

Aston University

Access and participation plan 2025-26 to 2028-29

Introduction and strategic aim

Our 2030 strategic priorities, as they relate to the delivery of equality of opportunity for students, are that we:

- Prepare our students for work and life through contemporary learning experiences enriched with professional practice across all disciplines and courses.
- Create a place-based innovation ecosystem through strategic partnerships to serve as a catalyst for impactful research, high value business creation and inclusive growth.
- Develop a sustainable operating model for the future through innovation, diversified growth, and strategic commercial partnerships.

We are preparing our diverse community of students who study on a diverse range of pathways for the changing world of work. In parallel we are actively creating in our city an innovation ecosystem, bringing high value jobs and opportunities – into which many of our graduates will progress in the longer term.

Due to its social mobility and diversity commitments, Aston has many accolades. In 2023, Aston was awarded TEF Gold overall as well as for both Student Experience and Student Outcomes. The English Social Mobility Index, published by the Higher Education Policy Institute has placed Aston in the top two for social mobility in England for the past two years. Our commitment to inclusion is recognised numerous ways, for example we are a University of Sanctuary, we won the inaugural University of the Year award at the BAME Apprenticeship Awards and achieved the Bronze Race Equality Charter in 2022. All three of our Colleges hold Athena Swan awards and in March 2024 we were the second university in England to be awarded institutional Athena Swan Gold.

Aston will be opening the University Maths School for the West Midlands in 2025. We also offer an employer-linked curriculum for 13–19-year-olds at the Aston University Engineering Academy (AUEA) and Aston University Sixth Form. 88% of AUEA students progress to university and apprenticeship schemes compared to 48% nationally. Through the longstanding Aimhigher West Midlands (AHWM) partnership we will make the most of the existing expertise on evaluation to collaborate and better understand the impact of interventions across partner institutions. AHWM funds pre-16 outreach activities to enhance collaboration and efficiency. It delivers three evidence-based interventions targeting learners at grade 3/4 or 4/5 borderline, focusing on FSM/Pupil Premium, care-experienced, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The partnership also addresses ethnicity awarding gaps through regional best practice sharing and collaborative strategies.

We recognise the diversity of our learners and their unique needs regarding study and development. Aston was an early adopter of degree apprenticeships, providing a focus for recruitment of mature learners moving forward and supporting our commitment to becoming an omni-channel university by 2030.

Our local Birmingham population is very diverse with 52% identifying as being from minoritised ethnic (ME) groups, according to the 2021 census. We attract a significant proportion of our UG students from the local area with 60% identifying as commuter students and 40% finding employment in the West Midlands after graduation. Most of our UG students (81%) identify as being from minoritised ethnic (ME) backgrounds and 49% of this ME student population is female. Many of our students are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with 44% of our students from IMD Quintile 1.

In preparing this APP, we have reflected on the success of our students, but also the differences at each stage of the student lifecycle between students from different groups. We have undertaken a

comprehensive analysis, considering intersections between different groups. To effectively monitor impact over the next four years, we have funded two doctoral researchers and recruited an Educational Impact Evaluation Officer.

Risks to equality of opportunity

Comparison of Aston University data with sector norms: In figure 1 below, for Access, red indicates that Aston has a lower **proportion** of disadvantaged students than the sector average, and green indicates that Aston has a higher proportion. For Continuation through to Progression, red indicates that Aston has a larger **gap** than the sector mean, and green indicating that Aston has a smaller gap than the sector mean.

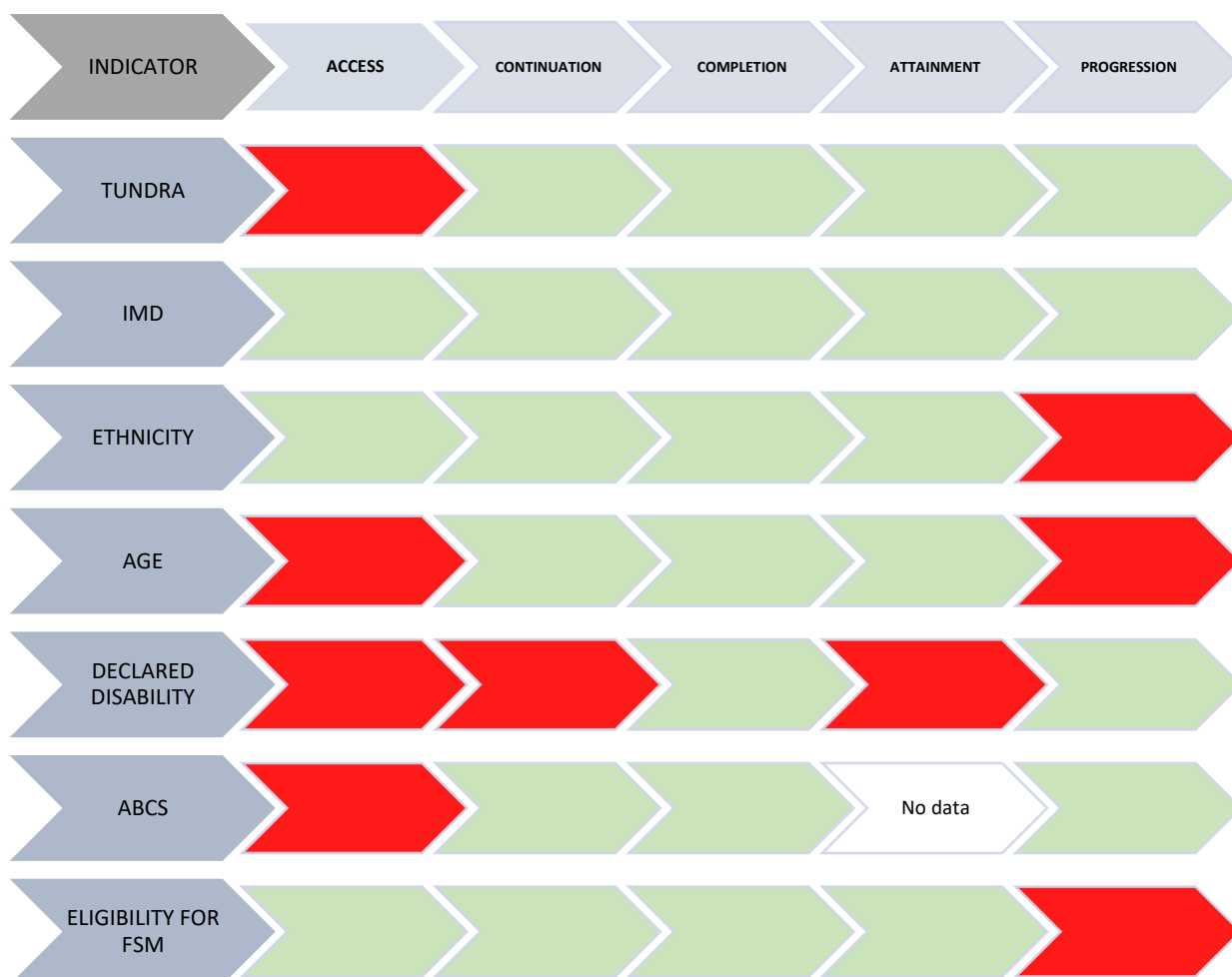


Figure 1: Comparison of Aston data with sector norms (4-year aggregate data)

Tracking the experience of Aston students across the lifecycle stages

In the following schematic, we have identified key gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students at Aston across the lifecycle stages. We have applied arbitrary gradings as follows:

- Green indicates internal Aston gaps of 2 percentage points or less
- Orange indicates internal Aston gaps of between 2.1 and 4 percentage points
- Red indicates internal Aston gaps of 4.1 percentage points or above.



Figure 2: Internal gaps by metric and student lifecycle stage

*See discussion of data related to age in Annex A.

Overview of risks

Risk	Rationale
Risk 1 Knowledge and skills Risk 2 Information and guidance	Aston performs well at Access compared with the sector for IMD and eligibility for free school meals. However, we recognise that to maintain this good performance we need to continue to explore innovative ways to mitigate the risk that financially disadvantaged students may find it harder than their peers to acquire the knowledge, skills, information, and guidance required to successfully enter higher education. This is particularly relevant considering the ongoing cost-of-living crisis which is felt profoundly in the Birmingham area.
Risk 3: Perceptions of higher education	Only 8.5% of Aston students declare a disability compared with a sector average of 16.7%. Feedback from students via our Disability Working Group suggest that students may not feel confident to declare their disability and this may be related to cultural intersections.
Risk 6: Insufficient academic support	Students from disadvantaged backgrounds and from some ME backgrounds may feel that the academic support offered is insufficient for their needs or less accessible for them leading to attainment gaps.
Risk 7: Insufficient personal support	Disabled students may not feel that their personal and academic support needs are met, making it difficult for them to continue their course.
Risk 8: Mental health	Gaps between students who declare disability and those that do not are small across all on-course life-cycle stages. However, when disaggregated we see significant gaps for mental health at continuation (4.2%), completion (7.7%), attainment (2.9%) and progression (5.5%). Students may not feel able to access mental health and wellbeing support if it is not tailored to their individual needs. Lack of support may result in lack of continuation or lower attainment.
Risk 10: Cost pressures	Financially disadvantaged students may have to work to support themselves and therefore be more likely to withdraw or experience lower attainment.
Risk 12: Progression from higher education	The progression gap between students from Black, Other and Mixed backgrounds and White students is larger at Aston compared to the sector. ME students are less likely to complete a placement than White students. Financially disadvantaged students at Aston are less likely to complete a placement year which may impact their progression from higher education.

Objectives

	Objectives and targets
Knowledge and skills/Information and guidance	<p>Objective 1: To ensure that students that are in receipt of FSM and those from IMD Q1-2 continue to access Aston at a high rate through to 2028-29.</p> <p>Target 1.1 (PTA_1). Maintain the proportion of students accessing Aston University in receipt of FSM (currently 26%) through to 2028-29.</p> <p>Target 1.2 (PTA_2). Maintain the proportion of students accessing Aston University from an IMD Q 1-2 background (currently 65.8%) through to 2028-29.</p>
Perceptions of higher education	<p>Objective 2: To ensure equality of opportunity around access for students who declare a disability by 2028-29.</p> <p>Target 2 (PTA_3). Increase the number of students progressing into Aston University who have declared a disability from 8.5% to 10.5% by 2028-29 through including disabled students within our contextual offer scheme and implementing the Disabled Students' Commitment.</p>
Insufficient academic support	<p>Objective 3: To ensure that Black and Asian students have equal opportunity to attain a degree award that reflects their academic capabilities by 2028-29.</p> <p>Target 3.1 (PTS_1). Reduce the attainment gap between Black and White students from 11.1% to 4% by 2028-29 by embedding small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning.</p> <p>Target 3.2 (PTS_2). Reduce the attainment gap between Asian and White students from 8.2% to 2% by 2028-29 by embedding small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning</p>
Insufficient personal support	<p>Objective 4: To ensure that students who declare a disability, particularly those with social or communication impairments, have equal opportunity to attain a degree award that reflects their academic capabilities by 2028-29.</p> <p>Target 4 (PTS_3): Improve attainment rates of students with social or communication impairments from 79.4% to 81.5% by 2028-29 by providing specialised peer-mentoring programmes, enhancing our personal tutoring system, and improving the accessibility of our campus.</p>
Mental health	<p>Objective 5: To ensure that students who report a mental health condition have equal opportunity to complete their degree by 2028-29.</p> <p>Target 5 (PTS_4). Reduce the completion rate gap between students who report a mental health condition and those who do</p>

	not declare a disability from 7.7% to 4.5% by 2028-29 through development of a programme of mental health ambassadors and a buddy scheme.
Cost pressures	<p>Objective 6: To ensure that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have equal opportunity to continue their course through to 2028-29.</p> <p>Target 6 (PTS_5). Maintain current good continuation performance (where there are only minimal continuation gaps between IMD quintile 1 & 5) against challenging cost-of-living context through enhancement and targeting of our scholarships offering to those most in need.</p>
Progression from higher education	<p>Objective 7: To ensure that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have equal opportunity to progress to good graduate outcomes by 2028-29.</p> <p>Target 7 (PTP_1): Reduce the progression gap between students eligible for free school meals and those that are not from 7.1% to 3.4% by 2028-29 via development of a final year outreach programme for work experience, launching the Power Skills module, and enhanced support for placements and work experience.</p> <p>Objective 8: To ensure that Black students have equal opportunity to progress to good graduate outcomes by 2028-29.</p> <p>Target 8 (PTP_2): Reduce progression gap between Black and White students from 12.6% to 4% by 2028-29 via a new mentoring programme and development of an Inclusive Employer programme and enhanced support for placements and work experience.</p>

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Intervention strategy 1: Objectives and targets

Objective 1: To ensure that students that are in receipt of FSM and those from IMD Q1-2 continue to access Aston at a high rate through to 2028-29.

Target 1.1 (PTA_1): Maintain the proportion of students accessing Aston University in receipt of FSM (currently 26%) through to 2028-29.

Target 1.2 (PTA_2): Maintain the proportion of students accessing Aston University from an IMD Q 1-2 background (currently 65.8%) through to 2028-29.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Risk 1 (Knowledge and skills) and Risk 2 (Information and guidance)

Investment: £2,430,000

Intervention activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
Outreach 1.1 Aspire to Aston (existing outreach programme) Target students: KS3/KS4 Working with eight partner schools to deliver 500 unique student engagements per year	Student ambassadors Workshop materials /venues	<p>Short term: Increased awareness and knowledge of future pathways / options and Aston University. Increased knowledge of Higher Education (HE) pathways, including, types of courses, entry requirements and funding options. Improved knowledge and awareness of campus life. Improved parental knowledge of HE options. Improved study and exam skills. Improved employability skills</p> <p>Medium term: Increased likelihood to progress to HE. Improved KS4/5 attainment for pupils. Improved KS4/5 attainment in partner schools.</p>	ABCS Q1-2. Minority ethnic students, students who declare a disability.

<p>Outreach 1.2 Pathways to the Professions Programmes (existing)</p> <p>Our innovative Pathways to the Professions programmes have been designed to expand knowledge, develop skills, and give an insight into what university life is really like for those students with ambitions to study STEM subjects.</p> <p>Target students: KS4/KS5 120 learners on an 18-month sustained programme</p>	<p>Skills knowledge and time Outreach Manager and Student Ambassadors.</p> <p>Funding to cover workshop materials, school travel expenses, catering and student ambassador pay/venues</p>	<p>Short term: Increased awareness and knowledge of future pathways / options and Aston University. Increased knowledge of Higher Education (HE) pathways, incl. types of courses, entry requirements and funding options. Improved knowledge and awareness of student life. Improved parental knowledge of HE options. Increased awareness of healthcare careers. Improved study and exam skills and employability skills. Increased awareness of achieving high level GCSEs.</p> <p>Medium term: Increased likelihood to progress to HE. Increased likelihood to progress into healthcare degrees. Increased likelihood to progress into Year 12 Aston Pathway. Support improved attainment. Support improved attainment in partner schools.</p>	<p>ABCS Q1-2. Minority ethnic students, students who declare a disability.</p>
<p>Outreach 1.3 Offer Holder Day travel bursary. (Adapted) Target students: Eligible for FSM</p>	<p>Staff resource</p> <p>Financial commitment.</p>	<p>Short term: An increased number of learners eligible for FSM are able to attend the Aston Offer Holder Day. Otherwise cost pressures can hinder a learner’s opportunity to travel to campus to attend an Offer Holder Day and make an informed decision.</p> <p>Medium/long term: Sustain the number of learners on FSM enrolling at Aston following attendance at the Offer Holder Day.</p>	<p>ABCS Q1-2.</p>
<p>Attainment raising 1.4 Villa Vision (existing, collaborative) An eye Health initiative with the Aston Villa Foundation and Aston University’s Optometry School. Supporting primary school children’s vision during a crucial phase of their development</p>		<p>Short term: Deliver: 6000 individual interventions through a combination of workshops, vision screening and eye testing in over 60 school visits</p> <p>Medium term: Children flagged for further investigation and conduct over 200 full eye examinations. Dispense 300 free complete pairs of glasses to children requiring them. Support 125 Aston optometry students in half-day school placements.</p>	<p>ABCS Q1-2. Minority ethnic students, students who declare a disability.</p>

		Long term: Supporting students vision enabling them to see correctly during lessons leading to increased confidence and increased attainment.	
Attainment raising 1.5 Level Up Literacy (New, collaborative) Target students: KS3 Students from under-represented groups, those on free school meals and from low participation neighbourhoods. 10 schools with at least 60 students per school	X1 FTE UniConnect Programme Manager Financial resource,	Medium term: Improved literacy and comprehension skills. Improved attainment determined by pre and post assessment. Long term: Increased confidence. Increases the likelihood of progressing to HE.	ABCS Q1-2. Minority ethnic students, students who declare a disability.
Attainment raising 1.6 Subject specific tutoring in English or Maths (New, collaborative) Target students: KS4 & 4 students from under-represented groups, those on free school meals and from low participation neighbourhoods. Numbers of participants/schools: This activity will consist of at least 10 learners per school gaining 10 weeks of one-to-one tutoring in English or Maths.	Staff resource Financial resource,	Medium term: Improved attainment in English or Maths. Improved GCSE grade as determined by pre and post assessment. Long term: Increased confidence. Increases the likelihood of progressing to HE.	ABCS Q1-2. Minority ethnic students, students who declare a disability.

Evidence base and rationale: High-level overview of the evidence base used for this intervention strategy, and signpost to full explanation in Annex B if necessary.

Evidence base to support outreach programmes and attainment raising (Annex B, pages 46-49)	
Internal	External
I1-I9	E1-E12

Evaluation: the table below details our evaluation of individual activities; this plan will also be evaluated, as a whole, against the target.

Evaluation activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
<p>1.1 Aspire to Aston</p>	<p>Short term: Increased awareness and knowledge of future pathways / options and Aston University. Increased knowledge of Higher Education (HE) pathways, including, types of courses, entry requirements and funding options. Improved knowledge and awareness of campus life. Improved parental knowledge of HE options. Improved study and exam skills. Improved employability skills.</p> <p>Medium term: Increased likelihood to progress to HE. Improved KS4/5 attainment for pupils. Improved KS4/5 attainment in partner schools</p>	<p>Type 1 evidence (Short term): Implementation and process evaluation questionnaires asking about changes in knowledge etc</p> <p>Type 2 evidence (medium term): Improved GCSE attainment of targeted pupils vs. others. Increased likelihood to progress to HE in targeted pupils vs. others.</p>	<p>Timing: Annually from September</p> <p>Format: Report to be published on website</p>
<p>1.2 Pathways Programmes</p>	<p>Short term: Increased awareness and knowledge of future pathways / options and Aston University. Increased knowledge of Higher Education (HE) pathways, incl. types of courses, entry requirements and funding options. Improved knowledge and awareness of student life. Improved parental knowledge of HE options. Increased awareness of healthcare careers. Improved study and exam skills and employability skills. Increased awareness of achieving high level GCSEs.</p> <p>Medium term: Increased likelihood to progress to HE. Increased likelihood to progress into healthcare degrees. Increased likelihood to progress into Year 12 Aston Pathway. Support improved attainment. Support improved attainment in partner schools.</p>	<p>Type 3 evidence: Randomised controlled trial underway in conjunction with TASO to compare those who did vs. Did not get onto pathways. Will measure progression to HE. Also Type 2 evidence for IAG elements.</p>	<p>Timing: Analysis of IAG elements by July 2024. Analysis of progression to HE data by July 2025 (HESA data available)</p> <p>Format: Attempt to produce journal publication</p>
<p>1.3 Offer Holder Day travel bursary.</p>	<p>Short term: An increased number of learners eligible for FSM are able to attend the Aston Offer Holder Day. Otherwise cost pressures can hinder learners' opportunity to travel to campus to attend an Offer Holder Day and make an informed decision.</p>	<p>Type 2/3 evidence: analyse how many students from an FSM eligible background attended an Offer Holder Day in 2023-4 vs. 2024-5.</p>	<p>Timing: Analyse data end of 2025 UCAS cycle and annually</p>

	Medium/long term: Sustain the number of learners on FSM enrolling at Aston following attendance at the Offer Holder Day.		Format: publish report on website by June 2028
1.4 Villa Vision	<p>Short term: Deliver: 6000 individual interventions through a combination of workshops, vision screening and eye testing in over 60 school visits</p> <p>Medium term: Children flagged for further investigation and conduct over 200 full eye examinations. Dispense 300 free complete pairs of glasses to children requiring them. Support 125 Aston optometry students in half-day school placements.</p> <p>Long term: Supporting students vision enabling them to see correctly during lessons leading to increased confidence and increased attainment.</p>	Type 2 evidence: A Knowledge transfer partnership has been set up to design an evaluation framework for this activity.	<p>Timing: By March 2026</p> <p>Format: Full report of impact</p>
1.5 Level Up Literacy	<p>Medium term: Improved literacy and comprehension skills. Improved attainment determined by pre and post assessment.</p> <p>Long term: Increased confidence. Increases the likelihood of progressing to HE.</p>	Type 2 evidence: Improved attainment determined by pre- and post-assessment.	<p>Timing: Annual</p> <p>Format: Partnership report</p>
1.6 Subject specific tutoring in English or Maths	<p>Medium term: Improved attainment in English or Maths. Improved GCSE grade as determined by pre and post assessment.</p> <p>Long term: Increased confidence. Increases the likelihood of progressing to HE.</p>	Type 3 evidence: Improved attainment in English or Maths compared to an untutored group (randomised)	<p>Timing: Annual</p> <p>Format: Report</p>

Intervention strategy 2: Objectives and targets

Objective 2: To ensure equality of opportunity around access for students who declare a disability by 2028-29.

Target 2 (PTA_3): Increase the number of students progressing into Aston University who have declared a disability from 8.5% to 10.5% by 2028-29 through including disabled students within our contextual offer scheme, and implementing the Disabled Students' Commitment

Risks to equality of opportunity: Risk 3 (Perceptions of higher education)

Investment: £764,000

Evaluation: the table below details our evaluation of individual activities; this plan will also be evaluated, as a whole, against the target.

Intervention activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
Admissions 2.1 Contextual offer strategy (existing, adapted) Target students: Enhancing our approach to contextual offers to include those who declare a disability and better assist students from Free School Meals (FSM)	Staff resource	Short term: Giving students who are nationally recognised as being disadvantaged an opportunity to meet the entry requirements by recognising the context in which they've achieved their academic qualifications. Medium term: Increased volume of applications and enrolments from students who qualify for FSM or who declare a disability including those with mental health conditions.	ABCS Q1-2, students who declare a disability
Student support 2.2 Disabled Students Commitment	Staff resource	Medium term: Develop institutional awareness of how best to support disabled students. Long term: Enhanced and improved experience for disabled students through changes to policy and procedures informed by disabled students	

Evidence base and rationale

Evidence base to support equality of opportunity around access for students with disabilities (Annex B, pages 50-51)	
Internal	External
I10	E13-16

Evaluation: the table below details our evaluation of individual activities; this plan will also be evaluated, as a whole, against the target.

Evaluation activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
2.1 Contextual offer strategy	<p>Short term: Applicants in targeted groups feel that their UCAS offer from Aston is more attainable and attractive</p> <p>Medium term: Increased volume of conversion and enrolments from students who qualify for FSM or who have a disability.</p>	<p>Type 1 evidence (short term) - Acceptors survey run by market research to ask about impact</p> <p>Type 2/3 evidence (medium term) - Compare conversion and eventual enrolment of and students who declare a disability in 2023-4 and FSM eligible students who were not eligible for contextual offer) with conversion and enrolment in 2024-5 when they all will be.</p>	<p>Timing: Market research report is published annually at the end of the cycle.</p> <p>Format: Report to be published on website detailing analysis of conversion and enrolment by December 2026</p>
2.2 Disabled Students Commitment	<p>Medium term: Develop an awareness of the lived experience of disabled students that informs an action plan</p> <p>Long term: The experience of disabled students is improved</p>	Type-2 evidence – student feedback via focus groups and questionnaires	<p>Timing: Initial data collection by July 2025 with follow up in July 2-26 and 2027</p> <p>Format: Written reports published on website</p>

Intervention strategy 3: Objectives and targets

Objective 3: To ensure that Black and Asian students have equal opportunity to attain a degree award that reflects their academic capabilities by 2028-29.

Target 3.1 (PTS_1): Reduce the attainment gap between Black and White students from 11.1% to 4% by 2028-29 by embedding small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning.

Target 3.2 (PTS_2): Reduce the attainment gap between Asian and White students from 8.2% to 2% by 2028-29 by embedding small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Risk 6 (Insufficient academic support)

Investment: £1,832,000

Intervention activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
Learning Development Centre 3.1 Co-created mentoring activities (peer and professional) - addressing insufficient personal support risk	LDC staff resource: mentoring coordinator	Short term: greater sense of belonging in participating students Medium term: increased attainment in participating students Medium term: greater uptake of placement year in those participating in professional mentoring	Likely to also support mature students, students with disabilities and other ethnic minority groups, care leavers, children from a military family, refugees, young carers and estranged students
Learning Development Centre 3.2 Co-created expansion of existing peer-assisted learning programmes to support Black students, mature learners, and learners with disabilities - addressing insufficient academic support risk	LDC staff resource (maintenance of but increased targeting of)	Short term: more targeted students engaged in peer assisted learning activities Medium term: increased attainment in participating students	Likely to also support mature students, students with disabilities and other ethnic minority groups, care leavers, children from a military family, refugees, young carers and estranged students
Learning Development Centre 3.3 Early transition diagnostics and support to pick up additional needs early – data informed interventions - addressing knowledge and skills risk	LDC staff resource (maintenance of but increased targeting of)	Short term: early identification of students needing additional support Medium term: increased attainment and continuation in struggling students	Likely to also support mature students, students with disabilities and other ethnic minority groups
Staff development 3.4 Support inclusive learning and teaching practice by building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning, ensuring all staff have Blackboard (virtual learning environment) training	Academic staff time in training and implementation of guidelines	Short term: greater student engagement in course materials and understanding of requirements to do well in course Medium term: increased attainment in students	Likely to also support mature students, students with disabilities and other ethnic minority groups, care leavers, children from a military family, refugees, young carers and estranged students

Evidence base and rationale

Evidence base to support small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning to reduce ethnicity attainment gaps. (Annex B, pages 52-53)	
Internal	External
I11-15	E17-20

Evaluation: the table below details our evaluation of individual activities; this plan will also be evaluated, as a whole, against the target.

Evaluation activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
3.1: Learning Development Centre: co-created mentoring activities (peer and professional)	<p>Short term: greater sense of belonging in participating students</p> <p>Medium term: increased attainment in participating students</p> <p>Medium term: greater uptake of placement year in those participating in professional mentoring</p>	<p>Type 2/3 evidence: Compare students who have vs. have not engaged in mentoring activities on Sense of Belonging, attainment and placement uptake.</p>	<p>Timing: Analyse attainment measures at the end of each academic year (first data 2026). Placement take up measures will take longer</p> <p>Format: Internal report by Dec 2026, conference dissemination by Dec 2027</p>
3.2: Learning Development Centre: Co-created expansion of existing peer-assisted learning (PAL) programmes to support Black students, mature learners, and learners with disabilities	<p>Short term: more targeted students engaged in peer assisted learning activities</p> <p>Medium term: increased attainment in participating students</p>	<p>Type 2/3 evidence: Compare attainment gaps in programmes before vs. after PAL embedded</p>	<p>Timing: Analyse attainment measures at the end of each academic year (first data 2026)</p> <p>Format: Internal report by Dec 2026, conference dissemination by Dec 2027</p>
3.3 Learning Development Centre: early transition diagnostics and support to pick up additional needs early	<p>Short term: early identification of students needing additional support</p> <p>Medium term: increased attainment and continuation in struggling students</p>	<p>Type 2/3 evidence: Analyse pass rates on modules before vs. after diagnostics used</p>	<p>Timing: Look at pass rates of modules at the end of each academic year (first data 2026)</p> <p>Format: Internal report by Dec 2026</p>

3.4: Support inclusive learning and teaching practice by building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	<p>Short term: greater student engagement in course materials and understanding of requirements to do well in course</p> <p>Medium term: increased attainment in students</p>	<p>Type 2/3 evidence: Tag UDL designed modules vs. Non-UDL modules and compare performance of students with disabilities across module types</p>	<p>Timing: Assess progress end of 2028</p> <p>Format: Internal report July 2029</p>
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Intervention strategy 4: Objectives and targets

Objective 4: To ensure that students who declare a disability, particularly those with social or communication impairments, have equal opportunity to attain a degree award that reflects their academic capabilities by 2028-29.

Target 4 (PTS_3): Improve attainment rates of students with social or communication impairments from 79.4% to 81.5% by 2028-29 by providing specialised peer-mentoring programmes, enhancing our personal tutoring system, and improving the accessibility of our campus.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Risk 7 (Insufficient personal support)

Investment: £1,003,000

Intervention activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
<p>4.1 Estates to consider inclusive by design in building new projects – addressing capacity/ suitability of access risk</p>	<p>Additional consideration (and potentially funding) to be given to all new building projects to consider a diverse range of end users – going above and beyond legal building requirements. Estates to co-create with range of student stakeholders</p>	<p>Short term: students feel visible and heard Medium term: safe spaces created for students with various disabilities and neurodivergence Long term: attainment (and continuation) rates improve</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>4.2 Academic support programme developed (group teaching) for students with additional needs and neurodivergence. Staff awareness raised – addressing insufficient</p>	<p>LDC and disability team resource.</p>	<p>Short term: students feel visible and heard Medium term: safe spaces created for students with various disabilities and neurodivergence Long term: attainment (and continuation) rates improve</p>	<p>No</p>

academic support risk			
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Evidence base to support specialised peer-mentoring programmes, enhancing our personal tutoring system, and improving the accessibility of our campus to reduce disability attainment gaps (Annex B, pages 54-55)	
Internal	External
I16-18	E21-25

Evaluation: the table below details our evaluation of individual activities; this plan will also be evaluated, as a whole, against the target.

Evaluation activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
4.2 Academic support programme developed (group teaching) for students with additional needs and neurodivergence.	<p>Short term: students feel visible and heard</p> <p>Medium term: safe spaces created for students with various disabilities and neurodivergence</p> <p>Long term: attainment (and continuation) rates improve</p>	Type 1/2 evidence: monitoring. Attainment and continuation gaps decreased amongst targeted groups.	<p>Timing: Attainment and continuation data published 2026</p> <p>Format: Report</p>

Intervention strategy 5: Objectives and targets

Objective 5: To ensure that students who report a mental health condition have equal opportunity to complete their degree by 2028-29.

Target 5 (PTS_4): Reduce the completion rate gap between students who report a mental health condition and those who do not declare a disability from 7.7% to 4.5% by 2028-29 through development of a programme of mental health ambassadors and a buddy scheme.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Risk 8 (Mental health)

Investment: £2,341,000

Intervention activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
5.1 Continue to invest in proactive counselling and mental health support (achieve the Student Minds University Mental Health Award)	Staffing of teams	Short term: Students in distress continue to be kept 'safe for now' and have other short-term support available Medium/long term: Students may feel better able to continue with their course.	No
5.2 Introduction of buddy system to students joining at L4 who declare a mental health or social and communicative disability. The programme should be supported by robust training and development (and awards) for those acting as buddies - mental health risk	Staff time Training resources Award resources	Short term: students feel greater sense of belonging and wellbeing Medium term: Continuation rates improve Long term: completion and attainment rates improve	No
5.3 Review and enhancement of personal tutoring system – addresses insufficient personal support risk	Academic staff training around mental health support and wellbeing (ensuring that the training is sensitive to the different cultural communities and ways of expressing mental health and seeking support that are culture bound). Increased academic time.	Short term: students feel greater sense of belonging and wellbeing and are more likely to declare a mental health concern Medium term: Continuation rates improve Long term: completion and attainment rates improve	Will support all students and enhancement will include specific focus on care leavers, children from a military family, refugees, young carers and estranged students

5.4 Awareness raising: Ensure that all staff and students are aware of the way in which disability impacts learner journey and what services are available within the University to support students - addresses personal support risk	Marketing resources and staff time	Short term: students know where to go to seek help. Increased understanding of mental health issues Medium term: increased disclosure rates Long term: completion and attainment rates improve	No
5.5 Wellbeing for all: programmes of events and support for all - addresses personal support risk	Programme level events held to encourage wellbeing – financial resources	Short term: students feel greater sense of belonging and wellbeing – prevention of deterioration of mental health Medium term: Continuation rates improve Long term: completion and attainment rates improve	Will support all students

Evidence base to improve completion for students who declare a mental health condition through a programme of mental health ambassadors and a buddy scheme (Annex B, pages 56-57)	
Internal	External
I19-20	E26-28

Evaluation: the table below details our evaluation of individual activities; this plan will also be evaluated, as a whole, against the target.

Evaluation activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
5.1 Continue to invest in proactive counselling and mental health support (achieve the Student Minds University Mental Health Award)	Short term: Students in distress continue to be kept 'safe for now' and have other short-term support available Medium/long term: Students may feel better able to continue with their course.	No new evidence considered necessary for this activity	No new evidence considered necessary for this activity
5.2 Introduction of buddy system to students joining in first year who declare a mental health or social and communicative disability.	Short term: students feel greater sense of belonging and wellbeing Medium term: Continuation rates improve Long term: completion and attainment rates improve	Type 2/3 evidence: Compare students who have vs. have not engaged in buddying on continuation and attainment.	Timing: Attainment, continuation and completion data published each year, but due to small groups wait until end 2028 to analyse aggregated data

			Format: Publish study on website July 2029
5.3 Review and enhancement of personal tutoring system	Short term: students feel greater sense of belonging and wellbeing Medium term: Continuation rates improve Long term: completion and attainment rates improve	Type 3 evidence: For type 3 evidence staggered introduction of this required e.g. BSS 2025, EPS 2026, HLS 2027 and analyse continuation and attainment rates.	Timing: Analyse NSS results on academic support 2026 (Q15 and Q16). Analyse continuation and attainment data by December 2028. Format: Draft journal article by 2029.
5.4 Awareness raising: Ensure that all staff and students are aware of the way in which disability impacts learner journey and what services are available within the University to support students	Short term: students know where to go to seek help. Increased understanding of mental health issues Medium term: increased disclosure rates Long term: completion and attainment rates improve	Type 2 evidence: Increased satisfaction levels on relevant NSS questions for all. Increased disclosure rates each year vs. previous year. Disaggregated disability gaps reduce vs. previous years.	Timing: Analyse NSS results 2026 Question 26 by December 2026 Format: Publish disclosure rates on website from July 2027
5.5 Wellbeing for all: programmes of events and support for all - addresses personal support risk	Short term: students feel greater sense of belonging and wellbeing – prevention of deterioration of mental health Medium term: Continuation rates improve Long term: completion and attainment rates improve	Type 2/3 evidence: expect increase in wellbeing communication.	Timing: Analyse NSS results 2026 Question 26 by December 2026 Format: Publish wellbeing results on website

Intervention strategy 6: Objectives and targets

Objective 6: To ensure that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have equal opportunity to continue their course by 2028-29.

Target 6 (PTS_5): Maintain current good continuation performance (where there are only minimal continuation gaps between IMD quintile 1 & 5) against challenging cost-of-living context through enhancement and targeting of our scholarships offering to those most in need.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Risk 10 (Cost pressures)

Investment: £8,175,000

Intervention activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
6.1 Provide £500 to students with household income <£42,875 in year 1 - addresses cost pressure risk	Financial support	<p>Short term: increase sense of belonging across various student groups</p> <p>Short term: meet some financial needs of students in year 1 reducing the need to work so many hours and increasing the ability to participate fully in university life.</p> <p>Medium term: improve continuation rates amongst all those with lower household incomes</p>	Likely to support/ encompass mature students, students with disabilities, minority ethnic students, FSM, POLAR4 Q1-Q2, TUNDRA Q1-Q2, ABCS
6.2 Provide £1,250 per year to care leavers, children from a military family, refugees, young carers and estranged students - addresses cost pressure risk	Financial support	<p>Short term: increase sense of belonging across these student groups</p> <p>Short term: increase disclosure of these student groups</p> <p>Short term: meet some financial needs of students in all years reducing the need to work so many hours and increasing the ability to participate fully in university life.</p> <p>Medium term: improve continuation rates amongst all these groups</p>	Likely to be supporting some FSM students, POLAR Q1-Q2, TUNDRA Q1-Q2, ABCS Q1-Q2
6.3 Create fund (that has fewer restrictions than hardship fund) for colleges to use specifically for EDI/WP/ wellbeing purposes, with particular focus on second year, allowing staff creativity in how they support students in their context, but may include funds for equipment, travel or wellbeing activities - addresses cost pressure risk	£250,000 per year	<p>Short term: academic staff consider what support is most applicable to students in their context and consider making anticipatory purchases as well</p> <p>Medium term: more students able to continue with their studies, attend placement interviews/ NHS placements or have access to essential equipment</p> <p>Long term: more students complete their studies</p>	Likely to be supporting some FSM students, mature students, POLAR Q1-Q2, TUNDRA Q1-Q2, ABCS Q1-Q2

Evidence base to maintain low continuation gaps between students from IMD Q1 and 5 through enhancement of our scholarship offering (Annex B, pages 58-59)	
Internal	External
I21	E29-32

Evaluation: the table below details our evaluation of individual activities; this plan will also be evaluated, as a whole, against the target.

Evaluation activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
6.1 Provide £500 to students with household income <£42,875 in year 1	<p>Short term: increase sense of belonging across various student groups</p> <p>Short term: meet some financial needs of students in year 1 reducing the need to work so many hours and increasing the ability to participate fully in university life.</p> <p>Medium term: improve continuation rates amongst all those with lower household incomes</p>	<p>Type 3 evidence: Compare continuation rates in these groups in the years before vs. after this scholarship for those with high vs. low grades.</p>	<p>Timing: Wait for 2 years of new scholarship data – so 2027.</p> <p>Format: Attempt to draft journal article July 2028.</p>
6.2 Provide £1,250 per year to care leavers, children from a military family, refugees, young carers and estranged students	<p>Short term: increase sense of belonging across these student groups</p> <p>Short term: increase disclosure of these student groups</p> <p>Short term: meet some financial needs of students in all years reducing the need to work so many hours and increasing the ability to participate fully in university life.</p> <p>Medium term: improve continuation rates amongst all these groups</p>	<p>Type 1 evidence: Expect increased disclosure / number of care leavers. Qualitative data on sense of belonging. Increased continuation rates.</p>	<p>Timing: due to small numbers, evaluate aggregated numbers 2028. Annual monitoring of numbers of students in these categories and their continuation rates starting July 2026</p> <p>Format: Publish report on website</p>
6.4 Create fund (that has fewer restrictions than hardship fund) for colleges to use specifically for EDI/WP/ wellbeing purposes, with particular focus on second year	<p>Short term: academic staff consider what support is most applicable to students in their context and consider making anticipatory purchases as well</p> <p>Medium term: more students able to continue with their studies, attend placement interviews/ NHS placements or have access to essential equipment</p>	<p>Type 2 evidence: create collection of qualitative case studies from recipients of support (staff projects and student direct support).</p>	<p>Timing: Ongoing after 2026 when fund due to start.</p> <p>Format: Publish case studies on website from 2027 (with permission from recipients).</p>

	Long term: more students complete their studies		
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Intervention strategy 7: Objectives and targets

Objective 7: To ensure that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have equal opportunity to progress to good graduate outcomes by 2028-29.

Target 7 (PTP_1): Reduce the progression gap between students eligible for free school meals and those that are not from 7.1% to 3.4% by 2028-29 via development of a final year outreach programme for work experience, launching the Power Skills module, and enhanced support for placements and work experience.

Risks to equality of opportunity: Risk 12 (Progression from higher education)

Investment: £2,160,000

Intervention activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
7.1 Final Year Outreach Programme for students that have not undertaken work experience. Students are proactively contacted and offered tailored information, advice and guidance relating to their careers and next steps after graduation. The programme will be evolved to prioritise support to students eligible for FSM and low socio-economic backgrounds offering them enhanced support (existing, collaborative)	0.5 FTE Careers Consultant (Existing)	Short term: Increase in students eligible for FSM engaging in appointments with Careers Consultants and an increase in the number of new graduates eligible for FSM who seek support from the Aston Careers and Placements team. Medium term: Graduate Outcomes will improve	Will also support Black students and those from other ethnic minority groups, IMD Q1-2, ABCS Q1-2
7.2 Power Skills stackable material to develop digital, leadership, management, entrepreneurship skills, sustainability awareness and cultural competence (new, collaborative, and co-created)	Financial resource. Staff time.	Embed Power Skills in all undergraduate programmes by 2026-7 Short term: improvements in digital, leadership skills and employability amongst students Medium term: enhanced employability	Likely to support minority ethnic students, students who declare a disability, IMD Q1-2, ABCS Q1-2
7.3 Provide £1,250 provided to placement year students with household income <£42,875, those	£1,075,000 per year	Short term: students are encouraged to explore placement year as an option (where optional)	Likely to be supporting some FSM students,

taking unpaid placement year or those taking placement year abroad - addresses cost pressure risk (new)		Medium term: more students take optional placements Long term: more students have good graduate outcomes and improved attainment	TUNDRA Q1-Q2, ABCS Q1-Q2
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Evidence base to improve progression for students who are eligible for free school meals through employability support and placement opportunities (Annex B, pages 60-61)	
Internal	External
I22-I26	E33-37

Evaluation: the table below details our evaluation of individual activities; this plan will also be evaluated, as a whole, against the target.

Evaluation activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
7.1 Final Year Outreach Programme for students that have not undertaken work experience.	Increase in students eligible for FSM engaging in appointments with Careers Consultants Graduate Outcomes will improve	Type 2/3 evidence: measure graduate outcomes of those who have vs. have not undertaken work experience before vs. after introduction of programme	Timing: Annually from September 2026 Format: Report
7.2 Power skills Material	Embed Power Skills in all undergraduate programmes by 2026-7.	Type 1/2 evidence: qualitative feedback from students on the impact of Power Skills and increased confidence in relevant skills	Timing: Annually from September 2027 Format: Report
7.3 Provide £1,250 to placement year students with household income <£42,875, those taking unpaid placement year or those taking placement year abroad	Short term: students are encouraged to explore placement year as an option (where optional) Medium term: more students take optional placements Long term: more students have good graduate outcomes and improved attainment	Type 1/2 evidence: interview students and get qualitative evidence – ask if the scholarship made a difference	Timing: Annually from September 2026 Format: Report

Intervention strategy 8: Objectives and targets

Objective 8: To ensure that Black students have equal opportunity to progress to good graduate outcomes by 2028-29.

Target 8 (PTP_2): Reduce progression gap between Black and White students from 12.6% to 4% by 2028-29 via a new mentoring programme and development of an Inclusive Employer programme and enhanced support for placements and work experience

Risks to equality of opportunity: Risk 12 (Progression from higher education)

Investment: £2,372,000

Intervention activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
8.1 Black students co-created mentoring programme. We will introduce a new strand to our Graduate Mentoring Scheme which provides an opportunity for final year students to benefit from an Aston graduate's experience and to help feel better prepared to start their graduate career. The programme will be co-created by Black students and Black mentors seeking to address specific barriers for this group of students (new, collaborative)	1 FTE Mentoring Coordinator (Existing)	Short term: Increase Black students' engagement in mentoring (currently the lowest participation group by ethnicity) Medium term: Graduate Outcomes will improve for Black Students with a focus on those eligible for FSM.	ME students
8.2 Our Careers and Placement team will develop a new Inclusive Employer Pathway seeking to engage exclusively with employers committed to diversity and inclusion. Employers will have early access to students via the pathway and special events and sessions will be created in collaboration with employers as part of the offer (new, collaborative)	1 FTE Employer Engagement Officer (new role)	Short term: Increase in Black students engaging with Careers and Placements activities Increase in Black students applying for work experience. Medium term: Graduate Outcomes will improve for Black students particularly those eligible for FSM	Will support all minority ethnic students

Evidence base to improve progression for Black students who are eligible for free school meals through mentoring for students and a new Inclusive Employer Pathway that seeks to engage employers committed to diversity and inclusion (Annex B, pages 62-63)	
Internal	External
I25, I27-28	E38-40

Evaluation: the table below details our evaluation of individual activities; this plan will also be evaluated, as a whole, against the target.

Evaluation activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
8.1 Black students co-created mentoring programme.	<p>Increase Black students' engagement in mentoring (currently the lowest participation group by ethnicity)</p> <p>Graduate Outcomes will improve for Black Students with a focus on those eligible for FSM. Success?</p>	<p>Type 2/3 evidence: Compare outcomes for Black students before vs. after mentoring programme introduced. Include those students who did vs. did not engage in it.</p>	<p>Timing: Annually from September 2026</p> <p>Format: Report</p>
8.2 Our Careers and Placement team will develop a new Inclusive Employer Pathway seeking to engage exclusively with employers committed to diversity and inclusion.	<p>Increase in Black students engaging with Careers and Placements activities</p> <p>Increase in Black students applying for work experience.</p> <p>Graduate Outcomes will improve for Black students particularly those eligible for FSM</p>	<p>Type 2/3 evidence: Compare outcomes for Black students before vs. after programme introduced.</p>	<p>Timing: Annually from September 2027</p> <p>Format: Report</p>

Whole provider approach

Our APP is directly informed by the Aston 2030 Strategy and is underpinned by our Education, Estates, Digital Enterprise, and College Enabling Strategies as well as the Inclusion Strategic Plan. Our APP is overseen by our Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic, who Chairs the University's APP Governance Panel.

Development of the APP has been supported by working groups focused on Access, Success, and Progression. The members of the working groups represent each of the student lifecycle stages and include student and SU representation. The Governance Panel comprises our working group leads (including the Head of UK Student Recruitment and Outreach, Director of Employability), an academic expert on student experience and evaluation of interventions, Director of Planning, Performance and Statutory Returns, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor Diversity & Inclusion and Head of Government Relations & Policy. Our Governance panel have provided insight that ranges from primary school outreach activities through to graduate outcomes. We have also drawn upon our experience of collaborating with a range of external stakeholders including AimHigher West Midlands, Aston Villa, Titan project, Aston University Engineering Academy, Aston University Maths School, and employers.

In developing this APP, we have reflected on all widening participation and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) activity that has taken place at Aston underpinned by the Equality Act 2010. We have several action plans developed through previous Access and Participation work, Athena Swan College and University submissions, as well as the Race Equality Charter. The types of activity that underpin those action plans have commonality across socioeconomic status and the protected characteristics. We are keen to consolidate inclusion activities to ensure positive engagement and maximum, intersectional, impact in line with the Aston 2030 Strategy and underpinned by our Principles for Inclusion.

Our Inclusion Strategic Plan identifies five key themes of work: **Transparency, Respect & Dignity, Cultural Competence, Accessibility** and **Transformation**. These consolidate the key internal and external inclusion activities such as those around decision making, awarding gaps, bullying and harassment, and accessibility. Underlying all this work is the ambition of transformation, which results in our students feeling a strong sense of belonging and reaching their potential.

Our Inclusion Principles acknowledge that the changes necessary to create inclusive environments require a multi-faceted approach via our enabling strategies. To try and provide a clear path to transformation in line with the Aston 2030 strategy, we have identified one Key Measure of Success to drive the Inclusion Strategic Plan via each of these enabling strategies. For example, we have aligned reduction of the awarding gap with the Education Strategy supported by many of the activities in our intervention plans. Our institutional approach promotes interlinking of effort driven by key themes of cultural competence to ensure that all students feel a strong sense of belonging and personal connection with curricula, and accessibility regarding our physical space and support for mental health and neurodiversity.

Student consultation

Student Voice is a key driver of our work around Access & Participation as well as wider EDI activity across all levels of study. As well as specific consultation with the Aston Students' Union on our APP, we have reflected on student input into our TEF triple Gold award, Race Equality Charter Bronze and Athena Swan Gold awards. We have incorporated NSS feedback and qualitative feedback received via student involvement in our broad range of EDI working groups including Decolonising the Curriculum, Disability and Neurodiversity. Students have fed directly into our intervention plan via our Access, Success and Progression working groups and will be engaged in elements of co-design and evaluation as we implement our plan. To mitigate the burden of this engagement, we have developed a paid EDI Ambassador initiative meaning that students will be financially compensated for their time commitment.

We also presented our key risks, associated objectives and related intervention plans to our SU Officers and student representatives. Feedback from these students included:

- Ensuring that the provision of learning development centre activities is flexible to allow maximum opportunities for students to access this support
- Allow SU Societies to access the central support funds that they can put on events that will support students and their engagement
- It is very important to have a golden thread of support around mental health, so that the personal tutoring system is linked with counselling and wellbeing support services.
- Students would like to be actively involved in the development of campus regeneration plan, particularly with respect to seen and unseen disabilities.

We have incorporated this feedback into our plan and will continue to review as we implement our plan in consultation with the SU.

Evaluation of the plan

Moving forward, the implementation of our plan will be overseen by the same Governance Panel, supported by SU Officers, and the appointment of an Education Impact Evaluation Officer, which is a new role developed specifically to coordinate evaluation of the APP. This individual will be supported by two internally funded doctoral students who are focused on design and evaluation of interventions to support the on-course experience of students, particularly those from minoritised ethnic groups and those who are disabled.

We have conducted an evaluation self-assessment using the OfS tool to help us understand whether our evaluation plans and methods will be able to generate high quality evidence about the impact of our interventions. Our scoring overview was:

	Total score	Category of evaluation practice	Two-year target score
Strategic context	19/24	Advanced	24
Programme design	15/18	Emerging	18
Evaluation design	8/9	Advanced	9
Evaluation implementation	13/20	Emerging	18
Learning from evaluation	15/22	Good	20

Over the next two years we aim to increase our scores as shown in the table. We will achieve this with the dedicated support of the Education Impact and Evaluation Officer, through engagement with other providers via local and national evaluation collectives, and by making the most of the resources provided by TASO. We will work with AimHigher to collaborate with participating universities, sharing evaluation experience and expertise.

The evaluation outcomes will be made available to internal and external stakeholders on our [webpages](#). We will hold an annual APP review session with SU Officers and students to feedback our findings, and to take on board student views. Outcomes will be reported annually to our Executive. We will also build a community of practice around our APP via regular workshops and information session with staff.

Provision of information to students

The University will ensure all information on fees and financial support to prospective and current students is available on the University website and in the appropriate University pre-entry literature. It will also make all scholarship information available to students is easier to find and in one place on the website. It will also ensure, as suggested by the Students' Union, that the University regularly reminds current students of the support services available to them via email, newsletter, and other internal communications tools.

Information about tuition fees is available to prospective and current students here: [Student Contract | Aston University](#)

The table below summarises the financial support available for students starting in year 2025-26 to 2028-29

Provide £500 to students with household income <£42,875 in year 1	£500 for year 1
Provide £1,250 per year to care leavers, children from a military family, refugees, young carers and estranged students	£1,250 for each year of study
Provide £1,250 to placement year students with household income <£42,875, those taking unpaid placement year or those taking placement year abroad	£1,250 for placement year

More information about scholarships, including full eligibility criteria, is available here: [Funding and scholarships | Aston University.](#)

Annex A: Assessment of performance

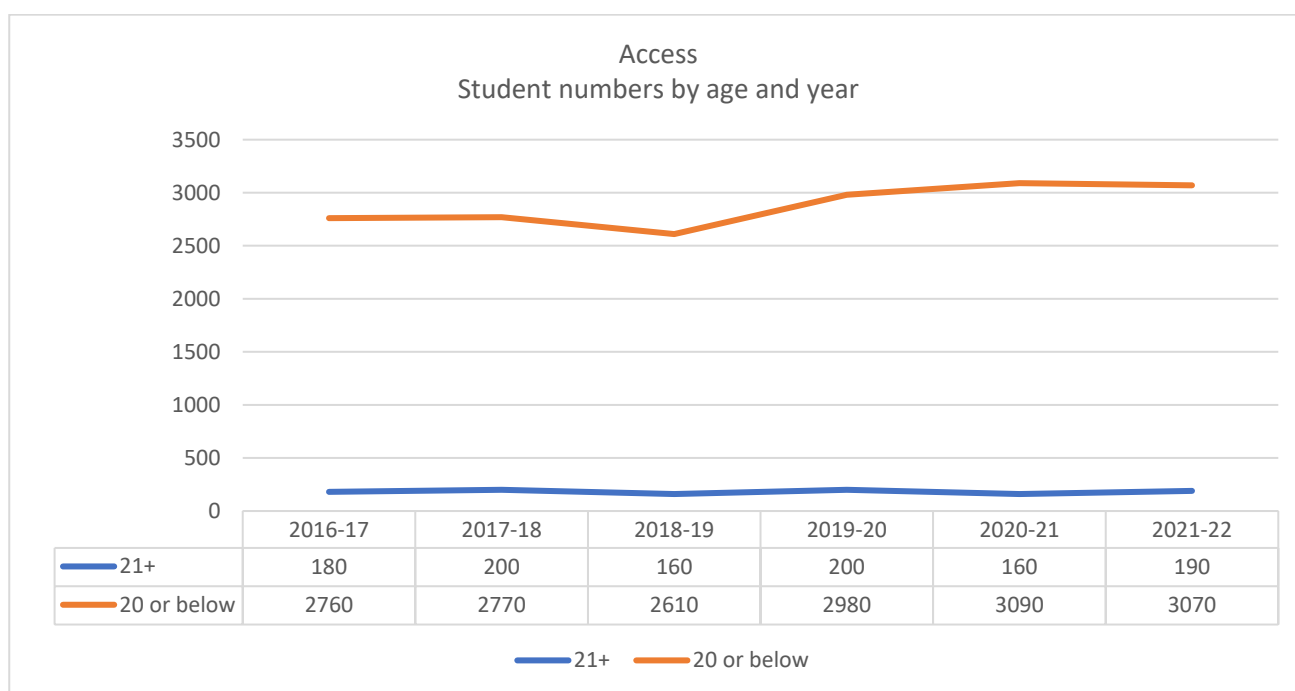
Our Assessment of performance (AoP) was conducted between October 2023 and January 2024 based on our institutional data downloaded from the OfS dashboard.

We completed an initial review of all data based on the 4-year aggregate, comparing Aston gaps with the sector averages. For context, we also reviewed the raw number trends over the latest six years to better understand our direction of travel, to help us to identify appropriate but ambitious targets, and to contextualise potential impact on specific student groups.

Identifying key risks to equality of opportunity at Aston University

Age:

At Aston, 5.6% of UG students are aged 21 years or above, compared with a sector mean of 27.7% (4-year aggregate). This may be reflective of the full-time, vocational nature of our UG degree programmes, many of which are professionally accredited, providing little flexibility around delivery mode. Although our proportion of mature learners differs significantly from the sector, we have not focussed on this as an area of risk for this APP. We see a longer-term opportunity to address this imbalance with the launch of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and so this is likely to be a key area of activity in our next APP. We acknowledge that mature learners underperform compared to the sector across all subsequent lifecycle stages. However, at present numbers are very small (190 21+ students versus 3070 aged 20 or below enrolled in 2021-22). In the 2023 NSS, there was little difference between those who were under 21 years on entry and those who were between 21 and 25 years old on entry for most survey sections. Older respondents were less positive about Organisation and Management at Aston compared to those under 21 years old on entry (71% positive compared to 81% positive).



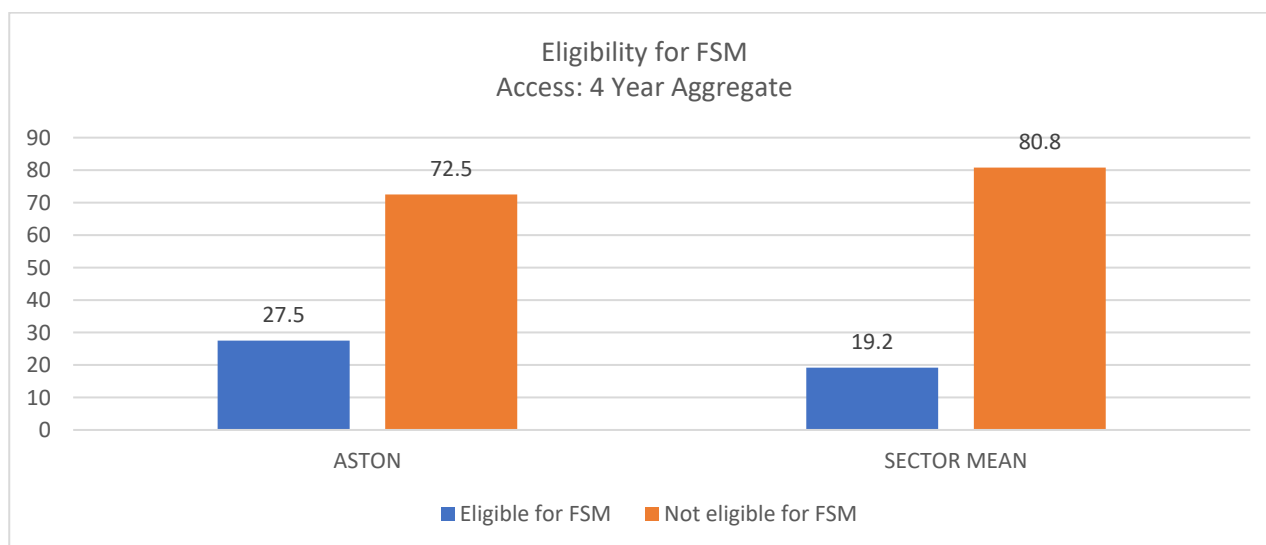
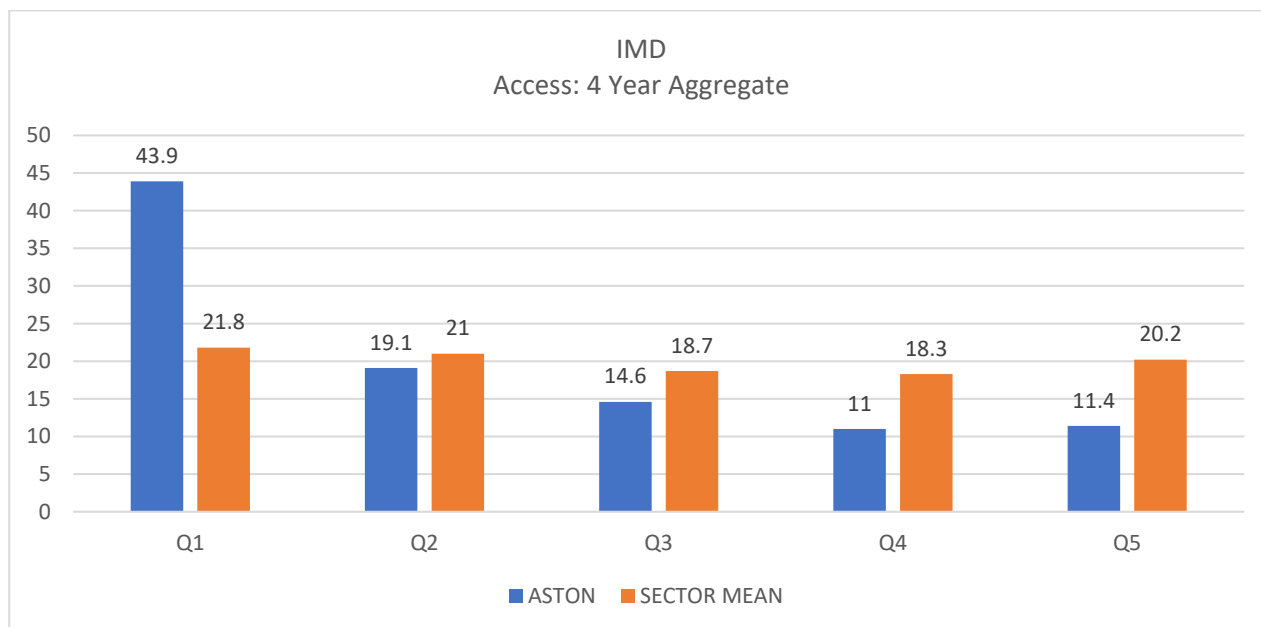
Gaps for continuation, completion and attainment are small compared with the sector (4-year aggregate):

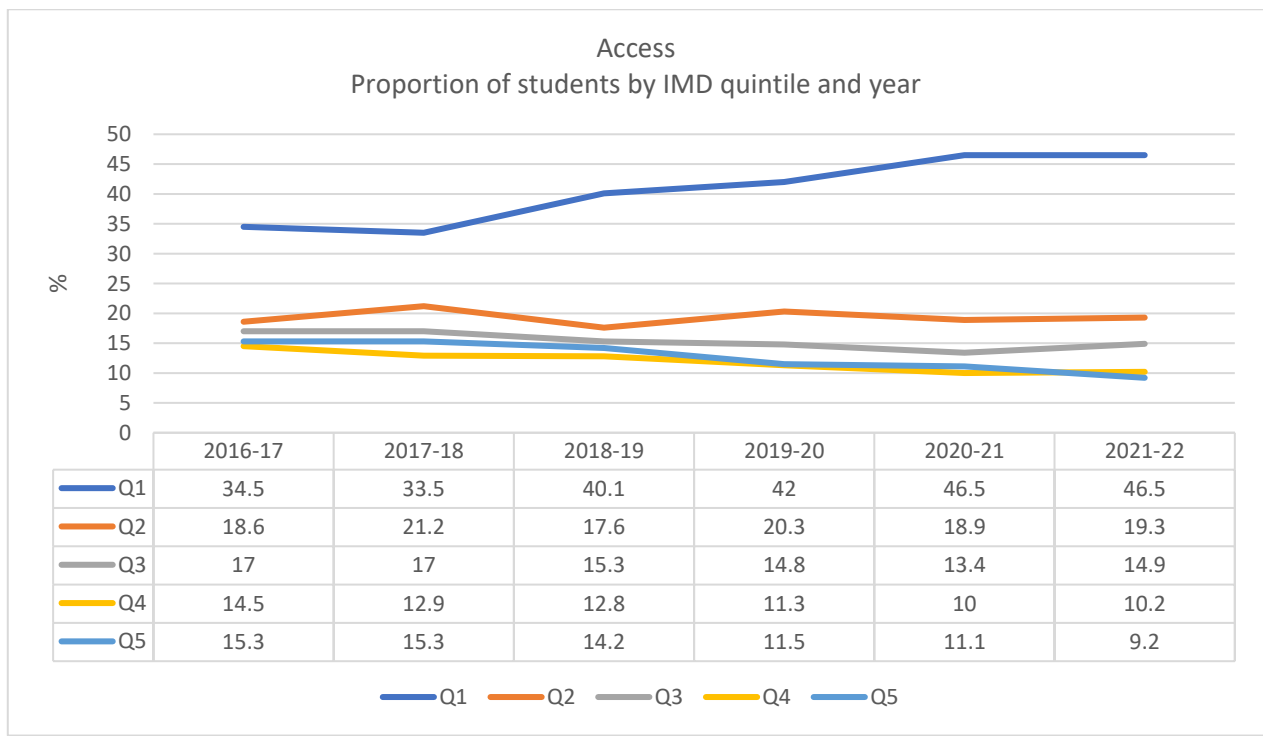
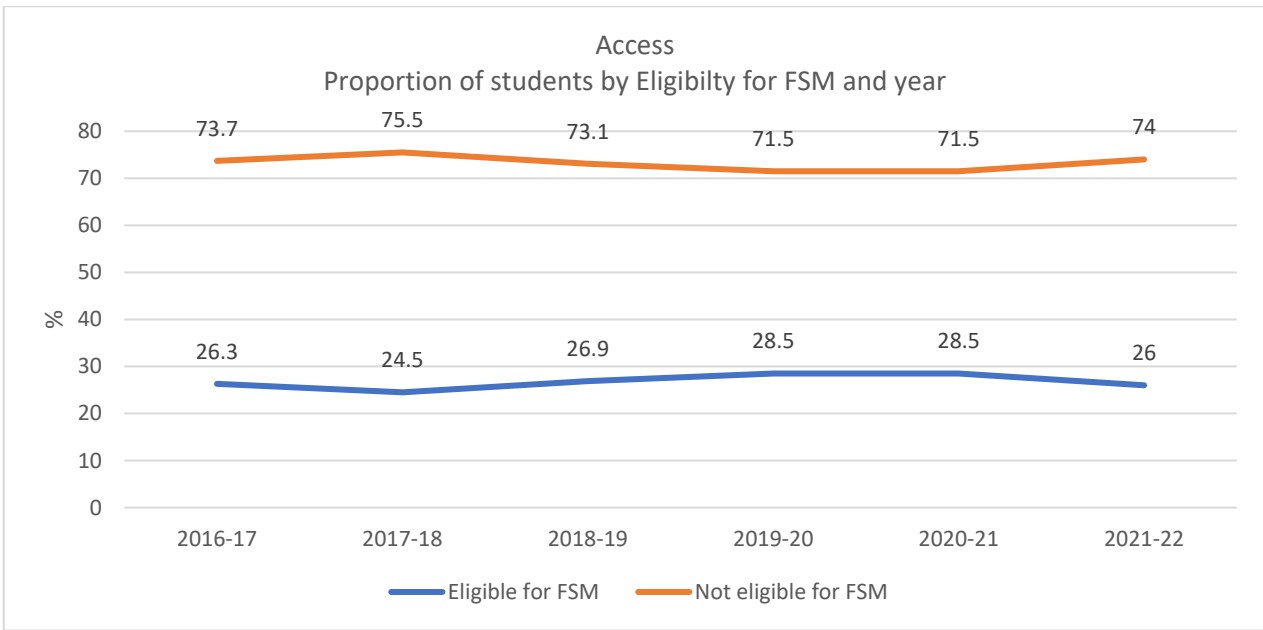
4-year aggregate data: Age gaps at Aston and for the sector (%)				
	CONTINUATION	COMPLETION	ATTAINMENT	PROGRESSION
20 or below - 21+ (Aston)	6.1	6.6	7.8	-7.7
20 or below - 21+ (sector)	8.7	9.9	10.2	-0.3

Mature learners at Aston outperform those aged 20 or below at the Progression stage.

IMD and Eligibility for FSM:

Our data shows that we compare well with the sector at Access for IMD and Eligibility for FSM. 43.9% of our students are classified as IMD quintile 1 and 27.5% of students are eligible for FSM.





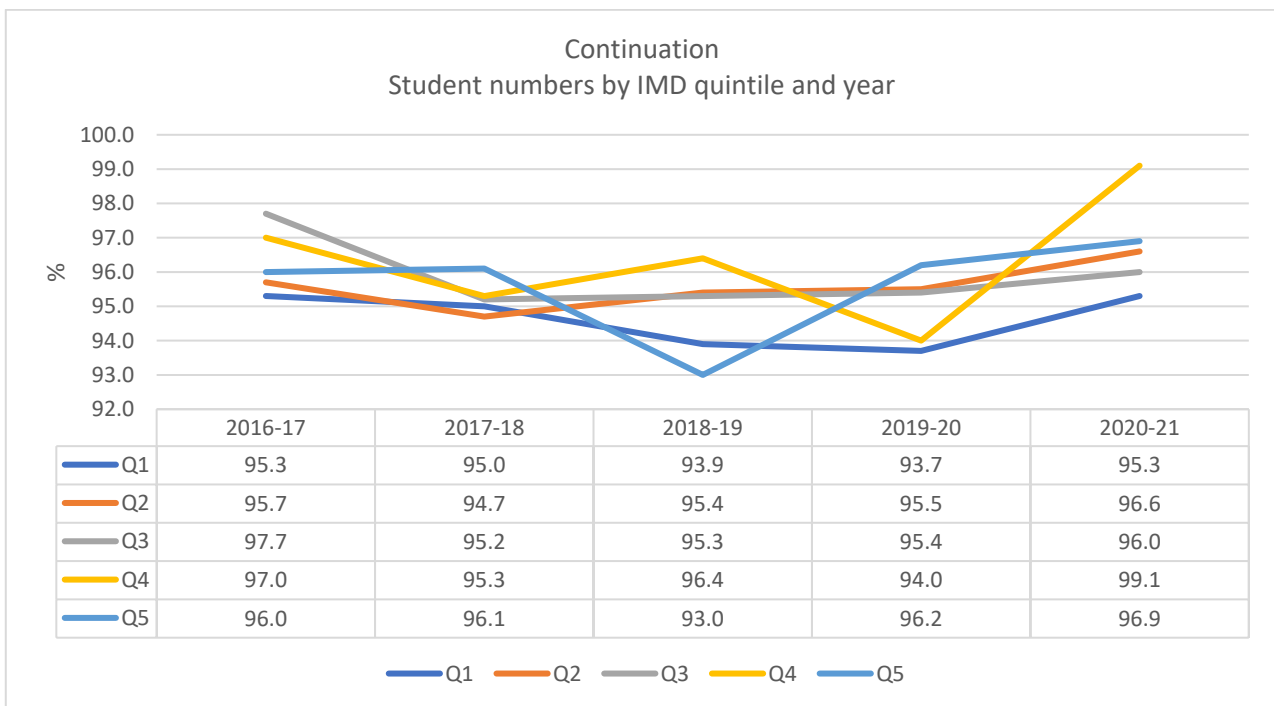
Acknowledging the importance of maintaining Aston’s proportion of IMD quintile 1 students, and students who are eligible for free school meals, we have included an objective to continue our activity in this area:

Target 1.1 (PTA_1). Maintain the proportion of students accessing Aston University in receipt of FSM (currently 26%) through to 2028-29.

Target 1.2 (PTA_2). Maintain the proportion of students accessing Aston University from an IMD Q 1-2 background (currently 65.8%) through to 2028-29.

IMD overview: 4-year aggregate					
	ACCESS	CONTINUATION	COMPLETION	ATTAINMENT	PROGRESSION
Q1	43.9	94.5	93.9	83.1	76.7
Q2	19.1	95.6	93.4	85.2	78.8
Q3	14.6	95.5	94.8	86.3	79.2
Q4	11.0	96.2	94.9	89.8	81.7
Q5	11.4	95.5	95.5	89.9	84.0

Despite high Access rates for IMD quintile 1 & 2 students, we start to see a gap between Q1 and Q5 at Continuation. Reviewing the previous five years of data, we see that this gap was 0.7 in 2016-17 but increased to 1.6 in 2020-21. We seek to address this via Target 6.



Target 6 (PTS_5): Maintain current good continuation performance (where there are only minimal continuation gaps between IMD quintile 1 & 5) against challenging cost-of-living context through enhancement and targeting of our scholarships offering to those most in need.

Aston's 2023 NSS results show few clear trends in results based on IMD, and no significant concerns from IMD Q1-2 students. The results show that respondents from IMD quintile 5 (least deprived areas) had a lower total positivity metric than the other groups (78% compared to 81% for other groups). These respondents also had the lowest positivity for Teaching, Learning Opportunities, Academic support, Organisation and Management and Student Voice. This group's positivity for Teaching was also 5% lower than the sector average.

Examining the intersection between IMD and ethnicity, we see that ABMO students outperform White students within IMD quintiles 1-2 and 3-5 at the continuation and completion stages.

IMD Ethnicity overview: 4-year aggregate (%)					
	ACCESS	CONTINUATION	COMPLETION	ATTAINMENT	PROGRESSION
IMDQ12 ABMO	57.3	95.4	94.4	83.5	77.0
IMDQ12 WHITE	5.6	90.9	89.1	91.6	80.8
IMDQ345 ABMO	24.8	96.8	96.2	86.8	80.2
1MDQ345 WHITE	12.2	94.0	93.7	92.7	83.0

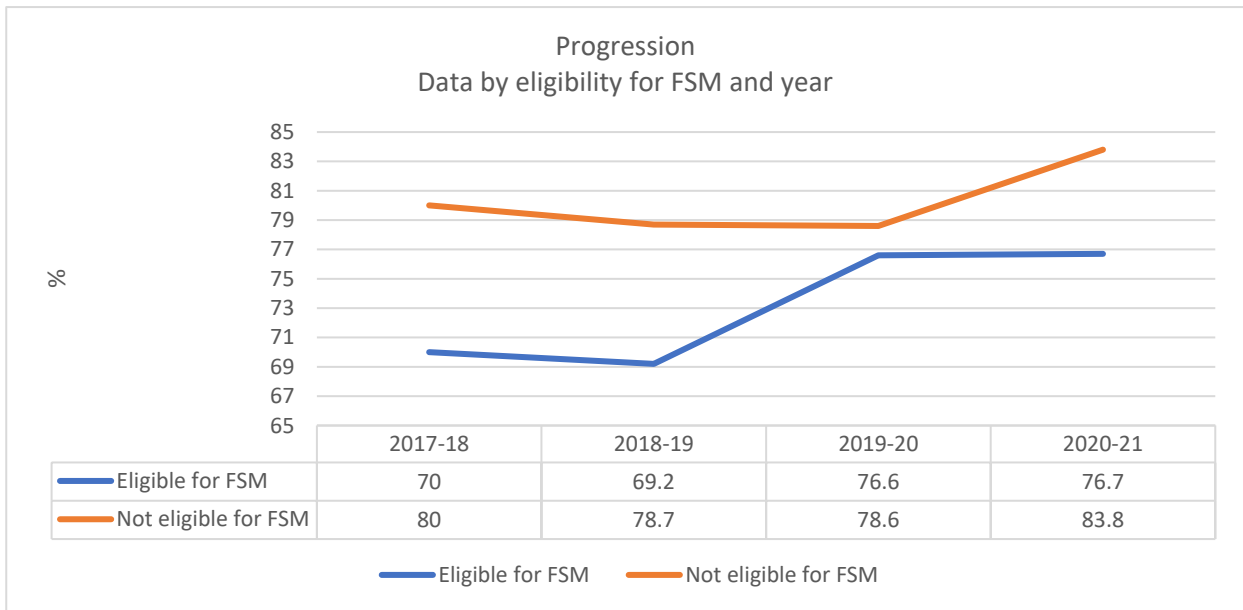
However, there are differences at attainment and progression with ABMO students having lower rates than White students within both IMD quintile 1-2 and IMD quintile 3-5 groups. For this reason, we are linking Objective 3 with Objectives 7 and 8, anticipating that work around the Black and Asian attainment gaps may intersect with work to reduce progression gaps.

Examination of our free school meal eligibility data shows a similar trend as seen with IMD, in that the gap between students who are eligible and those who are not increases with lifecycle stage.

Eligibility for free school meals: 4 Year Aggregate (%)					
	ACCESS	CONTINUATION	COMPLETION	ATTAINMENT	PROGRESSION
Eligible for FSM	27.5	94.2	94.1	82.9	73.1
Not eligible for FSM	72.5	96	95.1	88	80.2

4-year aggregate data: Eligibility for free school meals gaps				
	CONTINUATION	COMPLETION	ATTAINMENT	PROGRESSION
Eligible for FSM - Not eligible	-1.8	-1	-5.1	-7.1

Progression data for those eligible for free school meals has improved over recent years with the gap between those who are and are not eligible reducing from 10% in 2017-18 to 7.1% in 2020-21.



Internal data (4-year aggregate) shows that students who are eligible for FSM have been less likely to do a placement than students who are not eligible.

Placement Numbers and Proportions by FSM Eligibility in Subject Areas with Optional Placements (4-year aggregate)					
Free School Meals	Placement PAID	Placement UNPAID	No Placement	% Placement	% Paid Placement
Not Eligible	515	431	669	59	32
Eligible	121	100	238	48	26

Data also shows that students who complete a paid placement are most likely to have good progression outcomes.

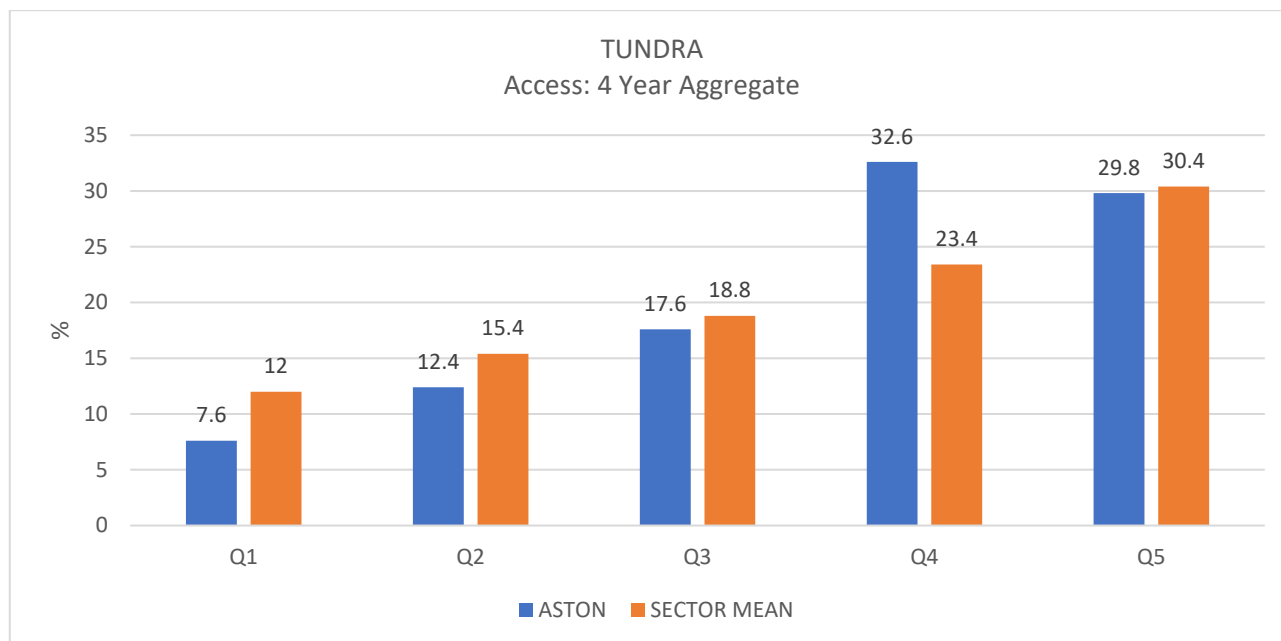
Progression % by FSM Eligibility in Subject Areas with Optional Placements (4 year-aggregate)				
Free School Meals	Placement PAID	Placement UNPAID	No Placement	Grand Total
Not Eligible	86	76	73	78
Eligible	87	77	67	74

We seek to reduce the progression gap further via target 7 through tailored outreach programmes, a new Power Skills Module to support employability, and provision of a bursary to placement students.

Target 7 (PTP_1): Reduce the progression gap between students eligible for free school meals and those that are not from 7.1% to 3.4% by 2028-29 via development of a final year outreach programme for work experience, launching the Power Skills module, and enhanced support for placements and work experience.

TUNDRA:

Our 4-year aggregate data show that we are under-represented compared with the sector for TUNDRA quintiles 1 and 2:



Looking at the proportion of students from each TUNDRA quintile since 2016-17, we see a small reduction in representation amongst quintiles 4 and 5, and a small increase in representation amongst quintiles 1 and 2:

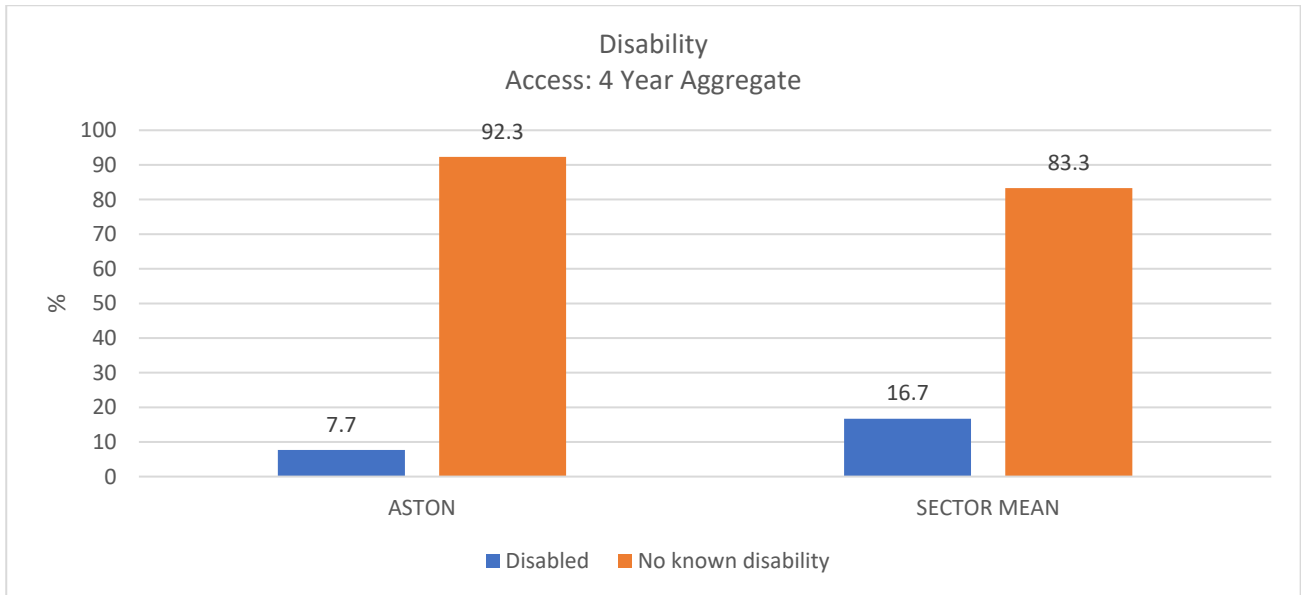
TUNDRA Quintiles (%) by year (Access)						
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Q1	6.5	7.1	7.4	7.4	7.7	7.9
Q2	12.6	12.3	11.1	12.0	11.6	14.5
Q3	17.3	17.7	16.9	17.2	16.7	19.5
Q4	30.5	29.7	31.9	33.3	34.5	30.6
Q5	33.0	33.2	32.7	30.0	29.5	27.5

We have not included a specific Access target around TUNDRA classification in this APP for the following reasons:

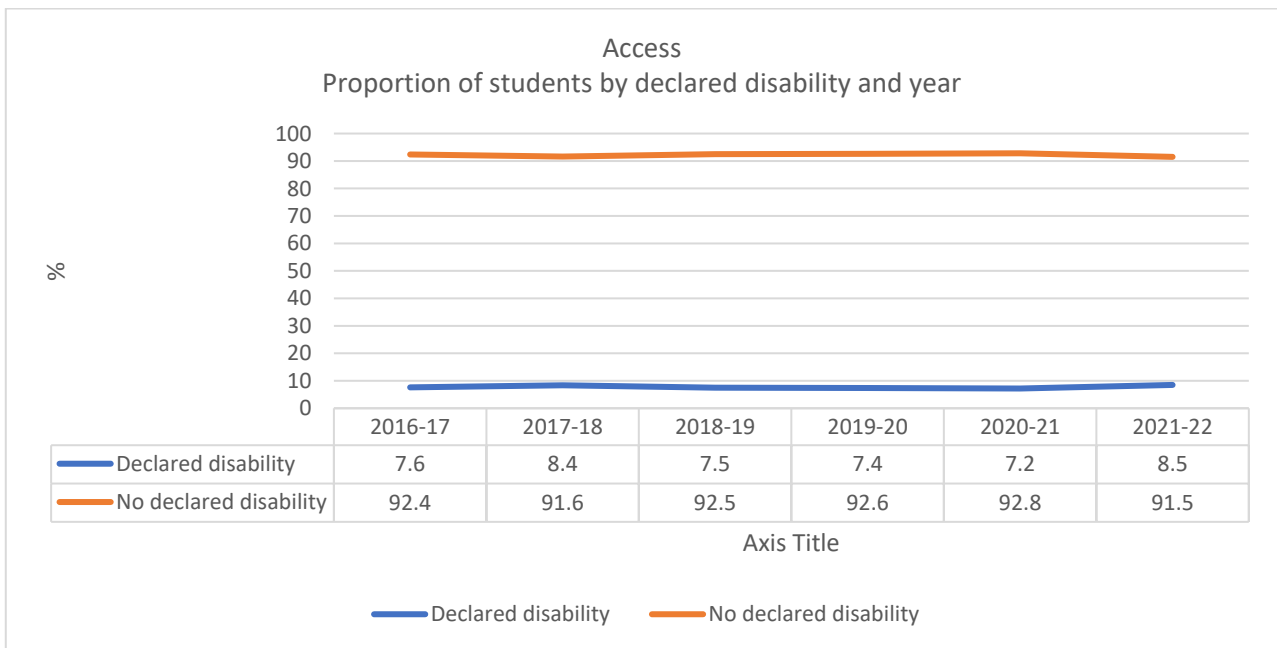
- TUNDRA not provided by UCAS in-cycle so we can't assess applicant against TUNDRA status as part of the application process. This makes it hard to factor TUNDRA into the contextual offer scheme.
- When we reviewed the schools we currently collaborate with, out of the 79 IMD Q1-2 schools, only 22 (28%) are also classified as TUNDRA 1-2.
- This means that we would have to make considerable changes to the schools that we work with to make meaningful change against this metric, and it would be likely to have a detrimental effect on our engagement with IMD Q1-2 schools. Moreover, our outreach team is committed to providing consistent and long-term engagement with partner schools.

Declared disability:

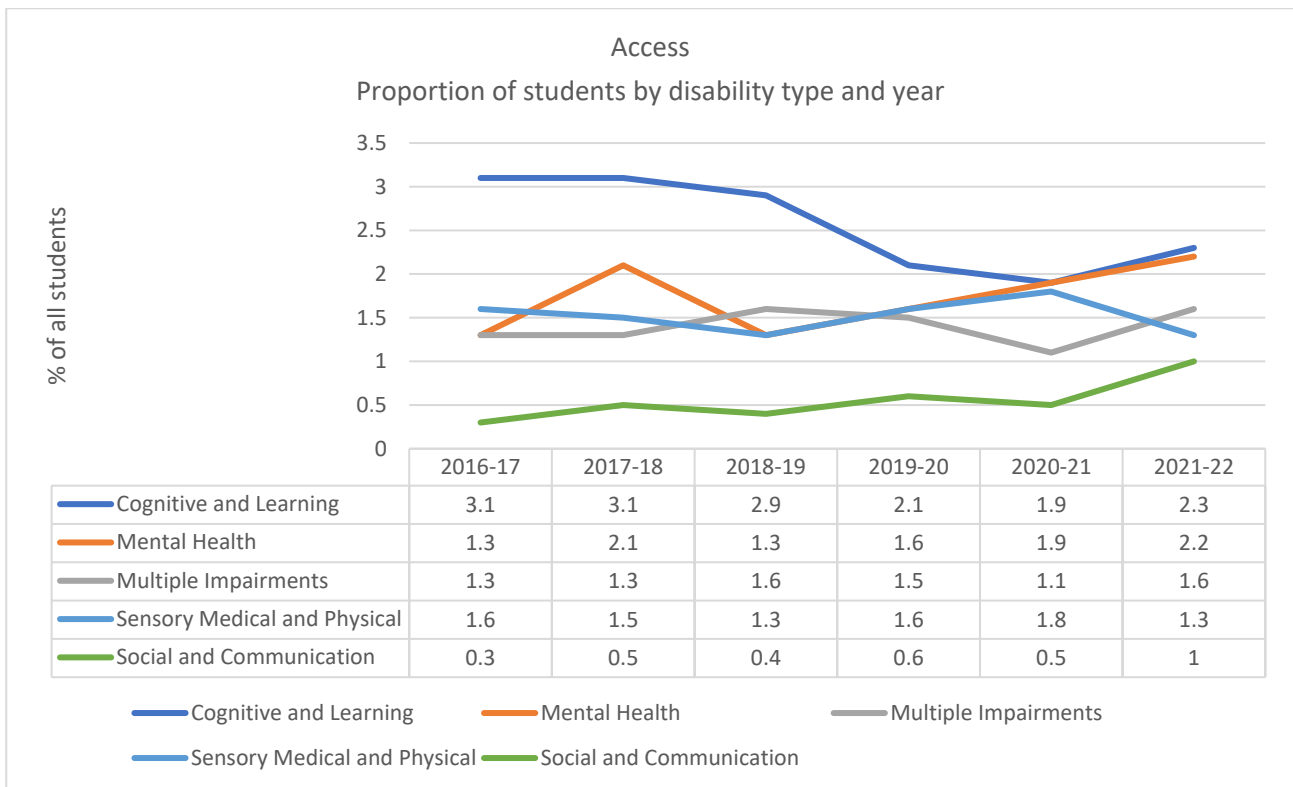
7.7% of Aston students declare a disability compared with a sector average of 16.7% (4-year aggregate). In the 2023 NSS results, there were generally only small differences between in positivity between students who reported a disability (170 respondents) and those who did not (1782 respondents). The positivity measure for Organisation and Management was around 2% lower for disabled students than those that reported no disability (78% compared to 80%). This figure was still around 10% higher than the sector average positivity for Organisation and Management for disabled students (69%).



In this APP we address the low declaration rates amongst Aston students. We will determine specific interventions that address student feelings of safety around declaration of disability that may intersect with culture and heritage, the physical accessibility of our campus, and how we support students, particularly those with mental health conditions, to succeed.



Since 2016-17, the proportion of Aston students who declare a disability has increased slightly by 0.9% from 7.6% to 8.5%.



The largest increases have been amongst those declaring Mental Health conditions and Social and Communication disabilities. We will address the low proportion of students who declare disabilities at Aston via Target 2.

Target 2 (PTA_3): Increase the number of students enrolling into Aston University who have declared a disability from 8.5% to 10.5% by 2028-29 through including disabled students within our contextual offer scheme and implementing the Disabled Students' Commitment

Disability type overview: 4-year aggregate (%)					
	ACCESS	CONTINUATION	COMPLETION	ATTAINMENT	PROGRESSION
Cognitive and Learning	2.3	95.2	95.4	84.9	80.4
Mental Health	1.8	91.1	86.8	83.3	74.3
Multiple Impairments	1.4	90.7	91.4	86.6	79.5
No Known Disability Type	92.3	95.3	94.5	86.2	79.8
Sensory Medical & Physical	1.5	93.5	95.3	82.7	81.4
Social and Communication	0.6	91.5	93.0	79.4	[low]

4-year aggregate data: Disability type gaps				
	CONTINUATION	COMPLETION	ATTAINMENT	PROGRESSION
Cognitive and Learning - NKD	-0.1	0.9	-1.3	0.6
Mental Health - NKD	-4.2	-7.7	-2.9	-5.5
Multiple Impairments - NKD	-4.6	-3.1	0.4	-0.3
Sensory Medical & Physical - NKD	-1.8	0.8	-3.5	1.6
Social and Communication - NKD	-3.8	-1.5	-6.8	-

These data highlight the need for tailored support, particularly for students with mental health conditions and social and communication disabilities, which will be addressed via targets 4 and 5.

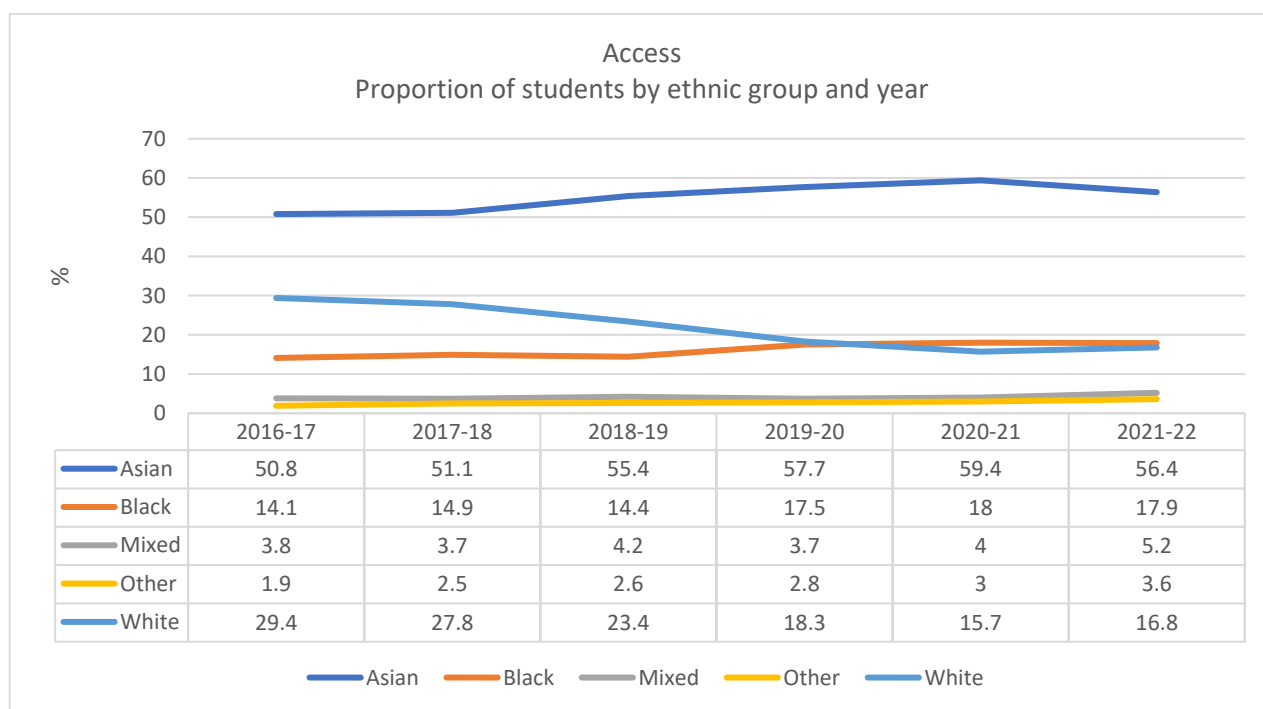
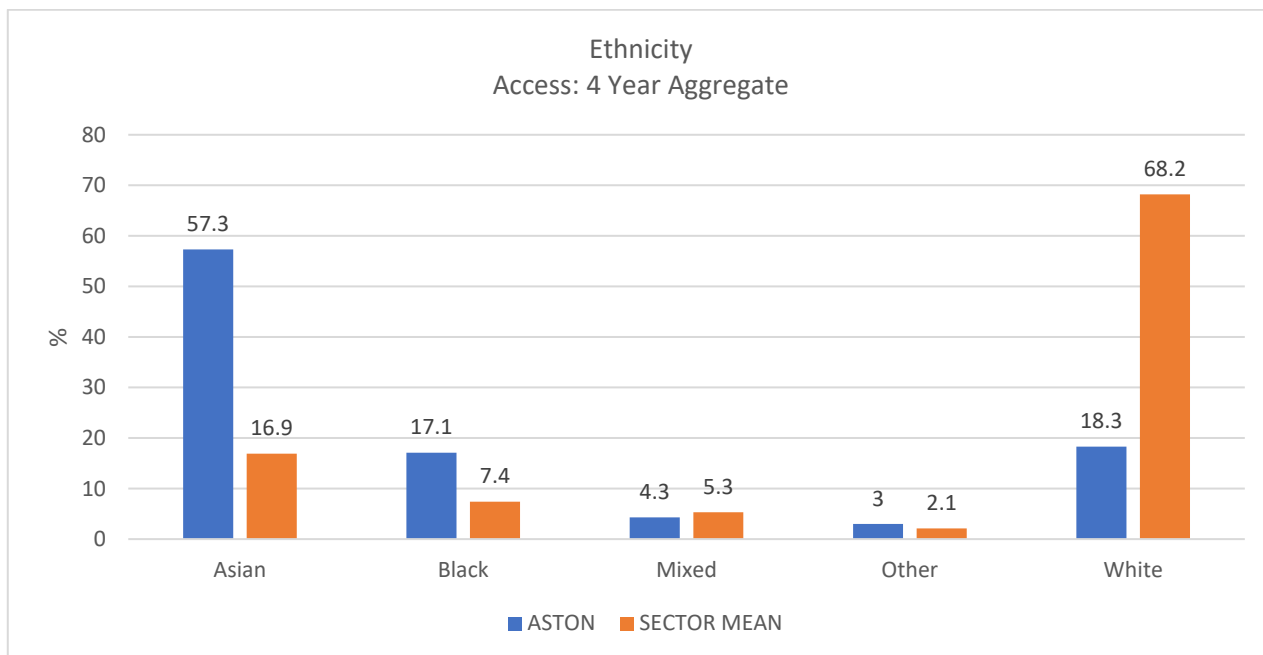
Target 4 (PTS_3): Improve attainment rates of students with social or communication impairments from 79.4% to 81.5% by 2028-29 by providing specialised peer-mentoring programmes, enhancing our personal tutoring system, and improving the accessibility of our campus.

Target 5 (PTS_4): Reduce the completion rate gap between students who report a mental health condition and those who do not declare a disability from 7.7% to 4.5% by 2028-29 through development of a programme of mental health ambassadors and a buddy scheme.

Aston's 2023 NSS results show that respondents with cognitive or learning difficulties, and those with multiple or other impairments reported lower positivity levels than respondents with no reported disability (78% overall positivity compared to 81%). Those with a mental health condition, sensory, medical or physical impairment or social / communication impairment reported higher levels of positivity compared to those without a condition (between 81% and 86% total positivity). Positivity about Teaching was 5% lower than the sector average for respondents with cognitive or learning difficulties, but 9% higher than the sector average for those with a social or communication impairment (although based on a small sample size of 11 respondents).

Ethnicity

At Aston we enrol a much higher proportion of Asian and Black students compared with the sector.



Aston's 2023 NSS results show that:

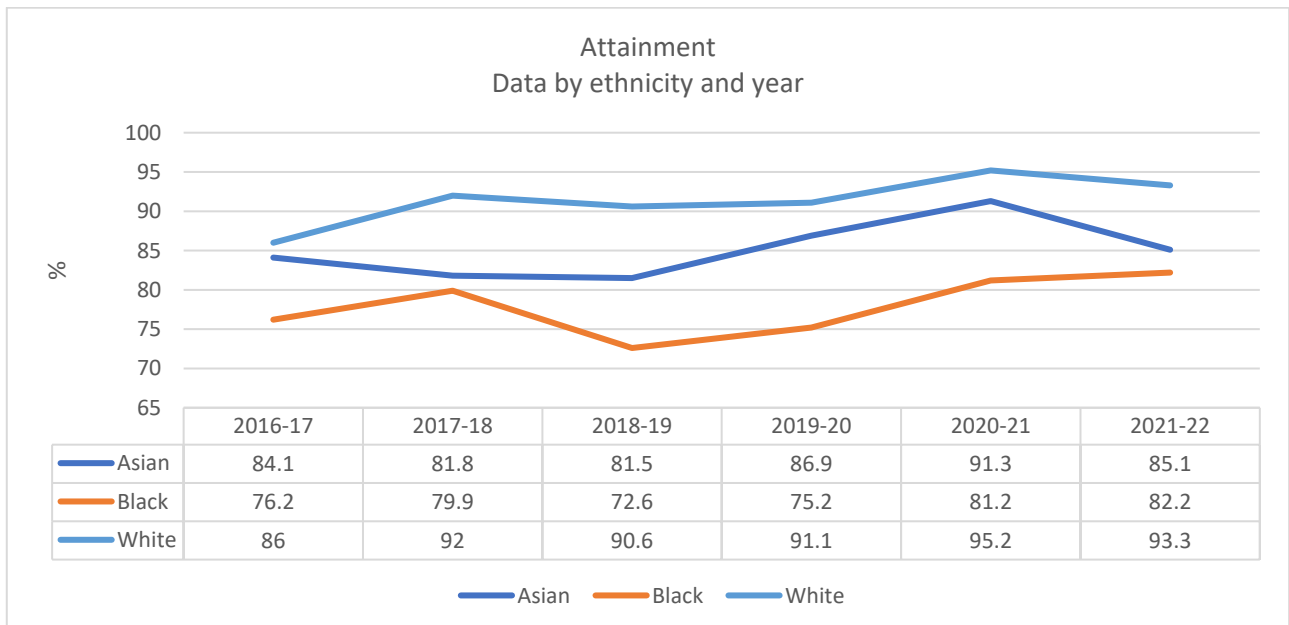
- White students were the least positive about teaching (83% compared to 85%-86% for other groups) and Organisation and Management (74% compared to 81%-83% for other groups)
- Black students were least positive about Assessment and Feedback (72% compared to 75%-76% for other groups). This result was also 9% lower than the sector average for Black students.
- Black, Asian, Mixed and White students had higher positivity than the sector average for Academic support, Organisation and Management and Student Voice

ETHNICITY: 4 YEAR AGGREGATE					
	ACCESS	CONTINUATION	COMPLETION	ATTAINMENT	PROGRESSION
Asian	57.3	96.0	95.4	86.2	79.4
Black	17.1	95.3	94.7	77.8	74.9
Mixed	4.3	94.6	92.6	86.2	79.0
Other	3.0	95.3	94.8	82.5	69.8
White	18.3	93.1	92.7	92.3	82.6

Gaps between ethnic groups are small at continuation and completion but increase at the attainment and progression stages. Gaps across all lifecycle stages at Aston are generally smaller than the sector mean.

4-year aggregate data: Ethnicity gaps								
	CONTINUATION		COMPLETION		ATTAINMENT		PROGRESSION	
	Aston	Sector mean	Aston	Sector mean	Aston	Sector mean	Aston	Sector mean
Asian-White	2.9	-0.7	2.7	-1.5	-6.1	-8.6	-3.2	-3.4
Black-White	2.2	-5.4	2	-7.6	-14.5	-20.2	-7.7	-4.4
Mixed-White	1.5	-1.8	-0.1	-3.1	-6.1	-3.8	-3.6	-0.5
Other-White	2.2	-3.5	2.1	-4.5	-9.8	-11.1	-12.8	-3.6

In the chart below we consider the attainment of Asian, Black, and White groups, acknowledging that Mixed and Other groups are very small (150 and 100 student respectively in 2021-22).



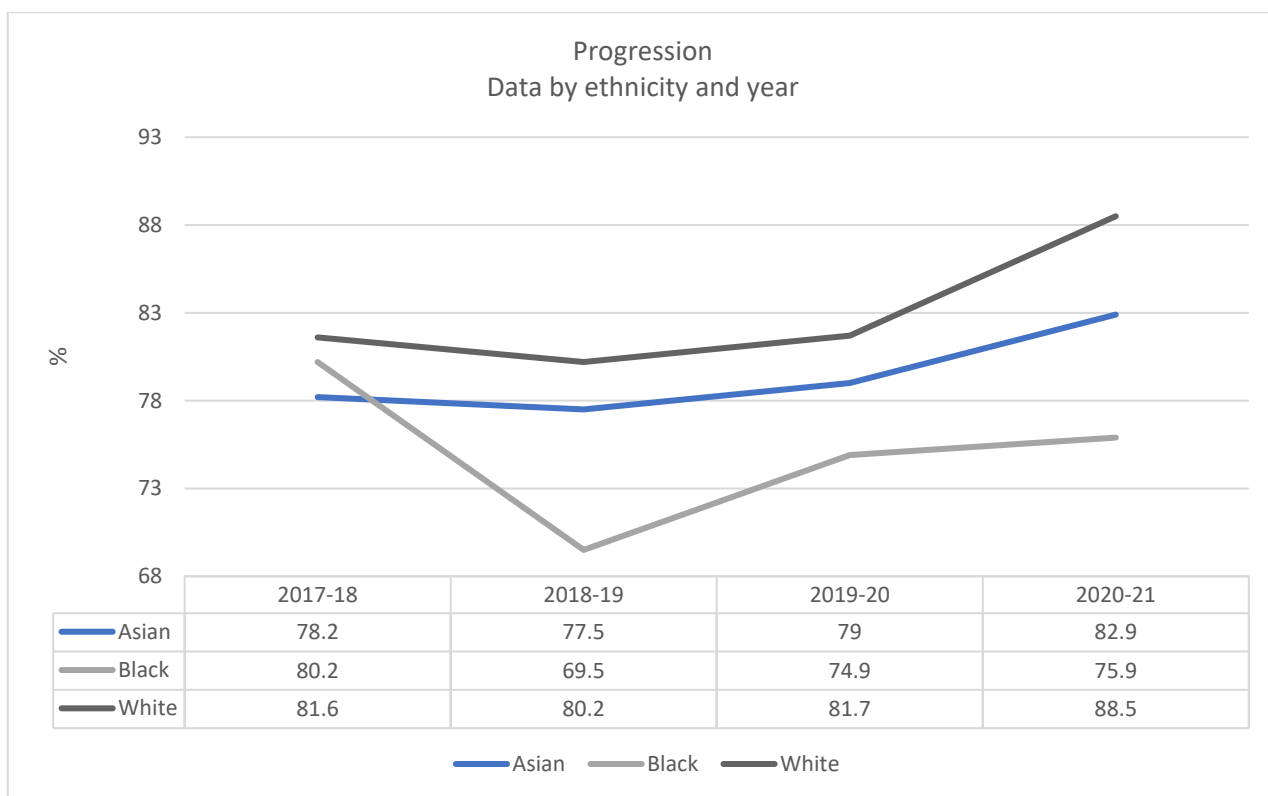
Since 2016-17, the attainment gap between Black and White students has increased from 9.8% to 11.1% and the attainment gap between Asian and White students has increased from 1.9% to 8.2%. This is despite White students have been the smallest group by representation over the same time period. We aim to address this via Targets 3.1 and 3.2.

Target 3.1 (PTS_1): Reduce the attainment gap between Black and White students from 11.1% to 4% by 2028-29 by embedding small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning.

Target 3.2 (PTS_2): Reduce the attainment gap between Asian and White students from 8.2% to 2% by 2028-29 by embedding small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning

At the Progression stage, White students outperform both Black and Asian groups, with the gap for Black students being higher than the sector average (7.7% versus 4.4%, 4-year aggregate).

The chart below shows Aston’s Progression data by year, highlighting that while Progression for Asian and White students increased by 4.7% and 6.9% respectively, Progression for Black students decreased by 4.3% between 2017-18 and 2020-21.



Internal data (4-year aggregate) also shows that students from ME backgrounds have been less likely to do a placement than White students.

Placement Numbers and Proportions by Ethnicity in Subject Areas with Optional Placements (4 year aggregate)							
Ethnicity	Placement PAID	Placement UNPAID	Placement Total	No Placement	Overall Total	% Placement	% Paid Placement
Asian	296	256	553	606	1159	48	26
Black	92	78	170	152	322	53	29
Mixed	26	34	60	36	96	63	27
Other	14	7	22	24	45	48	32
White	332	229	561	325	886	63	37

We can also see that taking a placement (particularly a paid placement) has a positive impact on progression rates:

Progression % by Ethnicity in Subject Areas with Optional Placements (4 year aggregate)					
Ethnicity	Placement - PAID	Placement - UNPAID	Placement Total	No Placement	Overall Total
Asian	88	78	84	72	77
Black	81	71	77	69	73
Mixed	90	80	84	71	79
Other	65	82	71	67	69
White	88	75	83	81	82

Taking an intersectional approach, internal data shows that FSM eligible graduates who were also from a ME background were the least likely group to do a placement.

Placement Numbers and Proportions by Ethnicity and FSM Eligibility in Subject Areas with Optional Placements (4-year aggregate)					
Ethnicity - FSM	Placement PAID	Placement UNPAID	No Placement	% Placement	% Paid Placement
Asian - Not Eligible	188	166	354	50	27
Asian - Eligible	72	58	148	47	26
Black - Not Eligible	53	46	62	62	33
Black - Eligible	25	18	53	45	26
White - Not Eligible	242	192	217	67	37
White - Eligible	18	14	13	71	39

Again, for all groups doing a paid placement has the largest impact on progression rates:

Progression % by Ethnicity and FSM Eligibility in Subject Areas with Optional Placements (4-year aggregate)					
Ethnicity - FSM	Placement PAID	Placement UNPAID	Placement Total	No Placement	Overall Total
Asian - Not Eligible	86	79	83	70	77
Asian - Eligible	92	79	86	67	76
Black - Not Eligible	86	68	78	67	73
Black - Eligible	73	68	71	64	67
White - Not Eligible	86	76	81	80	81
White - Eligible	94	68	83	62	77

We aim to address differences between groups who are taking paid placement via Target 8 and interventions that include targeted mentoring programmes, a new Inclusive Employer Pathway in which we will work directly with employers to support equality, diversity and inclusion, and a new postgraduate taught scholarship.

Target 8 (PTP_2). Reduce progression gap between Black and White students from 12.6% to 4% by 2028-29 via a new mentoring programme and development of an Inclusive Employer programme and enhanced support for placements and work experience

To note that, in addition, we are addressing progression for students who are eligible for FSM specifically via target 7 (PTP_1).

Care leavers, carers, refugees, and students from the Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) community and students from military families

We have reviewed our data with respect to these students and report that numbers are very small, with each of these groups representing less than 0.5% of our cohort at the Access stage. Although numbers are very small, tracking the lifecycle stages, we can see that Attainment is lower for students within these groups. In addition, we see relatively low continuation rates amongst students who are carers.

Intervention activity 6.2 seeks to support these students:

6.2 Provide £1,250 per year to care leavers, children from a military family, refugees, young carers and estranged students - addresses cost pressure risk.

We have also identified cross-intervention for these students within the following intervention activities:

3.1: Learning Development Centre: co-created mentoring activities (peer and professional) - addressing insufficient personal support risk

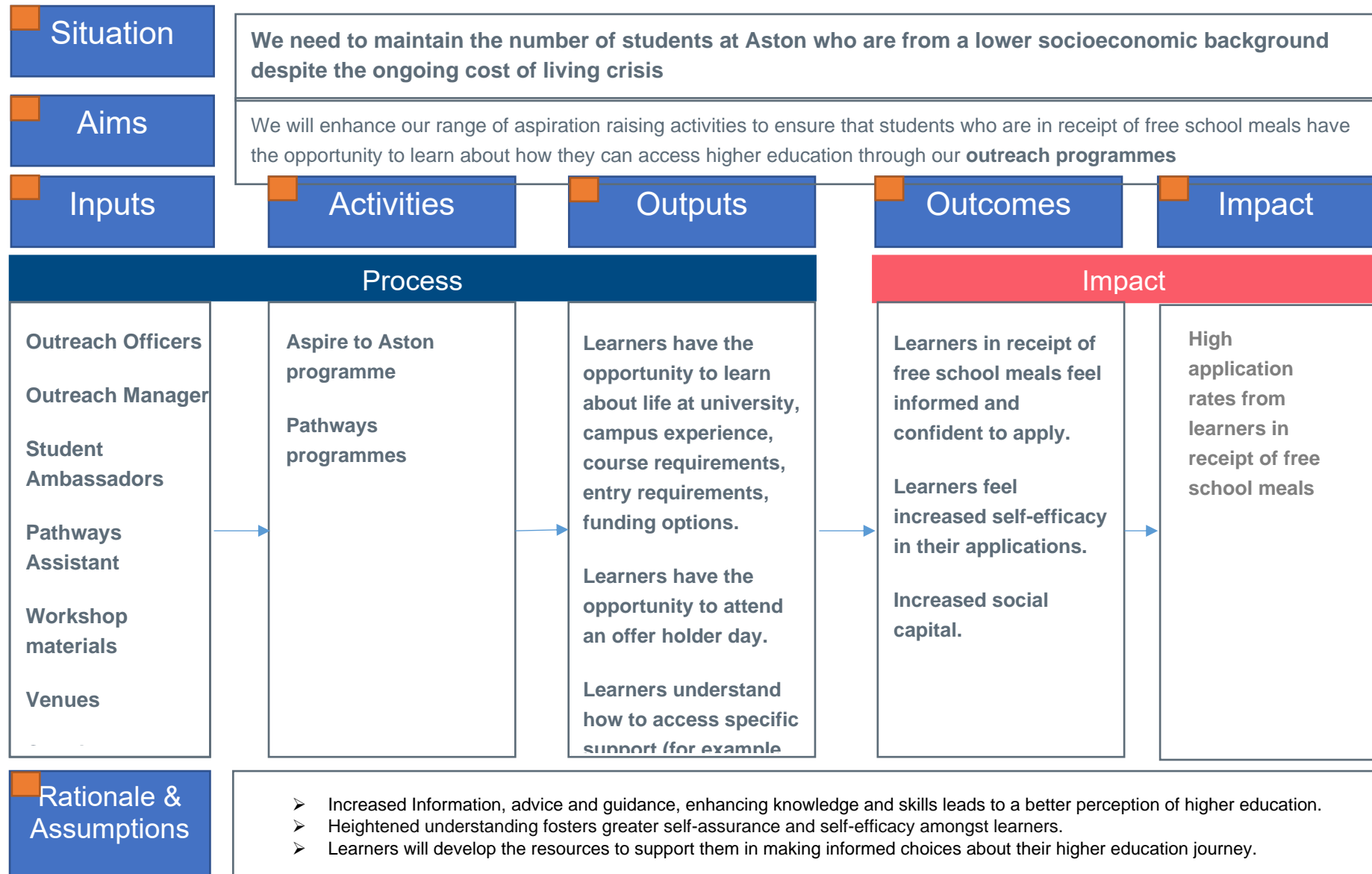
3.3 Learning Development Centre: early transition diagnostics and support to pick up additional needs early – data informed interventions - addressing knowledge and skills risk

3.4: Support inclusive learning and teaching practice by building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning, ensuring Blackboard training, and introducing mandatory module guides

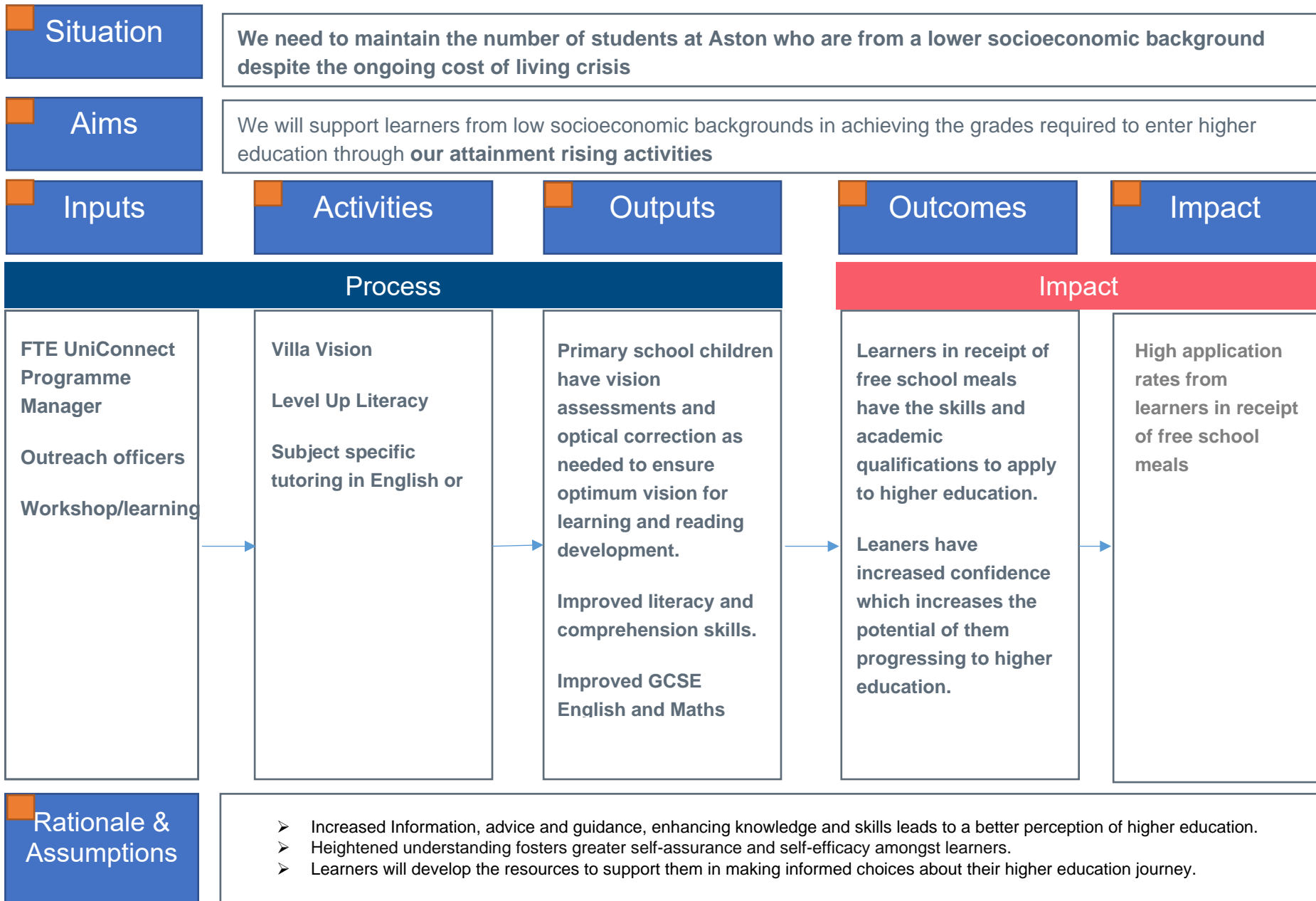
5.3 Review and enhancement of personal tutoring system – addresses insufficient personal support risk

Annex B: Evidence base and rationale for intervention strategies (further detail)

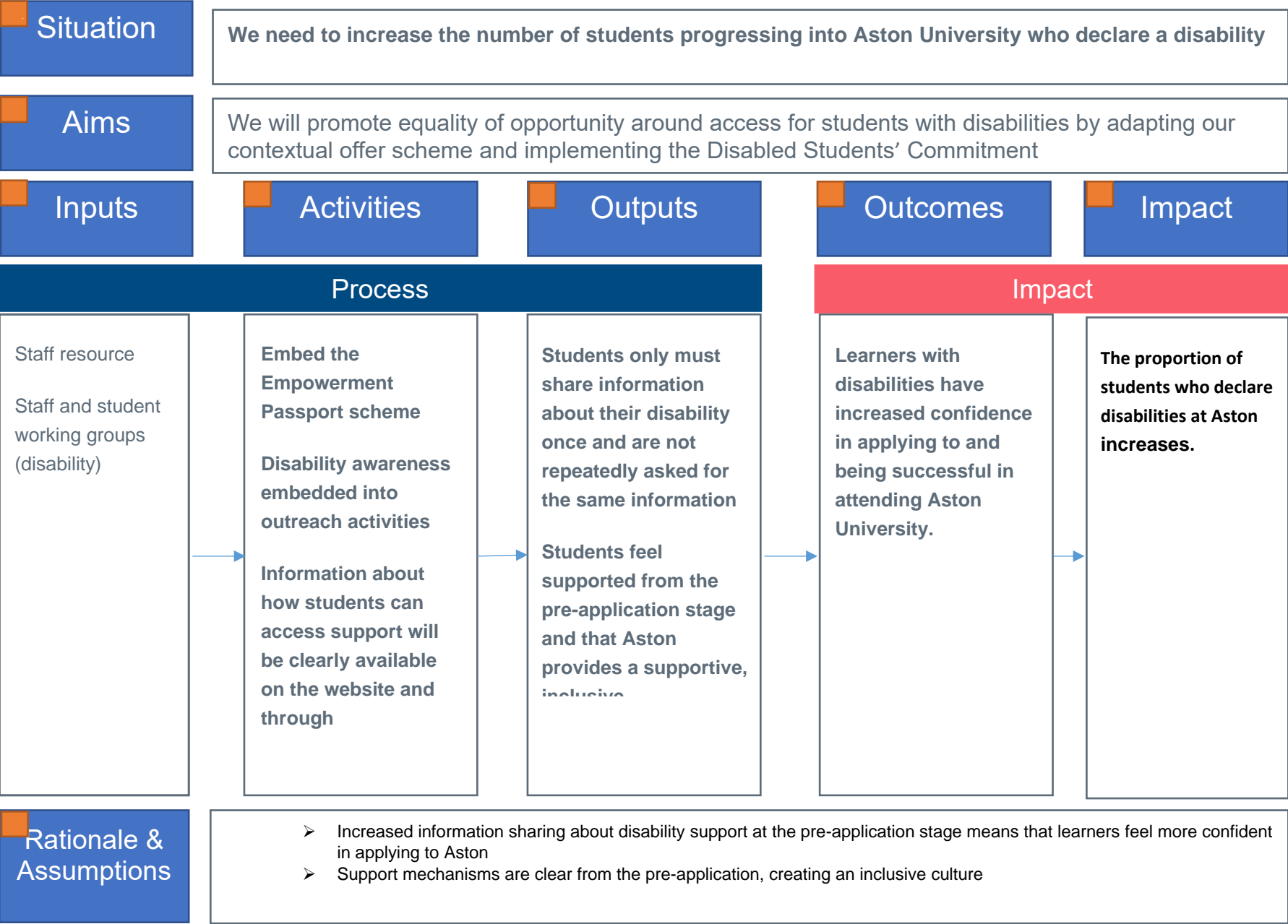
Theories of Change and evidence base for interventions



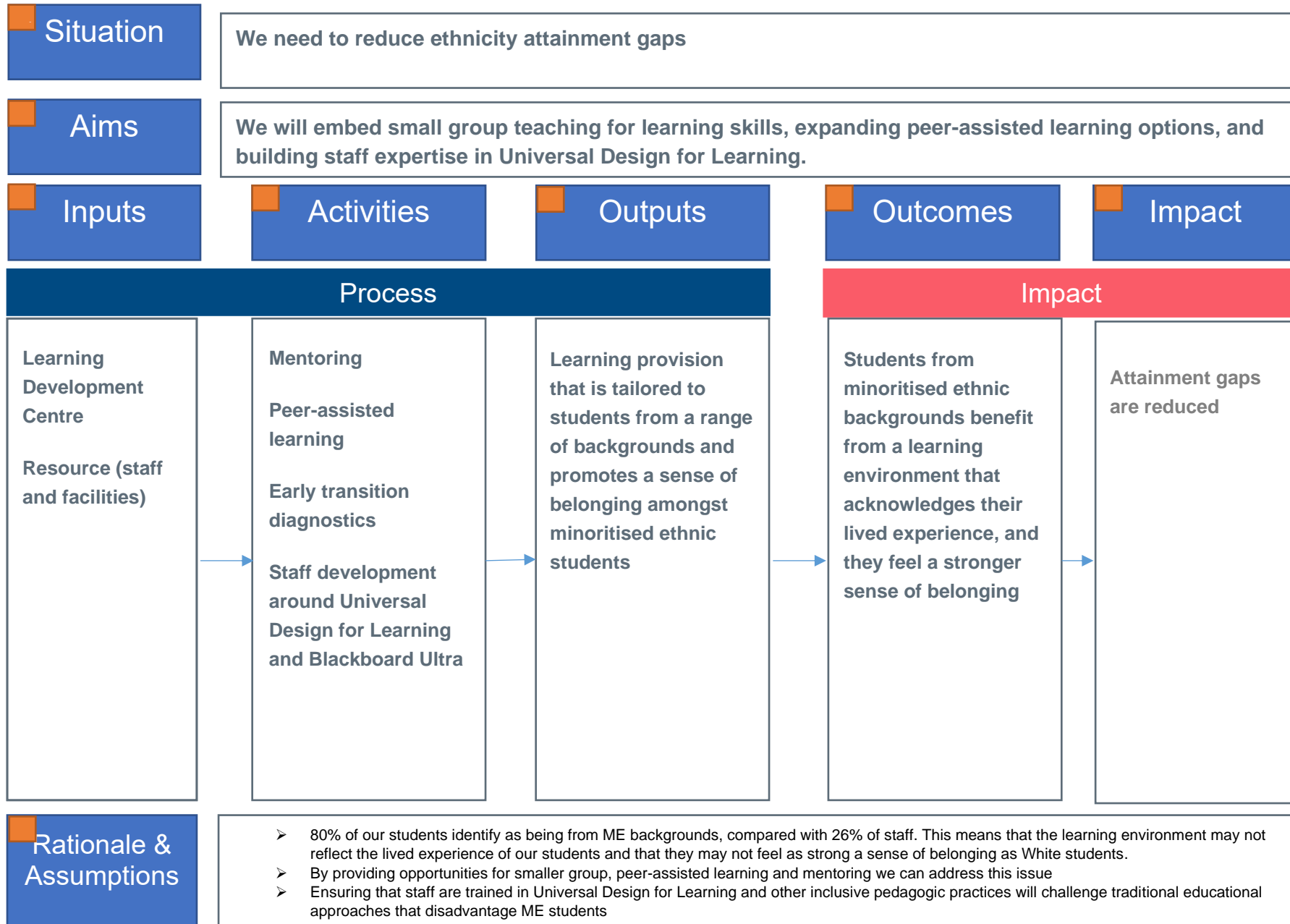
Evidence base to support outreach programmes	
Internal	External
<p>I1. Increased Information, advice and guidance, enhancing knowledge and skills leads to a better perception of higher education. Heightened understanding fosters greater self-assurance and self-efficacy amongst learners.</p> <p>I2. Optimising the impact of a multi-intervention outreach programme on progression to Higher Education: recommendations for future practice and research Burgess, A., Horton, M. & Moores, E., Jul 2021, In: Heliyon. 7, 7, e07518.</p> <p>I3. Our Pathways programmes respond to a National call from HEFCE, MSC, GMC & Health Education England for a ‘widening of the social profile of healthcare students’. Healthcare continuingly seen as an elite profession with multiple barriers to students from least advantaged areas. Astons Year 12 Pathway evidenced the lack of awareness in young learners of the variety of NHS and healthcare careers, and the importance of achieving high level GCSEs to pursue a lot of healthcare courses for university and beyond. The pre-16</p> <p>I4. Pathway aims to Raise students Aspirations to study higher education. Raise students Access to study at higher education.</p> <p>I5. Aspire to Aston: A targeted multi-intervention programme working with students and their parents throughout KS3 and KS4 to raise students' educational aspirations and foster a sense of belonging in HE. Raise students access to study at higher education. Support students' academic attainment. Increase students' information, advice and guidance about university and higher education options and support them in making informed decisions for their future.</p>	<p>E1. Chowdry, H., Crawford, C., Dearden, L., Goodman, A., Vignoles, A., 2013. Widening participation in higher education: analysis using linked administrative data. Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society) 176, 431–457.</p> <p>E2. Anders, J. and Micklewright, J., 2015. Teenagers' expectations of applying to university: how do they change?. Education sciences, 5(4), pp.281-305.</p> <p>E3. Burgess, A.P., Horton, M.S. and Moores, E., 2021. Optimising the impact of a multi-intervention outreach programme on progression to higher education: recommendations for future practice and research. Heliyon, 7(7), p.e07518.</p> <p>E4. Chilosi, D., Noble, M., Broadhead, P. and Wilkinson, M., 2010. Measuring the effect of Aimhigher on schooling attainment and higher education applications and entries. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 34(1), pp.1-10.</p> <p>E5. Harding, Sarah and Lindsay Bowes, 2022. Fourth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships.</p> <p>E6. Patel, R. and Bowes, L., 2021. Third independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships: A summary of the local impact evidence to date for the Office for Students. CFE Research</p> <p>E7. Herbaut, E., & Geven, K. (2020). What works to reduce inequalities in higher education? A systematic review of the (quasi-)experimental literature on outreach and financial aid. Research In Social Stratification And Mobility, 65, 100442</p>



Evidence base to support attainment raising activities	
Internal	External
<p>I6. Research has shown there is a strong link between reading ability and general academic performance, and that their impact of reading ability on attainment is seen not just for English-related subjects, but across all subjects. Crucially, there is a pronounced gap in reading ability between pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and those who are not.</p> <p>I7. Targeted small group and one-to-one interventions have the potential for the largest immediate impact on attainment, with our own research showing a full grade increase for learners who receive tuition for a full term. Moreover, pupils eligible for FSM typically receive additional benefits from one to one tuition.</p> <p>I8. Level up Literacy: https://www.aston.ac.uk/latest-news/aston-university-research-shows-extra-tuition-blending-letter-sounds-helps-struggling A reading and comprehension programme, which will include the delivery of a programme focusing on grammar, word study and comprehension as well as disciplinary reading. Research has shown there is a strong link between reading ability and general academic performance, and that the impact of reading ability on attainment is seen not just for English-related subjects, but across all subjects. Crucially, there is a pronounced gap in reading ability between pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and those who are not. Uniconnect/Aimhigher West Midlands will be delivering the programme to at least 60 students per school. We will be working with up to 9 schools across year groups 7 to 9, who are on a ¾ grade borderline, and meet widening participation criteria.</p> <p>I9. Subject specific tutoring in English or Maths: Targeted small group and one-to-one interventions have the potential for the largest immediate impact on attainment, with Aimhigher West Midland’s research showing a full grade increase for learners who receive tuition for a full term. Moreover, pupils eligible for FSM typically receive additional benefits from one-to-one tuition.</p>	<p>E8. Anthony, Anna (2019) ‘What works’ and ‘what makes sense’ in Widening Participation: an investigation into the potential of university-led outreach to raise attainment. (Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis, University of Kent).</p> <p>E9. Mannion, J. and Mercer, N. (2016). Learning to learn: improving attainment, closing the gap at Key Stage 3, The Curriculum Journal, 27(2), pp. 246-271.</p> <p>E10. Elbaum, B., Vaughn, S., Tejero Hughes, M. and Watson Moody, S., (2000). How effective are one-to-one tutoring programs in reading for elementary students at risk for reading failure? A meta-analysis of the intervention research. Journal of educational psychology, 92(4), p.605.</p> <p>E11. Cohen, P.A., Kulik, J.A. and Kulik, C.L.C., (1982). Educational outcomes of tutoring: A meta-analysis of findings. American educational research journal, 19(2), pp.237-248</p> <p>E12. Nickow, A., Oreopoulos, P. and Quan, V., (2020). The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence. Working Paper 27476. National Bureau of Economic Research.</p>

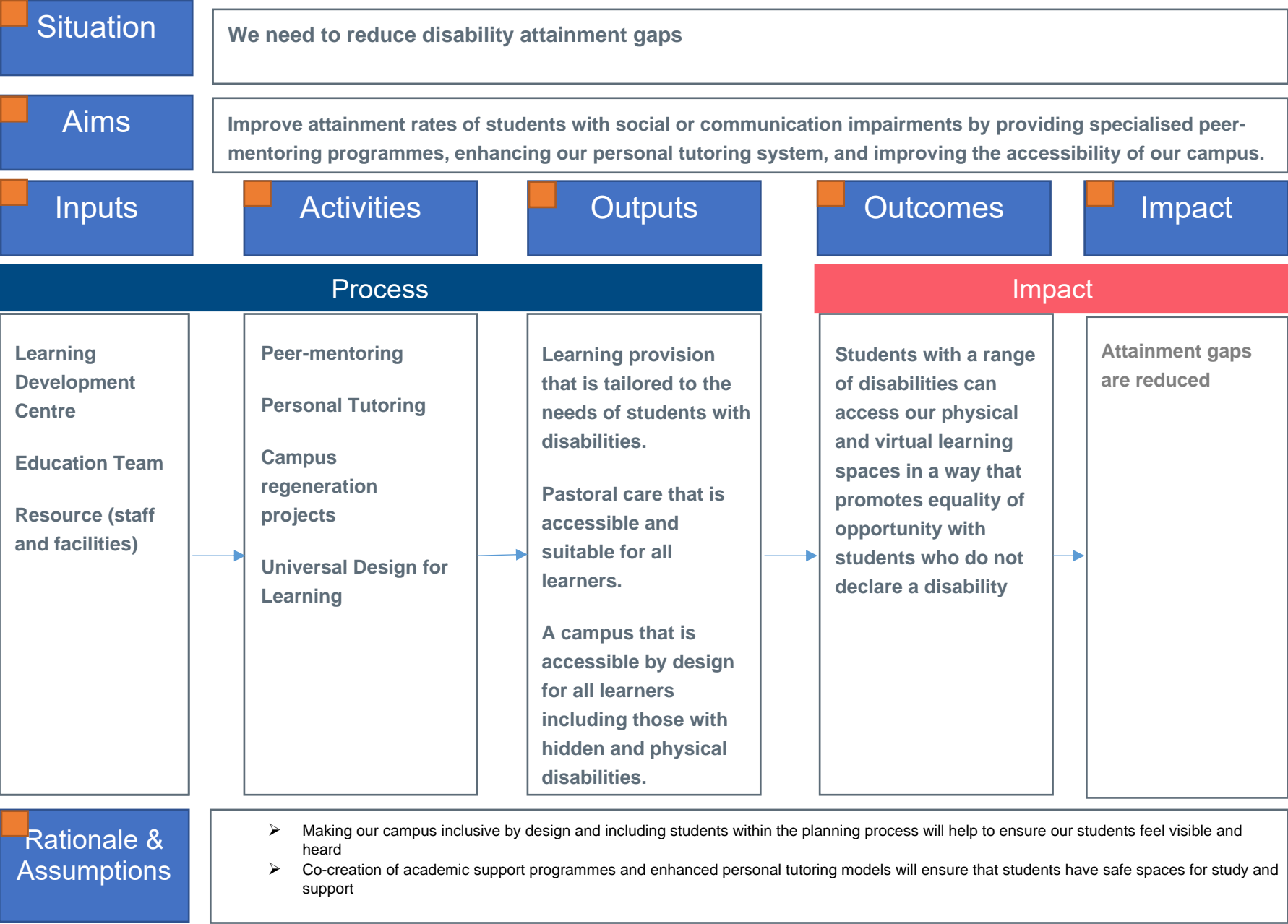


Evidence base to support equality of opportunity around access for students with disabilities	
Internal	External
<p>I10. Andrews, J., Clark R., and Thomas, L. (2012) Compendium of effective practice in higher education retention and success. Higher Education Academy.</p>	<p>E13. Disabled Student’s Commission (2023) Disabled Student’s Commitment. Advance HE.</p> <p>E14. Empowerment passport Ltd (2021) The Empowerment Passport</p> <p>E15. Soorenian, A (2017) Inclusive education and disabled students’ genuine right to British higher education. Malta Review of Higher Educational Research 11(2): 243-259.</p> <p>E16. Safer, A., Farmer, L., & Song, B. (2020) ‘Quantifying difficulties of university students with disabilities’, Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 33(1), 5-21.</p>

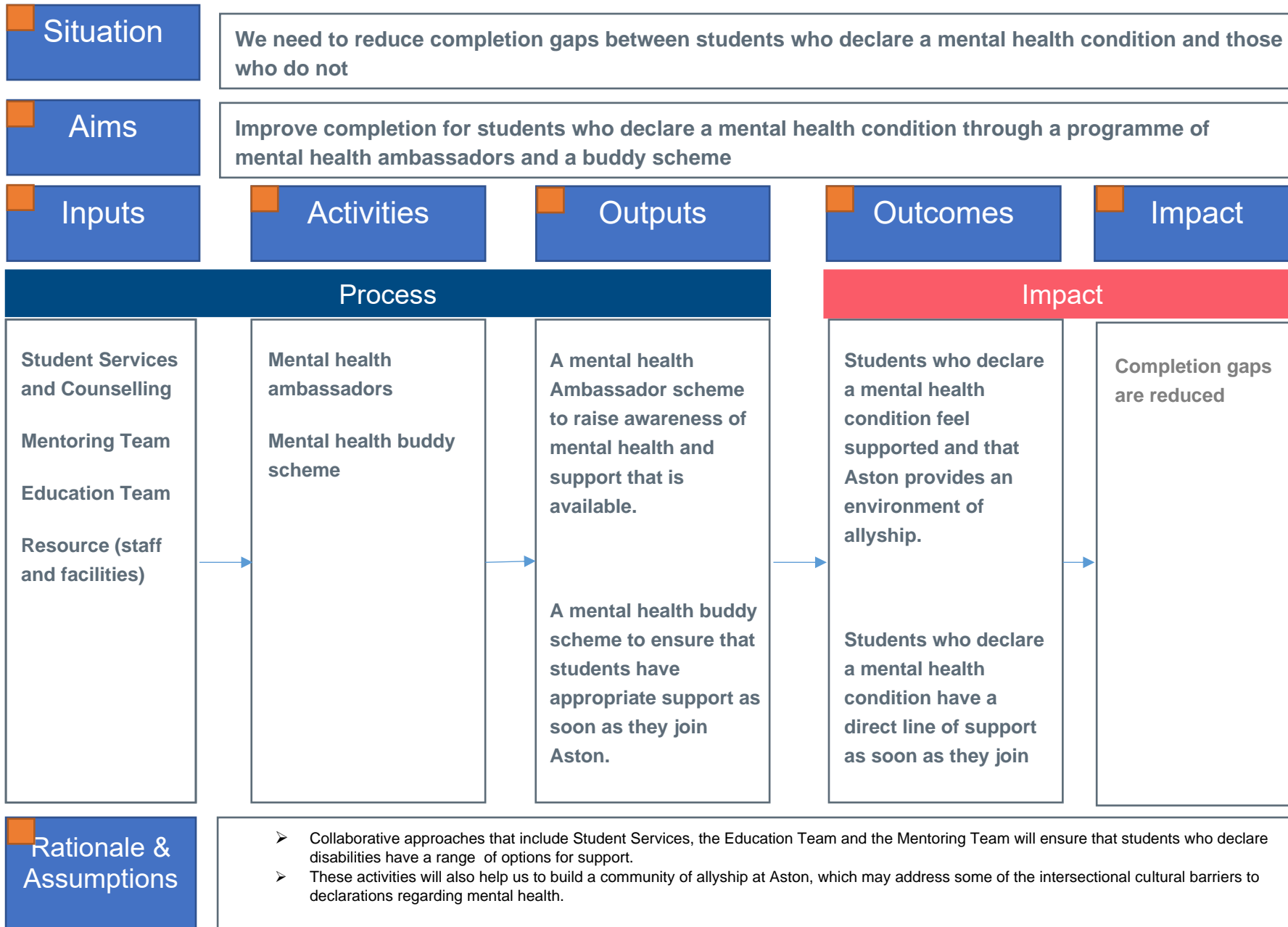


Evidence base to support small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning to reduce ethnicity attainment gaps.

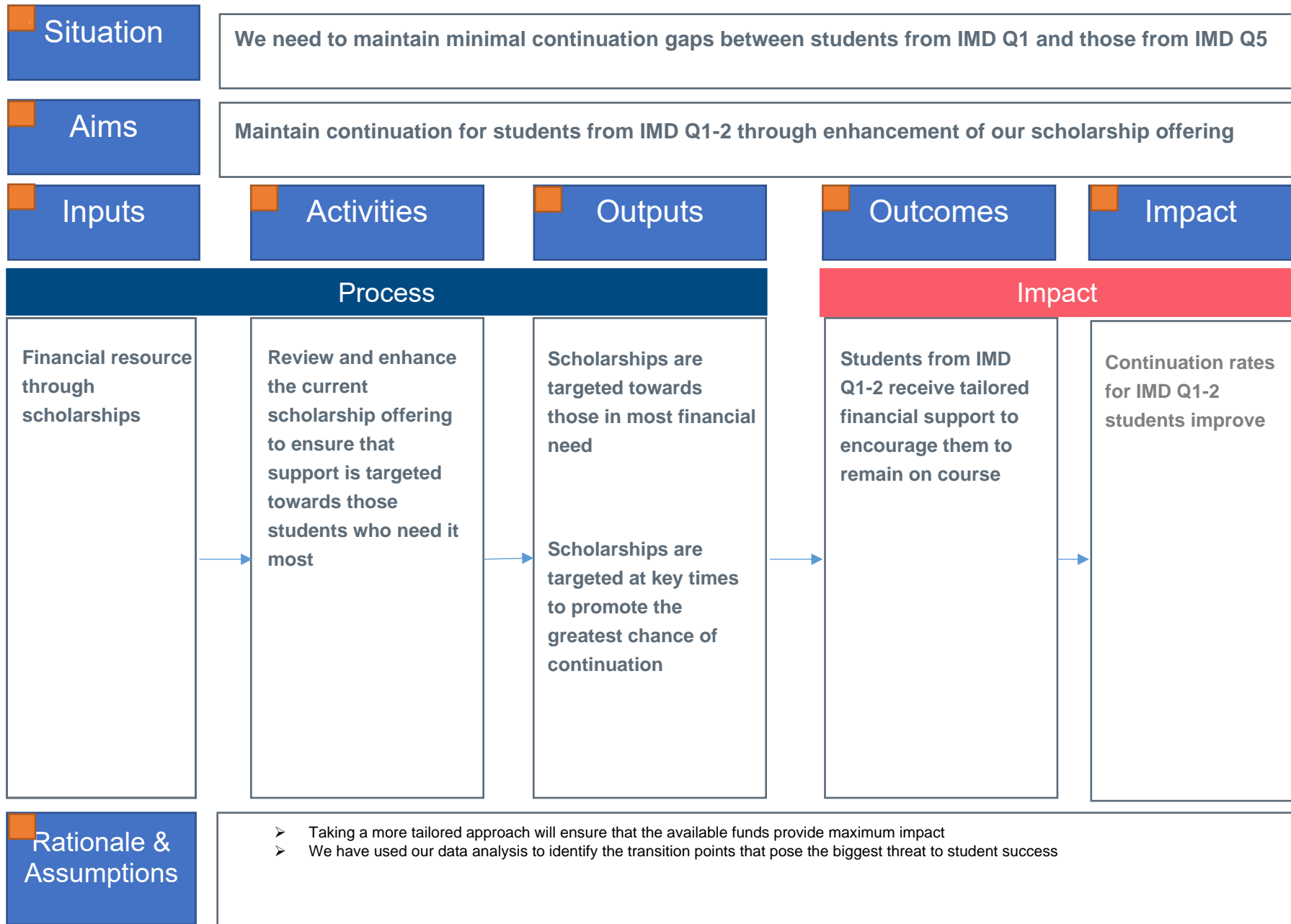
Internal	External
<p>I11. Measures of engagement in the first three weeks of higher education predict subsequent activity and attainment in first year undergraduate students: a UK case study Summers, R., Higson, H. & Moores, E., 2021, In: Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education. 46, 5, p. 821-836 16 p. <i>Research output: Contribution to journal › Article › peer-review</i></p> <p>I12. Pope, E. and O’Hara, M. (2023) ‘Smells like Team Spirit’: working in partnership with students to shape and support university transitions. European First Year Experience Conference (EFYE): Discovery and Design for Academic and Social Success. Abertay University, Scotland, 27th – 29th June 2023.</p> <p>I13. Pope, E. and Carroll, V. (2022) Retaining students from disadvantaged backgrounds and ensuring they are supported throughout their university journey. Widening Participation in Higher Education 2022: Ensuring Access and Opportunity for All. Government Events (Online Conference), March 2022.</p> <p>I14. Carroll, V. (2019) Enhancing the student retention by offering an outstanding student experience. Inside Government event – Increasing Student Retention across Higher Education, London, 26th March 2019</p> <p>I15. Doss, T.P., Allett, N, Woods, G.J., Poursharif, G., and Knight, G. (2021) ‘Effective measures of tailored learning support for Engineering Work-Based Learners in HE: A Case study’. Higher Education Pedagogies 6 (1), 66-78. https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2021.1882327</p>	<p>E17. Bettinger, E., & Baker, R. (2011). The Effects of Student Coaching in College: An Evaluation of a Randomized Experiment in Student Mentoring. NBER Working Paper No. 16881. National Bureau of Economic Research</p> <p>E18. Capstick, M. K., Harrell-Williams, L. M., Cockrum, C. D., & West, S. L. (2019). Exploring the effectiveness of academic coaching for academically at-risk college students. <i>Innovative Higher Education</i>, 44(3), 219-231.</p> <p>E19. Lombardi, A., Rifembark, G. G., Monahan, J., Tarconish, E., & Rhoads, C. (2020). Aided by Extant Data: The Effect of Peer Mentoring on Achievement for College Students with Disabilities. <i>Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability</i>, 33(2), 143-154</p> <p>E20. Fostier, M., & Carey, W. (2007, June). Exploration, experience and evaluation: Peer Assisted Study Scheme (PASS), sharing the experience of The University of Manchester. Science, Learning and Teaching Conference</p>



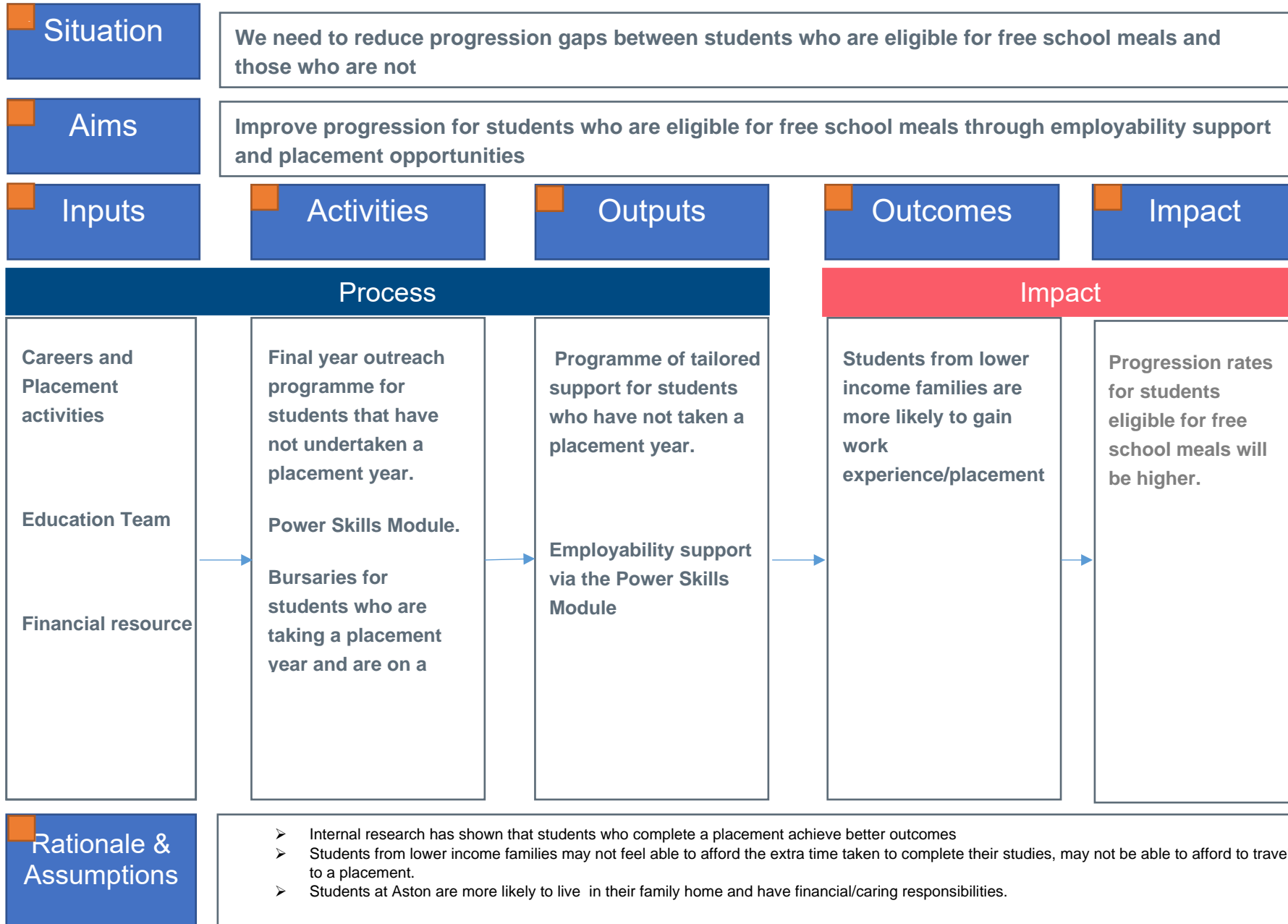
Evidence base to support specialised peer-mentoring programmes, enhancing our personal tutoring system, and improving the accessibility of our campus to reduce disability awarding gaps	
Internal	External
<p>I16. Knight, G., Powell, N., and Woods, G. (2022) Combining diagnostic testing and student mentorship to increase engagement and progression of first-year computer science students <i>European Journal of Engineering Education</i> 47 (5) Topic/Idea Aim and focus Raised by Evaluation methods/existing evidence pp. 712-724 https://doi.org/10.1080/03043797.2022.2063109</p> <p>I17. Pope, E. and Allett, N. (2023) "Relationships matter: addressing the challenges of PAL expansion across a university." Online workshop: Association for Peer Learning and Support, 12th June 2023.</p> <p>I18. Woods, G., Ozbaser, P., Allett, N., Pope, E and Poursharif, G. (2023) 'Implementing Baseline Mathematics Testing and In-Curriculum Peer Mentoring Scheme to Improve Attainment and Continuation of 1st Year Engineering and Computer Science Students Post COVID-19.', SRHE International Conference, Aston University, 06 December 2023. Submission: https://aston.box.com/s/va8s2y8vdglwbajypv04be183zyivefu Slides: https://aston.box.com/s/97eb2dfvsaop5d4lfb4nl66qu3ru9txq</p>	<p>E21. Fleming, A. R., Plotner, A. J., & Oertle, K. M. (2017). College Students with Disabilities: The Relationship between Student Characteristics, the Academic Environment, and Performance. <i>Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability</i>, 30(3), 209-221</p> <p>E22. Markle, L., Wessel, R. D., & Desmond, J. (2017). Faculty Mentorship Program for Students with Disabilities: Academic Success Outcomes (Practice Brief). <i>Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability</i>, 30(4), 385-392</p> <p>E23. Hillier, A., Goldstein, J., Tornatore, L., Byrne, E., & Johnson, H. M. (2019). Outcomes of a peer mentoring program for university students with disabilities. <i>Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning</i>, 27(5), 487-508</p> <p>E24. Kim, W. H., & Lee, J. (2016) 'The effect of accommodation on academic performance of college students with disabilities', <i>Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin</i>, 60(1), 40-50.</p> <p>E25. Safer, A., Farmer, L., & Song, B. (2020) 'Quantifying difficulties of university students with disabilities', <i>Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability</i>, 33(1), 5-21</p>



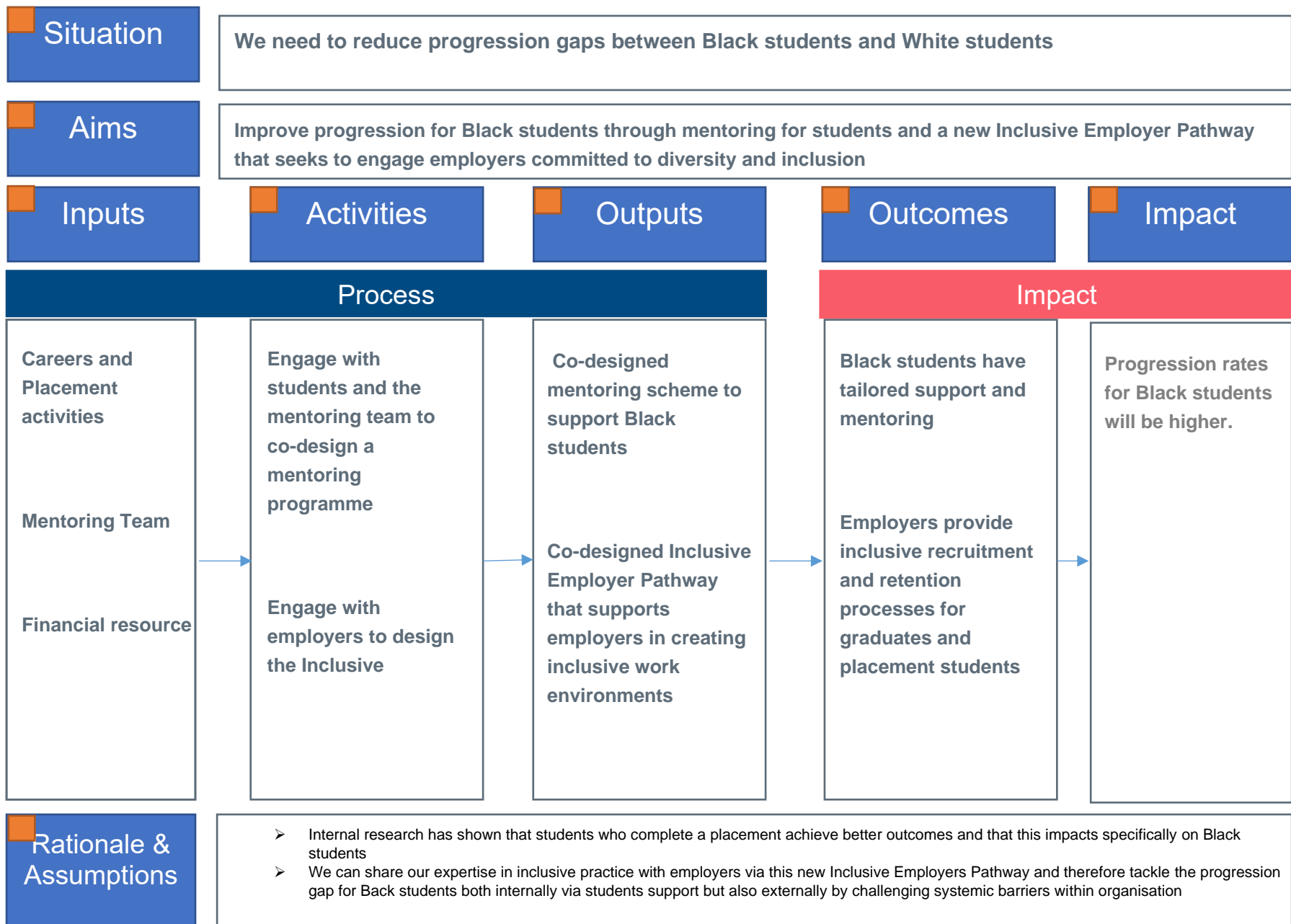
Evidence base to improve completion for students who declare a mental health condition through a programme of mental health ambassadors and a buddy scheme	
Internal	External
<p>I19. A student-led creative wellbeing group has been set up by psychology students at Aston University, with the help of their tutor, to connect student participants through art and help enhance their wellbeing. Psychology students launch creative sessions to support wellbeing through art Aston University</p> <p>I20. Aston University is working with PwC to provide additional mental health support to students and staff to combat the effects of the pandemic. Mental health training is being delivered to staff and students to help normalise access to mental health support among peer groups. Through two-hour workshops, staff in front-line roles including fees teams, personal tutors and students' union representatives are receiving training to increase mental health literacy to help them support students and colleagues with mental wellbeing. Aston University joins forces with Big Four firm to provide extra mental health support for students Aston University</p>	<p>E26. Supporting medical students with mental health conditions. General Medical Council.</p> <p>E27. Supporting students with mental health conditions. UCAS</p> <p>E28. Priestly, M., Broglia, E., Hughes, G., Spanner, L. (2021). 'Student perspectives on improving mental health support services at university'. Journal of Counselling & Psychotherapy Research. 22:197-206</p>



Evidence base to improve continuation for students from IMD Q1-2 through enhancement of our scholarship offering	
Internal	External
<p>I21. Financial support differentially aids retention of students from households with lower incomes: a UK case study Moores, E. & Burgess, A., 2023, In: Studies in Higher Education. 48, 1, p. 220-231 12 p.</p>	<p>E29. Bettinger, E. (2015). Need-Based Aid and College Persistence: The Effects of the Ohio College Opportunity Grant. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 37(1_suppl), 102S-119S</p> <p>E30. Goldrick-Rab, S., Kelchen, R., Harris, D. N., & Benson, J. (2016). Reducing Income Inequality in Educational Attainment: Experimental Evidence on the Impact of Financial Aid on College completion. American Journal of Sociology, 121(6), 1762-1817</p> <p>E31. Kaye, N. (2021). Evaluating the role of bursaries in widening participation in higher education: a review of the literature and evidence. Educational Review, 73(6), 775-797</p> <p>E32. 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</p>



Evidence base to improve progression for students who are eligible for free school meals through employability support and placement opportunities	
Internal	External
<p>I22. Measuring the benefits of a psychology placement year Reddy, P. A. & Moores, E., Dec 2006, In: Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education. 31, 5, p. 551-567 17</p> <p>I23. Do Work Placements Improve Final Year Academic Performance or Do High-Calibre Students Choose to Do Work Placements? Jones, C. M.; Green, J. P.; Higson, H. E. <i>Studies in Higher Education</i>, v42 n6 p976-992 2017</p> <p>I24. No Regrets? Measuring the Career Benefits of a Psychology Placement Year (2012) <i>Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education</i> 37(5):535-55</p> <p>I25. Delis & C. Jones (2023): The impact of work placements on graduate earnings, <i>Studies in Higher Education</i>, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2023.2211999</p> <p>I26. Internal student placement surveys.</p>	<p>E33. Scott, F. J. & Willison, D. (2021) Students’ reflections on an employability skills provision. <i>Journal of Further and Higher Education</i>. 45 (8), 1118–1133</p> <p>E34. Valdes, R. M. T., Santa Sorano, A. & Alvarez, C. L. (2017) Resignification of educational e-innovation to enhance opportunities for graduate employability in the context of new university degrees. <i>Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research</i>. 7 (1), 7–78</p> <p>E35. Eimer, A. & Bohndick, C. (2021) How individual experiential backgrounds are related to the development of employability among university students. <i>Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability</i>. 12 (2), 114–130</p> <p>E36. Kerrigan, M., Manktelow, A. & Simmons, E. (2018) Sandwich placements: negating the socio-economic effect on graduate prospects. <i>Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning</i>. 20, 81–107</p> <p>E37. Roberts, C. (2017) The inbetweeners: the new role of internships in the graduate labour market. Institute for Public Policy Research</p>



Evidence base to improve progression for Black students who are eligible for free school meals through mentoring for students and a new Inclusive Employer Pathway that seeks to engage employers committed to diversity and inclusion

Internal	External
<p>I25. Delis & C. Jones (2023): The impact of work placements on graduate earnings, Studies in Higher Education, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2023.2211999</p> <p>I27. Placement year academic benefit revisited: effects of demographics, prior achievement and degree programme Reddy, P. A. & Moores, E., 1 Apr 2012, In: Teaching in Higher Education. 17, 2, p. 153-165 13</p> <p>I28. Placement work experience may mitigate lower achievement levels of Black and Asian vs. White students at university Moores, E., Birdi, G. & Higson, H. E., 12 Sept 2017, In: Frontiers in Psychology. 8, 10 p., 1518.</p>	<p>E38. Mason, G., Williams, G. & Cranmer, S. (2009) Employability skills initiatives in higher education: what effects do they have on graduate labour market outcomes? Education Economic. 17 (1), 1–30</p> <p>E39. Black Careers Matter: Improving the early careers of people from Black heritage backgrounds. Institute of Student Employers</p> <p>E40. UCAS (2019) Is work experience important?</p>

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Aston University

Provider UKPRN: 10007759

Summary of 2025-26 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflation statement:

Subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations we will increase fees each year using RPI-X

Table 3b - Full-time course fee levels for 2025-26 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	9250
First degree	Only applies to the integrated work based learning year for MEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering and MEng Electronic Engineering and Computer Science programmes	N/A	4625
Foundation degree		N/A	9250
Foundation year/Year 0		N/A	9250
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year		N/A	1250
Turing Scheme and overseas study years		N/A	1250
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 3b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2025-26

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 4b - Part-time course fee levels for 2025-26 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree		N/A	6935
Foundation degree		N/A	6935
Foundation year/Year 0		N/A	6935
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	N/A	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year		N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years		N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2025-26

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Aston University

Provider UKPRN: 10007759

Investment summary

A provider is expected to submit information about its forecasted investment to achieve the objectives of its access and participation plan in respect of the following areas: access, financial support and research and evaluation. Note that this does not necessarily represent the total amount spent by a provider in these areas. Table 6b provides a summary of the forecasted investment, across the four academic years covered by the plan, and Table 6d gives a more detailed breakdown.

Notes about the data:

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Yellow shading indicates data that was calculated rather than input directly by the provider.

In Table 6d (under 'Breakdown):

"Total access investment funded from HFI" refers to income from charging fees above the basic fee limit.

"Total access investment from other funding (as specified)" refers to other funding, including OIS funding (but excluding Uni Connect), other public funding and funding from other sources such as philanthropic giving and private sector sources and/or partners.

Table 6b - Investment summary

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£770,000	£789,000	£808,000	£827,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£2,337,000	£1,934,000	£1,944,000	£1,960,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£175,000	£179,000	£183,000	£188,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£427,000	£433,000	£443,000	£453,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£343,000	£356,000	£365,000	£374,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Access activity investment	Total access investment (£)	£770,000	£789,000	£808,000	£827,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment (as % of HFI)	2.6%	2.8%	2.8%	2.7%
Access activity investment	Total access investment funded from HFI (£)	£700,000	£717,000	£734,000	£752,000
Access activity investment	Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)	£70,000	£72,000	£74,000	£75,000
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£2,322,000	£1,669,000	£1,679,000	£1,695,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£15,000	£265,000	£265,000	£265,000
Financial support investment	Total financial support investment (£)	£2,337,000	£1,934,000	£1,944,000	£1,960,000
Financial support investment	Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)	8.0%	6.9%	6.7%	6.4%
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£175,000	£179,000	£183,000	£188,000
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%

Fees, investments and targets

2025-26 to 2028-29

Provider name: Aston University

Provider UKPRN: 10007759

Targets

Table 5b: Access and/or raising attainment targets

Aim [500 characters maximum]	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
Knowledge and skills/Information and guidance: Maintain the proportion of students accessing Aston University in receipt of FSM (currently 26%) through to 2028-29.	PTA_1	Access	Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM)	Eligible		We are consistently out-performing the benchmark for FSM. Through collaborative working and our evolving access proposition we aim to maintain this rate.	Yes	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	26%	26%	26%	26%	26%
Knowledge and skills/Information and guidance: Maintain the proportion of students accessing Aston University from an IMD Q 1-2 background (currently 65.8%) through to 2028-29.	PTA_2	Access	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations (IMD))	IMD quintile 1 and 2		We are consistently out-performing the benchmark for IMD Q1_2. Through collaborative working and our evolving access proposition we aim to maintain this rate.	Yes	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	65.8%	65.8%	65.8%	65.8%	65.8%
Perceptions of higher education: Increase the number of students progressing into Aston University who have declared a disability from 8.5% to 10.5% by 2028-29 through including disabled students within our contextual offer scheme and implementing the Disabled Students' Commitment	PTA_3	Access	Reported disability	Disability reported		Since 2016-2017 the proportion of Aston students who declare a disability has increased by 0.3%. This target is to increase application and access into the University.	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage	8.5%	9.0%	9.5%	10%	10.5%
	PTA_4														
	PTA_5														
	PTA_6														
	PTA_7														
	PTA_8														
	PTA_9														
	PTA_10														
	PTA_11														
	PTA_12														

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone
Insufficient academic support: Reduce the attainment gap between Black and White students from 11.1% to 4% by 2028-29 by embedding small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning	PTS_1	Attainment	Ethnicity	Black	White		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	11.1%	10%	8%	6%	4%
Insufficient academic support: Reduce the attainment gap between Asian and White students from 8.2% to 2% by 2028-29 by embedding small group teaching for learning skills, expanding peer-assisted learning options, and building staff expertise in Universal Design for Learning	PTS_2	Attainment	Ethnicity	Asian	White		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	8.2%	6%	4%	3%	2%

