

2025

University of
Kent

OUTREACH AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION IMPACT REPORT

WE STAND FOR AMBITION.



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OUTREACH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT

At the University of Kent, we stand for ambition. We are proud of our collaborative work with schools and colleges to support students from all backgrounds to access, succeed in and progress from higher education (HE).

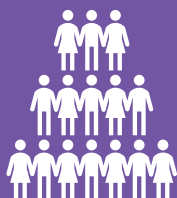
This report, written in 2025, highlights the outreach work undertaken during the 2023–24 academic year. Due to the time required for data collection and analysis, 2023–24 is the most recent academic year for which complete data is available.

Our programmes are evidence-based by design, grounded in sound pedagogy and informed by impact data to ensure meaningful outcomes. For over 15 years, we have collected data from students during outreach activities to monitor our work and its outcomes to assess its impact on under-represented students.

We are founding members of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT), a collaboration of over 100 HE providers and third-sector organisations committed to monitoring and evaluating interventions to understand what works for equality of opportunity.

Since 2000, the University has:

Tracked over
73,000
outreach participants



Of which **32%**
progressed to
higher education



Over **3,000**
of these students
enrolled at the
University of Kent



Meaningful collaboration

The University has close relationships with local schools and colleges, including members of the Kent and Medway Progression Federation.

The University is also a member of the East Kent Schools Together (EKST) partnership.

The University of Kent Academies Trust

The University is the proud sponsor of the University of Kent Academies Trust (UKAT). The Trust comprises of two secondary schools in Medway – Brompton Academy and Chatham Grammar.

The University of Kent's relationship with the two schools goes well beyond the formal governance role.

500 hours of
outreach are delivered
to UKAT each year



Brompton Academy
is currently the most
oversubscribed
non-selective school
in Medway



In 2024, over **70.5%**
of all UKAT students who
completed Year 13
progressed to HE



Our work with UKAT was featured as a case-study for effective practice by the Office for Students (OfS).



Fulfilling our regulatory commitments

Our ambitious Access and Participation Plan (APP) addresses the risks to equality of opportunity that we have identified and prioritised.

Our efforts and resources will be targeted to address Kent's greatest equality of opportunity risks.



2023-24 IN NUMBERS

In 2023-24:

We engaged with over
7,600
students



Delivering more than
600
outreach activities



To more than **100**
institutions across
Kent and Medway



This equates to more
than **2,200**
hours of contact time



Driving equity in access to higher education

We remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting students who are underrepresented in higher education.

50% of
participants were
from socio-economically
disadvantaged areas
(IMD Quintiles 1 & 2)



58% came from
areas with historically
low higher education
participants
(TUNDRA Quintiles 1 & 2)



Over **70** Access
to HE students
supported in FE
colleges



OUR PRE-16 WORK

The importance of early engagement

For our pre-16 work, we work in partnership predominantly with local schools that fall within the bottom 40% nationally for GCSE attainment, providing targeted support to help raise achievement and improve outcomes for students.

Research consistently shows that engaging students before the age of 16 is crucial for supporting long-term progression. Our own data reinforces this, which is why we begin working with learners from Year 7 onwards to lay the groundwork for future success.

We tracked over 1,000 HE-ready students (aged 18+) in 2021. Overall, 20.9% progressed to higher education.

Progression rates varied by outreach engagement:

- 22.7% for those who participated in pre-16 only activities
- 16.8% for those who participated in post-16 only activities
- 25.2% for those who engaged both pre- and post-16

These findings highlight the impact of sustained outreach across key stages.

Wherever possible, we also involve parents and carers to strengthen the support network around each student.

HEAT (2020) research shows that learners who attend on campus activities are more likely to enter HE than those attending off-campus activities. This is particularly pronounced among disadvantaged groups.

In 2023/24:

// On the tour when we were walking around, I was actually in my head thinking, I could actually go here. //

Student (Year 7)

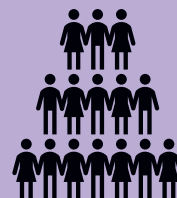
1,600+ pre-16 students:

Visited our Canterbury and Medway campuses



Including over 400 Year 7 students:

At the very start of their secondary school journey



25+ families welcomed to campus:

Opening doors for parents and carers to explore higher education alongside their children



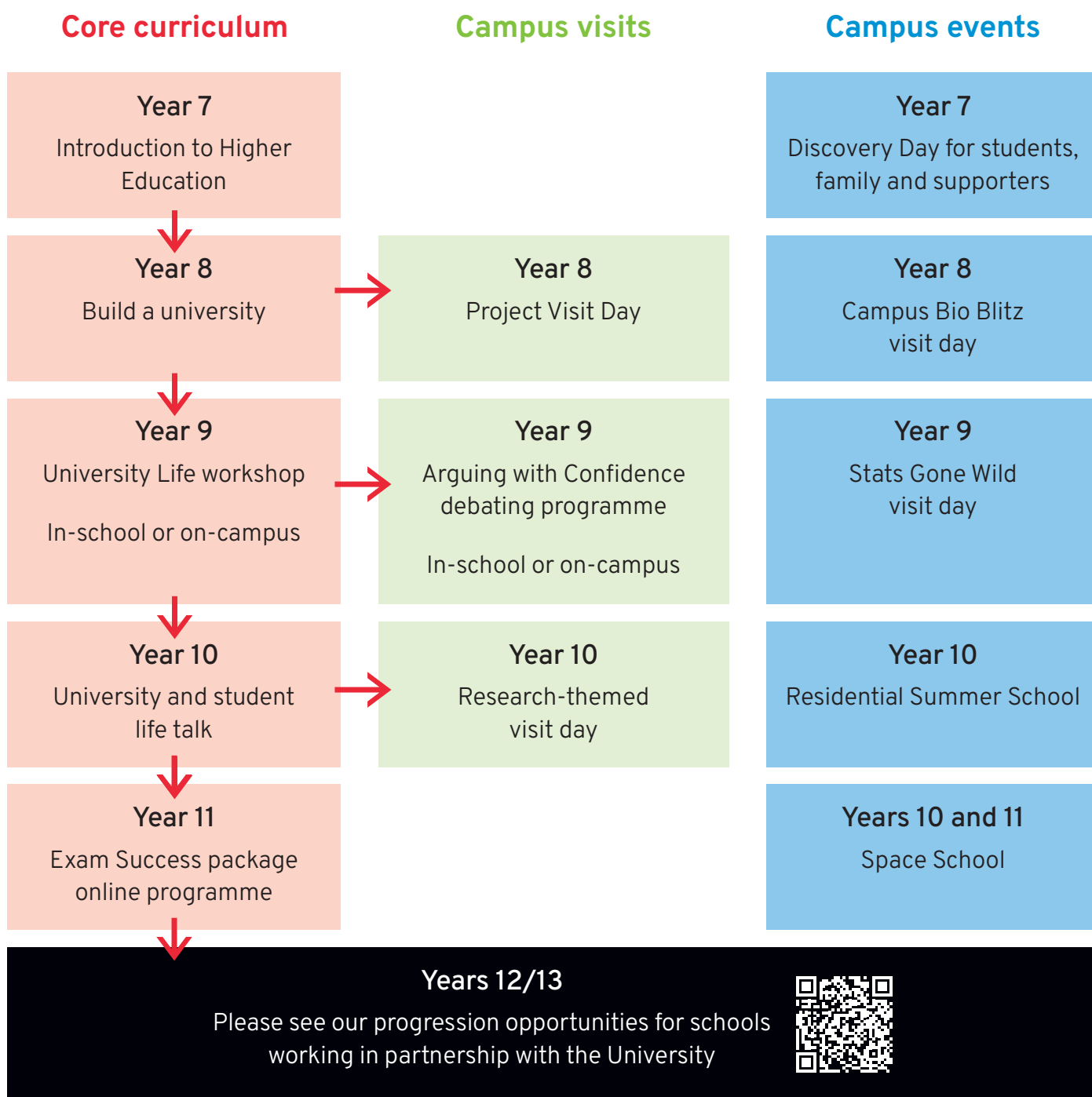
Igniting curiosity:

At this pivotal stage, we focus on inspiring a love of learning and helping students imagine their future possibilities.



PRE-16 PROGRESSION ROUTE MAP

Our curriculum has been designed to allow students opportunities to engage with university and our student ambassadors throughout their student journey. By following our core curriculum and adding optional visits, students will be provided with a unique opportunity to develop their understanding of HE.



ATTAINMENT RAISING

In line with the OfS regulatory call to action, we work collaboratively with local schools to tackle their specific areas of need and support student outcomes.

In response to significant attainment gaps, widened by local deprivation and lasting effects of the pandemic, schools highlighted literacy and numeracy as a critical area of need. These foundational skills are essential, as they unlock access to a broader curriculum and overall academic success.

Our literacy programme

We delivered two key strands of support: reading intervention for Year 7 students and oracy coaching for Year 9s.

To measure impact, we used a mixed-methods approach: standardised tests tracked academic progress, while interviews and observations captured shifts in confidence and engagement that data alone can't show.

For Year 7, over 100 students took part across three schools, benefiting from targeted, evidence-led support.

38% of students improved their reading age by at least one year.

Students showed:

- Improved ability to explain definitions
- Confident use of new vocabulary in context.

Schools reported:

- Increased reading confidence
- More enjoyment of reading
- More reading before bed
- More students buying their own books.

Our oracy programme

Students participated in a six-week oracy programme, which utilised debating to develop oracy and critical thinking skills. Throughout the programme, students debated real world social issues that relate to a variety of curriculum areas.

Our results show:

- Average speaking time per student rose from 29 seconds to 104 seconds
- Students reported greater confidence in speaking skills
- Improved ability to organise and structure arguments
- Significant boost in confidence to succeed in GCSE English.

Feedback said:

// I have witnessed pupils who were too fearful of talking aloud, blossom into confident speakers and are then able to apply this in other subjects and all aspects of their life. Some students were so motivated by the debating sessions, they even commented that 'it was the reason they came to school'.//

School teacher

// Yeah, confidence. Because, normally, I even struggle to speak in front of my friend groups, because there's so many people. But now I can properly, like, actually speak freely.//

Pupil

Our numeracy programme

We teamed up with Catch-Up® to provide numeracy support to over 20 students across two schools. The programme focuses on key foundational mathematics concepts.

Student ambassadors and staff connected with pupils to explore:

- How students feel about maths
- The influence of family and teachers on their enjoyment
- Discussions about university pathways.

Our results show:

- 56% of students showed an increase in their enjoyment of maths and how easy they found it
- By the end of the programme, 63% of students said they would 'spend time trying to work it out and get there in the end' compared to 44% at the start.

Feedback said:

// It's fun and has helped with my maths. I don't have to feel so nervous because I know more stuff.//

Student

// You help me try and get the answers and help me remember what we've done. I don't normally get help in maths lessons so I just sit there and don't know what to do. I love 1:1.//

Student

GCSE science practicals

We know that our schools struggle with space for science practicals, so we have allocated lab sessions for schools to be able to complete the required GCSE assessments. Schools have access to our technicians who help with the experiments.

Our solution:

- Allocated lab sessions for schools to complete practicals on campus
- Access to expert technicians who assist with experiments
 - 27 students were supported with core science practicals
 - 28 students engaged in Physics practicals, designed as a GCSE extension.

KS4 results

The latest KS4 results of our outreach participants are from the 2023 exam cohort. On average, students who took part in outreach activities designed to raise attainment generally, or specifically in literacy, did better than their school averages.

General attainment raising activities

On average, students who took part in general attainment raising activities had a better Attainment 8 score (+6.61) and Progress 8 score (+0.37) than their school average. More outreach participants achieved 9-4 in English and Maths (by 6pp).

	Participants	School average
Average attainment 8 Score	45.78	39.17
Average progress 8 Score	0.08	-0.29
Achieved 9-4 English and Maths	62%	56%

Literacy attainment raising activities

On average, students who took part in literacy attainment raising activities had a better Attainment 8 score (+12.41) and Progress 8 score (+0.55) than their school average. More outreach participants achieved 9-4 in English and Maths (by 20pp).

	Participants	School Average
Average attainment 8 Score	60.86	48.46
Average progress 8 Score	0.57	0.02
Achieved 9-4 English and Maths	88%	68%



Summer Schools

Summer schools offer an immersive experience that help attendees envision themselves as university students.

In July 2024, 47 Year 10 students took part in a residential experience at our Canterbury campus.

57% of students
were eligible for
free school meals



63% of students'
parents did not
attend HE



54% of students
were from TUNDRA
Q1 areas



Our evaluation showed us:

- A reported increase in their knowledge of HE
- Strong increases in their knowledge of what studying in HE would be like and how it is different to studying in school
- Participants performed better than their school average in Attainment 8 scores

Feedback said:

// I'm feeling glad that I've met people actually like me and are actually interested in the things that I like as well. Everyone that I've met on this summer school has been super nice and [had] very open arms... it's been great.**//**

Summer school student

Read our summer school report here:



Family and Supporter Discovery Days

Parents and supporters play a key role in shaping young people's decisions. We ensure they are well-informed and empowered to support their young person's journey to higher education.

These half-day visits to campus offer students and their family and supporters the opportunity to learn more about university life.

25 families
joined us on
campus



Feedback said:

// I attended today's open day for year 7 students with my daughter and we thoroughly enjoyed it and it was very informative and helpful and has made not only my daughter excited about her future but it also spoke to me as well.**//**

Parent

// Now that I have the idea of what a campus is like and stuff, I feel like I'd be more comfortable than I was before.**//**

Student

OUR SIXTH-FORM AND FE COLLEGE WORK

In 2023-2024:

We engaged with over
3,900
students in Sixth-Form
and FE Colleges



Hosting **49**
campus visits with
900+ students
visiting our campuses



Delivering over
300+ activities



Head Start

Our Head Start events provide resources, guidance and support throughout the summer, to ensure that students will be ready to go from the moment they arrive at Kent.

In 2023-2024, the outreach team:

Successfully supported
150+ students
transition to the University
of Kent through our
Head Start programme



Academic Mentoring

As part of our Sixth Form offer at UKAT, we have trained postgraduate student ambassadors to provide specialist academic mentoring for A Level students.

In 2023-2024:

We provided academic
mentoring in **10**
different subject
specialisms



With more than
60 hours of
specialist support



For **72** students
within our UKAT
Sixth Form cohort



Our records show that
85% of students
attended 3 hours or more
academic mentoring with us



// I remember leaving the pears lecture hall with big dreams of what university could be...I realised today that I've already done everything I even thought about and so much more.//

Former FE outreach participant who became a student ambassador

Visit the Head Start webpages here:



PROGRESSION ROUTE MAP

Our activities are designed to inform, inspire and increase awareness of higher education. We have a range of talks and workshops within the themes below to support students at each step throughout their educational journey.

Our sessions are available in person or online. We also offer a series of livestream talks to support students and their parents/guardians through these decision-making moments.

The livestreams, placed at key points in the UCAS cycle, offer essential information, first-hand experience from our student ambassadors and a chance to have students' questions answered.

In-school/FE college

Considering university

Explore the decision-making process ensuring that students make the choice that's right for them.



Applying to university

From understanding the UCAS process, to writing a personal statement, preparing for interviews and understanding student finance, we can support your students every step of the way.



Preparing for university

Students planning to enter university often have many questions about how to best prepare. Help them feel fully prepared and confident in knowing what to expect next. These sessions include insights from current students and practical information on the transition to university.

Online

Value of HE



It's not too late to consider HE



A guide to finance



What can I expect at university

Meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks

We've mapped how each of our activities and events are aligned with the Benchmarks and how they can support schools and colleges to deliver on their Careers Strategy.





“ I think before Succeed, I wasn’t as confident, and now I’ll be in a lecture hall, calling out stuff. [...] They taught us so much about what uni life is and how you can get support.”

Focus Group Participant

AMBITION TO SUCCEED PROGRAMME

Ambition to Succeed is our flagship Level 3 progression scheme which is designed to support students to explore their options before applying to higher education. The programme takes place over six months with additional optional support offered in Year 13 when making applications. Sessions include in-person visit days and online workshops, culminating in a four-day residential on our Canterbury campus. Students who complete the programme are also eligible for our Ambition to Succeed Scholarship.

As part of the programme, Year 12 students are introduced to a diverse range of academic subjects, many of which may be unfamiliar to them. Through immersive experiences such as university-style lectures, they are encouraged to explore new interests and gain a deeper understanding of the different subjects on offer at Kent. By the end of the year, students are equipped with the knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions about their future academic journeys. While we hope to welcome many of them to Kent, this experience provides valuable preparation for wherever they choose to progress. It also enhances their personal statements with evidence of curiosity, motivation, and academic engagement.

The results:

Over the last seven years, we've had over

170 students complete the programme



57% of whom progressed into higher education



Our most recent cohorts:

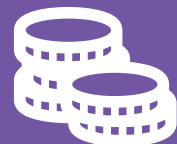
In 2024, **47** students finished the programme



66% of those have applied for a place at the University of Kent



6 students from the 2023 cohort have received the University's Ambition to Succeed Scholarship in 2024/2025



// Before, you think of university and you think 'Oh, they are all geniuses.' [And now], It was like 'I could be one of them.' //

Succeed Participant

// I will fit in more than what I thought I would before the Succeed Programme. //

Succeed Participant

OUR WORK WITH TARGETED GROUPS

Care-experienced students

Care experienced students are underrepresented in HE and have significantly poorer educational outcomes (OfS, 2022).

Published statistics show that progression to higher education has declined over the last few years: the Kent and Medway average stood at 8% in 2016/17 but was reported at 4% in 2020/21 (Department for Education, 2022).

We want to change the narrative.

Key highlights from our work in 2023-2024:

7 insight visits delivered for care-experienced students, focused on supporting their application journey and transition into higher education



4 online CPD sessions reaching **28** professionals, equipping them with tools to better support care-experienced learners



Specialist sessions delivered to **45** foster carers and professionals offering guidance on applications to HE



10 care-experienced young people participated in our Spring School, gaining valuable exposure to university life and new aspirations



Opening Doors

Acknowledging the unique challenges faced by care-experienced students, we work in close partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University and the University for the Creative Arts through the Kent and Medway Progression Federation (KMPF). Together, we deliver a broad range of opportunities designed to empower young people and provide vital support to those who guide them, including professionals and foster carers.

Our Opening Doors programme plays a central role in this mission, helping young people and their support networks make informed, confident decisions about their future.

Supporting care-experienced young people: Plan My Path and beyond

Plan My Path is a progressive programme for pre-16 children in care, offering inspiring, interactive sessions both in school and on the University of Kent campus. Designed to help students explore their future and pathways to higher education, the programme is delivered in partnership with schools with higher numbers of children in care.

2023-24 Plan My Path highlights:

15 sessions delivered across **6** schools



33 students engaged, with **58%** attending multiple sessions



75% of participants (25 students) joined a campus visit





In addition...

We also worked with 24 ESOL learners, mostly unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, at Broadstairs College, supporting them through tailored activities.

Our partnerships with Virtual School Kent and Kent County Council's 18+ Care Leaving Service allowed us to connect with professionals and care leavers aged 18–25. We presented at VSK's annual conference, reaching around 150 professionals, and took part in the 18+ Care Leaver Summer Event.

Co-creation

All of this work is supported by our Targeted Outreach Ambassadors – current University of Kent students with care experience. The ambassadors are consulted, invited to share ideas, review the sessions, and support the delivery of sessions. Their lived expertise drives the impact of our outreach:

// Being a Targeted Outreach Ambassador is empowering. I've been able to share my care experience and help young people overcome stereotypes. //

// This role has helped me understand my own story and use it to empower others – including the professionals who support care-experienced people. //

Our work with targeted ambassadors was published in *Co-constructing Education for All* – read the article here:



Transition support

Our work with care experienced students extends beyond entry into higher education. Our targeted outreach team continue to support students transitioning into and succeeding within higher education.

To find out more about the full lifecycle support offered to care experienced students visit our case study:



Championing Boys

Research shows that boys encounter persistent educational challenges throughout the education lifecycle and those with socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to experience lower GCSE attainment rates and lower progression to higher education than their female counterparts.

Championing Boys is a progressive programme designed to support boys who experience these educational challenges through a series of modules aimed to explore potential identities and future educational opportunities as well as giving a platform for their voices to be listened to.

Students reported:

92% of students enjoyed participating in the programme



78% of Year 8 participants said the programme allowed them to explore new interests



78% of students said they found meeting student ambassadors useful



Student feedback said:

// Some people say like, when a door is shut, and it opens another one. So, it opens a door for you to think about your education and what you're going to do after school. Like, I need to pay a bit more attention in classes to actually get me somewhere. //

Student

// Yeah, I've been more confident at school. Like, in English, I've answered a lot more questions, and I've been giving a lot more detailed answers. //

Student

Teacher feedback said:

// I can already see the foundations of what is going to grow over upcoming years thanks to the skilled way they work with our pupils. The pupils within the groups are developing strong bonds and friendships and developing a deeper understanding of who they are. //

Teacher

// Our first cohort was a group of Year 9 boys, and we have seen drastic improvements in their confidence and oracy skills, based on the sessions they have completed. This has been commented on by a number of teachers who have seen this grow in the classroom. //

Teacher

Read our reports here:



2023



2024

This work was accepted as part of a Parliamentary enquiry into the attainment and progression of boys. Read the submission here:



HE PROGRESSION AND SUCCESS

At the University of Kent, we are committed to increasing participation in higher education more broadly. Our goal is to empower students to choose the institution that is right for them – wherever that may be.

We're proud that many of these students choose Kent as their destination, and we are here to welcome and support them every step of the way.

Kent & Medway entrants and Outreach participation

44% of University of Kent entrants in 2024/25 engaged meaningfully in Outreach prior to enrolling



Around **500** students participated in a University of Kent outreach activity before starting their course at Kent



Including Kent & Medway Progression Federation Partners

49% of University of Kent entrants in 24/25 engaged meaningfully in Outreach from a KMPF partner (including Kent) prior to enrolling



Our data shows a strong link between the depth of engagement and progression into higher education:

- The more they engage, the further they go
 - **Minimal engagement**
One activity or survey only
 - 15.9% progressed to higher education (2021/22)
 - **Deeper engagement**
Two or more outreach activities
 - 20.9% progressed to higher education (2021/22)

That's a five percentage point increase in progression for students who engage more intensively with our programmes!

Why it matters

Even though 20.9% may sound like a modest figure, it's important to remember:

- Many of the students we work with, often haven't considered higher education as an option
- These outcomes represent real, meaningful progress
- We're not just preparing students for university – we're helping them see that it's possible.

Long-term success of Outreach participants

Once they're in, they thrive

90.1% of our outreach participants continued in HE (above the national average)



75.3% achieved a 2:1 or above at degree level



Why it matters

This shows that when given the opportunity and support, students from underrepresented backgrounds can – and do – achieve just as highly.

STUDENT VOICE

Student voice shapes everything we do – from programme design to informing our Widening Participation strategy.

We employ a diverse team of student ambassadors who co-create and evaluate our activities, and deliver sessions in schools and FE colleges. Their lived experience and insight ensure our work remains relevant and impactful.

As relatable role models, our ambassadors play a vital role in helping young people imagine and aspire to their future selves.

300+

student ambassadors employed by the University



20%

of ambassadors took part in outreach before joining us!



20,000 hours of paid ambassador work was offered to students in the 2023/2024 academic year



// We fit in with them and they fit in with us and it makes life a lot easier to relax and know you're with someone who can help you if you need it //

Summer school attendee, talking about student ambassadors

WP Student Advisory Panel

We recognise that widening participation extends beyond access – it must also support student success and progression.

To help shape our strategy, provide meaningful insight, and ensure accountability, we have established a Widening Participation Student Advisory Panel. This panel plays a key role in guiding our work and ensuring it reflects the real experiences and needs of students.

- Made up of students underrepresented in higher education
- Bring lived experience of barriers and shared strategies to enable access to HE
- Diverse group of students, from different academic schools
- Help shape our strategy and hold us accountable

// The ambassador scheme is a beautiful way for students to learn a little bit about taking responsibility and understanding that their work has an impact on something other than themselves. It also opens their eyes to what a lot of people from different backgrounds have to go through, even at a young age and helps to really broaden perspectives. //

Student ambassador

Thank you to all the schools and colleges who have provided data to help us evaluate our collective impact.

Our latest evaluations can be viewed here:



HIGHLIGHTS OF 2024/25 SO FAR...

Commendation from NEON for HE Institution of the Year

We received a commendation in the prestigious National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) 'Higher Education Institution of the Year' Award category in recognition of our commitment and accomplishments in supporting learners from underrepresented groups to access and succeed in HE.



Kent and Medway Boys' Impact Conference

In April, we welcomed over 130 people from across the education sector to launch the Kent and Medway Boys Impact Hub. This hub will work towards setting the regional strategy to support the educational success and progress of boys who experience compounded educational disadvantage. The University is excited to be co-chairing this new hub.

// This is the best conference I have ever attended. //

Conference delegate

Student Voice WonkHE spotlight

Our work to ensure that students voice is meaningfully embedded was spotlighted in WonkHE.



Special performance of Generation FOMO

Generation FOMO is a verbatim play based on interviews conducted with 11–25-year-olds by Isabelle Defaut, Artistic Director of Portrait Theatre. The play has been expanded to include 'The Social Experiment' – a piece of ongoing research led by Isabelle Defaut and Dr Lindsay Cameron in our School of Psychology, designed as a springboard for conversations between young people and their parents/carers and teachers about smartphone use. In July 2025, Outreach and Widening Participation held a special performance of Generation FOMO at the Aphra Theatre, followed by a panel Q&A, for Headteachers/teachers, mental health practitioners, parents and educators across Kent and Medway.

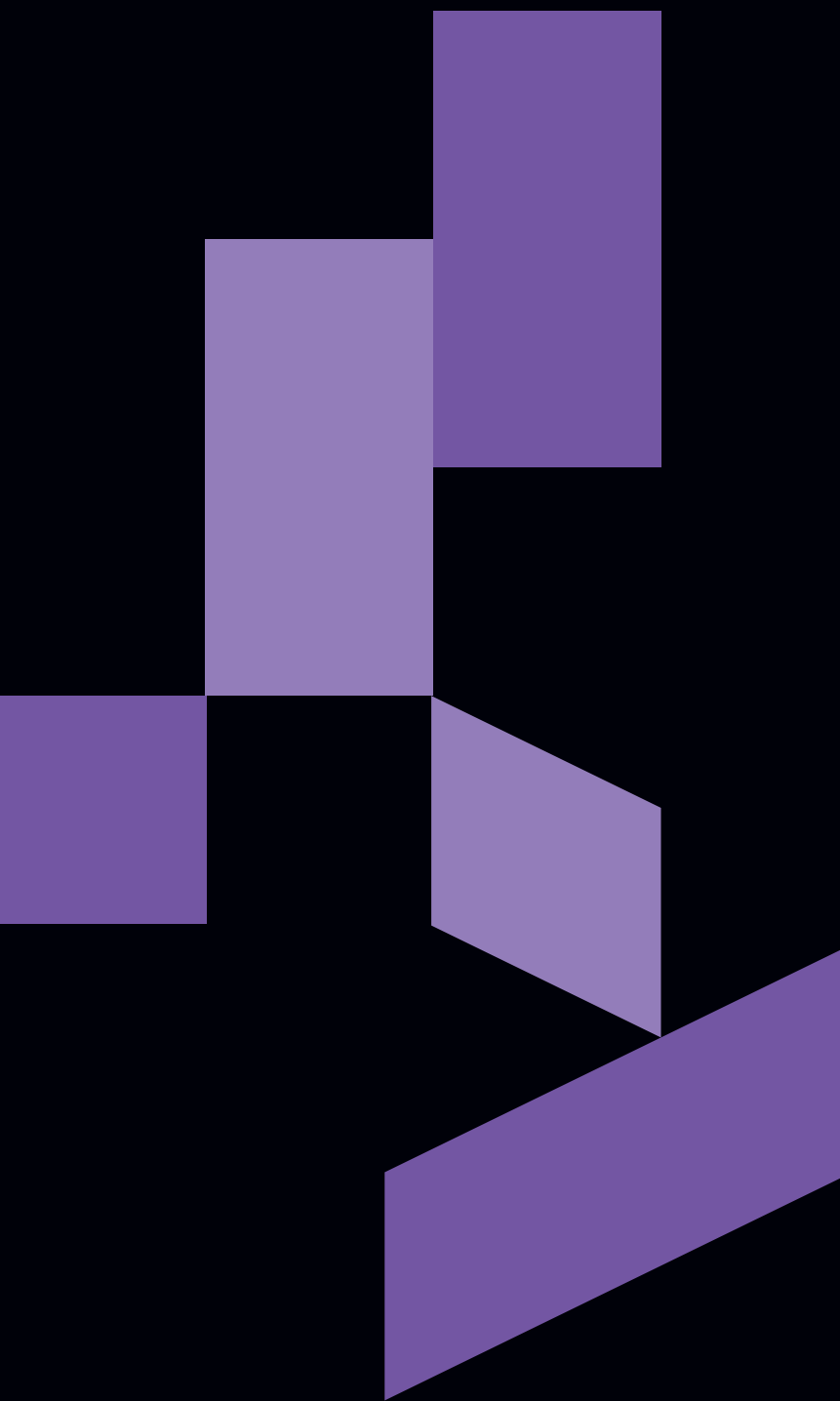


Activities in 2024-2025

In 2024-2025 the University has continued to offer a wide range of events and activities to support the success and progression of students across Kent and Medway. This includes developing new and exciting events such as our inaugural Festival of Languages & Culture, a week-long celebration of benefits of language learning and of cultural diversity in HE.

Held **127** events
on our university
campuses





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