

Durham University - Summary of 2025-26 to 2028-29 access and participation plan

What is an access and participation plan?

This Access and Participation Plan (APP) outlines how Durham University ensures students from all backgrounds can access, succeed in, and progress from higher education. This plan represents a step change in Durham's approach and focuses on breaking down barriers for underrepresented groups, improving retention and success rates, and reducing attainment gaps. Revised every four years, the plan reflects Durham's commitment to equity and inclusivity.

See the full access and participation plan at: www.durham.ac.uk/study/access-and-participation

Key points

The plan aims to address disparities in access, continuation, and outcomes among specific groups. Key findings include:

- Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and students eligible for Free School Meals, are underrepresented.
- Students of Black-heritage or Asian-heritage face lower access, continuation and attainment rates compared to white students.
- Students with disabilities experience lower success rates in continuation and attainment, compared to students without a recorded disability.
- Mature students and those entering through non-standard routes show lower rates of continuation and attainment.
- Mental health challenges and a lack of sense of belonging contribute to disparities in outcomes for several groups.

See pages 3-5 of the [access and participation plan](#) for more information.

Fees we charge

Tuition fees are payable for every year of your course (including during placement and study abroad) and are subject to annual change depending on any increments (usually in line with inflation) determined by government. The current tuition fee for students starting their course in the autumn of 2025 is £9,250, which is the maximum allowed by the UK government.

The UK Government has announced proposed increases in tuition fees for UK students studying in England. These increases will take effect from the academic year 2025/26. The increases are subject to further parliamentary approval, and are proposed to come into effect from 1 August 2025. Durham University will adopt tuition fees at the new rate of £9,535 per year.

For more information, see: www.durham.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/fees-and-funding/tuition-fees

See page 81 of the [access and participation plan](#) for more information.

Financial help available

We're committed to ensuring all our students thrive, regardless of financial background, and for this reason Durham's financial support package for students is one of the most generous in the UK. Our [Durham Grant Scheme \(DGS\)](#) has been enhanced to support families in the "squeezed middle", reflecting our understanding of the financial pressures students face. Understanding the additional financial burdens our students face, we've also expanded our support network. This includes:

- Hardship Funds: Specifically designed to assist those in urgent need.
- Activity Funds: To ensure that all students can partake in extracurricular activities without financial strain.

Furthermore, our ongoing initiatives like the [Cost of Living Hub](#) and partnerships with local entities aim to improve the overall living and learning environment for our students.

Our financial aid focuses on reducing barriers for students facing economic hardship:

- Contextual bursaries for students from low-income backgrounds.
- Expanded scholarships tied to attainment and participation.

An [up-to-date list of undergraduate scholarships](#) is available on Durham's website, in addition to scholarships available via a student's chosen College. Durham also maintains a [Funding Database](#), highlighting funding available from donations. Further information is available on the University website which includes eligibility criteria for financial support, and on specific course webpages. Where multiple students meet the criteria, we look for factors which the donor/university has identified as being supportive of students who are looking to improve their education and have shown personal initiative and support of the wider community.

See pages 28-29 of the [access and participation plan](#) for more information.

Information for students

We recognise the difficulty students may face in understanding information about tuition fees and financial support, and we are committed to making our information clear and accessible. Clear guidance on fees, bursaries and scholarships will continue to be provided for students. We publish relevant information on our website in a timely fashion and disseminate information to prospective and current students, based on where they are in their student journey. This includes providing advice and guidance through our pre- and post-application open days, integrated messages within our widening access and outreach provision, and tailored communications to applicants via our CRM system. Our central student financial support service works closely with staff in the University's constituent colleges to ensure that all existing students have access to the financial support they need. We also ensure information is provided to UCAS and SFE, so they can ensure their applicant facing web services are up to date.

See page 30 of the [access and participation plan](#) for more information.

What we are aiming to achieve

The university has identified seven key risks that hinder equality of opportunity:

1. Attainment.
2. Information, advice, and guidance.
3. Perceptions of highly selective universities, like Durham.
4. Cost pressures.
5. Insufficient academic support.
6. Mental health.
7. Sense of belonging.

Durham University's plan includes seven key objectives to address these risks:

1. **Increase access:** Reduce the ratio of low participation students to 2.7:1 and increase the proportion of Free School Meals students to 10.5% by 2028-29.
2. **Improve ethnic diversity:** Raise the proportion of Black students to 3% and Asian students to 7.5%.
3. **Reduce attainment gaps:** Minimise the degree outcome gaps for disabled and Black students to 1.5% and 15% respectively.
4. **Enhance continuation rates:** Decrease gaps in continuation for socioeconomically disadvantaged, disabled, and mature students.
5. **Support mature students:** Address continuation and completion disparities for mature learners.
6. **Mental health equity:** Reduce the attainment gap for students reporting mental health disabilities.
7. **Promote inclusivity:** Foster a strong sense of belonging for all priority groups.

See pages 3-5 of the [access and participation plan](#) for more information.

What we are doing to address keys risks to equality of opportunity

Our objectives are embedded in a student support model that combines departmental advice and guidance with a uniquely intensive and personalised College support model that ensures that all students are engaged and supported as individuals. We have heavily invested in this support model to ensure it delivers equally well for students from all backgrounds.

Durham University is committed to employing tailored strategies across the student lifecycle:

- Access: Targeted outreach to disadvantaged schools, contextual admissions, and partnerships like the North East Raising Aspiration Partnership (NERAP).
- Continuation: Enhanced student support through mental health initiatives, bespoke transition programmes, and financial assistance.
- Attainment: Academic skills programmes, culturally relevant curricula, and specific support for Black, Asian, and disabled students.
- Progression: Career workshops, placement opportunities, and mentoring tailored to underrepresented groups.

See pages 5-25 of the [access and participation plan](#) for more information.

How students can get involved

Students are integral to shaping Durham's access strategy. Opportunities include:

- Joining the Widening Access and Participation Student Advisory Board.
- Participating in mentoring and outreach ambassador roles.
- Engaging in consultations to inform future Widening Access and Participation initiatives.
- Student representative on formal committees via the Students' Union.

See pages 27-28 of the [access and participation plan](#) for more information.

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved

Durham University has developed evaluation plans for each of the intervention strands, as well as ensuring systems are in place to collect data consistently across the different areas of activity. This ensures that evaluation activity is embedded in each intervention strategy from inception.

A key priority is to understand how sense of belonging influences student outcomes. Building on the research conducted by academics at the University, we will embed a survey measure in our access and participation work that has been tested and validated with Durham students. This will help us to identify the student groups who are at risk of experiencing exclusion. Finally, by partnering with external organisations, such as The Brilliant Club and The Elephant Group, we will be able to contribute to nation-wide evaluation activities that generate causal evidence.

Durham University ensures robust evaluation through:

- Ongoing tracking of participation, attainment, and progression metrics.
- Pre- and post-activity surveys to assess the impact of programmes.
- Sharing findings internally and with external stakeholders for transparency.

Progress is reviewed biannually by the Student Access, Success, and Outcomes Committee (SASOC), with results published online.

See pages 7/8, 10, 13/14, 17, 20/21, 23, 24/25, & 30 of the [access and participation plan](#) for more information.

Contact details for further information

For more details on the plan and related initiatives, visit: www.durham.ac.uk/study/access-and-participation

Contact the Access and Participation Team at: accessandparticipation@durham.ac.uk