

Birmingham City University

Summary of BCU's Access and participation plan 2024-25 to 2027-28

What is an Access and Participation Plan?

Our Access and Participation Plan (APP) is a document, submitted to and approved by the Office for Students, that sets out how we will improve equality of opportunity for under-represented groups to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education. It also makes clear what targeted actions we're taking to improve student outcomes for specific groups of students. You can see our full Access and Participation Plan on the [BCU website](#).

Key points

Birmingham City University (BCU) is a large university of 31,300 students (as of 2022-23) with a strong record of widening access to and meeting local demand for higher education. Our mission is to provide excellent and transformational higher education to improve the life chances of all our students. With that in mind, following an assessment of performance based on our data, we identified the following risks to equality of opportunity at BCU:

- Students from Black or Asian backgrounds and those entering BCU with vocational qualifications are less likely to achieve a First-Class (1st) or Upper Second-Class (2:1) degree at BCU.
- Asian students are less likely to progress to employment or further study after completing their studies at BCU.
- Students entering with vocational qualifications, young male students who were eligible for Free School Meals, mature students aged 21 to 25 from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and students with experience of care are less likely to continue and complete their studies successfully.

Fees we charge

At BCU, the maximum fees we charge UK undergraduate students are:

- £9,250 for full-time students
- £11,100 for accelerated degrees
- £6,935 for part-time students

Financial help available

We are committed to providing prospective students with clear, accessible and timely information relating to fees and finance, including hardship funding and scholarship opportunities like BCU's new [Accelerate programme](#) which provides transition support and a £1,000 scholarship to eligible students from lower-income households. Comprehensive information about financial support for students can be found on our dedicated [BCU webpages](#).

BCU has a significant Financial Assistance Fund to help students experiencing financial difficulties impacting on their success or progression at the university. Further information about our Financial Assistance Fund can be found on our [dedicated BCU webpage](#). We also launched a new Care Leaver Bursary in academic year 2022-23. Full details including the eligibility criteria can be found on the [website](#).

Information for students

We are in the process of ensuring that information about total costs associated with study are very clear for students. Information on the costs of study and other necessary information are communicated through:

- BCU's website and prospectus;
- direct communications with current applicants, entrants and enquirers;
- information provided at Open Days and Applicant Taster Days;
- other direct, tailored communications to local education partners or agencies;
- in the student contract at offer and acceptance stages.

What BCU is aiming to achieve

We recognise that improving the performance of students has to do with empowering those students, but it also has to do with reviewing university practices, policies and processes to ensure our university is delivering the best it can for our current and future students. Our APP interventions seek to:

- Enable our Black students to attain the highest possible degree outcomes.
- Enable our Asian students to attain the highest possible degree outcomes, and to progress to highly skilled employment or further study.
- Enable students who enter BCU with a vocational qualification to progress successfully through their studies, to complete those studies, and to attain the highest possible degree outcome.
- Enable young male students who were eligible for Free School Meals to progress through their studies and complete their programmes successfully.
- Enable mature students aged 21 to 25 years old and from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to progress through their studies and complete their programmes successfully.
- Enable young students who are care leavers or who have had experience of care to progress through their studies and complete their programmes successfully.

All objectives are aimed to deliver improvements by 2027-28 and will be measured through monitoring of continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates, as well as monitoring gaps between these groups and other students.

What BCU is doing to address key risks to equality of opportunity

We will deliver and evaluate a range of activities to better support the student groups listed above, including those below:

- We are designing a diagnostic tool for new ethnic minority students and those entering BCU with vocational qualifications to help us identify their specific learning needs and provide more targeted support
- We are increasing our use of peer mentors, the use of which will be informed by the diagnostic tool mentioned above and expanding our personal tutor network
- We will launch revamped 'Welcome Weeks' focusing on transitions into higher education learning expectations and experiences

- We will review and revise assessment practices and policies across the university to ensure that BCU is sympathetic to the types of learning our students have had prior to entry and the type of work they may encounter after leaving the university
- We will embed work placement and work exposure opportunities in more programmes, especially those with high percentages of Asian students in order to improve their progression into employment
- We will develop an alumni mentoring scheme to further support our Asian students to maximise their employment opportunities

How students can get involved

BCU students contributed to the design of this plan and continue to contribute to its governance by participating in our APP Strategy Board, which oversees delivery of our APP. We will also be appointing 2 PhD students in 2024 to contribute to the evaluation of this APP.

Students can contact the Students' Union at any time about this work. Sabbatical Officers are able to answer questions from their involvement in the plan's development and delivery, and are able to send questions on that they might not be able to answer immediately.

Students can also become an elected student representative to make their voices, and those of their peers, better heard. Elected SU officers represent students across all academic committees including Board of Governors, Academic Board, College Course Performance Committee, and several others.

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved

BCU's APP evaluation will comprise both a process and an impact evaluation so we can identify both our own effectiveness in implementing the activities in the plan and the effectiveness of the activities themselves. To determine the activities, we've used the best available evidence on what works and used 'theory of change' models to ensure the activities can deliver our desired improvements.

To lead and manage the university-wide APP evaluation, BCU has established an evaluation team in our Planning and Performance Department (PPD). PPD colleagues will design and deliver a robust programme-level evaluation. We are working with TASO to develop approved approaches to closing gaps in student outcomes, which will then be shared with the rest of the higher education sector. We will also share our evaluation findings, including what works and what hasn't worked, with other universities and the sector more broadly through publications and presentations.

The university's APP Strategy Board will monitor and report on these processes and oversee the delivery and evaluation of activities to ensure ongoing progress against yearly milestones in the plan. The APP Strategy Board reports to University Executive Group and the Board of Governors.

Contact details for further information

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