

Access and Participation Evaluation



UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

Exploring the impact of two Access Programmes
on student knowledge, confidence, and decision-
making

Summary Report

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September 2025



Access and Participation Plan 2024-28

The University's Access and Participation Plan (APP) outlines strategic commitments to reducing barriers, improving equality of opportunity, and ensuring that all students, regardless of background, can access, succeed in, and progress beyond Higher Education (HE). It identifies nine key risks faced by student groups at Bath (Figure 1) and sets out four intervention strategies to address them. Ten research projects, including this one, support the evaluation of these interventions and associated risks.

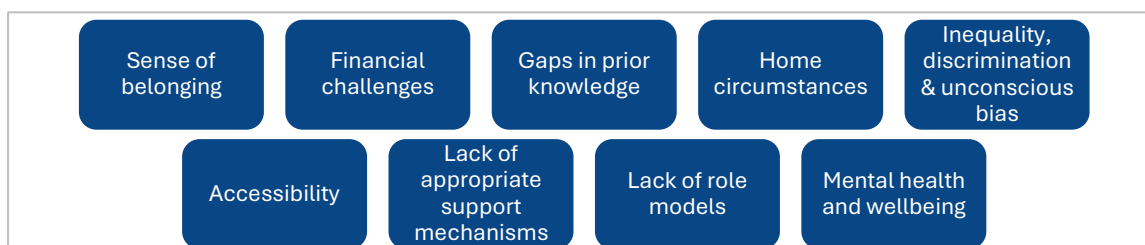


Figure 1: University of Bath's key risks to equality of opportunity across the student lifecycle.

The main associated risks this evaluation is designed to address are:

- Sense of belonging
- Gaps in prior knowledge
- Home circumstances
- Lack of appropriate support mechanisms
- Lack of role models

Project Background

Discover Bath (Discover) is a short-term engagement intervention for Year 12 students, providing a 3-day residential experience. Pathway to Bath (Pathway) is a six-to-eight-month multi-intervention for Year 12 students, comprising of an online academic enrichment programme, information, advice and guidance (IAG) and a residential experience. Both programmes offer a guaranteed Undergraduate admissions offer scheme upon completion, if criteria is met. Both programmes aim to increase HE knowledge and confidence, supporting applications to the University of Bath.

The evaluation explored the effectiveness of Discover and Pathway. Each was assessed independently in relation to supporting students' HE knowledge, HE expectations, academic self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and applications to Undergraduate programmes at Bath.

A pre-post survey design, using the Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) Access and Success Questionnaire, was implemented, alongside admission and participant engagement analysis. In total 1,079 students participated across the two programmes, with 1,436 surveys responses collated.

Key findings

- Both programmes improved students' HE knowledge, academic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging.
- Minimal change in HE expectations was found, potentially reflecting a high baseline of motivation found in those attending.
- Academic content combined with guidance and experiential learning emerged as a strong driver of HE application behaviour.
- Application rates to the University of Bath were significantly higher among programme participants compared with similar non-participants (those who applied for the programme but did not participate). Discover attendees applied at higher rates overall

(61%) but Pathway project completers achieve the highest application rate (75%), suggesting depth of engagement is as important as programme length.

Considerations

- Anonymous survey responses could not be matched pre- and post- programme, limiting causal attribution. In addition, some constructs were not implemented fully, inhibiting programme comparability.
- Self-selection bias and concurrent participation in widening access activities could not be controlled for and may have influenced results.

Conclusion

The evaluation suggests that Discover and Pathway programmes boost students' readiness and confidence in HE, with notable impact from structured academic elements, task-based learning, and sustained engagement. High levels of applications to Bath reflect this influence, though limitations in survey design and data collection mean findings should be interpreted with caution. With continued rigorous evaluation, the University can build on the strengths of the current approach to widen access and improve outcomes for under-represented student groups.

Stakeholder Reflections

Dr Andrew Ross, Head of Access, Recruitment and Outreach said:

It's encouraging to see the positive impact these outreach interventions are having in addressing barriers to equality of opportunity for under-represented students. The findings, particularly those showing an increase in students' sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy, are reassuring and show the value of both the programme design and the chosen modes of delivery. Future evaluations will build on these insights, allowing us to explore individual impact in more depth and to identify the specific elements that influence decision-making at a personal level.

In response to this report, the Widening Access, Outreach and Recruitment teams identified several actions that will inform and shape the broader portfolio:

- *Explore opportunities to further integrate structured academic activities and task-based learning into programme design, where appropriate.*
- *Retain residential components in existing programmes and assess where similar experiences could be embedded in others.*
- *Evaluate the impact of guaranteed offers, particularly how they affect student decision-making.*
- *Strengthen evaluation design by introducing consistent outcome measures, enabling clearer comparisons between programmes and more robust subgroup analysis. We'll also explore how qualitative methods can be used to better understand student experiences and uncover the underlying drivers of behavioural and attitudinal change.*

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