

Summary of 2026-27 to 2029-30 access and participation plan

What is an access and participation plan?

An access and participation plan explains how a higher education provider will take meaningful steps to promote and improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups, as required by the Office for Students, so they can access higher education, succeed in their studies and progress into employment or further study.

You can see the full access and participation plan for South Essex Colleges Group at [South Essex College of Further and Higher Education APP 2026-27](#)

Key points

University Centre South Essex is part of South Essex Colleges Group, a small higher education provider with campuses in Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock, and Basildon. We offer degree-level programmes in partnership with leading universities, alongside Higher Technical Qualifications and apprenticeships.

Each year, around 600 higher education students' study with us, most from the local area. Our student community includes mature learners, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with disabilities. We are committed to widening participation and supporting every student to succeed.

Our Focus

- Access: Helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those eligible for free school meals to enter higher education.
- Success: Providing tailored academic and wellbeing support to improve continuation and completion rates.
- Attainment: Closing gaps so all students can achieve good honours degrees.
- Progression: Embedding employability into courses and offering career support to help students move into graduate-level jobs or further study.

We aim to remove barriers, foster a sense of belonging, and create opportunities for all students to thrive.

See pages 1–4 and 24-26 of the full plan for strategic aims and objectives.

Fees we charge

The annual fees charges for new students in 2026-27* are as follows

Degree Level: £9535 (full time) and £4767 (part time)

HNC/HND/HTQ: £8000 - £8500 (full time) and £4000 (part time)

PgCE: £8250 (full time) and £4125 (part time)

*South Essex Colleges Group may increase tuition fees for future years for new students in line with any inflationary uplift as determined by the UK Government.

Financial help available

The financial support outlined below is made available as part of UCSE's commitment under this Access and Participation Plan to improve access, continuation, and success for students from underrepresented backgrounds:

We offer financial support to reduce barriers for students from underrepresented groups.

- Hardship Bursary: Up to £1,500 per year
- Emergency Expense Fund: Up to £500 (one-off)
- Laptop Loan
- Travel Support Bursary: Up to £150 per term for students living in Southend Halls of residence and commuting to Thurrock, Purfleet, or Basildon campuses.
- DSA Contribution Award: £200
- Care Leavers Bursary: £1,000 per year
- Careers & Skills Development Fund: Up to £200 for skills development/preparation for employment

Priority groups include students with disabilities, ethnic minority backgrounds, and those from disadvantaged areas Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 1 & 2; students who had free school meals (FSM).

See pages 29–30 of the plan for full details.

Information for students

Prospective students: We provide clear and accessible information about fees, financial support, and course details on our website. This information is also shared during open days and induction events. Prospective students can find guidance on eligibility, costs, and available bursaries before applying.

Current Students: Current students receive ongoing support through our virtual learning environments and Microsoft Teams. Academic and support staff actively help students apply for financial support and direct them to the Undergraduate Support Advisor for personalised guidance throughout their studies.

See pages 29–30 for more information.

What we are aiming to achieve and what we are doing to address key risks to equality of opportunity

Objectives 1 and 2: Increase access into higher education and provide clear, targeted information, advice, and guidance:

To raise aspirations and support informed decision making, we will deliver a range of initiatives aimed at students from low participation areas into higher education and those eligible for free school meals. These include school visits, pre-16 and post-16 taster days, and mentoring programmes that provide early engagement and personalised guidance. Competitions such as Creative Minds and Enquiring Minds encourage interest in higher education among underrepresented groups, while university fairs and online resources for students and families offer accessible, targeted information about the benefits of higher education. Through these activities, we aim to reduce barriers to entry and enable students to make informed choices about their future.

Objective 3: Review and adapt curriculum delivery for flexibility and inclusivity:

To improve accessibility and inclusivity, particularly for male students and those from ethnic minority backgrounds, we are reviewing and adapting curriculum delivery to include flexible, blended, and online learning options. We embed employability into the curriculum through live briefs and guest speakers to enhance relevance and engagement. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and Disability working groups play a key role in informing inclusive curriculum design, while EDI training for staff ensures that teaching practices effectively support diverse learners.

Objective 4: Achieve equality in continuation and completion rates:

To achieve equality in continuation and completion rates for all students, including those from the most disadvantaged areas (Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles 1 and 2), students who were eligible for free school meals at Key Stage 4, and students declaring a disability, we focus on fostering a strong sense of belonging, ensuring consistency in inclusive practices, and providing tailored support to remove barriers to engagement and success. We support transition through summer schools, early intervention for students with disclosed needs and a range of wellbeing initiatives. Additionally, sense of belonging initiatives such as social events and digital ambassadors helps create a vibrant community and enhance student engagement.

Objective 5: Close attainment gaps for students with disabilities and ethnic minority backgrounds

To identify needs early and provide tailored academic support, we screen for dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Academic skills support helps improve performance and confidence, while Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training and dedicated working groups promote inclusive teaching and assessment practices.

Objective 6: Improve progression into graduate-level employment or further study

To achieve equality in progression to graduate-level employment or further study for all students particularly those declaring a disability or from an ethnic minority background. We focus on consistent inclusive practices, engagement strategies, and tailored career support. We connect students with employers and alumni through inclusive job fairs and networking events. Virtual reality tools are used to develop soft skills and resilience, preparing students for workplace challenges. Employability is embedded into the curriculum through live briefs, guest speakers, and industry visits to build the skills and confidence needed for graduate-level roles.

See pages 4 -22 of the plan for full details.

How students can get involved

Students helped shape our plan and were actively involved through surveys, focus groups, course representative meetings, and HE committees. A dedicated Student Union widening participation role will be introduced. Student feedback has shaped interventions such as sense of belonging activities and the creation of a disability working group.

See pages 22 and 27–28 of the plan for full details.

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved

We will track progress using data dashboards and student feedback. Each year, we will review our work and publish reports in 2030 on our website. Our evaluation uses a clear method to identify what works and make improvements. Student voice will be included through surveys and representation in evaluation discussions.

Key milestones:

- 2025/26: Establish evaluation group, design CPD, develop dashboards.
- 2026 - 2028: Deliver CPD, roll out tools, share interim evaluations, peer learning.
- 2028/29: External review, advanced CPD, sector collaboration.
- 2029/30: Pilot Type 3 evaluation, publish final report.

See pages 28–29 of the plan for full details.

Contact details for further information

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