

# **A Summary of the Bishop Auckland College Access and Participation Plan (2025-26 to 2028-29)**

## **Introduction and Strategic Aim**

Bishop Auckland College (BAC) is an educational provider in South West Durham, offering a broad curriculum aligned with current workforce demands. Its higher education (HE) provision, developed in partnership with The Open University, Pearson, and others strategic partners, serves a largely local student body, with 70% progressing internally from Level 3 study programmes. The college's HE strategy aligns with local and regional skills priorities, including the North East Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

County Durham has below average qualification levels, lower earnings, and high unemployment rates. BAC provides accessible HE opportunities to address these challenges, offering local alternatives to city based universities, reducing transport barriers, and supporting disadvantaged students.

## **Key Risks to Equality of Opportunity**

BAC identifies four key risks to equality of opportunity:

1. **Limited HE Access for Under-21s**
  - The majority of HE students at BAC are mature learners. There has been limited promotion of HE pathways to younger students, resulting in low participation among under-21s.
2. **Low HE Participation Among Students with Disabilities**
  - A lack of clear information on reasonable adjustments and support services discourages students with disabilities from applying.
3. **Inconsistent Continuation and Completion Rates for Mature Students**
  - Financial pressures, knowledge gaps (especially in digital and academic skills), and inconsistent academic support contribute to non-completion among mature students.
4. **Lower Continuation and Completion Rates for Students from Deprived Backgrounds**
  - Students from areas of multiple deprivation face financial hardship, limited social capital, and difficulties transitioning from Level 3 vocational courses.

## **Objectives and Intervention Strategies**

BAC has set four strategic objectives, with targeted interventions to address each risk area.

### **Objective 1: Increase HE Participation Among Under-21s (by 10% by 2027/28)**

#### **Strategies:**

- **Improved Marketing & Outreach:**
  - Enhanced website and marketing materials.

- Increased promotion of HE pathways to current Level 3 students and local schools.
- Two annual HE-specific open events.
- Utilisation of UniConnect funding to support aspiration-raising activities.
- **Curriculum Development:**
  - Expanding HE programme options, including full-time, part-time, and hybrid study modes.
  - Development of a new Pearson Higher National Programme in eSports.
- **Financial Support:**
  - Provision a £1,000 (full time equivalent) bursary per student to alleviate financial barriers.

**Expected Outcomes:**

- Increased applications and enrolments from under-21s.
- Higher attendance at open events and outreach activities.

**Objective 2: Increase HE Participation Among Students with Disabilities (by 7% by 2027/28)**

**Strategies:**

- **Improved Accessibility & Support Information:**
  - Development of an accessible, interactive website with detailed information on disability and wider inclusion support.
  - Personalised application support for students requiring reasonable adjustments.
- **HE Student Liaison Mentor Support:**
  - Additional guidance for applicants with disabilities and wider inclusion needs to ensure a smooth transition into HE.
- **Flexible Study Options:**
  - Programme revalidation to include more part-time and blended learning options.

**Expected Outcomes:**

- Increased applications and enrolments from students with disabilities.
- Improved student experience through tailored inclusion support and flexible study modes.

**Objective 3: Improve Continuation and Completion Rates for Mature Students (by 5% by 2027/28)**

**Strategies:**

- **Enhanced Inductions & Student Support:**
  - Standardised HE inductions to improve awareness of academic, personal, and mental health support.
  - Increased engagement with the HE Student Liaison Mentor.
- **Financial and Pastoral Support:**

- Increased financial guidance and support for students balancing studies with employment and family commitments.
- **Bridging & Study Skills Support:**
  - Targeted academic study skills sessions, particularly in digital literacy.
  - Flexible timetables and personalised learning plans.

#### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Higher continuation and completion rates among mature students.
- Improved student satisfaction, and increase engagement with support services.

### **Objective 4: Improve Continuation for Students from Areas of Multiple Deprivation (by 5% by 2027/28)**

#### **Strategies:**

- **Financial Support & Flexibility:**
  - Bursary support for essential study costs, and enhancement opportunities.
  - Hardship funds and transport cost support.
  - Bespoke timetables to accommodate employment commitments.
- **Improved Awareness of Student Support Services:**
  - Termly sessions on academic and mental health support options.
  - Early intervention strategies through the HE Student Liaison Mentor.
- **Enhancing Tutorial Support:**
  - Programme teams to use tutorials for targeted student guidance.
  - Regular individual meetings to track student progress.

#### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Higher continuation and completion rates among students from deprived areas.
- Increased engagement with financial and wellbeing support services.

### **Evaluation & Impact Measurement**

Each intervention will be systematically evaluated through:

- Monitoring application, enrolment, conti, and completion rates.
- Tracking student engagement with support services.
- Gathering student feedback through surveys and focus groups.

Annual reports on progress will be submitted to the BAC Academic Board, Curriculum and Quality Committee, and published online.

#### **Conclusion**

Bishop Auckland College aims to create **positive change through education and learning**, ensuring HE is **inclusive, accessible, and aligned with local needs**. Through targeted interventions, BAC seeks to expand participation among underrepresented groups, improve student continuation, and strengthen support structures to help all students succeed in higher education.