Annex I:

The Bedford College Group

Summary of 2025/26- 2027/28 access and participation plan

What is an access and participation plan?

An access and participation sets out provisions that will be meaningful and effective in promoting equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups, as determined by the Office for Students.

You can see the full access and participation plan for the Bedford College Group at [insert link].

Key points

The purpose of The Bedford College Group is to help individuals, communities and society flourish through education by reducing inequality to create a sustainable future. We are committed to strategies to widen participation in Higher Education courses and enabling and improving progression opportunities for all students.

The Bedford College Group serves the communities of Luton, Dunstable, Bedford, Wellingborough, Corby and Silverstone. Our Access and Participation plan aims to ensure there is equal opportunities for individuals within our communities to enter into and be successful in higher education.

See pages 1-3 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Fees we charge

The Bedford College Group will charge the following fees for the 2026/2027 year. Subject to the review following parliamentary changes to maximum student tuition fee charges announced in November 2024 and 2025..

£7500 per year HNC/HND and £6528 Foundation Degree

£9790 per year Top up degree courses

See pages 34-35 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Financial help available

All students receive information when they apply to the college by email detailing the process of applying for student finance The College website has a section on college bursaries and support available to students with direct links to apply for bursaries. Higher Skills bursaries include hardship, travel and progression.

- The progression bursary is a one-off payment in year 1 of a students' course of £500. The eligibility criteria include the student being
  a) A UK or EU national and studying either at Bedford College, Shuttleworth College, Tresham College, National College for Motorsport or The Bedford Sixth Form, The Corby Sixth Form or Central Bedfordshire College who has successfully completed a full-time Level 3 programme, or Level 3 apprenticeship.
  b) Must be enrolled on a full-time or part-time higher education course at the Bedford college group
  c) Apply before 31st December of the academic year
  d) Have a student loan approved or agreed, an agreed direct debit or have paid their fees in full
  e) Not have been awarded the progression bursary in any previous academic year.

- The travel bursary can be up to £500 per academic year. The eligibility criteria for the travel bursary include a student to have

  a) Achievement of a level 3 qualification at The Bedford college group and has progressed to a university centre course at a different campus where not available at their original campus
  b) Lives more than 15.5 miles walking distance from their new campus
  c) Enrolled on a Bedford College Group University course

  The travel bursary is also dependent on attendance to the course.

- The hardship fund has a maximum funding level grant of £500 per application and is subject to available funding at the time of the application. The grant is limited to once per academic year

  Eligibility criteria for the hardship bursary include the following criteria

  a) The student is enrolled and attending as a student on a Higher-Level Skills courses at Bedford College Group at the time of payment.
  b) The student has received a full tuition fee loan from Student Finance England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland that covers your tuition.
  c) The student has received a full entitlement of maintenance loans from Student Finance England
  d) Full-time students and students with children, lone parents, mature students, students with low-income families, students who have been in care, students who are homeless, final-year students, disabled students and students that were eligible for Free School Meals at KS4 are also eligible to apply to this fund.
- ALS staff will support eligible students with their DSA applications, including those on L3 courses progressing onto HE

See pages 34-35 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Information for students

Information on all of our fees can be found in the following places:

- Published fees in prospectus and on the college website
- Fees updated on HEP portal for student finance
- Fees published through UCAS
- Student services, admissions and course leaders receive training on student finance and how to guide students through the process
- HE information events- give verbal presentations to students on the bursary and financial support options

See pages 34-35 of the access and participation plan for more information.

What we are aiming to achieve

Our plan includes 3 key risks to equal opportunity at The Bedford College Group for which we are trying to address. These include;

Risk: Lower proportions of students from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds (using the indices of deprivation 2019 measure) access higher education at The Bedford College Group (TBCG).

Aim: The Bedford College Group will increase the numbers of students from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds and reduce the gap to 0 % by 2029. We aim to achieve this through our awareness campaign and progression support policies which will target the perceptions of higher education and the barriers to entry due to poor academic outcomes at KS4

Risk: Students who were in receipt of free school meals at KS4 are less likely to continue their studies at the college

Aim: The Bedford College Group will increase the continuation rate of students who were in receipt of FSM at KS4 to within 3% of those who were not in receipt of FSM hence reducing the gap by 2028. We will achieve this through targeted tutorial support, improving communications and guidance on all available bursaries amongst staff and students and better understanding our students at application.

Risk: Completion rates from four year and two-year aggregate data consistently demonstrate that completion for white students is higher than those of black and mixed-race students.

Aim: The Bedford College Group will improve completion rates for non-white students to 82.0% by 2028. This will be achieved by improving academic and personal support throughout the student lifecycle, staff training and our belonging campaign.

See pages 2-4 of the access and participation plan for more information.

What we are doing to address keys risks to equality of opportunity

To address the key risks to equality and opportunity we are implementing three interventions strategies.

Intervention Strategy 1- Access and Awareness Campaign

The equality of opportunity risks that will be addressed as part of this intervention will be to include work on the perception of higher education by ensuring every student feels that they can apply to higher education courses no matter their background and to ensure they have the correct information and guidance to support them in decision making. To support in the development of knowledge and skills required for higher education courses and to support with cost pressures that may form a barrier to students entering into or continuing in higher education.

As part of this intervention The Bedford College Group will be rolling out a new progression strategy, pathways to higher education programs for 16-18 and adults, higher education enhancer days, staff training, future learning programs and support North Northamptonshire's big 50 program.

Intervention Strategy 2- The Bedford College group Educational Gains and Support Strategy

The equality of opportunity risks that will be addressed as part of this intervention will be cost pressures, limited course and delivery mode and insufficient personal support.

As part of this intervention and to address these issues The Bedford College Group will be rolling out flexible learning options, increased options of higher and degree apprenticeships, review our higher education university partners, staff training, educational gain induction and tutorial program, educational gain skills development program and a review of our bursary and guidance.

Intervention Strategy 3- Student belonging strategy

The equality of opportunity risks that will be addressed as part of this intervention will be insufficient academic and personal support and cost pressures.

As part of this intervention and to address these issues The Bedford College Group will be rolling out its ‘More Like me campaign’, academic and tutorial mentoring, peer mentoring, staff training, religion and belief policies, LGBTQ+ support advocates and an enhancement calendar for HS students.

See pages 4-18 of the access and participation plan for more information.

How students can get involved

We welcome student involvement with the implementation and evaluation of the access and participation plan. Student voice has contributed to its development and we have taken on board their comments when designing the intervention strategies.

Students can become involved in feeding back to us on the plan through the following channels:

Volunteering to be a student course representative.

Attending departmental committee meetings, academic board and governors’ meetings.

Joining the student focus group meetings where the targets and progress of the access and participation plan will be shared.

See pages 33 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Evaluation – how we will measure what we have achieved

Over the course of the Access and Participation plan we will be using The Bedford College Groups data systems to anise the impact of the intervention strategies on applications, continuation and completion rates for the targeted groups. We will also gather data through student voice, student focus groups and student surveys to measure the impact of the intervention strategies.

In addition to the data we can obtain from our college systems we will hold a regular (termly) access and participation committee which will monitor progress of the intervention strategies, an annual report to the academic board and an end of project report.

See pages 27, 33-34 of the access and participation plan for more information.

Contact details for further information

Please contact the Higher Skills Team HEOffice@bedford.ac.uk for more information.

(Fees amended to reflect the increased fee limits as set by the government in 2025 and 2026)