

STUDENT LIFE

TEESSIDE UNIVERSITY
ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN
IMPACT REPORT 2024/25



**AMBITION
DELIVERED
TODAY**



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FOREWORD

Teesside University seeks to level up opportunity. We do this through providing accessible and inclusive higher education, ensuring anyone, regardless of their circumstances, can reach their full potential. It was this mission that drove us to be one of the first universities in the country to engage in the new access and participation plan (APP) process.

Each year approximately 85% of Teesside students face barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education or progressing from it. Many of our students face challenges in relation to their socio-economic background, living with disability, having experience of care and/or other factors. We are extremely proud of the diversity of our student body and the sector-leading support we provide.

We recognise there is still work to be done to address institutional and societal inequalities. For this reason, we have set ourselves a series of ambitious targets to further increase the diversity of our student population and ensure that our students can fully benefit from the opportunities that higher education offers.

This is our first annual impact report for this APP cycle and sets out our key achievements:

- > Increased partnerships with schools and colleges with a high proportion of students from ethnically and culturally diverse (ECD) heritages. Over the year we have engaged 730 students from these schools.
- > In consultation with students, developed our Future Leaders Residential to build confidence and skills for students from ECD heritages to access HE.
- > Provided substantial investment in our support for students with mental health conditions and other disabilities.

This has included specialist student success tutors and disability coordinators who provide high-quality support and timely adjustments for students who require them.

- > Provided 214 internship opportunities for graduates focussed on creating opportunities for those who face barriers to graduate-level employment. Interns consistently report improvements in employment related skills including time management, business awareness and access to professional networks.
- > Continued investment in our support for care experience students. This year we have recruited three retention support officers who will provide personalised support for students enabling them to build social and professional networks and facilitate priority access to any specialist support required.
- > As part of our commitment to raise school children's attainment and aspirations in the region we have delivered sessions to over 450 local students covering a range of topics from hair discrimination to digital careers for girls. We have also secured an agreement to deliver a programme of activities for students who have barriers to education within six schools for the next three years.

These achievements reflect our unwavering dedication to creating a university experience that is inclusive, empowering, and transformative. As we move forward, we remain committed to working collaboratively with our students, partners, and communities to ensure that opportunity is not just available - but accessible to all.

Professor Mark Simpson
Deputy Vice-Chancellor

WHOLE PROVIDER APPROACH

Throughout 2024/25 we have worked hard to implement a whole provider approach (WPA) to implementing our access and participation plan. Teesside recognises that a WPA is vital to ensuring a comprehensive, institution-wide response to the inequalities of opportunity that exist throughout the HE sector. It is only through cross-department collaboration that holistic and student-centred solutions can be delivered.

Over the year this has included a restructure of our governance framework, revisiting the APP Board structure to ensure we have strategic oversight and support from across academic and professional services. Five work streams have also been established to implement, deliver and evaluate our APP interventions. The work streams similarly benefit from representation from across the University.

Communicating both the APP and the evidence we are starting to generate through it has also been a focus as we establish the plan. This includes a comprehensive communications and integration plan, the development of an **APP Hub** for staff and students and refreshing our externally facing communications.

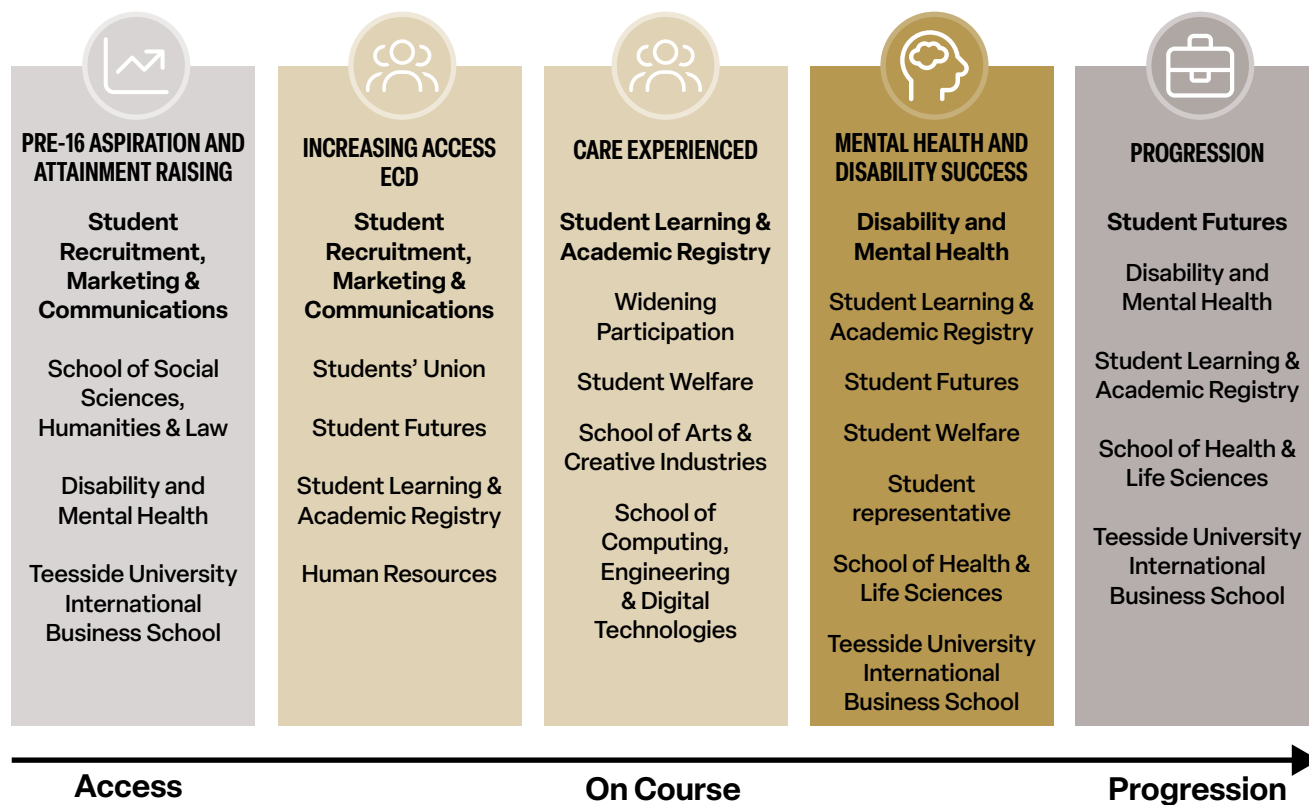
We have also been pleased to be working with TASO (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education) and Professor Liz Thomas, (University of York, Research Centre Lead): Centre for Research on Education and Social Justice to further conceptualise our WPA through developing a specific theory of change. This process, facilitated through a workshop attended by colleagues has enabled us to review our current approach for UK domiciled students as well as support our thinking of how to expand this work for our international students.

Board of Governors

Academic Assurance Committee

Access and Participation Plan Board Chair: DVC

Equality of Opportunities Team



INCREASING ACCESS FOR ETHNICALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

Context and goals

Teesside University recruits fewer domestic students from an ethnically and culturally diverse (ECD) background compared to the national average, making up just 12.1% of our student population compared to the national average of 34.8%. Whilst this reflects the communities within the North East and Tees Valley, from which the University primarily draws, increasing the diversity of our student body is a priority. By 2029 we aim to increase the percentage of ECD home UK domiciled students by 2%.

To address these risks our activities and interventions this year have included:

Key activities

- > Facilitation of focus groups with 22 students from two colleges with strong existing links with Teesside. All of the students we spoke to were from an ethnically and culturally minoritised heritage and were considering higher education.

The findings highlighted some of the perceived barriers to higher education and were used to shape the programme for the upcoming Future Leaders Residential which took place 16 -18 July 2025.

> Positive ECD Role Models

When planning the Future Leaders Residential and producing promotional materials, we were purposeful in ensuring representation when selecting speakers. We felt it was important for attendees to feel they could relate to the individuals delivering the sessions who themselves are successful educational professionals from ethnically diverse backgrounds.



IN FOCUS

School outreach in targeted geographical schools/colleges

Prior to the 2024/25 cycle commencing, the Recruitment and Outreach Team revised their relationship building strategy to include schools and colleges with a high proportion of ECD students. These included 11 colleges from across the North of England. Across these eight new accounts, we have actively engaged with Teesside University which has resulted in 401 interactions with students from these colleges.

In addition to this, the new strategy continued to build upon existing relationships with schools and colleges located in geographical areas with a high population of ECD students.

Yellow bus activity

One strategy used to engage with ECD students across these colleges included the hire of an American yellow school bus which visited seven colleges to offer support to students writing their personal statements, and about studying at Teesside University. A fun activity included our spin to win game.

Over the five-day tour we engaged with 730 students, 48% of whom were from an ethnic diverse background and 33% of students were from lowest participation areas in higher education (TUNDRA quintile one and two).



School outreach: Future Leaders Residential

Sessions were created based on the feedback from the focus groups with the aim of helping to build confidence and skills, providing strategies for managing pressure, ensuring a healthy study/life balance as well as mastering time management. Social elements of the residential provided opportunities to explore the cultural and religious aspects of university. An overview of the programme can be found below.

19 students attended from 11 colleges throughout the North East of England. Students took part in a range of sessions:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Introduction > Social activities — Level X 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Let's succeed with Baasit Siddiqui > CV writing > UCAS and personal statements > Social at the Students' Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Aim a little higher with Kamal Ellis-Hyman > Student finance > Digital story telling with Erin Sparks

A theory-based evaluation has been undertaken, utilising a theory of change to establish how and why a desired change was expected to happen. This included identifying the aims and objectives of the programme and assessing the success of the intervention looking at the outcomes and impact.



STUDENT SUCCESS – MENTAL HEALTH AND DISABILITY

Context and goals

Teesside University provides accessible higher education for students with mental health conditions and those with disabilities. As a result, we have seen an increasing complexity of need and a growing demand for personal and academic support. Data analysis revealed that students with a mental health diagnosis have lower continuation, completion and attainment rates than their peers with no known disability. These rates are also lower than the national levels. Those with social and communication disabilities are also less likely to continue into the second year of their course, whilst those with cognitive and learning disabilities are less likely to attain first or upper second-class degrees.

We have committed to removing the continuation, completion and attainment gaps and improve graduate outcomes for those diagnosed mental health conditions by 2029. We also intend to reduce to 3.8% the continuation gap for students with social and communication disabilities and remove the attainment gap between students with cognitive and learning disabilities.

To address these risks our activities and interventions this year have included:

Key activities

- > Recruitment of three FTE disability coordinators to provide specialist support and guidance for students and staff.
- > Creation of mental health and disability awareness training for staff. In-person training has been delivered throughout the academic year in disability and mental health.
- > Contracting of external providers to ensure students can access confidential 24/7 help and support to increase our capacity for counselling.
- > Maintained our Mental Health Chartership status.
- > Signed up to the Disabled Student Commitment.
- > Developed and implemented a triage model across Student Life upskilling front of house staff in areas such as crisis management.
- > Recruitment and implementation of three new student success tutors providing specialist support.

IN FOCUS

Disability coordination

To support the implementation of the disability coordinator role a comprehensive mapping and co-design exercise with Schools was undertaken to ensure this additional resource provides additionality to and consistency in the support/ reasonable adjustments being provided to students. Through this approach an action plan was developed which includes:

- > creating a community of practice
- > further developing exam support provision for disabled students including assistive software
- > reviewing core competencies and reasonable adjustments
- > early support for teaching staff in the implementation of standard reasonable adjustments
- > identifying and contributing towards the development of relevant training including additional autism and neurodiversity awareness.

Culture of support

Over the course of the academic year, we have delivered activities linked to several national campaigns including University Mental Health Day, Dyslexia Awareness Week and International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Between 10 -15 March we delivered our own Great Minds festival promoting positive mental health and wellbeing which engaged over 470 students in activities designed to support people to consider how they stay well. A video of contributions from students can be found [here](#).

Autism Awareness Week saw meaningful engagement from over 80 students who engaged in a range of activities including showcasing artwork representing neurodiversity, a sensory stop for students to experience sensory items and opportunities to build peer support networks.

Student success

Three student success tutors with specialisms in disability and/or mental health were recruited in June. Over the first months of the service the tutors had developed a combined caseload of 30 students needing their specialist support, delivering a total of 110 one-to-one sessions. 75% of the APP-aligned sessions focused on supporting neurodiverse students to develop their academic skills and academic resilience. 21% centred around this type of support for students with mental health needs, and 4% for students with other disability needs. A more detailed summary of activity to-date can be found [here](#).



GRADUATE PROGRESSION

Context and goals

TUNDRA progression

Data shows Teesside graduates from areas of low participation in HE (by the TUNDRA measure) are less likely to progress into graduate level opportunities than their peers from areas of higher participation. By 2029 Teesside intends to reduce the progression gap between students from the very lowest areas (Q1) and the highest (5%) by 3.4% and remove the gap entirely between students from the second lowest areas (Q2), and the highest.

The Teesside University Future Ready Survey indicates that the gap may be due to lower confidence amongst Teesside Q1 and Q2 graduates and fewer networking opportunities. Tees Valley data indicates that digital poverty can also be a barrier to employment progression. Data also suggests location may influence job choices with 48% of Teesside students prioritising employment in the Tees Valley which has higher rates of unemployment compared to the national average.

To address these inequalities of opportunity Teesside University's activities and interventions this year have included:

Key activities

- > Recruitment/restructure of Student Futures.
- > Diversification of internship model.
- > Graduate success offer enhancement.
- > Future link mentoring scheme launched.
- > Purpose Lab Ambassador Programme.



IN FOCUS

Strategic realignment of APP roles and targeted delivery

Following a portfolio realignment in October 2024, Student Futures established a dedicated Graduate Opportunities Team and redefined the Student Futures Project Officer role. These changes enabled a more strategic, data-informed approach to addressing progression gaps and improving graduate outcomes. The revised delivery model has supported the implementation of high-impact, targeted interventions for under-represented student and graduate groups throughout the 2024/25 academic year.

Graduate internships

Between August 2024 and July 2025, the Graduate Opportunities Team delivered 166 internships across 68 employers. Internships were offered in both full-time and part-time formats to accommodate diverse graduate needs and were underpinned by a structured employability offer, including:

- > pre-placement briefing and onboarding workshops
- > midpoint development sessions focused on CV enhancement and networking
- > consolidation workshops covering LinkedIn, personal branding, and one-to-one coaching.

To ensure robust evaluation and continuous improvement, a Theory of Change for Internships and a Student Futures Distance Travelled Evaluation Framework were developed and piloted. Whilst interns reported learning gains across a range of areas, those showing greatest gains included time management, business awareness, confidence and professional networks. These are the core skills/knowledge targeted by the APP to improve graduate outcomes.

Full implementation of the Student Futures Distance Travelled Evaluation Framework is scheduled for 2025/26 across all APP-aligned Student Futures activity. This will enable longitudinal tracking of skill development and alignment with graduate outcomes, strengthening the evidence base for strategic decision-making and inclusive practice.

Graduate success offer: extending reach and impact

This year the Graduate Success programme was significantly extended to provide access to Student Futures support for up to two years post-graduation. Key developments delivered by the Graduate Opportunities Team include:

- > 728 graduates who requested support from Student Futures were contacted by the Graduate Opportunities Team
- > refreshed Target Connect pathways and digital resources
- > expanded provision of CV clinics, practice interviews, and a reimagined Graduate Success workshop series
- > 475 graduates engaged with the targeted Talent Pool
- > 309 hours of one-to-one coaching.

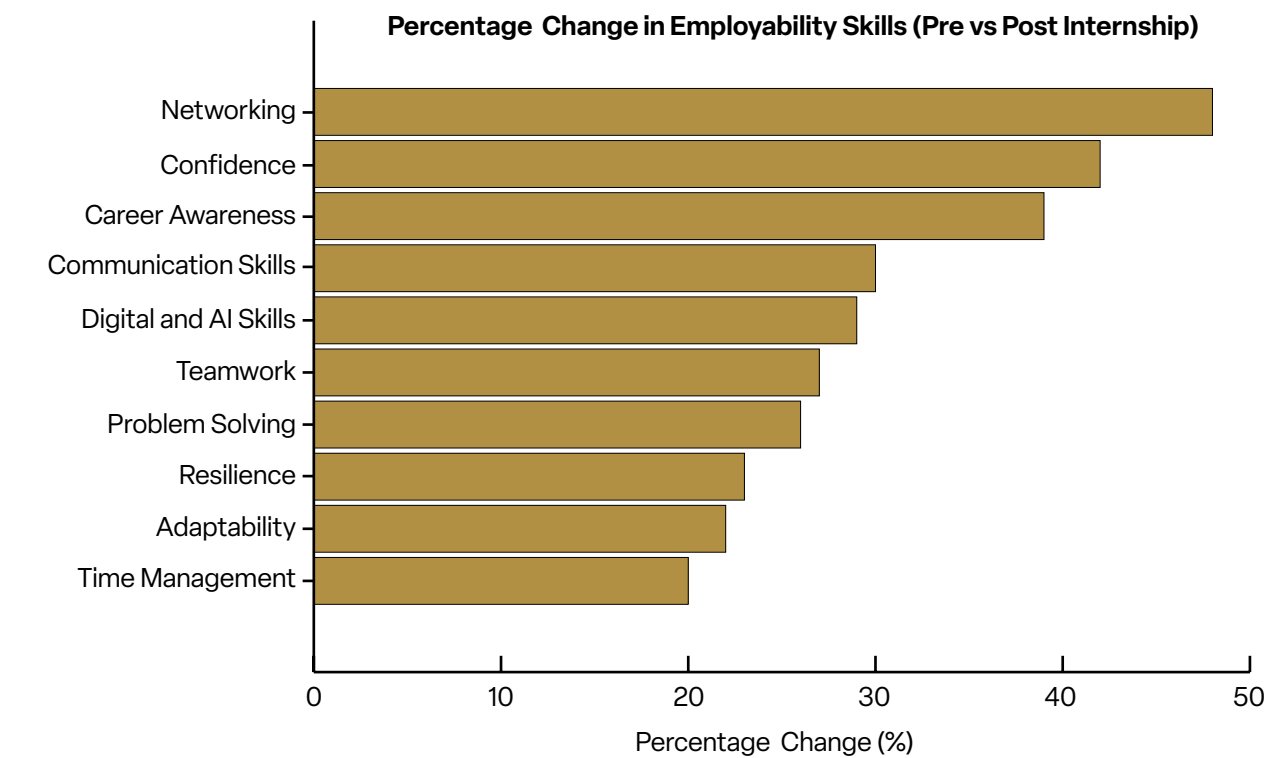
These enhancements significantly extended the programme's reach, delivering sustained, personalised support for graduates during early career transitions.



Future ready summer internship programme 2025

The Future Ready Summer Internship Programme, piloted by Student Futures in April 2025, was a strategic initiative designed to enhance career readiness, strengthen graduate outcomes, and support equitable access to meaningful work experience. During May to July 2025, 48 second-year undergraduates undertook paid, part-time internships (20 hours per week).

Theory-based evaluation has identified skills development and learning gains across all 11 core employability skills, again with greatest gains being seen in business awareness, networking and confidence.



Purpose Lab: diversifying opportunities and broadening horizons

In June 2025, Student Futures launched the Purpose Lab Ambassador Programme in partnership with The Purpose Coalition. This nine-month, flexible, remote engagement opportunity connects participants with high-profile employer networks, national events, and facilitates critical insights into inclusive recruitment practices while contributing to the development of equitable employment ecosystems.

A targeted promotional campaign and a bespoke programme of workshops led to the successful recruitment of 20 undergraduate students into paid ambassador roles.

In July one of our ambassadors attended an event at the House of Commons. Early participant feedback underscores the value of the experience, as illustrated by the quote below.

“

I am grateful for the ongoing support from Teesside University, which continues to empower students like me to engage in national platforms, create meaningful impact, and represent our university’s values of innovation, inclusivity, and leadership.



CARE-EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

Context and goals

Those who have left care or have experience of it face multiple barriers in accessing HE. They are also likely to experience experience intersectional risks in relation to their continuation, completion and attainment (UCAS **Next Steps** report). In recognition of these barriers and the continued focus required to increase the number of care-experienced students at Teesside the APP Board agreed to retain this workstream in the current APP cycle.

We continue to play an active role in the North East Raising Aspirations Partnership (NERAP) and remain committed to the Care Leavers Covenant.

To increase the number of care-experienced students accessing HE, and improve their experience whilst at Teesside, we have undertaken a number of initiatives.

Key activities

- > Recruitment of retention support officers (RSO) to provide a bespoke package of support for care-experienced students.
- > Hosted the annual Raising Aspirations conference providing information to carers and guardians about the benefits of HE and the Teesside University offer.
- > A review and update of our support against the NERAP Care Leavers Covenant.
- > Introduction of a dedicated care-experienced email address for specific contact.



IN FOCUS

Retention support officers

The work of the retention support officers (RSOs), based within the Welfare Team, has allowed a review of the current offer to be undertaken and development of new resources and options of support for care-experienced students. From the academic year 2025/26 care-experienced students will be proactively contacted by the RSOs to ensure they are aware of the package of support available. This package includes a welcome pack on arrival, priority access to counselling and welfare services, regular drop-in sessions and opportunities for developing peer support and networks.

Raising Aspirations Conference

In July we hosted our annual Raising Aspirations conference. Now in its thirteenth year, it welcomed 74 partners from a range of stakeholders including foster carers, local councils, other universities and colleges. The conference provides a space to raise awareness of the barriers facing care leavers and the support available at Teesside. Keynote speeches this year were delivered by Luke Rodgers and Ian Thomas and complemented by four workshops delivered by: Rachel Close, Blue Cabin, Luke Rodgers and Ian Thomas. Feedback from the event was excellent.

“

The event was amazing and inspiring. I have returned to work singing the praises of everyone involved and encouraging more staff to attend from our workplace.



RAISING ASPIRATIONS

Context and goals

The North East consistently has the lowest progress 8 scores (a measure of how much a student has progressed from the end of primary to the end of secondary school) across all English regions. As an anchor institution Teesside University intends to improve the regional opportunities for young people who face barriers in education through early intervention. By 2028 we hope to have increased the number of disadvantaged young people entering HE and reduce the gap in attainment rates in the North East when compared to the national average.

Additionally, we aim to increase the use of technology in the classroom through sharing best practice on the use of digital resources in teaching therefore improving digital literacy of teachers and students.

To contribute to our mission of positively contributing to the economic and social success in the region, over the last 12 months our work with school children has included:

Key activities:

- > **STEAM Health Professions Day** targeting secondary school students in collaboration with a number of NHS Trusts. 35 Year 9 and 10 students from three schools attended.
- > **Creative Day** was hosted in collaboration with AccessVFX, a global industry-led non-profit company focused on aspiration raising and inclusivity. 72 Year 10 students from four schools attended.
- > **Hello World** focussed on promoting digital careers for secondary school girls. 21 Year 9 and 10 from two schools attended.
- > **Advanced Maths Support Project** provided a targeted maths lecture for secondary school students. 173 Year 10 students from 14 schools attended.
- > **Black History Month**, in partnership with the Ideas Foundation, we delivered a Power of Hair workshop focussing on hair discrimination. 20 students from one school took part.
- > **Animexperience** 130 Year 6 students from five schools, took part in activities introducing them to stop motion animation. This culminated in a red-carpet event for students and their families, showcasing their achievements.



IN FOCUS

Choose your future

51 Year 10 students from four schools attended campus on 7 May 2025. The activity aimed to increase young people's knowledge of higher education, careers options and increase their intention to study to HE level.

A theory-based evaluation was undertaken utilising validated pre and post event measures including the Access and Success Questionnaire. The evaluation identified positive impact in relation to students' knowledge of, and sense of belonging to HE as well as an increased intention to attend. The full impact report can be found [here](#).

BeInspired

This year we have secured agreement to work with seven Outwood Academy schools over the next three years. The University will provide a programme of activities which aim to support student attainment through improved behaviour, engagement and self-esteem and ultimately increase the progression outcomes of these students to attend HE. Activities will be aimed at students in receipt of free school meals and who are predicted borderline 3/4 grades at GCSE.

A robust theory-led evaluation has been designed to assess the impact of the multi-intervention programme, including longitudinal tracking of students' application to and enrolment in HE. Information sharing with the schools will also enable us to understand whether the programme effects intended outcomes such as school attendance, engagement in learning and GCSE results. The programme will start in the first term of the academic year 2025/26.



LOOKING AHEAD

Throughout the last year we have worked hard to establish a solid foundation from which the APP can be delivered and we are grateful to all our colleagues who have supported us in this. From this foundation we can continue to deliver and evolve our interventions using the data and evidence we generate to understand what is working for our students, building on these successes and adapting where required.

Looking ahead to the next year our priorities are:

- > continue to build our evidence of impact through robust evaluation, which will include exploring the use of secondary data analysis to establish quasi-experimental designs across all our key interventions
- > develop and publish our Disabled Students Commitment Action Plan
- > continue to build upon our community relationships to understand how we can continue to work with partners to reduce inequalities
- > plan how we can continue to develop our whole provider approach beyond our regulatory responsibilities to address inequalities for all Teesside University students.



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