

**University of Northampton Access and Participation Plan End of Year Report 2023/2024**

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September 2024

Contents

[Executive Summary 4](#_Toc181780271)

[1. Access and Participation Plans 7](#_Toc181780272)

[1.1. Who are we? 9](#_Toc181780273)

[2. The 2023/2024 Focus 10](#_Toc181780274)

[2.1. Widening Access 10](#_Toc181780275)

[3. Research Design 12](#_Toc181780276)

[3.1. Quantitative Data 13](#_Toc181780277)

[3.2. Qualitative Data 13](#_Toc181780278)

[3.2.1. Sample size in Qualitative Research 13](#_Toc181780279)

[3.3. Case studies of Best Practice 14](#_Toc181780280)

[4. Findings 15](#_Toc181780281)

[4.1. The Importance of Building Rapport: The Lecturer-Student Dynamic 16](#_Toc181780282)

[4.1.1. Transitions 19](#_Toc181780283)

[4.1.2. Theme Summary 22](#_Toc181780284)

[4.1.3. Case Study: APP Ambassadors Programme 23](#_Toc181780285)

[4.2. Supporting Students: Exploring Resources, Services, and Wellbeing at UON 24](#_Toc181780286)

[4.2.1. Theme Summary 26](#_Toc181780287)

[4.2.2. Case Study: Improvements: Scholars Green Accommodation- A Recommendation from Last Year’s Report 27](#_Toc181780288)

[4.3. Thinking about the Future: How are services can support students? How can we communicate and build a better sense of community? 28](#_Toc181780289)

[4.3.1. Services 28](#_Toc181780290)

[4.3.2. Sense of Community 29](#_Toc181780291)

[4.3.3. Theme Summary 30](#_Toc181780292)

[4.3.4. Case Study: Building Belonging Project – A Recommendation from the Last Year’s Report 31](#_Toc181780293)

[4.3.5. Case Study: EDI Careers 32](#_Toc181780294)

[5. Summary 33](#_Toc181780295)

[6. References 36](#_Toc181780296)

[7. Appendices 38](#_Toc181780297)

[7.1. APP End of Year Report Student Interview Schedule 38](#_Toc181780298)

[7.2. Interview Schedule for UON Staff 40](#_Toc181780299)

[7.3. Interview Schedule for APP Ambassadors 40](#_Toc181780300)

[7.4. Theory of Change for Widening Access 41](#_Toc181780301)

[7.5. Theory of Change for Success 42](#_Toc181780302)

[7.6. Theory of Change for Graduate Outcomes 43](#_Toc181780303)

[7.7. University Teams Contributing Data for APP report 45](#_Toc181780304)

[7.8. Additional Quotes Supporting the Findings 45](#_Toc181780305)

[7.8.1. Quotes from 4.1. The importance of Building a Rapport 45](#_Toc181780306)

[7.8.2. Quotes from 4.1.1 Transitions 46](#_Toc181780307)

[7.8.3. Quotes from 4.2. Supporting Students: Exploring Resources, Support, Services, and Wellbeing 47](#_Toc181780308)

[7.8.4. Quotes from 4.3. Thinking about the Future: How are services can support students? How can we communicate and build a better sense of community? 48](#_Toc181780309)

[8. Glossary of Terms 49](#_Toc181780310)

# Executive Summary

The University of Northampton’s Access and Participation plan is evaluated by the Institute for Social Innovation and Impact (ISII). This document*, “University of Northampton Access and Participation Plan End of Year Report 2023/2024”* details the evaluation period from August 2023 to September 2024 (see: Section 3 for Research Design). The End of Year Report also includes a supplementary Widening Participation Activity (WA) Report, which can be found [online](https://www.northampton.ac.uk/about-us/governance-and-management/equality-and-access-unit/access-and-participation-plans/). The evaluation plan both for APP and WA are encapsulated in the University’s Theory of Change (see Appendices 7.4, 7.5. and 7.6), which details the key areas that the University wishes to impact, and how the evaluation has captured data points relevant to these areas, with regards to outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

For this report, quantitative data was collected from 8,736 undergraduate students. A total of 26 interviews were also conducted for this report bringing the total number of interviews to 150 since the beginning of the APP evaluations in 2021, all from APP targeted cohorts (this includes GEM, IMD, and students with a declared disability groups). Conducting 26 interviews represents a substantial and valuable sample for qualitative data collection, as the emphasis in qualitative research is not on large numbers but on the depth, richness, and quality of the data gathered. Further information provided regarding this in section 3.2. As a result, our research has identified seven areas for improvement that will impact the closing of the award and continuation gap for those from APP cohorts:

1. **Tailored support to each year of study:**
2. Support levels should be tailored to each year of study. Our research shows that first-year APP students need more guidance in navigating academic structures (e.g., referencing and assignments), and students in their final year require more individualised academic support, especially during crucial projects (e.g., dissertation). The University should ensure that third-year APP students, despite their increased independence, have weekly access to lecturers and personalised guidance.
3. **Prioritise student continuation:**
4. Consideration should be given to prioritising on the continuation gap. The APP financial report indicated significantly different levels of students continuing into their second year, with gender, age, and IMD quintile having statistically significant influences on outcomes. This has been recognised by staff an area of contention within the institution, believing that an unintended consequence of the institutional focus on the award gap has been that continuation has been overlooked.
5. **Increase lecturer-student interaction:**
6. Our research shows that APP students across all years need more one-on-one time with lecturers to enhance their academic experience. The University should create more opportunities for personal interaction through consistent scheduled office hours and mentorship programmes, particularly in challenging courses. Lecturers should provide regular guidance, mentoring, and encouragement, as this has been shown to improve students' chances of completing their degrees and achieving better academic outcomes.
7. **Improve access to support services and communication about resources:**
8. Our research shows that APP students face difficulties in accessing consistent support when required, particularly with counselling services. The University should work to support the team reduce waiting times for those who need support and ensure that students in immediate need are prioritised for quicker access to these services.
9. Further to this, there is a clear need for better communication about the resources available, especially for students with additional needs, such as dyslexia. The University should ensure that students are informed about these services early in their academic journey to provide timely support and help them navigate their studies more effectively.
10. **Further work on fostering a sense of belonging for mature students:**
11. Our research shows that, while developments are already underway, such as the Building Belonging Project, the University should develop platforms or societies specifically for mature students who are part of the APP targeted groups. Offering tailored resources and opportunities for connection, particularly for those studying off-campus or part-time, would be highly beneficial in fostering a sense of community and belonging for these students.
12. **Expand peer support programmes:**
13. Our research shows that peer support is highly beneficial for academic and personal development. The University should consider expanding peer mentorship programmes for all APP targeted cohorts. This would help them navigate their academic journey more effectively, feel more integrated into the student community, and give students more resources for support.
14. **Improve responsiveness to student feedback:**
15. Our research showed that some students expressed frustration with not being heard when raising issues about their courses. The University should prioritise developing a process for staff that addresses student feedback early and acts promptly, as delays can not only lead to negative academic outcomes but also undermine trust between students and the institution. Regular feedback mechanisms should be introduced to ensure student concerns are addressed in real-time, where possible, as a lack of responsiveness can erode students' confidence in the University's commitment to their success.

**Researchers’ Commentary:**

Throughout our research, a key emerging theme is the impact of intersectionality within the APP cohort, with other demographic features, such as GEM or mature student status, often exasperating the academic challenges these students face. The findings indicate that APP mature students, for example, are underrepresented in outreach initiatives and experience isolation at the University of Northampton, often being under researched, or potentially assumed to be able to cope with the rigour of academic study and life change. Further, one of the recommendations discusses early interventions for disabled students, but it should be noted there remain significant challenges in overcoming the stigma around disability, leading some students to choose not to declare their disabilities, which complicates self-identification and the accuracy of data on this group, or the design of effective outreach provisions. This is an area the institution should consider engaging with. Finally, the study highlights the critical role of lecturer-student relationships in supporting undergraduate students, directly influencing their persistence and success in completing their studies. How subject groups chose to develop this will differ, depending on course context, however, we encourage faculties to support and encourage this process. We advise that these areas be scrutinised to address gaps and improve support for these students.

# Access and Participation Plans

Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in the United Kingdom are regulated by the Office for Students (OfS) under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA). The OfS regulate and monitor universities so that each meets the conditions of registration. Access and Participation Plans (APP) work to set out “how higher education providers will improve the opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education (OfS, 2021). Under an institutional APP ‘qualifying persons’ on ‘qualifying courses’, includes most of the undergraduate students that are coming from underrepresented backgrounds and hold certain characteristics such as students in receipts of free school meals (Office for Students, 2023a).

According to [OfS' Regulatory Notice 1 (2023](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8077/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance-march-2023.pdf)), universities' Access and Participation Plan interventions may target, but are not limited to, the following groups:

a. Students receiving free school meals.

b. Students with specific backgrounds, such as those with care experience, those estranged from their families, and students from Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller communities.

c. Students with protected characteristics under [the Equality Act 2010](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7e3237ed915d74e33f0ac9/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf) face inequality due to those characteristics

* + These include Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) students, students with disability status, Students from lower higher education participation areas, lower household income levels, and/or lower socio-economic status groups. These students are identified through postcode data and the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)[[1]](#footnote-1).
* d. Students facing multiple barriers to higher education or whose characteristics intersect, such as male students receiving free school meals.

In the 2023/24 academic year[[2]](#footnote-2), 42.78% of the students registered to the three main faculties at UON were GEM, 39.66%[[3]](#footnote-3) had a home postcode linked to IMD Quintile 1 or 2, and 17.56% of students had a declared disability. This represents a slight increase in representation across all three groups compared to the 2022/23 financial year (Figure 1.1).

**Figure 1.1.** Percentage of students who are either GEM, have a registered disability, or from a postcode within IMD quintile 1 or 2.

Regarding intersectionality, 5.86% of students are GEM and have a registered disability, and increase on the previous year, there was also an increase in GEM students who come from an IMD Quintile 1 or 2 postcode, with 23.32% of the current cohort, compared to 22.20% from the previous academic year. This suggests a growing complexity of GEM student cohorts with increased intersectionality. Students with registered disabilities from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 declined by more than half, representing 6.59% of students compared to 14.59% of students last year (Figure 1.3).

**Figure 1.3.** Intersectionality across the APP targeted cohorts.

In addition to these groups, nationally collected data has indicated other student groups are subject to equality gaps within higher education, including:

* Carers.
* People estranged from their family.
* People from Roma and Traveller communities.
* Children of military families.

An effective APP will set out the University’s ambitions and strategies in closing the gap between those most and least represented students, over a five-year period. These plans are monitored by the OfS, and universities are required to submit an APP every five years, alongside an annual impact report that sets out an action plan for subsequent years, including any related financial information. If a university’s APP should not be approved by the Director for Fair Access and Participation at the OfS, they may be unable to charge the higher rate tuition fee (OfS, 2019). An APP can also be used to help universities promote and sustain access to higher education for the least represented, support students on their pathway to success, and contribute to the institution’s strategic mission, which in the case of the University of Northampton (UON) is “Supporting aspiration, creating opportunities, delivering impact” (University of Northampton, 2023).

The long-term aim of an APP is to provide equality of opportunities for students from underrepresented backgrounds, ensuring they can access, succeed in, and progress through higher education (Office for Students, 2023). The APP ensures that all universities, including UON, maintain similar ambitions of addressing inequalities, within their control, which are apparent in schools, colleges, and wider society. This report specifically focuses on the teaching and learning resources of UON and the continuation and award gap.

## Who are we?

The Institute for Social Innovation and Impact (ISII) is the evaluation partner working with UON to investigate the impact of its APP activities. The ISII works alongside a variety of departments across the University who contribute to the development of an inclusive and eclectic evaluation that captures the voices of students, staff, and other stakeholders. As part of the APP, a Theory of Change was developed to highlight specific areas of focus. This TOC was developed through a PhD thesis that was completed at the University of Northampton in 2019 (see Appendices 7.4, 7.5. and 7.6). It should be noted that this TOC is part of the current APP evaluation strategy and will be updated in the following academic years.

# The 2023/2024 Focus

In previous years, the evaluation reports had a wide remit of investigating the experiences of APP students at UON to uncover the challenges and barriers that inhibited their success, and the positive impacts that institutional interventions had upon them. This year the evaluation team’s focus for the End of Year Report is on addressing closing the award gap for IMD and GEM students as a means of enhancing APP student retention. The APP management team and ISII have revised data collection tools to support this goal, for example, a new interview schedule was developed prior to commencing student interviews and new datasets were collected. This year, there was an increase in staff interviews, including with members of the University Leadership Team (ULT), to evaluate the progress made since the release of the End of Year Report in August 2023. Notably, two of the case studies (see section 4.2.2 and section 4.3.5) are based on recommendations[[4]](#footnote-4) from last year’s report. To explore how these recommendations were actioned, interviews were conducted with two ULT members, providing valuable insight into the steps taken to address the suggested improvements.

As part of the continuing evolution of the APP evaluation strategy, this year’s report is the final End of Year evaluation that will utilise the 2019 Theory of Change model presented in Appendices (7.4, 7.5. and 7.6). The APP management team and ISII have develop a new Theory of Change model to accompany the next APP cycle, which will start in August 2025. This new Theory of Change will be available for the next End of Year report (2024/2025).

## Widening Access

As part of the Access and Participation plan, the Widening Access initiative is tasked with increasing the number of disadvantaged students from the local areas, into higher education. The University of Northampton has identified two target groups:

1. White Working-Class Males with the goal of increasing their representation 15% each year.
2. Students from a GEM background with the goal of maintaining their representation above 25%.

The changes in the student cohort are measured through a dataset provided to the university from HESA. This dataset has currently been delayed until January/February 2025, therefore, the changes in the White Working-Class Male and GEM cohort are unavailable in this report.

The Widening Access interventions are subject to a separate report which can be found [online](https://www.northampton.ac.uk/about-us/governance-and-management/equality-and-access-unit/access-and-participation-plans/).

# Research Design

The monitoring and evaluation of the APP programme occurs at each of the three stages in the student life cycle:

1. Widening Access.
2. Success (Continuation and Award).
3. Graduate Outcomes (Employment or Further Study).

During the access stage, universities may provide activities or events that support underrepresented student groups to access information on higher education. Activities may take place in schools, colleges, job centres, summer schools, or within peer-mentoring schemes. UON supports Uni Connect and Widening Access activities through its Schools Engagement Team to deliver activities for students in the local area aged between nine and 18 years old. Once students enrol at the University, they may be targeted by internal APP provisions due to the significant cross-over in the local area between POLAR and IMD quintiles. This research design has been developed to capture student data throughout the Access and Success stages of the lifecycle. The research process for the current reporting period, running from 2022/23 to the current academic year, is illustrated below (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1.** APP Research Process (Update)

The aim of the evaluation is to identify students who have moved through the student life cycle and received support that aids their progression, and to compare their experiences to non-APP targeted students. Over the period that ISII has been conducting evaluations of the APP, data has increased in both breadth and complexity, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of the impact of the APP activities conducted at UON. This year additionally sees the continuation of case studies introduced last year, which represents forms of best practice conducted by staff at the University, resolutions to issues identified in previous reports, or emerging considerations. This report represents the findings from the academic year 2023/24.

## Quantitative Data

A range of teams at UON provide quantitative data to support the evaluation of the APP provisions. Individualised and anonymised data has been collected from most teams, allowing an in-depth analysis on the impact of the support offered at the University. The contributing teams are listed in Appendix 7.7. In total, data was collected for 8,736 undergraduate students who were attached to one of the three faculties at UON.

## Qualitative Data

Semi-structured interviews (n=26) were conducted with staff (n=7) and students (n=19) which were analysed by researchers from ISII, who applied a thematic analysis approach to the data. Thematic analysis identifies patterns, categories, and themes within qualitative data. This allows researchers to familiarise themselves with the data, generate codes, and define both categories and themes, in a six-stage approach (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017; Braun and Clark, 2006).

### Sample size in Qualitative Research

This year, 26 interviews were conducted, bringing the total number of interviews to 150 since the beginning of the APP evaluations in 2021, representing a substantial and valuable sample for qualitative data collection. The emphasis in qualitative research is not on large numbers but on the depth, richness, and quality of the data gathered. One of the key advantages of qualitative research is its capacity to uncover and explain processes and patterns of human behaviour that are often challenging to quantify (Tenny et al., 2022). Experiences, attitudes, and behaviours can be complex and nuanced, making them difficult to capture accurately using quantitative methods alone (Mason, 2010). Therefore, unlike quantitative research, which seeks statistical significance through larger samples, qualitative research aims to explore complex phenomena, capture detailed perspectives, and provide an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. While qualitative data can be quantified to some extent, its true value lies in identifying themes and patterns that may not be easily measurable (Tenny et al., 2022). A sample size of 26 allows for diverse viewpoints while reaching a point of saturation[[5]](#footnote-5), where no new themes or insights emerge, which is considered sufficient for generating meaningful and comprehensive results (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Mason, 2010). In qualitative research, it is the richness of the data and the depth of the analysis, rather than the size of the sample, that determines the strength of the findings.

## Case studies of Best Practice

To support the research and other additional insight into the work conducted at The University, this report includes four short case studies of best practice that emerged from the research analysis. Research case studies provide rich qualitative information and offer an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon. Case studies can allow researchers to explore complex issues, in a specific context, and provides examples of ‘real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles (Cohen et al., 2011, pp.289). The aim of including these case studies is to provide insights into what works in different departments at UON and identify if, how and why, these interventions work and can potentially be adopted or adapted by other members of staff. These four case studies are based on staff (N=4) and student (N=2) interviews looking at four developments at the University, namely: *APP Ambassadors Programme (4.1.3), Improvements: Scholars Green Accommodation- A Recommendation from Last Year’s Report (4.2.2), Building Belonging Project- A Recommendation from Last Year’s Report (4.3.5);* and *EDI Careers (4.3.6)*. The University of Northampton has also developed a Best Practice Hub, available on the staff intranet, which acts as a central point for offering staff content to adapt and awareness of best practice within the institution.

# Findings

This section presents the results and outcomes of the research, focused on the areas that impacted the award gap through the designed interview schedule. The findings section includes three key themes from the qualitative and quantitative data analysis which are: **The Importance of Building Rapport: The Lecturer-Student Dynamic**; [**Supporting Students: Exploring Resources, Services, and Wellbeing at UON**](#_Toc177564991); and **Thinking about the Future: Addressing Student Needs, Communication, and Belonging at UON**. These themes are also supported by four case-studies: **APP Ambassadors Programme**, **Improvements: Scholars Green Accommodation- A Recommendation from Last Year’s Report**, **Building Belonging Project-A Recommendation from Last Year’s Report**, and **EDI Careers** (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1.** Overview of the report themes

## The Importance of Building Rapport: The Lecturer-Student Dynamic

This theme explores student engagement and support at the University, focusing on how personal relationships, attendance, and teaching methods influence the student experience. By examining these factors, we can better understand their impact on theaward gap, ensuring that all students have equitable opportunities to succeed, regardless of background. It also includes a section (4.1.1) on the support available during key transitions, such as moving from Foundation Year to L4, or from L4 to L5. The perspectives of both students and staff reveal different understandings of support systems, with some students highlighting the importance of self-initiative in accessing help, while others suggest that personal bonds with staff can encourage success. For example, Student 1 noted:

*I would say my Head of Year has been really understanding, even being honest I feel like I’ve taken the [expletive], but it’s not me intentionally [doing it] (…) But to be fair they are helping you get, it is individual based. If you don’t ask, you won’t get. (Student 1).*

Existing literature states that building rapport is crucial for students' success as it fosters a sense of safety and connection with educators, alongside feelings of respect and encouragement. Regarding classroom time, where the rapport can be built, there are statistically significant differences in engagement by APP-category, for example, students from a Black Ethnic group had an average attendance of 59.51% compared- to an average of 66.71% (f=19.273; *p*<.001). The differences were similar for all measure categories, with APP targeted students who were likely to receive lower degree outcomes having less engagement in the classroom, except for students who had a registered disability who were as likely to succeed as their peers (Karlidag-Dennis et al., 2024) (Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2.** Average attendance by APP-targeted category (%)[[6]](#footnote-6)

This supports the findings of the financial report with IMD quintile being linked to degree outcome, with students from IMD Quintile 5 being 71.4% more likely to attain a higher degree classification than IMD Quintile (Karlidag-Dennis, Maher, and Hazenberg, 2024). As a result, students are more motivated to achieve their academic, behavioural, and emotional learning goals (Rafsanjani et al., 2019). Another student commented on lecturers’ approachability:

 *As of the teaching, 95% of the lecturers are really, really good. They are very open, they will listen. Obviously, you can only do so much because there are different stipulations to what they can change or alter within what you are learning (Student 9).*

The importance of Personal Academic Tutors (PATs) in supporting students was also evident from the interviews. For some, having a responsive and thoughtful PAT made a significant difference in their academic journey. For example, Student 3 reflected on how their tutor's approach to encouraging critical thinking, pushed them to refine their work and consider different perspectives:

*I had a PAT tutor, he was very supportive, he was very quick to reply. I’ve heard from other people that their PAT tutor was not as quick as mine and when I told them that mine was, they felt envious of me because he was really, really good (Student 3).*

Similarly, Student 5 complimented their tutor’s attentiveness and organisation, which catered specifically to their needs as a dyslexic student:

*I just think the support network, especially from my personal tutor, xxx she’s amazing… she’s so organised and I just absolutely love that because dyslexics are the most organised people (Student 5).*

From the staff’s perspective, attendance is seen as a key factor in student success. Staff member 5 below highlights that regular participation in PAT tutorials and seminars is crucial:

*From my perspective I think the most common challenge comes from attendance. If we can get students to attend sessions, to attend PAT tutorials, to attend seminars, then everything else follows. The more input they have, the better grades (Staff 5)*

The link between attendance and achievement is well-documented (see Klein et al., 2022), reinforcing the idea that consistent involvement with both tutors and peers plays an essential role in student development. While the overall feedback on teaching was highly positive during the interviews, one student raised a concern about the balance between remote learning and practical sessions:

*My only feedback (regarding teaching) would be that some of the learning was a little more remote learning, whereas some of the learning could have been integrated into more practical sessions…because cross-disciplinary working in healthcare is such an important thing (Student 12).*

While the majority of the students were positive about the teaching and the rapport they had with their lecturers, during the interviews, some of the students expressed frustrations about not being heard when raising issues with their courses. One student said:

*I think they need to listen more if there are students - not ‘complaining’ but pointing out that maybe the course isn’t going to so well, maybe some things need to change. I think they need to listen more when something is going wrong. (Student 8).*

Student 16’s quotes below indicated that delayed responses and last-minute changes to modules can leave students feeling unsupported and anxious:

*I just failed a module for the first time, which really made me have - I’ve been crying (…) When a student fails a module, they send a general email because we only have two attempts. So, they just send a general email (…). So far, I’ve emailed my personal tutor. I think maybe she’s in a holiday time because this is holiday period, so she hasn’t got back to me. (Student 16).*

### Transitions

According to the interviews, peer relationships seem to play a crucial role in shaping the student experience, as the students progress through their academic journey. Student 1 below noted that in year two, in contrast to year one, they started to form friendships, contributing to their overall experience positively:

*What I would say is I actually made friends. So I do feel like making friends also does help support-wise. And everything is a bit more in person, I would say so. In first year, I think it was a bit, a tad more virtual (Student 1).*

Similarly, Student 5 highlighted that group work in the second year provided opportunities to connect with new peers outside their usual social circles.

*I definitely think, especially in second year when we do group work, that’s when you get to really know other people that you don’t necessarily meet in the first year. When you are in your first year you kind of pick your friend groups, you just stay within your groups and you’ll intermittently talk to other people that you get on with (Student 5).*

This aligns with findings in previous End of Year reports, with lecturers expecting students to be up to a certain level of competency in their later years of study (Karlidag-Dennis et al., 2023). This was identified in the quantitative data with students entering their third year, normally their dissertation year, being more likely to book tutorials[[7]](#footnote-7) (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3.** Booked academic tutorials by year of study (%)

The reliance on booking tutorials with the academic librarians may be a response to lower levels of support in the classroom. At Level 4 tutorials were conducted across 102 programmes, with 5,910 minutes of taught minutes which engaged with 2,391 students, this drops for Level 5 students, before rising again in Level 6, with a substantial increase in the amount of time spent with students. This would suggest students are highlighting academic needs as they move through their years and willingly seek out support (Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4.** Programme delivery of Academic Librarian sessions split between the total sum of taught minutes, and total sum of students (total number).

Overall, students felt that having more one-on-one time with lecturers would be helpful for their studies. One student, however, shared a different experience during their first year. Unlike others who felt well-supported, this student was in a STEM course and also had hospital shifts, which added to the pressure they experienced. Student 4 spoke about the anxiety they faced when completing practical assessments and mentioned that they received more support from hospital staff than lecturers.

*It got to the point where my practice assessor at the time at the hospital, she was literally like, ‘You are going to fail if you don’t do the stuff’. And I remember crying to her and saying, ‘I’ve got this anxiety (…) I feel I had more people to talk to at the hospital than at the uni (Student 4).*

Student 4's experience highlights the unique challenges faced by students balancing both academic and practical responsibilities, especially in fields like healthcare. While the overall feedback suggests that more direct interaction with lecturers would be beneficial for most students, it also emphasises the importance of tailored support, particularly for those with additional pressures, such as hospital placements A staff member (Staff 7) emphasised that supporting student continuation is as important as achieving high-degree outcomes. Helping struggling students to complete their degrees, even with a 2:2, is often undervalued by institutions:

*Sometimes the good outcome is - so if people are around about 2:2, to get them to a 2:1, in my experience that’s more about do they turn up. That’s more about them turning up. The amount of time and effort you put in and mentoring and coaching and encouragement to enable someone to pass, requires a lot more effort and frankly in my mind is a lot more valuable (Staff 7).*

Award gaps are significant because they can have long-lasting effects on students, making it harder for them to access and compete for job opportunities (Times Higher Education, 2022). At UON, theses award gaps impact significantly on APP targeted students, with male students, those from areas of lower deprivation, and lower entrance tariff scores being statistically significantly more likely to receive lower degree classifications (Karlidag-Dennis et al., 2023) However, research shows that lecturer support plays a crucial role in keeping students engaged and improving their academic success (Thomas et al., 2021). Building positive relationships with students is linked to more active classroom participation and deeper learning, both of which are essential for achieving higher grades (ibid).

### Theme Summary

This theme focused on the engagement and support students receive at university. Many students found personal connections with lecturers and peers essential for success, emphasising the value of one-on-one support. PATs are important in helping students, as research suggests they have a big impact on the student experience at university (Yale, 2017). Transitions between academic years were another key area of discussion. Peer relationships became more meaningful in the second year, with group work helping students’ bond with classmates they wouldn't usually interact with. Overall, the interviews indicated that the majority of our students value their lecturers' support and feedback, whether they are in their first or third year. With the significant award gaps noted in previous research, closer relationships with lecturers will enable APP students to access additional academic support when required, build their confidence in asking for help, and build better classroom environments for them to succeed.

### Case Study: APP Ambassadors Programme

The APP Ambassadors Programme was launched to support staff who were interested in targeted research related to the UON APP. The initiative provided participants with 225 hours of funded research time and the opportunity to fully engage with their proposals. Outputs of this initiative include valuable focus groups, interviews, policy analysis, and quantitative data analysis. Several staff members took part, leading projects that explored various aspects of the student experience.

One of the key strengths of the programme was the collaborative whole provider approach it fostered. Participants highlighted the value of working alongside colleagues from different departments, allowing them to learn about diverse research projects. The supportive atmosphere helped create a strong sense of teamwork, with regular meetings providing a platform for sharing insights and approaches.

**“In terms of development from being part of the APP Ambassador Project, it’s definitely widened the networks that I’m involved in. It has given me a greater understanding of APP from a metric perspective” (Staff 6).**

A significant learning outcome for many involved was a deeper reflection on their teaching practices. The programme encouraged lecturers to consider the diverse backgrounds and challenges faced by students, often overlooked in day-to-day teaching. The importance of getting to know students and their circumstances became a recurring theme, with participants emphasising the need to prioritise student engagement alongside curriculum delivery.

The programme also revealed variations in how projects were managed, mainly regarding time allocation. Some participants found that the hours assigned to their projects were insufficient, while others completed their work more quickly than anticipated. Despite these, the overall experience was considered invaluable, offering participants the chance to step out of their usual routines and gain broader perspectives on university-wide practices.

According to the staff interviews, the APP Ambassadors Programme seemed to facilitate important research and also promoted cross-departmental collaboration and fostered a greater understanding of student needs across the University.

##  Supporting Students: Exploring Resources, Services, and Wellbeing at UON

This theme focuses on the challenges that students faced during their academic studies and the valuable assistance they received from the University's services. Whether navigating issues with accommodation, managing academic workloads, or seeking support for learning difficulties, students emphasised the importance of the whole-provider support in fostering a positive student experience. Student 5 below talked about how useful ASSIST has been:

*But you have ASSIST, which are great. And obviously I have my tutors, which they all know so if you go down there out of ASSIST they obviously tell you everything. You have allowances for things like presentations, I’ll have longer because again they assess you, they look at it (Student 5).*

When discussing the resources available at the University, students generally expressed satisfaction with what is provided, highlighting a broad range of support services that supported them through their studies to get a good degree award. Although not all students have used every service, there is recognition that those who have, particularly regarding mental health support, found them beneficial. However, some challenges, such as long waiting times, were noted:

*Resources-wise I think there is actually quite a lot offered. I haven’t used the mental health side of it but another student that I’m really good friends with, he has and they’ve been really helpful. There is a long waiting list, but there is a long waiting list whether that’s at university or generally for mental health. It’s just part of the time we’re in now (Student 9).*

There are, however, differences in how APP targeted students engage with support services, for example, of the 558 booked tutorial sessions accounted for in the research, only 11 students categorised as White Working-Class males engaged with academic tutorials (4.26% of the cohort), compared to 138 disabled students (9.87% of the cohort), 261 GEM students (7.95% of the cohort), and 218 from IMD Quintiles 1 or 2 (7.33% of the cohort) (Figure 4.5).

**Figure 4.5.** Booked tutorials by student characteristic (%)

While most of the interviews provided positive feedback regarding the resources and facilities at the University, one comment suggested that further investment in student accommodation was needed. This issue was previously highlighted in our End of Year Report 2022/2023, and since then, progress has been made in improving the accommodation (see Case Study 4.2.2). However, it remains important to include this reflection for Student 1, to explore what further actions the University can take:

*I think the University should invest in more student accommodation rather than private accommodations because I also have realised - I’m lucky that - because something happened. I was meant to do a private accommodation, but my student finance wasn’t sorted so I had to live in the student accommodation (Student 1).*

Quality student accommodation plays a crucial role in supporting student wellbeing, which in turn influences their likelihood to persist with their studies. When students have access to safe, comfortable, and supportive living environments, they tend to feel more settled and focused. This stability reduces stress and fosters a sense of belonging, both of which are essential for academic engagement and motivation. Therefore, further investment in university-managed accommodation would help ease the challenges students face with private housing and support their overall mental health and academic experience.

### Theme Summary

This theme highlights student experiences with the University's resources and support services, addressing both the challenges they encountered and the assistance they received. Students appreciated services such as ASSIST, academic support, and the academic librarians, especially those with learning difficulties or needing extra academic help. While some mentioned issues like long waiting times for mental health services, the overall feedback was positive, with most students acknowledging the wide range of support available. This research builds on the findings of the financial report, which indicated a reduced likelihood of degree continuation, linked to APP categories and a need to improve communication (Karlidag-Dennis et al., 2024).

### Case Study: Improvements: Scholars Green Accommodation- A Recommendation from Last Year’s Report

Scholars Green has been a key option for students from lower-income backgrounds studying at UON due to its affordability. Recognising the challenges faced by students living there, especially its distance from campus, the University has implemented several improvements following recommendations from the previous End of Year Report 2022/2023.

One major enhancement has been providing all Scholars Green residents with a free bus pass, valued at a total of £450,000, to ease the burden of commuting to the Waterside Campus. The University also refurbished all kitchens in the accommodation, improving the living conditions for students.

To address safety concerns, the University increased residential life drop-ins and introduced regular drop-ins from local police. These sessions, designed to offer advice and support, aim to reduce concerns about criminal activity in the area, including issues related to county lines and drugs. The police presence is not for enforcement but to engage with students over tea and biscuits, helping foster a safer community.

“We have looked at how we can make students feel as though they belong a bit better up there, because we do recognise that it is out of town, it can take up to 40 minutes to get here on the bus. A lot of those students won’t have their own transport. So we’ve ensured they’ve all got a free bus pass” (Staff 13).

In addition, a common room with amenities like a pool table was created, though its underuse suggests further efforts are needed to encourage social engagement. The University is focused on maintaining a clean and well-kept environment, demonstrating care for Scholars Green and its students.

Looking ahead, the University has partnered with the Northampton Landlords Association to offer advice on private rented accommodation. This initiative helps students avoid substandard housing when they move off-campus.

UON continues to evaluate the future of Scholars Green, considering refurbishment or relocation closer to Waterside. Any decision will keep in mind the financial constraints and needs of APP students, ensuring that their sense of belonging and access to affordable housing remains a priority.

## Thinking about the Future: How are services can support students? How can we communicate and build a better sense of community?

This theme looks into the range of resources and facilities to support student well-being and academic success at UON. The aim of this theme is to highlight areas for improvement at The University to better support our current students, ensuring they continue their studies and graduate with a strong degree outcome. The theme is divided into two areas: *Services* (4.3.1), and *Sense of community* (4.3.2).

### Services

During the interviews students reflected on their experiences, and some challenges were noted, such as the accessibility and timeliness of certain services. For example, Student 6 mentioned below that while counselling services provide valuable support, there can be delays in securing consistent, ongoing help:

*To get a consistent counsellor, I’m not sure if it’s changed but I think it was about six weeks when I did it. Which is understandable to some degree but if you are in dire need for that help it can be a bit like you feel you’ve been put on a back burner and you’ve been pushed aside. (Student 6).*

As the University actively recruits students from underrepresented routes, these students are more likely to require additional support in areas such as academic writing, critical thinking, and transitioning into higher education:

*As a widening participation provider, which the University proudly states, we do have challenges in the sense that the students that we recruit, that we actively recruit, are coming in from either non-traditional routes into higher education and often that means expectations that may be different of what higher education is, different needs in terms of that transitional stage to higher education (Staff 6).*

The lack of awareness or delays in accessing resources, such as counselling or learning support for dyslexia, can become more significant for our underrepresented students, as they may already face challenges that differ from those of traditional students. The need for clear communication and timely provision of resources is crucial to ensure that all students are adequately supported throughout their university journey:

*I know there are a lot of things available at the University, but I think sometimes the way in to access those particular areas is either unknown or quite hard to get into. I’ve had help in the past, but it got to the point where my tutor was like, ‘No, I would like to refer you’* (Student 11).

For students with long-standing issues like mental health concerns, proactive and transparent communication about support options will help to prevent students from feeling isolated or overlooked.

### Sense of Community

The interviews indicated that students coming from underrepresented backgrounds are more likely to have different needs at the University. They are also more likely to face challenges when it comes to engaging with university life, as some of the mature students who come from the APP targeted cohorts during the interviews mentioned that they did not have a strong community at the University:

 *The Student Union side of things was tough for our course because a lot of people, at least half the students, were coming from quite a long way away so they would literally arrive 15 minutes before the lecture and then when the lecture was done they were off to families or for long drives home(Student 12).*

This quote from Student 15 who is from the APP targeted cohort reflects the challenges mature students face in achieving a sense of community and the generational gap between mature students and their younger peers can create differing perspectives and experiences in classes, further enhancing feelings of isolation:

*We come from a different generation and different experiences and we see things differently, completely different from the Gen Zs…But having this platform (a mature student platform) created by the Student Union or the academic organisation, I think will help people of my generation to find a place where they can freely and easily socialise (…) (Student 15).*

This development of a mature student platform could provide an essential opportunity for these students to share their experiences, support each other, and feel a sense of belonging within the University environment. This initiative not only fosters socialisation but also helps address the unique challenges faced by mature students, offering them a space where they feel understood and supported:

*With her course she felt a little bit isolated because she’s the only Punjabi girl there and she just felt quite isolated. She does podiatry and a lot of her course is majority white people so she felt quite isolated in her journey. So I feel like creating more peer support groups things like that for people that may feel a little bit isolated with their cohorts, that would be something that could be really good (Student 5).*

This was noted in the quantitative data, with students partaking in the democratic functioning of the Student Union, such as the forums that discuss and pass policy, having a younger average age than the University in general (22.54 years old versus the wider undergraduate average of 24.06 years). Creating student platforms provide a vital space for peer support, especially for those who may feel disconnected from their peers, as noted by Student 5 above. Research also indicates that peer support schemes are essential for university students, where issues of loneliness and isolation are widely acknowledged (Davies, 2016).

### Theme Summary

This theme explored the resources and support available at the University and highlighted areas for improvement to better address student needs. When it comes to services, some students expressed concerns about the accessibility and timeliness of support, including counselling and learning resources. There was a particular focus on ensuring underrepresented students, such as those from widening participation IMD and GEM backgrounds, are made more aware of available support to aid their transition into higher education. Some students also mentioned challenges related to a sense of community, particularly among mature students, who often feel disconnected from university life due to their differing responsibilities and experiences.

### Case Study: Building Belonging Project – A Recommendation from the Last Year’s Report

One of the recommendations from the most recent End of Year Report highlighted that students lacked a sense of belonging at the University. In response, this feedback was acted upon, leading to the establishment of the Building Belonging initiative, aimed at fostering a stronger sense of connection at the University.

To build a better sense of belonging at the University, the initiative Building Belonging has been established. The approach taken in the Building Belonging project differed from that of many other universities in that it involved as many people as possible. Approximately 40 staff and student representatives, many from areas not typically engaged in such initiatives, participated. These individuals now form a steering group for a community of practice focused on belonging. Their continued involvement will help sustain and develop projects, serving as an "ideas hub" for new initiatives. With "belonging" now being part of the University’s discourse, these representatives are in a position to foster further projects, such as creating short videos explaining university policies. Although simple, these videos could make a significant impact by helping people understand how the University operates for their benefit.

“What we wanted to do is (…) to look at culture change and to embed belonging into the discourse of the University. So when you are talking about assessment feedback you should be thinking about belonging and you should be explicitly talking about belonging in that context” (Staff 4).

Another example of this project's integration involves a colleague who had already been working with the foundation degree, a programme with many students from underrepresented backgrounds. This colleague has been exploring staff journeys, aiming to challenge the common misconception that all academics have had smooth, worry-free career paths. By sharing stories of personal challenges, this initiative fosters a stronger sense of belonging within the academic community, beyond subject-specific groups. While this project was not created by the Building Belonging initiative, bringing the colleague into the community of practice has enabled it to grow. The concept of belonging has made it easier to propose and expand such initiatives across the University, as there is now a wider, more receptive audience.

Belonging has become a key focus of the University’s Learning and Teaching Strategy. This focus likely gained traction due to the University’s emphasis on inclusivity and the APP, demonstrating how the project has helped embed belonging into the broader institutional framework.

### Case Study: EDI Careers

The EDI Careers virtual work experience programme is an innovative initiative to engage first and second-year undergraduates with diverse talent while maintaining industry standards. The week-long programme, focused on GEM students, delivered in collaboration with market-leading partners such as Rolls-Royce, offers students the opportunity to develop essential career skills and confidence through industry-led workshops and career insights. Throughout the week, students participated in various workshops delivered by professionals from different fields, such as law, corporate, and technology. One student noted how a speaker from Rolls-Royce provided valuable advice on navigating industries, specifically as a young Black male, highlighting the importance of representation and relatability in professional development. While the virtual format presented some limitations, particularly the lack of face-to-face interaction, students appreciated the insights into real-world challenges and opportunities. In addition to industry-specific advice, the programme featured speakers from legal backgrounds, such as barristers and solicitors, who shared their diverse career paths. This helped students realise that there is no single route to success and that each individual’s journey can be unique. Furthermore, organisations like Citizens Advice guided how students could gain practical experience through volunteering. An impactful session focused on how to build a professional presence on LinkedIn. Overall, the programme successfully contributed to increasing students' confidence, helping them to focus on their academic and professional goals, and fostering a sense of belonging within their chosen fields. While the programme was highly beneficial, two potential improvements could enhance the experience further. 1) Introducing in-person sessions would allow students to engage more directly with professionals, offering a richer, more immersive learning environment. 2)Extending the programme over a longer period to provide student more time.

The lady that spoke to us from Rolls Royce, she was explaining to us how to navigate through certain industries, especially as a young Black male for me. She’s a young Black woman but she was able to relate on certain aspects, that would definitely be helpful for me when I got to practise in the real world (Student 17).

Networking is so important. They gave us good tips and good ways to network that I use to this day because I wrote everything down. Every time I go to a networking event, and I go back home after we’ve connected on LinkedIn or anything I always go through that list (EDI careers provided) and see if I did the right steps to make sure I can maximise the connection (Student 18).

# Summary

This year’s report focused on three key areas: teacher-student relationships, the availability and effectiveness of resources at the University of Northampton (UON), and potential improvements for the future. These categories were identified through qualitative and quantitative data collected from the student body. The findings emphasised the importance of fostering strong, supportive teacher-student relationships, particularly in relation to personalised academic guidance, which is crucial for closing the award gap for students from our targeted APP cohorts specifically from IMD and GEM backgrounds. Additionally, the report highlighted the role of university resources in supporting diverse student needs at various stages of their academic journey, which directly impacts the retention of students within the Access and Participation Plan (APP) groups. By enhancing resource communication, improving support for IMD and GEM students, and addressing delays in services, the University can better contribute to APP student success, well-being, and satisfaction, ultimately helping to close the award gap.

**Recommendations**

Our seven main recommendations for this year are as follows:

1. **Tailored support to each year of study:**
2. Support levels should be tailored to each year of study. Our research shows that first-year APP students need more guidance in navigating academic structures (e.g., referencing and assignments), and students in their final year require more individualised academic support, especially during crucial projects (e.g., dissertation). The University should ensure that third-year APP students, despite their increased independence, have weekly access to lecturers and personalised guidance.
3. **Prioritise student continuation:**
4. Consideration should be given to prioritising on the continuation gap. The APP financial report indicated significantly different levels of students continuing into their second year, with gender, age, and IMD quintile having statistically significant influences on outcomes. This has been recognised by staff an area of contention within the institution, believing that an unintended consequence of the institutional focus on the award gap has been that continuation has been overlooked.
5. **Increase lecturer-student interaction:**
6. Our research shows that APP students across all years need more one-on-one time with lecturers to enhance their academic experience. The University should create more opportunities for personal interaction through consistent scheduled office hours and mentorship programmes, particularly in challenging courses. Lecturers should provide regular guidance, mentoring, and encouragement, as this has been shown to improve students' chances of completing their degrees and achieving better academic outcomes.
7. **Improve access to support services and communication about resources:**
8. Our research shows that APP students face difficulties in accessing consistent support when required, particularly with counselling services. The University should work to support the team reduce waiting times for those who need support and ensure that students in immediate need are prioritised for quicker access to these services.
9. Further to this, there is a clear need for better communication about the resources available, especially for students with additional needs, such as dyslexia. The University should ensure that students are informed about these services early in their academic journey to provide timely support and help them navigate their studies more effectively.
10. **Further work on fostering a sense of belonging for mature students:**
11. Our research shows that, while developments are already underway, such as the Building Belonging Project, the University should develop platforms or societies specifically for mature students who are part of the APP targeted groups. Offering tailored resources and opportunities for connection, particularly for those studying off-campus or part-time, would be highly beneficial in fostering a sense of community and belonging for these students.
12. **Expand peer support programmes:**
13. Our research shows that peer support is highly beneficial for academic and personal development. The University should consider expanding peer mentorship programmes for all APP targeted cohorts. This would help them navigate their academic journey more effectively, feel more integrated into the student community, and give students more resources for support.
14. **Improve responsiveness to student feedback:**
15. Our research showed that some students expressed frustration with not being heard when raising issues about their courses. The University should prioritise developing a process for staff that addresses student feedback early and acts promptly, as delays can not only lead to negative academic outcomes but also undermine trust between students and the institution. Regular feedback mechanisms should be introduced to ensure student concerns are addressed in real-time, where possible, as a lack of responsiveness can erode students' confidence in the University's commitment to their success.

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# Appendices

## APP End of Year Report Student Interview Schedule

Consent forms and Participant Information Sheets were shared before the interview.

1. Could you tell me about yourself please? (i.e., your family, school years, where did you grow up, what did you want to be)
2. What motivated you to pursue a university degree?
	1. Did you have any doubts?
	2. Do you still feel motivated about your degree? (Why/Why not)
	3. Did you consider an apprenticeship or alternative to higher education?
3. What do you study?
4. Can you tell me a little about how you decided to study this course at the University of Northampton?
	1. I am interested in knowing who helped you to decide to apply and where and what to study?
5. How have you found supporting yourself financially?
	1. Are there any financial concerns or constraints that can affect your ability to continue or complete your degree?
6. How has your experience of university been so far?
	1. Do you enjoy the teaching? (academic)
	2. What are your thoughts on the resources/facilities that the University provides? (professional, prompt: finance, mental health, skills and knowledge, academic support, PAT and pastoral support)
7. Could you please share any specific goals or aspirations that you have that are driving you to finish your degree?
8. Have you encountered/come across any challenges or barriers that have made you think about not completing your degree? (Would you mind telling us?)
9. What support have you had with assessments and meeting deadlines? (prompt: feedback on marking, what aspects of assessment)
10. Are there things that the University can do better?
	1. How do you think the University can better support students in overcoming any obstacles and successfully complete their degrees? (from academic and professional services point of views)
	2. How do you think the University can better support students from L4 to 5 or L5 to L6? (remember to explain the students the levels)
11. Did/do you feel supported during your first year of your studies?
	1. Can you tell us if you felt supported during your transition to university (the access stage)?
	2. How do you think our university environment, including your communication with your peers and lecturer can help you feel more supported and confident?
	3. In what ways do you think the University can help students develop their confidence and resilience?
12. Do you feel that your views and opinions are heard/valued by the University? (i.e., SU, PAT, module feedback)
13. Do you feel supported by the University? (i.e., your lecturers, admin, any staff working at the University)
14. Are you aware of or used:
* ASSIST
* Student Union
* Mental Health and counselling
* Learning development
* Student Information Desk
* Academic Support

If you have, could you please let us know your thoughts?(what was good/what needs improvement).

1. Do you know your PT? Could you please tell me if you talk/meet with your PT to discuss any issues that you may have?
2. What support systems or resources have been most helpful to you in staying on track with your studies?
	1. Do you find NILE/Student Hub to be a useful platform for getting information for your course and communicating with tutors?
3. Do you feel part of the UON community? (why/why not)
	1. What could make you feel more part of the UON community?
	2. Does the hidden curriculum hinder your progress? (language, processes and norms that may not be understood by the student)
4. What are your hopes and plans for after you graduate from university?
	1. Do you feel like the University has supported you with your post-graduation plans? If not, how can they support you?

## Interview Schedule for UON Staff

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your role at the University please?
2. What is your understanding of Access and Participation Plans (APP)?
3. What are some common challenges that students might be facing while studying at the University of Northampton?
4. Can you please tell me about the project that you were working on in relation to APP?
5. What can the University do better?
6. Is there anything that you would like to add that I may have not asked during this interview?

## Interview Schedule for APP Ambassadors

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your role at the University please?
2. What is your understanding of Access and Participation Plans (APP)?
3. What are some common challenges that students might be facing while studying at the University of Northampton?
4. Can you tell me a bit about the APP Ambassadors programme?
5. What do you think that you learnt from the programme/from the sessions? (prompt about if they learn anything about research as well as APP itself).
6. Have you had time to reflect on these sessions and link back to your practice? (How?)
7. In your opinion, what could be improved about the Ambassadors programme?
8. Is there anything that you would like to add that I may have not asked during this interview?

## Theory of Change for Widening Access

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| APP Theme | Institutional Approach | Student agency/ decisions | Target groups | Outputs | Outcomes | Impact |
| Access(Widening Access)[[8]](#footnote-8) | Guest Lecture programmeSummer school & in-reachProgramme of enrichment resourcesLevel 3 learning resourcesSubject networks/researchCare leavers package Military CovenantCEC Enterprise Co-ordinator | Improved resilienceGeneral Self-efficacyHigher AspirationsRaise Attainment | White economically disadvantaged males (IMD – Q1-Q2)UPNCare leaversMilitary families\*Parents\*Young people (IMD Q1/Q2) in Northamptonshire | % of young people (IMD 1 +2) attending in-reach% of young people accessing STEAM activities (IMD Q1 & Q2)% of schools signing an ‘English Learning Resource Agreement’% of schools signing a ‘Maths Learning Resource Agreement’ | Improved general self-efficacyIncrease % of white working-class males from IMD 1 + 2Increase predicted attainment levels in KS2 English for participating schoolsIncrease predicted attainment levels in KS2 Maths for participating schools | Overcoming barriers to entry to HE for young people with protected characteristics that are underrepresented at UON |

**Table 1.1.** Theory of Change for Widening Access

## Theory of Change for Success

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| APP Themes | Institutional Approach | Student agency/decisions | Target groups | Outputs | Outcomes | Impact |
| Success(Progression and Award) | Transition into HE programmeAttainment & Aspiration programmeIntegrated Learner supportSU Student Voice BAME ForumSpecialist Personal Tutor SupportInclusive Academic practiceLearner Analytics (LEARN)Dedicated SU BAME SabbaticalFoundation Stage FrameworkASSIST | Personalisation of Student ExperienceIncreased Academic ExcellenceImproved Resilience Improved Digital LiteracyImproved WellbeingLearner Support ModelAccess to the Learning and Teaching ModelReduce the Additional Cost of StudyImproved Financial Management | BAMECare LeaversDisabilitiesIMD Q1 - Q2Low socio-economic IMD Q1 - Q2 (males)MaturePart timePolar 4 Q1 – Q2All Students Experiencing Financial difficulties | % of no-to-low student engagement reported on the LEARN dashboard% of students continuing from Level 4 to Level 5 of their programme of study with 120 credits and average grade of C or above% of students continuing from Level 5 to Level 6 of their programme of study with 120 credits and average grade of B or above | Reverse negative trends in continuationImproved progression rates Level 4 to Level 5 and Levels 5 to Level 6Close continuation gapsImprove BAME attainmentImprove attainment for students from working class backgrounds | Achieve Success for AllImprove social mobilityOvercome barriers to successProvide Exceptional Value for Money |

**Table 1.2.** Theory of Change for Success

## Theory of Change for Graduate Outcomes

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| APP Themes | Institutional Approach | Student agency/decisions | Target groups | Outputs | Outcomes | Impact |
| Graduate Outcomes(Progress) | Increase Levels of Joint Professional AccreditationEnhanced employability offerCareer registration Work-based & work-related learning opportunities (collaborative)Northampton Employment PromiseCounty Employer ForumsBAME mentoring programmeCareers for Life | Develop and Evidence Graduate AttributesRelevant sector work experience and skillsAccess to IAG and employability General Self-EfficacyDigital Literacy | BAMECare-leaversDisabilitiesLow socio-economic IMD Q1-Q2Part -timeYoung students (under 21) | % of students completing the employability award% of programmes with industry year option% of programmes with joint professional accreditation | Improve trends in graduate outcomesClose the gap in graduate employability between UoN BAME and White (all students)Close the graduate employability gap between UoN students IMD Q1-Q2 and the UoN (all graduates) figure | Achieve outstanding levels of graduate employability and further study outcomes for all students |

**Table 1.3.** Theory of Change for Graduate Outcomes

##  University Teams Contributing Data for APP report

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Data Source** | **Team** |
| Current Student Data | BIMI/HESA |
| Historical Student Data | BIMI/HESA |
| Historical Outreach Data | Schools Engagement |
| Learning Development Sessions | Learning and Teaching Enhancement |
| Academic Librarian Sessions | Library and Learning Services |
| ASSIST Support | ASSIST |
| Counselling and Mental Health Support | Counselling and Mental Health Team |
| HESA Track | HEAT |
| Financial Support Survey | ISII |
| Employability Plus Award | Student Futures |
| Attendance Data | Learning Development |

##  Additional Quotes Supporting the Findings

### Quotes from 4.1. The importance of Building a Rapport

*‘How much more can he help?’ Even other people complain about there being a lack of support (…) I feel having personal bond with people does also put you on a pedestal to do better as well. It’s just human nature, if someone’s more inclined to you they are going to do more for you, naturally (Student 1).*

*So yes, generally the teaching is really good. It’s very informative, there’s a lot of help there if you need it (…) And also it’s very open within the lectures, so you can talk about other things, you can see if other areas blend into the area you are working with, especially in xxx anyway. So that part of it I’ve really enjoyed (Student 9).*

*He would always question my work and say, ‘Is there a different way to explain this?’. He doesn’t give me the answer straight away but it makes me think back on my work, what is a better way to address what I want to say? Is there a different way to present it? Am I considering all the factors to my point? Am I covering myself up with the right of amount of literature (Student 3).*

*. I think everything’s always pristine, everything’s always where it should be. And my personal tutor, she knows that and she’s like, ‘I’m answering this question and then I’m answering this question to that question that I know that you are going to be asking me a question to’ (Student 5).*

*It ended up that a large majority of the course were failing. I don’t know the exact percentage but I think there were about 100 people in our class and when we sat the exams and handed in the assignment, I haven’t got the correct figures but it was something like 18-20% actually passed because we weren’t listened to (Student 8).*

### Quotes from 4.1.1 Transitions

*But I would definitely say second year is definitely group work is the hardest but it’s also the most rewarding because you’ll be paired with people that necessarily you wouldn’t pick if you were picking yourself. (…) And normally in the first year you wouldn’t have gone and spoken to that person at all. So I think definitely peer work is important. Peer support is really important as well because it just makes your experience ten times nicer when you get on with everyone (Student 5).*

*I think for our course specifically it felt sometimes that we weren’t given that support, we were expected to do things independently or just be able to come in or speak to our lecturers. But sometimes you need that face to face, one on one time and sometimes they don’t always have that to give you. Which is fair enough when everyone’s schedule is what their schedule is but I sometimes felt that could have been a bit more that could been done to help us, clarify a few things or things like that (Student 6).*

*Yes, the hospital staff, the people I spoke to, they were really accommodation with how I felt. Even now if I have a problem I usually go to the ward (…) with the lecturers, there are one or two that I’m close with, that I can go to if things have got bad. But I think it’s just easier for me at the hospital because I see them (…) I think for me it’s just being approachable. Because at the end of the day they are lectures. Some lecturers, they are teachers, they teach and that’s it. But then you have some lecturers that are like genuinely wonder (…) You have lecturers like who are genuinely wondering, ‘Let’s talk, what’s going on? (…) So I think being open and being friendly a little bit as well. Obviously, the lecturers are there to teach but at the end of the day we are all humans, so we all have our things that we’ve got to go through (Student 4).*

*A lot of my time in terms of PAT work or academic PAT work and stuff I do when I’m a module leader is ensuring people pass and working really hard. That can be for a range of reasons, some of which can be really hard social situations where people don’t have much money, or they can’t commute or they are a carer or they are caring for younger siblings. The amount of time and effort you put in, and mentoring and coaching and encouragement to enable someone to pass, requires a lot more effort and frankly in my mind is a lot more valuable (Staff 7).*

### Quotes from 4.2. Supporting Students: Exploring Resources, Support, Services, and Wellbeing

*I would say there are definitely times, especially because my specialism in there is xxx and it’s a lot of numbers, calculations and you would think that is a dyslexic’s worst nightmare. And it is, definitely, but again you have support from technicians, you have support from your one-to-one tutors. They will just sit there and be like, ‘You’ve got this due’(…)‘Oh my God, I completely forgot about that’, and they are like, ‘That’s what I’m here for, to remind you of all of this stuff’. I’ve still got to go and sign up because I’ve got so much going on in the second year. But definitely the tutors were like, ‘Don’t forget you’ve got this, I’ll put it on NILE, I’ll give you an email about it, I’ll even write it on a bit of paper for you’ (Student 5).*

*I’m dyslexic so I use ASSIST, or I did prior to my course, I haven’t had much need to contact them since, and that was useful. I have used academic learning help. I’ve used the tutors, I’ve been to the gentleman, xxx, who provides help with stats, I’ll probably be using him quite a lot more again next year as well. Yes, so I’ve used all the resources that are there, I think (Student 14).*

 *In fact they are really helpful because I remember in one of my objectives, it was Level 6 writing, and I was like, ‘I don’t know what that is, I don’t know what it is’. But when I went for the drop-in, they gave me a document on what to go through, gave me a few suggestions. And because of that I passed my essay, so yes, I feel like the academic librarians are really good, really helpful (Student 4).*

*And again the second year, because of the lack of student accommodation I have to live in private accommodations, I have noticed that the poor conditions of private accommodation have contributed a lot to people’s mental health. For example, someone in my class, her washing machine was broken for four weeks. She wasn’t talking to me but I overheard the conversation (Student 1).*

### Quotes from 4.3. Thinking about the Future: How are services can support students? How can we communicate and build a better sense of community?

*So their standard level of things such as English and maths might be different; their academic writing skills might be different, the way they engage with things like critical thinking may be different (Staff 6).*

 *I live in Coventry so there was pressure to get away and get home. So the Student Union activities were, I think, more difficult for a lot of the mature students on that course to necessarily engage with and possibly there could have been some messaging that was tailored to people who don’t live on campus, who don’t have time to necessarily stick around into the evenings, who aren’t necessarily up for going out and hitting the clubs (Student 12).*

*In my first year I went to the students union and I saw that there was provision for mature students society. I contacted them and they said they’d just had a meeting but basically there was no meeting because there was nobody there. Towards the end of this second year they called for a meeting(…)Now we are four people- they are now working on the constitution to get it started and running starting from the next academic year in September. And some of the issues that I experienced in class, when I said the dynamics of the class, they had a similar experience (Student 15).*

# Glossary of Terms

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Term | Definition |
| APP | Access and Participation Plan. |
| Access | A stage in the student lifecycle focused on students’ access to university. |
| APP TARGETED COHORTS  | In this report our APP targeted cohorts and IMD, GEM and SEND students. |
| ASSIST | Additional Student Support and Inclusion Services Team. |
| AwarD gap | The Award Gap which is also known as the Attainment Gap refers to the differential degree outcomes between students from underrepresented groups and their peers. In this report we focus on the Award Gap between White and Gem students. As the gap has significant impact on GEM students. |
| BIMI  | Business Intelligence Management Information |
| Continuation | Refers to a student continuing from their first year of study into the second |
| GEM | Global Ethnic Majority |
| HEAT | Higher Education Access Tracker |
| IMD | The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) categorise postcode areas by the level of deprivation. This is split into five quintiles, with quintile one having the highest deprivation, and five the lowest. |
| Intersectionality | Intersectionality describes how social categories like race, class, and gender overlap and interact, often leading to combined systems of discrimination or disadvantage. In this report, intersectionality is evident between IMD backgrounds and mature students, as well as between GEM backgrounds and mature students. Most of the students in the study were not only from IMD or GEM backgrounds but were also mature students. |
| MATURE STUDENT | UCAS defines mature students as individuals who are over 21 years of age at the beginning of their undergraduate studies, or over 25 years of age at the beginning of their postgraduate studies. |
| OfS | Office for Students |
| POLAR | The Participation of Local Area (POLAR) categorises postcode areas in line with the local population’s inclusion in higher education. It is split into five quintiles, with quintile one having the lowest participation, and five the highest. |
| Students with a declared disability | A student with a declared disability has a physical and/or mental impairment that has a negative impact on their abilities. |
| QUANTIATIVE RESEARCH | Quantitative research is a systematic investigation that primarily focuses on collecting and analysing numerical data to understand patterns, relationships, or trends. It is widely used to test hypotheses, make predictions, or generalise findings across larger populations. This type of research often involves structured methods, such as surveys, experiments, and statistical analysis. |
| QUALITATIVE RESEARCH  | Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that focuses on understanding human behaviour, experiences, and the meanings individuals or group of individuals attach to them. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on numerical data, qualitative research aims to explore complex phenomena through in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, feelings, and social contexts. This approach is often used in social sciences and psychology. In qualitative research, measurement involves various techniques to gather and analyse non-numerical data, including interviews. For this report, interviews were gathered from UON students and staff. |
| White WORKING-CLASS male | In the context of this report “white working-class male” is categorised by gender (male), ethnicity (white), and IMD quintals (IMD 1 and 20.  |

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This data was up to date as of 28/02/2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. An APP target is to maintain GEM representation above 25%. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Due to staff changes within ULT, the action for the Deputy Vice-Chancellor centred around “language barriers” was delayed but has been adopted by the new Chair of the Student Experience Forum for inclusion in the APP evaluation for 2024-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Saturation is widely recognised as a key methodological principle in qualitative research. It generally signifies that, based on the data already collected or analysed, no additional data collection or analysis is required (Saunders et al., 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Each of the measured categories had statistically significant differences except for White Working-class males: Ethnicity (f=58.440; *p*<.001); Disability (f=20.866; *p*<.001); IMD Quintile (f=19.273; *p*<.001); White Working-Class Male (f=.743; *p*=389). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. To book an academic tutorial, students are asked to provide a student number, however, this is not mandatory. In total, 1189 sessions were booked, with 558 being linked to the quantitative student dataset. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The terms in brackets refer to category names during the original development of the Theory of Change in 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)