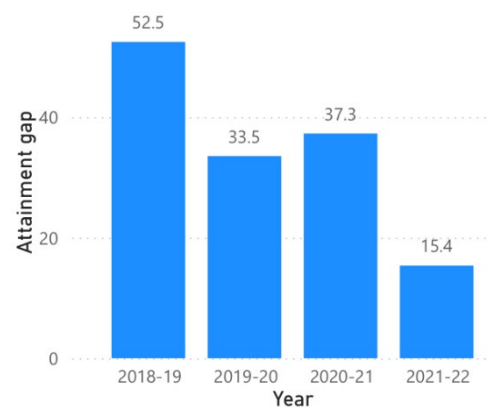
Attainment gap between Asian and white students
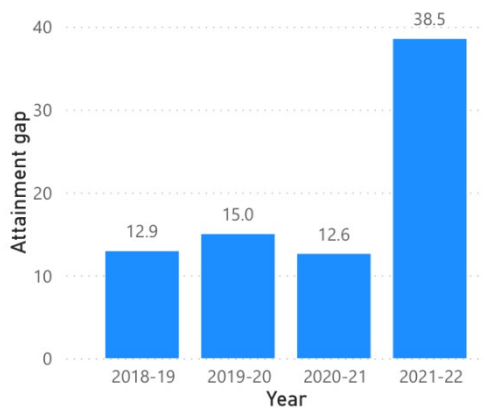
Attainment gap by Year

When disaggregating the data used to calculate our ethnicity attainment gap between ABMO and white students (23.2pp pp for 2021/22), we noticed this gap increases to 38.5pp when considering Asian students only (n=27). As the denominator for this gap is relatively low, we then looked at this gap using aggregated data for the last four years of available data: 20.3pp (n=108 students).
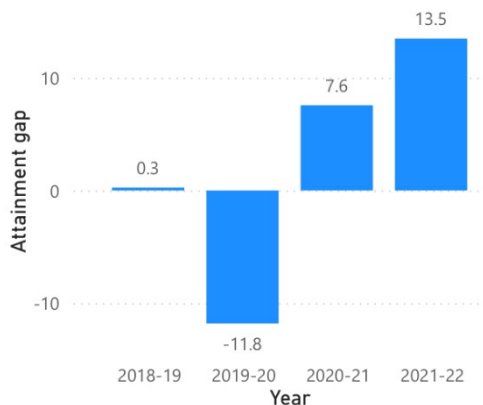
Attainment gap between Black and white students

Attainment gap by Year

When disaggregating the data used to calculate our ethnicity attainment gap between ABMO and white students (23.2pp pp for 2021/22), we noticed this gap increases to 8.9pp when considering Black students only (n=9). As denominator for this gap is very low, we then looked at this gap using aggregated data for the last four years of available data: 33.9pp (n=47 students).

Attainment gap between students of mixed ethnicity and white students
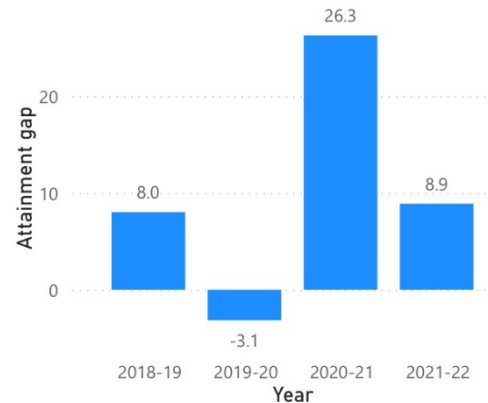
Attainment gap by Year

When disaggregating the data used to calculate our ethnicity attainment gap between ABMO and white students (23.2pp for 2021/22), we noticed this gap increases to 13.5pp when considering students of mixed ethnicity only (n=29). As the denominator for this gap is relatively low, we then looked at this gap using aggregated data for the last four years of available data: 3.3 (n=126 students).

Attainment gap between students of other ethnicities and white students

Attainment gap by Year

When disaggregating the data used to calculate our ethnicity attainment gap between ABMO and white students (23.2pp for 2021/22), we noticed this gap increases to 8.9pp when considering students of mixed ethnicity only (n=<5). As denominator for this gap is very low, we then looked at this gap using aggregated data for the last four years of available data: 10.2pp (n=9 students).

The next step in our analysis of performance was to interrogate the relationship (if any) between outcomes for different Lifecycle stages (continuation, completion, attainment and progression) and students' characteristics.

The data used for the statistical significance analysis included records of students in different years, with most records referring to years 2017/20. Due to the low number of records in each year, we chose to disregard the academic year as an influencing factor and consider all the records to be part of a unique cohort of students. This was possible since these metrics have stayed approximately the same at York St John in the years considered (academic year 2021/22 was an exception due to the anomalies caused by the pandemic, please see below).

Our analysis considered the following factors:
- Age on Entry (Young/Mature)
- Disability (No disability reported/Disability reported)
- Ethnicity (White/Black/Mixed/Asian/Other)
- Free School Meals (Eligible/Not eligible)
- Gender (Male/Female)
- IMD quintile (1/2/3/4/5)
- TUNDRA quintile (1/2/3/4/5)
- Qualification type (A level/Other)

To investigate any possible relationships between the above characteristics and the outcomes at different Lifecycle stages, we conducted two types of statistical analyses. Interdependency between factors was first analysed, followed by more detailed analysis of how each factor could be statistically linked to the OfS metrics. For both types of analysis, we excluded empty/unknown values from the records, when present.

For the first type of analysis, Fisher's exact tests were used. Correction for the multiple testing was applied at the Lifecycle stage level (Benjamini-Hochberg). Due to low observed frequencies, it was not possible to use the Chi-square test. This led to a more time-consuming, but more precise, statistical analysis. For the second type of analysis, Barnard's exact tests were used for all student characteristics except for IMD quintile, TUNDRA quintile and Ethnicity, for which we used a Chi-square test of independence, followed by pairwise Barnard's tests as post-hoc analyses. A step-down method using Bonferroni adjustments was adopted to correct for the multiple testing. Barnard's test was preferred over Fisher's test as it is generally more powerful than Fisher's test when comparing binary factors (here-by powerful, we mean more likely to correctly detect statistical differences). For both types of analysis, statistical significance was set at a threshold of 0.05. Finally, we conducted an ad-hoc analysis to investigate the relationship between Ethnicity and IMD quintile in the four Lifecycle stages. For this analysis, we used Fisher's exact tests for ease of implementation. Threshold for statistical significance was set at 0.05 as well.

The first type of analysis has shown that most student characteristics are related to each other, which has prompted us to conduct an intersectional analysis (tables X and Y). A summary of this analysis is shown in page 39.

The following tables show the results of the second type of analysis. All statistically significant factors (student characteristics) are listed per student lifecycle (including their associated p value):

Characteristic	P value for Continuation
Age on Entry	$1.11 * 10^{-2}$
IMD quintile	$1.77 * 10^{-4}$
Free School Meals	$3.03 * 10^{-3}$
Gender	$1.48 * 10^{-3}$
Qualification type	$8.29 * 10^{-4}$
TUNDRA quintile	$1.54 * 10^{-4}$

Table 2: Student factors that have been found influential for Continuation, reported with their P values. P-values cannot be compared with other P-values in any meaningful way and are simply compared to a pre-selected threshold value to determine statistical significance.

Characteristic	P value for Completion
Age on Entry	$1.54 * 10^{-2}$
IMD quintile	$5.66 * 10^{-4}$
Gender	$2.04 * 10^{-2}$
Qualification type	$8.21 * 10^{-3}$
TUNDRA quintile	$7.03 * 10^{-3}$

Table 3: Student factors that have been found influential for Completion, reported with their P values. P-values cannot be compared with other P-values in any meaningful way and are simply compared to a pre-selected threshold value to determine statistical significance.

Characteristic	P value for Progression
Age on Entry	$4.32 * 10^{-8}$
Free School Meals	$7.42 * 10^{-3}$

Table 4: Student factors that have been found influential for Progression, reported with their P values. P-values cannot be compared with other P-values in any meaningful way and are simply compared to a pre-selected threshold value to determine statistical significance.

Characteristic	P value for Attainment
IMD quintile	$4.20 * 10^{-5}$
Ethnicity	$3.19 * 10^{-7}$
Gender	$5.80 * 10^{-3}$
Qualification type	$4.25 * 10^{-7}$

Table 5: Student factors that have been found influential for Attainment, reported with their P values. P-values cannot be compared with other P-values in any meaningful way and are simply compared to a pre-selected threshold value to determine statistical significance.

The analysis revealed that:

- Most student characteristics are correlated with each other in the APP data
- An average of three factors per Lifecycle stage have been found to influence OfS-measured outcomes
- The most "influential" student characteristics across the stages are Age on Entry, IMD quintile, Gender and Qualification type
- Age on Entry influences Continuation, Completion and Progression rates
- IMD quintile, Gender and Qualification type influence Continuation, Completion and Attainment
- Disability has not been found to be of any influence in the four Lifecycle stages
- Ethnicity does influence Attainment only
- FSM influences performance in Continuation and Progression
- TUNDRA quintile influences success in Continuation and Completion

The ad-hoc analysis revealed that combinations of Ethnicity and IMD quintile influence performance in the four Lifecycle stages in the same exact way that IMD quintile does, and in particular only students with different IMD quintiles (first three quintiles versus last two) display statistically different success, suggesting that the leading factor among Ethnicity and IMD quintile is the latter, and in their combination, the former plays little to no role in the four Lifecycle stages.

The analysis above was used to decide which groups are most at risk at YSJU, and to set specific targets related to different Lifecycle stages. A list of the students most at risk and the relevant lifecycle stages is below:

- ABMO students (access and attainment)
- Students with vocational qualifications only (continuation, completion, attainment and progression)
- Students from IMD1 (continuation, completion and attainment)
- Students previously eligible for Free School Meals (continuation and progression)
- Mature students (continuation, completion and progression)

In addition, and in line with our commitment to social justice, we decided to include our current and future work with young people in low attainment areas across York and North Yorkshire which is captured by commitment 1. Following analysis of internal data, as well as in consultation with staff and students we have also decided to develop our support for students from military families (commitment 2), commuter students (commitment 3) and students with disclosed mental health conditions (objective 6).

The analysis of intersection of characteristics (tables x) used access data for 2021/22. The analysis shows that:

- Of all students previously eligible for FSM, around two thirds lived in areas of high deprivation (IMD1&2), and almost half arrived at YSJU with a vocational qualification. Nearly a quarter reported a disability, and over 60% lived in an area with low representation in HE (TUNDRA1&2).
- Of all students from areas with low representation in HE (TUNDRA1&2) over 60% lived in areas of high deprivation (IMD1&2) and nearly a quarter had received FSM.
- Of all students arriving at YSJU with a vocational qualification only, almost 40% lived in an area of high deprivation.
- Of all mature students, nearly 45% arrived at YSJU with a vocation qualification only and over 30% reported a disability.

A similar analysis was undertaken for ABMO students. Due to the small numbers per academic year, we used four-year aggregated data. The analysis (table Y) shows that:

- Of all Black students, nearly 30% were previously eligible for FSM, and around 70% lived in areas of high deprivation (IMD1&2). Around 40% arrived at YSJU with a vocational qualification only, and over 30% were also mature students.
- Of all Asian students, 17.2% were previously eligible for FSM and around 60% lived in areas of high deprivation (IMD1&2). Around a third arrived at YSJU with a vocational qualification only.
- Of all our students of mixed ethnicity, a quarter were previously eligible for FSM, and nearly half lived in areas of high deprivation (IMD1&2). Over a third arrived at YSJU with a vocational qualification only.
- Of all students of other ethnicities, nearly a third were previously eligible for FSM and over half lived in areas of high deprivation (IMD1&2). Over a quarter arrived at YSJU with a vocational qualification only, and a quarter were also mature students.

This analysis has helped identify where intervention strategies may contribute to each other.

Table X.

INTERSECTIONALITY (%)	2021/22 Access Data														
	ALL	FSM	IMD1	IMD2	IMD 1&2	BTEC/ Voc	Disability Reported	Cognitive/ Learning	Mental health	Multiple or other	Sensory, medical, physical	Social/ Comm	TUNDRA1	TUNDRA2	TUNDRA 1/2	Mature
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
FSM	16.6		29.1	16.4	23.2	15.8	12.7	5.6	18.0	12.9	10.2	13.2	25.1	22.6	23.7	0.0
IMD1	19.3	44.5				22.7	18.8	8.3	24.6	20.0	20.4	18.4	51.8	28.1	38.4	16.4
IMD2	16.7	21.6				16.7	15.5	12.0	19.8	12.9	16.3	10.5	24.3	25.1	24.7	17.6
IMD1&2	36.0	66.1				39.5	34.3	20.4	44.3	32.9	36.7	28.9	76.1	53.2	63.1	34.0
BTEC/Voc	36.0	41.9	39.5	33.8	36.8		38.4	43.5	35.3	28.6	44.9	47.4	39.8	30.6	34.6	44.7
Disability Reported	23.6	24.2	23.3	22.4	22.9	27.5							26.7	21.4	23.7	31.1
Cognitive or Learning	5.9	2.6	2.6	4.3	3.4	7.8							4.8	4.6	4.7	6.3
Mental health	9.1	13.2	11.8	11.0	11.5	9.8							12.4	8.6	10.2	14.2
Multiple or other	3.8	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.6	3.3							4.8	4.0	4.3	4.1
Sensory, medical, physical	2.7	2.2	2.9	2.7	2.8	3.6							2.8	2.1	2.4	3.8
Social or communication	2.1	2.2	2.0	1.3	1.7%	3.0							2.0	2.1	2.1	2.8
Black	1.6	3.5	4.9	1.0	3.1%	2.7	0.9	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	1.2	1.6	2.5
Asian	2.6	4.0	5.8	3.0	4.5%	1.7	2.3	2.8	2.4	0.0	4.1	2.6	2.4	3.1	2.8	1.6
Mixed	3.0	5.3	5.5	2.7	4.2%	3.2	4.2	5.6	2.4	4.3	6.1	5.3	4.0	3.7	3.8	2.2
Other	0.4	1.8	0.0	1.3	0.6%	0.2	0.5	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.6	0.3	0.6
ABMO	7.6	14.5	16.1	8.0	12.4	7.6	7.9	8.3	7.8	4.3	10.2	10.5	8.4	8.6	8.5	6.9
TUNDRA1	16.9	27.8	37.5	20.4	29.6	16.6	15.5	11.1	18.6	17.1	14.3	13.2				0.0
TUNDRA2	22.0	32.6	26.8	27.4	27.1	16.6	16.	13.9	16.8	18.6	14.3	18.4				0.0
TUNDRA1&2	38.9	60.4	64.3	47.8	56.7	33.2	31.7%	25.0	35.3	35.7	28.6	31.6				0.0
Mature	17.3	0.0	15.0	18.7	16.7	23.5	22.9	18.5	26.9	18.6	24.5	23.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table Y.

Four-year aggregated data					
ALL %	Black %	Asian %	Mixed %	Other %	ABMO %
12.5	28.9	17.2	25.9	31.3	23.9
17.4	48.5	38.5	29.3	28.1	36.0
16.3	19.6	21.9	18.0	18.8	19.7
33.7	68.0	60.4	47.3	46.9	55.7
30.6	38.1	33.1	36.1	28.1	35.0
23.2	17.5	14.2	30.2	15.6	21.5
5.9	2.1	2.4	6.8	3.1	4.2
8.9	9.3	7.1	14.6	9.4	10.7
3.8	1.0	2.4	4.4	0.0	2.8
2.7	3.1	1.2	2.9	0.0	2.2
1.9	2.1	1.2	1.5	3.1	1.6
1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
2.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
6.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
14.2	20.6	11.2	16.6	21.9	15.9
17.3	11.3	20.7	18.5	9.4	17.3
31.5	32.0	32.0	35.1	31.3	33.2
15.4	32.0	12.4	17.6	25.0	19.1

In 2023/24, we conducted a survey evaluating our current scholarships offers. The survey was sent to all scholarship recipients. The findings are summarised below:

- only 9% of respondents indicated that they had accessed University 'hardship funds'.

- around 68% indicated they had undertaken paid work during the current academic year, 49% of whom indicated they worked 16 hours or more a week.

- around 61% of respondents did not know that they would be eligible for a YSJ scholarship prior to staring the course, and another 20% were unsure.

This included feedback about the Low-Income Family Scholarship (LIFS) created in 2020 to provide a small award of £250 to support students addressing post-pandemic cost of living pressures. Qualitative feedback is mixed. While some indicate they require higher levels of support (available via the Student Support Fund), conversely, a number of others were unaware they had received a scholarship at all or felt the amount had little impact and was more of a 'token'.

Data released by the Student Loan Company in mid-April 2024 (see figure W) indicates that continuation for YSJ Scholarship recipients has increased more significantly from 2021/22 to 2023/24 than for students who do not receive a scholarship of any kind. Indeed, continuation rates for scholarship recipients, as a whole, now exceed that of those who do not receive a scholarship. The most significant increases have been for Care Leavers, Contextual Offer recipients and

Estranged students. The increase in continuation for ABMO scholarship and LIFS recipients is slower and largely indistinguishable from the rate of improvement found for students who do not receive a scholarship.

The survey also sought qualitative feedback on the experience of scholarship recipients. A common theme among recipients is the increased cost of living, in particular accommodation costs. This leads a number of respondents to request additional support in finding opportunities for paid employment. This limited evidence of impact of the LIFS, the significant student feedback on increased living costs, and the desire for employment opportunities, both correlate with scholarly research and sector best practice, indicating that structured opportunities to enhance belonging, confidence, self-efficacy, graduate attributes and employability have potentially significant benefits for students from demographic groups underrepresented in HE. These insights led us to plan to discontinue the LIFS from 2025 entry and to redeploy the resource to include FSM and military service children in our contextual offer scheme and to invest in higher-impact opportunities and support delineated in the Scholarships Plus intervention.

Figure W: Continuation rates for scholarship recipients
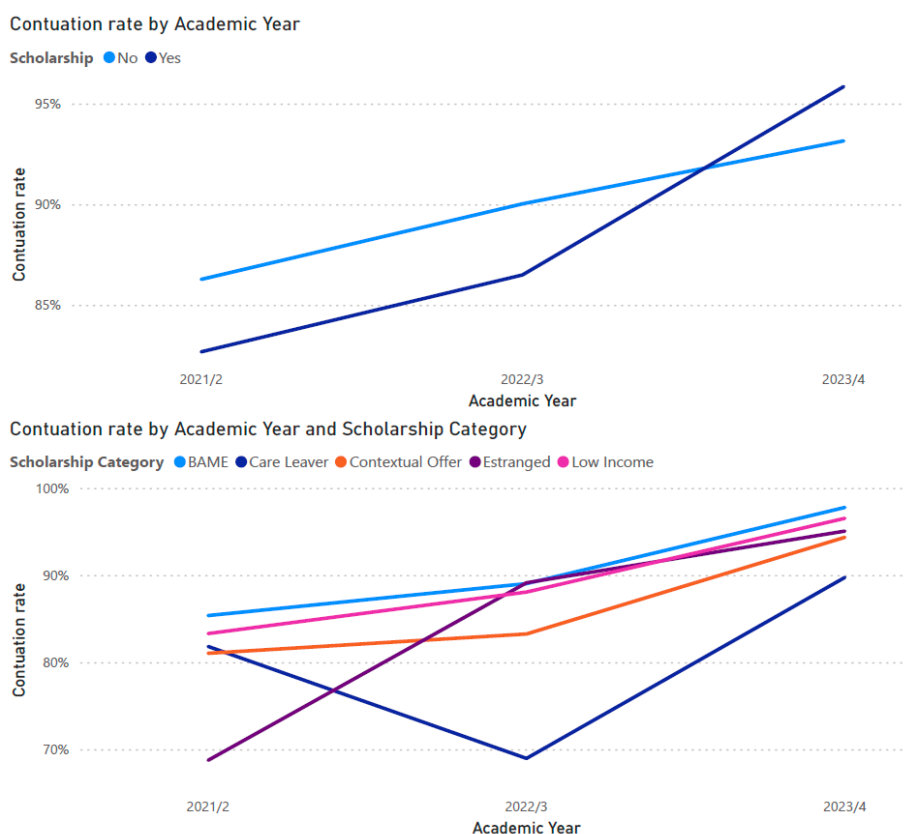
Annex B: Further information that sets out the rationale, assumptions and evidence base for each intervention strategy that is included in the Access and Participation Plan.

Rationales per intervention strategy

Intervention Strategy 1 –ABMO Access

Why aim to increase our institutional diversity? As US author Daryl Smith states:

> The question is not whether we want diversity or whether we should accommodate diversity, for diversity is clearly our present and our future. Rather it is time to move beyond old questions and to ask instead how we can build diversity into the centre of HE, where it can serve as a powerful facilitator of institutional mission and societal purpose.[5]

Diversity, therefore, is not simply an imperative for HE; it is necessary to create and drive positive change in a globalised world. The University attained a Bronze award for the Race Equality Charter (REC) in November 2022. Our REC Implementation Plan commits us to increasing the diversity of our student and staff populations, and we are already actively engaged in a wide range of activities to maximise the number of enrolments for ABMO students with domestic fee status. Our approach to this strategic and ethical imperative has been to develop a number of strands, the rationales for which are supported by internal data, surveys of sector best practice and interrogating external research and scholarship, including literature review.

Demographic evidence supports the need to increase our recruitment of ABMO students. York and North Yorkshire, which make up the recruitment hinterland for the University, have limited ethnic diversity. In the most recent UK census (March 2021), 92.8% of City of York residents reported identifying with a white ethnicity. (The wider Yorkshire and the Humber region reported greater diversity, with 81.5% of residents identifying as white in 2021). York's diversity level is broadly typical of North Yorkshire, a county with relatively few large population centres and large rural areas.

Although much of our Student Recruitment and Widening Participation team's efforts are centred on North Yorkshire, and particularly on pockets of high deprivation in the City of York and the Yorkshire Coast, the University also conducts both general and targeted activities in the West and South Yorkshire conurbations, which have much more concentrated urban populations and much higher ABMO populations.

For us, our REC bronze award was a starting point not an end point. As Bhopal and Pitkin observe, 'real action' must result from the REC which impacts positively on ABMO students' lived experience.[6] In exactly the same way, our efforts to increase our ABMO student population is not envisaged as an end in itself nor an exercise in social justice 'marketing'. Our commitment to facilitating lasting and meaningful change can be seen in our current approach. We discussed Intervention Strategy 1 with the Student Council, where it met with broad support. Some Council members noted the importance of addressing a sense of belonging as a significant consideration for access. This intervention strategy should be read in conjunction with both Intervention Strategy 4 and the account of our Scholarships Plus programme below. Intervention Strategy 4 entails a number of significant and thoroughgoing actions related to curriculum reform and pedagogy, representation and allyship, and staff training. Scholarships Plus creates additional opportunities specifically for ABMO scholarship recipients, to build self-efficacy, influence and sense of

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[5] Smith, D. G. (2020) Diversity's Promise for HE: making it work, Baltimore, US, JHU Press, p. 24.
[6] Bhopal, K. and Pitkin, C. (2020) '"Same old story, just a different policy": race and policy making in HE in the UK', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(4), pp. 530–547. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2020.1718082.

belonging. We are confident that the cumulative impact of Intervention Strategies 1 and 4 and the Scholarships Plus programme will enable us to meet our target.

Our targeted Outreach across Yorkshire involves working with specific partner-schools, with many of these partnerships being longstanding. We have also worked with the QED Foundation in West Yorkshire and formed a multi-faceted partnership which involves work at multiple levels, including sponsoring the annual Yorkshire Asian Young Achievers Award and work with schools in Bradford on the 'Yay YSJ' project. This is a Year 10 mentoring project with several Bradford secondary schools aimed at raising aspirations, enhancing study techniques and developing focused career aims. In addition to this project, the University also runs the Encompass Project with support from the Black Geographers' Society, which provides a mixture of full-day workshops, field trips and links to our summer schools for Year 12 AMBO students. We believe that there is strong evidence to support this type of multi-faceted intervention.[7]

This work is further supported by annual Year 10 and Year 12 summer schools, which are aimed at Widening Participation (WP) students, with AMBO students being particularly encouraged to participate. We will continue to develop, sustainably expand and evaluate these activities. Although the external evidence base around the link between summer school activities and HE progression is still relatively weak, there is some evidence to show that this activity can boost both attainment in school and progression.[8] The University has a Contextual Offer Scheme. Our admissions statistics have shown that ABMO applicants are disproportionately eligible for the admissions concessions that our scheme offers. Data also shows that, when applicants receive four or more points in the scheme, the conversion rate from offer to acceptance is very strong. The Contextual Offer Scheme is linked to a specific scholarship; moreover, our BAME scholarship is also in place to catch any applicants who are not eligible for the Contextual Offer Scholarship but otherwise qualify on financial grounds. The University has conducted a detailed study of offer rates and has found that disparities in offer rates are inconsistent and are mainly caused by factors within the ABMO cohorts, such as tendency towards being mature applicants, and also the courses that the individual groups apply for; for example, Health courses. The study has suggested a number of actions that would help to tackle the disparity in offer rates which will be further considered.

Intervention Strategy 2 – Qualification on Entry

Analysis of our internal data demonstrates statistically significant gaps for students who join us with BTEC or other vocational qualifications only, mirroring sector trends. Sector data shows that students entering UK HE with just BTECs are more likely than A-level entrants to drop out, more likely to need to repeat their first year, and more likely to graduate with a lower degree classification. These differences are largely attributable to differences in academic performance on modules, rather than to non-academic reasons.[9]

Our intersectional analysis (Annex A) shows that, within YSJU's student population arriving with vocational qualifications only, there are high proportions of students who also live in areas of high deprivation and/or areas of low representation in HE as well as ABMO students and mature students. As such, Intervention Strategy 2 also contributes to all targets under Objectives 3 (Socio-Economic Background and Underrepresentation), 4 (Ethnicity). and 5 (Age on Entry).

Studies have shown that guidance and support offered by FE colleges to students studying vocational qualifications can constrain choice and understanding of HE at key decision-making

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[7] Burgess, A.P., Horton, M.S., Moores, E. (2021). Optimising the impact of a multi-intervention outreach programme on progression to HE: recommendations for future practice and research. Heliyon. Vol. 7, Issue 7. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07518.

[8] TASO (2021) Summer Schools - https://taso.org.uk/intervention/summer-schools accessed 5/7/24

[9] Dilnot, C., MacMillan, L., & Wyness, G., (2022) *Educational Choices at 16-19 and University Outcomes* Nuffield Foundation - https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/students-with-btecs-university-success

stages.[10] Reilly et al show that entry qualification is a material factor in the development of self-efficacy and academic performance.[11] Myhill and Morgan demonstrate that, far from being an individual deficit, lower levels of positive outcomes for students entering HE with vocational qualifications is largely attributable to a lack of familiarity with HE's 'hidden curriculum', of 'knowing the ropes'. They stress the importance of enhancing student induction, support and reform of teaching and assessment to establish academic literacies and confidence.[12]

Mitton and Hensby demonstrate that an increasing proportion of ABMO students enter HE with vocational qualifications and are 'often disadvantaged by a learning culture that presupposes and privileges A-level entrants'.[13] Whilst the proportion of vocational entrants at YSJU coming from ABMO backgrounds currently directly matches our overall proportion (7.6% in 2021/22), we are mindful that our target to increase ABMO intake to 12% could increase the proportion of students entering with vocational qualifications. This reinforces our responsibility and determination to ensure that such intersectional disadvantages are not perpetuated.

Drawing on these insights, we will design a bespoke package of pre-arrival and induction activities for students with vocational qualifications. Building on our long track record of partnership with schools, we will develop partnerships with FE providers to collect insights and develop initiatives that enhance YSJU staff's knowledge and understanding of those patterns of learning, teaching and assessment common in vocational qualifications relevant to their subjects. We anticipate that the resulting enhancements to academic practice will enhance both academic confidence and sense of belonging for students entering with BTEC or other vocational qualifications.

Internal intersectional analysis of awarding gaps for vocational entry and for ethnicity has indicated significantly greater awarding gaps in timed assessments and examinations, and in essays, when compared to other types of assessment. These findings correlate with studies demonstrating that examinations are a significant contributor to ethnicity awarding gaps.[14]

The OfS-funded 'Transforming Transitions' report also emphasises that the destabilising impact students can feel when encountering changes in assessment methods is felt more acutely by those entering HE with BTEC and vocational qualifications, suggesting a review of assessment practices at HE level is required.[15]

Over the last year, we have fully revised our institutional generic assessment descriptors (GADs). This was not only in response to regulatory requirements but also to sector research which has shown enhancing and engaging students actively with criteria of assessment to have a positive impact on awarding gaps.[16] Our new descriptors were co-created with students and staff to ensure their clarity, and they use inclusive and compassionate language throughout. All programme directors and their teams are currently aligning their criteria of assessment with the new GADs, and

[10] Gill, A. (2019). Student Transition into HE: Exploring BTEC Sport and Exercise Students Forthcoming Transition to HE Taught within a Further Education Setting. Innovative HE. 3. 90-112; Atkinson, D. (2024). The conditions enabling and constraining BTEC HE decision-making in an English further education college. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *29*(1), 64–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2023.2285630.

[11] Reilly, D., Warren, L., Kristandl, G. & Lin, Y. (2021) An investigation into the self-efficacy of year one undergraduate students at a widening participation university, Teaching in HE, 16 Dec 2021 doi: 10.1080/13562517.2021.2015756

[12] Myhill, D. and Morgan, S. (2019), "Vocational Qualifications, University Access and Widening Participation: Setting the Context", Banerjee, P.A. and Myhill, D. (Ed.) *Transitions from Vocational Qualifications to HE*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Leeds, pp. 13-38. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78756-995-920191002

[13] Mitton, L., Hensby, A. (2024). Bringing Vocational Qualifications into the Inclusivity Agenda: The Case of the BTEC. In: Hensby, A., Adewumi, B. (eds) Race, Capital, and Equity in HE. Palgrave Studies in Race, Inequality and Social Justice in Education. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51617-7_5

[14] Louise Cramer (2021) Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: Alternative strategies for closing the award gap between white and minority ethnic students eLife 10:e58971

[15] Myhill, D., Transforming Transitions: Addressing Barriers to Student Success, 2020. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/70f70c1a-a266-4a6f-bd9e-5c26d31a91b3/exeter-abss-transforming-transitions-report.pdf

[16] QAA, "Collaborative Enhancement Projects - Inclusive Assessment," 2022. [Online]. Available: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/membership/collaborative-enhancement-projects/assessment/.

student support teams will also use the new institutional criteria to ensure student understanding of assessment expectations is enhanced. Building on this work, in line with our Inclusive Education Framework (see below), and based on our analysis of the disproportionate contribution of a small number of assessment types to our awarding gaps, we will undertake a review across the 2024/25 academic year to establish consistent implementation of socially just assessment practice at YSJU.[17]

Studies have shown that students entering HE with vocational qualifications frequently 'struggle to decode the academic structure and language they find themselves in, which leads them to question the worth of their previous knowledge, creating a sense of not belonging in University'.[18] Support to develop skills of independent learning is especially important as this is an area of which many students (especially the already disadvantaged) have limited prior experience and often divergent expectations and processes involved.[19] This is something likely to have been exaggerated post-Covid.[20] Our understanding of and commitment to what it takes to support a successful student transition to HE extends well beyond the first few weeks at university, with activities enhancing academic literacies throughout the first semester and beyond. We will increase the range of assessment and study skills support targeted to meet the needs of students arriving with vocational qualifications only.

Intervention Strategy 3 – Socio-Economic Background and Underrepresentation

The EORR suggests that students from low-income and low participation households make up one of the most vulnerable groups in HE, linking these students to all 12 risks in the EORR. As noted above, our data shows strong intersections between lower IMD quintiles, FSM recipients and entrants from areas with low representation in HE (TUNDRA). It also shows a strong intersection with students who enter HE with vocational qualifications only and some intersections with students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds. As such, interventions in strategies 2 and 4 are also expected to impact objective 3 and its related targets.

Financial challenges are significant for many students and have become ever more pronounced in the last few years due to increased cost of living pressures.[21] The majority of students work increasingly long hours in part-time employment.[22] There is some evidence that students who work longer hours in paid employment have worse outcomes.[23] The challenge of combining part-time employment with studies negatively impacts scope for engagement with social events and

[17] Joanna Tai, Rola Ajjawi, Margaret Bearman, David Boud, Phillip Dawson & Trina Jorre de St Jorre (2023) Assessment for inclusion: rethinking contemporary strategies in assessment design, HE Research & Development, 42:2, 483-497, doi: 10.1080/07294360.2022.2057451; Pauline Hanesworth, Seán Bracken & Sam Elkington (2019) A typology for a social justice approach to assessment: learning from universal design and culturally sustaining pedagogy, Teaching in HE, 24:1, 98-114, doi: 10.1080/13562517.2018.1465405

[18] Swinton, K. (2020). The BTEC 'problem': one strategy aiming to help with retention, attainment and progression. *Academics as changemakers: Addressing challenges in HE context*, (2), 30-37. https://www.northampton.ac.uk/ilt/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/06/Academics-as-Changemakers-Final.docx, p.3 citing Katartzi, E., & Hayward, G. (2019). Transitions to HE: The case of students with vocational background. *Studies in HE,* pp.1-11. P.7.

[19] Gartland, C. & Smith, C., (2016) *Towards a Connected Approach for Inclusive and Positive Transitions into HE* QAA.

[20] Goudeau, S., Sanrey, C., Stanczak, A. *et al.* Why lockdown and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to increase the social class achievement gap. *Nat Hum Behav* **5**, 1273–1281 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01212-7

[21] Adams, R. (2022) 'Thousands of UK students face financial hardship as costs rise: Black, working-class and mature students most at risk of being forced out of HE by financial pressures', *The Guardian*. Monday 10 October. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/oct/10/thousands-of-uk-students-face-financial-hardship-as-costs-rise.

[22] Neves, J, Freeman, J., Stephenson, R., Sotiropoulou, P., (2024) *Student Academic Experience Survey 2024* AdvanceHE/HEPI. pp.38-41.

[23] Zhang, X., & Yang, L. (2020, March). The effects of employment on undergraduate student academic performance. In 2020 ASEE North Central Section conference. https://peer.asee.org/the-effects-of-employment-on-undergraduate-student-academic-performance

activities, which, in turn, leads to experiences of disconnect and isolation. Participation in extra-curricular activities is shown to enhance student outcomes.[24]

TASO have found that post-entry financial support based on students' needs has a positive impact on continuation and completion for those from low-income households.[25] As part of our assessment of performance, we found limited evidence on the impact of our LIFS, due to its low value and broad eligibility. Conversely, we saw greater improvement in continuation rates for our Contextual Offer Scheme scholarship holders. This scholarship recognises significant factors of socio-economic disadvantage, such as Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). In light of data showing on-course gaps for Free School Meal recipients, we will undertake to include FSM within our Contextual Offer Scheme criteria in future. These scholarships, together with our significantly expanded Student Support Fund, seek to mitigate the risks presented by financial pressures to continuation and completion.

Research indicates that students from underrepresented student groups struggle to ask for help when on course.[26] A recent Sutton Trust poll shows students from deprived areas are more likely than their more affluent peers to have missed deadlines or asked for an extension in order to prioritise paid work.[27] TASO's evaluation demonstrates there is a plausible casual connection between the use of Learner Analytics and improved student outcomes.[28] Foster and Siddle note that 'students with widening participation status generate alerts' in learning analytics systems at markedly higher rates, 'demonstrating the potential of such systems to preferentially target support at disadvantaged groups without needing to target directly based on immutable factors such as their socio-economic background'.[29] YSJU's use of Learner Analytics enables academic tutors,[30] our retention call centre and other appropriate staff to identify declines in academic engagement and proactively contact and support students to remain on their course. Our new Student Hub will provide well-signposted and accessible triaged guidance on the support available, including support for assessments, extensions, study support, as well as funding advice, our Student Support fund, Wellbeing and Welfare, Disability and Inclusion, and other support services. Contextual Offer Scheme scholars will also receive targeted communications promoting available support as well as opportunities for paid employment or to study abroad. We anticipate this will increase awareness and uptake of support available and mitigate risks to all on course and progression outcomes.

Alongside the direct financial support provided, we will continue to monitor and reduce additional course costs and provide enhanced financial education and training to support students in deploying their financial resources to maximum effect. Importantly, this education and training does not assume any personal deficiency or lack of skill in budgeting, but provides a structured opportunity to enhance confidence in managing finances.

TUNDRA1 students frequently return to their 'home' areas after graduation where there are likely to be fewer 'high-skilled' employment opportunities. Interventions are needed to increase opportunities or raise aspirations of geographical mobility. Graduate career satisfaction is strongly correlated with the perception that HE has equipped students with the skills and attributes to

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[24] Kerrigan, M., & Manktelow, A. (2021). Extra-curricular activities in HE: Enhancing the student experience. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 23(1), 123-147.
[25] TASO (2023) Financial support (post entry) Available from: https://taso.org.uk/intervention/financial-support-post-entry/#heading-what-is-this-intervention
[26] Chiu, T., (2023) 'Students Need Help Asking for Help' – WonkHE - https://wonkhe.com/blogs/studentsneed-help-asking-for-help/
[27] Sutton Trust, 'New Polling on the Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Students' 6th March 2023 https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/new-polling-on-the-impact-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis-on-students/
[28] TASO https://taso.org.uk/intervention/learning-analytics-post-entry/ accessed 25th June 2024
[29] Foster, E., & Siddle, R., (2020) 'The effectiveness of learning analytics for identifying at-risk students in HE.' Assessment and Evaluation in HE 45:6, 842-854.
[30] Our term for personal tutors.

function effectively in their work.[31] There is emerging evidence that courses structured to include a range of work-related 'placements' have beneficial effects for the students who have the means to access them.[32] A key part of our commitment to positive progression outcomes for all students is our Work-Related Experiential Learning (WREL) framework which is designed to ensure that students from all backgrounds benefit from opportunities to work directly with employers from a range of sectors. It has long been recognised that embedding such opportunities into the curriculum is beneficial.[33] Our innovative approach to WREL ensures that a variety of forms of engagement with employers feature within curricula, at all levels, in ways authentically mapped to the particular subject discipline and signature pedagogy of the subject students are studying. Research demonstrates that these intimate connections between employability, and the particular interests and context of the students on a course, enhance the depth of student engagement.[34]

Students from underrepresented backgrounds are more likely to have significant commitments to part-time work and responsibilities that restrict the scope for engagement in extracurricular employability-related activities.[35] Internships are increasingly prominent as a means for graduates to access the jobs to which they aspire. However, research demonstrates these are often difficult to access for those without social capital, 'connections, know-how and the financial means to support themselves'.[36] Nonetheless, there is a strong correlation between the skills criteria identified in graduate job advertisements and the skills gained by students in part-time work.[37] There is also strong evidence that students' participation in in-curricular work-related experience leads to clear 'labour market gains, irrespective of the type of employment students engaged in during their university years'.[38] Our 'employability profile' and content embedded in curricula also enable our students to reflect on the ways in which their part-time employment and prior experience enhance their graduate attributes. TASO suggest there is currently limited evidence of the impact of technology-based solutions to improve employability / employment outcomes.[39] Nonetheless, they note one study demonstrating that employers recognise the positive benefits of using e-portfolios.[40] A more recent study shows that students' perceptions of such portfolios are correlated with increased confidence in their skills, attributes and competencies as they enter the graduate job market.[41]

Our Scholarships Plus offer (below) includes mentoring opportunities from mentors and targeted employability mentoring for scholarship recipients aimed at enhancing aspiration and confidence.

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[31] Emms, K., (2020) "Drivers of early career success for UK undergraduates: an analysis of graduate destinations surveys". London: Edge Foundation
https://www.edge.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/edge_hesa_analysis_report_web-1.pdf. Accessed 26.6.24.
[32] TASO toolkit – Work experience (post-HE) https://taso.org.uk/intervention/work-experience-post-he/ accessed 26/6/24.
[33] For example Jackson, D & Dean, B.A. (2023) The contribution of different types of work-integrated learning to graduate employability, HE Research & Development, 42:1, 93-110, doi: 10.1080/07294360.2022.2048638
[34] Scott, F. J., & Willison, D. (2021). Students' reflections on an employability skills provision. *Journal of Further and HE*, *45*(8), 1118–1133. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1928025
[35] Peach, D., Moore, K., Campbell, M., Winchester-Seeto, T., Ferns, S., Mackaway, J., & Groundwater, L. (2016). Building institutional capacity to enhance access participation and progression in WIL. Australian Government. Jackson, D., Dean, B. A., & Eady, M. (2023). Equity and inclusion in work-integrated learning: participation and outcomes for diverse student groups. *Educational Review*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2182764
[36] Roberts, C and Ouwehand, O. (2017) internships as opportunity how employers should offer accessible, high-quality placements. Institute for Public Policy Research https://trustforlondon.org.uk/research/internships-opportunity-how-employers-should-offer-accessible-high-quality-placements/ accessed 26/6/24.
[37] Evans, C., and Yusof, Z. (2020). The importance of part time work to UK university students. Industry and HE, 35(6), 725-735.
[38] Jackson, D. (2023). The relationship between student employment, employability-building activities and graduate outcomes. *Journal of Further and HE*, *48*(1), 14–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2023.2253426
[39] TASO toolkit 'Technology-based solutions to improve employability/employment outcomes (post-HE). https://taso.org.uk/intervention/technology-based-solutions-to-improve-employability-employment-outcomes-post-he/ accessed 26.6.24
[40] Mitchell, L., Campbell, C., Somerville, M., Cardell, E. & Williams, L. T. (2021) Enhancing graduate employability through targeting ePortfolios to employer expectations: a systematic scoping review. Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability. 12 (2), 82–98
[41] Gutiérrez-Santiuste E, García-Segura S, Olivares-García MÁ, González-Alfaya E. HE Students' Perception of the E-Portfolio as a Tool for Improving Their Employability: Weaknesses and Strengths. *Education Sciences*. 2022; 12(5):321. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12050321

TASO's evaluation highlights emerging evidence that coaching and mentoring positively impact student outcomes.[42] More specifically, there is evidence that focussed blended mentoring improves attainment and progression outcomes.[43] However, the broad definition and variable focus and implementation of such interventions in the sector restricts the strength of evidence of sustained impact. We will provide students with mentoring focussed specifically on their transition to employment, with a significant component seeking to increase aspiration for graduates from underrepresented backgrounds. We anticipate this tighter focus and more tailored approach may enhance progression outcomes.

Intervention Strategy 4 – ABMO Award

At YSJU, we recognise that the ethnicity awarding gap is widespread, persistent, and widening across the sector. While our targets are formulated at a high level of aggregation (ABMO), this is solely due to some small denominators generating statistically insignificant volatility in gaps. We recognise that there are differences in outcomes within and between race and ethnic groups listed. As such, the aggregation ABMO is limited and has the potential to mask the complexity of factors and experiences contributing to the awarding gaps.[44] Our students from ABMO backgrounds are nearly twice as likely to come from IMD1 locations, are moderately more likely to be mature entrants, and enter HE with vocational qualifications only. As such, Intervention Strategies 2, 3 and 5 are anticipated to have a beneficial impact for students from ABMO backgrounds.

In line with emerging practice in the sector, we adopt the term 'awarding gap' to avoid the deficit modelling often implicit in the still more commonly used 'attainment gap'.[45] As Loke notes, this conscious change in wording provides "recognition of the multiplicity of factors that contribute to student success, and how institutional structures and discrimination can affect this".[46] The failure of deficit approaches to impact awarding gaps is due in large part to the misdirected and stigmatising focus on students' own backgrounds and adopting tactics to 'fix' these.[47]

There is limited evidence of consistently effective interventions to reduce awarding gaps. Mountford Zimdars *et al* suggest retention and awarding gaps have a range of explanatory factors, including: relationships between staff and students and students' sense of belonging; differences of social and cultural capital and challenges in navigating the 'hidden curriculum of HE'; curricula, learning, teaching and assessment practices; psycho-social and identity factors such as feeling supported, encouraged, isolated or alienated in daily interactions with their institution and course.[48] The activities under this intervention strategy address these factors via a multi-faceted approach. They represent or complement actions under our Race Equality Charter (Bronze award) action plan. They are structured around three themes: representation and belonging, accessing support, and reform of curricula and teaching practice.

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[42] TASO toolkit 'Mentoring, counselling, coaching and role models (post-entry) https://taso.org.uk/intervention/mentoring-counselling-role-models-post-entry/ accessed 26.624.

[43] Kerrigan, M., & Manktelow, A. (2021). Extra-curricular activities in HE: Enhancing the student experience. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 23(1), 123-147.

[44] Paul Campbell, D., Hawkins, C. D., & Osman, S. (2021). *Tackling Racial Inequalities in Assessment in HE: A Multi-Disciplinary Case Study*. University of Leicester. https://le.ac.uk/-/media/uol/docs/news/tackling-racial-inequalities-in-assessment-in-he-may-21.pdf

[45] Ross, F., Tatam, J., Hughes, A., Beacock, O., & McDuff, N. (2018) "The great unspoken shame of UK HE: Addressing inequalities of attainment, *African Journal of Business Ethics,* 12:1, pp.104-115.

[46] Loke, 2020. "Time's up for the awarding gap" https://wonkhe.com/blogs/times-up-for-the-awarding-gap/ National Union of Students and Universities UK (2019) *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: closing the Gap",* p.16

[47] Seuwou, P., Dodzo, N., Osho, Y., Ajaefobi, W., & Ngwana, T. A. (Accepted/In press). Exploring the Factors that Impact Ethnic Minority Students' Attainment at a British University. *Journal of Educational Research and Review*, 6(1). p.3. accessed at https://pure.northampton.ac.uk/en/publications/exploring-the-factors-that-impact-ethnic-minority-students-attain.

[48] Mountford-Zimdars, A., Sabri, D., Moore, J., Sanders, J., Jones, S., & Higham, L. (2015). *Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes (HEFCE)*. HEFCE p.92. See also Cousin, G. and Cureton, D. (2012) *Disparities in Student Attainment (DISA).* York: HEA.

Students frequently suggest that a lack of representation of diverse ethnicities and identities in their learning environments impacts their sense of belonging.[49] Whilst we have made progress in both Home and International access for ABMO students, our undergraduate population remains predominantly white. Research shows that students from Black, Asian or other minoritised ethnic backgrounds identify a lack of diversity represented in academic and professional staff as a barrier to them accessing support and increasing their academic engagement.[50] Cook notes "lack of representation in the curriculum will prevent students from recognising their own abilities. By not recognising themselves in their role models they will not be inspired to think that they can have comparable achievements, potentially leading to demotivation and lack of success".[51]

Our interventions under this strategy are designed to increase the sense of influence and belonging enjoyed by students from ABMO backgrounds. This was a key issue identified during our 2021 Race Equality Charter student survey. Our EDI Ambassadors scheme provides paid opportunities for students to develop and run events celebrating difference and diversity. Our Race Equality Charter action plan also includes an array of activities focussed on recruitment and retention of staff from Black, Asian or other minoritised ethnic groups. All staff are expected to undertake training to establish a clear understanding right across our community of structural racism, white privilege, microaggressions, etc. Student induction materials include online training designed to raise awareness of issues of racial injustice. Our 'Report and Support' platform enables members of the University to report concerns and incidents of discrimination and harassment.

The EORR identifies a risk of insufficient academic and personal support reaching our students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds. Our 2021 Race Equality Charter student survey, townhall events and externally facilitated focus groups all indicated that students from Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic backgrounds have less awareness and confidence in the academic support services available at YSJU. NSS and internal survey scores for 'academic support' for students from ABMO backgrounds show lower levels of confidence and satisfaction in these areas. Research shows that, when students perceive their institution to be unsupportive, this has a detrimental impact on their sense of belonging, itself a significant factor in continuation and completion, as well as on the depth of academic engagement and success in assessments.[52] Students from minoritised ethnic groups attending predominantly white institutions frequently report lower levels of belonging and higher levels of dissatisfaction.[53] There is strong evidence across the sector that lower awareness and uptake of academic support impacts continuation, completion and attainment.[54] There is also general evidence of a lack of confidence in seeking support for wellbeing concerns, which reduces levels of accessing support both within universities and more

[49] Blake, Sunday., Capper, Gail., Jackson, Anna. (2022) *Building Belonging in HE: Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach,* Pearson and WonkHE, p.24. UUK, & NUS. (2019). Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities: #closingthegap. https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/bamestudent-attainment.pdf p.22.

[50] Cureton, Debra & Gravestock, Phil. (2019). 'We Belong': differential sense of belonging and its meaning for different ethnicity groups in HE. Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching. 12. 10.21100/compass.v12i1.942; Arday J, Branchu C, Boliver V. What Do We Know About Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Participation in UK HE? Social Policy and Society. 2022;21(1):12-25. doi:10.1017/S1474746421000579.

[51] Cook, F. (2024). Representation and Sense of Belonging for People of the Global Majority in HE. *Student Engagement in HE Journal*, 5(2), 111–128. https://sehej.raise-network.com/raise/article/view/1210, p.123.

[52] Hussain, M., & Jones, J. M. (2021). Discrimination, diversity, and sense of belonging: Experiences of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in HE, 14*(1), 63–71. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000117 Fan, X., Luchok, K. & Dozier, J. College students' satisfaction and sense of belonging: differences between underrepresented groups and the majority groups. *SN Soc Sci* **1**, 22 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-020-00026-0 Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. Research in HE, 48. 803-839.

[53] Foxx, K. 2021, "Cultivating a Sense of Belonging: Black Students at a Predominantly White Institution", *Negro Educational Review,* vol. 72, no. 1-4, pp. 107-129,165., Hunter, C. D„ Case, A. D„ & Harvey, I. S. (2019). Black college students' sense of belonging and racial identity. International Journal of Inclusive Education. 23(9), 950-966.

[54] Mimirinis, M., Ventouris, A. & Wright, E. (2024). Variation in Black students' conceptions of academic support. *British Educational Research Journal*, 50, 241-259. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3921 Panesar, L., (2017) "Academic support and the BAME attainment gap: Using data to challenge assumptions *Spark:UAL Creative Teaching and Learning Journal,* 2(1) pp.45-49.

widely.[55] Our intervention strategy to address awarding gaps includes provision for bespoke promotion of support services alongside a whole provider approach to enhancing the visibility, availability and efficiency of both academic and non-academic support.

Efforts to improve the visibility of academic and support staff from minoritised ethnic backgrounds can mitigate the sense of isolation that can arise in predominantly white university environments.[56] Increased diversity within academic and support staff can encourage ABMO students to engage in academic and pastoral support.[57] In addition to the positive impact of increased representation and of our Student Hub project (noted above), we anticipate that additional promotion of the support available at YSJU will increase awareness and confidence among ABMO students. Our Specialist Support Advisers provide dedicated support to students who encounter social and structural barriers to getting the most out of their university experience.

It is well recognised in the sector that reliance on and exposure to a limited range of perspectives and authors in course content and on reading lists can be disengaging for students from ABMO backgrounds. This leads to lower levels of engagement with course materials and texts required for 'success' in assessments.[58] Through our Race Equality Charter work, our students have provided feedback suggesting module and course content which is currently insufficiently attentive to diverse experiences and contexts is a barrier to their engagement and to the depth of learning. This is consistent with a range of other studies.[59]

TASO's 2022 report on 'The impact of curriculum reform on the Awarding Gap' concluded curricular reforms produced limited impact. This was in part attributed to risks of inconsistent implementation and variable staff engagement. TASO's evaluation also argued that greater impact of curriculum reform is found where developments are embedded within a broader range of diversity training and the provision of enhanced opportunities for staff engagement and reflection. Even then, for such enhancements to be successful, visible commitment from senior leaders and a combination of 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches are required to establish buy-in.[60] At YSJU, our ambitions extend further than diversifying our curricula; we have a longstanding strategic commitment (articulated in our LTSE Strategy) to decolonise our curricula and develop anti-racist pedagogic practices.

YSJU's approach to curriculum reform is just one part of our wider Race Equality Charter action plan, which has sustained visible leadership and commitment from all members of the Executive Board, involves mandatory staff training, a diverse range of workshops and events, and a community of practice gathering insights and experiences from across our community. Our Scholarships Plus provision for EDI Ambassadors and Scholarship Curriculum partners (see below) provides students with voluntary and paid opportunities to work closely with staff, impact our practice, and shape their experience. Research consistently demonstrates that co-creation

[55] Arday *et al* 2022, p.19, citing MIND (2013) Mental Health Crisis Care: Commissioning Excellence for Black and Minority Ethnic Groups, London: MIND.

[56] Seuwou, P., Dodzo, N., Osho, Y., Ajaefobi, W., & Ngwana, T. A. (Accepted/In press). Exploring the Factors that Impact Ethnic Minority Students' Attainment at a British University. *Journal of Educational Research and Review*, *6*(1). p.3. accessed at https://pure.northampton.ac.uk/en/publications/exploring-the-factors-that-impact-ethnic-minority-students-attain.

[57] Dhanda, M., (2010) Understanding disparities in student attainment: Black and minority ethnic students' experience, Available at: http://www2.wlv.ac.uk/equalopps/mdsummary.pdf.

[58] Bird, K. S., & Pitman, L. (2020). How diverse is your reading list? Exploring issues of representation and decolonisation in the UK. HE, 79(5), 903-920. doi: 10.1007/s10734-019-00446-9; Thomas, D. S. (2022) "Pluralised Realities: Reviewing Reading Lists to Make Them More Culturally Sensitive" in A. Day, D. S. Thomas, J. Spickard, & L. Lee (Eds) *Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization: Practical Tools for Improving Teaching, Research, and Scholarship.* Bristol University Press. Pp.110-124.

[59] Ridley, A. M. (2007) "Approaches to learning, age, ethnicity and assessment: Implications for widening participation." *Psychology Teaching Review* 13:3-13; Morrison, N., Machado, M., & Blackburn, C., (2019) "Student perspectives on barriers to performance for black and minority ethnic graduate-entry medical students: A qualitative study in a West Midlands medical school. *BMJ Open;* 9: e032493. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2019-032493.

[60] TASO (2022) The impact of curriculum reform on the ethnicity degree awarding gap. Available at: https://cdn.taso.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Full-report-the-impact-of-curriculum-reform-on-the-ethnicity-degree-awarding-gap.pdf.

activities of this kind increase a sense of influence and autonomy, belonging and self-efficacy for students.[61] Student participation in the shaping of curriculum increases a sense of self-efficacy, belonging and influence.[62] Curriculum design needs to address the variety and range of motivations and priorities of students in undertaking HE. It is imperative that the conceptualisations of academic success, most meaningful to minoritised groups, are heard and addressed in the design of curriculum and learning and teaching.[63] We have redesigned our institutional Generic Assessment Descriptors to facilitate the co-creation of assessment criteria and guidance, and we follow sector best practice in ensuring that staff and students co-design responses to feedback and engage in open dialogue to support a sustained change of culture.[64]

As noted above (IS2), analysis of internal data demonstrates that certain assessment types are contributing disproportionately to our awarding gaps. Our assessment review is expected to reduce awarding gaps for ethnicity. Part of this cross-institutional project will involve an increase in authentic and diverse forms of assessment aligned to active learning. Sector research demonstrates that adopting more widespread 'active learning' techniques also positively impacts continuation and awarding gaps. 'Active learning' is a deliberately broad, umbrella term describing learners' active engagement with their peers and tutors in a collaborative exercise of learning. It can encompass approaches from enquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, team-based learning or other experiential learning modes.[65] In providing support for a variety of models, we will ensure our chosen forms of active learning fit well with subject content and disciplinary norms, while affording students a sense of greater agency and self-efficacy in their learning.[66] Active learning approaches establish deeper engagement and a stronger sense of belonging and academic confidence. These outcomes, in turn, have the potential to reduce both continuation and awarding gaps for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.[67] Through careful scaffolding and co-creation of students' learning experiences, we intend to ensure students from diverse cultural backgrounds and with differing levels of familiarity and confidence with active learning approaches all thrive.[68]

The range of activities entailed in this intervention strategy aim to make sustained change across students' on-course lifecycle, encompassing curriculum, academic and non-academic support, and

[61] Lubicz-Nawrocka, T., & Bovill, C. (2021). Do students experience transformation through co-creating curriculum in HE? Teaching in HE. doi: 10.1080/13562517.2021.1928060

[62] Hughes, A., Michener, C., Mohamed, K., & McDuff, N. (2019). Curriculum co-creation as a transformative strategy to address differential student outcomes: the example of Kingston University's Student Curriculum Consultant Programme. *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching in HE, 12*(1). doi: https://doi.org/10.21100/compass.v12i1.955.

[63] Hughes, S., Laidlow, R., Booth-Carey, J., & Turnbull, E. (2024). Student Inclusion Consultants and Their Role within HE Facilities: Exploring student voice of underrepresented students and the changes they can make in HE . *Student Engagement in HE Journal*, 5(2), 8–12. https://sehej.raise-network.com/raise/article/view/1230.

[64] UUK, & NUS. (2019). Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities: #closingthegap. https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/bamestudent-attainment.pdf May 2019, accessed 26.6.24.

[65] Leat, David (ed) *Enquiry and Project Based Learning: Students, School and Society* London: Routledge, 2017. Garnham, Wendy, & Gowers, Isobel, *Active Learning in HE: Theoretical Considerations and Perspectives* London: Routledge, 2023. Misseyanni, Anastasia, Lytras, Miltiadis D., Papadopoulou, Paraskevi (eds) *Active Learning Strategies in HE: Teaching for Leadership, Innovation and Creativity* Bingley: Emerald, 2018.

[66] Lombardi, D., Shipley, T. F. et al. (2021). The Curious Construct of Active Learning. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 22, 8-43.https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100620973974, p.15.

[67] Braxton, J.M., Jones W.A., Hirschy A.S., & Hartley III H.V. (2008). The Role of Active Learning in College Student Persistence. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning,* 2008 (115): 71-83. https://doi:10.1002/tl.326; Theobald, E.J., Hill, M.J., Tran, E., & Freeman, S., Active Learning narrows achievement gaps for underrepresented students in undergraduate science, technology, engineering and math PNAS - Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 117:12 6476-6483 https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1916903117; Kozanitis, A., Nenciovici, L. Effect of active learning versus traditional lecturing on the learning achievement of college students in humanities and social sciences: a meta-analysis. *High Educ* 86, 1377–1394 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00977-8; Ariel A. Pfeifer, Julio J. Cordero, Julie Dangremond Stanton, "What I Wish My Instructor Knew: How Active Learning Influences the Classroom Experiences and Self-Advocacy of STEM Majors with ADHD and Specific Learning Disabilities", CBE—Life Sciences Education, 22, 1, (2023).https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.21-12-0329; Haak, D. C., HilleRisLambers, J., Pitre, E., & Freeman, S. (2011). Increased structure and active learning reduce the achievement gap in introductory biology. Science, 332(6034), 1213–1216. https://doi.org/10.1126/science .1204820.

[68] Bovill, C. (2020). Co-creation in learning and teaching: the case for a whole-class approach in HE. *HE* 79, 1023–1037.

teaching and assessment. We anticipate the cumulative effect of these will reduce awarding gaps for Black, Asian and students from other minoritised backgrounds.

Intervention Strategy 5 – Age on Entry

Mature students currently make up a sizeable proportion of our undergraduate community and range in age from 21 to 74, with the majority distributed between the ages of 21 and 34. Our analysis of performance shows significant continuation and completion gaps for this group together with high rates of intersectionality for IMD and TUNDRA. Research also indicates that mature students are more likely to have non-traditional qualifications, be studying part-time, have caring responsibilities, a disability, or come from a minoritised background.[69] All of these additional characteristics can add further barriers to students continuing and successfully completing their degrees. Although the numbers of mature students are falling at a national level,[70] the introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement may see this trend start to reverse, bringing a larger and more diverse group of students into our community, necessitating an increased need for impactful interventions.

Mature entrants to HE often report a significant dissonance between their expectations and their experience of university, especially where social, emotional and financial challenges are concerned.[71] Our bespoke Welcome Week Induction aims to introduce mature students to university life from the start of their student experience, ensuring they are fully aware of all the support available, offering academic 'refresher sessions' and establishing mature students as a valued group within the student body. Confidence, or lack of it, often plays a significant role in the experience of mature students;[72] enabling them to feel prepared for the start of their academic studies and integrating them securely into the student body will work to combat this.

Studies have shown that mature students do not always feel listened to within their HE communities.[73] By establishing regular drop-in sessions where they can shape the format and potential activities that occur, we will work to combat this. The Mature Student Network, run in conjunction with the Students' Union, will also provide an opportunity for mature students to feedback to the University on matters that impact them as a group. This ability to take charge and drive change in their own experience will not only increase their confidence but also their sense of belonging, which in turn, will have a positive impact on continuation rates.[74]

Mature students are also more likely to be studying for career purposes than their younger counterparts.[75] Access to a mentoring platform will provide them with the chance to add to their employability skills by receiving mentoring, as well as offer valuable skills and knowledge back to other students by acting as mentors. TASO evidence, although not causal, identifies mentoring as having a positive effect on student outcomes, particularly continuation and completion.[76]

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[69] Hubble, S., & Bolton, P. (2021). Mature HE Students in England (House of Commons Briefing Paper 8809). Retrieved from https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8809/.

[70] https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2024-cycle/2024-cycle-applicant-figures-31-january-deadline.

[71] Hayman, R., Wharton, K., Bell, L., & Bird, L. (2024). Navigating the first year at an English university: exploring the experiences of mature students through the lens of transition theory. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *43*(1), 39–51. Retrieved from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02601370.2023.2297671.

[72] Pearce, N. (2017). Exploring the Learning Experiences of Older Mature Undergraduate Students. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, Volume 19, Number 1, pp. 59-76(18). Retrieved from https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/openu/jwpll/2017/00000019/00000001.

[73] Brown, C. (2021). Mature students: a silent or silenced voice? *What is the student voice? Thirteen essays on how to listen to students and how to act on what they say, HEPI Report 140,* 91 – 98. Retrieved from https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2021/08/21/mature-students-a-silent-or-silenced-voice/.

[74] Thomson, H., Bellaera, L., Ilie, S. & Maragkou, K. (2022) Intermediate outcomes for HE access and success (TASO Rapid Review).

[75] OfS Insight Brief (2021), Improving opportunity and choice for mature students. Retrieved from https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/improving-opportunity-and-choice-for-mature-students/.

[76] TASO Evidence Toolkit. Retrieved from https://taso.org.uk/intervention/mentoring-counselling-role-models-post-entry/.

Results from the 2024 Student Academic Experience Survey indicate that mature students are far more likely to have caring responsibilities,[77] which is reflected in our own data. (Currently 10% of our mature student population are carers and they make up 26% of our student-carer population.) This presents a further barrier to this group engaging in the student experience and achieving successful outcomes. Working with the Learning and Work Institute, as part of their Driving Change in HE project, will enable us to identify student-carers accurately and work to put appropriate support in place to help them achieve successful outcomes. This same project has already been run within Further Education (FE) institutions and the results have shown an increase in retention, as well as the overall wellbeing of these students.[78]

Intervention Strategy 6 – Mental Health

Over the last decade, UCAS has identified a 450% increase in students declaring a mental condition when applying for university.[79] This is, in part due to the willingness of students to talk about mental health, but also due to the increase in stressors faced by students. In total, UCAS estimates that 70,000 students may enter HE every year with a mental health condition, noting that there is still a significant proportion of students who do not declare pre-existing mental health conditions.

At YSJU, we recognise the importance of understanding the complex needs of students who declare mental health conditions. With this in mind, Wellbeing Services are committed to developing a clear understanding of service usage to ensure that appropriate mental health support is provided to students with mental health conditions. This will enable us to deliver targeted support and interventions to ensure students are able to reach their full academic and personal potential.

The service is in the process of developing a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which is supported by Microsoft Dynamics and Power BI. The implementation of the CRM in the Wellbeing and Disability and Inclusion services will enable us to gather targeted student data regarding service usage, and identify patterns and trends across the University. This will allow these support services to deliver data driven intervention strategies to enable improved outcomes for students with declared mental health conditions. The CRM will enable the University to identify students at risk, thereby enabling proactive interventions to improve academic performance and retention rates.[80]

In addition to mapping, monitoring and evaluating service usage, the University is working, in collaboration with support services to develop a Student Hub. The Student Hub will provide a first point of contact for support and advice to ensure that students are able to access the right services for their needs in an effective and timely way. Students will be able to access support both online and in person. This will ensure that they can be triaged effectively and receive the right support and guidance to meet their individual needs. The development of Student Hubs has been shown to increase a sense of belonging, which in turn has a positive impact on student mental health and wellbeing.[81]

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[77] Neves, J., Freeman, J., Stephenson, R. & Sotiropoulou (2024) HEPI / Advance HE Student Academic Experience Survey 2024. Retrieved from https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2024/06/13/student-academic-experience-survey-2024/.

[78] Driving Change Project and Evaluation Report (2022). Retrieved from https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/driving-change-project-and-evaluation-report/.

[79] UCAS: 450% Increase in Student Mental Health Declarations over Last Decade but Progress Still Needed to Address Declarations Stigma. https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/450-increase-student-mental-health-declarations-over-last-decade-progress-still-needed-address accessed online 09/07/2024

[80] ZettaByte (2024). The 15 advantages of CRM in HE. https://medium.com/@zettabyte_pte_ltd/the-15-advantages-of-crm-in-higher-education-269dda71448b accessed online 09/07/2024

[81] HEPI (2024): Link Between Stress and Belonging Uncovered, and Student Mentors Needed. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2024/07/05/link-between-stress-and-belonging-uncovered-and-student-mentors-needed/ accessed online 09/07/2024.

The University is committed to implementing a whole University approach to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of its students. The University Mental Health Charter provides a Framework to guide universities in developing evidence-based interventions which can be embedded in in all areas of their institutions.[82] Supporting domains and themes incorporate all staff groups including academic staff, student support and library staff, and also colleagues in HR, accommodation and security staff. At YSJU, this holistic approach aligns with the ethos and structure of our Inclusive Education Framework (see below).

YSJU's Wellbeing and Disability and Inclusion services will be instrumental in supporting the mental health of students by delivering tailored training sessions to staff. The implementation of specific mental health awareness training will increase the confidence of staff in responding to students with mental health conditions.[83] Staff will gain essential skills in managing students in distress, and also in identifying and appropriately responding to students who present with risks to themselves or to others. We are confident that implementing our whole University approach can improve outcomes for students with mental health conditions through the provision of a safe and consistent approach to mental health across the University. Enhancing and scaling-up staff training institution-wide will ensure that issues relating to mental health and wellbeing can be identified early and the appropriate support can be implemented, thereby improving student experience and contributing to better student retention and outcomes, as well as increasing staff knowledge and confidence.

Intervention Strategy 7 – Pre-16 Attainment

The City of York is generally seen as affluent, but there are pockets of extreme disadvantage within the city. School achievement on the Yorkshire Coast is concerningly low with some wards within coastal areas amongst the most deprived in the county.

York St John has a lengthy history of working with local schools to raise attainment. The University has been training teachers at primary and secondary level since its foundation in 1841, and our School of Education, Languages and Psychology nurtures long-standing links with schools within our area and, with the York and North Yorkshire UniConnect partnership, has worked very closely with schools and colleges on the Yorkshire Coast for some time.

Our work with local schools takes a number of forms, driven by our mission and current strategy. Work is highly targeted and includes a mixture of activity around raising awareness of HE, confidence building, building study skills, specific subject sessions to enhance disciplinary knowledge, providing role models from students currently in HE, and mentoring and literacy projects.

Partnerships with local schools have been broadened and strengthened, with a particularly successful example being the work done with the Hope Sentamu Trust, which covers a number of schools in York and on the Yorkshire Coast. Much of the work currently being carried out is collaborative in nature. Examples of direct partnership working include a collaboration with a local primary school to design and host an event to help their Year 6 students transition smoothly into secondary education. In addition to YSJU's direct partnership work with schools, our collaborative projects involve other key partners, such as the University of York and the York and North Yorkshire UniConnect partnership.

[82] Student Minds: University Mental Health Charter. https://hub.studentminds.org.uk/university-mental-health-charter/ Accessed online 09/07/2024.
[83] Brewster, L., Jones, E., Priestley, M., Wilbraham, S. J., Spanner, L., & Hughes, G. (2021). 'Look after the staff and they would look after the students' cultures of wellbeing and mental health in the university setting. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *46*(4), 548–560. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1986473

The University has more recently broadened the activities it offers to schools. Many of our projects also include opportunities for parents to be involved and aim to promote the benefits of achievement at school and the role that parents can play.

We will continue to leverage these relationships for attainment raising and will explore new ways in which an impact can be made in this area. All courses within our Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes focus on training and educating teachers to support excellent pupil outcomes. Many members of our School of Education also act as School Governors and belong to strategic boards focusing on school improvement. We will continue to work closely with our School of Education to ensure our work in schools aligns with the ambitions set out in this plan.

We have agreements in place to work with the University of York on their 'The Place' project and will be looking to contribute in a number of ways, including using 'The Place' as a possible placement for both our Counselling and ITE students.

Many of our activities around raising attainment are led by student ambassadors. This is an evidence-based approach undergirded by sector research showing the positive impact of role modelling by ambassadors on raising attainment through raising aspiration.[84] Although it is acknowledged that the evidence in this area is difficult to disentangle, specifically as such activity tends to form part of a wider programme, there is qualitative evidence to suggest role-model interventions are most effective when students see the role model as relatable.[85] Consequently, although we will continue to offer activities that are led by University staff, we will emphasise the role that our student ambassadors play in our activities.

Our partnerships with schools; both for widening participation and attainment raising; and between our School of Education and schools and trusts continue to broaden and thrive, and this is an area that the University will continue to develop. Evidence of the effectiveness of such partnership is underdeveloped at present but there are some studies that suggest a beneficial effect.[86]

There is a more established evidence base around the teaching of study skills and soft academic skills and their contribution to attainment raising. This type of activity is embedded in the majority of the activities that we run with pre–16 age groups.[87]

Our programme of summer schools (of which the Year 10 summer school is within the scope of this area) continue to be popular with our participants and are often over-subscribed. This allows us to be selective around participants, based on their individual circumstances and which school they attend, allowing us to make assessment and truly prioritise participants who have the most indicators of disadvantage. We work with participants' schools in order to do this. Although this activity is typically our most expensive intervention in this area, there is good evidence to show its effectiveness in both attainment and aspiration raising.[88]

Intervention Strategy 8 – Students from Military Service Families

The University has a long history of work with service leavers, exemplified by our extensive Outreach activities for service children and status as signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant.[89] However, we do not currently offer dedicated support to young people from military families once they arrive at the University. We already recruit heavily from both North Yorkshire and the North

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[84] J. Sanders and L. Higham. (2012). 'The role of higher education students in widening access, retention and success' A literature synthesis of Widening Access, Student Retention and Success National Programme Archive. HE Academy.
[85] C. Gartland. (2013). 'STEM strategies: Student Ambassadors and Equality in HE. Trentham Books.
[86] SDH Officer, J. Grim, M. medina, R. Bringle, A. Foreman. (2013). 'Strengthening Community Schools Through University Partnerships. Online publication.
[87] Schneider, M., & Preckel, F. (2017). 'Variables associated with achievement in HE: A systematic review of meta-analyses. Psychological Bulletin.
[88] TASO analysis in conjunction with the HE Access Tracker. 2021.
[89] https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/

East, areas which have some of the highest concentrations of service children in the UK,[90] and Inspiring Choices; the UniConnect partnership based at YSJU, is in the top quarter of partnerships in terms of numbers of service children supported.

Research conducted by the Service Children's Progression Alliance Research indicates that service children have a lower rate of progression to HE than their peers (approximately 24% compared to a national average of 43%), and they can face similar issues to those experienced by care leavers, such as a disrupted education and home life.[91] It can, therefore, be predicted that they will require similar levels of support. The addition of this group into our Contextual Offer Scheme acknowledges these challenges, and we anticipate this intervention will work to reduce and remove associated barriers which can limit access to HE.

Service children also receive additional pastoral support whilst in school, funded by the Department for Education's Service Pupil Premium, but this dedicated support stops once they reach HE, despite there still being a need for it. Our commitment to working with this group, and including them in our Contextual Offer Scheme, with its corresponding scholarship, will put them in scope for our additional promotion of support services to scholars. This, we anticipate, will increase their engagement with our Welfare and Wellbeing services. It will also ensure that they are considered in the design of any new support mechanisms alongside other underrepresented student groups. Current data and evidence from interventions for this student group is limited, with nearly 60% of APPs within the last cycle failing to mention this group. The OfS is aware that this is a group where better understanding is needed in order to understand fully the barriers they face and how best to improve outcomes for them.[92] The introduction of the new UCAS widening participation questions to identify future students and students from an Armed Forces background will allow us to build up a clearer picture of how many of these students we have at YSJU and how they fare compared to other students in terms of access, continuation, completion, retention and progression.

This intervention is committed to obtaining new data and interrogating this in detail, along with qualitive feedback from students from military families on their HE experience and the support needed to ensure successful outcomes.

Intervention Strategy 9 – Commuter Students

In 2023, work done as part of our wider LTSE Strategy began to highlight the challenges faced by commuter students at YSJU. This group makes up a significant proportion of students at YSJU, with our list of top feeder schools consistently made up of those within the immediate local area, and around a quarter of our undergraduate students opting to commute. Commuter students now make up 20% of recorded interactions with our Specialist Support team, indicating a need for a more nuanced and individualised support offer. Cost of living pressures and rising house costs in York are only likely to cause this figure to increase.[93]

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[90] *Online Targeting Tool*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Service Children's Progression Alliance: https://www.scipalliance.org/map.

[91] Atherton, G., & Satchell, L. (2023). *Under the Radar: Service children and HE in England Report.* Retrieved from https://www.scipalliance.org/assets/files/Under-the-Radar-Service-children-and-Higher-Education-in-England-FINAL.pdf.

[92] *Transforming Opportunity in HE – An analysis of 2020-21 to 2024-25 Access and Participation Plans.* (n.d.). Retrieved from Office for Students: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/2efcda44-8715-4888-8d63-42c0fd6a31af/transforming-opportunity-in-higher-education.pdf; *Living in Our Shoes: Understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families.* (2020). Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/living-in-our-shoes-understanding-the-needs-of-uk-armed-forces-families: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ef46ad4e90e075c4e144c01/Living_in_our_shoes__Summary__1__embargoed_30_June.pdf.

[93] Blackbullion (2024). Student Money Wellbeing Report. Retrieved from https://business.blackbullion.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Student-Money-Wellbeing-2024-Blackbullion.pdf

Previous research indicates that commuter students are likely to have high intersectionality with other underrepresented student groups, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those within the ABMO student population.[94] Therefore, any work done to meet this commitment will also positively impact many of our other APP objectives.

Guidance in the TASO Evidence Toolkit suggests that there is a positive correlation between programmes of support aimed at groups, such as commuter students, and improved outcomes, but that the evidence is not robust enough to show a causal impact.[95] Our commitment under IS9 will ensure that we have detailed data on commuter students at YSJU, including the distances they travel to campus, their reasons for commuting and the impacts that this has on their university experience. This will allow us to develop effective programmes of support that provide the right interventions at the right time. We will also conduct feedback and ongoing evaluations to build an evidence base for what works.

Further information on key whole-provider activities

Scholarships Plus

Research shows correlation, but not causation, between financial support and improved student outcomes across all on-course areas and progression.[96] Moores and Burgess found that the impact of scholarships is stronger in cases where students come from low-income backgrounds.[97]

There is some evidence that bursary funding also has positive effects on strengthening the intangible benefits of HE, as well as enhancing participation, including sense of belonging, security, independence, motivation, engagement and confidence.[98] However, the impact of financial support post-entry is far stronger when complemented with a range of non-financial support and opportunities.[99] These have the benefit of ensuring a cross-University experience of support across the whole of a student's lifecycle and address non-financial barriers to success experienced by scholarship recipients.[100] In this way, our Scholarships Plus programme combines scholarships with a range of supportive activities and opportunities designed to maximise impact. By integrating Scholarships Plus into our Contextual Offer Scheme and BAME scholarships, the University recognises intersectionality while retaining a strong, explicit focus on the barriers experienced by minoritised groups. Due to these intersections, our Scholarships Plus programme cuts across Intervention Strategies 2, 3 and 4. It comprises activities designed to increase sense of belonging, influence and self-efficacy, improved engagement with support services, and increased academic and careers confidence.

Aspects of the scheme designed to enhance student belonging include our new Scholars Forum, which convenes facilitated student co-creation events to inform key institutional developments

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[94] Donnelly, M., & Gamsu, S. (2018). Home and Away: Social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility. Retrieved from https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/home-and-away-student-mobility/.

[95] https://taso.org.uk/intervention/programmes-of-student-support-post-entry/. See also Maguire, D., & Morris, D. (2018) Homeward Bound: Defining, understanding and aiding 'commuter students' (HEPI Report 114). Retrieved from https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/12/13/homeward-bound-defining-understanding-aiding-commuter-students/; https://www.lizthomasassociates.co.uk/projects/2018/Commuter%20student%20engagement.pdf

[96] Byrne, L., & Cushing, S. (2015). The impact of structured financial support on student retention case study: Buckinghamshire New University. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 17(3), 47-59.

[97] Moores, E., & Burgess, A. P. (2022). Financial support differentially aids retention of students from households with lower incomes: a UK case study. Studies in HE, 1-12

[98] Reed, R. J., & Hurd, B. (2014). A value beyond money? Assessing the impact of equity scholarships: from access to success. *Studies in HE*, *41*(7), 1236–1250. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.96854; Harrison, N., Davies, S., Harris, R., & Waller, R. (2018). Access, participation and capabilities: theorising the contribution of university bursaries to students' well-being, flourishing and success. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *48*(6), 677–695. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2017.1401586.

[99] Clotfelter, C. T., Hemelt, S. W., & Ladd, H. F. (2018). Multifaceted Aid for Low-Income Students and College Outcomes: Evidence from North Carolina. Economic Inquiry, 56(1), 278-303. doi: 10.1111/ecin.12486.

[100] Kaye, N. (2020). Evaluating the role of bursaries in widening participation in HE: a review of the literature and evidence. *Educational Review*, *73*(6), 775–797. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2020.1787954.

(new infrastructure and buildings, reconfigured student-facing services) and voluntary and paid opportunities to undertake roles on selected staff recruitment panels. The Scholarship Plus network will be an annual event enabling networking between current scholars and alumni. There is emerging evidence to suggest that programmes involving mentoring, counselling, coaching and advising are associated with better outcomes for students in terms of attainment, retention and completion.[101] We will develop opportunities for externally facilitated mentoring via an online platform that will provide mentor-matching training and support for scholarship recipients and mature entrants. We will also continue our provision of expert and accessible Specialist Support Advisers providing dedicated support to students who encounter social and structural barriers to getting the most out of their university experience.

We articulate above (IS4) the significant benefits of co-creating curricula for students from demographic groups underrepresented in HE. Our planned co-creation activities will include voluntary and paid opportunities - EDI Ambassadors and Curriculum Partners will not only receive employment that fits around their study commitments, but also have the opportunity to work in partnership with staff and peers to co-create curricula and increase their sense of belonging.[102] These opportunities will ensure students from underrepresented groups are offered flexible means to enhance their university experience, including participation in course validations; consulting on major strategic developments in learning, teaching and assessment; and the development of new courses and student-facing infrastructure projects. Similar approaches in the sector have positively impacted awarding gaps.[103] This partnership and co-creation activity will also support course teams to embed the University-wide Inclusive Education Framework (see below), by facilitating student-led dialogue and development events.

The social aspect of life at university is often identified by students as pivotal in intensifying their feelings of belonging and developing their self-efficacy skills. Studies that have shown that sense of belonging is positively associated with academic success.[104] The HEFCE project *Realising Engagement through Active Culture Transformation (REACT)* concluded that sense of belonging is enhanced when students engage in activities within university spaces.[105] Providing a range of opportunities for social connection, both within learning environments and through extracurricular activities, will help our students feel supported, reduce loneliness and increase sense of belonging.[106] Our EDI Ambassador scheme will provide scholarship recipients with resources and paid opportunities to create events to raise awareness and celebrate different cultures, identities and experiences.

Finally, our Scholarship Plus scheme will create a series of opportunities focussed on career progression, enhancing aspiration and employability. In addition to our strategic Work-Related Experiential Learning (WREL) framework, we will provide scholarship recipients with opportunities to choose between digital internships (with microcredentialing), bespoke career mentoring,

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[101] TASO 'Mentoring, counselling, coaching and role models' https://taso.org.uk/intervention/mentoring-counselling-role-models-post-entry/ accessed 27/6/24. Kerrigan, M., & Manktelow, A. (2021). Extra-curricular activities in HE: Enhancing the student experience. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 23(1), 123-147.
[102] Barefoot, H. and Boons, C. (2019) Developing a BME Student Advocate Programme, Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching, vol 12 (1); Islam, M., Burnett, T. and Collins, S. (2021). Trilateral partnership: An institution and students' union collaborative partnership project to support underrepresented student groups. International Journal for Students as Partners. 5. 76-85. 10.15173/ijsap.v5i1.4455.
[103] Hughes, A L., Michener, C., Mohamed, K., and McDuff, N (2019) Curriculum co-creation as a transformative strategy to address differential student outcomes : the example of Kingston University's Student Curriculum Consultant Programme. *Compass*, 12(1).
[104] Robertson, A., Cleaver, E., & Smart, F. (2019) Beyond the Metrics: Identifying, Evidence and Enhancing the Less Tangible Assets of HE. QAA Scotland
[105] Shaw, C., Humphrey, O., Atvars, T. and Sims, S., (2017) "Who they are and how to engage them: A summary of the REACT Systematic Literature Review of the 'Hard to Reach' in HE. *The Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change,* 3(1), pp.51-64.
[106] Worsley JD, Harrison P, Corcoran R. Bridging the Gap: Exploring the Unique Transition From Home, School or College Into University. Front Public Health. 2021 Mar 17;9:634285. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2021.634285. PMID: 33816421; PMCID: PMC8009977.

graduate internships, enhanced start-up support or increased incentive, to pursue taught postgraduate study.

Our current Find Your Future bursary, where care leavers and estranged students undertake a careers-related activity (e.g. a guidance appointment) in order to qualify for a monetary bursary, has yielded strong results and provided us with a successful model for this type of scheme. In 2023/24, 86% of the eligible cohort engaged with the programme, up from 80% in 2022/23. This group made up 20% of the total appointments with the Careers team despite only making up 2% of our student population, and 86% of care leavers and estranged students have logged into their Handshake online account compared to 40% of the general student population. Qualitative data also shows an overwhelmingly positive response to the intervention, with a large number of students responding that they would now be considering doing something additional, such as an internship or further study, to progress in their chosen career.

Inclusive Education Framework

Inclusivity is essential for all students to make the most of HE.[107] The QAA's 'Enabling Student Achievement' guidance from 2018 established an expectation that from admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from HE.'[108] However, lack of understanding of the breadth and depth of inclusivity 'on the ground' often lags behind the aspiration to be truly inclusive. Providers sometimes struggle to define 'inclusive education' and lack guidance and resources to embed inclusive practice effectively throughout an institution.

In 2022, YSJU was awarded QAA Collaborative Enhancement funding, together with colleagues from four other HEPs,[109] to create and launch to the sector an Inclusive HE Framework, Toolkit and self-study resource.[110] The aims of the project were to:

- help staff and students understand the breadth and depth of what inclusive practice means in HE

- empower students and staff to work together in building an inclusive curriculum in its truest sense

- cultivate and nurture inclusive cultures across the wider sector

The Framework uses a broad definition of inclusivity, a stance underpinned by key regulatory expectations. In common with all UK HEPs, YSJU is expected to develop, embed and extend inclusive teaching and learning practices across the University.[111] Since the reform of Disabled Students' Allowances by UK government in 2015,[112] this expectation goes beyond a statutory duty to provide retrospective reasonable adjustments for disabled students and requires the development of anticipatory approaches which support the full range of learning differences likely to be present within any student population. Thus the IEF eschews a culture of reasonable

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[107] Cachia, M., Lynam, S, and Stock, R. (2018). Academic success: Is it just about the grades?, HE Pedagogies, 3:1, 434-439. Available at https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2018.1462096. Accessed 7 July 2024; Thomas, L. & May, H. (2010) Inclusive Learning and Teaching in HE. York: HE Academy. Available at https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/inclusive-learning-and-teaching-higher-education. Accessed 7 July 2024; York, T.T., Gibson, C., & Rankin, S. (2015). Defining and measuring academic success. Practical assessment, research and evaluation, 20(5), 1–20. Available at https://openpublishing.library.umass.edu/pare/article/id/1493/. Accessed 7 July 2024.
[108] QAA (2018) UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Enabling Student Achievement. P. 2. Available at: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/2018/advice-and-guidance-18/enabling-student-achievement. Accessed 7 July 2024.
[109] University of Hull (lead), University of Derby, Keele University, Staffordshire University.
[110] University of Hull, et al. (2023) Inclusive Education Framework. Available at https://www.inclusiveeducationframework.info/. Accessed 7 July 2024.
[111] Office For Students (2019) Beyond the bare minimum: Are universities and colleges doing enough for disabled students? (Insight Brief). Available at https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/beyond-the-bare-minimum-are-universities-and-colleges-doing-enough-for-disabled-students/. Accessed 7 July 2024
[112] For a summary, see UK Parliament. (2016) Reform of the Disabled Students' Allowance in England (Research Briefing). Available at https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7444/. Accessed 7 July 2024.

adjustments for individual students, and considers instead the needs of a diverse student body, including those disadvantaged groups we highlight within this APP, such as commuter students, students with caring responsibilities, students from ABMO backgrounds, etc. The Framework takes a whole institution approach to inclusive practice and is organised into the following themes: structures and processes, curriculum design and delivery, assessment and feedback, community and belonging, and pathways to success (each supported at YSJU by its own Theory of Change). These all-encompassing dimensions, which signal the responsibility of all members of the University community for embedding and enhancing inclusion, were co-created by academic and professional services staff and students (including paid interns) across the project's partner institutions.

The IEF is already being used at YSJU to support a full range of holistic and empathic inclusive activity.[113] These interventions include staff induction and professional recognition schemes, remodelled programme (re)validations co-convened with students (one of our key interventions discussed above), Registry staff's compassionate review of routine communications with students informed by consultation with current learners and recent graduates, and this year's revision of the University's Generic Assessment Descriptor Criteria. Activities, outputs and outcomes planned under the umbrella of the IEF (e.g. increase in flexible, authentic assessment types; development of the Student Hub) are deliberately designed to deliver impact against our APP interventions relating to retention and reducing awarding gaps.[114] We plan, this year, to connect our use of the IEF even more closely with our institutional commitment to decolonial work and our APP objectives in this area by developing an anti-racist lens on the IEF. This will draw on research undertaken in 2022 by Leeds Beckett University and Newcastle University which resulted in an Anti-Racism Framework for Initial Teacher Education,[115] and the ongoing collaboration between staff in our Teaching and Learning Enhancement Team, Anti-Racist and Decolonial Pedagogies Working Group, and the Leeds Beckett Centre for Race Education and Decoloniality.

[113] Hubbard, K., Gawthorpe, P., Fallin, L., & Henri, D. (2020). Addressing the hidden curriculum during transition to HE: the importance of empathy. In Hinchcliffe, T. (2020) The Hidden Curriculum of HE (59-76). Heslington, York: Advance HE. Available to https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/hidden-curriculum-higher-education. Accessed 7 July 2024.
[114] Universities UK and National Union of Students (2019) Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities: #closingthegap. Universities UK; National Union of Students. Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf. Accessed 7 July 2024.
[115] Smith, H. & Lander, V. (2023) Anti-Racism Framework for Initial Teacher Education / Training. Available at https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/centre-for-race-education-and-decoloniality/anti-racism-framework/. Accessed 7 July 2024.