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 all students to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education (HE). It makes clear what targeted actions we are taking to improve student outcomes for those groups of students identified as most at risk of inequality of opportunity. You can see our full Access and Participation Plan on the BCU website.

Key points

Birmingham City University (BCU) is a large university of over 31,000 students with a strong record of widening access to and meeting local demand for higher education. Our mission is to be an exemplar anchor institution and to create and share knowledge for a better and more inclusive society. We develop talent for tomorrow, create knowledge for good, and power prosperity. Following our data-led assessment of performance, we have identified six groups facing the greatest risks to equality of opportunity in Higher Education at BCU:

- Students from Black or Asian backgrounds and young (U21) students 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.
- Young (U21) students entering HE with vocational qualifications, young (U21) male students who were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), mature students (aged 21 to 25) from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, and students that declare care experience are less likely to continue and complete their studies successfully.

See pages 3 - 6 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Fees we charge

Fees we charge in 2025/26 at BCU, the maximum fees we charge UK undergraduate students are:

- £9,535 for full-time students
- £11,440 for accelerated degrees
- £7,145 for part-time students.Tuition fees will be set each year in line with the maximum fees set by the government

BCU reserves the right to increase fees each academic year for new entrants and continuing students after their first year of entry. If you are a UK home student, the fees are regulated and set by the UK Government. Where fee caps are raised by the UK Government, the University will usually increase fees to the maximum level.

Financial help available

BCU offers a range of financial support funds and bursaries, including hardship funding and opportunities like BCU's Accelerate programme, which provides transition support and a financial payment to eligible students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds. Information about financial support for students can be found on our dedicated BCU webpages.

Our Financial Assistance Fund helps students experiencing financial difficulties that impact upon their success or progression at the university. Further information can be found on our dedicated BCU webpage. We also offer a package of support for care experienced students, including a Care Leaver's Bursary. Full details including the eligibility criteria can be found on our website.

Information for students
We are committed to providing prospective students with clear, accessible and timely information relating to fees and finance. 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
- Student contract at offer and acceptance stages

See page 32 of the access and participation plan for more information.

What BCU is aiming to achieve
We recognise that improving outcomes is about empowering students by centring their voice and needs, but it is also about 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 young students (U21) 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 (U21) 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 and from the most socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds to progress through their studies and complete their programmes successfully.
- Enable young (U26) students who are care leavers or who have had experience of care to progress through their studies and complete their programmes successfully.

All objectives aim to deliver improvements by 2027-28 and will be measured through monitoring of continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates, as well as outcomes gaps between these groups and other students. See pages 6-8 of our access and participation plan for more information.

What BCU are doing to address keys 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 have designed a validated Success Survey to help identify our students' specific learning needs and provide bespoke support.
- We are improving our induction offer to engage learners, build community and improve student experience.
- We are increasing our use of peer mentors, informed by our Success Survey, and improving on our approach to personal tutoring.
- We have established a team of Thrive Tutors working across BCU to support our students' success.

- We are reviewing and revising curriculum and assessment practices and policies across the university to ensure that the educational experience at BCU is connected to students' prior learning experiences and the type of work they may encounter after leaving the university.
- We are developing a Black student Leadership Programme and providing seed corn funding for action research and co-created projects on courses that are contributing to ethnicity degree awarding gaps.
- We are embedding workplace micro-placements and employability exposure opportunities in more programmes, especially those with high percentages of Asian students in order to improve their progression into employment.
- We are developing our alumni mentoring scheme to further support our Asian students to maximise their employment opportunities.

See pages 10-23 of the access and participation plan for more information.

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 Operational Team, which oversees delivery of our APP. We will also be appointing new students to contribute to the evaluation of this APP through our Changemaker programme.

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 forward questions 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. See pages 26-27 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved
BCU's APP evaluation will comprise both process and impact evaluation so we can identify how well we have delivered the activities in the plan and determine 'what works' to achieve equality of opportunity for our students in our context. To identify and design our activities, we used the best available evidence on what works and used 'theory of change' models to ensure we can deliver improvements.

To lead and manage the university-wide APP evaluation, BCU has established an evaluation function in our Planning and Performance Department (PPD). PPD colleagues are supporting the design and delivery of robust programme-level evaluation. We will continue to work with TASO to develop approved approaches to closing gaps in student outcomes, which will be shared with 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 engagement with regional and national HE evaluation networks and through publications and presentations.

BCU's APP & Project Zero Strategic Oversight Group (chaired by the Vice Chancellor) provides oversight, with delivery managed and monitored by our APP Operational Team to ensure ongoing progress against yearly milestones in the plan, along with reporting to University Executive Group and the Board of Governors.

See pages 27-30 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Contact details for further information
Please contact Professor Marcia Wilson, marcia.wilson@bcu.ac.uk for more information.