

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2025-26 TO 2028-29

Section A: Introduction and strategic aim

Arts University Plymouth (AUP) is a small, specialist creative arts university with around 1,500 students in total. The University has set a vision towards 2030 through its new strategic plan *AUP 2030: Creative Education for a Changing World*. This vision is based upon sustainable growth, solution focussed teaching and research, and a commitment to impactful social justice and ecological change through its people, culture and place. This ensures that our work is energised and designed to meet the ambitions of students and staff while acknowledging the shifting realm of creativity through new technologies and the workplaces of tomorrow.

Our vision for the University is a new kind of art school for the 21st century, preparing graduates who are uniquely placed to provide creative solutions to the complex global challenges of our times. We champion our people, place and pedagogy at the heart of our mission, delivering sustainable growth and impactful change in terms of creative economies, civic engagement and cultural ambition in Plymouth and the wider region. AUP will become widely regarded as a catalyst for individual, societal and ecological transformation, delivering innovative and distinctive learning, teaching and research through its interdisciplinary ecosystem of materials, processes, technologies and knowledge exchange.

The University is committed to:

- creating a student body that is balanced and diverse in terms of cultural background and experience
- providing fair and equal access to all prospective students who are able to demonstrate the potential to benefit from and contribute to a programme of study; and the potential to complete a chosen programme of study successfully, regardless of background
- providing a professional admissions service with clear, fair and consistently applied policies and procedures.

Student perception and public profile

In July 2024 the NSS results positioned AUP as the second highest scoring in the country according to analysis by the Times Higher Education. This followed being ranked as the number one Small or Specialist Institution in the Whatuni Student Choice Awards of May 2022. These awards are based on reviews submitted by students from across the UK, and winners judged by a panel made up of prospective and current university students. Student submissions praised “fantastic lectures” and “incredible support” while others singled the University out for the “*accepting and accommodating nature*” of staff and other students. Alongside the award AUP was allocated £10,000 in bursaries to grant to Widening Participating students. The five students who were awarded the bursary were all active participants in the University community who went above and beyond their course requirements, despite facing a range of significant health issues.

Teaching for Our Time, and the Common Unit Framework

As a small specialist Arts university, we have a creative endeavour which has generosity, belonging and co-creation as its central ethos: through the student-centred approach from our dedicated staff, the inclusive, caring and ethical environment of our University; and the partnership with our students

at every level of the organisation from Boardroom to Student Union. We promote the pedagogic principle of education, the act of turning the student towards the world, to inspire them to want to exist in and care for the world, and to act with kindness as both a method and a means to enact change and deliver positive outcomes.

The development of a new curriculum for Arts University Plymouth was first approved in 2020. Our approach acknowledges the power of creative agency, not dependency, in determining transformative outcomes both for those we educate, and through the impact of that education in effecting change upon the world we live in. As our greatest ambassadors, we seek to place students at the heart of everything we do and our approach to learning in this new curriculum provides a framework through which open, pluralistic and inclusive learning empowers students to develop as creative leaders, practitioners and influencers in the 21st Century.

The resulting Common Unit Framework is an inclusive curriculum that recognises and encourages diversity in the student population; that supports progression through levels of learning in line with FHEQ level outcomes; provides all students with the opportunity to develop their skills as critically informed creative practitioners.

Access and Participation at Arts University Plymouth

Our creative undergraduate cohorts are rich in backgrounds from widening participation categories. For the academic year 2020/21, approximately three-quarters of our undergraduate full-time cohort comprised students who were either mature on entry, young from low participation neighbourhoods, students with disabilities, or students from deprived areas. HESA data show consistently high proportions of young entrants from areas with the lowest participation in Higher Education (TUNDRA measure), entrants previously eligible for DSA, and almost double the specialist art university average for the first in family to enrol in higher education.

A notable exception to AUP's access is in its ethnic diversity of students which, while not a formal gap, is to be addressed with interventions and objectives underway. There are also very low numbers of care experienced students enrolling, as is the case nationally, and this is also being addressed. AUP has 89.2% of its students from a white background against 65.8% nationally with a mix of 2.9% Asian students, 4.9% students from other mixed ethnic diversity and a number of black students too low to be published.

For the 'first in family' to attend Higher Education AUP is typical for HE providers in England overall (63% AUP / 68% England), but nearly double the average for specialist arts universities (33-42%) and for students previously eligible for free school meals (FSM) AUP is just above the average for England (19.1% / 18.4%).

AUP's mature student population (aged 21+) is typical for HE providers in England (29%) but has risen at AUP over the last two years to 36.4%. This relatively high proportion of mature students is supported by the offer of entry to HE through an extended 4-year pathway for all current undergraduate courses. With a typical entry of c.40 students over the past five years, students enrol into a specific named course, but with a largely common initial Level 0 year. This is attractive for mature students without standard entry qualifications but with good portfolios and the potential to develop their academic competency through Levels 4 to 6. Typically, around 45% of our mature students are over the age of 30 and we also support entry for those with the qualifications and skills

directly into the first year of the BA Year 1 (Level 4) and Levels 5/6 and full or part-time as appropriate).

AUP has more than twice the average for HE providers in England of those students reporting a disability (currently 46.9% compared to 17.1% in England) and the proportion of all students across all years who declare a disability has remained high, even in comparison to some other specialist arts universities; an average of 39% over the past 10 years. Increasing proportions of students have declared a mental health condition, specific learning difficulty, or social communication/autistic spectrum disorder, (most recently c. 30%). It is also evident that over the last 3-4 years the complexity of mental health conditions has been increasing.

Separate from our HE campus in Tavistock Place is our Pre Degree campus roughly one mile away at Palace Court. Its curriculum is designed for those post-GCSE students who can complete an Extended Diploma in a range of creative subjects before progressing to employment, apprenticeships or further study at any HE provider, with some choosing to progress to degree study within AUP. Formal transitional arrangements are made for those doing so who typically make up 17-20% of the undergraduate population enrolling each year.

In addition to our specialist undergraduate and postgraduate courses in arts, design and media, there are opportunities provided for younger learners. Our Young Arts programme was established in 1988 and features a renowned Saturday Arts Club and for over 30 years has worked to bridge the gap in arts provision for young people created by increasingly limited access to creative activity in schools. We are proud to be a member of the [National Art and Design Saturday Club network](#), an initiative set up by the [Sorrell Foundation](#). This provides young people aged 14-16 the opportunity to study art and design every Saturday morning for free. Additionally, our Holiday classes, working with Plymouth Arts Cinema, provide a range of activities for those aged 9-11 and 12-15.

I believe, quite genuinely, that Arts University Plymouth is a special place unlike any other in the UK. There is an indescribable atmosphere here...- something closer to family than a community. I have never been someone who took pride in where they lived or studied - I spent a lot of my life in Quintile 1 areas, where going to university wasn't really an option for anyone. No one in my family has done this before. (Student Union President 2023)

Section B: Risks to Equality of opportunity

Following an assessment of performance across the whole provider based on the OfS Access and Participation dashboard data, this section highlights the key local risks to equality of opportunity identified within the review. To identify the risks to equality of opportunity faced by Arts University Plymouth students, and to set corresponding strategic objectives to mitigate these risks, the following methodology has been used:

- 1) By reviewing sector level risks within the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) provided by the OfS. (Equality of Opportunity Risk Register - Office for Students)
- 2) By reviewing Arts University Plymouth's APP performance, data sets and targets/milestones. (Data dashboard - Office for Students)
- 3) By collaboration with local partners, Next Steps South West (NSSW).
- 4) By setting up groups within AUP to meet with and evaluate risks and potential strategies to treat the risks:
 - Access: getting into university
 - Retention and continuation: staying at university
 - Completion: succeeding at university
 - Graduate outcomes: career after university

This section pays due regard to sector wide risks to equality of opportunity as cited in the EORR where six key institutional risks were identified amongst the twelve:

Table 1: Office for Students' Equality of Opportunity Risk Register and relevance of risks to Arts University Plymouth

OfS Risk	Detail	Arts University Plymouth risk
1	Knowledge and skills Students may not have equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto higher education courses that match their expectations and ambitions.	NO
2	Information and guidance Students may not have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, or to make informed choices about their higher education options.	NO
3	Perception of higher education Students may not feel able to apply to higher education, or certain types of providers within higher education, despite being qualified.	NO
4	Application success rates Students may not be accepted to a higher education course	NO

OfS Risk	Detail	Arts University Plymouth risk
	or may not be accepted to certain types of providers within higher education, despite being qualified.	
5	Limited choice of course type and delivery Students may not have equal opportunity to access a sufficiently wide variety of higher education course types.	NO
6	Insufficient academic support Students may not receive sufficient personalised academic support to achieve a positive outcome.	YES
7	Insufficient personal support Students may not receive sufficient personalised non-academic support or have sufficient access to extracurricular activities to achieve a positive outcome.	YES
8	Mental health Students may not experience an environment that is conducive to good mental health and wellbeing.	YES
9	Ongoing impacts of coronavirus Students may be affected by the ongoing consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.	YES
10	Cost pressures Increases in cost pressures may affect a student's ability to complete their course or obtain a good grade.	YES
11	Capacity issues Students may not have equal opportunity to access limited resources related to higher education, such as suitable accommodation.	NO
12	Progression from higher education Students may not have equal opportunity to progress to an outcome they consider to be a positive reflection of their higher education experience.	YES

These risks were also confirmed using the other methodologies. The other risks were not discounted however but it was felt that there was currently either no risk or a manageable risk for the risks at 1-5 and 11.

While the demographic of those most likely affected fits for **Risk 1**, AUP is not currently a particularly selective institution as much as a Russell Group university might be. Those who may be most at risk in this area are care experienced students and young carers, who may not have had as much access to technology such as personal computers and smartphones. These students will be included within our objectives.

It is similar for **Risk 2** with students from other ethnic backgrounds. AUP recruits regionally, nationally and internationally and together with its partner, Next Steps Southwest helps to mitigate this risk, providing informed choices for all potential applicants.

For **Risk 3** this was not seen as a significant risk. AUP recruits a large proportion of its students from those who are from a low household income or the first to go to university. As mentioned before, AUP is still targeting increased access for students who are care experienced or from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including those from a Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen or Boater (GTRSB) community.

Risk 4 was not seen as a risk as contextual offers are already made and now detailed clearly in our Admissions Policy. As a relatively new university, AUP is not yet as competitive in the recruitment market as others in the small, specialist arts provision.

As a specialist arts institution there was no perceived risk of having a 'Limited choice of course type and delivery' mode (**Risk 5**) with both full-time and part-time provision, as well as an online offer for some courses. In addition, we are one of three universities in the City, which together cover almost all types of subjects with a similar risk relating to 'Capacity' (**Risk 11**). While the cost of living is a concern, and AUP does not provide its own accommodation, unlike University of Plymouth and Plymouth Marjon, the city however provides a glut of student housing options, with AUP working closely alongside its preferred student letting provider.

The other six risks (Risks 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12) were seen as significant risks to equality of opportunity.

Section C: Assessment of Performance, and New Objectives

See **Annex 1** for the University's assessment of its current performance in Access and Participation.

The following objectives have been shaped by the assessment of current performance (**Annex 1**) which forms the rationale for the strategic interventions detailed in section 3. Taking these risks and the wider process, this has formed the basis of objectives to inform targeted strategic activity with additional emphasis on the following:

Table 2: Summary of the 7 Objectives for the APP 2025-2029

Lifecycle stage	Objective	Current Data	Target improvement to 2029
Access	01: Increase applications and enrolments from under-represented groups, specifically care-leavers, ethnically diverse applicants (including Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman and Boater communities)	<p>Ethnic diversity UK: 34% of students are non-White AUP: 10.8% of students are non-White</p> <p>Students from areas with the lowest participation in HE UK: 12.3% AUP: 21.1%</p>	<p>To increase the ethnic diversity of our undergraduate student population by 2 percentage points to 12.8% in four years to 2029.</p> <p>To maintain the proportion of students from areas with the lowest participation in HE at the current level of 21.1%; in the context of growing student numbers to 2028-29; including increased support for care-experienced students</p>
Continuation	02: Improve continuation rates for students who were previously eligible for FSM	National gap in continuation: 5.3% AUP gap: 11.8%	To increase continuation rates for students previously eligible for Free School Meals, from AUP current 75% to the current national average of 84.3%, in 4 years
Continuation	03: Improve continuation rates for students who have a reported disability	National continuation rate for students reporting a disability: 87.3% AUP continuation rate for students reporting a disability: 86.3%	To maintain recent improvement in continuation rates for students reporting a disability (86.3%) and reach the national average of 87.3% continuation; in the context of growing student numbers to 2028-29.
Completion	04: Maintain recent improvement in completion rates for mature students, particularly those over 30	National completion rate for mature students: 80% AUP completion rate for mature students: 83.3%	To maintain the current continuation rate for mature UG FT and PT students (83.3%), particularly for those over the age of 30; in the context of growing student numbers to 2028-29.
Completion	05: Improve completion	National completion rate for	To increase the completion rate

Lifecycle stage	Objective	Current Data	Target improvement to 2029
	rate for students reporting a disability	students reporting a disability: 85.7% AUP completion rate for students reporting a disability: 75.8%	for UG FT and PT students with a disability from the current rate of 75.8% to the national average of 85.7%
Attainment	06: Improve attainment for students reporting a disability	National attainment rate for students reporting a disability: 79.4% AUP attainment rate for students reporting a disability: 60.9% AUP attainment rate for students not reporting a disability: 72.2%	To improve the attainment rate for students reporting a disability (currently 60.9%); to match the current AUP average for students without a disability, of 72.2%.
Progression	07: Improve progression to graduate level employment for students from ABCS quintile 1 - those least likely to access, continue and progress in HE	National progression rate for students from ABCS quintile 1: 64.1% AUP progression rate for students from ABCS quintile 1: 54.1%	To improve progression to graduate level employment and/or further study for ABCS quintile 1 students - those least likely to access, continue and progress in HE; improve progression from current level of 54.1% to national average level of 64.1% (10 percentage point increase)

Section D: Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Introduction: Supporting the APP 2025-2029 Interventions

(i) Student lifecycle approach

A full student lifecycle approach is in place at the University, with access and participation activity beginning with outreach activity, on to pre-entry transition, to on course success, and through to post-graduation progression. Specifically, engagement with the University's target groups will be through the continued development of outreach activities such as building on our partnership with the Next Steps South West Uni Connect programme, relationships with schools and colleges, community and employer networks, academic partnerships, and partnership working with our Students' Union

(ii) Access and Participation Working Group

Enhancement of this commitment will require collaboration and engagement across the University. The approach will depend upon leadership and collaboration at all levels, with dedicated monitoring by the APP Working Group feeding into the EDI Committee which reports to the University's senior executive team, and ultimately the Board of Governors via the Academic Board. The APP Working Group will prepare for delivery of the University's 2025-2029 Plan and monitor activity and evaluation once the Plan is live.

(iii) Alignment with other strategies

University's Strategic Plan 2030

The new plan is aligned to the University's Strategic Plan 2030, at a broad level to support the University achieving recognition as 'as a catalyst for individual, societal and ecological transformation', and in the detail of the Creative Endeavour sub-plan, to build on progress against our access and participation objectives.

Single Equality Scheme

The University has a Single Equality Scheme and implementation plan-that aligns with the equality of opportunity risks identified in this Plan. The University is also developing its own 'Equality of Opportunity Risk Register' which will link to its Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Risk Register. This new EORR will integrate leadership, monitoring and reporting of Access and Participation activity with cross-university equality and diversity measures, complying with the University's legal responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010).

Teaching for Our Time

'Teaching for our Time' sets out Arts University Plymouth's pedagogical principles:

We consider practice-based research and enquiry in the arts as an authentic dialogue and encounter with the world and its materials through an exploration of their creative possibilities and tacit knowledge.

We design teaching that recognises that life is a dialogue between creative aspirations, an encounter with ideas and materials, and the societal resistance that is met along the way. We understand the agency of the arts in providing meaningful life-long learning and the personal fulfilment that brings.

We understand that education is the act of turning the student towards the world, to inspire students to want to exist in and care for the world, and to act with kindness as both a method and a means to enact change and deliver positive outcomes.

We recognise the need to provide the space, time and resources to figure out what creativity might mean; and to nourish and sustain the student in this challenging space.

We believe that the arts provide unique possibilities for encountering and learning through resistance and experimentation, for students with a diversity of interests from the sciences, humanities or the arts, while negotiating the hopes and wishes we hold for the world, the environment and our place within it.

(iii) Next Steps South West - Uni Connect programme

As part of our collaborative work through NSSW, we will work with the other Plymouth higher education providers (HEPs) to avoid duplicating work in schools, and to ensure there is outreach and pre-16 attainment raising coverage for the schools with the highest numbers of underrepresented students. Where we have similar objectives and identified inequalities of opportunity that are common to the Plymouth context, we will explore the possibility of delivering and evaluating the same activities to provide more robust outcomes.



Table 3: overview of interventions, objectives and EORR risks

Intervention name	APP objectives addressed	Relevant risks from the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register
1: Project APP CPD for Arts University Plymouth Staff	04: Maintain recent improvement in completion rates for mature students, particularly those over 30 03: Improve continuation rates for students who have a reported disability 05: Improve completion rate for students reporting a disability 06: Improve attainment for students reporting a disability	6: Insufficient academic support 7: Insufficient personal support 8: Mental health
2: Project Direct Financial Support	01: Increase applications and enrolments from under-represented groups, specifically care-leavers, ethnically diverse applicants (including Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman and Boater communities)	9: Ongoing impacts of Coronavirus 10: Cost Pressures

Intervention name	APP objectives addressed	Relevant risks from the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register
	02: Improve continuation rates for students who were previously eligible for FSM	
3: Project Mature Student Support	04: Maintain recent improvement in completion rates for mature students, particularly those over 30	6: Insufficient academic support 7: Insufficient personal support
4: Project Disabled student lifecycle	03: Improve continuation rates for students who have a reported disability 05: Improve completion rate for students reporting a disability 06: Improve attainment for students reporting a disability	6: Insufficient academic support 7: Insufficient personal support 8: Mental health
5: Project Progression	07: Improve progression to graduate level employment for students from ABCS quintile 1 - those least likely to access, continue and progress in HE	12: Progression from Higher Education
6: Project APP Evaluation 2025-2029	All 7 objectives	6: Insufficient academic support 7: Insufficient personal support 8: Mental health 9: Ongoing impacts of Coronavirus 10: Cost Pressures 12: Progression from Higher Education

Intervention 01: Project APP CPD: continuous professional development work themed on Access and Participation, for internal Arts University Plymouth staff

<i>Name of Intervention</i>	1: Project APP CPD for Arts University Plymouth Staff	
<i>Link to AUP Objectives for APP 2025-229</i>	<i>Link OfS Equality of Opportunity Risks</i>	<i>Expected Outcomes</i>
<p>04: Maintain recent improvement in completion rates for mature students, particularly those over 30</p> <p>03: Improve continuation rates for students who have a reported disability</p> <p>05: Improve completion rate for students reporting a disability</p> <p>06: Improve attainment for students reporting a disability</p>	<p>6: Insufficient academic support</p> <p>7: Insufficient personal support</p> <p>8: Mental health</p>	<p>To increase the ethnic diversity of our undergraduate student population by 2 percentage points to 12.8% in four years to 2029.</p> <p>To maintain recent improvement in continuation rates for students reporting a disability (86.3%), and reach the national average of 87.3% continuation; in the context of growing student numbers to 2028-29.</p> <p>To maintain the current continuation rate for mature UG FT and PT students (83.3%), particularly for those over the age of 30; in the context of growing student numbers to 2028-29.</p> <p>To increase the completion rate for UG FT and PT students with a disability from the current rate of 75.8% to the national average of 85.7%</p> <p>To improve the attainment rate for students reporting a disability (currently 60.9%); to match the current AUP average for students without a disability, of 72.2%.</p>
Activities	<p>a) Coaching training for all academic staff to provide a skill set and approaches for supporting students with neurodiversity and mental health conditions. <u>There is evidence to show</u> that Universities with smaller student numbers, students are more likely to reach out to their tutors or other teaching staff. Those who don't openly disclose, will likely show signs of deteriorating health - and tutors will have frequent opportunities to observe these signs which is why basic mental health awareness training is key.</p> <p>b) We will continue to develop, and internally publish a new AUP guide to introduce or enhance the notion of Anti-Racism, Allyship and Decolonisation.</p> <p>c) Staff development - enhanced transition from further to higher education HE delivery teams will have opportunities to engage with the Pre-degree (further education) campus to understand emergent trends and types of students prior to commencing HE study.</p>	

	<p>d) Local BAME outreach We will expand our work with key local groups, including the Diversity Business Incubator (Plymouth), with whom we hosted the Grand BAME Business Conference (2024), and outreach activities into schools - raising awareness of our commitment to EDI and encouraging an aspiration to progress into HE amongst the local BAME community.</p> <p>e) Maintaining progress: Building on University Title Since gaining University Title in 2022, AUP has attracted more national applications (from outside the Devon and Cornwall region) than previously. The University's recruitment and marketing efforts are increasingly aimed at a more national audience.</p> <p>f) Maintaining progress: Building on current good practice See the context section directly below for 5 further actions to build on good practice in attracting students from the areas with lowest participation in HE.</p>
Resources	Learning and Teaching days at Arts University Plymouth; academic staff time Senior Lecturer, Education and Development
Monitoring and Evaluation	Data and Insights team: APP dashboards including progress reports on coaching training for academic staff

Context for this intervention:

The Anti-Racism, Allyship and Decolonisation Guide: the guide itself includes examples of shared practice to foster confidence in delivery teams. This supports the work AUP is doing to create an ethos that has generosity, belonging, and co-creation as central themes. In this sense, it is possible for this guide to be read as a broader guide to inclusivity, transcending the focus on anti-racism and allyship. It aims to meet the needs of a staff and student community that is increasingly made up of students from a non-UK, non-white background. Anti Racism, Allyship and Decolonisation are key themes within further and higher education, and AUP itself, which has a broader demographic of student communities in terms of learning contexts and social/economic backgrounds.

In the next APP period of 2025-2029, we will maintain and build upon our considerable success in attracting and supporting students from areas with the lowest participation in HE: 2021-22 data from the OfS's APP Dashboard shows that the University's undergraduate student cohort includes 21.1% from this group, 75% higher than the England average of 12.3%.

Notable current CPD content includes the following which will be enhanced to incorporate relevant content in support of the University's Access and Participation objectives:

- Arts University Plymouth Neurodiversity Guide
- Learning and Teaching Day on the subject of Neurodiversity and perceptions of 'disability'
- Reasonable adjustments and inclusive teaching
- Peer reviews and studio walks (formally observations) that support critical discussion and peer sharing.
- Learning and Teaching Day explores themes of flexibility, multi-modal delivery, and sector changes/demand.

The following areas will be further developed to meet both of the above access measures (increase ethnic diversity of our student cohort, and maintaining a high proportion of students from areas with the lowest participation in HE:

(i) Young Arts Club

Arts University Plymouth's Young Arts programme was established in 1988. Young Arts features the University's renowned Saturday Arts Clubs and for over 30 years has worked to bridge the gap in arts provision for young people created by increasingly limited access to creative activity in schools. We will work closely with the Young Arts Club to facilitate recruitment activities and support progression in accordance with the above objective.

(ii) Attainment Raising

Currently our outreach team focuses only on creative subjects and does not offer any Maths or English attainment. This is something that currently Next Steps South West offer but is due to finish in 2025 which would leave a gap in the market. The current NSSW projects focus on pupils in years 8-11 who are disadvantaged or from groups that are under-represented in HE. If the Uni Connect programme does not continue after 2025, the University will:

- Add English and Maths attainment as part of our offering
- Run attainment raising courses alongside our Build Your Portfolio courses

Now that the Uni Connect programme has moved from their mentoring programmes to focus more on the attainment raising. This can be replicated, focusing on enhancing study skills for Year 10 students preparing for their GCSEs. This initiative not only emphasises academic strategies but also prioritises self-care and mental health, ensuring a holistic approach to student well-being. By incorporating an arts angle, we will further enrich this programme, using creative disciplines to foster both educational and personal growth. This artistic integration can provide students with unique tools for expression and stress management, ultimately contributing to a more balanced and effective learning experience. We will:

- Train our Student Ambassadors to become mentors
- Offer mentoring programmes to our local feeder schools

(iv) Care Leavers and Care-experienced students

We will improve our procedures for identifying Care-experienced applicants and students and create tailored communications to support their enquirer and application journey. We will also introduce direct financial support for Care Leavers and Care-experienced students, recognising the particular financial challenges in navigating university and living costs for these students.

(v) Improving evaluation

Although the recruitment team already conducts thorough evaluations, there is room to improve on how they document these processes. There is potential to enhance evaluation efforts further by working with our data and insights team, but we would need to ensure that feedback formats remain consistent across all activities. NSSW demonstrates effective practices in this regard and would be good to discuss this with further. We will:

- Review and improve the evaluation process for outreach activities
- Roll out a standardised report format to present findings

Intervention 02: Project Direct Financial Support

<p>Name of Intervention</p>	<p>2: Project Direct Financial Support</p>	
<p>Link to AUP Objectives for APP 2025-229</p>	<p>Link OfS Equality of Opportunity Risks</p>	<p>Expected Outcomes</p>
<p>01: Increase applications and enrolments from under-represented groups, specifically care-leavers, ethnically diverse applicants (including Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman and Boater communities)</p> <p>02: Improve continuation rates for students who were previously eligible for FSM</p>	<p>9: Ongoing impacts of Coronavirus</p> <p>10: Cost Pressures</p>	<p>To increase the ethnic diversity of our undergraduate student population by 2 percentage points to 12.8% in four years to 2029.</p> <p>To maintain the proportion of students from areas with the lowest participation in HE at the current level of 21.1%; in the context of growing student numbers to 2028-29; including increased support for care-experienced students</p> <p>To increase continuation rates for students previously eligible for Free School Meals, from AUP current 75% to the current national average of 84.3%, in 4 years</p>
<p>Activities</p>	<p>a) Introduce and promote a new 'Materials Hardship' bursary introduced to help students from low-income backgrounds afford the materials required for their course in each year; introduce additional financial support for Care Leavers and Care Experienced students.</p> <p>Eligibility: UK undergraduate students only (noting no franchise students included); based on assessed household income of £25k or less; or students identified as Care Leavers or Care-experienced.</p> <p>b) Updated, course costs transparency information to be shared with all applicants and students</p> <p>c) Provided targeted information about the Hardship Fund to students from low-income backgrounds and students previously eligible for Free School Meals.</p> <p>d) Curriculum review: course delivery and unit requirements of the Common Unit Framework (CUF) will be reviewed to ensure that staff set inclusive assessment opportunities that do not measure success on what equipment students have access to.</p> <p>e) Access to digital resources: we will roll out an institutional Adobe Express licence that is free to students and accessible off campus on personal devices. This can give access to those using mobile phones, smart devices and web</p>	

	browsers through a laptop or desktop and can support all learners regardless of economic background.
Resources	Financial resources of the University (see the separate Fees, Targets and Investment document) Registry staff time to promote and administer the bursary Marketing and Brand staff time to publish and update the course costs document.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Data and Insights team and Registry staff: periodic in-year monitoring of bursary uptake; annual evaluation of uptake and impact.

Context for this intervention

Recent student consultations have revealed that with student accommodation and private letting costs spiralling above rates of inflation and with maintenance loan increases not rising at the same rate, students on all levels of maintenance loan are struggling and citing cost of living as a reason for not continuing with study. Further, the University has conducted internal research on material costs for each year of study and has identified that these costs can be a significant barrier to retention to students from low-income backgrounds. The new bursary therefore is carefully targeted to meet additional course costs for students from the lowest income backgrounds.

a) Materials Bursary and eligibility

The Materials Bursary will be paid to undergraduate students studying at the Tavistock Place campus, from households with income of less than £25k per annum. This will be assessed via Student Finance England (SfE) for those in receipt of student finance; students paying their tuition fees direct, will apply via PMS, the University's student bursary fund management system. The amounts will be:

- £100 for those students studying at Level 4 (including Extended BA),
- £200 in Level 5 and
- £300 in their final year of study (Level 6), for a grand total of £600.
- Part time students will receive half of the above amounts each year, again for a grand total of £600.

b) Care Leavers Bursary, and eligibility

Further, the University will provide additional direct financial support for undergraduate students studying at the Tavistock Place campus, who are Care Leavers or who are Care Experienced. Care Leavers or Care Experienced students can apply for a cash bursary of £1,000 per year of study (or £500 per year for part time study), subject to satisfactory evidence of status being provided. These students will also be entitled to the Materials Bursary if eligible, and may apply to the Hardship Fund.

c) Arts University Plymouth Pre-Degree Progression Award, and eligibility

This is a £300 bursary, paid to any Arts University Plymouth Pre-Degree student who progresses onto undergraduate study at the University's Tavistock Place campus. Students must achieve 70% attendance or higher in their first and second semester of undergraduate study to be awarded the £300 Progression Award.

Eligibility details for all bursaries can also be found on our [website](#).

Intervention 03: Project Mature Student Support

Name of Intervention	3: Project Mature Student Support	
Link to AUP Objectives for APP 2025-229	Link OfS Equality of Opportunity Risks	Expected Outcomes
04: Maintain recent improvement in completion rates for mature students, particularly those over 30	6: Insufficient academic support 7: Insufficient personal support	To maintain the current continuation rate for mature UG FT and PT students (83.3%), particularly for those over the age of 30; in the context of growing student numbers to 2028-29.
Activities	<p>a) Enhance the scope, uptake and monitoring the Mature Students' Survey as an annual exercise</p> <p>b) Increase refresher workshops for mature students looking to enhance their technical knowledge and skills</p> <p>c) Introduce enhanced Data Analytics, including triangulation of data between key areas which can identify students at risk of dropping out enabling appropriate intervention. Having an intersectional view of disabled/mature students would provide a foundation on which initiatives can be built.</p> <p>d) Introduce enhanced continuation processes: the Registry will introduce a new method of managing the deferral / withdrawal / transfer process for students, where students must submit a request to Registry first, which will be assessed by the team to see if the student could be supported in continuing their studies - this may include referral to student support, academic skills etc before a final decision is made.</p> <p>e) Work with the Mature Students' Society to enhance the University's support for mature students, through the lenses of belonging, timetable challenges (e.g. for childcare and for part time students) and assessment and feedback.</p>	
Resources	Staff time: Assistant Dean, Student Experience Officer; Data and Insights team	
Monitoring and Evaluation	Data and Insights team: reporting on the annual survey; reporting on NSS and Graduate Outcomes surveys to gain further actionable insights from the University's mature student population.	

Context for this intervention:

The University is currently engaged in work to better understand the needs and issues facing mature students. Some do not complete their studies because of external factors- e.g. family/caring responsibilities, financial issues. Some have individual barriers to learning e.g. lack of confidence, poor digital skills, difficulty fitting in with predominantly young cohorts. Internal research exercise has shown that many mature students feel that the university and the curriculum is fundamentally organised to support young students. There needs to be a greater understanding of the need to differentiate could support mature student retention, e.g. differentiated approach to tutorial support, flexibility in timetabling, offering of part time study.

In 2024 a survey for mature students was administered by the Assistant Dean for Student Experience with a range of significant insights. Some students felt that they were in a minority on their course and

felt they weren't treated in accordance with their age, being amongst many aged 18-20 for example. Some mature students are anxious having not studied for a long time and some have other responsibilities, such as holding down a job to provide for themselves and family, others have caring responsibilities and are more likely to do so than the younger cohorts.

Mature students often feel as nervous as young students for a range of reasons such as studying for the first time since leaving school, wondering if they will 'fit in' and managing external pressures such as work and family with study. A Mature Student Society exists to provide a network for mature students to interact with others in similar situations. This has proved a great success to date, with students supporting one another and helping to retain at least one known student who was considering withdrawing as she didn't fit in with her course cohort.

Some mature students have admitted to lacking or maintaining technical knowledge and skills. It was noted from Student: Staff Feedback meetings that there are inductions at the start of study, but it may be some time before students start working in the area inducted with knowledge fatigue becoming apparent. Therefore, refresher workshops will be provided for those who are affected in this way with other inductions being introduced for those who need it.

Intervention 04: Project Disabled Student Lifecycle

Name of Intervention	4: Project Disabled student lifecycle	
Link to AUP Objectives for APP 2025-229	Link OfS Equality of Opportunity Risks	Expected Outcomes
<p>03: Improve continuation rates for students who have a reported disability</p> <p>05: Improve completion rate for students reporting a disability</p> <p>06: Improve attainment for students reporting a disability</p>	<p>6: Insufficient academic support</p> <p>7: Insufficient personal support</p> <p>8: Mental health</p>	<p>To maintain recent improvement in continuation rates for students reporting a disability (86.3%), and reach the national average of 87.3% continuation; in the context of growing student numbers to 2028-29.</p> <p>To increase the completion rate for UG FT and PT students with a disability from the current rate of 75.8% to the national average of 85.7%</p> <p>To improve the attainment rate for students reporting a disability (currently 60.9%); to match the current AUP average for students without a disability, of 72.2%</p>
<p>Activities</p>	<p>a) Sign up to the AdvanceHE Disabled Student Commitment and follow the programme's principles</p> <p>b) Develop a student lifecycle project to understand points of significant challenge for disabled students</p> <p>c) Introduce a Whole University Approach to student support, supported by a task force and reporting to ED&I Committee</p> <p>d) Introduce Occupational Therapist placements to the Student Support team</p> <p>e) Enhance partnership working with local and regional authorities to enable joined up working with regards to safeguarding and threshold management for vulnerable students. As part of this, introduce an information sharing agreement with Livewell Southwest.</p> <p>f) Introduce enhanced Data Analytics, including triangulation of data between key areas which can identify students at risk of dropping out enabling appropriate intervention. Having an intersectional view of disabled/mature students would provide a foundation on which initiatives can be built.</p> <p>g) Introduce enhanced continuation processes: the Registry will introduce a new method of managing the deferral / withdrawal / transfer process for students, where students must submit a request to Registry first, which will be assessed by</p>	

	the team to see if the student could be supported in continuing their studies - this may include referral to student support, academic skills etc before a final decision is made.
Resources	Staff time including Student Support staff, and senior staff; additional investment in Data Analytics software to be determined and dependent on affordability.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Data and Insights team: internal APP data dashboards including in-year monitoring for continuation. Annual report to ED&I Committee.

Context for this Intervention:

46% of undergraduate entrants to the University reported a disability, against an England average of 17% (2021-22 data from the OfS APP Dashboard).

The Disabled Student Commitment themes feed through many of the areas discussed here - information sharing, the onus on the student to report, channels of communication, explicit and informed consent from the student (with transparency over the exact information being shared); “on-course experience” is effectively managed through appropriate staff training and a whole university approach. The Whole University Approach applies to the entire student journey and covers four domains of Live, Learn, Work and Support, underpinned by ‘enabling themes. This isn’t an existing piece of work and will include a ‘taskforce’ at AUP to develop, plan and implement this - feeding into the ED&I Committee.

The DSC themes feed through many of the areas discussed here - information sharing, the onus on the student to report, channels of communication, explicit and informed consent from the student (with transparency over the exact information being shared); “on-course experience” is effectively managed through appropriate staff training and a whole university approach. The Whole University approach applies to the entire student journey and covers four domains of Live, Learn, Work and Support, underpinned by ‘enabling themes. This will require the introduction of a ‘task force’ at AUP to develop, plan and implement this - feeding into the ED&I Committee.

There are changes that can be made such as opportunities to explore different role profiles within the team which don’t expend financial resources, for example Occupational Therapist (OT) placements, with long-arm supervision and would require partnerships with our two other Plymouth universities who train these specialists and who can work across disability and mental health. An OT focus would allow for a clinical view on adjustments, links with external healthcare and SFE DSA assessors; it would also provide credibility and manage risk.

Other increased partnership working is working well and has potential to be further enhanced. AUP has a well-established and collaborative local university network, enabling sharing of resources, best practice and joined up working on strategic initiatives. Of note is the NHS/Livewell initiative. Livewell Services are a not-for-profit healthcare provider working on behalf of the NHS. AUP is currently in the early stages working with Livewell services - next step is to begin formulating an information sharing agreement. We will then have monthly ‘Complex Case Review’ meetings to discuss ‘threshold’ (neither high nor low need) students who aren’t currently being supported appropriately.

Intervention 5: Project Progression

Name of Intervention	5: Project Progression	
Link to AUP Objectives for APP 2025-229	Link OfS Equality of Opportunity Risks	Expected Outcomes
07: Improve progression to graduate level employment for students from ABCS quintile 1 - those least likely to access, continue and progress in HE	12: Progression from Higher Education	To improve progression to graduate level employment and/or further study for ABCS quintile 1 students - those least likely to access, continue and progress in HE; improve progression from current level of 54.1% to national average level of 64.1% (10 percentage point increase)
Activities	<p>a) targeted careers and further study options support for students identified as ABCS Quintile 1</p> <p>b) enhance analysis and evaluation of the Graduate Outcomes Survey by student characteristics, and incorporate this additional detail into the University-wide Annual Monitoring process for each course</p> <p>c) Increase and enhance the communication of graduate Case Studies, to celebrate the success of AUP graduates from diverse backgrounds</p> <p>d) Targeted promotion of postgraduate study options and financial support and incentives for postgraduate study at the University.</p> <p>e) Complete the enhancement of the full Student Experience, Employability & Enterprise Action Plan for 2025 onwards (7 key objectives) to support this Progression objective, for example through improved data profiling of target audiences for communications regarding the Careers and Enterprise service.</p>	
Resources	Additional staff time in the Data and Insights time for identification of students categorised as ABCS Quintile 1; Careers team staff time.	
Monitoring and Evaluation	Data and Insights team: more detailed evaluation of annual Graduate Outcomes survey by graduate characteristics; evaluation report presented to Academic Board and Board of Governors annually.	

Context for this intervention:

High level of one-to-one support is provided, enabling students from all backgrounds to effectively understand their skills. There is already very good support for students with declared disabilities and neurodiversity along with acute awareness of the challenges facing graduates. There is emphasis in the curriculum on personal development, building personal confidence and overcoming potential barriers to employment.

The Employability and Careers Adviser works closely with the academic skills and student support teams to provide advice and guidance to students with a range of disabilities including: dyslexia, dyspraxia, ASD, as well as those with physical disabilities and mental health conditions. This includes

support with drafting CVs, cover letters, applications, coaching and mentoring.

Preparing our graduates for graduate roles rather than just creative roles will be key. Our students work collaboratively, perhaps more so than in some non-creative degrees and should use this as an advantage. Some industries are enticed by the creativity and flexibility of art & design graduates.

Progression for our mature students is regarded as excellent - these students are often stronger candidates for highly skilled / managerial / professional employment. A higher number also progress into postgraduate study, a number are already employed, while studying part time.

2020-21 data shows 73% positive progression for mature students, significantly above the OfS benchmark. In contrast, progression for younger students in the same period was 57%. There is a challenge here, for young graduates being able to progress into highly skilled / managerial / professional employment within 15 months of graduation - due in part to the nature of typical entry routes into the creative industries, but also the economic climate of the South West, where a high percentage of our graduates choose to continue living and working.

Initiatives have been developed in 2023-24 to support graduates to develop part time freelance creative practice alongside part time paid employment. Enabled by Shared Prosperity Funding through Plymouth City Council, we have worked with an external partner (Digital Remit) to provide small business training, including enterprise thinking, pricing, business planning, marketing and networking skills. We hope this ongoing support will improve progression opportunities for our graduates

Progression to postgraduate study is currently low, impacting our achievement against the OfS Benchmark. This may be in developing more industry-oriented MAs, e.g. appropriate to Commercial Photography, Fashion Media & Marketing and Graphic Design. These subjects typically attract more vocationally oriented students that are not drawn to our arts-based postgraduate provision.

Intervention 6: Project APP Evaluation

<i>Name of Intervention</i>	<i>Link to AUP Objectives for APP 2025-229</i>	<i>Link OfS Equality of Opportunity Risks</i>	<i>Expected Outcomes</i>
6: Project APP Evaluation 2025-2029	All 7 objectives	6: Insufficient academic support 7: Insufficient personal support 8: Mental health 9: Ongoing impacts of Coronavirus 10: Cost Pressures 12: Progression from Higher Education	Delivery of all APP targets for 2028-29. Annual internal and public reporting of progress and evaluation of interventions and objectives.
Activities	<p>a) Enhance the University's APP dashboards in line with the APP 2025-2029, to support in-flight and annual reporting, analysis and evaluation of progress, for internal scrutiny and for publication.</p> <p>b) Enhance data collection for Student Support interventions to assess effectiveness of support offered to students with certain characteristics</p>		
Resources	Data and Insights team; additional database functionality		
Monitoring and Evaluation	Annual internal and public reporting on progress against the APP 2025-2029		

Context for this intervention: See Section H: evaluation of the plan, below.

Section E: Targets

- see the Fees, Investments and Targets Annex (spreadsheet)

Section F: Whole Provider Approach

The University takes a Whole Provider Approach to access and participation, to ensure the engagement of colleagues across the University; academics, student support services, senior leaders, digital and technical support services, library services, estates and resources teams and business support staff members.

The Data and Insights team will continue to provide a range of student data dashboards accessible to all staff members to help monitor the student progress targets.

Through the Students' Union, students will be engaged in supporting and evaluating APP interventions across the University, with opportunities to feed back through Student Voice meetings and Student: Staff Feedback meetings, and in particular monthly meetings with the SU Executive Officers with members of the University's senior executive team.

Creativity and diversity are explicitly celebrated in our inclusive model of access, which will be further developed to ensure continuous improvement in gap areas for Continuation and Attainment. Being a small higher education provider many of the stakeholders for these areas are the same staff, working alongside a small Student's Union. This means integrated activity and monitoring is already well established. For example, consideration of protected characteristics in relation to Success and Progression gaps helps to explore our intersections of disadvantage, acknowledging that these students are more likely to be adversely affected in their Success and Progression outcomes.

Section G: Student Consultation

Art University Plymouth's Students' Union consists of its elected President and the Students' Union Manager. Together they have been partners in the design and development of this Plan, participating in discussions and working groups to integrate these objectives with their activities.

Student consultation has been collated from feedback provided from the Student's Union, student ambassadors and course student representatives, from a diverse range of backgrounds themselves. In addition, there are Student: Staff Feedback Meetings (SSFMs) where student representatives from each course have the opportunity, twice during the academic year, to provide feedback on academic and related areas to the Assistant Dean, Head of Resources, Head of Compliance & Quality, with their course leader and Student Union President in attendance.

Areas covered include the curriculum, assessment, timetabling, learning environment as well as the wider student experience such as how well they have been supported, both academically and pastorally, such as interactions with Student Support and Learning Support. There has also been a survey of mature students, coordinated by the Assistant Dean for Student Experience. The Student Voice forum, which meets four times a year, is attended by Student Representatives and a broad section of staff members, consisting of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and heads of departments and teams. This is an opportunity for students to raise points of interest about anything in their university experience.

Section H: Evaluation of the plan

(i) Strategic leadership and oversight

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor as a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE) takes overall responsibility for the coordination of the provisions of, and monitoring of performance against our access and participation plan (APP). The Board of Governors has oversight of the provisions of access and participation plans and will continue to receive annual reports against the performance and provisions of the plan, as approved by VCE. These reports are coordinated by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor with input from other members of VCE and other line managers as appropriate, all of whom have contributed to the development of this APP.

(ii) Monitoring progress

Monitoring progress against this APP and achievement of our strategic aims and objectives will be embedded into AUP management processes and procedures.

Monitoring progress against access objectives will be covered at operational level by our Student Recruitment Insights Group, which meets bi-monthly, considering outreach and student recruitment and feeding into reports to VCE and Academic Board. Monitoring against student continuation is part of the work of Attendance and Retention Working Group which monitors non-continuation overall and by student characteristic.

This group feeds into Annual Monitoring Review meetings and Student: Staff Liaison Groups, and into academic performance reporting to Academic Board through both Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) and Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC).

Academic performance reports are made termly to ASQC, Academic Board and Board of Governors meetings including recruitment, non-continuation, attainment and progression to employment with statistics broken down by student characteristic. This will be strengthened by monitoring these performance statistics against the targets in this APP for the specific groups identified, providing clear oversight of progress or otherwise from working level to Academic Board and Board of Governors. This will incorporate monitoring of absolute performance for target groups as well as the gap in performance between target groups compared to their counter-categories, thus ensuring that performance is understood in its full context (i.e. change in both absolute performance and gap).

Such monitoring aims to ensure that any lack of progress against APP targets will be identified swiftly and, where applicable, at individual course level through the data prepared for and considered at meetings of Student Recruitment Insights Group, and Attendance and Retention Working Group. Where lack of progress is identified, remedial action will begin with detailed review of the measures undertaken at university level and course level as applicable. Action plans at course and/or school/department level will be developed setting out details of immediate recovery measures and any proposed new initiatives. These will be prepared for approval through line management by the appropriate member(s) of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Committee, and incorporated in future planning regarding Access and Participation Plans as well as report to Academic Board and Board of Governors for note.

(iii) Publishing our findings

The University will publish our evaluation findings annually, in early December, on the Arts University Plymouth website: <https://www.aup.ac.uk/reports-legal-privacy>

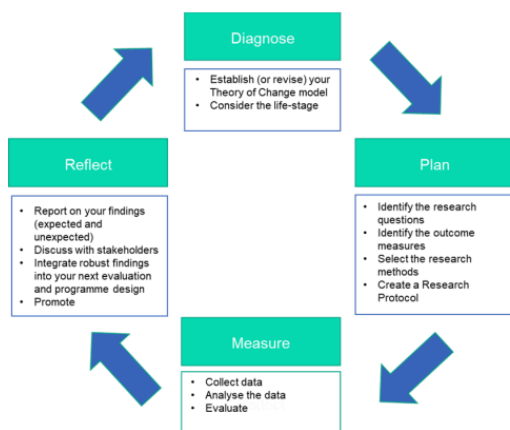
This will follow committee scrutiny through October, via the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee, Academic Standards and Quality Committee, and Learning and Teaching Committee before going to the Academic Board for approval and to the Board of Governors at the end of November, before being published. It is expected that the first findings to be published will be in December 2026.

(iv) Student engagement

Students are engaged with the monitoring of performance and provisions of our APP through their involvement in Student: Staff Liaison Groups, University Committees, Academic Board and the Board of Governors. As mentioned previously, we plan to utilise the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee with its strong and diverse student representation as well as student groups and the Students' Union Executive more extensively in ongoing developments and evaluating access and participation. As part of this, EDI Committee will be incorporated in formal monitoring of performance and provisions of this APP.

Our processes align with the TASO monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework (diagram below) with four key iterative stages:

1. Diagnose – where a theory of change is developed
2. Plan – where research questions are developed, outcomes measures identified, and appropriate methodologies are selected
3. Measure – the stage where data is collected and analysed
4. Reflect – the reporting stage, where findings are discussed and integrated into future programme development.



Ongoing APP analysis will be the responsibility of the University's Data and Insights team.

The University's academic governance framework includes ongoing monitoring of performance against Access and Participation Plan targets and objectives. Specifically, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee will review progress at least once per year, reporting to the Academic Board and ultimately to the University's Board of Governors.

Following review of our access and participation evaluation framework and practice, and introduction of a dedicated evaluation role, we are refining our monitoring and evaluation processes. These have

been clearly defined in a process document which outlines how we undertake and manage APP evaluation activity effectively and embed it within the university. The APP Working Group will have responsibility for consideration of all APP projects and will inform the EDI Committee and Equality Duty Implementation Plan, reported to the Academic Board and Board of Governors.

Section I: Investment

- See the Fees, Investments and Targets Annex (spreadsheet)

Section J: Provision of information to students

We are committed to ensuring information for both existing and prospective students is clear and accessible, including the fees we intend to charge and details of financial support that we offer, as well as the costs associated with their life as a student on their chosen programme at the University.

We achieve this through a mixture of media including our website and prospectus, through specific information included at Open Days, through information accompanying our offers that we make to students and that we impart to students at initial registration and induction, and that we make available on-line through our student portal. Information on direct financial support will be on the University [website](#), and this information will include eligibility criteria.

We will also continue to seek to enhance the general information and guidance made available and provided to potential applicants, applicants and students. Following approval, this Plan will be published on our website.

ENDS.

Annexes:

1. Assessment of Access and Participation Current Performance
 2. Current access, outreach and widening participation interventions
 3. Core Student Support Services
 4. Local employability context
Targets, investment and fee summary (see separate Excel document)
-

Annex 1: Assessment of Performance

Following the identification of six key risks to equality of opportunity at AUP across the student lifecycle, this section details the assessment of the University's access and participation performance, and the strategic objectives set to improve performance and address the relevant risks to equality of opportunity.

(i) The OfS APP Dashboard - access metrics for Arts University Plymouth

The APP dashboard shows a lack of ethnic diversity in our new entrants, that AUP was aware of. While not a formal gap, our numbers are slowly increasing but will require specific actions to increase diversity. It is also intended to increase applications and enrolments for those who are care leavers and care experienced.

(ii) The OfS APP Dashboard - continuation metrics for Arts University Plymouth

Retention rates / continuation at undergraduate level has remained broadly similar in the last two years. At Level 4, we are now seeing retention above 89% in all our undergraduate courses, averaging 95% with Level 5 improving slightly but last year at 85% and had six courses with cohort retention below 80%. At level 6, overall retention is tracking similarly to last year, at 75%. However, there are significant gaps in certain areas.

There are gaps in continuation for our students who were previously eligible for free school meals. AUP's gap is 11.8% compared to a national gap of 5.3%. A similar gap in continuation occurs for continuation rates in our students with a reported disability. The gap is 6.5% compared to 0.2% nationally (*this is from 2020/21 OfS data which saw a dramatic fall in continuation for both sets of students, with continuation rates for students without a disability falling faster*).

Exit interviews and dealings with Student Support services have revealed key reasons for students not continuing.

It is more difficult to quantify why students who were in **receipt of free school meals** have a lower continuation rate than those who were not in receipt of free school meals. The cost-of-living crisis clearly has had an impact and while all students are affected, those from poorer backgrounds, with families either not in work or in low-paid work are more likely to struggle to cope with rising living costs such as rent and food.

With regards to **mature students**, while student satisfaction is high, supported by NSS results, this conflicts with the data reflecting gaps between young and mature students. Some students were anxious about returning to study and felt that they were in a minority on their course, with the majority being much younger and felt they weren't treated in accordance with their age and concerned that they don't 'fit in'. Some mature students have external pressures and responsibilities that are not aligned to long hours of study, such as having to provide for a family and continuing to work not

insignificant hours in employment. Increasing numbers are more likely to have caring responsibilities than the younger cohorts. Adding to anxiety for some is that some mature students admit to lacking technical knowledge and skills that their younger peers may have become confident in through school and college.

(iii) The OfS APP Dashboard - completion metrics for Arts University Plymouth

Significant gaps in degree completion occur for mature students compared to young students with a gap of 13.4% in comparison to a national gap of 10.3%.

The reasons for non-completion for mature students can be read as the reason for non-continuation. Some are self-funded and completing the degree either for fun or as an ambition they may have held in younger years when there were fewer opportunities. Despite having better progression outcomes than other cohorts there are some mature students who are studying for their second or even third degree and others are retired and not looking to complete their degree to kickstart a new career and therefore, not completing does not have the same impact as it may have for a younger person. Increasing caring responsibilities with private care costs rising has been cited as a reason to withdraw or defer as has ill health. Completion rates for mature students will be an area of focus for AUP.

Another significant gap in completion rates is for disabled students compared to non-disabled students. While AUP's gaps have improved in the most recent data, the OfS dashboard indicates that the gap is 6.6% compared to a national gap of 2%.

Completion rates are lower for students reporting a disability than those not reporting a disability.

(iv) The OfS APP Dashboard - attainment metrics for Arts University Plymouth

In attainment disabled students again show a gap, 11.3%, showing fewer earning a first or 2:1 degree. This has dropped for two consecutive years since 2019-20 but is significantly different to the national gap which shows a minus 0.5% gap meaning higher attainment levels were achieved by disabled students compared to those without a disability.

Attainment rates are lower for students reporting a disability than those not reporting a disability.

(v) The OfS APP Dashboard - progression metrics for Arts University Plymouth

AUP has a core commitment to student outcomes and despite a small improvement in outcomes for full-time, first-degree graduates, AUP remains below the OfS numerical threshold for B3 conditions, with 59.7% of surveyed graduates (4 year rolling average to 2021/22 per the OfS B3 dashboard) in professional employment or further study, against a threshold of 60%. In progression to graduate level employment or further study it is students reporting a disability who show a significant gap of 3.0% slightly below the national average of 2.1%. Our mature students have higher progression with a gap of minus 15.2% compared to our young students. This compares to a national gap of 2.8%.

(vi) Monitoring of APP metrics at Arts University Plymouth

Considering the risks raised in the EORR together with the OfS dashboard data a range of strategic interventions will be put in place. This will be aided by the AUP Data Insights team who has developed a number of tools to enable staff to support students through data-driven student support.

A comprehensive suite of dashboards tracks all aspects of our students' academic progress and welfare. As well as highlighting general areas of excellence or where attention is needed, they also give staff an early warning where a student might need further support, or when they aren't taking full advantage of the support available, so that they can intervene if necessary.

In addition to the dashboards, a bespoke interface called SoMIS not only streamlines access to our student record system, but also helps our staff support our students more effectively. In the last year, for example, our Student Support team accessed pages 90,000 times; this included logging details of conversations with students and decisions made, recording confidential records from counselling sessions, managing safeguarding issues, maintaining DSA and reasonable adjustment details, as well as reporting and monitoring data for use in University governance and continual improvement processes.

Annex 2:

Current access, outreach and widening participation interventions

(i) Extent of outreach:

Our outreach efforts extend far beyond the southwest, reaching widely across the country including Wales and Northern Ireland. Whenever there is a UCAS event, we proactively contact schools, offering either one of our workshops or engaging talks. Our outreach encompasses all types of schools, including alternative provision, ensuring that we target a broad spectrum. We provide a wealth of resources to teachers without discrimination, supporting them with materials such as portfolio preparation guides and key date posters. Our approach is threefold: maintaining a local focus, capitalising on UCAS events, and engaging with key feeder schools. We also host various events open to all enquirers and applicants, including large-scale open days and multi-day portfolio building courses. Below are a number of schemes which took place in 23/24 and will continue in future years:

(ii) Offer Making

We believe in making tailored offers that recognise that artists, designers and makers can have a wide range of relevant experience and skills beyond formal qualifications. We therefore ask all applicants to submit a portfolio of work as part of their application, regardless of their grade profile. This allows applicants the opportunity to demonstrate their creative skills, and what they're passionate about. Following a successful portfolio review, offers will be tailored on an individual basis.

Our standard entry requirements are between 104-120 UCAS points. With our contextual offers, we reduce this to 72 UCAS points. However, we give all applicants the opportunity to submit a portfolio to have their creative potential assessed in-person or digitally regardless of tariff points, making tailored offers that recognise that artists, designers and makers can have a wide range of relevant experience and skills beyond formal qualifications.

(iii) Travel Bursaries

- These are not means tested
- Up to £80 towards travel costs dependent on mileage
- Available to enquirers and applicants
- 160 claims were made in 2023-24

We offer prospective students or applicants who visit our campus for an open day, campus tour, interview, or similar events up to £80 to cover their travel expenses. This bursary is not means-tested and is calculated based on the distance travelled. In the 2023/2024 academic year, we received approximately 160 claims for this travel bursary, nearly double the number from the previous year. Many visitors have expressed that ours is the only institution they have encountered that provides such support and have expressed their appreciation, particularly given the rising cost of living.

(iv) Build Your Portfolio

- Free four-day portfolio builder course
- Open to anyone between the ages of 15-18 years old
- Sole requirement is an interest in going onto a creative course

We offer a free four-day "Build Your Portfolio" course, specifically designed for individuals aged 15 to 18. This course aims to assist participants in creating a diverse range of work and developing the skills necessary to present a compelling creative portfolio to the universities of their choice. The sole entry requirement is an interest in pursuing a creative course of study.

Our program is conducted twice annually, during the April and October half-term breaks. In the 2023/24 academic year, 55 participants successfully completed the course, with 98% rating it as either good or excellent overall.

(v) Making Change

- Free three-week portfolio builder course
- Open to anyone between the ages of 18-70 years old
- For people who want to explore higher education opportunities at an undergraduate or postgraduate level at Arts University Plymouth
- 2023/24 - 37 participants

Our Making Change course is a free three-week portfolio builder and has been designed to prepare attendees to start university, alongside building a portfolio and gaining support for their application. As well as getting an insight on what studying at an arts university is like there are also opportunities to speak with academics, admissions team and student support.

(vi) School Workshops and Talks - Link to website

- In 2023/24, 23 we ran workshops with schools
- Open to all schools - but feeder schools will have priority
- Available to local and national schools
- Pre-set workshops and talks but can create bespoke workshops for highly engaged schools

Our outreach team provides various workshops for schools, either as standalone events or as part of a careers fair visit. If we are visiting another event in the area, we do contact schools local to the venue to see if they would like us to include them in our visit to run a workshop or talk. Schools can book one of our workshops from our workshop menu which features a selection of pre-designed sessions across a number of disciplines. Although our focus is primarily on students aged 15-16 and older, we also cater to primary and younger secondary age groups. Workshops include:

- Dynamic Doodles (Illustration)
- Experimental Painting & Drawing (Painting, Drawing & Printmaking)
- Heat Press Sublimation (Textile Design)
- Working to a Live Brief (Graphic Design and Interior Design & Styling)
- Photograms (Photography)

For our feeder schools we are also happy to organise a bespoke workshop tailored to align with their current themes or focus on specific creative subjects.

Talks available either in person or online

- An introduction to Creative Careers
- Portfolio Advice and Guidance
- Student Life - with our Student Ambassadors
- How to write a Personal Statement

→ Student Finance and How to budget as a student

Over 2023/24 we had 23 workshops booked with schools both locally and nationally. The aim for 24/25 and future years is to increase this number with a focus on our feeder schools.

(vii) **Online Sessions**

- Accessible for those who are unable to visit campus
- Themes to cover include
- Opportunity to ask questions during the event
- Talks available on demand to access at any time

Throughout the year, we host online information and guidance sessions for those unable to attend our on-campus events. These 30-minute sessions, led by our Outreach team and Student Ambassadors, cover topics such as portfolio advice, accommodation recommendations, and what to expect during Freshers' Week. All sessions are recorded and available on our on-demand page, allowing anyone to access them at their convenience.

We also host an online drop-in session every Monday with our Admissions team for anyone who needs support making an application.

(viii) **Materials and teacher packs** - Link to downloadable resources

At every event where we interact with teachers and careers advisors, we provide them with a comprehensive teachers' pack. This pack includes useful information posters, prospectuses, and other materials they can share with their students. Part of our engagement involves introducing teachers to Arts University Plymouth and offering support to help their students, whether through workshops, talks, or advice on applying to university.

The materials we distribute to students, whether in person or by post, contain clear information on key areas such as accommodation, finance, and student support. We recognize the importance of providing the right information at the right stages of the student journey, making it less overwhelming and easier to digest.

(ix) **Communications**

Our communication plan is meticulously crafted to ensure that all our enquirers and applicants receive the most current information and guidance throughout their academic journey. This sometimes includes segmenting our audience into groups based on criteria such as age, location, and course interest, thereby ensuring that the information provided is relevant to their specific needs.

In addition to updates focused to Arts University Plymouth, we also provide crucial information about UCAS deadlines and detailed application guides. Furthermore, we have developed an information booklet for Parents, Guardians, and Supporters, which is tailored to assist the applicant's support network in navigating the university application process. This booklet offers comprehensive guidance on various levels of study, accommodation application procedures, and the different types of university offers.

We also host online drop-in sessions for Parents, Guardians, and Supporters to address any questions they may have. Recognising that many of our enquirers and applicants are first-generation

university students, we strive to ensure that the terminology and processes we consider commonplace are clearly explained and accessible to all.

(x) Next Steps South West Uni Connect Programme - Institutional Officer

Following approval by the NSSW Board and University of Plymouth HR and Finance, NSSW funding and staffing for 2023/24 was confirmed with one full time equivalent Institutional Officer (IO).

IOs based at NSSW partners deliver the NSSW core offer to eligible year groups (Yrs 11-13 in 2023/24). They are responsible for supporting the attainment-raising projects with selected schools.

The remit of the roles includes:

- Liaison with a revised set of schools, selected for attainment-raising activity
- In-person classroom support for delivery of 2 of the AR projects: Year 9 Oracy and Year 11 Exam Skills (led by third party providers)
- Coordination of the other 2 AR projects: Yr 8 Literacy and Year 10 Mentoring (overseen by NSSW Team Leaders, delivered by SAs under IO supervision)
- Sourcing SAs from their HEI and assisting with SA training for AR projects
- Organising and supporting campus visits at the HEI where they are based

To accommodate the new attainment-raising remit, IOs based at NSSW university partners will be responsible for supporting the attainment-raising projects with selected schools.

Annex 3: Core Student Support Services

There is **strong and close collaboration between central student support services and individual course teams** from the outset to ensure students are aware of and able to access appropriate support for their needs. The diverse backgrounds and characteristics of our students make this particularly important in terms of initial orientation and inspiring a sense of belonging. Course inductions and initial activities are designed to be inclusive, different types of SU activities and events are designed to ensure opportunities are available that will appeal to students from all backgrounds and characteristics, including those with physical, social or communication impairment, and orientation days in advance of the wider induction programme are offered by Student Support for students with disabilities.

Student Support services are able to offer a **personalised and bespoke service** to many students with a disability. Currently a strength, however, with the rise in complexity and prevalence (currently over a third of enrolled students (437 in 2023-24) have reasonable adjustments in place) this approach isn't sustainable and requires some redesign around process and procedure. The department has had strong feedback on services and how support offered enables students to complete. During the next academic year, we will be collecting data on this to show efficacy and retention impact.

The Head of Student Support has carried out a series of **workshops with academic staff members** to help them understand their role in supporting students with disabilities and introducing reasonable adjustments. This aligns with a new Health & Wellbeing Support to Study Policy, enhancing the existing Support for Study Policy. This update was researched and planned over one year, with a number of internal and external stakeholders in its development with a Student Needs Framework and the Student Taskforce Implementation Report being used to feed into it.

The new **Health and Wellbeing Support to Study Policy** includes different steps introduced from a voluntary stage to a more formal fitness to study stage and added a formal return to study stage that can be used for a range of criteria. While not relating to all students with mental health issues it is geared towards giving academic staff more ownership, with Student Support as the facilitator and with a user-friendly guide being provided separately for students.

Alongside this new policy is a redeveloped **Learning and Disability Support Policy**. This introduced a Reasonable Adjustments Review Panel (RARP) introduced for Summer 2024. This panel considers and makes recommendations on cases where levels of support recommended by a needs assessment would not be covered by, or would cost more than funding provided by the Disabled Students Allowance ('over and above'), or where there may need to be further discussion around whether a proposed adjustment is considered "Reasonable".

The University recently **increased its student counselling offer** by supporting two wellbeing staff members to qualify as counsellors. This has provided more counselling opportunities for students and a triage system ensures that those most in need are seen with almost no waiting time. Counselling has been arranged for those thinking of leaving due to mental health struggles and this has resulted in some students changing their mind and remaining on their courses. Other students in need of counselling will not wait more than two weeks to be seen in general. During any wait time they are able to meet with members of the wellbeing team or disability support team, with the Head of Student Support also playing a significant part in meeting students face-to-face when needed.

Annex 4: Local employability context

Local employability context and national creative industries context

Arts University Plymouth has some course areas that perform very well in terms of employability such as Fashion, Media & Marketing, Interiors, Commercial Photography and recently in Animation & Game Arts which has become increasingly industry facing.

Unlike other geographic areas such as Bristol (Spike Island), the South East (London and Brighton in particular) and Scotland (game production) the creative arts is predominantly a micro-industry in Devon and Cornwall. However, many students who study at AUP want to remain in the South West and work part-time while developing their creative practice.

In terms of securing work experience, long-term unpaid internships have been an established practice in the industry, but can disadvantage fair access by shutting out those graduates who cannot afford to subsidise their placements. Improving the diversity of their workforces is becoming a focus of more employers in this field.

Not all graduates are going to be creative practitioners, with graduates instead moving into other roles both within and outside of the creative arts industries. There is evidence of our graduates being employed in office-based / administrative and management roles, in student wellbeing and teaching.

As a coastal region the area is dominated by the marine and maritime industries, and these do provide opportunities for all graduates. Our students work collaboratively in their studies unlike some other academic areas, and this can be an advantage with some industries enticed by the all-round creativity of art graduates.

Supporting graduate startups

Arts University Plymouth's Workroom is a creative business incubation programme in Plymouth, supporting graduates to develop and grow the next generation of creative business start-ups. Designed for new and emerging creative industry start-ups and creative businesses with a focus on collaboration and innovation, for a fee of £100 per month (2024 rate), graduates will receive a package of alumni support, talks, seminars and mentoring from industry and enterprise specialists, plus hot-desking spaces and bookable access to workshops, studios and specialist equipment within Arts University Plymouth.

The scheme is open to alumni who have graduated from Arts University Plymouth and are in the early stages of developing a creative business or career. Successful graduates joining Arts University Plymouth's Workroom will receive benefits and support including:

- hot desking space at Arts University Plymouth's main Tavistock Place campus, as well as space to book meeting rooms and conferencing equipment, and informal flexible meeting spaces across the campus,
- bookable access to cutting-edge resources and equipment through the curated Arts University Plymouth Creative Associates scheme, a scheme that allows bookable access to workshops, studios and specialist equipment within the arts university,
- monthly talks, seminar discussions and one-to-one mentoring with industry and enterprise specialists,
- access to Arts University schemes and services including the Library, Refectory and Digital Print Bureau,

- bike storage and shower facilities for Workroom residents wishing to cycle (or run) to the University,
 - continued access to advice and support from the Arts University Plymouth Careers & Enterprise team
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