



# Access and Participation: Changes ahead

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## WARM UP

# Introduce yourself

You've got 2 minutes to say hello to everyone on your table. You're going to working them soon.

You could give your name, your role/organisation  
and one reason why you're engaged in Court

**2:00**

The most extensive programme of education reform in a generation spanning early years through to higher education and the skills landscape.

Since October 2025:



White papers, reviews  
and consultations



**central shifts in school education:**  
narrow → broad curriculum  
sidelining → including disadvantaged  
children  
Disengagement → Active family and  
community participation in education



priority sectors identified by  
Skills England for immediate  
action

## National Targets

- ✓ All children leaving school with average grade 5+
- ✓ Halving the disadvantage gap = a full grade improvement per GCSE
- ✓ 6,500 more expert teachers in secondary, special and FE
- ✓ Attendance rate above 94% = 20 million more school days/year
- ✓ 75% of five-year-olds reaching good level of EY development

## Curriculum Reform

Broadened National Curriculum with oracy, creativity, critical thinking. New enrichment entitlement. Progress 8 reform to reward breadth.

## SEND Reform

Tiered support model replacing EHCPs. New National Inclusion Standards. £200m+ training package for all staff from September 2026. Schools pooling funding for shared expertise.

*These changes will reshape the profile and preparedness of students entering higher education over the next decade.*

**25%+**

of vacancies due to  
skills shortages

**~1m**

16–24 year olds  
are NEET

**8.5m**

adults with low  
English or maths

**18.5%**

decline in employer  
training investment

## New Qualification Pathways

### V Levels

New vocational pathway at Level 3 alongside A Levels and T Levels

### Level 2

Two new pathways: Occupational (work) and Further Study (progression)

### Target

Two-thirds of young people in higher-level learning by age 25

## Growth & Skills Levy

Replaces the Apprenticeship Levy. Short courses within the levy for the first time

Sector skills packages in digital/AI, engineering, construction and defence

£625m in construction skills including £100m for Skills Bootcamps

100,000 Sector Based Work Academy places expanded



## Specialisation & Collaboration

Providers challenged to specialise in areas of strength.  
Fewer generalists expected.

Regional collaboration to maintain breadth of provision.



## Financial Sustainability

Tuition fee cap rises with inflation — conditional on quality threshold. 44% of institutions forecast deficit in 2024/25. Research cost recovery averaged just 66%.



## Lifelong Learning Entitlement

Four years of tuition loan across a lifetime with modular funding. Break points enabling L4 after year one, L5 after year two. Launches academic year 2026/27.



## Access & Maintenance

Targeted means-tested maintenance grants for lowest-income households on Industrial Strategy courses. Funded by new International Student Levy.

## Social mobility requires whole-of-education partnerships and hyper-local solutions.

### Regional alignment

with Mayoral Combined Authorities and local government through LSIPs, Local Growth Plans and devolved adult skills budgets.

### Deep integration with schools and colleges

through collaborative outreach and sustained engagement programmes.

### Employer partnerships

to align skills pipelines, co-design provision at Levels 4–5, and support the Industrial Strategy growth sectors.



Three LSIPs cover our wider region with employer-led research into skills needs.

## West of England & North Somerset

### Priority sectors:

Creative Industries  
Health, Social Care & Life Sciences  
Construction & Built Environment  
Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering

## Gloucestershire

### Priority sectors:

Digital Industries  
Agriculture, Agritech & Land Mgmt  
Construction & Built Environment  
Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering

## Swindon & Wiltshire

### Priority sectors:

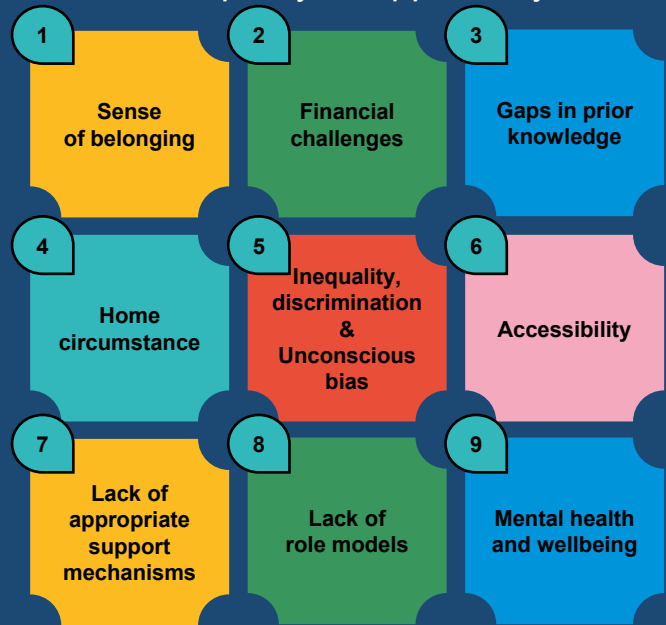
Automotive, Transport & Logistics  
Health, Social Care & Life Sciences  
Agriculture, Agritech & Land Mgmt  
Construction & Built Environment  
Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering

## Current Framework

- ✓ Access and Participation Plans required for higher fee charging
- ✓ Reformed 2023: focus on 'risks to equality of opportunity'
- ✓ Three national priorities: pre-16 attainment, diverse pathways, student mental health
- ✓ Evaluation-driven: theories of change and published outputs
- ✓ TEF framework assessing teaching quality and student outcomes

# Access and Participation Plan (2024-28)

## 9 Risks to Equality of Opportunity:



## 20 Indicators of Risk

## 3 target groups

Socio-economically disadvantaged

Minority ethnic groups

Declared disability

## 4 targets:

- 1. **Access**  
Reduce gap between most and least socio-economically advantaged students (IMD)
- 2. **Access**  
Reduce gap between students on Free School Meals and not (FSM)
- 3. **Success**  
Reduce degree awarding gap for socio-economically deprived students (IMD)
- 4. **Success**  
Reduce degree awarding gap for students from minority ethnic groups

## 4 intervention strategies

Access

Continuation/Completion

Success

Progression

## 10 Evaluation & Research projects

Investment  
**£10M**  
30% HFI  
(approx. per year)



## 6.5%

FSM entrants (2025/6)  
(milestone: 6.0%)

**Met for first time**

## 19.2pp

IMD gap (2025/6)  
(milestone: 20.5pp)

**Both access targets hit**

## 60,000

Pre-18 students engaged  
across ~1,000 events

**In 2024/25**

## Key Activity & Partnerships

### Wessex Inspiration Network

OfS-funded Uni Connect partnership, 2,500+ young people supported in 24/25 across BANES, Wiltshire and North Somerset

### Sustained programmes at scale

Online programme grown from 35 to 1,400+ students, one of the largest in the sector

### Regional collaboration

Roundtable events, Education Empowerment with Bath Mayor, CareerPilot

### Contextual admissions

Two-grade contextual offer from October 2024, ring-fenced offers for target groups, near-miss WP criteria at confirmation

# Regulation of Access & Participation

## What's changing

Risk-based regulation: reduced burden for strong performers, greater accountability for lagging providers

Postgraduate access included for the first time: addressing declining home PhD numbers and financial barriers

Fee uplifts conditional on meeting quality thresholds

Greater emphasis on evaluation sharing and collaboration

## What might be changing

Specialisation of providers (impact on mobility?)

Localisation: APPs are about the only lever that can be pulled to get HEIs to engage with the local skills agenda

Closer alignment with TEF

New structure / funding for the UniConnect programme

New Task and Finish group of sector experts, charities, OfS and UCAS

OfS leadership transition — new Chief Executive and Director for Fair Access

# Summary of Key Reforms

## Schools & SEND

**Grade 5+ target:** all children leaving school with average grade 5 or higher

**Disadvantage gap:** ambition to halve — a full grade improvement per GCSE

**Curriculum:** broadened with oracy, creativity, critical thinking and enrichment entitlement

**Assessment:** Progress 8 reform to reward breadth; new high-attainment measure at grade 7+

**SEND:** tiered Universal/Targeted/Targeted Plus model replacing EHCPs

**Inclusion:** £200m+ training for all staff from September 2026

**RISE:** £20m school improvement programme — every school is a RISE school

**Attendance:** target of 94%+ — equivalent to 20m more school days per year

## Post-16 Education & Skills

**V Levels:** new vocational pathway at Level 3 alongside A Levels and T Levels

**Level 2:** two new pathways — Occupational (work) and Further Study (progression)

**Participation target:** two-thirds of young people in higher-level learning by age 25

**L4/5 target:** at least 10% entering Level 4/5 study by 2040

**Growth & Skills Levy:** replaces Apprenticeship Levy with short courses included

**Skills England:** new body for data-driven national skills picture

**Youth Guarantee:** education, training or employment support for all young people

**LLE:** four years of tuition loan across a lifetime with modular funding

## Access & Participation

**Postgraduate access:** included for the first time — addressing declining home PhD numbers

**Conditional fees:** tuition fee uplifts linked to meeting quality thresholds

**Maintenance grants:** targeted, means-tested for lowest-income households on IS courses

**Specialisation:** providers expected to specialise and collaborate regionally

**Localisation:** focus on place as a mechanism for social mobility

**Uni Connect:** redesigned collaborative outreach with national backbone and regional partnerships

**TEF reform:** integrated with quality and access regulation; gateway for LLE provision

**OfS transition:** new Chief Executive and Director for Fair Access being recruited

## How It Works

**1**

### Write

Each group responds to a question on their flip chart sheet using one pen colour

**2**

### Rotate

Sheets move clockwise. A new group builds on the previous thinking with a new question

**3**

### Evaluate

A third group reviews all contributions and selects the strongest 1–2 ideas

**4**

### React

Sheets return to the original group. They share the selected idea and give their honest reaction

## Practical Notes

Think about where you are writing on the page, other groups need to be able to add content  
Online group works in a shared Google Doc following the same timings

|                       | Round 1        |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>Table A</b>        | Sheet A        |
| <b>Table B</b>        | Sheet B        |
| <b>Table C</b>        | Sheet C        |
| <b>Table D</b>        | Sheet D        |
| <b>Table E</b>        | Sheet E        |
| <b>Table F</b>        | Sheet F        |
| <i>Online Group 1</i> | <i>Group 1</i> |
| <i>Online Group 2</i> | <i>Group 2</i> |
| <i>Online Group 3</i> | <i>Group 3</i> |

## ROUND 1

# What do you see?

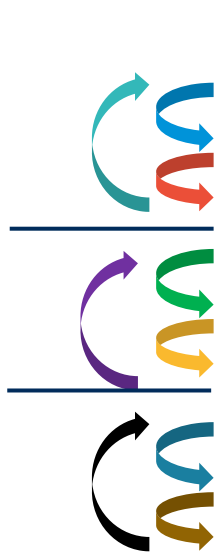
Focusing on social mobility:

From your experience in your own sector or institution, what are the most pressing skills challenges you're seeing and where are the gaps or missed opportunities in how universities currently respond?

Start with 2 minutes of individual reflection, then discuss as a group.

Write on your flip chart sheet

10:00



|                       | Round 1        | Round 2        |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Table A</b>        | Sheet A        | Sheet C        |
| <b>Table B</b>        | Sheet B        | Sheet A        |
| <b>Table C</b>        | Sheet C        | Sheet B        |
| <b>Table D</b>        | Sheet D        | Sheet F        |
| <b>Table E</b>        | Sheet E        | Sheet D        |
| <b>Table F</b>        | Sheet F        | Sheet E        |
| <i>Online Group 1</i> | <i>Group 1</i> | <i>Group 3</i> |
| <i>Online Group 2</i> | <i>Group 2</i> | <i>Group 1</i> |
| <i>Online Group 3</i> | <i>Group 3</i> | <i>Group 2</i> |

## ROUND 2

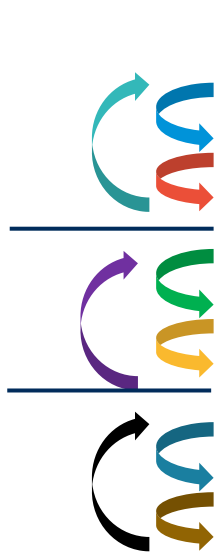
# What could we do?

Building on what the previous group identified, what could the University do practically, in partnership with employers, colleges or other organisations, to better address these challenges?

Read the previous round's notes first, then reflect and discuss.

Build on the existing sheet

**10:00**



|                       | Round 1        | Round 2        | Round 3        |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Table A</b>        | Sheet A        | Sheet C        | Sheet B        |
| <b>Table B</b>        | Sheet B        | Sheet A        | Sheet C        |
| <b>Table C</b>        | Sheet C        | Sheet B        | Sheet A        |
| <b>Table D</b>        | Sheet D        | Sheet F        | Sheet E        |
| <b>Table E</b>        | Sheet E        | Sheet D        | Sheet F        |
| <b>Table F</b>        | Sheet F        | Sheet E        | Sheet D        |
| <i>Online Group 1</i> | <i>Group 1</i> | <i>Group 3</i> | <i>Group 2</i> |
| <i>Online Group 2</i> | <i>Group 2</i> | <i>Group 1</i> | <i>Group 3</i> |
| <i>Online Group 3</i> | <i>Group 3</i> | <i>Group 2</i> | <i>Group 1</i> |

## ROUND 3

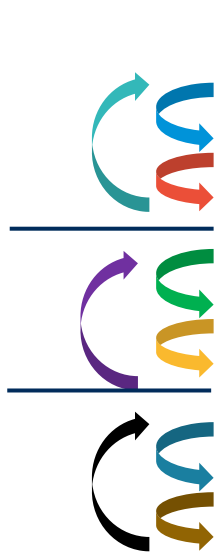
# What matters most?

Review the observations and ideas from the previous two rounds. Which one or two ideas have the most potential to make a real difference, and what would need to happen to make them work?

You are seeing this sheet for the first time. Be an objective evaluator.

Circle or clearly mark your selections

**5:00**



|                       | Round 1        | Round 2        | Round 3        | Plenary               |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Table A</b>        | Sheet A        | Sheet C        | Sheet B        | <b>Sheet A</b>        |
| <b>Table B</b>        | Sheet B        | Sheet A        | Sheet C        | <b>Sheet B</b>        |
| <b>Table C</b>        | Sheet C        | Sheet B        | Sheet A        | <b>Sheet C</b>        |
| <b>Table D</b>        | Sheet D        | Sheet F        | Sheet E        | <b>Sheet D</b>        |
| <b>Table E</b>        | Sheet E        | Sheet D        | Sheet F        | <b>Sheet E</b>        |
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| <i>Online Group 2</i> | <i>Group 2</i> | <i>Group 1</i> | <i>Group 3</i> | <b><i>Group 2</i></b> |
| <i>Online Group 3</i> | <i>Group 3</i> | <i>Group 2</i> | <i>Group 1</i> | <b><i>Group 3</i></b> |

## PLENARY

# Do you agree?

Tell us which idea was selected as having the most potential. Do you agree with the choice? What would you add, change or challenge?

Your sheet is back. React to how your ideas were developed and what was chosen.

~2 minutes per group • Capture key points on the flip chart

**2:00**