

# PATHWAYS FOR POTENTIAL

How universities, regulators and Government  
can tackle educational inequality

Case studies

# INTRODUCTION

**Our report, Pathways for Potential, considers the actions which are needed to accelerate progress in widening access to university and supporting students from under-represented backgrounds to succeed on their degrees and beyond.**

It explores how universities can deliver on their responsibility to diversify campuses and help their students to reach their full potential by embedding evidence of good practice across their access and participation efforts.

In order to support this work, we have drawn together case studies from Russell Group universities highlighting a range of different approaches to addressing educational inequality with evidence about how these have worked in practice. We hope this will be a useful resource to support continued improvement and collaboration.



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# ADVANCING ACCESS

Advancing Access is an information, advice and guidance service focused on widening participation. It is targeted primarily at schools and colleges which have a higher number of disadvantaged students and lower than expected progression rates to selective universities.

The service is funded and supported by all 24 Russell Group universities and provides teachers and advisers with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) resources, events and sessions designed to help them support students to progress to competitive higher education institutions. Advancing Access offers regular online virtual conferences, physical conferences in schools and colleges and smaller CPD sessions delivered in schools.

Staff from Russell Group universities lead sessions at conferences, record webinars that can be accessed through the Advancing Access website and deliver school CPD sessions in their region. Topics covered include helping students to choose an appropriate course and university, and navigating the application and admissions system.

Russell Group universities provide governance through a project Steering Group and oversight through the Russell Group Widening Participation Association. By working collaboratively, Russell Group universities aim to boost impact of their CPD offer and avoid the additional costs associated with developing independent work programmes.

More than 20,000 users have accessed digital resources through the Advancing Access website since the platform was launched, and 2,000 teachers and advisers have registered, which enables them to track their use of the resources and to attend conferences. Those in Opportunity Areas - areas the Government has identified as facing the biggest challenges to social mobility - are twice as likely to be using the resources as teachers elsewhere.

External evaluation of the project has shown that a large majority of teachers who use the service are extremely satisfied with the quality of the support it provides.

Find out more about  
Advancing Access here:

[advancingaccess.ac.uk](http://advancingaccess.ac.uk)



Advancing Access gave us relevant, up-to-date and clearly presented training. In our two-hour session, we learnt how to advise and guide students to apply for appropriately aspirational courses, and how to maximise students' chances of gaining offers from top universities. I would highly recommend this excellent training opportunity to all sixth form teams with aspiring university students.

Secondary school teacher

# University of Birmingham Academic Enrichment Programme

The University of Birmingham's Academic Enrichment Programme (AEP) provides year 12 students from under-represented groups with sustained, targeted support to help them secure places at research-intensive universities. By addressing barriers and misconceptions about higher education, the AEP works to raise aspirations and motivate students to get the best grades possible.

Support through the AEP starts with attendance at a week-long residential summer school, and continues with study skills support, application support and access to one to one e-mentoring throughout year 13. Students also join a Facebook group to keep in touch and support each other which remains live until the end of the programme.

On completion of the programme, students that apply to the University of Birmingham successfully receive an offer which is two grades below the standard offer. They are also eligible for a bursary and scholarship.

Evaluation of the AEP has shown participants outperform their contemporaries academically, with higher average A-level results. The evaluation

approach combined a "Theory of Change" with a mixed methods longitudinal design spanning six cohorts of students. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected to track students' progress across their engagement with the programme and into higher education.

Alumni of the programme report the scheme was a big help in boosting their understanding of the process of applying to university. This suggests the programme is addressing some of the gaps in the provision of appropriate advice and guidance about applying to university for students from under-represented groups.

AEP students are also more likely than the average state or independent school pupil to apply and progress to a selective university.

When compared to independent school pupils, one cohort of AEP students had 33% greater progression to higher education and 10% greater progression to Russell Group universities.

Find more information on the University of Birmingham's widening participation initiatives here:

[birmingham.ac.uk/teachers/pupil-opportunities/index.aspx](https://birmingham.ac.uk/teachers/pupil-opportunities/index.aspx)



“

I didn't have a clue on where to start with my personal statement and my UCAS application. AEP helped me by giving me the confidence to apply for dentistry; something which I could have only dreamed of before participating in AEP. It has completely shaped my future.

Academic Enrichment Programme alumni

# University of Bristol

## Bristol Scholars

The University of Bristol introduced the Bristol Scholars programme in 2016 - an intensive programme for students from the City of Bristol that brings a new approach to widening access. The scheme looks beyond traditional methods of identifying talent and allows teachers to nominate students to receive a tailored offer from the University of Bristol of up to four grades below the standard offer. Reasons for nomination include students experiencing physical or mental ill health, speaking English as a second language, or coming from a low-income family.

Scholars who accept offers and progress to the university receive wrap-around support to ensure they achieve their potential before and during their time at Bristol. This includes tutoring sessions before their A level (or equivalent) exams, pre-sessional support, access to a dedicated Bristol Scholars adviser, study skills support, a peer mentor and a guaranteed internship. Those from low-income households receive a one-year tuition fee waiver and annual bursary of £3,750.

The number of students enrolling at Bristol from the city and surrounding areas has traditionally been very low. However, there has been a 49%

increase in local applications and an 86% increase in enrolments since the introduction of the scheme. For 2019 entry, 78 Bristol Scholars are holding firm offers. Of this cohort, 12% are young carers and 65% live in areas with low progression to university (POLAR Quintiles 1 and 2).

Bristol Scholars is one example of contextual admissions policies the university has supported over many years. In 2017/18, the university increased its grade reduction for under-represented students from across the country from a one to two grade drop compared to standard entry requirements. All UK undergraduate applications are

automatically assessed for eligibility for a contextual offer. This enhanced system has resulted in a 112% increase in the number of applicants from POLAR Quintiles 1 and 2, and a 66% increase in enrolments (from 512 in 2016/17 to 853 in 2019/20).

Find more information on the University of Bristol's widening participation initiatives here:

[bristol.ac.uk/study/outreach](https://bristol.ac.uk/study/outreach)



Bristol Scholars was a massive help to me. It really pushed me and helped me to get my place here. Just looking at the timetable, it looks like I'm going to be learning a lot of great stuff. It's been great to meet a bunch of new people and I'm excited to get started and to be taught by people so passionate about the subject.

Current Bristol Scholar

# University of Cambridge Cambridge Bursary Scheme

The University of Cambridge offers the majority of its financial support through the Cambridge Bursary Scheme, which provides over £6m per year to UK students from low-income households. Additional support is provided to eligible mature students, care leavers and estranged students. In 2017/18, 22% of UK students at Cambridge received an award through the Bursary Scheme (1,760 students in total).

The University of Cambridge recently evaluated the impact of its bursary provision and found, despite the national trend of students from low-income households achieving less well relative to their peers and being less likely to continue with their studies, Cambridge students in receipt of a bursary had the same outcomes as those not in receipt of a bursary. 97% of students who received a full bursary continued into their second year of study and 86% achieved a 'positive' graduate destination (a graduate-level job or higher-level study). This was equal to those who did not have financial support through this scheme. This shows that the Cambridge Bursary Scheme has a positive effect on outcomes for disadvantaged students.

Furthermore, students reported that they valued the bursary contribution very highly. They said that it alleviated concerns regarding their families' capacities to support their study, allowed them to focus on their studies, and contributed positively to their overall wellbeing.

Following the evaluation, the university is considering how to make its financial support offering more visible and easier to understand but is also exploring refining the criteria for eligibility and level of support to produce the best outcomes.

Find more information on the University of Cambridge's widening participation initiatives here:

[undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/find-out-more/widening-participation](https://undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/find-out-more/widening-participation)



It's really great...It makes me feel quite valued, it's Cambridge acknowledging that you're going to need extra support and it makes me feel like Cambridge really wants me to be there....You are able to focus on your study rather than thinking about how you'll make money in the summer.

Recipient of a full bursary

# Cardiff University Discovery Programme

Cardiff University's Discovery Programme works to help boost academic performance amongst young people with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC), improve social skills and encourage progression to higher education. The programme has been running since 2011. It offers students aged 14-19 fortnightly mentoring sessions that boost learning skills and enable them to find out more about studying at university.

Cardiff University hosts a dedicated Discovery Programme visit day, which allows students, their families and teachers to learn more about admissions requirements, academic courses and the specific support which is provided for students with ASC.

The university also holds a residential summer school each July, which gives students with ASC the opportunity to experience campus life in a structured and supported way. Events are delivered by undergraduate volunteers, with participants receiving personalised support.

Students receive ongoing support by phone and email from the access and participation

team at Cardiff University throughout the course of their engagement with the Discovery Programme. Young people with ASC can take part in the programme over several years, accessing the activities which suit them.

Testimonials from participants and their families suggest the programme makes a huge difference in encouraging young people with ASC to enter higher education. 80% of participants in Year 13 progressed to university over the last two years (compared with 13% of disabled students currently progressing into higher education).

Find more information on Cardiff University's widening participation initiatives here:

[cardiff.ac.uk/about/our-profile/who-we-are/university-for-all/widening-access](https://cardiff.ac.uk/about/our-profile/who-we-are/university-for-all/widening-access)



My daughter had an amazing time at the Discovery Camp. She has come home animated and hasn't stopped talking about the whole experience all evening! It has enormously built up her self-confidence and esteem. She has told me several times how proud of herself she is.

Parent of a Discovery Programme student

# Durham University

## Supported Progression

Supported Progression is a two-year programme run by Durham University which provides targeted support to sixth form students from the North East who have the potential to study at a selective university. Students attending the programme typically come from backgrounds under-represented in higher education.

The Supported Progression programme includes a day visit for the student and a parent or carer as well as residential events at Easter and in the summer. Working with an undergraduate mentor who acts as a role model and guide, students learn about the application process, university life and study, student finance, and studying abroad. Many of Durham's Supported Progression mentors are previous Supported Progression participants themselves.

Those who complete the programme are eligible for a reduced offer of two to three A-level grades or equivalent below the typical entry requirement for their chosen degree, as well as a guaranteed offer should they choose to study at Durham.

In Year 13, support continues to be offered regardless of whether the participants in Supported Progression choose to apply to Durham or not.

Since 2010, more than 2000 students have taken part in the programme, with 68% of those attending a summer school applying to the university. Participants who chose to apply to Durham have been significantly more likely to progress to the university than other applicants. Almost 60% of Supported Progression students who applied to Durham went on to enrol at the university.

Find more information on Durham University's widening participation initiatives here:

[dur.ac.uk/asr](http://dur.ac.uk/asr)



My dream has always been to teach. Although it has always been something I have wanted to do, I would never have had the confidence to pursue my passion without the encouragement of Supported Progression. It has inspired me to go out into my community and give students the support and belief the Supported Progression team gave to me.

Supported Progression summer school graduate

# University of Edinburgh

## Access Programme

The University of Edinburgh's Access Programme is a part-time course that aims to provide adult returners with the skills, confidence and qualifications to study for a degree in the university's College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Launched in 2018, the Programme creates opportunities for adult returners from diverse backgrounds and under-represented groups to study and supports them through the transition to university.

Students take a range of skills-based courses equivalent to Higher qualifications over two semesters. Early work is formative, with a strong focus on learning from feedback to ensure students receive the guidance they need to develop study skills successfully. Students who complete the course receive conditional offers from the University of Edinburgh.

Guidance is a key part of the programme and includes support with progression and practical issues, such as UCAS applications, funding and employability. Students are allocated a Personal

Tutor and meet with them several times in person as well as communicating via an online learning journal, which provides an opportunity for reflection on their learning and development.

A cultural and social engagement strand complements learning and is designed to broaden horizons, encourage full engagement with campus life, and build a sense of belonging.

The first Access cohort of 50 students began their studies in August 2018 and are nearing completion of the programme. Almost half of the enrolled students are from the most economically disadvantaged areas. All current Access Programme learners have received conditional offers for undergraduate study.

Find more information on University of Edinburgh's widening participation initiatives here:

[ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/widening-participation](https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/widening-participation)



I never thought I would ever be able to go to university, but through this programme, I am now confident I can succeed in doing so. I have gained not only the academic knowledge to move forward, but the essential practical skills needed to excel at full-time study.

Access student

# University of Exeter Centre for Social Mobility

The Centre for Social Mobility at the University of Exeter was set up in 2018 as a joint venture co-directed by the Head of Widening Participation, Nicola Sinclair and a Professor of Social Mobility in Exeter's Education department, Anna Mountford-Zimdars. The centre combines the insights from both academics and practitioners for the benefit of students, staff and partners to support social mobility through higher education.

The Centre provides context and support for developing new evidence-based ideas for practice and research, which can be applied to national policy. The Centre's members are drawn from professional service and academic staff and include Professor Lee Elliot Major who joined the Centre from his previous post at the Sutton Trust. The Centre doesn't just look at national evidence but also rigorously examines the Exeter's own widening participation initiatives. It contributed towards the university's access and participation plan, as well as its strategies for education, research, impact, and inclusivity. A research tool created at the Centre which helps assess the impact of widening

participation activities has been adopted by the Office for Students to help monitor access and participation plans at universities across England.

The Centre aims to become a regional, national and international hub of research and evidence-based practice, which brings perceptions and knowledge together to make a difference to social mobility in the UK. It is also developing international partnerships and collaborative research projects with the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the University of Newcastle, Australia and the University of Michigan, USA.

Find more information on University of Exeter's widening participation initiatives here:

[exeter.ac.uk/undergraduate/  
applications/  
wideningparticipation](https://exeter.ac.uk/undergraduate/applications/wideningparticipation)



Evidence and practice in education-based social mobility are enhanced by combining the skills of a range of people. How else are we going to address the complex issues underlying the significant gaps we witness within higher education? We have co-created the structure of our Centre to enable collaboration among all of our members who are driven by an overarching mission to improve outcomes for marginalized and under-represented people through the transformative power of education.

Anna Mountford-Zimdars  
and Nicola Sinclair,  
Centre Directors

# University of Glasgow Top-Up Programme

The University of Glasgow's Top-Up Programme works with 2,100 pupils in over 90 Scottish schools annually to promote aspiration for higher education study in under-represented groups, prepare applicants for the transition to university and provide an alternative access route through admissions progression agreements. It has worked with over 20,000 students since its inception.

Pupils take part in 12 sessions run in schools and at the University of Glasgow that are designed to provide a mini higher education experience. 100 postgraduate tutors facilitate sessions, introducing pupils to the learning skills needed for success in HE. Independent learning undertaken in school is put into practice during on-campus sessions, where pupils become familiar with university learning methods and environments.

Successful pupils receive graded student profiles, which are forwarded to every Scottish university to which a pupil applies for use in contextualised admissions offer-making. In 2017/18, 282 participants progressed to Glasgow, and at least 1,000 more went on to other universities.

Evaluation of the programme over the last 15 years has shown Top-Up is helping close the gap in progression rates between widening participation pupils and students from more affluent backgrounds across Scotland. Top-Up pupils have a higher rate of progression than is typical for their schools and perform as well as pupils from higher progression schools in terms of exam performance, year 1 completion and degree completion.

Find more information on the University of Glasgow's widening participation initiatives here:

[gla.ac.uk/study/wideningparticipation](https://gla.ac.uk/study/wideningparticipation)



This has been the best experience I could have asked for while here in Glasgow. I have greatly enjoyed it and it was wonderful seeing the pupils get their A's and B's and hopefully head off to university. It will be a hard programme to leave."

Postgraduate Top-Up tutor

# Imperial College London Wohl Reach Out Lab

A dedicated science outreach lab has allowed academics and students at Imperial College London to deliver innovative Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematic (STEM) programmes to nearly 40,000 pupils from 870 London state primary and secondary schools since 2009.

Access to high-quality research facilities gives pupils from under-represented groups the opportunity to complete practical experiments in areas of science which are new to them, increasing awareness of different fields of study and raising aspirations.

The Wohl Reach Out Lab (WROL) allows young people to explore fields outside of school curriculums, and work with undergraduate mentors to increase their understanding of issues such as student finance and tuition fees which can discourage pupils from under-represented groups from applying to university. Over the past decade, experts from Imperial College

have created, refined and evolved a portfolio of STEM programmes delivered in the WROL which target pupils from year one onwards.

Evaluation of the WROL has shown programme participants are more likely to progress to Imperial College or go on to study a STEM subject at a Russell Group university than their contemporaries.

Research also suggests engagement with practical scientists in the WROL benefits teachers, with those leading groups reporting increased confidence in the classroom after working with Imperial College experts.

Find more information on Imperial College London's widening participation initiatives here:

[imperial.ac.uk/be-inspired/student-recruitment-and-outreach](https://imperial.ac.uk/be-inspired/student-recruitment-and-outreach)



The Wohl Reach Out Lab has given [one of my students] the opportunity to learn about science outside of the curriculum and has motivated him to begin his own after school club where he wants to build rockets.

Secondary STEM teacher

# King's College London

## Parent Power

Recognising the importance of parental engagement in educational success, King's College London's "Parent Power" programme uses community organising techniques to help parents of children from groups under-represented in higher education become university access experts. The group was formed in partnership with campaigning organisation Citizens UK.

Since 2017, the scheme has recruited 35 Parent Power leaders who currently work with more than 200 parents across London to aid local students in their journey to higher education and improve their chances of attending highly selective universities.

Parent Power groups meet once every six weeks and receive training on tutoring, student finance, accessing medical courses, university access more broadly, community organising and the media. Word-of-mouth endorsement from participants has helped drive increased engagement and recruitment of new parent leaders in key demographic groups.

Working with leading universities, Parent Power groups have helped children from under-represented backgrounds attend

open days and access bursary support for residential summer schools. They have also met with Council officials and MPs to call for better local education provision.

Feedback shows that 100% of parents who have taken part in Parent Power now feel more confident about their child accessing university.

The project has also enabled King's to better understand the concerns of local families through events, meetings and one-to-one discussions with parents and carers across Lambeth and Southwark. In 2019, Parent Power were the winners of The Guardian University Social and Community Impact award. In January 2020, King's worked with the Greater Manchester Uni Connect partnership and Opportunity Area to support their launch of Parent Power in Oldham,

and in London launched Empoderando Padres, a Spanish-speaking version of Parent Power to engage parents from the large Latinx communities in local boroughs.

Find more information on King College London's widening participation initiatives here:

[kcl.ac.uk/study/widening-participation/wp](https://kcl.ac.uk/study/widening-participation/wp)



The Parent Power programme...has shown me that we really do have power. We have power to open doors which otherwise seem closed. Through building a community of parents we have the power that we otherwise wouldn't have.

Parent Power leader

# University of Leeds

## Access to Leeds and Plus Programme

The University of Leeds offers end-to-end support for students from under-represented groups in the form of Access to Leeds and the Plus Programme.

Access to Leeds applicants complete a pre-entry module consisting of online study skills tutorials and a subject assignment, with accompanying support from a university academic. Eligibility criteria take account of financial, educational, domestic and socio-economic factors and 6,795 students have secured places on undergraduate courses through the scheme since 2003. It is a national scheme open to all UK applicants, regardless of their geographical location or the school they attend.

Access to Leeds has helped the University of Leeds increase the number of students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds by 21% since 2014. Participants are also eligible for assistance through the award-winning Plus Programme, which provides transitional and ongoing support to boost retention, student success and graduate outcomes.

In 2018/19, 880 students registered at the university through Access to Leeds whilst the Plus Programme supported 3,000 widening participation students across all levels of their degrees. 81% of 2018 Plus Programme graduates achieved a 2:1 or first-class degree, compared with 66% of students from a deprived background at all English universities, and 76% of all deprived students at the University of Leeds. The non-continuation rate for Plus Programme students from a low participation neighbourhood (LPNs) was 5%, compared with 12% for all students at the university from an LPN.

Find more information on the University of Leeds' widening participation initiatives here:

[leeds.ac.uk/info/130547/student\\_education/367/widening\\_participation](https://leeds.ac.uk/info/130547/student_education/367/widening_participation)



Access to Leeds is a great scheme for students who may have been held back from achieving their full academic potential by personal circumstances... .I feel so grateful for the scheme as, since starting at university, I have attained a grade average of a 1st every year, even though my A-level grades would not usually have allowed me to study at a university like Leeds. I have gained a lot of confidence both personally and academically and I have learned how to believe in myself.

Access to Leeds student

# University of Liverpool

## Fast Trackers

The University of Liverpool's Fast Trackers programme, which began in 2009, is a one-year mentoring programme designed to help Year 11 students from a Somali and Yemeni background to get the most out of their final school year and maximise their results at GCSE level.

The programme is delivered in partnership with Liverpool City Council's Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS), whose experience of drawing on local knowledge to raise the educational attainment of ethnic minority pupils has helped ensure support is targeted effectively and secured "buy in" from families and community leaders.

The students are selected from Liverpool schools and attend fortnightly mentoring sessions organised by the university's Widening Participation and Outreach team. These sessions involve the young people working closely with current undergraduate mentors, who support them with coursework, homework and study skills. A number of mentors were previously participants in the programme and are now

acting as positive role models, helping embed the project further within the community.

Throughout the year the programme also includes presentations from the university's Widening Participation and Outreach team and the mentors on different aspects of higher education such as time management and finances. In the past, prominent members of the local black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) community have given talks to the young people about their own experiences of education and how these led to their current careers.

As cohorts are typically no more than 25 students there is a high degree of flexibility in what is offered. Sessions are tailored to best meet the needs of students.

Find more information on the University of Liverpool's widening participation initiatives here:

[liverpool.ac.uk/widening-participation](http://liverpool.ac.uk/widening-participation)



Fast Trackers supports a cohort of Year 11 pupils of Somali and Yemeni heritage from across a number of secondary schools. Pupils are selected based on their academic potential and their long-term goal of attending University. The programme has a real sense of collaboration; schools, EMTAS, University staff and family. Equally, it impacts on expectation within community.

Gill Rowlands - Ethnic Minority Travellers Achievement Service Manager

# London School of Economics

## Contextual Admissions Policy

Five years ago, the admissions team at LSE introduced a “flagging system” that highlights widening participation indicators such as data on participation rates of young people in higher education by local areas. Academic selectors then use these indicators to ensure the potential of applicants is assessed within a wider educational and social context.

Admissions staff have been empowered to use this enhanced contextual information to make offers to widening participation candidates who might be less competitive than the cohort overall. Flags are also considered when making confirmation decisions for applicants who missed offer conditions narrowly.

Any decision not to offer to a candidate with widening participation flags must be justified to admissions managers.

Technical changes to application forms have ensured contextual information is presented clearly and the quality of these data is underwritten by enhanced auditing. Support from senior management was fundamental to

securing the resources required to make changes to existing admissions processes a success.

Changes to admissions processes led to immediate and sustained improvements in LSE’s performance against every metric used commonly to measure success in widening access to higher education. Applicants from the most under-represented backgrounds are now around 50% more likely than those from the most highly represented backgrounds to receive an offer.

LSE are currently looking at ways to develop this model further in order to support more disadvantaged students attending their school.

Find more information  
on the London School  
of Economics’ widening  
participation initiatives here:  
[lse.ac.uk/wideningparticipation](https://lse.ac.uk/wideningparticipation)



LSE has a longstanding commitment to fair access and widening participation – recruiting students with the highest academic and intellectual potential, regardless of their background. We are delighted that concerted effort and initiatives have helped turn more applications from talented but under-represented students into offers. We will continue to monitor and build on this work, seeking out the most effective ways we can attract exceptional students from all parts of society.

Minouche Shafik, Director of LSE

# University of Manchester School Governor Programme

The University of Manchester is helping support schools in the most disadvantaged areas through a programme which has placed more than 1,000 staff and alumni as school governors.

Volunteer school governors play a crucial role in raising educational standards. The School Governor Initiative was established in 2011 to address the challenge local schools were facing in recruiting appropriately qualified individuals to governing boards. The university works with two educational charities, Governors for Schools and Inspiring Governance, to recruit and place volunteers in schools and colleges with the greatest need and expanding the initiative to alumni has enabled this to happen on a national basis.

Currently, staff and alumni governors give 12,000 days of support to schools each year, impacting on approximately 450,000 learners nationally. Locally, staff are based in 158 schools across Greater Manchester. Staff receive face-to-face and online support through a governor network, which holds regular network meetings

and an annual conference providing crucial professional development opportunities.

Of the schools where staff are governors, 92% of those with a current Ofsted inspection (142 schools in total) were rated good or outstanding in 2019. In just under half of the schools where staff and alumni govern, a third of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The scheme has also helped improve relationships between the University of Manchester and the schools themselves. The links created with senior leaders in schools support promotion of widening access activities and events, leading to an improvement in attendance and take up of widening participation programmes.

The programme has been recognised nationally and internationally as an exemplar of public service and social impact. It has won a National

and International Green Gown Award, a Times Higher Education Outstanding Contribution to the Community Award, a Business in the Community Big Tick Award, the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service and a Spirit of Manchester Award.

Find more information on the University of Manchester's widening participation initiatives here:

[manchester.ac.uk/discover/  
social-responsibility/  
widening-participation](https://manchester.ac.uk/discover/social-responsibility/widening-participation)



Both of the colleagues that are working with us have an academic perspective which is slightly different from ours.... that perspective of knowing education but not being in our particular part of it helps to keep our minds a bit more open.

Executive Head of School Governor Initiative partner school

## Newcastle University

### The PARTNERS Programme supported entry route

The PARTNERS supported entry route at Newcastle University, launched in 1999, is open to all eligible students resident in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The university receives over 2,000 applications each year for the Programme, and students entering through this route currently account for over 60% of the total intake of students from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds.

Applicants applying to the university through PARTNERS receive a reduced offer of up to three grades below the standard entry requirements to any undergraduate degree programme. Participants have the opportunity to attend an Academic Summer School which gives them a unique opportunity to work on campus with academic staff to develop personal and subject specific skills related to their chosen degree programme. Students complete a formative assignment and receive personal feedback on this enabling them (and academics) to identify areas of strength, and – crucially – areas where they may require further support on entry to support their success at university.

Students receive ongoing support once they enter the university. Longitudinal evidence collected from the start of the Programme shows that non-continuation rates for PARTNERS students (6.5%) are significantly lower than for the students from similar backgrounds at the university overall (9.8%). In 2018, 82% of PARTNERS graduates obtained a first class or 2:1 degree, compared to 79% of other students from similar backgrounds.

Find more information on the University of Newcastle's widening participation initiatives here:

[ncl.ac.uk/who-we-are/partnerships/schools](https://ncl.ac.uk/who-we-are/partnerships/schools)



I came to Newcastle thinking that... I didn't deserve to be here. One, because of my background, and two, because of the fact that I am surrounded by all these clever people. But I was given the opportunity, and took it ... to be on the same playing field... I am now motivated to achieve even higher things than I did when I first walked through the doors of the medical school.

PARTNERS student

# University of Nottingham

## Care Leaver Provision

The University of Nottingham provides wrap-around support for care leavers and care experienced students to attempt to mitigate the multiple challenges they face in progressing to university and succeeding in their studies and beyond.

The university provides extensive pre-entry support to address barriers that prevent the students accessing higher education. Care leavers and care experienced students are given access to specific campus visit days and the university runs a care professionals' day to ensure those supporting looked-after children understand how they can help them into higher education.

They receive contextual offers, and are offered pre-entry consultations with widening participation teams, academics or financial services representatives. They are able to remain in university accommodation all year round and payment deadlines are delayed until student finance is in place. Practical support is available to help them move into halls of residence and complete a first shopping trip.

Once at the university, care leavers and care experienced students are eligible for bursary assistance of up to £3,000 annually and are allocated a mentor who offers ongoing support throughout the year. Widening participation staff are in regular contact with students to ensure they are receiving all the financial support to which they are entitled.

As a result of these measures, the number of care leavers and care experienced students at Nottingham greatly increased in 2017/18 and these students are now more likely to continue their studies than the average UK student.

The University of Nottingham is also a pilot institution in the development of the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) Quality Mark framework

to improve support for care leavers and care experienced people in colleges and universities across the country.

Find more information on the University of Nottingham's widening participation initiatives here:

[nottingham.ac.uk/externalrelations/student-recruitment/widening-participation-and-outreach.aspx](https://nottingham.ac.uk/externalrelations/student-recruitment/widening-participation-and-outreach.aspx)



With regards to the university so many people have been of use and I've never felt like I've got to go it alone - I'm now proud to say I receive help and I put it to good use, such as mentoring care leavers myself and convincing them to take and ask for all the help they can while they can.

Care experienced student

# University of Oxford UNIQ Residential Programme

UNIQ is a free programme which gives 17 and 18-year-old students an opportunity to study at the University of Oxford, meet Oxford tutors, sample their chosen course, stay in a college and receive support in making a competitive application.

It is designed to break down the barriers that students from disadvantaged backgrounds report can discourage them from applying to the university: a lack of confidence or encouragement, absence of role models, outdated perceptions of the university, and myths around the admissions process.

UNIQ participants gain insight into student life at Oxford by completing one of 36 different residential academic courses delivered by departments and faculties from across the university. They also receive targeted support and advice to enable them to make informed decisions about higher education. In 2020, 1,350 widening participation students will have the opportunity to experience the University of Oxford through UNIQ.

Independent evaluation of UNIQ shows the programme has a significant beneficial impact on the satisfaction and higher education outcomes of young people who participate in the scheme. Between 2010 and 2015, 25% (1,100) of the 4,423 UNIQ participants progressed to the University of Oxford, and this figure increased to 34% in 2016.

The programme has also helped increase progression of students from under-represented groups to other universities, with 58% (2,546) of those attending a UNIQ summer school between 2010 and 2015 going on to study at a highly selective institution. Since the scheme was launched, a total of 83% of students who participated in a UNIQ summer school went on to secure a place at a highly selective university.

Find more information on the University of Oxford's widening participation initiatives here:

[ox.ac.uk/about/increasing-access/widening-access-and-participation](https://ox.ac.uk/about/increasing-access/widening-access-and-participation)



UNIQ was glorious. I fell in love with Kafka on the spot as I sat in the sun on St John's College garden reading his work for the first time. At UNIQ I also had my first tutorial. At first it was utterly terrifying to present my thoughts on a poem I'd read the day before to an Oxford academic. But the tutor listened and took my ideas seriously. A far cry from any classroom setting I'd experienced.

The phrase "it changed my life" is clichéd, but UNIQ genuinely did. All because the tutors and student helpers convinced me I'd be wanted in a place like Oxford

Academic Enrichment Programme alumni

# Queen Mary University of London

## School Partnerships

**Queen Mary University of London is involved in several sustained and innovative partnerships with state schools in East London, helping to improve standards of education and inspiring young people to fulfil their potential.**

The university co-sponsors the Drapers' Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) in the London Borough of Havering and supports the MAT's specialisms in mathematics and science through close collaboration with academic departments to enrich the curriculum and support improvements in pupil attainment. In addition to the academic curriculum, Queen Mary delivers a comprehensive progression curriculum from Year 7 through to Year 13, designed to help students on the path to higher education. Staff from Queen Mary have worked closely with the school to develop a new, exciting curriculum designed to attract students into science disciplines.

Progression to higher education is supported through tutoring, workshops and seminars with leading academics and student ambassadors, one-to-one support in academic writing and a mentoring scheme. Students have the

opportunity to participate in long-term access schemes, including the 'Bridge the Gap' programme which provides targeted assistance for students considering studying medicine and dentistry. Working in partnership with local NHS providers, Queen Mary offers tailored support through the application process for medicine, online mentoring with current medical undergraduates, interactive sessions in medical simulation laboratories and extended work experience placements in local hospitals.

Senior members of Queen Mary staff sit on the governing body and trust board as part of a broad, long-term programme of academic and governance support being provided by the university and its partners.

Queen Mary is also a partner in the University Schools Trust along with King's College London,

the Institute of Education (at University College London) and the University of Warwick. St Paul's Way Trust School has noticeably improved its GCSE results in recent years, and currently holds an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating. The latest Ofsted report references the positive impact the universities have in extending the experiences of students within and beyond the school day.

**Find more information on Queen Mary University of London's widening participation initiatives here:**

[qmul.ac.uk/outreach](https://qmul.ac.uk/outreach)



**Our partnership with Queen Mary has been most effective in supporting students' progression to Higher Education. The sustained programme of activity has engaged students of all year groups in a range of in-school activities, visits to the Queen Mary campus, individual and tailored support from staff on results day, and provided on-going UCAS support for our post-16 students. More recently, they have provided the opportunity to attend a lecture at QMUL delivered by Michael Foale, an astronaut, about his career in space exploration which was of great interest to our students.**

Lee Bryant, Head of Sixth Form

# Queen's University Belfast Junior Academy Sports Programme

The Junior Academy Sports Programme inspires and supports white working-class boys and other boys from under-represented groups by using sport to foster early engagement with Queen's University Belfast.

A total of 110 in year 8 boys are involved with the programme each year. Participants are selected from secondary schools across Northern Ireland, and work with the university over a three-year period.

In year 8, participants are introduced to the university environment, the state-of-the-art Queen's Sport facilities, lecture theatres and teaching spaces and the world-class McClay Library. Visits to the campus are structured around team challenges facilitated by student ambassadors.

In year 9, pupils engage more closely with academic subjects linked with sport, and participate in tailored workshops including nutrition, sports psychology and management.

In year 10, participants have the opportunity to complete a Level 1 Sports Leadership Award, accredited through Sports Leaders UK. Participants have reported that gaining this practical qualification gives them a sense of achievement and motivation and sets strong foundations for future development.

Find more information on Queen's University Belfast's widening participation initiatives here:

[qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/wpu](http://qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/wpu)



I am a graduate from the Queen's Academy Sports Programme. My school chose me alongside a few other pupils to take part. I found the programme to be well organised and I particularly enjoyed playing the sports. If I was to give advice to other Junior Academy Sports programme participants it would be to stick at it and have fun, after all you get a qualification at the end. My aspirations for the future are to become a vet or an environmental engineer and to play football for Newcastle 3rds. I feel the sports academy has made me more confident in being able to take care of large groups and plan ahead.

Former participant and year 11 student

# University of Sheffield

## Race Equality Action Plan

The University of Sheffield has worked with students and staff to introduce a new institution-wide Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan. It aims to close the student attainment gap, address the under-representation and progression of BAME students and create a diverse and inclusive university culture. The plan was developed following a detailed evidence review and extensive consultation with students and staff. It was launched in March 2019 by the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the university.

Specific actions being taken to help boost the number of BAME students at the University of Sheffield include giving staff involved in interviewing and admissions decisions implicit bias training, as well as appointing dedicated BAME staff to work nationally to encourage BAME pupils to apply. The university is also completing a comprehensive review of open days and supporting materials to assess whether they provide an authentic representation of diversity.

Other objectives include reducing the attainment gap between BAME and white students to zero, with a root and branch assessment of learning and teaching practices underway to help develop

an inclusive curriculum. To support graduates and their progression, the university is identifying work experience and internship opportunities that could be ring-fenced for BAME students, and is working to enhance mentoring support for students from under-represented groups.

The implementation of the plan is overseen by a Race Equality Steering Group, chaired by a member of the University Executive Board. This places race equality firmly within university governance structures and ensures it has the high level of scrutiny necessary to keep this as a key priority for the university. Crucially, members of the group represent staff and students who

have the lived experience to continue to inform this work going forward.

Find more information on the University of Sheffield's widening participation initiatives here:

[sheffield.ac.uk/outreach](https://sheffield.ac.uk/outreach)



Our Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan is the result of partnership work between staff and students and aspires to improve the representation, progression and success of BAME students and staff. As our strategy sets out, it is vital that we take a holistic approach to race equality, and the ongoing commitment of our entire university community is essential as we work together to create a university community which is truly diverse and inclusive. We know that the issues around differential student attainment, and BAME staff and student representation and progression at all levels, are well known across the sector and are reflected at our university, and we are committed to making progress in this vitally important area.

Professor Gill Valentine, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor

# University of Southampton

## BM6

The University of Southampton's BM6 programme provides students from socially and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds with an alternative entry route to a degree in medicine through a bespoke contextual admissions process.

Students accepted through BM6 complete an extra year of study on a specially designed "year zero" course before progressing to the first year of the standard medicine course. Participants receive extensive tutorial and pastoral support throughout the year zero curriculum and complete regular observational placements in primary and secondary care settings.

BM6 students receive targeted support throughout the course, including life skills workshops delivered prior to completing clinical attachments that are designed to boost progression by helping develop confidence and a sense of belonging. Evaluation of the BM6 programme has also informed the development of a mentoring scheme, a personal tutor service and bursary payments.

32 students per year are admitted through the BM6 route and the medical faculty works with the university outreach team to identify and engage potential applicants. The university provides students who have the potential to benefit from BM6 with the opportunity to attend a three-day residential event and access medical work experience opportunities to raise awareness of medicine as a career choice.

322 BM6 graduates are currently practicing medicine in a range of specialisms.

Find more information on the University of Southampton's widening participation initiatives here:

[southampton.ac.uk/schools-colleges.page](https://southampton.ac.uk/schools-colleges.page)



The BM6 programme afforded me the opportunity to study medicine when other universities wouldn't. Southampton could see my potential and then took the time to nurture it. Lots of students struggle with the transition from school to university. Year Zero helped equip me with the skills needed to successfully complete my medical degree. I felt staff were committed to my personal and professional development.

BM6 graduate

# University College London

## Discover UCL Summer School for D/deaf and hard of hearing students

The Discover UCL Summer School aims to equip D/deaf and hard of hearing students for university life. The programme includes disability support sessions, practical information, advice and guidance (on personal statement writing and student funding, for example) as well as object-based learning sessions using UCL's collections and PhD student talks.

In addition to this, D/deaf role models along with current and former UCL D/deaf students give talks to convey career choices and barriers. Their personal stories help students plan for university and careers.

The programme creates unique opportunities for the students attending and develops the UCL community. It is delivered as a partnership between the UCL Access and Widening Participation Office and the UCL Deafness, Cognition and Language Research Centre, with each team providing valuable expertise.

Of students participating in the programme over 2014-2017, 27% went on to higher education. This compares favourably to national figures on progression rates for students with a hearing impairment.

Figures obtained under FOI show that in 2015/16, 20% of students with a hearing impairment who undertook A-levels or equivalent qualifications in state schools progressed to higher education.

Find more information on University College London's widening participation initiatives here:

[ucl.ac.uk/wp](http://ucl.ac.uk/wp)



The Discover UCL Summer School was one of the most influential and beneficial times of my life. I developed myself academically, met friends for life and most importantly learnt that even though I am deaf, university is a very real goal.

Former Discover Summer School participant

# University of Warwick

## 2+2 Programme

The University of Warwick's 2+2 programme helps adult learners with few or no traditional qualifications to access higher education and transform their career prospects.

Learners spend two years re-engaging with formal learning at a local further education college before transferring to the university for two years of honours level courses. Around 200 students are currently enrolled in the programme, and 2+2 has helped 2,000 adult learners graduate with a BA (Hons) degree in Social Studies or Health and Social Policy.

Applicants to the programme take an entrance exam and are interviewed at a local college, giving tutors involved in assessing candidates the opportunity to evaluate potential without reference to formal qualifications.

University academics work closely with college-based tutors to ensure students are fully prepared for the shift to higher education in year three of their course.

Transition activities are held at the university throughout years one and two, which focus on academic skills, IT and career planning. Learners are encouraged to attend lectures and workshops at the university and make full use of its facilities from the beginning of their studies. Once at the university, learners can choose from a range of modules including in Business, Economics, Lifelong Learning, Philosophy, Politics and International Studies, and Sociology.

Almost every learner in the 2+2 programme is the first in their family to attend university. Most students graduate from the Centre for Lifelong Learning with first class or upper-second class honours with many going on to postgraduate study, including at doctoral level.

Find more information on the University of Warwick's widening participation initiatives here:

[warwick.ac.uk/study/outreach](http://warwick.ac.uk/study/outreach)



I started my degree at the age of 34 with four children between the ages of 2 and 16 years. I had always wanted to attend university but believed that due to a lack of GCSEs and A-levels it would never be possible. When I got the opportunity to undertake a degree at the University of Warwick I was overjoyed. During the four years of my degree I feel that I have progressed not just academically, but also in terms of my self-belief and confidence. Another positive has been the effect it has had on my family. My 18-year-old daughter had never spoken about attending university up until I started studying my degree. However, [she started university] in September 2019.

Former 2+2 student

# University of York Shine Programme

The University of York's Shine programme works with young people from the final year of primary school right through to year 11, providing a range of activities to inspire and motivate participants to succeed at school and to consider applying to university. It supports 2,500 pupils each year from across Yorkshire, the Humber and the North East. The programme is run in partnership with 21 participating secondary schools.

Partner schools identify 30 year 7 pupils to take part, all of whom meet the eligibility criteria and are the 'most able, but least likely' to consider higher education. The same pupils continue to receive support through Shine as their education progresses, visiting the university each year and taking part in workshops in school.

In year 10, pupils have the opportunity to attend a three-day residential course at the University of York and in year 11 they complete the programme by attending a large progression conference on campus.

Participants are encouraged to continue working with one of the University of York's post-16 outreach programmes throughout their time at sixth form or college. The Shine programme also works with many feeder primary schools; year 6 pupils are invited on a campus visit in the summer term.

In 2017/18, 89% of pupils said that as a result of taking part in Shine, they were more likely to apply to higher education. York will use the Higher Education Access Tracker to monitor progression to higher education for Shine participants.

Find more information on the University of York's widening participation initiatives here:  
[york.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges](http://york.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges)



Before Shine, I knew almost nothing about university. The programme has been very enlightening, especially for someone who will be the first in their family to attend university. It taught me a lot about areas in life I wouldn't have ever considered exploring.

Shine participant

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Access and participation plans** – These plans set out how higher education providers in England will improve equality of opportunity for disadvantaged and under-represented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. The plans look forward over five years and are regularly monitored by the Office for Students.

**Attainment** – Grades achieved at school and university.

**Care experienced** – Anyone who has experienced the care system at any point in their lives.

**Care leaver** – A young person who has been in the care of, or has been given accommodation by, their local authority (LA) for a period of at least 13 weeks before the age of 16.

**Contextual admissions** – Admissions processes which take into context the social and/or educational background of the applicant.

**Continuation** – Refers to students staying in higher education after their first year of study.

**D/deaf** – This term is used to differentiate between deaf (which refers to individuals who have a hearing loss) and Deaf (which refers to deaf individuals who use sign language and identify as being part of a cultural and linguistic minority group, the Deaf community).

**Disadvantaged** – Applicants, students and graduates who have experienced barriers to accessing higher education. These can include different circumstances, such as family income, geographical location, or different characteristics and identities such as ethnic background or whether the individual is care experienced.

**Foundation year** – An alternative route into higher education through an additional year of study prior to starting a degree course which supports students to achieve the academic requirements needed.

**Latinx** – Relating to a person of Latin American origin or descent.

**Mature students** – Students entering higher education over the age of 21.

**Office for Students** – The English regulator for higher education providers.

**POLAR** – This dataset measures the participation of students in higher education by local area. These areas are classified into five groups or quintiles, ranging from Quintile 1 (the least represented) to Quintile 5 (most represented) in higher education. POLAR is an area-based measure rather than a measure of individual disadvantage.

**Progression** – Refers to what happens to students once they graduate (i.e. if they continue into further study or skilled employment).

**Success** – This generally refers to students continuing and completing their degree, attaining well and progressing into further study or highly skilled graduate employment. However, individual students and universities will have their own measures of success (as this is a highly complex concept to define).

**Under-represented** – Refers to students with identities or characteristics which are not well-represented in the higher education system or in parts of the system, such as within selective universities.

**Widening participation** – Refers to efforts to increase the rate of access to higher education for those who are currently not well represented in the sector.

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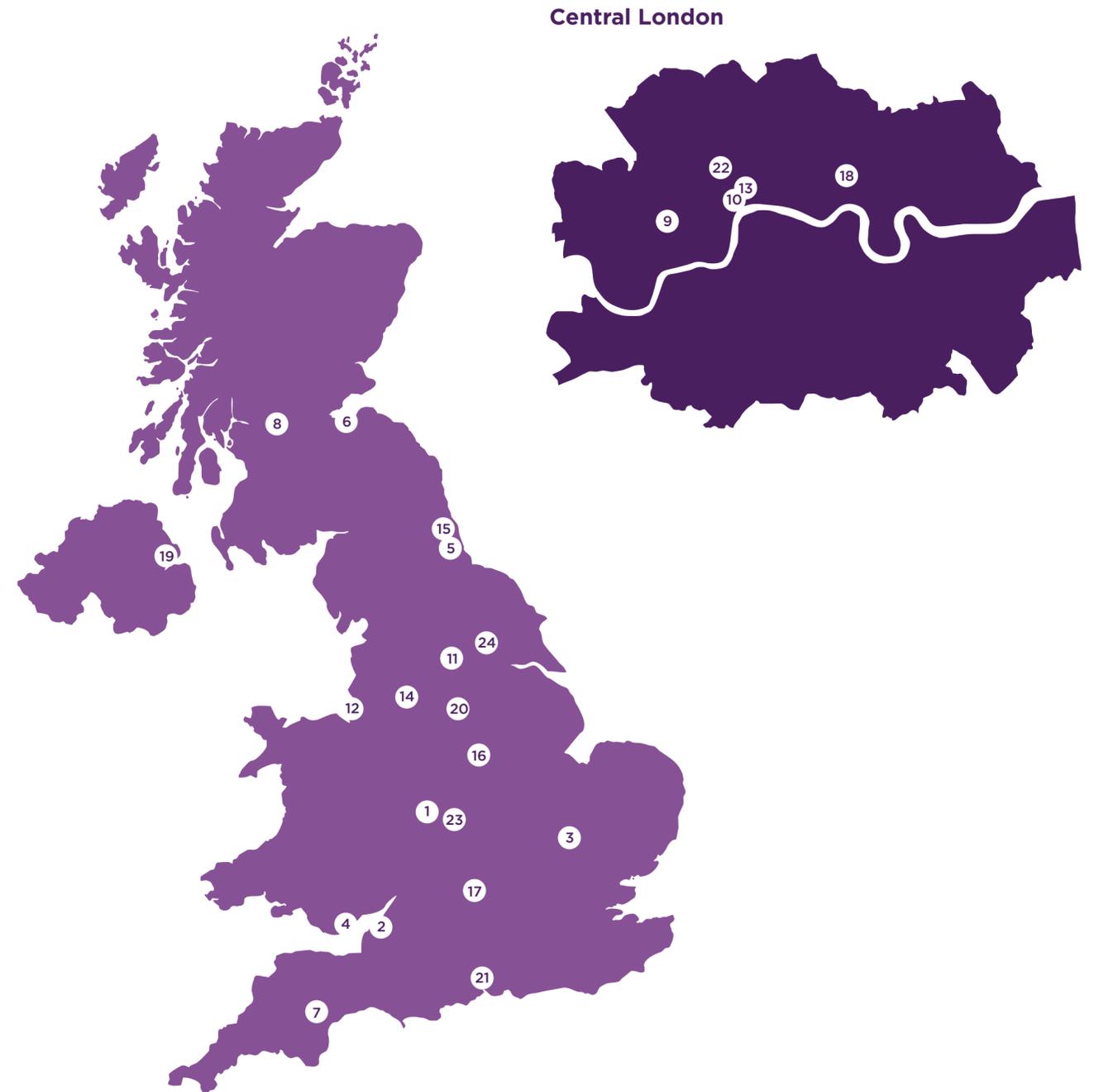
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