

# National Centre for Circus Arts

## Access and Participation Plan - 2022-23 to 2026-27

### Introduction

The National Centre for Circus Arts (**the National Centre or NCCA**) is a registered charity and one of Europe's leading providers of circus education. Based in a magnificent Victorian power station adjacent to Hoxton Square in London, we involve thousands of people in the creation and performance of circus arts every year. Over half of the annual income needed to run the National Centre comes from grants and donations.

We are not fearful of the unknown and have a solid track record of innovation. Circus appeals to a broad range of people and we are committed to ensuring we meet the needs of the sector by being inclusive, open and accessible to everyone.

Our diverse range of work includes a BA Hons degree in Circus Arts, a structured progressive training programme for under 18s and professional development opportunities for aspiring and established performers. Adults and young people can take part in a range of recreational classes and we provide workshops and away days for the business community.

In 2005 the National Centre entered the Higher Education (**HE**) sector, joining the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (**CDD**) and validating its Foundation Degree and BA (Hons) course in Circus Arts with the University of Kent. Under CDD's access and participation plan, we have made good progress in achieving a more representative student population, but we want to go further. This Access and Participation Plan (**APP**) outlines our assessment of the National Centre's historic performance in this area. We have identified areas where we will take further action and set out the strategic approaches we will take to improve the participation of under-represented groups in our circus training.

We have consulted our students as part of the development of this APP and their comments and feedback have been included in this document. Words matter to us and our students and our language is something we review regularly in the National Centre. For that reason, we refer to People of Global Majority to describe Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students; and students with "specific learning differences" to describe students with a "specific learning difficulty" throughout this APP. The reference of these terms throughout the plan only applies to qualifying students that come under an access and participation plan<sup>1</sup>.

### 1. Assessment of performance

Although we are a newly registered Higher Education Provider (**HEP**), we have the advantage of having been a constituent part of another HEP, namely CDD. One of the key aims of this plan is to build a consistent set of measures, appropriate for the subject we teach, so that we can establish useful benchmarks for evaluating our performance.

Our principal data sources for analysing our performance are:

- the Office for Students (**OfS**) access and participation data for the sector and the Centre (via the OfS APP dashboard, March 2021 release);
- sector wide data available through the Higher Education Statistics Agency (**HESA**);
- internal Annual Programme Monitoring and Review (**APMR**) data for academic years 17/18, 18/19 and 19/20;
- internal equality monitoring on student success (continuation and attainment) for academic years 17/18, 18/19 and 19/20;

---

<sup>1</sup> when we are referring to "People of Global Majority" we are referring to BAME students as an underrepresented group as detailed in Regulatory Notice 1 and as reflected in the A&P data dashboard.

- anecdotal internal data about graduate destinations for the cohort graduating in 2018, 2019 and 2020. As with other specialist arts institutions, the (former) Destination of Leavers in Higher Education survey has limitations for students working in a freelance capacity. We ourselves collect information about student destinations specifically in relation to professional employment in their areas of training;
- long-term trend analysis based on internal data for NCCA and OfS APP dashboard data for the sector which helps to visualise our journey. In order to comply with HESA's rounding methodology we have reduced the data included on the Y-axis to only include minimum and maximum values.

We are a small institution. In 2019 there were 19 graduates from the BA (Hons) Programme and 17 graduates from the Foundation degree.

Our performance data should be understood in that context: a difference of one student often leads to a 2 to 3 percentage point change. To smooth out the volatility caused by changes in one or two students, we have included a linear trend line in our analysis, which shows the underlying trend and direction of travel whilst recognising that individual data points will inevitably vary from this trend. This draws on internal data, because the OfS dashboard does not report the small numbers.

The small size of each cohort also means that in reporting performance we must be careful not to enable the inadvertent identification of individual students. In the presentation below we follow the approach adopted by HESA, which means that often we are unable to report actual numbers or percentages. We use five-year – or where available three-year - aggregates to enable us to present data on our specific gaps, bearing in mind the small number of students who sometimes make up these categories.

Whilst the National Centre has two separate undergraduate programmes, the one-year top-up BA (Hons) in Circus Arts follows on from the two-year Foundation Degree in Circus Arts. The assessment of our performance covers entry to our Foundation Degree as well as entry to our one-year top-up BA (Hons).

In the next section we focus on access, continuation, attainment and progression for each of the under-represented groups:

- students from low participation neighbourhoods,
- students from deprived socio-economic backgrounds,
- student members of People of Global Majority (the category of People of Global Majority will be further disaggregated as part of the work planned in this APP see more detail under our Strategic Measure 5 on page 15),
- mature students,
- students with a disability or learning difference (this group will be further disaggregated as part of the work planned in this APP see more detail under our Strategic Measure 5 on page 15),
- care-leavers.

## 1.1 Access

The analysis that follows shows that the Centre has made steady progress in recruiting a diverse group of students. The Centre has increased participation by People of Global Majority, as well as mature entrants and has maintained good access for entrants with declared disabilities. Whilst the Centre is proud of the improvement made over the last 5 years in those areas, the analysis also shows a lack of progress in increasing participation to entrants from the areas with lowest participation and entrants with the highest level of deprivation.

### Higher education participation, household income or socioeconomic status

The graphs, tables and commentary below set out the Centre's performance in recruiting students from deprived socio-economic backgrounds. We have assessed our performance by reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation

(IMD) and the POLAR4 classification of Low higher education Participation Neighbourhoods (LPNs), which is often used as a proxy for the socio-economic status of entrants from those areas. We track reduction of the gaps in participation and success between students from different POLAR4 and IMD quintiles. To enhance our analysis, we have included students' household income to gain fuller evidence of our progress in achieving equality of opportunity across socio-economic groups.

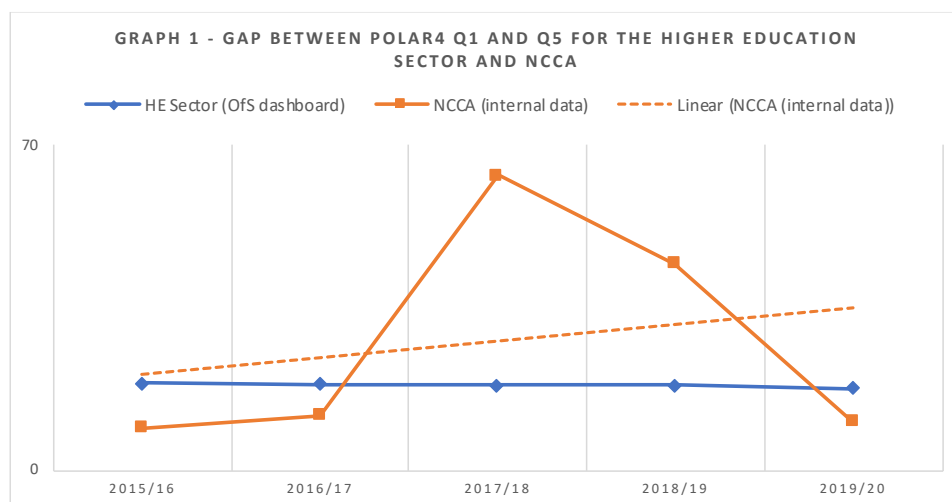
## POLAR4 data

POLAR4 divides the UK in postcode areas and each is classified according to whether young people attend University. Postcodes are divided in 5 groups or quintiles. Quintile 1 includes postcodes with lowest level of participation. Quintile 5 the highest. When applied to London, from which we recruit a high proportion of our students, POLAR4 has limitations: a higher percentage of young people from London progress to university when compared to other regions. It is also not unusual for single postcodes to encompass some neighbourhoods with very high levels of participation, and some with very low levels of participation. These facts mean that there are proportionally fewer POLAR4 quintile 1 postcodes, exacerbating the scale of the gap.

The aggregate gap between POLAR Q5 and Q1 for all full-time undergraduate entrants to the HE sector in England is 18.3pp for the five years 2015/16 to 2019/20 and 18.1pp for the three years 2017/18 to 2019/20. The five-year aggregate gap between POLAR Q5 and Q1 for all full-time undergraduate entrants to the Centre is 25pp for the five years 2015/16 to 2019/20 and 35pp for the three years 2017/18 to 2019/20 (OfS APP dashboard).

Our analysis shows that the trend over time is for the gap to increase, so there is clearly a substantial amount of work to do to enable a greater proportion of people from low-participation neighbourhoods to study at the Centre.

Graph 1 shows that whilst there are significant variations between years, the trend (shown by the dashed linear trend line) is an increasing gap between POLAR4 Quintile 1 (students from postcodes with lowest higher education participation) and Quintile 5 (students from postcodes with highest higher education participation) over time. Graph 1 also shows that the gap between POLAR4 quintile 1 and quintile 5 has grown wider for NCCA than the gap for the Higher Education sector in England (which covers 247 registered HE providers) which has been declining.



Source: OfS APP dashboard for the HE sector gap and internal data for NCCA gap.

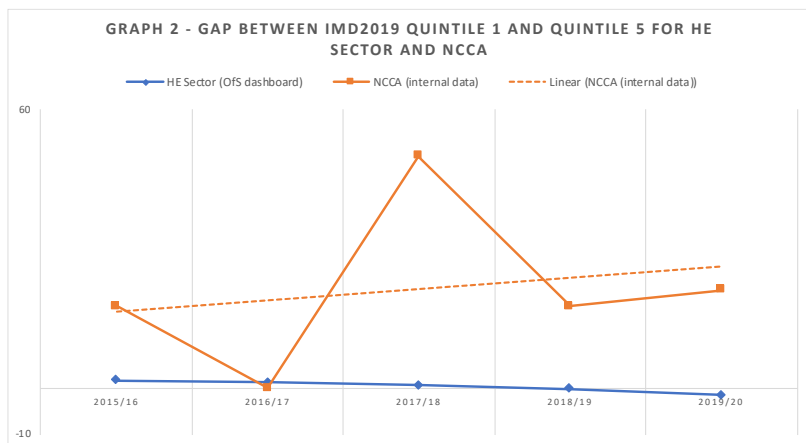
## Index of Multiple Deprivation data (IMD)

The Index of Multiple deprivation is calculated from a set of measures which classifies areas in England (only) by their level of deprivation relative to the rest of England. It includes seven domains of deprivation: income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services and living environment. Quintile 1

represents the most disadvantaged population; Quintile 5 represents the least disadvantaged population. As a measure, it captures deprivation robustly including in London.

The aggregate gap between IMD2019 Q5 and Q1 for all full-time undergraduate entrants to the HE sector in England is 0.3pp for the five years 2015/16 to 2019/20 and -0.4pp for the three years 2017/18 to 2019/20. (OfS dashboard data). The aggregate gap between IMD2019 Q5 and Q1 for all full-time undergraduate entrants to the Centre is 13pp for the five years 2015/16 to 2019/20 and 16 pp for the three years 2017/18 to 2019/20 (OfS APP dashboard).

Graph 2 shows that whilst there are significant variations between years, the trend (shown by the dashed linear trend line) is an increasing gap between students with backgrounds from the most deprived and least deprived backgrounds. The gap at NCCA remains significantly bigger than the gap for the English HE sector as a whole.



Source: OfS APP dashboard for HE sector gap and internal data for NCCA gap

## Household Income data

Of those students who declare their household income as part of their application to the Student Loans Company (SLC), slightly less than half come from low-income households (less than £25k) each year.

Table 1: Proportion with household income less than 25k (of all students who declared household income)

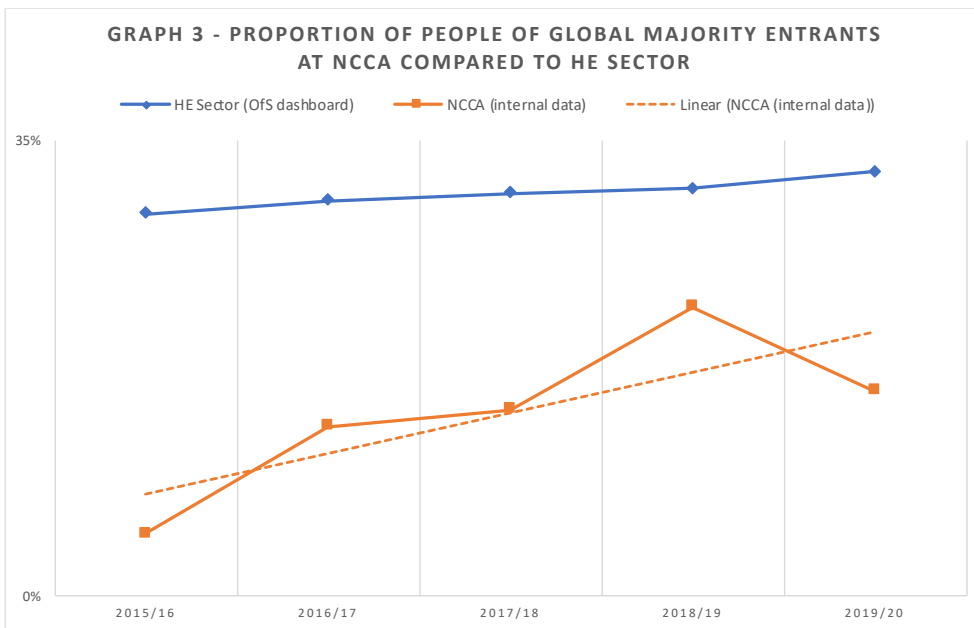
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
% home UG students from low income background	57%	44%	41%

Source: SLC data

## People of Global Majority students

Over the five-year period 2015/16 to 2019/20 in aggregate 30.9% of all full-time undergraduate entrants into HE were People of Global Majority. For the period 2017/18 to 2019/20 this was 31.6%. This compares with an aggregate 14% (for 2015/16 to 2019/20) and 15% (for 2017/18 to 2019/20) for the Centre. (OfS APP dashboard)

Our analysis shows that the trend over time is for the proportion of People of Global Majority to increase, but there is still clearly work to be done to enable a greater proportion of People of Global Majority to study at the National Centre.



Source: OfS APP dashboard for HE sector and internal data for NCCA.

Graph 3 shows that the proportion of People of Global Majority entrants to NCCA has been on an improving trend.

Proportionally there are fewer People of Global Majority who study at the Centre compared to the overall HE sector and it is the Centre’s ambition to continue to progress, to make the Centre more reflective of the wider society, and in line with its commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

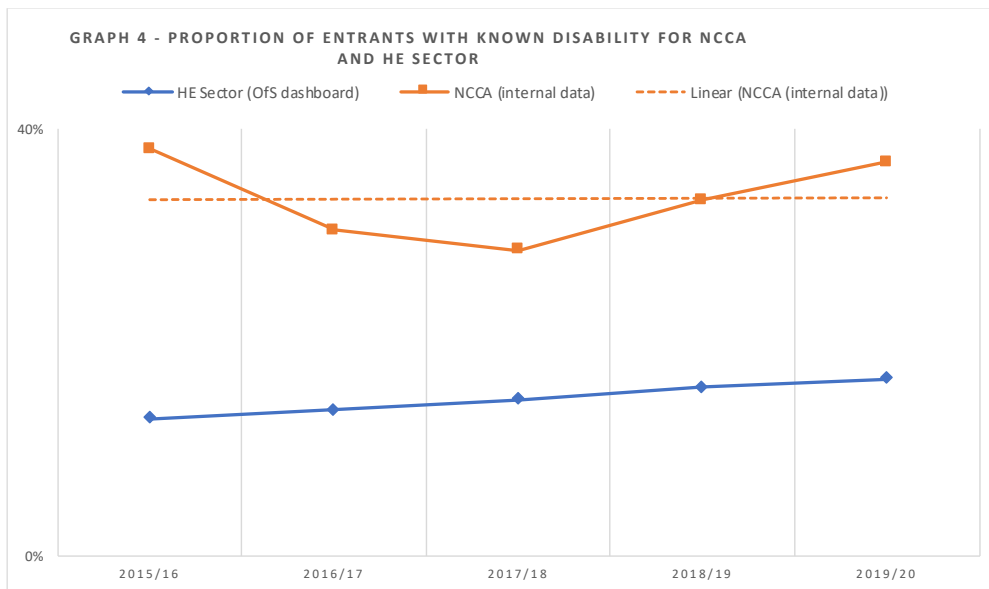
### Mature students

Mature students are defined as students aged 21 and older. During the five-year period 2015/16 to 2019/20 in aggregate 28.5% of all full-time undergraduate entrants to the HE sector were mature. This was in aggregate 29.2% for the three-year period 2017/18 to 2019/20. For the Centre in aggregate 48% of full time undergraduate entrants were mature during the period 2015/16 to 2019/20 and this was 49% for the period 2017/18 to 2019/20. (OfS APP dashboard)

The National Centre has an excellent track record in admitting mature students.

### Disabled students and students with a learning difference

During the five-year period 2015/16 to 2019/20 in aggregate 14.8% of all full-time undergraduate entrants to English HEs had declared a disability (OfS APP dashboard). This was in aggregate 15.7% when measured over the three-year period 2017/18 to 2019/20. Over the same five-year period in aggregate 37% of the National Centre’s full time undergraduate entrants had declared a disability and measured over the recent three-year period (2017/18 to 2019/20) this was also in aggregate 32% for the Centre (OfS APP dashboard).



Source: OfS APP dashboard for the HE sector and internal data for NCCA.

Graph 4 shows that the proportion of students at the National Centre with a known disability has been consistently been above the HE sector.

## Care leavers

The Centre has not had any students who fall within the specific definition of care leaver within its undergraduate student population in the past five years.

Young people who access our programme and our feeder activities have a high level of regular home support, which is a common issue across the performing arts sector. The barrier for care leavers is in accessing regular training and skills development.

## Intersections of disadvantage

Our focus up to now has been on delivering activity and monitoring gaps in achievement for the core groups. As part of this plan we will improve our data monitoring so that we can look in more detail at intersections of disadvantage. Because the National Centre only has a small number of students, the effect of any intersections will be magnified by the performance of one or two students.

## 1.2 Success - Continuation

Our internal APMR data for academic years 2017/18; 2018/19 and 2019/20 shows that a negligible proportion (too small to report either as an absolute number or as a percentage) do not continue to the next year of study in line with expectations.

We have taken a detailed look at the characteristics of those students who withdrew, did not progress or repeated a year over the last 3 academic years – the number was very small. We found that only a small proportion of this very small number had characteristics which were indicative of disadvantage within the HE sector (such as mental health disability or People of Global Majority).

As part of our performance assessment we reviewed each case individually and established that the Centre had provided extensive support to those students, many of whom were struggling with personal and family challenges.

We will be improving our data gathering and analysis over the time of this plan and continue to ensure each individual student has the support they need to progress and succeed.

### Low participation neighbourhoods

During the three-year period 2016/17 to 2018/19 in aggregate the gap in continuation between POLAR4 Q1 and POLAR4 Q5 for entrants in English HEs was 4.8pp (OfS APP dashboard).

The small number of students at the National Centre means that we cannot report the gap analysis at NCCA.

Our detailed analysis showed that there was no obvious continuation gap for entrants from low participation neighbourhoods.

### Low socio-economic status

During the three-year period 2016/17 to 2018/19 in aggregate the gap in continuation between IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 for entrants in English HEs was 7.8pp (OfS APP dashboard).

The small number of students at the National Centre means that we cannot report the gap analysis at NCCA.

Our detailed analysis showed that there was no obvious continuation gap for entrants from low socio-economic status backgrounds.

### People of Global Majority

During the three-year period 2016/17 to 2018/19 in aggregate the gap in continuation between People of Global Majority Students and white entrants was 3.2pp (OfS APP dashboard).

The small number of students at the National Centre means that we cannot report the gap analysis at NCCA.

Our detailed analysis showed that there was no obvious continuation gap for entrants from People of Global Majority.

### Mature Students

During the three-year period 2016/17 to 2018/19 in aggregate the gap in continuation between young and mature entrant in English HEs was 7.8pp (OfS APP dashboard).

The small number of students at the National Centre means that we cannot report the gap analysis at NCCA.

Our detailed analysis showed that there was no obvious continuation gap for mature entrants.

### Students with Disabilities

During the three-year period 2016/17 to 2018/19 in aggregate the gap in continuation between entrants in English HEs who had declared a disability and those who had not was 0.8pp (OfS APP dashboard).

For the National Centre the gap was 10pp for the three-year period 2016/17 to 2018/19.

Our detailed analysis did not shed enough light on the reasons for this gap and so as part of this plan we will look to carry out a more in-depth analysis into this continuation gap.

## Care leavers

The National Centre has not had any students who fall within the specific definition of care leaver within its undergraduate student population in the past five years.

### 1.3 Success - Attainment

The range of outcomes awarded at BA (Hons) level ranges from a First to a Second Class (Lower). We have taken a detailed look at the student characteristic of those students who achieved an outstanding outcome (First) and a Lower Second (we looked at the data from academic years 17/18, 18/19 and 19/20 for People of Global Majority and students with disability or learning differences; data for low participation background and deprivation was limited to 19/20).

#### Low participation neighbourhoods

During the three-year period 2017/18 to 2019/20 in aggregate the gap in attainment between POLAR4 Q1 and POLAR4 Q5 for students qualifying with an honours level qualification in English HEs was 9.3pp (OfS APP dashboard).

The small number of students at the National Centre means that we cannot report the gap analysis at NCCA.

Our detailed analysis showed that there was no obvious attainment gap for qualifying students from low participation neighbourhoods.

#### Deprivation

During the three-year period 2017/18 to 2019/20 in aggregate the gap in attainment between IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 for students qualifying with an honours level qualification in English HEs was 16.8pp (OfS APP dashboard).

The small number of students at the National Centre means that we cannot report the gap analysis at NCCA.

Our detailed analysis showed that there was no obvious attainment gap for qualifying students from deprived backgrounds.

#### People of Global Majority

During the three-year period 2017/18 to 2019/20 in aggregate the gap in attainment between People of Global majority Students and white students qualifying with an honours level qualification was 12.1pp (OfS APP dashboard).

The small number of students at the Centre means that we cannot report the gap analysis at NCCA.

Our analysis showed that whilst People of Global Majority are not represented in the high attainment group of Firsts and overrepresented in the Lower Second group, the numbers are too small to make robust generalisations.

#### Mature Students

During the three-year period 2017/18 to 2019/20 in aggregate the gap in attainment between young and mature students qualifying with an honours level qualification in English HEs was 10pp (OfS APP dashboard).

The small number of students at the National Centre means that we cannot report the gap analysis at NCCA.



## Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences

During the three-year period 2017/18 to 2019/20 in aggregate the gap in attainment between students qualifying with an honours level qualification who had declared a disability and those who had not was 2pp (OfS APP dashboard).

The small number of students at the National Centre means that we cannot report the gap analysis at NCCA.

Our detailed analysis showed that there was no obvious attainment gap for students with disabilities or learning differences.

## Care leavers

The National Centre has not had any students who fall within the specific definition of care leaver within its undergraduate student population in the past five years.

## 1.4 Progression to employment and further study

Table 2 shows the progression rates across the English HE sector by characteristic. It shows that a number of significant gaps remain in progression for qualifying students with certain characteristics (POLAR4 quintile 1; IMD quintile 1, People of Global Majority and students with reported disability).

The table also shows that the National Centre does better than the HE sector in terms of progression to employment and further study of qualifying students with a disability or learning difference, as well as for mature students.

Table 2: Shows the gap in progression of qualifying students by characteristic for the HE sector and for NCCA

	5 year aggregated gap (2012/13 to 2016/17)	
	HE Sector	NCCA
Between POLAR 4 quintile 5 and quintile 1	6.8	DP
Between IMD quintile 5 and quintile 1	8.3	DP
Between People of Global majority and White	4.4	DP
Between Young and Mature	-5.4	-5
Between No disability reported and Disability reported	1.4	-10

DP: The data is not reportable due to suppression for data protection reasons

Source: OfS APP dashboard data

We plan to systematically collect graduate outcomes data over the period of this plan. We anticipate our first systematic analysis to be included in our 26/27 APP (this takes into account that we are dealing with small numbers and will need to analyse the data using a 5 year aggregate). This will also address some limitations to sector wide graduate outcomes surveys – specifically incomplete data and potentially inaccurate data on self-employment, which is one of the most important employment routes for our graduates.

## 2. Strategic aims and objectives

The National Centre's overall strategic aims are to:

- support circus as it matures and is ever more widely recognised as a dynamic, relevant and important part of the arts and cultural life of the UK;
- deliver excellent circus arts training to support the development of the next generation of world-class circus artists;
- support and collaborate with circus artists and companies throughout their careers to embed professional standards in teaching, facilities and the creation and presentation of circus to reach new audiences and participants with relevant, challenging and engaging work;
- grow the National Centre's reach and relevance through the development of revenue generating activities that can support our core education and artists support activity.

In terms of widening access and success, NCCA plans to:

- get better at tackling micro-aggressions to make sure all our staff, students, partners and stakeholders feel comfortable and able to work and create in the very best way possible;
- make sure there are spaces available for discussion and debate around issues of current concern, not least how we can support the management of mental health within our community, and while we may not be the expert in the field, we will engage with others to help us to ask the right questions and take action to disrupt and change to be a truly diverse and open organisation.

### 2.1 Aims and objectives

The National Centre is committed to a whole of life-cycle approach to access, success and progression.

Based on our performance assessment, we consider that the most significant identified gaps relate to access, and in particular to access from students from low participation neighbourhoods; from deprived neighbourhoods; and by People of Global Majority.

We recognise also that care leavers are under-represented in our student body. Whilst we are not suggesting specific targets for this group, we will include activities in our strategic measures which relate to these groups.

At continuation and success stages, we will investigate the continuation gap between students with a known disability or learning difference and those students without a known disability or learning difference.

At the progression stage, we do not consider that there are gaps which we should prioritise.

We will continue to maintain our work for under-represented groups at continuation and success and progression stages to ensure gaps do not appear in the future.

Group	Life-cycle stage	Aim
Low Participation Neighbourhoods	Access	Reduce the participation gap for full-time undergraduate entrants between POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 5
Deprived Neighbourhoods	Access	Reduce the participation gap for full-time undergraduate entrants between IMD quintiles 1 and 5
People of Global Majority	Access	Grow the People of Global Majority entrant population

## 2.2 Target Groups

### A critical note on target setting

The national performance measures set by the OfS focus on the closing of gaps between the most and least disadvantaged and over and under-represented groups of students. We recognise this approach as the most effective way of supporting sector-wide change.

Because of the small number of students concerned and to prevent erratic data fluctuations as a result of the small size of the Centre, we will reviewing progress using both in year performance as well as 3-year aggregates.

### Targets for the plan period

Target	Gap to address	Target for the plan period
1	The 3-year aggregate (2017/18 to 2019/20) participation gap between POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 5 is 35pp	Reduce the 3- year aggregate participation gap for full-time undergraduate entrants between POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 5 to 22pp by 2026/27.
2	The 3-year aggregate (2017/18 to 2019/20) participation gap between IMD quintiles 1 and 5 is 16pp.	Reduce the 3-year aggregate participation gap for full-time undergraduate entrants between IMD quintiles 1 and 5 to 11.3pp by 2026/27.
3	The 3-year aggregate (2017/18 to 2019/20) proportion of People of Global Majority entrants in the National Centre is 15%	Increase the 3-year aggregate overall People of Global Majority full -time undergraduate entrant population to 29% by 2026/27.

## 3. Strategic measures

### 3.1 Whole provider strategic approach

#### Overview

Following a strategic review of our entire operations in 2019/20 we re-articulated our work into three distinct strands. The developing the performers of tomorrow strand encompasses all of the work we do in the education sphere from early years, through the London Youth Circus and Centre of Advanced Training, Outreach and into the Higher Education programme. As part of the strategic review, we developed a new operating model to support our activities and brought together the whole journey of the circus artist – from youth circus to professionals in training – in one directorate. Under our new operational model, the Participation and Outreach team is now solely focused on our access and participating activities and delivering truly exciting engagement activity. Recreational circus activity, a revenue generating activity, now sits under our commercial directorate.

The high-level institutional theory of change which underpins this plan draws on the OfS “Using standard of evidence to evaluate the impact of outreach” and is based on the evaluation framework developed by NERUPI adapted for the nature of arts performance training by CDD. It is also based on Kirkpatrick’s model<sup>2</sup> and recent research in partnership working<sup>3</sup>, the Access HE report which focuses on targeting learners of colour<sup>4</sup>. We will continue to refine and develop our approach and theory of change by evaluating our activities through our

<sup>2</sup> Kirkpatrick, D., & Kirkpatrick, J. (2007). Implementing the four levels: A practical guide for effective evaluation of training programs. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.istor.org/stable/j.ctt1t891n1.18?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.istor.org/stable/j.ctt1t891n1.18?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.accesshe.ac.uk/yYdlx0u7/The-more-colours-you-add-AccessHE-Creative-report.pdf>

annual evaluation of specific interventions such as the CAT scheme and London Youth Circus and by engaging with scholarly research about widening participation and lifelong learning so that we find better ways to support our applicants and students and widen our reach.

Theory of Change				
		Inputs	Change Factor	Impact
Key Institutional Enablers	Strategy and Leadership	Excellent strategy and leadership at Centre, sub-sector and sector level; and effective stakeholder engagement	Institutional practices and outputs are coherent and aligned to mission; staff supported and developed; active performance monitoring is in place	Increased performance outcomes across Access, Success and Progression; Increased practice standards and capable institution
	Enhancing data capability	Enhanced understanding and application of a range of data to track, monitor and evaluate performance across the student lifecycle	Increasingly evidence-led and data-driven practices, continuous improvement	Increased performance outcomes across Access, Success and Progression; Increased practice standards and capable institution
	Student Engagement	Collaborating with students	Student-led and informed practices at the Centre; students are more engaged	Better student outcomes (success, engagement, NSS & TEF), Collaborative community of practice
Access strategies	Early Engagement in Circus	Provision of a range of (early) experiences in circus; (early and ongoing) Skills development in circus	Stimulates confidence, awareness, interest and passion in circus. Students more likely to consider and apply to HE	Students are equipped with ability (skills and experience) to progress to HE and excel in circus. Students successfully apply and enrol
	Partnerships, Collaboration	Partnerships and collaboration with schools and other organisations	Improves activity reach and effectiveness; increase teacher and key influencer engagement	Target groups more aware and likely to apply to HE; influence on school curriculum
	Supporting Access and Admission	Provision of a range of access pathways into circus, including support with admissions, audition and interview process	Enables target students to successfully participate in access programmes and auditions/interviews for HE	Target students are offered places and enrol in specialist HE
Outcomes strategies	Diversity and Relevance in Curriculum	Increasing diversity of the Centre's Offer and curriculum in circus; Delivery of highly experiential, inclusive and industry linked curriculum	A Broader, inclusive range of opportunities appeals to more diverse student groups, inclusive curriculum supports ongoing success and participation of all students and into employment	High proportion of student Continuation, Attainment and Graduate-level progression with comparable rates across cohort and target groups
	Excellence in Student Support	Provision of excellent and timely student support, that responds to student needs in their study and career context	Students are more likely to be retained, engage and achieve higher degree and satisfaction outcomes; students more likely to enter employment	High proportion of student Continuation, Attainment and Graduate-level progression with comparable rates across cohort and target groups

## Alignment with other strategies

### Learning and Teaching

Our commitment to diversity and inclusion is also reflected in our Learning and Teaching action plan. This is made up of four strands:

- 1. Learning and Student Diversity** – To embed and deliver excellence in Learning within a diverse student body through
  - nurturing and developing a diverse student body of exceptional calibre through a student centred approach to assessment, progression and success, and inclusive methods of learning and assessment
  - delivering a responsive and evolving curriculum that meets the diversity need of student talent
  - fostering and embedding research into pedagogy, particularly within somatics and embodied learning, and to explore and develop best practice in performance-based assessment

2. **Industry – Employable graduates** – To produce exceptional artists and performing arts professionals who are equipped to become leading practitioners in the arts
3. **Communities of Learning** – To create and support communities and partnerships of learning across and beyond the National Centre
4. **Digital Technologies** – To drive forward the digital development of the National Centre in support of learning and teaching

## Equality and Diversity

We have an action-focused approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: in a small institution this enables us to communicate values through behaviours, which we believe to be more effective than words alone. An EDI Committee, co-chaired by the chair of our governing body, and engaging both staff and students, provides a focus for action and for monitoring implementation of our EDI Action Plan.

Our EDI plan is supported by a number of specific policies:

- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Statement
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Disability & Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- Codes of Conduct for service users

Our EDI Action Plan has a range of activities focused on:

- Staff and student recruitment practices
- A comprehensive programme of training in EDI issues
- Composition of our Board of Trustees
- Integration of EDI into governance and management activities
- Listening to users and communicating better our EDI actions
- Developing approaches to inclusive teaching
- De-centring the curriculum
- Delivery of programmes targeted at neurodiverse young people
- Financial support for youth programmes targeted using measures of socio-economic deprivation, low HE participation and People of Global Majority
- Partnerships with local primary and secondary schools engaging with underrepresented learners, addressing socio-economic deprivation and participation from People of Global Majority
- Development of youth activities aimed at under-represented groups
- Better gathering of EDI data on participants in public and outreach activities
- Partnership with other organisations to create a graduate circus company, the majority of whose members are People of Global Majority
- Evaluating our brand and how we represent ourselves via, for example, the images we use in marketing materials, in particular our website

The APP is aligned with our approach to EDI.

For example, our EDI actions include two specific measures which match our APP target groups: the financial support for youth programmes and the partnerships with local schools.

Other examples of actions currently being undertaken by members of the EDI committee include the development of a set of stories about how people got into circus, which will help with inclusion across the student body including the target groups in the APP; and considering how NCCA marks global and national events and days of commemoration, which may be of particular significance to under-represented groups targeted by the APP.

The draft APP was presented to, and discussed by, the EDI committee before it was signed off by the Board: this ensured that the APP reflected the priorities which EDI committee members saw for NCCA's work.

Through our leadership role in FEDEC, the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools, our values of diversity and inclusivity also have international reach.

## Strategic Measures

### 1. Embed our new operational model

This strategic measure will help us to achieve all our targets.

Now integrated in the Directorate of Professional Development, the Participation and Outreach team will continue to develop a programme of engagement and outreach activities across the whole circus artist's journey. We will embed collaborative and holistic ways of working across our professional development activities and create new management and governance structures to support these activities.

One of the groups we will be developing as part of this APP is the Inclusivity, Diversity and Equality group. This group focuses on access, participation and attainment and will play a key role in monitoring and supporting our progress.

### 2. Sustain our pathways to HE

This strategic measure will help us to achieve all our targets and also to support access by care leavers.

We will continue to invest in our programme of long-term measures to ensure progression to Circus training. Our programme of activities encompasses are our National Youth Circus Events, our summer schools, our London Youth Circus, our Centre for Advanced Training and our HE assist programme.

Our National Youth Circus Event is an annual residential weekend of workshops and performances for approximately 90 11-16 year olds and their practitioners from across the UK. The event is accessed by youth participants and attendance by people from areas of low HE participation, from areas of high levels of multiple deprivation and from People of Global Majority background is prioritised. The event provides a crucial pathway to our Centre for Advanced Training (**CAT**) scheme and HE programmes. The event also provides an opportunity for practitioners to build partnerships and gain information and resources to support their work in their own circus schools. Starting in 22/23, we will work with practitioners to explore how we can overcome barriers to access faced by care leavers as well as support their success and progression. Also starting in 22/23, we will systematically collect details on care leavers as part of our access activities. As we learn we commit to putting in place any support measures to improve access for care leavers we identify.

Our annual summer school provides another opportunity for people to engage intensely with circus training. Our summer school provides a weeklong programme of workshops to approximately 40 participants and results in participants sharing their work. It provides for another stepping-stone in the journey to HE participation.

The **London Youth Circus** (LYC) provides regular progressive and focused training to young people aged 11-21 years who are interested in taking their circus skills further. This is a paid for programme of training deliver at the NCCA. We have identified a number of people who have subsequent to attending the LYC joined our CAT programme.

The CAT scheme provides young people aged 10-18 years with accessible and inspirational performing and circus arts training. Through their regular discipline and supporting class and intensive masterclass sessions CAT students develop their passion for and progress their technical skills in performing and circus arts. Through the

CAT we provide exceptional and innovative tuition to young people, regardless of their personal circumstances, and therefore reaching out to under-represented groups, for example People of Global Majority, POLAR4 quintile 1 and IMD quintile 1. These schemes are a national partnership, funded by the DfE's Music and Dance scheme and progression from CAT schemes is benchmarked nationally. We will continue to evaluate the impact of the CAT schemes both through the DfE metrics and through their impact on progress towards our access targets overall.

To complement the technical skills' focus of the National Circus school, Summer Schools, LYC and CAT scheme, we run the Arts Awards scheme. This is a programme of activities which encourages students to think critically about their training and develops the academic skills necessary for entry into our HE programme.

Our HE assist programme provides people who are ready to apply to our HE programmes with a programme of support activities. These include an audition toolkit and information about mentoring and other means of support.

### 3. Financial support

By offering financial support in the form of bursaries we are looking to reduce the financial obstacles for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (IMD quintile 1) and low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR4 quintile 1) to access our programmes. Because we want to target those students most in need, our bursaries will be allocated on the basis of household income<sup>5</sup>, more specifically a bursary of £1000 will be allocated to applicants with a household income of £25,000 or less. In addition we have set aside funding to support care leavers and estranged students.

We are also looking to improve the success and progression of those students to employment and further study. We know that financial hardship is an obstacle for students to accessing and participating in HE and progressing into work. There are set periods in the academic cycle – our production period for example - when our students are not able to undertake external paid work whilst studying our programme. Hardship grants offered at this time ensure students can continue to study. These funds are heavily promoted amongst our student cohort in the period leading up to production time and the details are also available on our website. Our internal evaluation - which is anecdotal - has shown that our hardship scheme is effective in supporting retention and success for students from low family incomes.

We therefore will continue to provide bursaries for our access activities and hardship funds for our HE programme over the next five years (ie 2022/23, 2023/24, 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27).

We will continue to review the effectiveness of our financial support, shift from gathering anecdotal evidence to a more systematic analysis by 2026/27 and adjust the schemes in light of the evidence we gather.

### 4. Targeted partnerships with local schools and community groups in areas of multiple deprivation and POLAR4

This strategic measure will help us to achieve all of our targets and provide feeder activity for our more established pathways into HE, described in strategic measure 2.

We will continue to work with local schools and community groups to enthuse young people about performing and circus arts and inform them about the HE opportunities available. Our work involves a host of activities – from open rehearsals for Schools, teacher workshops to educational visits – and we work hard on engaging schools and community groups new to the National Centre. To date the evidence that these activities are working to encourage people to participate in our HE programmes has been based on anecdotal evidence - individual observations of particular participants.

---

<sup>5</sup>“The most accurate way of identifying socio-economic disadvantage is via the use of individual level data. This data could be related to measures of social class or income.” page 16 of AccessHE report “POLAR opposite: How the targeting of learners for access to HE work could be improved”

In this APP we want to move from providing a series of one-off engagements to a more sustained and targeted programme of activity with schools and community groups by 2026/27, where we can reach the students from areas of low HE participation, from areas of high levels of multiple deprivation and from People of Global Majority background. Our timeline recognises that whilst we have started to work with a small group of pilot schools already, it will take time to build deep relationships with those schools. We plan to use the way in which we engage practitioners in the National Youth Circus Event as a model for developing the programme of activity.

We will also over the period of this APP build up a more robust evidence base for these activities. We will improve our evidence gathering and put in place regular monitoring. Initially we expect to use proxy measures (such as postcodes of the schools participants attend) which we will make more robust over the years of this plan.

## 5. Enhance our data collection, analysis and evaluation capability and capacity

This strategic measure will help us to achieve all of our targets.

We recognise that, as a small and specialist arts institution, we do not have the capacity of large universities to evaluate our activity. We plan to invest in our data collection and analysis capacity during 2022/23 and subsequent years to ensure that we are able to collect and analyse consistent data across all stages of the student lifecycle.

This will be done at a level of disaggregation that permits us to assess outcomes over a period of time for students from different groups, even where these are in very small numbers. For example, we want to look in more detail at the breakdown between the various groups that make up our People of Global Majority population and we want to develop a greater understanding of the different forms of disability and learning difference and the impact on continuation. We will in the academic year 2023/24 undertake a project to review this continuation gap. To enable this project we will systematically collect continuation, attainment and graduate outcomes data from 22/23. We also want to identify care leavers as part of our widening access, application and enrolment activities.

Should our data collection and annual analysis shed light on the reasons for the continuation gap, identify any gaps during the period of this APP or should any gaps emerge over this time, we will act on that evidence. We commit to start acting on our internal data analysis in 2023/24. We will do that through the EDI committee, who will regularly monitor the data, evaluate the activities and play a role in developing our approach. We do not anticipate being in a position to publish a more detailed analysis on People of Global Majority and students with different disabilities or learning differences as part of this APP before 26/27 because of our small numbers, but nonetheless we commit to taking action earlier informed by our internal analysis.

## 3.2 Student consultation

Although we do not have a formally-constituted students' union, we have a system of student representation: year group representatives. All of these are current students, and none has a paid sabbatical position. Our approach to ensure that students were properly consulted as part of this APP has been as follows:

- We provided our Student Staff Liaison Committee with a summary of the data analysis, the gaps we have identified and the proposed steps to address these gaps. We then asked for their views about the approaches, suggestions and other measures.
- We shared the APP with all students and asked for their feedback.
- Consultation outcomes from students involved in access and participation discussions and in developing and reviewing the APP, all of which have subsequently been endorsed and reflected in this APP, were:
  - To involve current students in outreach activities;



- To draw on the experience of current students to improve our outreach, recruitment and admissions processes
- The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which includes student representatives discussed our draft APP.
- The final plan submitted incorporates our students' views.

We will continue to engage and consult with our students on access and participation at our student-staff liaison meetings, the meetings of our Academic Board and our EDI Committee (access and participation will be a regular item for monitoring, evaluation and discussion).

Our EDI Committee is open for any student to join. Its membership includes staff and professional members in addition to students and includes a broad grouping of people. The Committee is co-chaired by the Chair of our governing Board, ensuring the group has top-level support. We will review the membership of the EDI committee to ensure it represents students with protected characteristics and where it does not, we will proactively engage with those students through the group members.

### **3.3 Evaluation strategy**

Our strategy for evaluating our access and participation measures and activities has developed over time and has benefited from our membership of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD).

#### **Strategic Context**

We are taking a collective and joined-up approach to access and participation activities and have brought together access activities at the start of the journey with progression and professional activities after graduation under our Director of Professional Development. The team supporting this activity regularly discusses evaluation of the impact of their activities

The next stage in our journey is to develop and improve the systematic data gathering and analysis' aspects of our evaluation and develop the analytical skills of the team. We will start this work in 22/23.

#### **Programme design**

For each of our programmes we have articulated clear objectives and how those will be measured and evaluated. We have in place the tools for capturing the following information systemically for each project: project description, project costs, learner details (number, characteristic, method of targeting) and evaluation method and review each project annually. We draw on our own evidence and the expertise of AccessHE (as our local Uni Connect) and our validating university, the University of Kent to inform our programme design.

Specifically, we will:

- Continue to engage practitioners annually in the National Youth Circus Event in the development of our programme of activity.

#### **Design of evaluations**

We intend to continue evaluating each project and use a framework based on the Kirkpatrick model for analysing and evaluating the results of training and educational programs. Each of our projects is evaluated on four levels - reaction (has the project enthused?); learning (has the project informed?); behaviour (has the project developed skills?); and impact (has the project supported entry to HE?) and over the short, medium- and long-term.

Over the period of this plan, we will improve our evaluation approach by:

- Ensuring that we are gathering datasets from our participants and that we are able to access other information sources to assess and interpret data about participants, starting in 22/23

- Setting up some specific evaluation projects which will provide us with additional insight (for example, into our admissions processes) in 24/25
- Starting in 22/23, seeking to target our evaluation rather than a single approach for all projects. We would expect to evaluate our longer-term activities in greater depth, gathering more data from participants, and tracking their progress beyond completion of the pre-entry programme (and, where possible, tracking applicants who do not participate in the pre-entry programme) to understand outcomes.

### **Evaluation implementation**

To evaluate each of our programmes we collect personal data at the start of the programme and in doing so we comply with GDPR and HESA data collection and sharing requirements. We capture changes in attitudes through before and after surveys. Evaluations are scheduled for each project in line with the programme design and taking into account the term over which the impact is expected. Over the period of this plan we want to enhance our quantitative analysis.

Specifically we will:

- Ensure that we have the capacity to gather and analyse baseline data in relation to our student population and participants in our widening participation activity (access-focused) from 22/23.
- Ensure that from 22/23 our annual monitoring cycle includes reference to ongoing evaluation and the effectiveness of our programme of activity and the need to adjust this if we are not achieving the desired objectives.

### **Learning from our evaluation**

Whilst we recognise that it is unlikely that we will be producing evaluation which can establish a causal link between an intervention and outcome (because we are generally dealing with intensive interventions and small numbers), we use our evaluations to develop our programmes and regularly review and improve our approach to evaluation as well as our systems and structures.

Our National Youth Circus Event is a good example of how our approach to evaluation has impacted the programme design. The National Youth Circus Event (**NYCE**) is a residential opportunity for young people across the UK to access Circus activity and has run for the past 10 years. It targets young people who are not able to access the NCCA regularly and who may have trained in isolation. To increase its reach we developed it so that each year a proportion of places is targeted at new participants and organisations. We have also added the requirement that young people who attend pass on their skills and information after attending the NYCE. Our evaluations have shown us that these changes have increased the reach and impact of the NYCE. Based on more evidence we developed a parallel activity for the young people's lead practitioners. This allows us to share good practice in circus training for young people nationally and contributes to more young people being able to access excellent circus training locally.

Specifically, we will:

- in 23/24 consider the effectiveness of our programme of activity as part of the annual monitoring cycle undertaken by our EDI committee and amend the programme of activity in light of this evaluation
- in 24/25 review which data sources have been most effective in directing our widening access activities and take decisions to enhance our data collection, analysis and evaluation capability and capacity based on this increased understanding.
- over the period of this plan, continue to work with other partners, for example AccessHE (as our local Uni Connect) and our validating university, the University of Kent, to draw on their greater expertise and adjust our approach to evaluation

In addition to the above, we will continue to conduct an evaluation of our Bursary and Hardship grants on an annual basis (using the OfS financial support evaluation toolkit and building on the work started when it was a member of CDD)

### **3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan**

Our principal mechanism for monitoring progress against the delivery of the APP will be National Centre's cycle of Annual Programme Monitoring and Reporting (APMR). We are obliged to do this to fulfil both quality assurance obligations and the requirements of our validating university, the University of Kent. Our APMR framework is inclusive of both individual programme and also whole-provider developments, including student support, academic governance and quality assurance activity and widening participation. In this way we can monitor targets at both a programme and institutional level.

We generate an action plan in relation to the AMPR which is reviewed at Academic Board and the Senior Leadership Team. The annual reporting is reviewed by NCCA's Board of Trustees (the governing body). There are both individuals and committees accountable for ensuring actions are completed on time and that we can evidence our actions. It seems sensible, for an institution of our size, to incorporate our APP monitoring into that framework, consolidating those objectives with others, including equality, diversity and inclusion actions.

As noted above we will regularly review our access and participation work at our Student Staff Liaison Committee and Academic Board. Our academic governance structures include student representation at all levels who are involved in the monitoring and reporting process.

NCCA's Director is responsible for ensuring APP activities are reported to the Board. The Director of Professional Development is responsible for ensuring that progress against the APP is monitored, with day to day responsibility being held by the Head of Professional Development and Access and Participation Managers.

We will review progress annually as part of the AMPR process, and if we are failing to make the anticipated progress, we will adjust our actions to address any areas of deficit. The APP will also be reviewed by NCCA's Board of Trustees as part of its monitoring of that plan. We consider that this embeds the APP into our organisational structures.

## **4. Provision of information to students**

### **4.1 Fees**

NCCA will not have a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) rating from 2022-23, but we may seek to have a TEF rating (or be obliged to do so) during the period of this APP. We will continue to notify students via our website of fee information. We currently publish fees on the Fees and Finance section of our website and on the programme page. We also publish the following information, in accordance with consumer rights obligations:

- total fees for the programme
- our Fees Policy
- our Terms and Conditions
- our Student Protection Plan (once approved)
- information about bursaries and scholarships

## **4.2 Financial support offered through the Access and Participation Plan**

The National Centre will continue to offer bursaries and hardship grants to its students, building on our current offer under the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama.

All 'Home Fee' students who meet the eligibility criteria of 'household residual income of up to £25,000' will be offered £1000 per year of study, for the duration of their time enrolled at NCCA.

This will be cash transfer towards living cost expenditure and will be paid by bank transfer in May of each year, once all tuition fees for that year have been settled.

Students who meet the definition of a care leaver or estranged student will be offered £1000 per year of study, for the duration of their time enrolled at NCCA.

NCCA offers a Hardship Fund which is available to students upon application. Each year students able to apply for up to £1500. They can make three applications each year totalling to no more than the maximum amount. Applications will be approved by the HE team on the basis of supplied evidence of hardship

Details of the financial support available will be published on our website, shared as part of the application process and extensively promoted with each student cohort during the academic year (because we have such a small cohort we meet regularly with the full student cohort and share financial support information).

## Summary of 2022-23 entrant course fees

\*course type not listed

## Inflationary statement:

Subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations we will increase fees each year using RPI-X

Table 4a - Full-time course fee levels for 2022-23 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£9,000
Foundation degree		£9,000
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2022-23

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4c - Part-time course fee levels for 2022-23 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2022-23

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

# Targets and investment plan 2022-23 to 2026-27

Provider name: National Centre for Circus Arts

Provider UKPRN: 10001444

## Investment summary

The OFS requires providers to report on their planned investment in access, financial support and research and evaluation in their access and participation plan. The OFS does not require providers to report on investment in student success and progression in the access and participation plans and therefore investment in these areas is not recorded here.

### Note about the data:

The figures in Table 4a relate to all expenditure on activities and measures that support the ambitions set out in an access and participation plan, where they relate to access to higher education. The figures in Table 4b only relate to the expenditure on activities and measures that support the ambitions set out in an access and participation plan, where they relate to access to higher education which is funded by higher fee income. The OFS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
<b>Total access activity investment (£)</b>	£81,789.00	£83,424.00	£85,093.00	£86,795.00	£88,531.00
Access (pre-16)	£76,266.00	£77,791.00	£79,347.00	£80,934.00	£82,553.00
Access (post-16)	£5,523.00	£5,633.00	£5,746.00	£5,861.00	£5,978.00
Access (adults and the community)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Access (other)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
<b>Financial support (£)</b>	£68,000.00	£69,000.00	£70,000.00	£71,000.00	£72,000.00
<b>Research and evaluation (£)</b>	£5,000.00	£10,000.00	£10,000.00	£10,000.00	£10,000.00

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
<b>Higher fee income (£HFI)</b>	£237,000.00	£252,000.00	£252,000.00	£252,000.00	£252,000.00
<b>Access investment</b>	25.6%	24.5%	25.0%	25.5%	26.0%
<b>Financial support</b>	8.0%	7.9%	8.3%	8.7%	9.1%
<b>Research and evaluation</b>	2.1%	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%
<b>Total investment (as %HFI)</b>	35.7%	36.5%	37.3%	38.2%	39.1%

