National Centre for Circus Arts
Access and participation plan 2026-27 to 2029-30

1. Introduction and strategic aim

The National Centre for Circus Arts (the National Centre) 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. Throughout the past 30 years, continual upgrades and modifications to our site has meant we can proudly recognise the National Centre is the largest and best equipped circus training facility in the UK. The building contains multiple studios of varying sizes including two very large spaces with dozens of aerial rigging points. The school provides onsite rigging expertise which supports students' learning and safety awareness as well as promoting creativity and technical solutions to their creative ideas. The National Centre has a mixed income model and relies heavily on the generation of commercial income to support the delivery of our core activity.

Our aim is to promote the very best training in the art form whilst advocating for circus as an art form within the wider cultural offering in the UK. 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. Our outreach work spans all ages and abilities as we engage with schools and community groups to deliver educational experiences and workshops. 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 made good progress in achieving a more representative student population, but we want to go further. In 2021 the CDD disbanded, and the National Centre became an independent higher education provider. This Access and Participation Plan (APP) is based on and is a continuation of the previous Plan. The Plan outlines our assessment of the National Centre's historic performance in this area, and we have identified areas where we will take further action and set out the strategic approaches, we will take to improve the participation of underrepresented groups in our circus training. As an arts institution, we strongly believe circus as an artform benefits from a diversity of practitioners. This diversity in cultural and life experiences enriches the learning process for the entire student cohort and for the creation of art for audience members.

The National Centre for Circus Arts runs a highly specialised vocational degree programme, with all students being enrolled in our BA (Hons) Circus Arts degree. Our cohort size is typically between 60 and 75 students across the three-year programme. As reflected in the ambitions of this plan, ethnic diversity is an area of focus, as we recognise our cohort consists of predominantly white students. We also aim to increase our representation of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and more disadvantaged areas. Small student numbers mean there is limited statistical significance in our data and when shown as percentages, small changes in student numbers represent large shifts in percentage numbers.

With such small student numbers, the National Centre is able to prioritise student support and offers personalised learning plans for many students. Year on year the school celebrates the success of our

neurodivergent students and those with disclosed learning differences. We consistently see outstanding exam board outcomes with an exceptional number of upper second and first degrees achieved every year.

In late 2024 the National Centre had a change in leadership. The incoming CEO, as part of his first year in post, is working closely with the staff team to set out a shared vision and clear values. He sits on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) committee and aspires for all aspects of National Centre work to be assessed through the lens of EDI, Health and Safety, Safeguarding and an APP lens. The CEO is working to ensure information is easily available and understood across all levels of the organisation, including to the Board of Trustees level.

Our organisational objectives highlight our commitments to circus education and to:

- Deliver the very best training in circus arts to ensure that graduates have the skills, insight, and technical ability to take their place in the in the sector and develop as professional artists.

- Nurture and advocate for circus and the circus arts so that they continue to be dynamic and innovative arts forms within the rich cultural tapestry of the performing arts in the UK.

- Support and collaborate with circus artists and companies, both to facilitate the honing of their craft and the development of new work, but also to ensure that their best practice and understanding of the sector can be applied to our own training.

- Breakdown barriers to circus and circus arts training by developing wide-reaching recreational and preparatory programmes that aim to provide access for - and represent - as diverse a pool of participants as possible.

Circus is inherently inclusive. There are a range of disciplines meaning artists have a choice of specialisations that will highlight their strengths and artistic vision, and group work is limited, allowing individual differences to be accepted and celebrated. Circus promotes creativity and originality as opposed to recreating other artists work, which allows individuals to dictate their approach to the equipment and act creation.

We have consulted our students as part of the development of this APP and their comments and feedback have been included in this document. As set out in our previous plan, 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[1].

This Access and Participation Plan will outline our targeted commitment to increasing enrolments of students from a Global Majority background and those from quintile one and quintile two of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. To achieve our objectives and target numbers by the end of the period covered by this plan, we will work with partners across the UK to support the training and teaching of young circus participants. Early access to training is a significant advantage for those aspiring to enter higher education level training in circus. We will support potential degree applicants to be more prepared for the audition process and for the demands of higher education. We will offer scholarships to improve access to circus training.

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[1] 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.

2. Risks to Equality of Opportunity

To understand where risks to equality of opportunity may be present at the National Centre for Circus Arts, we have completed an assessment of performance (Annex A), which explores enrolment, continuation, completion, degree outcomes and progression to employment for our students over the last 5 years. This thorough assessment of our performance used the Office for Students (OfS) Access and Participation dataset as our primary source, supplemented with internal data and other external datasets and evidence where appropriate, such as HESA and UCAS data, alongside data from education and industry. We have also considered information and data from our student body. We have considered the data against the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) and our own institutional context and identified access as our key risk. We recognise that as a small and specialist institution with limited resources, we must focus our interventions and have conducted thorough data analysis to decide which risks are both most pertinent for our student body and most feasible for us to make a positive change to address at an institutional and sector level. Our intervention strategies seek to address the risks we have identified as a priority for us.

Access

1.1. **Risk 1 - There is a risk that learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and learners from the Global Majority are experiencing inequitable access to pre-entry provision, advice and guidance relating to higher education pathways in the performing arts.**

We have identified two indicators of risk which suggests this risk may be occurring.

IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) Q1 and Q2 students

Our gap between IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 enrolments is 13.7pp (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23). The sector gap is -2.8pp (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23) in favour of IMD Quintile 1 students. Across the last nine years of data there are some fluctuations in our internal data, though our gap remains significantly larger than the sector gap.

Students from the Global Majority

We have had a consistently low intake of students from the Global Majority enrolling on courses over the last 6 years, with a four-year aggregate of 13.9% (2019-20 to 2022-23). This is well below the sector's average of 34.3% non-White entrants (4-year aggregate 2019-20 to 2022-23). Due to our small numbers, disaggregating by ethnic group is not possible to report, and our focus is on increasing the intake of students from all Global Majority backgrounds.

1.1.2 Links to the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)

Along with education sector and industry evidence (see Annex B), our institutional experience and student consultations suggest that these differential enrolment rates may be a result of EORR Risks 1 to 3, and Risk 10 (applied here in the pre-enrolment phase).

- **EORR Risk 1 (Access to knowledge and skills)**: We are concerned that target students may not have equal opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills required to access higher education and more specifically, circus training experience and suitable physical preparation. Opportunities to develop the requisite knowledge and skills for university pathways may be limited for target

groups due to home, school, or geographical context. There is a limited number of circus schools in the UK and of those that do exist, some only offer a limited range of circus disciplines.

Research by Ashton and Ashton (2023) discusses the disparity that exists in the quality and variety of culture and arts opportunities learners get to experience dependent on their enrolment at a state or privately funded education setting, which goes to support findings from Reay (2017) and Whitty (2001) on the varying experiences of learners from lower socioeconomic groups and regions. Our experience suggests that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have seen circus performances regularly during the school years, and/or have 'cultural capital' such as familiarity with performing arts in general.

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds who do become our students often talk about a 'chance' inspirational event or encounter that set them on this pathway, and they tell us how much they benefit from the cultural opportunities built into their programmes of study. This was acknowledged in our student consultation for this Plan, which saw a student citing attending a circus show at the National Centre as being a core reason for deciding to pursue a degree in the circus arts sector.

- **EORR Risk 2** (**Access to information and guidance about higher education**) Target students may face inequality of opportunity in their access to appropriate information and guidance about higher education including higher education choices, study modes, expectations, and access pathways; as well as linked information about careers and employability. Systematic devaluing of the arts in secondary schools, and a lack of understanding about the value of an arts degree and the broader array of opportunities in terms of career and employment outcomes is a concern under this risk which is more likely to affect target groups. Specific information and guidance about circus pathways is likely to be difficult for students from our target groups to access. Consultation with our students in the development of this Plan highlighted that students felt pressured to pursue a "normal job" by stakeholders in their schools and were dissuaded from furthering their education in the performing arts sector. In instances where the students' post-16 learning took place in an arts-specialised institution, students expressed that there was limited information, guidance and application support for non-traditional and alternative art courses. This saw students reporting feeling ill-equipped for their course, not prepared or aware of the primarily practical mode of study embedded within it and unaware of the careers available in their field. With teaching staff and career advisors having limited knowledge of the circus arts and the career possibilities within the sector, means little or no advise is provided for circus education.

  Our applicant feedback suggests that students from target under-represented groups value personal, bespoke information and guidance that helps them navigate the interview/audition process, clearly explains the format of the programme of study they are interested in, and that demonstrates the career success of our alumni. Parents are encouraged to attend open days and to speak with our staff to allay concerns. Seeing our unique building, having the chance to watch classes and talk with both teachers and students is extremely valuable to understanding the context of the school and what is involved when undertaking a degree in circus arts.

- **EORR Risk 3** (**Perceptions of higher education**): Coupled with limited knowledge about the value of studying an arts degree and career outcomes, there are perceptions that a career in the creative industries is the preserve of white middle classes. The Musicians Census (2023) and Arts Council England's (2021) review of the creative industries workforce shows that the industries are still dominated by white artists from affluent backgrounds. As alluded to by Reay (2017) there is a sense among learners from the Global Majority that they must pursue careers that enable a typical

financially stable lifestyle and that can give back to their communities. Our experience resonates with these findings. Learners from the Global Majority tell us how important a sense of belonging is to their choice of subject, course and institution. They appreciate diverse representation on interview/audition panels and crucially expect that same level of diverse representation throughout their learning journey.

Findings from the student consultations in other arts institutions revealed that students felt that an increased diversity in representation could be achieved by recruiting more staff from the Global Majority to provide students with positive role models and a relatable point of contact during their studies. An additional difficulty relating to perceptions of higher education is the extent to which the National Centre for Circus Arts is a unique institution, and those with knowledge of more conventional academic institutions may have misaligned expectations of the educational experience on offer at the National Centre. Equally, our institution is often compared to other circus schools around the world. This can also result in a mismatch of expectations with the course.

Outside of the limited available data, anecdotal evidence (seeing who is coming through our building, who we see in shows and on social media), shows relative homogeneity of the industry and the lack of diverse role models, which is a broader area of concern and one we wish to address via the production of diverse cohorts of excellent graduates who go on to positively influence the industry.

- **EORR Risk 10 (Cost Pressures)** Being able to cope with financial pressures of studying is considered as a risk for students, starting at the pre-entry phase. The impact of the cost-of-living crisis is being felt acutely, with students less likely to participate in pre-HE training and development that would support application and enrolment. During study, students on intensive study and training programmes at creative and arts-based providers are disproportionately affected due to limited availability for part-time work. Our experience suggests that concern about student finances and the high cost of living is an increasing issue for more and more students, and most particularly for those from lower income backgrounds. We are aware of the need to reduce costs for students wherever possible.

1.2 Other risks and challenges

- **Ongoing impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic:** The ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic should also be noted, as acknowledged in the EORR Risk 9. The impact upon the circus industry and the performing arts in general, was devastating. Theatres and other performance venues were closed for over a year, many theatre workers out of work and leaving the industry, audiences lost and some venues closing for good as a result. Those in education, in particular young people, were socially distanced in their learning and didn't have access to the same study experiences. Many of our subjects are built upon an ensemble environment, which needed to be modified. Some of the associated risks to equality of opportunity impacting learners across the whole student lifecycle, which have been highlighted to disproportionately affect under-represented and disadvantaged students, have not yet been fully realised or understood. We adapted as much as possible and offered online education and encouraged all students to stay fit and healthy as much as possible, but most were unable to access their specialist equipment for a prolonged period.

When classes were able to be scheduled again, we saw a significant drop in the number of teachers available to deliver classes as many of our staff had moved away from London due to the cost of living and the reduction of their performing income. The performing industry is rebuilding but very slowly, there are significantly fewer circus preforming opportunities for artists in London, and this is arguably a negative factor for young people considering a performing career.

While Risk 9 is not one of our identified priority risks, we will remain vigilant to the ongoing effects of the pandemic going forward, closely monitoring relevant data to ensure that any emerging gaps throughout the student lifecycle are identified and addressed. We will aim to better understand these risks, which we know disproportionately affect underrepresented and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, through ongoing evaluation and our collaborative work with other similar providers.

- **Small datasets:** When determining which risk areas to prioritise in this APP, we considered our context as a small and specialist provider. Our smaller scale means we work with limited cohort data, constraining our data analysis and the statistical significance of our conclusions. This also impacts our capacity to make precise evaluations and interpretations, particularly when examining disaggregated data and intersections of underrepresented characteristics. We have conducted a full assessment of both publicly available and internal datasets and opted to focus on areas where we aim to make the most meaningful impact.

- **Recruitment of males:** Both the OfS data and our own admissions records from 2018 to 2024 shows a consistent decline in applications from males. From information shared amongst our peer schools from across Europe and around the world, this is a shared statistic and a symptom of a wider sector, and global, under-representation of males pursuing circus training. We are choosing not to make this an official target for the institution, as we do not wish to divert resources from our selected targets and objectives relating to key student characteristics identified as the most likely to experience inequality of opportunity as defined by the OfS. However, we will be actively encouraging and nurturing young males to engage in circus training through our whole provider approach to improving the diversity of our cohorts.

3. Objectives

Table Reference (Table 5d, Annex C)	Objectives	Intervention Strategy
PTA_1	To support access and pathways into higher education and to the National Centre for students from Global Majority Backgrounds (Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnicities), achieving 21.4% Global Majority enrolments by 2029-30.*	IS1, IS2
PTA_2	To support access and pathways into higher education and to the National Centre for students from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds (IMD Q1 and Q2), achieving 40% IMDQ1 & Q2 enrolments by 2029-30.*	IS1, IS2

* Percentage based on four-year aggregate average.

4. Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Intervention Strategy 1 – Supporting readiness for circus training at HE level

Objectives:

- To support access and pathways into higher education and to National Centre for students from Global Majority Backgrounds (Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnicities), achieving 21.4% Global Majority enrolments by 2029-30.
- To support access and pathways into higher education and to National Centre for students from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds (IMD Q1 and Q2), achieving 40% IMDQ1 and 2 enrolments by 2029-30**.**

Targets: PTA_1, PTA_2 – See Annex C, Table 5b.

Risk to Equality of Opportunity: Risk 1, Knowledge and skills; Risk 2, Information and guidance; Risk 3, Perception of higher education; Risk 10, Cost pressures.

Evaluation: Evaluation for this intervention strategy will generate OfS Type 1 (T1) and Type 2 (T2) standards of evaluation, which will establish whether the intended outcomes are being achieved. We will evaluate each component part of the strategy, as detailed in the 'Evaluation' column in the Intervention Strategy Table below. The strategy will commence from September 2026, with publication and sharing of findings as per the publication plan below. We will be following the same publication plan across all of our intervention strategies and associated activities.

Publication Plan:

Format of findings	Sharing of findings
We will produce an annual summary progress and review report, which will: 1. Provide insights on the effectiveness and progress of relevant activities across our Intervention Strategies based on the achievement of intended outcomes. 2. Capture learning and insights that inform improvements in practice and any appropriate changes and developments. Highlights and themes from this report will be shared online, for example through our website/SEER website. Findings will also be shared internally to relevant committees and forum groups, to inform practice and decision making. See 'Evaluation Strategy' section.	Progress 'highlights' of what both works and doesn't work will be shared annually.
We will produce an Evaluation to Date or End of Project Report (whichever is relevant) capturing all evaluation and findings, disseminated online via our website/ the SEER website.	4 years on from Plan commencement (Autumn/Winter 2029) and/or at the conclusion of projects. For Financial Support evaluation, this will be every 2 years, from 2027-28.
We will also contribute at conferences and through workshops and events hosted by networks such as SEER, FEDEC and GuildHE.	At minimum every 2 years, starting from 2026-27.
We will contribute to other calls for evidence, such as through TASO.	As they arise – at a minimum every two years

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation Standards of Evidence are denoted as T1, T2 or T3
National Trainer CPD and networking New activity working collaboratively with London and regional circus schools to develop practice-sharing opportunities between trainers and practitioners nationally. By facilitating development opportunities, we will aim to help trainers build confidence in guiding young people as they develop circus skills. We will also develop trainers' confidence in advocating for circus HE. The activities will include various sessions and events aimed at developing trainer knowledge, with some targeted focus on trainers working with students from diverse backgrounds and experiences. We will share with trainers the fundamental skills that are looked for and assessed at auditions and the important physical and theatrical elements that underpin circus training. Pre HE access to circus training is a significant advantage for those aspiring to entre higher education in circus.	Delivery costs Percentage of National Centre team member time Administration and resource	**Intermediate outcomes:** • (Trainers) Increased knowledge and skills to prepare young people for circus training at HE level. • (Trainers) Increased confidence in preparing for young people entering HE and circus training at HE level. • (Students) Increased circus skills and knowledge through trainer interactions. • (Students) Increased awareness of HE circus. • (Students) Improved confidence in their ability to progress to HE level circus. • (Students) Improved sense of belonging. **Longer-term outcomes** • Improved engagement with National Centre for trainers and young people. • Improved readiness for HE.	**Process Evaluation** • Data Analysis: Number and % of trainers engaging with scheme. (T1) • Data Analysis: Number and % of young people engaging with trainers who have been involved in the scheme and % of young people with target characteristics. (T1) • Output analysis: Number of networking activities/events delivered. (T1) • Post-activity polls gathering stakeholder (trainer and young people) experience and perceptions. (T2) **Impact Evaluation** • Baseline and post-activity young people survey (targeting young people taught by trainers engaged with through this activity) exploring perceptions and confidence in respect of circus skills and HE knowledge. (T2) • Baseline and post-activity trainer survey exploring (a) perception of achievement of interim outcomes for students; and (b) interim outcomes for practitioners.

(Pre 16 Activity)		• Increased progression to National Centre youth training opportunities. • Applications to HE. • Offers from HE providers. • Enrolments in HE.	• Data Analysis: application rates to National Centre by target groups. (T2) • Data Analysis: enrolments to National Centre by target groups. (T2)
Scholarship recipients offered free or subsidised opportunities National Centre scholarships are an existing activity that offers free or subsidised training and enrichment activities e.g. show tickets. Scholarships are awarded to young people enrolled in a National Centre youth recreational or progressive course for one year. These scholarships support their progression through the National Centre's training pathways by covering course fees and providing access to Higher Education student shows. Scholarships are awarded through a criteria-based application process, which includes means testing. Allocation is guided by the Access and Participation Plan target areas to ensure we reach underrepresented young people.	Percentage of National Centre team member time Bursary costs Administration and resource	**Intermediate outcomes** • Improved access to National Centre youth training, where cost may ordinarily be a barrier. • Reduced financial pressures. • Increased attainment in circus skills and knowledge for participants. • Increased knowledge of National Centre offer. **Longer-term outcomes** • Improved engagement with National Centre. • Increased progression to National Centre youth training opportunities. • Applications to HE. • Offers from HE providers.	**Process evaluation** • Data Analysis: Number and % of students receiving scholarships (T1), analysed by student characteristics (where possible). • Output Analysis: Total spend of scholarships, including by student characteristics. (T1) • Poll gathering scholarship recipients' experience and perceptions of the financial support and training and enrichment opportunities. (T2) **Impact evaluation** • Data Analysis: engagement with training by scholarship recipients, by student characteristics (T2). • Data Analysis: application rates to National Centre by target groups (T2). • Data Analysis: enrolments to National Centre by target groups. (T2)

(Pre 16 activity)		• Enrolments in HE.	
Outreach Modified light touch activities designed to engage students and increase their awareness of HE circus. The activity will be split into pre 16 and post 16 provision. Post-16 outreach activities are related to increasing circus knowledge. This model will work specifically with organisations that provide activities similar to circus and already working with our target groups. Where possible and appropriate current HE students will be present at activities as ambassadors. For pre 16 engagement, the purpose of the activity is to increase the visibility of HE circus as an option, as well as build the connections between young people participating in circus training. *(Post and pre 16 activity)*	Percentage of National Centre team member time Delivery costs Administration and resource	**Intermediate outcomes** • Improved readiness for pursuing circus training in future. • Increased progression to National centre activities. • Increased knowledge and awareness of HE and circus training at HE level (student and practitioner/ teachers). • Increased sense of belonging. **Longer-term outcomes** • Increased progression to National Centre training opportunities. • Improved awareness of pathways to circus training degrees. • Applications to HE. • Offers from HE providers. • Enrolments in HE.	**Process evaluation** • Data analysis: Number and % of pupils attending activities with target characteristics (T1). • Output analysis: the number of activities delivered (T1). • Post-activity polls gathering stakeholder (practitioner and students) experiences and perceptions (T2). **Impact evaluation** • Baseline and post-activity young people survey exploring interim outcomes and perceptions of improved circus knowledge outcome after engagement with outreach activities (T2). • Data Analysis: application rates to National Centre by target groups (T2).

Cross intervention strategy: IS2

Total cost of activities

The total approximate cost of IS1 is £121,000 over the four years of this Plan (2026-27 to 2029-30).

Summary of evidence base and rationale

We have conducted a literature review, which includes specific references to the range of materials OfS has identified in its guidance, in addition to a range of other research and best practice references. Our national trainer CPD and networking activity draws on evidence which suggests that engagement in collaborative practice sharing can significantly benefit professional development of trainers in circus arts (Fedec, 2019). Research also suggests that this activity could enhance the inclusivity of teaching circus arts, leading to positive effects on wellbeing for students, particularly those from disadvantaged and traumatic backgrounds (Van Es, 2021).

Our pre-entry scholarship activity draws on evidence which shows that fee waivers and financial support to attend outreach and preparatory courses can improve access to higher education in creative subjects for under-represented students (Comunian et al., 2023). By directing this financial support at under-represented students, we aim to increase student's participation in outreach activity and their likelihood of applying and enrolling in higher education (Office for Fair Access, 2017; Torgerson et al., 2014). We understand that accessing circus skills courses can be prohibitively expensive for our target groups, and has been mentioned in student consultations as a key issue.

Evidence suggests that delivering outreach in partnership with schools, colleges, and community organisations can help respond to the diversity of needs and barriers to accessing higher education for target students (CFE Research, 2023), informing our outreach activities and commitment to working with schools, colleges, and community organisations. As the UK leading circus institution with 30 years of circus education history, we have learnt that early access to circus training is a significant advantage for those aspiring to entre higher education circus training. The National Centre has a long history of outreach work and has been running workshops with schools and communities for many years. In recent years, we have made a concerted effort to focus outreach resources on projects targeted at low socio-economic and Global Majority groups. This aligns with evidence which suggests outreach activities with a focus on raising skills and preparing applicants for applying to higher education can be effective for under-represented groups like Global Majority students (McCabe et al., 2022).

In line with our observations and the supporting data, we have further to go to build our intake of students from the Global Majority and help to address inequalities of opportunity these students are more likely to experience in access to circus arts higher education. These include cultural perceptions of the value of performing arts as well as access to pre-enrolment circus provision, information and guidance.

We acknowledge feedback from the student consultation highlighting that additional bias awareness and inclusion training for circus teachers could be valuable. Students also emphasized the importance of outreach, identifying it as an area with potential for further development. In particular, they noted that outreach efforts are important in engaging our target groups, fostering face-to-face interaction, and better illustrating the nature of the training involved in the circus degree. We will take this into consideration during our activity planning alongside the evidence.

A more comprehensive review of our evidence base relating to these activities is available in the Annex B.

Intervention Strategy 2 – Pre-application support for students from the Global Majority and lower socioeconomic backgrounds

Objectives:

- To support access and pathways into higher education and to National Centre for students from Global Majority Backgrounds (Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnicities), achieving 21.4% Global Majority enrolments by 2029-30.
- To support access and pathways into higher education and to National Centre for students from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds (IMD Q1 and Q2), achieving 40% IMDQ1 and 2 enrolments by 2029-30.

Targets: PTA_1, PTA_2 – See Annex C, Table 5b.

Risk to Equality of Opportunity: Risk 1, Knowledge and skills; Risk 2, Information and guidance; Risk 3, Perception of higher education; Risk 10, Cost pressures.

Evaluation: Evaluation for this intervention strategy will generate OfS Type 1 (T1) and Type 2 (T2) standards of evaluation, which will establish whether the intended outcomes are being achieved. We will evaluate each component part of the strategy, as detailed in the 'Evaluation' column in the Intervention Strategy Table below. The strategy will commence from September 2026, with publication and sharing of findings as per the publication plan below.

Publication Plan: We are following the same publication plan across all of our intervention strategies and associated activities, see the publication plan for Intervention Strategy 1 for more details.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Evaluation Standards of Evidence are denoted as T1, T2 or T3
Activities to help students prepare for applications and auditions (16+) This activity supports young people from target groups applying to Higher Education at the National Centre through a combination of tailored individual support and structured HE preparation opportunities. Activities will include audition practice, application surgeries, and personalised guidance. These will be informed by analysis of application data to ensure proactive outreach and support for underrepresented groups. An *Audition Toolkit*, offers participants the opportunity to experience a mock audition. This helps demystify the process and prepares students	Percentage of National Centre team member time Delivery costs Administration and resource	**Intermediate outcomes** • Increased confidence and readiness for audition and application for target groups. • Improved attendance rate at auditions and interviews from target groups. • Improved access to audition and interview materials. • Improved engagement between students and National Centre, particularly amongst diverse student groups. • Improved communication and expectation-setting for new students. **Longer-term outcomes** • Improved audition and interview outcomes for target groups. • Improved sense of belonging and wellbeing in relation to auditions and interviews. • Increased applications to auditioned courses from target groups.	**Process Evaluation** • Data Analysis: Number and % of students with target characteristics receiving support (T1) • Post-engagement polls gathering stakeholder (practitioner and students) experiences and perceptions of the scheme (T2). **Impact Evaluation** • Data analysis: application rates to National Centre by target groups (T2). • Data Analysis: enrolment rates to National Centre by target groups (T2). • Up to 3 semi-structured interviews or focus groups will be held every two years (from 2027-28) with enrolled students who engaged with pre-application support to share experiences and suggestions. (T1, T2)

by outlining expectations and key elements of an audition. Students from the National Centre's progressive youth training programmes are fed into this support pathway, allowing us to identify and guide individuals from target groups towards pre-application support.		• Increased offers from auditioned courses for target groups. • Increased enrolments to auditioned courses for target groups.	
Financial Support Range of financial bursaries and scholarships for students from target groups. Financial support is awarded using evidence-based methods that consider both financial hardship and exceptional ability.	Percentage of National Centre team member time Administration and resource	**Intermediate outcomes** • Reduced financial pressures. • Student financial needs are supported. • Improved student emotional and mental wellbeing, linked to financial security. • Students are able to fully participate in the National Centre student experience, positively impacting sense of belonging. **Longer-term outcomes** • Increased applications to auditioned courses from target groups. • Increased offers from auditioned courses for target groups. • Increased enrolments to auditioned courses for target groups.	**Process Evaluation** • Data Analysis: Number and % of students receiving bursaries (T1), analysed by student characteristics (where possible). • Output Analysis: Total spend of bursaries, including by student characteristics. (T1) • Poll gathering bursary recipient experience and perceptions of the process and allocation (T2). **Impact Evaluation** • As per relevant parts of the OfS Evaluating the Impact of Financial Support toolkit, every two years from 2026-27. (T2)
Cross intervention strategy: IS1			

Total cost of activities

The total approximate cost of IS2 is £354,000 over the four years of this Plan (2026-27 to 2029-30). £180,000 of which is dependent on an external funding grant.

Summary of evidence base and rationale

We have conducted a literature review, which includes specific references to the range of materials OfS has identified in its guidance, in addition to a range of other research and best practice references. The evidence base focusing on the effects of providing support for prospective students preparing to apply to higher education highlights that supporting under-represented students with preparation for the application process can benefit them in preparing and being successful at application (Comunian et al., 2023). During the student consultation process, students suggested that fostering a sense of belonging earlier, at the pre-application stage, could be supported by increasing student presence and visibility. They gave positive feedback on the level of staff support during the application and audition stages and expressed a strong desire for this to continue. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of sharing clearer information about the degree structure, expectations, costs, and available support. They felt that doing so could help engage more diverse communities by providing a fuller picture of the experience and the benefits of the programme. This aligns with evidence which suggests that targeted support which includes information and guidance on the application process can enhance access to higher education for under-represented students (Barkat, 2019).

Our financial support commitments draw on evidence which suggests financial support can support disadvantaged students with continuation, ability to focus on their studies, and reducing the need to work during term time (Murphy and Wyness, 2015; Harrison et al, 2018; Hordasy et al., 2018). Our own evaluations and student consultations have corroborated this evidence, with students sharing their experiences of financial support enabling them to continue their studies and not need to work as frequently.

A more comprehensive review of our evidence base relating to these activities is available in the Annex B.

5. Whole Provider Approach

5.1 Our institutional journey

We take a whole provider approach (WPA) to access and participation, which we have considered under this Plan via participation in emerging research on the WPA, working with our SEER colleagues and led by Professor Liz Thomas (2024). We have evaluated our current WPA context and identified areas where we can go further, as part of the commitments in this Plan. The following provides a summary against the key domains in the WPA approach.

Since writing our previous APP, there have been significant changes to the management structure at the National Centre for Circus Arts. Most notable is the departure and replacement of our Chief Executive Officer. The ambition is to continue to prioritise equality and diversity and inclusion and do more to ensure it underpins all aspects of our operation model. Our new CEO is co-Chair of the

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team and promotes the values of this group as core and fundamental to the organisation.

As part of this, the CEO has made a conscious decision to broaden the membership of the management team to include the Heads of Departments. This approach flattens the structure to ensure the inclusion of a broader range of staff and to balance the gender and ethnic disparity of the senior leadership team. The inclusion of more staff in the strategic decision making has had a noticeable and positive impact on the communication across departments and an alignment of thinking and knowledge accumulation. This is particularly positive in regard to work on our Access and Participation Plan. There is a shared understanding of this work and a communal approach to success and implementation of the ethos. As a small organisation, we can confidently and proudly ensure a collective agreement and engagement in EDI and APP principles, which will further become a feature of the National Centre culture.

The National Centre for Circus Arts has always had a strong Learning and Participation team. Staff within that team are passionate about circus and how it can positively impact young participants, and for the purpose of creating this new plan we formed an APP Committee that had a broad representation of staff from across that team along with our Higher Education and Senior Management staff. With the support of SEER, the committee went through Theory of Change training and held several positive and productive Theory of Change sessions as part of the initial development of this plan. The APP Committee has collective knowledge of Learning and Teaching practice, specific knowledge of student needs based on our cohort, access and outreach expertise, safeguarding and general EDI principles.

The process itself was a powerful tool to support APP awareness and knowledge. All participants in the process developed their awareness and understanding of our APP ambitions and how we will successfully achieve them.

5.2 Our institutional and senior leadership commitment

Our CEO will be directly connected to the monitoring and implementation of the APP and will be supported by the broader management team. The team will use our own progress and evaluation toolkit to monitor under-represented groups in our student population, ensure commitments are delivered, and embed access and participation across the institution. As part of the monitoring and reporting process we have an Access and Participation Committee, reporting to the Senior Management Team, which in turn reports to the Board of Trustees. Membership of the Committee includes the Head of Learning and Access, Academic Admissions and Registry Manager, Learning and Participation Manager, and the Student Support Manger. The group oversees the implementation, monitoring, review, and evaluation of the APP, advise on research, and make reports and recommendations to the Senior Management Team including highlighting risk and making any necessary changes to the APP. If the group finds that progress towards objectives set out in the APP is not being achieved or is going backwards, it may recommend to the Senior Management Team to increase investment levels and or, reassess strategy.

Across the lifespan of this APP, the National Centre will be adapting to the organisational changes that have been a necessary adaptation as result of our response to changes in funding and the political landscape.

5.3 Our WPA student experience: Working across the student lifecycle and experience for all students

Our commitment to providing students with the best possible experience means we work across the whole student lifecycle and student experience for all of our students. Many of our everyday practices uphold the values of access and participation, and equality and diversity.

As a very small specialist institution, and unique within the Higher Education sector, it is important for us to supply clear and specific information about the school that is available and accessible to all interested parties and in particular, prospective students. Giving an insight into the day-to-day life and student experience of our school is important. We have created a range of information formats to allow access to this information as easy as possible. We have a small yet engaged marketing team creating written and visual information packs that give young people and their families a chance to see the inside of our facilities and witness the work of our current students and their teachers. Amongst a range of accessible social media channels, there are several videos available online that give a strong sense of student life within the school. We want young people to have a sense of belonging and to see where and how their skills will be nurtured and developed within the programme. We are aware of the importance of diversity in our teaching team, our office staff and our Board of Trustee members and try to ensure that we work towards increasing and maintaining that. Work has been done through our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion committee on developing an inclusive recruitment practise. Our marketing ethos ensures our messaging and imagery emphasises and celebrates the diversity within our building and the industry in general, to support and promote a sense of belonging and representation for current and future students. There is ongoing work, within the delivery of the degree to decolonialise the curriculum, and to look beyond the western centric history of circus.

5.4 Circus as an Inclusive Artform

Circus is inherently inclusive, and we continue to apply that principle to our approach to supporting participants at all levels. There are a range of disciplines for students to choose as a way of expressing their artistry. These options coupled with creativity and freedom to be unique means the artform is welcoming and encouraging of individuality and innovation. We support and encourage students defining new boundaries for any chosen discipline, they can steer their work towards their individual strengths. In practical terms this means students not only choose a circus skill that suites their prior training and physicality but also the style and artistry. The course allows students to find a discipline and a style that promotes success, and progression. We believe this approach underpins the success of our students and is reflected in the fact that we consistently achieve student outcomes above the national average for an institution.

Our audition process is designed to highlight potential as we recognise that many young people have not had access to extensive circus training. We offer full video auditions in cases where travelling to London might be a barrier. Our auditions are focused on physicality, creativity and drive as the underpinning requirements for entry. We use contextual admissions as our primary approach to our recruitment process. Because of this approach, we are able to support applicants who may have not been successful academically in secondary school and would potentially not find their way into conventional higher education institutions. However, due to their physical and artistic potential, they can thrive in a vocational arts environment.

Our Student Support Manager is available to applicants and their families to discuss the support available to them when they join the course. This can be extremely important for those with specific learning differences and those with mental health, neurodivergence, and other disability needs. The National Centre aims to have between 60 and 75 students total across all three years of our degree course. This incredibly small cohort size puts us in a unique position to have a very personalised approach to everyone and allows the Student Support Manager to get to know the challenges of each and every student on the course. The degree team offer an open-door policy for the office, which is located next to the training spaces and students have almost unlimited access to the office and delivery staff. They are also able to contact the degree team and teachers via Teams. The degree team know all the students by name and design their individual timetables to fit their needs and support them to be as successful as possible whilst on the programme.

The degree team also have a confidential Teams channel that allows them to share additional needs or concerns of they may have around the students. This ensures adjustments can be made to timetables, discussions with teachers or additional pastoral meetings with students. It ensures all relevant staff are aware of at-risk students and no one falls through any gaps in support.

We prioritise supporting student mental health and wellbeing through the support services available. In addition to one-to-one sessions with the Student Support Manager, we offer free counselling sessions with a professional external provider. Students are given up to six confidential sessions per year. In 2025, the National Centre launched an Employee Assistance Programme. The programme is also made available to students and offers mental health support, GP support and other benefits. The National Centre also supports students with their physical health by offering physiotherapy sessions for students with injuries that may impact their ability to engage in the physical training of the course.

There are multiple support mechanisms that are inherent to the programme due to the design of the timetables, the layout of the spaces, and the broader ethos of the National Centre. Students have regular interaction with students from other year groups. This sense of community across stages of learning is fundamental and supportive. Students with similar interests or practicing the same disciplines can connect with students from across all year groups. After timetabled classes finish for the day, students have access to the training space for further self-practice, and this allows them time to develop their skills in collaboration with other students and to develop independent training skills as will be required in the profession.

Alongside our BA (Hons) programme, the National Centre for Circus Arts runs a professional membership programme. Existing artists, including our graduates, come back to train and develop their skills. Outside of their timetabled classes students and professionals can train together. This provides a valuable networking opportunity and supports their transition into the profession once they graduate and often performing opportunities arise for students because of this networking with working artists. As part of supporting graduating students into the profession, we give graduates one year of free access to this training after graduation. For financial reasons, some students need to leave London immediately after graduation, so we allow graduates to initiate their free training option, up to one year after graduating.

In the lead up to the academic year 2024/25 we undertook a major course rewrite. The adjustments made to course were to ensure the content and design of the course was modernised and appropriate for the circus sector in its current form and to allow a certain amount of future proofing for the years to come. Critically, the course structure and assessment points were reviewed and

simplified. The new design highlighted and clarified the logical connection and progression from one level to the next from one year to the next. We reduced the number of assessment points and ensured deadlines were spread out across the academic year to avoid overload on students at specific points in the year. This was an important adjustment, particularly for those students with learning differences. We ensure students have adequate support for their written work while they are on the course. Our assessment methods are currently under review, and we are exploring moving away from only written submissions and adopting alternative assessment methods that will benefit all students on the course and will be particularly supportive of students with additional learning needs.

Our work with the London School of Contemporary Dance and our Centre for Advanced Training (CAT) has been a valuable opportunity for making nation-wide connections with young people from low socio-economic backgrounds who are engaged in circus training. The CAT network provides a foundation of circus-based relationships for our Intervention Strategies to capitalise on. Additionally, our connection with and positive relationship with circus centres around the country will allow us to support and guide the teaching and training processes needed to prepare young people for HE level training.

5.5. HEP structures that prioritise and facilitate widening access and student success

Our organisation is well placed to support and enable widening access and student success through our institutional polices and processes, which are aligned with our commitments to access and participation.

Our Learning and Teaching action plan reflects our commitment to diversity and inclusion through its four strands of action.

- Our priority for Learning and Student Diversity ensures we embed 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; and delivering a responsive and evolving curriculum that meets the diversity need of student talent.
- Our other strands of action, relating to industry, communities of learning, and digital technologies, consider how we can embed inclusivity in all of our work across these areas. In particular, we focus on creating and supporting communities and partnerships of learning across and beyond the National Centre, aiming to contribute to the development of diverse, supportive communities of circus arts students and professionals.

Our Admissions Policy places importance on Equality and Diversity.

- We are committed to selecting, training and supporting students regardless of ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, or religion. Applicants to National Centre are chosen solely on the basis of their talent and potential to develop the skills required for their chosen profession.
- In our admissions processes, we are committed to supporting students with disabilities. Disability support during training is managed under the School's Support Through Studies processes.

- The school has a Framework for Contextual Admissions. The Framework sets out the values and principles that the school applies during the admissions process to identify, acknowledge, and mitigate barriers to entry. We will also make any necessary reasonable adjustments, in accordance with the Equality Act (2010), to ensure that disabled students can train with appropriate support at the School.

Our approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is action-focused; in a small institution this enables us to communicate values through behaviours, which we believe to be more effective than words alone. We do this through: integration of EDI into governance, management and operational activities; evaluating our brand and representation of students used in our marketing materials; and promoting inclusive education. Our commitment to inclusive education centres on developing inclusive teaching, equitable access, and supporting underrepresented and marginalised youth through our programmes. We further embed EDI practices and commitments in our student experience through embedding EDI in student voice forums, and ensuring EDI needs are considered in adaptations to assessment and feedback, as well as through our dedicated support with mental health and wellbeing.

We also maintain an EDI Committee, which includes representation from all areas of the organisation, such as students, teaching teams, administrative teams, and senior management. The committee both reports to the Board and includes Board members among its membership, ensuring strategic alignment and accountability.

In our leadership role in FEDEC, the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools, we are able to talk about our approach to the implementation of diversity and inclusivity allowing the sharing of best practice and an international reach.

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 National Centre's work.

5.6. Our use of data and evidence

At the National Centre, data, evidence and evaluation play a central role in shaping our approach to access and participation. Our planning and interventions are informed by both internal monitoring and external datasets, enabling us to identify barriers, track progress, and respond adaptively to emerging needs. We collect and analyse student data internally, alongside HESA and OfS datasets.

Over the lifecycle of the Plan, we commit to continuing to monitor student data and look for opportunities to develop our data and evaluation capabilities where appropriate. We have engaged the Specialist Evidence, Evaluation and Research (SEER) team from Applied Inspiration as our external evaluators for Access and Participation. Their team provides a wealth of experience and expertise that we would not normally have access to in-house, and they have provided data analysis and support throughout the development of this Plan.

6. Student consultation

Although we do not have a formally-constituted students' union, we have a system of student representation through year group representatives. All of these are current students, and none has a paid sabbatical position. We recruit up to four student representatives per year group, to ensure representation for each year group at key meetings, and a proportionally high number of student representatives for our small cohorts. Student reps participate in our student-staff liaison meetings and are invited to join our EDI Committee. The EDI Committee membership includes staff and professional members in addition to students and includes a broad grouping of people. The Committee has representation from our governing Board, ensuring the group has top-level support. We consistently 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.

Throughout the development of this plan, our student representatives have been given opportunities to consult. At various key stages in the Plan development, students have been approached for feedback and insight. After the development of our Annex A, we provided our Student Voice Forum 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 held an initial student consultation session to discuss key areas of interest and concern for students, facilitated by our research and evaluation partner SEER, with representation from all three year groups. This informed our decision to involve current students in outreach activities, and to further draw on the experience of current students to improve our outreach, recruitment and admissions processes. We also shared a summary of the intended intervention strategies with all students and asked for their feedback. The initial student consultation highlighted strengths of our provision, particularly regarding the goodwill of staff, and the support given to all students, with emphasis on the support available for neurodivergent students. They also commented on the strong sense of community that is formed amongst the student body, staff and professionals. Some of the students shared concerns about on-course provision, which we are addressing beyond the scope of this Plan, through improving our communications and clarity of information for students. To address this, in collaboration with the student reps, we are supporting the writing and distribution of a regular student newsletter. Information is sent to the student reps and then they distil it and convey important information in a format they feel is most suitable and digestible for the student body. We will continue to support this approach or any future iterations in order to be as transparent as possible with issues that may affect the student experience and which may have the potential to contribute to inequality of opportunity. We plan to address concerns raised by students through our regular degree planning meetings throughout the year, and have reviewed all feedback from the student consultation with the degree team.

After development of our intervention strategies, a second consultation session was held with students from target groups to hear their opinions on the proposed activities. Students endorsed our proposed activities for access, and we have considered their feedback regarding the importance of engaging with target groups through face-to-face contact, ensuring transparency in outreach and pre-application support, and continuing the high level of individualised support available to

applicants and students. This second consultation focused on responses to the proposed activities, which the students involved felt were appropriate and useful to begin to address the risks to equality of opportunity observed in our data.

We feel confident that our final plan incorporates our students' views and experiences, embedded through our commitment to student consultation and in discussions with the EDI Committee, which includes student representatives. Going forward, 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, where access and participation will be a regular standing agenda item for monitoring, evaluation and discussion.

7. Evaluation of the plan

7.1 Strategic Context for Evaluation

Evaluation and research are part of our 'whole institution' approach to access and participation. Our academic, professional and leadership teams contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of targets, intervention strategies and activities in this plan through supporting and inputting on the range of evaluation measures. Our team have skills in ensuring data capture is appropriate for the required monitoring and evaluation outputs, including designing new reports and processes to capture, collate and extract data for various evaluation and research questions. We also draw on the skills of staff responsible for the delivery of the Activities in this Plan, and our student representatives, to effectively incorporate evaluation.

In our assessment of our current context for evaluation, using the OfS evaluation self-assessment tool, we are 'emerging' across all areas. We have some foundations in place, but need to develop our practices, including embedding evaluation into activity design and delivery and ensuring feedback cycles into improving practice. Therefore, as we continue to build our cross-institution capacities for effective evaluation and the application of findings to improve practice, staff and student representatives will be supported with relevant training in Theory of Change and evaluation methods, provided through our SEER membership. Students are important in this work, and we will work in partnership with students on the design and implementation of evaluation and research particularly where this pertains to current students. SEER provides us with additional and specialist evaluation and research expertise to deliver our commitments in these areas. We will actively participate in this network, which provides us with opportunities to be part of collaborative research and evaluation projects and learn and share practice with other members and external stakeholders. SEER host an annual Symposium and regular workshops, roundtables and 'learning lunches' throughout the year, as well as providing us with opportunities to showcase our practice and insights. We will also engage with TASO and other relevant organisations in calls for evidence, conferences, events, and training.

7.2 Activity design

As detailed in the Strategic Measures section of this Plan, evaluation has been established at the start. We have built effective evaluation practice into our Strategies by establishing a range of evaluation methods attached to the individual activities that contribute towards the overall

objective of each Strategy. We can therefore build up an understanding of which activities are 'working' and which are not. We have taken a Theory of Change approach to the development of our Intervention Strategies, identifying clear intended outcomes (intermediate and end) and a supporting evidence base that has informed our activity development and challenged assumptions. We will continue to review, develop and strengthen our Theories of Change (ToC), adding to our evidence base as our evaluation findings emerge and developing enhanced activity-level ToCs where required.

7.3 Evaluation design

We have collaborated with SEER and drawn from OfS and TASO toolkits and guidance on effective evaluation approaches. We have considered how the outcomes of activities can be evaluated credibly. Employing mixed method approaches is particularly important, as we will need to rely on qualitative data to support our understanding, or fill gaps, in quantitative data. We will triangulate findings where possible and seek to deepen our insights through qualitative methods. Given the developmental stage of our evaluation practice, the majority of our evaluations are type 1 (narrative), and type 2 (empirical enquiry) of the OfS 'Standards of Evidence'. We have however noted that we will explore and consider where type 3 evaluation could be implemented in future.

Our evaluation approach has also considered the context and scale of the activities and, as we have proposed working with strategic partners in our Intervention Strategies, we wish to note that some flexibility and development may be required as our collaborations take shape, allowing for input, support and advice from partners. Our evaluation approach, data collection and analysis have been formulated on the intended outcomes and objectives of our activities. Where appropriate and possible, we will consider and employ validated scales to our evaluation practices. We have also considered evaluation that spans (a) process and (b) impact, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how our activities are working. We will explore further research projects in relation to our activities and our ambition to better understand the experiences and challenges of target students and issues of equality of opportunity. For example, consultation with students as part of the development of this Plan supports the identification of risks relating to insufficient information and guidance available when applying to higher education and the National Centre; however, we consider that there is further research that would add insight to this area.

7.4 Implementing our Evaluation Plan

We will collaborate internally across our teams and with our strategic partners to deliver our evaluation plan. Our evaluation process will comply with institutional policies and complies with all legal requirements relating to data protection, following ethical, safeguarding, legal and risk considerations. As noted above, we are members of the Specialist Evidence, Evaluation and Research (SEER) service, with whom we will work in partnership to deliver our evaluation plan. A Data Sharing Agreement has also been established. SEER provides us with opportunities to collaborate on various evaluation and research items, including for example the evaluation of the impact of financial support, using the OfS toolkit. The design of our evaluation has also been heavily informed by intended and projected standardised outcomes being adopted by SEER across its membership base, which not only increases efficiencies but provides opportunities to increase the sample size and evaluation, helping to mitigate the issue of small datasets where these occur. SEER incorporate and draw on TASO guidance on best practices for evaluations. As a practice network, we are also able to participate in peer review of practice and evaluation and share practice and findings.

We are also well-placed to respond with agility to interim findings and emerging data. We can be responsive in flexing our activity accordingly to help to keep us on track to achieve our objectives and targets and continuously improve our practice.

7.5 Learning from and Disseminating Findings

We are committed to sharing our learning and findings internally, with our partners, within our close networks and with the broader sector, to develop a stronger and increased volume of evidence about what works and what can be improved. We are pleased to help to grow the evidence base for equality of opportunity in higher education and we will submit evaluation outputs to OfS' repository of evidence as appropriate. In Section 4, we have set out our publishing plan, which includes publishing findings on interim and longer-term outcomes through a range of channels. In developing the format of our communications, we will consider creative and visual methods, and different audiences/purposes. We will ensure that our findings are open access.

We are a member of the European Federation of Circus Schools (FEDEC) and GuildHE at which we can share and present findings. It is anticipated that we will actively contribute to conferences, network events and publications. Where appropriate we will draw on existing networks to collaborate and engage with similar organisations.

Shared practice across the institution allows for review and feedback on evaluation findings and reports, and discussion regarding the improvements that could be made. More broadly, evaluation findings related to access and participation work will inform other agendas and practice, such as programme review and revalidation, communications and recruitment strategies and community engagement. We will publish the findings of our evaluation activities on our website and with sector bodies as appropriate. Further details about how we will evaluate our intervention strategies is included in Section 4.

8. Provision of information to students

An accessible summary of this plan alongside this full version will be made available on our website.

Information regarding our fees, entry requirements and support services are available to students and applicants through our prospectus, website and internal student information platform. As well, friendly and knowledgeable staff are available for guests on our open days or via email and telephone. Our Student Support Manager is able to provide information to students directly and will proactively support students at risk or in any way disadvantaged, with individualised information and guidance.

Scholarships and bursaries are subject to change, for the most up to date information on our scholarships and bursaries (including criteria) please refer to our website. Our Leverhulme scholarships are subject to the continuation of Leverhulme support and are subject to change if funding is removed or altered.

The table below outlines our current financial support offer, incorporating our funded scholarships and bursaries alongside our externally funded scholarships.

Scheme Name	Purpose	Eligibility Criteria	Level of Support	Level of Support in Subsequent Years
Funded by National Centre for Circus Arts				
National Centre Bursary	To support students from low-income households (household income below £25,000) with the cost of living, to ensure they can engage with the student experience and lead to student success.	UK students and EU students with UK settled status. Household income below £25,000. Students who apply to the Students Load Company (SLC), are means tested and National Centre is notified by SLC of those who are eligible.	£750 cash award. Paid in Spring term.	The bursary is paid for each continuous year of study.
Care Experienced and Estranged Student Bursary	To provide additional support tailored to the needs of care leavers or students estranged from their families, with recognition that these students may be more likely to need to access student accommodation outside of term time.	UK-domiciled students on a FT UG programme who can demonstrate prior care experience (for 6 months+ prior to age of 16) or that they are estranged from their families.	£750 paid in full in Spring term.	The bursary is paid for each continuous year of study.
National Centre Hardship Fund	To support students throughout the year when they experience moments of financial hardship and ensure students can stay engaged with the student experience despite temporary financial difficulties	Application to be submitted with supporting evidence of hardship. Degree staff will make judgement of the application and will decide to award the fund and the value.	Up to £500 per year. Dependent on evidence provided and demand on the fund.	
Externally Funded				
Leverhulme Scholarship Fund	Based on merit, engagement with the course and financial need.	Students are selected for the scholarship based on their personal circumstances,	£5000 per student per year. Awarded in Spring term to 3	Funding continuous for each year of enrolment on the course. Dependent on

		commitment and progress on the course throughout their first year.	students per year group.	continuation of external funding from Leverhulme.

Annex A: Further information and analysis relating to the identification and prioritisation of key risks to equality of opportunity

APP Performance Assessment

We have conducted a thorough performance assessment based on the latest OfS APP data release (July 2024) which covers up to the 2022-23 monitoring year. We have supplemented this with internal data where relevant and possible, to provide additional insights particularly where datasets are small. From this analysis, we have determined our key Indicators of Risk, which we have explored further using supplementary information, data and evidence from internal and local sources; and, from the wider sector and sector bodies.

We considered performance across all APP measures, at each stage of the lifecycle:
- Access – enrolment
- Continuation – continuing students measured at 1 year and 15 days post initial enrolment
- Completion – students completing their course, up to 6 years after beginning their studies
- Attainment – achievement of a First or 2:1 degree outcome
- Progression – progression into highly skilled employment or further post-graduate study

This assessment presents only the identified indicators of risk areas from our full analysis.

Analysis Process

1. The first layer of analysis explored the whole OfS APP dataset, identifying the Indicators of Risk for further consideration and inclusion in this Annex, as part of our Access and Participation Plan (APP) performance assessment and determination of target areas.
2. Supplementary data (internal and external) and questions are then added to further understand the context for the indicator of risk and the possible occurrence of risks to equality of opportunity.
3. Commentary on our consideration of the risks in the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR), and whether they are occurring in our context, is then provided.

Summary Of Indicators Of Risk And Target Areas

The following table highlights all the indicators of risk we have identified from the full initial data analysis.

Table 1: Summary of Indicators of Risk and Priorities

Metric /Student Group	IMD Quintile 1	TUNDRA	Global Majority	Disabled	Mature learners (21 & over)	ABCS	FSM-eligible learners
Access	**PTA_1**	Gap is present, recommend monitoring.	**PTA_2**			Very limited data available. Recommend monitoring.	Very limited data available. Recommend monitoring.
Continuation		Small gap is present, but the data are very small.		Small gap is present, but the data are very small.		Small gap is present, but the data are very small.	
Completion							
Attainment				Small gap is present, but the data are very small.	Small gap is present, but the data are very small.		
Progression							

Key

■	No data available
■	Priority Target (PT)

Priority Target Areas

We have determined that the following priority areas will be of concern under our APP, with associated targets and milestones.

1. Enrolment of students from the Global Majority.
2. Enrolment of IMD Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 students.

1. Analysis - Access

We have identified some risks to equality of opportunity at NCCA at the Access phase of the student lifecycle. Risks are likely the result of multiple factors and complex intersections, including for example, access to pre-entry knowledge and skills specific to our circus arts context.

Overall, NCCA has had a small intake of students each year, with a four-year aggregate of 80 entrants and a two-year aggregate of 40 students. Because of the small intake of numbers, data is only provided from the two- and four-year aggregates.

The Access risk indicators below are associated with negative access rates and/or gaps in our data.

Index Of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019

The OfS data is limited due to low numbers requiring data suppression. Data for access by IMD quintile is only available for all quintiles in the 4-year aggregate (2019-20 to 2022-23).

The enrolment of students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (IMD Quintile 1) is 8.2% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23), which is significantly below the sector average of 22.5% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23).

The enrolment for students from IMD Quintile 2 is 24.7% across the 4-year aggregate (2019-20 to 2022-23), which is slightly above the sector average of 21.2% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23).

The gap in enrolments between students from IMD Quintile 1 and IMD Quintile 5 is 13.7pp (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23), with Quintile 5 students having more enrolments. The sector gap is -2.8pp (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23) in favour of IMD Quintile 1 students. This highlights that for NCCA, enrolment of IMD Quintile 1 is below the sector, and there is a gap between enrolment of IMD Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 students.
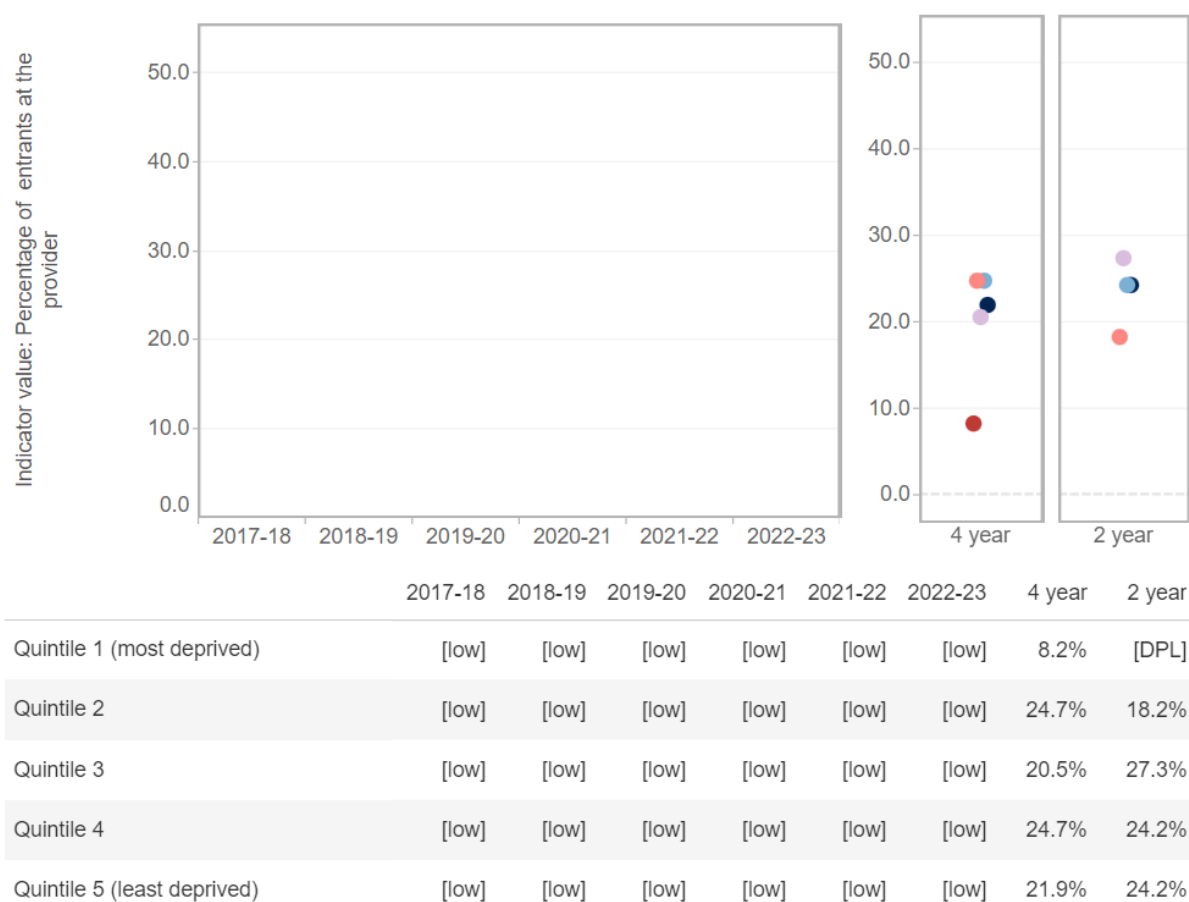
Figure 1 OfS APP dashboard access indicator values for IMD Quintiles

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	4 year	2 year
Quintile 1 (most deprived)	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	8.2%	[DPL]
Quintile 2	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	24.7%	18.2%
Quintile 3	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	20.5%	27.3%
Quintile 4	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	24.7%	24.2%
Quintile 5 (least deprived)	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	21.9%	24.2%

Key
- Quintile 1 (most deprived)
- Quintile 2
- Quintile 3
- Quintile 4
- Quintile 5 (least deprived)
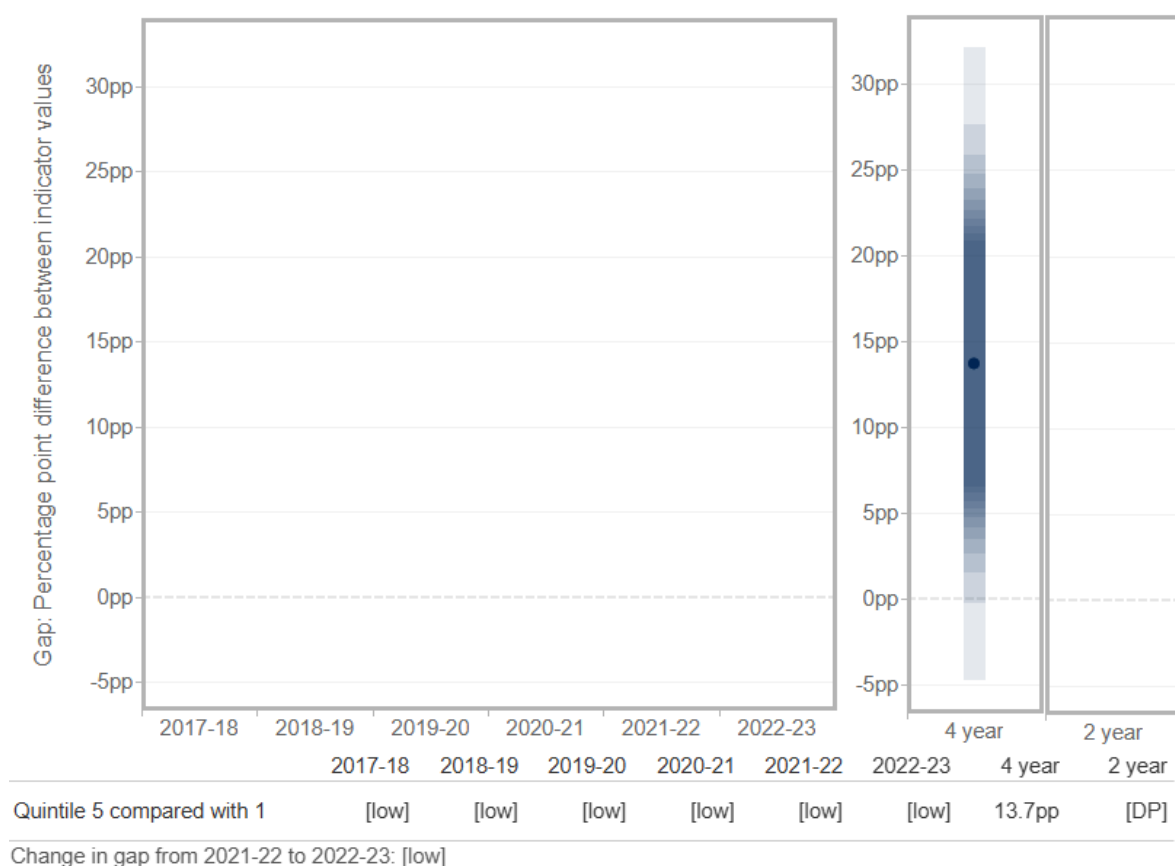
Figure 2 OfS APP dashboard access gap between IMD Quintile 5 compared with Quintile 1

Given this assessment, IMD is one of our priority targets for Access. Due to our small student numbers, we have proposed to monitor the access of both IMD Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 entrants to allow for more robust data collection and trend analysis.

Tundra (Low Participation Neighbourhoods)

TUNDRA is a Quintile-based risk indicator of participation in higher education by geographical area, where Quintiles 1 and 5 include students from areas with respectively the lowest and highest participation.

There is limited public data available for NCCA due to data suppression because of small numbers, and data is only available in the 4-year aggregate (2019-20 to 2022-23).

The enrolment of students from the areas of least participation in higher education (TUNDRA Quintile 1) is 10.7% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23), which is slightly below the sector average of 12.2% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23).

The gap in enrolments between students from TUNDRA Quintile 1 and TUNDRA Quintile 5 is 16.1pp (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23), with Quintile 5 students having more enrolments. The sector gap is 18pp (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23) in favour of TUNDRA Quintile 5 students. This highlights that for NCCA, enrolment of TUNDRA Quintile 1 entrants is slightly below the sector, and there is a smaller gap between enrolment of TUNDRA Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 students compared to the sector.

Access indicator values for: TUNDRA quintile

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	4 year	2 year
Quintile 1 (least participation)	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	10.7%	[DPL]
Quintile 2	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	16.1%	22.2%
Quintile 3	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	19.6%	22.2%
Quintile 4	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	26.8%	[DPL]
Quintile 5 (most participation)	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	26.8%	40.7%
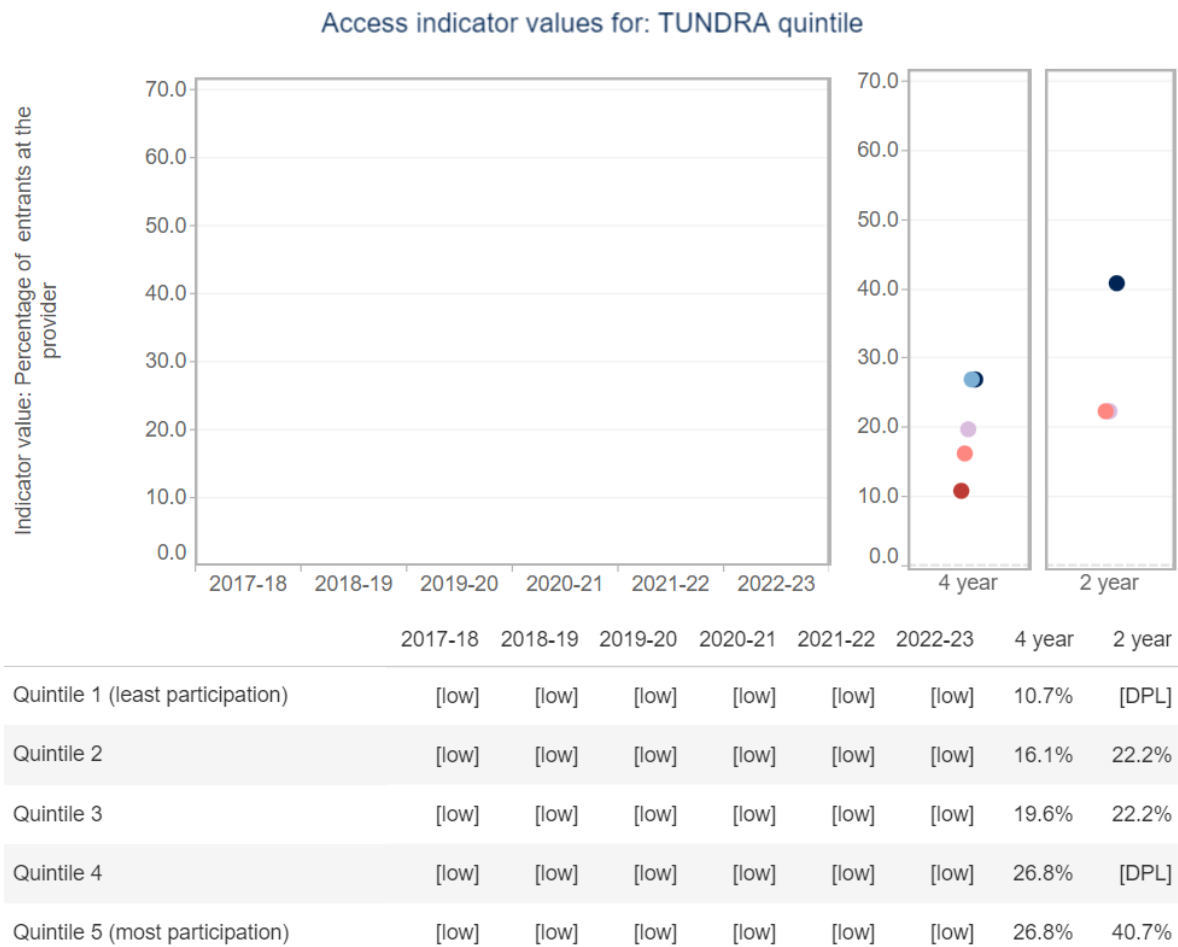
Figure 3 OfS APP dashboard access indicator values for TUNDRA Quintiles

Access gap: TUNDRA quintile – Quintile 5 compared with 1

Quintile 5 compared with 1	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	4 year	2 year
	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	16.1pp	[DP]

Change in gap from 2021-22 to 2022-23: [low]
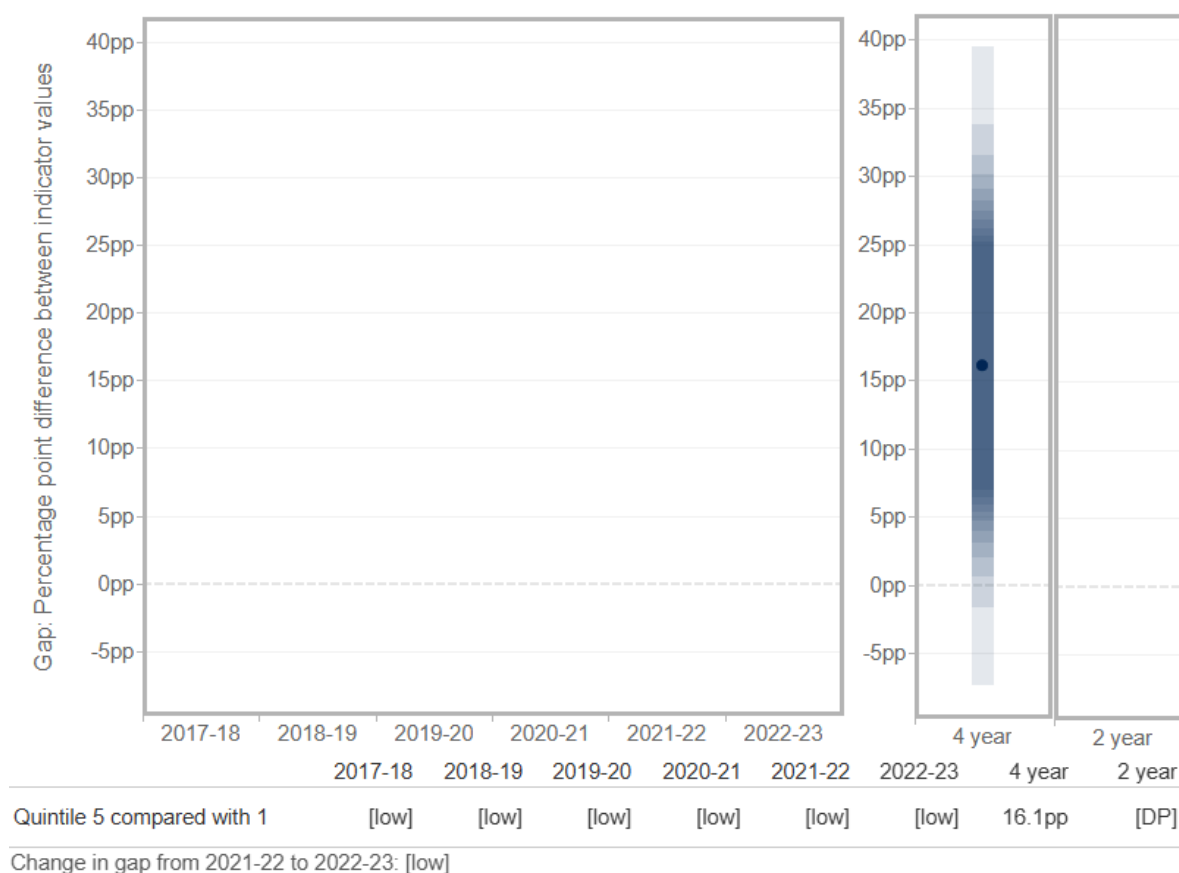
Figure 4 OfS APP dashboard access gap between TUNDRA Quintile 5 compared with Quintile 1

Whilst performance is slightly below sector average for TUNDRA Q1 access, our analysis has shown that our IMD Q1 access performance is of greater concern due to being significantly below the sector average. Given this assessment, TUNDRA is not one of our priority targets for Access. We will continue to monitor our performance in this area over the duration of the plan.

Students From The Global Majority

There is limited OfS public data available for all ethnicities due to low number data suppression. As there is only limited public data for White and Mixed ethnicities, and no public data for Asian, Black, and Other ethnicities, individualised institutional APP data has been used to investigate this further. Due to small numbers, data is only available to be reported in the 4-year aggregate (2019-2020 to 2022-23) and rounding and suppression guidelines have been followed.

Across the 4-year aggregate (2019-2020 to 2022-23), NCCA has an intake of 13.9% non-White students. This is well below the sector's average of 34.3% non-White entrants (4-year aggregate 2019-20 to 2022-23).

Due to small numbers, it is not possible to report on individual ethnic groups access to NCCA.

Access indicator values for: Ethnicity

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	4 year	2 year
Asian	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[DPL]	[DPL]
Black	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[DPL]	[DPL]
Mixed	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	12.7%	16.2%
Other	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[DPL]	[DPL]
White	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	86.1%	83.8%
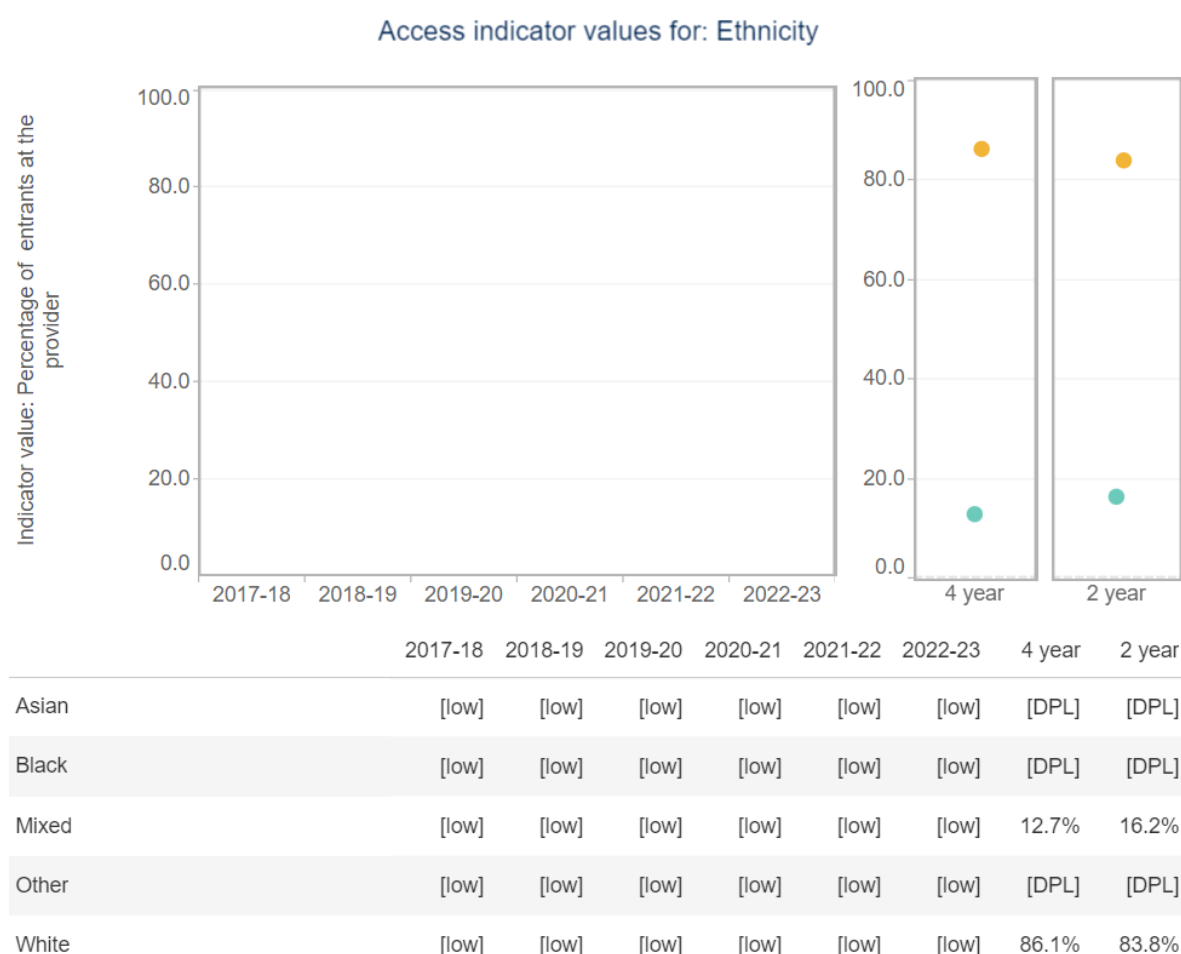
Figure 5 OfS APP dashboard access indicator values for Ethnicity

Key
- Asian
- Black
- Mixed
- Other
- White
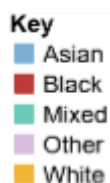
Given our low intake of students from the Global Majority, we have included Ethnicity as a priority target area for Access.

Disabled Students

Due to limited data from small numbers, disability data is only available to be reported in the 4-year aggregate (2019-2020 to 2022-23).

The data for disabled entrants shows a 4-year aggregate (2019-20 to 2022-23) of 26.6% of entrants reporting a disability. This figure is above the sector's 4-year aggregate (2019-20 to 2022-23) of 17.3% disabled entrants.

Data disaggregated by type of disability is very small, with some data suppression due to small numbers of students reporting some disability types. Analysis is limited by the very small numbers, although we can observe that cognitive and learning difficulties were the most common disability type, at 15.2% (4-year

aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23). This is followed by 6.3% of disabled entrants reporting a mental health condition (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23).

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	4 year	2 year
Disability reported	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	26.6%	13.5%
No disability reported	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	73.4%	86.5%
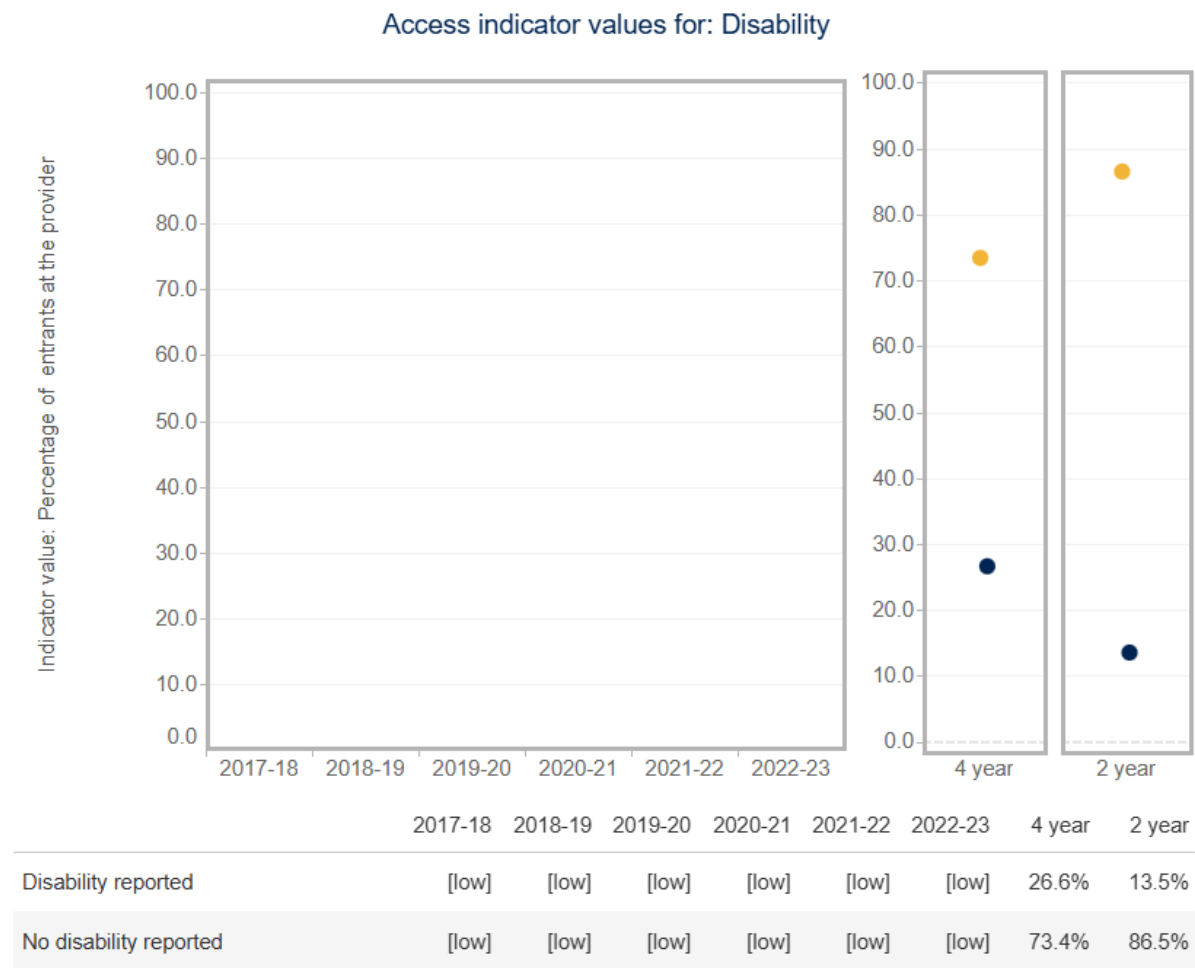
Figure 6 OfS APP dashboard access indicator values for Disability

Key
■ No disability reported
■ Disability reported

Access indicator values for: Disability type

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	4 year	2 year
Cognitive or learning difficulties	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	15.2%	[DPL]
Mental health condition	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	6.3%	[DPL]
Multiple impairments	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[DPL]	[DPL]
No disability reported	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	73.4%	86.5%
Sensory, medical or physical impairment	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[DPL]	[DPL]
Social or communication impairment	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[DPL]	[DPL]

Figure 7 OfS APP dashboard access indicator values for Disability Type

Key
- Cognitive or learning difficulties
- Mental health condition
- Multiple impairments
- Sensory, medical or physical impairment
- Social or communication impairment
- No disability reported

Given our assessment, we have not included Disability as a target area.

Mature Learners

Due to limited data from small numbers, age data is only available to be reported in the 4-year aggregate (2019-2020 to 2022-23).

The entrant rate for mature learners (21 and over) is 24.1% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23), which is slightly below the sector average of 28.5% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23).

Access indicator values for: Age

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	4 year	2 year
Mature (21 and over)	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	24.1%	21.6%
Young (under 21)	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	75.9%	78.4%

Figure 8 OfS APP dashboard access indicator values for Age

Key
■ Mature (21 and over)
■ Young (under 21)

Given the assessment that our mature learner rate is largely comparable to the sector average, we have not included mature learners as a target area.

Care Leavers

Data for care leavers is not available in the OfS dashboard and has been collected through our applications pipeline analysis. NCCA enrolled very few students categorised or self-declaring as care leavers and care experienced between 2022-23 and 2024-25. As such, our data for Care leavers are suppressed for GDPR reasons. While our intake of students from this target group is low, we are cognisant that students who are care leavers, estranged from families and refugees often face significant challenges in higher education, including lower continuation and attainment rates compared to their peers.

While this risk indicator is not included in our priority target areas for Access we will continue to monitor our internal data on care leaver enrolment.

ABCS

The new ABCS (Associations Between Characteristics of Students) measure considers multiple student characteristics including ethnicity, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, gender, income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) index of multiple deprivation (IMD) and TUNDRA. It is a quintile measure, with ABCS Quintile 1 representing the most disadvantaged.

NCCA has very limited access to data available for all ABCS Quintiles, so it is not possible to make any meaningful analyses of this measure. Based on the lack of data available and the newness of the measure, we are not proposing setting a target for this group at this time for Access, although we will continue to monitor it closely and look to improve our data collection for this measure.

Students Eligible For Free School Meals (FSM) At Key Stage 4

This measure explores access rates for students who have been eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) at Key Stage 4.

NCCA has very limited access to data available for FSM, so it is not possible to make any meaningful analyses of this measure. Based on the lack of data available, we are not proposing setting a target for this group at this time for Access, although we will continue to monitor it closely and look to improve our data collection for this measure.

Sex

Although Sex is not listed as an indicator of risk on the EORR, we feel it is a relevant measure to consider due to the under-representation of males across circus education providers nationally and internationally.

Due to limited data from small numbers, sex data is only available to be reported in the 4-year aggregate (2019-20 to 2022-23).

Our student intake is predominantly females at 74.7% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23). This is higher than the sector average of 56.9% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23).

Our male intake is 25.3% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23). This is far below the sector average of 43.1% (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23).

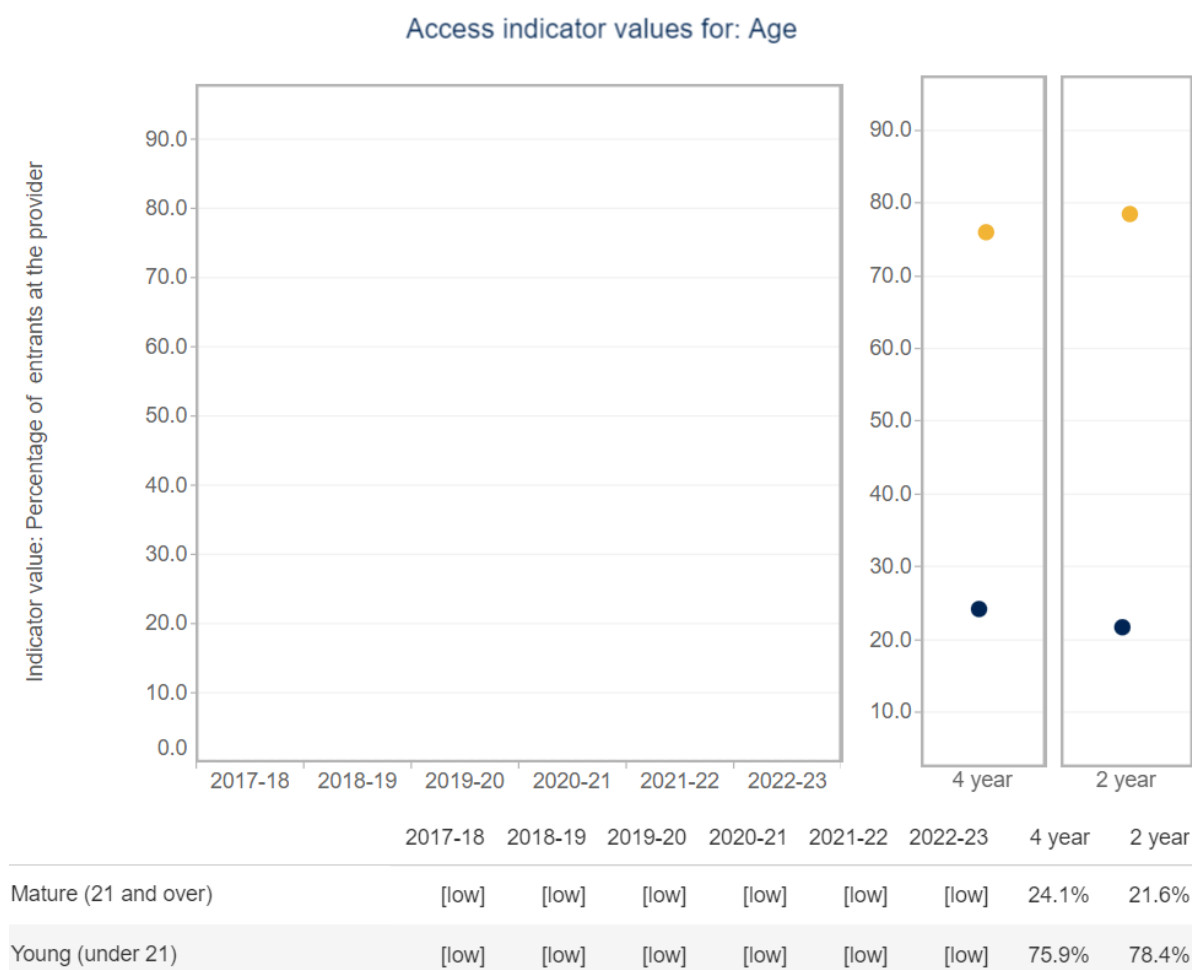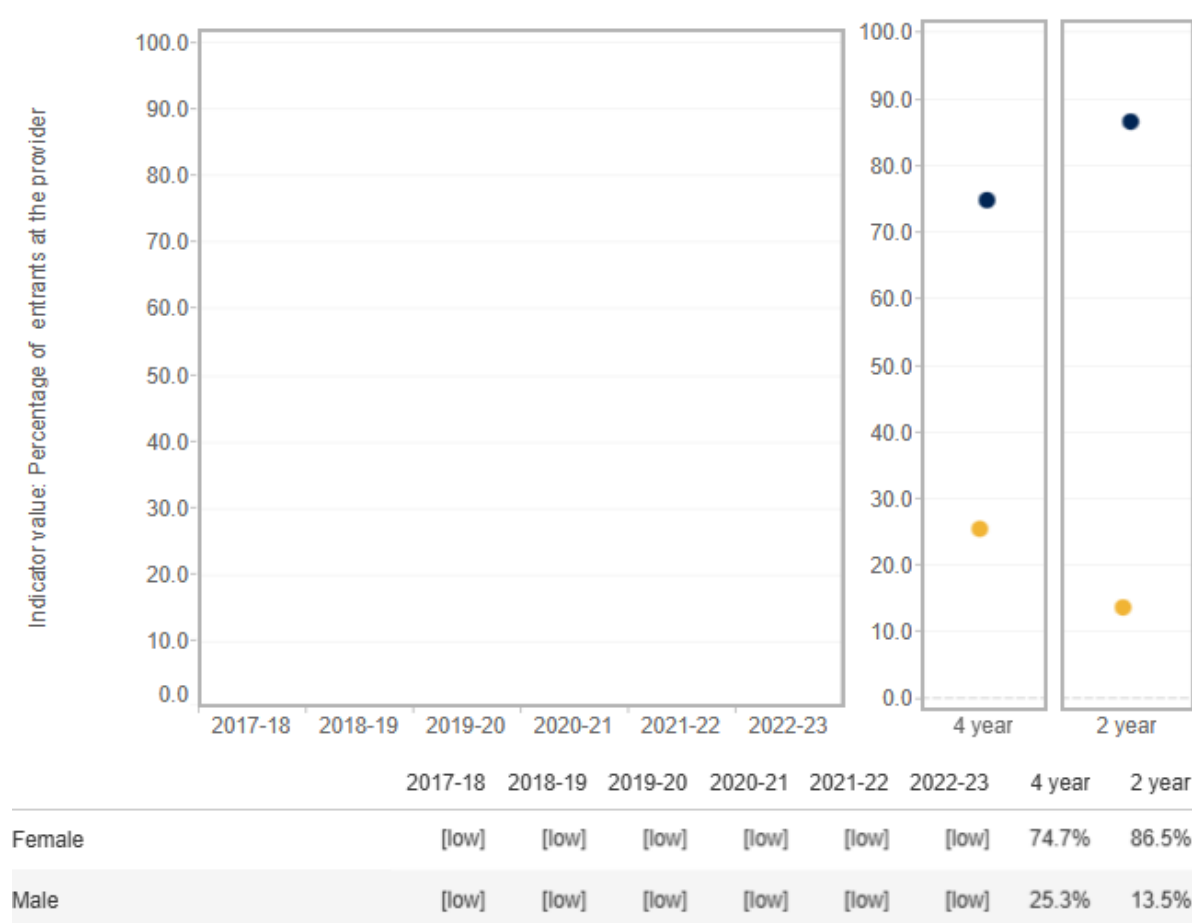Figure 9 OfS APP dashboard access indicator values for Sex

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	4 year	2 year
Female	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	74.7%	86.5%
Male	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]	25.3%	13.5%

Key
■ Female
■ Male

Whilst we acknowledge our particularly low intake of males as an institutional concern, we do not feel this should be included as a target area in our Plan, as this is not included in the national risk register. Access for males is a focus area for NCCA across our entire institutional strategy and will continue to be monitored throughout the duration of the Plan.

Continuation

This section provides our performance on student continuation for identified key risk indicators.

Continuation is measured as the proportion of enrolled students continuing into a second year of higher education study 1 year and 15 days post-enrolment or completing study and leaving with a higher education qualification.

Continuation data at NCCA is only available as a 4-year aggregate (2018-19 to 2021-22) figure, which is 94.9%. This is higher than the sector's 4-year aggregate (2018-19 to 2021-22) of 89.3%.

There is limited data available for each risk to equality of opportunity due to small data sets. As such, we will continue to monitor our data but not set any targets for Continuation.

Individualised institutional APP data (based on 4-year averages available for 2018-19 to 2021-22) shows that for some demographics, there are positive gaps where target groups have better continuation rates than their comparator groups.

IMD 2019 (Indices Of Multiple Deprivation)

IMD Quintile 1 students have a continuation rate of 100% compared to a continuation rate of 95% for their comparator group of IMD Quintile 5 students (across 4-year aggregate 2018-19 to 2021-22). This is based on extremely small numbers of Quintile 5 students withdrawing from study and this will continue to be monitored.

Mature Learners (21 And Over)

Mature students have a continuation rate of 96% compared to a continuation rate of 94% for their comparator group of Young students (across 4-year aggregate 2018-19 to 2021-22). This is based on extremely small numbers of students withdrawing from study and this will continue to be monitored.

Tundra (Low Participation Neighbourhoods)

Due to small numbers, our data for continuation for TUNDRA Quintiles is suppressed in the public OfS data. Individualised institutional APP data shows that over the 4-year aggregate (2018-19 to 2021-22) TUNDRA Q1 students have a continuation rate of 90% and TUNDRA Q5 students have a continuation rate of 94%. This is based on extremely small numbers of non-continuing students across the available years of data.

As the continuation rates in our provider context are broadly similar between TUNDRA Quintiles and based on extremely small numbers, we will therefore not be designating this risk indicator a priority area for Continuation in our plan. However, we will continue to monitor the data.

Students From The Global Majority

Due to small numbers, our data for continuation for Global Majority students is suppressed in the public OfS data. Individualised institutional APP data shows that over the 4-year aggregate (2018-19 to 2021-22), non-White students have a continuation rate of 92% and White students have a continuation rate of 95%. This is based on extremely small numbers of non-continuing students across the available years of data.

As the continuation rates in our provider context are broadly similar between Global Majority and White students, we will therefore not be designating this risk indicator a priority area for Continuation in our plan. However, we will continue to monitor the data.

Disability

Due to small numbers, our data for continuation for disabled and non-disabled students is suppressed in the public OfS data. Individualised institutional APP data shows that over the 4-year aggregate (2018-19 to 2021-22), disabled students have a continuation rate of 92% and non-disabled students have a continuation

rate of 96%. This is based on very small numbers of non-continuing students across the available years of data.

As the continuation rates in our provider context are broadly similar between disabled and non-disabled students and based on extremely small numbers, we will therefore not be designating this risk indicator a priority area for Continuation in our plan. However, we will continue to monitor the data.

ABCS

There is limited data available for continuation by ABCS Quintile, with ABCS Quintile 1 representing students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Due to small numbers, our data for continuation by ABCS quintiles is suppressed in the public OfS data.

Individualised institutional APP data between 2018-19 and 2021-22 shows that there is a continuation gap between ABCS Quintile 1 and ABCS Quintile 5 students. In the 4-year aggregate (2018-19 to 2021-22), ABCS Quintile 1 students have a continuation rate of 86% and ABCS Quintile 5 students have a continuation rate of 100%. However, this is based on extremely small datasets and the continuation rate for ABCS Quintile 1 is higher than the sector continuation rate of 80.8% (4-year aggregate 2018-19 to 2021-22).

Due to very small datasets and the limitation of interpreting these, and current better than sector performance for ABCS Quintile 1, we do not propose to set a target. We will however continue to monitor data and, as our datasets build over time, may seek to set a target in future if gaps emerge.

Completion

This section provides our performance in student completion for the OfS key risk indicators and target groups.

Completion is measured by as the proportion of students completing their course within 6-years from enrolment.

NCCA has limited completion data available in the OfS data dashboard, with data suppressed due to small numbers. Across all students, there is a 90.5% completion rate (4-year aggregate 2015-16 to 2018-19). Individualised institutional APP data does not highlight any gaps across any of the indicators of risk.

Therefore, we do not need to set any targets in Completion. We will continue to monitor our data here to observe whether any gaps emerge.

Attainment

This section provides our performance with respect to the attainment of our students from key target groups.

Attainment is measured as the proportion of students who achieve a 'good degree', i.e., a First (1st) or a 2:1 degree outcome.

NCCA has limited attainment data available in the OfS data dashboard, with data suppressed due to small numbers. Across all students, there is a 92.1% attainment rate (4-year aggregate 2019-20 to 2022-23).

Across some student characteristics, no gaps were observed across the 4-year aggregate (2019-20 to 2022-23). Data will continue to be monitored and targets may be considered if gaps emerge.

Individualised institutional APP data (based on 4-year aggregates available for 2019-20 to 2022-23) shows that for some demographics, there are positive gaps where target groups have better continuation rates than their comparator groups.

Disabled Students

Disabled students have an attainment rate of 90.5% compared to an attainment rate of 87.1% for non-disabled students (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23).

This is based on extremely small numbers, and data trends will continue to be monitored over time.

Tundra (Low Participation Neighbourhoods)

TUNDRA Quintile 1 students have an attainment rate of 100% compared to an attainment rate of 80% for Quintile 5 students (4-year aggregate, 2019-20 to 2022-23).

This is based on extremely small numbers, and data trends will continue to be monitored over time.

Students From The Global Majority

Global Majority students have an attainment rate of 100% compared to an attainment rate of 91.2% for White students (4-year aggregate 2019-20 to 2022-23).

This is based on extremely small numbers, and data trends will continue to be monitored over time.

The Attainment risk indicators below are associated with attainment gaps in our data.

Mature Learners (21 And Over)

There is no public OfS data available for attainment for mature and young students, due to small numbers. Individualised institutional APP data shows that mature students have an attainment rate of 88.9%, compared to an attainment rate of 100% for young learners (4-year aggregate 2019-20 to 2022-23). The data is based on extremely small datasets, so analysis is limited.

Due to this assessment and the small datasets, we do not propose including Mature as a target area for Attainment at this time. We will continue to monitor data in this area.

Progression

This section provides our performance in relation to the progression of students from the OfS key target groups.

Progression is measured in terms of graduate destinations into the labour market or elsewhere that include being employed in a highly skilled professional or managerial job, or undertaking further study, or another positive outcome.

NCCA has progression data available in the OfS data dashboard as a 4-year aggregate due to low number suppression. The progression rate is 79.9% overall (4-year aggregate 2018-19 to 2021-22). This is above the sector progression rate of 72.4% over the 4-year aggregate (2018-19 to 2021-22).

Across the limited data available in our individualised institutional APP data (4-year aggregate 2017-18 to 2020-21), we can see that for many of our indicator of risk groups, the target group is reporting better progression rates than their comparator group.

IMD 2019 (Indices Of Multiple Deprivation)

IMD Quintile 1 students have a progression rate of 100% compared to 78.6% for IMD Quintile 5 students (4-year aggregate 2017-18 to 2020-21). This is based on small numbers of Quintile 5 students who have not been recorded as having a 'Good Outcome' and will continue to be monitored.

Tundra (Low Participation Neighbourhoods)

TUNDRA Quintile 1 students have a progression rate of 100% compared to 88.9% for TUNDRA Quintile 5 students (4-year aggregate 2017-18 to 2020-21). This is based on small numbers of Quintile 5 students who have not been recorded as having a 'Good Outcome' and will continue to be monitored.

Disabled Students

Disabled students have a progression rate of 93.3% compared to 75% for non-disabled students (4-year aggregate 2017-18 to 2020-21). This is based on small numbers of non-disabled students who have not been recorded as having a 'Good Outcome' and will continue to be monitored.

Students From The Global Majority

Non-White students have a progression rate of 83.3% compared to 80% for White students (4-year aggregate 2017-18 to 2020-21). This is based on extremely small numbers of non-White students in the dataset, and small numbers of students who have not been recorded as having a 'Good Outcome' and will continue to be monitored.

Due to the nature of the industries in which our students work, Graduate Outcomes data may not be a reliable source to the extent of their success. Our students leave us as successful and capable circus artists, and, in line with ambitions, may pursue a variety of careers whilst carrying circus arts as a valuable and enriching part of their lives.

Given the context of pursuing a circus career, our above sector average performance, and the limited data we have on progression outcomes, we consider that analysis and determination of any indicators of risk in

this area are not meaningful. We have not set any targets for Progression but will continue to monitor our data.

2. Summary Of Target Areas

We have used the initial performance assessment above and the emerging indicators of risk (i.e. measures where our performance is weak) to signpost to the priority areas for further investigation and/or including as target areas in the new Access and Participation Plan (APP). In summary, these areas are:

Access

1. Enrolment of students from the Global Majority.
2. Enrolment of IMD Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 students.

Continuation, Completion, Attainment, Progression

No targets are included in these areas.

Areas For Continued Monitoring

The priority areas for continued monitoring are:

1. TUNDRA Quintile 1 access.
2. ABCS Quintiles.
3. Free School Meals eligibility data.
4. Male students access.

Risks To Equality Of Opportunity

We have considered the identified indicators of risk against the national Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR). This highlights 12 risks that are of national concern, and which are more likely to affect students within our target groups (IMD Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 students and students from the Global Majority).

Access (Pre-Enrolment)

The first five (5) Risks on the EORR relate to the Access (pre-enrolment) area, and we note that all 5 risks are generally more likely to have an impact on outcomes for the target groups we have identified in relation to enrolment outcomes (disadvantaged students, measured by IMD and FSM; and, students from the Global Majority). We have therefore considered all 5 Risks in relation to our context at National Centre for Circus Arts, and in consultation with our community of staff and students. The following information provides a summary of our context in relation to each risk, and considerations of whether it is occurring and potentially the cause of the indicators of risk (i.e. poor performance) we have identified. Further information can also be found in references in the main Access and Participation Plan and in Annex B.

Risk 1 – Knowledge And Skills

Our observations and experiences with schools and colleges indicate that applicants from our target groups often have fewer opportunities to develop the necessary skills and knowledge for higher education, particularly in the specialised circus training context. There is a lack of circus training opportunities in the UK in comparison to dance or theatre. Although creative subjects including dance and theatre have been devalued through defunding and reduced offerings, particularly in state-funded compulsory education, the lack of circus opportunities is particularly a concern for our applicants. The required training facilities and circus skills groups to develop specialist skills, and specialist knowledge about the options available to pursue circus training at a degree level and a career as a circus artist, are not readily available in all regions of the UK and for students from all backgrounds.

Many young people from underrepresented backgrounds face significant challenges in demonstrating aptitude for our circus training due to limited access to circus opportunities, as well as a lack of access to industry professionals. As circus skills are not included in schools curriculums, it can be more difficult for young people to be exposed to the opportunities to participate, or to develop their skills to the levels needed for our programme; access is dependent on their capacity to access opportunities outside of school, which can be impacted by geographical, social, and economic factors.

Many of our applicants will have had some training in circus and in other disciplines such as dance, theatre or gymnastics, which does support their success at audition. However, they may not have had exposure to the range of disciplines or the number of hours of training needed to be at degree entry level. We see a range of readiness from our applicants, both in the context of being ready for higher education generally and being ready for degree level circus training.

We already provide various skills development opportunities through our National Centre youth and adult courses, which may be beneficial in developing the necessary skills for those who can access these. These opportunities range from taster sessions to full-term programmes across various disciplines and skills levels. These activities are necessarily facilitated at our London campus, limiting access to those who can travel to the Centre, as specialist equipment is often required to participate. We also collaborate with schools to provide circus skills sessions to young people.

Recognising these challenges, the National Centre is dedicated to improving access through targeted intervention strategies. However, we acknowledge that the impact of these interventions will be limited without sustained and consistent access to our niche subject area and specialist training.

Risk 2 – Information And Guidance

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and underrepresented groups often miss out on crucial information, advice, and guidance that can shape their ambitions, expectations, and help them make informed decisions about higher education. This is particularly pertinent for specialist higher education, as the general information and guidance provided by schools is usually focused on broader subject areas and qualifications. Since the careers education reforms in 2012 (Holman 2014, Chadderton 2015), many schools lost their impartial specialist CEIAG advisor and along with them knowledge of the wider higher education context. For the National Centre, we offer one of only two BA Hons degree in Circus Arts in the UK, and as a small and very specialist provider, we are unlikely to be included in the vast majority of CEIAG provided to

young people in schools and colleges. This means many of our applicants have to seek information themselves, lacking support from school staff, which many of their peers applying to more traditional degrees are likely to have.

The process of applying to study at the National Centre differs from the typical UCAS application most young people will be informed about. We accept applications directly via our website, which includes submission of an audition video alongside a written application. The use of auditions as part of the application process and the knowledge of what specialist providers look for can also be something that is missing for young people. Schools may only provide guidance on the more typical application process. As we have a unique course offering, it is unlikely that advisors at individual schools have had direct previous experience with supporting applicants to the National Centre, so there may be less specific advice available to young people considering our course.

We are also aware of there being a lack of understanding of what a career in the circus arts may look like, as this is not a career likely to be discussed in compulsory education careers guidance. Students often associate a career in circus arts as something that doesn't pay well or is additional work alongside a main career. Some may even only view the arts as simply a hobby. Often only limited information about alternative career paths or portfolio careers is provided due to a lack of knowledge by those advising schools. It should be noted that this is not the same in all schools but there is a great disparity in the quality of careers education in compulsory education (Thompson, 2020).

Our outreach work has been focused on targeting schools with a high proportion of pupil premium and schools with a high proportion of Global Majority pupils. Numbers of applicants from our target characteristics are still low, as seen in our data above, but we support applicants from target groups as much as possible through application to enrolment. We consistently offer personal advice and support for young people interested in the degree programme, and young people and their families can speak directly to members of the degree team to receive personalised guidance and support.

The National Centre's intervention strategies must include robust information and guidance opportunities for the applicants we interact with as well as for key decision influencers such as parents and teachers/advisors. In our context, we are also interested in supporting youth circus trainers and performing arts facilitators (e.g. dance, gymnastics, and theatre teachers) to better understand our offer and application process, to improve the pipeline from youth participation to considering full-time circus training with us.

Risk 3 – Perceptions Of Higher Education

The world of circus can be associated with multiple, sometimes competing, perceptions. There are some representations in popular media and culture of young people from challenging circumstances and backgrounds 'running away to join the circus', and the longstanding cultural traditions of circus for Romani, Roma and Irish Travellers have been associated with experiences of societal exclusion and discrimination (Frank, 2023). This can lead to a career in the circus being seen as associated with a means of escaping everyday life for marginalised groups (King, 2018), or as an option only available to people from Romani, Roma and Irish Traveller backgrounds, and limited to the public perception of travelling circuses and shows which doesn't consider other career options as a circus artist.

However, the perception of pursuing a specialist degree in circus arts may be more closely linked with more general perceptions of arts degrees being the reserve of the elite and affluent. Learners from the global majority or low socioeconomic backgrounds are often discouraged from pursuing an arts career and degree in favour of courses which are perceived to guarantee a steady income and stable career. Formal circus training may be seen by some to be a less legitimate degree than more traditional subjects, particularly by parents and carers who may have dated and limited perceptions of available circus careers.

There may also be challenges for potential applicants in believing it is possible to take their youth interest in circus into a higher education setting. We are keen to raise awareness for applicants and their support systems about the positive benefits of studying a circus degree, which may offer an opportunity to complete a higher education degree which some of our applicants would otherwise not pursue.

Developing a sense of belonging is key to ensuring a successful transition from applicant to enrolled student, and part of this is about showing students that a circus degree is for them and others like them. We are aiming to improve the diversity of our cohort through our intervention strategies, and our access intervention strategies will utilise role models from a diverse range of backgrounds where possible to enable perceptions to improve.

There are also the young people's perceptions of what a circus degree involves which we must consider at application stage. Our applicants and students are often influenced by their expectations of circus training based on their understanding of circus schools across Europe and the rest of the world. This has been identified as an area of expectations mismatch and ensuring that applicants understand what our programme involves and why it has been structured in a particular way, is a crucial part of our intervention strategies.

Risk 4 – Application Success Rates

Due to the nature of our provision, our admissions decisions are heavily weighted towards our auditions and interviews. We recognise that auditioning may be a barrier for some applicants, either due to the costs involved or a lack of experience in auditioning. Our application pipeline data suggests that Global Majority and IMD Quintile 1 and 2 students could be experiencing barriers at the audition stage, which we plan to address through our intervention strategy activities focused on improving pre-application support, audition preparation, and targeted supports for applicants from these backgrounds.

Across our applications process, we have done a lot of work to ensure there are few barriers to entry whilst still maintaining entry standards for the school. We are not looking for a specific "level" for entry and have designed the auditions to be inclusive and informative around what being on the course will involve. Applicants need to be able to demonstrate adequate abilities at audition to ensure that the course is the right choice for them. We have created an audition process that tries to identify potential as much as previous training. We also interview each individual, which allows them to share their ambitions and reasons for applying. The panel is open to hearing about their artistic ideas and passion for the arts, which can support their entry onto the programme. We already offer both in-person and online auditions and interviews, and make adjustments where required for auditioning.

We see the challenges of this risk being more closely associated with limited opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted (Risk 1) and limited opportunities to receive the information

and guidance required to understand what is expected of them in the application process (Risk 2). Therefore, our intervention strategies focus on addressing Risks 1 and 2, which we expect will have a positive effect on this risk.

Risk 5 – Limited Choice Of Course Or Delivery Mode

The National Centre is limited in some aspects of this risk due to our size and our delivery model. The practical and vocational nature of our BA Hons Circus Arts course means we have few alternatives to the delivery of the course, which is full-time and delivered in-person at our London campus. Specialist equipment and training spaces are required to maintain our high standards of training, which necessitate the use of our specialist spaces on our campus. Full-time attendance is necessary to ensure students have the time needed to develop necessary skills to succeed in the course.

Whilst we are aware that the nature of our provision could mean some groups of students are unable to participate, we are currently not in a position to develop alternative delivery modes. We ensure that all applicants are aware of what the course involves at the time of application, so they understand that enrolment on the course does need the ability to attend in-person and on a full-time basis.

On-Course (Student Success)

The remaining Risks on the EORR relate to the on-course and progression areas. Whilst our on-course and progression data is in general positive, we are keen to not be complacent. We have therefore considered the risks in relation to our context at the National Centre, and in consultation with our community of staff and students.

The following information provides a summary of our context in relation to each risk, and considerations of whether it is occurring and potentially the cause of the indicators of risk we have identified. Further information can also be found in references in the main Access and Participation Plan, and in Annex B.

Risk 6 – Insufficient Academic Support

Due to our small cohort sizes and our delivery model, all of our students receive small group teaching, developing excellent working relationships. Once students specialise, they will have classes with their specific discipline teacher. These are generally small groups of three to four students although many students also have one-to-one classes. These extremely low class numbers allows teachers to teach to the needs of the individual. This individualised attention and support through learning is one of the reasons for the high attainment grades achieved by our students.

As our entry criteria is based on physical and artistic merit more so than previous academic achievements, and vocational arts schools have a tendency to attract students with dyslexia and other learning differences, many students need additional support for the academic aspects of the modules. For students who need additional support, we offer personalised learning plans. Year on year the school celebrates the success of our neurodivergent students and those with disclosed learning differences. We consistently see outstanding exam board outcomes with an exceptional number of upper second and first degrees achieved every year.

In our student consultations, some students have expressed difficulties in accessing information about changing timetables, which we are addressing through collaborating with student reps on a newsletter to disseminate key academic-related information. Some of our students have also felt that they have experiences less time in classes and discipline-specific classes compared to other circus schools globally; we have on-going work to ensure all information available to potential and current students is accurate and accessible. Module content, delivery hours and assessment expectations are all aligned and underpin the information given to students.

In 2023 we went through a degree programme rewrite with the objective to ensure the programme is in line with the needs of the industry and the students we had joining the programme. The course was historically run as a two-year foundation programme with a third year as a top for the BA qualification. We were seeing that most of the enrolling students were intending on completing the full three years. The rewrite meant we would make the course a single three-year BA course. This allowed us to create a much more connected and coherent programme, with each year defining a much clear educational journey from year one to year three. This also allowed us to reduce the number of assessment points, and we avoided deadline dates clashes. This was a noticeable improvement for all students but especially those with learning differences. As we have prioritised academic support and our data analysis does not indicate any particular areas of concern in this area, we do not consider Risk 6 as a priority area of action for us, although we are committed to making ongoing improvements and responding to student feedback.

Risk 7 – Insufficient Personal Support And Risk 8 – Mental Health

Access to personal support is important for our students. We have an above average proportion of students declaring a disability (26.6%, 4-year aggregate), with a significant percentage of these students reporting mental health conditions (6.3%, 4-year aggregate). Given the current cost of living situation in the UK, some students who would normally not consider themselves to have a mental health condition are also experiencing high levels of stress and worry.

Across the UK, the NHS' mental health services are stretched with extremely high volumes of need so our students may not be able to access the professional mental health services they need to cope with the requirements of study. We have seen an increased need for student mental health support over recent years, particularly for students experiencing high levels of anxiety. Our internal support offer includes a full-time Student Support Manager to oversee all our students. Counselling referrals are made when required. The rest of the degree team and teachers are also available to support individual students. Due to our small cohorts, we are able to develop strong relationships between staff and students, offering an exceptional level of care and support. Our student consultations highlight the importance of our student-staff connections, as students are aware of when staffing changes, and want to be introduced to new staff to understand who they can contact regarding any issues.

The National Centre is currently reviewing the support offer to both students and staff and we have implemented an Employee Assistance Programme that will also be rolled out to students. The senior management team work very closely with staff and promote an open door policy. We have a guardians scheme as well as mental health first aiders in the building.

As a physical degree, we also consider access to medical support as part of our personal support offer. Timetables are designed for the right balance of physical overload and rest, and students are given classes on anatomy, nutrition and injury prevention to ensure they are learning the skills needed to be

independent artists in the future. However, when injury does occur, we are able to support students with a Physiotherapist to assist them with their recovery. We have selected Physios with specific circus knowledge. The Physios understand the educational responsibility of the school and support the students learning around prevention of and recovery from injuries.

Whilst an important area to consider, we do not consider Risks 7 and 8 as a priority area of action for us, although we are committed to making ongoing improvements and responding to student feedback.

Risk 9 – Ongoing Impacts Of Coronavirus

Students may be affected by the ongoing consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. Students joining the National Centre over the next few years will have experienced disjointed and disrupted educational experiences prior to enrolment. This will have impacted students in a multitude of ways, including having limited access to extracurricular circus training and performances during times of lockdown. We have also noticed that recent cohorts have struggled with social skills, finding it challenging to work together and more guidance has been needed from staff. We have adapted teaching and support services where required, whilst maintaining high expectations to ensure students can progress successfully into employment or further study.

Risk 10 – Cost Pressures

Increases in cost pressures may affect a student's ability to complete their course or obtain a good grade. The Student Academic Experience Survey 2023 delivered by Advance HE and HEPI notes there has been a 10% rise in the number of students in paid employment since 2022. During study, students on intensive study and training programmes at creative and arts-based providers are disproportionately affected due to limited availability for part-time work. We ensure classes are not scheduled after 4pm to allow students to undertake evening work commitments if necessary. We conduct regular impact of financial support evaluations and our most recent survey in 2024 noted that 86% (n=6) of the respondents (n=7) funded their participation in higher education through earnings from work.

Our experience suggests that concern about student finances and the high cost of living is an increasing issue for more and more students, and most particularly for those from lower income backgrounds. We are aware of the need to reduce costs for students wherever possible and seek to do so. Our 2024 financial support evaluation highlighted how students were experiencing the increased costs of living, particularly regarding accommodation costs in London. The students were positive about how National Centre financial support had helped them in the cost-of-living crisis. Students commented that financial support has helped them pay essential costs, focus on their studies more, and afford to undertake less paid work.

We have also considered this risk in the context of access. The impact of the cost-of-living crisis is being felt acutely, with students less likely to participate in pre-HE training and development that would support application and enrolment. We aim to address these cost pressures through our intervention strategy focus on providing scholarships for young people to participate in our training courses and enrichment activities.

We continue to offer financial support on-course, targeted at students from lower household income backgrounds. Our recent change to our degree programme, to become a full three-year degree, has also benefited students financially as they are now able to access maintenance loans throughout their entire

degree; previously, students were not registered as students in the summer transition between their foundation and BA top-up.

We will continue to provide financial support and evaluate this to ensure we are offering the best and most effective support. We will monitor the impact on all students, with a particular focus on our target groups, e.g. IMD Q1 and Q2 backgrounds and Global Majority students.

Risk 11 – Capacity Issues

As in most small providers, space is always at a premium at the National Centre for Circus Arts. The availability of specialist spaces is finite which may pose issues for students who lack suitable practice space at home or in their accommodation, particularly for those who need to train using specialist equipment for their discipline.

Students benefit greatly from the small cohort size and personalised approach, with almost unlimited access to the degree team office and staff. There is access available to the training space for self-practice and small groups of students to practice together to continue their skills development outside of classes.

We are very fortunate to have the building and facilities we do. We have one of the best, circus-ready spaces in the UK. However, we know that circus does require a lot of space and specific equipment. This means our spaces are in high demand. As part of our mixed financial model, we do at times have our spaces available to hire for commercial use. We do our best to move students to alternative training sites to ensure the delivery of the degree modules continues, but the students can feel this as a loss of training space.

We supply all equipment needed for them to train, however, some students may choose a discipline that requires equipment that needs to match their body size, and we therefore encourage and support them to purchase their own equipment as they will need it once they graduate. We offer interest free loans to help them with this purchase.

The National Centre does not provide accommodation, but we do connect incoming students with the current students as there are usually rooms available in their shared flats once other students graduate. We also connect groups of new students in case they want to set up a flat together. Whilst we do not have our own accommodation offer, we offer this support where possible to facilitate students finding appropriate housing themselves, and with other students on their course if available and desired by the students.

This is not a priority risk for the National Centre, but we will monitor the impact and build it into our internal strategies going forward.

Risk 12 – Progression From Higher Education

Our APP data analysis did not highlight any areas of concern for our target groups in relation to progression, with some evidence of better progression outcomes for our target groups than their comparator peers.

Students have multiple opportunities to access employability and networking throughout their course. Open training, which involves professionals and students training in the same space, is well established in the culture at the National Centre. Students can make connections with industry professionals through our

professional development weeks. They are encouraged to contact industry professionals as part of assessments for a module, showing how careers and employability are embedded into the curriculum. Many of our teachers are also working circus artists, so students are always in contact with industry connections.

We also offer one-year of free training after graduation. This supports our recent graduates with a space to continue their training. The opportunity to join the professional network at the National Centre is an important and valuable aspect of what the school offers. Alumni will have continued access to the training spaces. Although the degree has priority during the hours of 9am - 4pm, the professionals are welcome to come in and use any remaining space. From 4pm-6pm the spaces are shared between students and professionals which creates a fantastic networking and learning environment. It is a rich skills exchange opportunity. From 6pm, graduates and professionals have priority and have exclusive use of some of the spaces. Graduates have free access for an entire year and can train all day, every day for no cost.

This is not a priority risk for the National Centre, though we will continue to monitor this area.

Annex B: Further information that sets out the rationale, assumptions and evidence base for each intervention strategy that is included in the access and participation plan

Intervention Strategy	Activity	Evidence (reference / links)	Key points from evidence and reference to proposed activity

IS1 Supporting readiness for circus training at HE level	**National Trainer CPD and networking**
	
	Scope: London and regional circus schools.
	
	Target: students who are from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 and from the Global Majority.
	
	What is it?
	Practice-sharing between circus art trainers and practitioners and developing a programme that aims to support trainer confidence and ability for:
	• advocating for circus HE and
	• facilitating skills development by prospective circus HE students from diverse backgrounds and experience.
		[1]Causeway Education. 2019. Access Champions: Interim Evaluation Report. Causeway Education.
		
		[2]OfS. 2022. Schools, attainment and the role of higher education. Insights. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/schools-attainment-and-the-role-of-higher-education/
		
		[3]The Sutton Trust. 2014. What makes great teaching? https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/great-teaching/
		
		[4]Ambon, J., B.S. Alias, A. Komariah & A.N. Mansor. 2024. The impact of continuous professional development on teaching quality: a systematic review. International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE), 13(6). http://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v13i6.30427
		
		[5]EPI. 2021. The effects of high-quality professional development on teachers and students: A cost-benefit analysis. https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/the-effects-of-high-quality-professional-development-on-teachers-and-students/
		
		[6]Fedec. 2018. SAVOIRS01: The profession of circus arts teacher in professional schools, towards defining a European competency framework for the profession. INTENTS Project. https://www.fedec.eu/en/article/247-savoirs01-the-profession-of-circus-arts-teacher-in-professional-schools-towards-defining-a-european-competency-framework-for-the-profession-2018-intents-project
		
		[7]Fedec. 2019. REFLECT Publication: REFLections and Exchanges for Circus arts Teachers. REFLECT project. https://www.fedec.eu/en/file/file/162
		
		[8]Liodaki, N., S. Kasola & T. Karalis. 2015. Evaluation and analysis of teachers; training outcomes in circus pedagogy. Edulearn 15
			Evidence around supporting the professional development of circus art educators suggests that:
			• having and engaging with opportunities for networking and professional development can generally enhance teachers' ability to[1]:
			  o guide students on applying to HE,
			  o guide students on careers linked to HE,
			  o guide on and support student development of skills needed to transition into HE.
			• teacher training and CPD can have a significant effect on student attainment[2,3] and can significantly raise teaching quality[4].
			• quality teaching can increase the attainment of disadvantaged students in particular by as much as a month's worth of extra learning[5].
			• effective CPD in teaching circus arts needs to encompass key competencies, including understanding of circus arts pedagogy; ability to work as part of a teaching team; knowledge of circus techniques, related performance artistry, and health and safety rules; ability to guide and support student learning[6].
			• engagement in collaborative sharing of practice, as an approach to CPD, as well as being engaged in co-designing training and even just attending a show as a critical viewer, can all significantly benefit professional development of trainers in circus arts[7].
			• professional development in the pedagogy of circus arts can benefit positively not only teaching quality,

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Proceedings, pp. 7159-7167.
https://library.iated.org/view/LIODAKI2015EVA

[9]Kriellaars, D. J., J. Cairney, M.A. Bortoleto, T.K. Kiez, D. Dudley & P. Aubertin. 2019. The Impact of Circus Arts Instruction in Physical Education on the Physical Literacy of Children in Grades 4 and 5. Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 38(2), 162-170. https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2018-0269

[10]Burtt, J. & K. Lavers. 2017. Re-imagining the development of circus artists for the twenty-first century. Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, 8(2), 143–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2017.1316305

[11]Carter, T. (no date) "Is the twenty-first century disabled artiste un-freaking or re- freaking circus." https://tinyurl.com/vwv5hb5d

[12]VERA VAN ES, ELS ROMMES, Leontien De Kwaadsteniet. 2021. Building Resilience by Becoming a Circus Artist. Journal of Refugee Studies, 34(1), 760–786. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez091

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including in other subjects[8], but also the physical development, motor competence, and general wellbeing of pre-16 students, as part of general physical education at school[9].
- raising trainers and tutors' awareness of modern pedagogic approaches for teaching circus arts, like Jon Burtt's 'integrated training'[10], and of historical role models for under-represented groups in circus arts like disabled artists[11], can help enhance the inclusivity of teaching circus arts and to increase the wellbeing of students, including students like refugees and asylum seekers who have a background of traumatic life experiences[12].

This activity will aim to:
- engage us in a collaborative effort to develop and provide professional development to trainers and tutors with the pedagogy and inclusive teaching practice in circus arts.

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Scholarship recipients offered free or subsidised opportunities

Scope: pre-HE learners enrolled in a 1-year National Centre Youth Recreational or Progressive Course.

Target: students who are from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 and from the Global Majority.

What is it?
Criterion-based, means-tested financial support that in effect

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[1]Golden, E. 2018. From Tropes to Troupes: Misty Copeland and the Hyper-Whiteness of Ballet. The Cupola: Scholarship at the Gettysburg College. Student Publications. https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/700/

[2]Donnelly, M., P. Lažetić, A. Sandoval-Hernandez, K. Kumar & S. Whewall. 2019. An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills and Social Mobility. University of Bath. Social Mobility Commission. https://socialmobility.independent-commission.uk/app/uploads/2024/07/An_Unequal_Playing_Field_report.pdf

[3]Johnson, O. 2017. The Black Sheep is the Black Dancer. Dance Major Journal, 5. http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/D551036259 Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7003g023

[4]Prichard, R. R. 2024. Privilege in Dance Education: A Discussion for Students and Teachers. Journal of Dance Education, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2024.2321150

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The evidence on providing pre-entry financial support, from funding participation in outreach activities to subsidising the attendance of admissions related activities like interviews and auditions, shows that:
- under-represented students (e.g., from low-income families, first-in-the-family in HE, Global Majority, disabled, etc.) may be less likely to apply and enrol to study circus arts because of combination of factors: from barriers they experience to participation in outreach and selection / admissions to HE activities (e.g., structural barriers like discrimination; lack of belonging, representation, and role models; the cost of equipment or participation), to negative perceptions among such students and their families of, e.g., the career prospects of studying a creative subject, including circus arts, in higher education[1,2,3,4,5].

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	makes free or subsidised the participation in pre-HE, training pathways and preparatory courses by covering course fees. Students may also receive free tickets to student shows.	[5]ICM Ltd. 2019. Perceptions of Higher Education Outreach and Access Activity. Office for Students. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/3905/perceptions-of-higher-education-outreach-and-access-activity.pdf [6]Herbaut, E. & K. Geven. 2020. What works to reduce inequalities in higher education? A systematic review of the (quasi-)experimental literature on outreach and financial aid. Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 65, 100442, ISSN 0276-5624, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2019.100442. [7]TLCMD. 2023. Consultation Lesson Fees. https://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/study/how-toapply/music-applications/music-auditions/consultation-lessons [8]Leeds Conservatoire. 2024. Audition Fees at the Leeds Conservatoire. https://www.leedsconservatoire.ac.uk/courses/apply-audition-fees/audition-information/ [9]Comunian, R., Dent, T., O'Brien, D., Read, T. & Wreyford, N. 2023. Making the Creative Majority: A report for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Creative Diversity on 'What Works' to support diversity and inclusion in creative education and the talent pipeline, with a focus on the 16+ age category. KCL. https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/projects/creative-majority-education [10]Robinson, D. & V. Salvestrini. 2020. The impact of interventions for widening participation to higher education. A review of the evidence. Education Policy Institute. https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Widening_participation-review_EPI-TASO_2020-1.pdf [11]Gorard, S., Smith, E., Thomas, E., May, H., Admett, N., & Slack, K. 2006. Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education. HEFCE. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/6204/1/barriers.pdf [12]Office for Fair Access. 2017. Understanding the impact of outreach on access to higher education for disadvantaged adult learners. Office for Fair Access. https://oro.open.ac.uk/50339/	- provision of financial support with unmet needs (e.g., access to equipment) and costs related to participation in outreach and admissions activities has a positive effect on the participation of under-represented students[6]. - fee waivers for outreach activities[7] and admissions activities like auditions and interviews8, and financial support with travelling to attend such activities, improve the access to HE in creative subjects for under-represented students[9]. - pre-entry financial support is most successful when what it is for, who is eligible, and how to apply, are easy to understand, and that information is targeted specifically at the under-represented groups who are meant to benefit from the support[10]. - providing means-tested subsidised or free participation in outreach activities, such as those offered through AimHigher[11] and UniConnect, targets financial support directly at under-represented students, which increases such students' participation in outreach and promotes their applying to and enrolment in HE[12,13]. Our planned provision of pre-entry financial support towards participation should help: - channel our available funds for supporting participation towards our target student groups.

		[13]Torgerson, C., Gascoine, L., Heaps, C., Menzies, V. & Younger, K. 2014, Higher education access: evidence of effectiveness of university access strategies and approaches, Sutton Trust. http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Higher-Education-Access-Report.pdf	
	Outreach **Scope:** target schools, colleges, and community organisations. **Target**: students who are from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 and from the Global Majority. **What is it?** Activities aimed at pre- and post-16 prospective circus arts HE students covering: • in the pre-16 provision, the raising of awareness of HE circus arts as a study option and facilitating networking and social capital building by learners who are already involved in circus training. • in the post-16 provision, the collaborative raising of circus knowledge and skills of learners enrolled with	[1]Universities UK. 2017. Raising attainment through school-university partnerships. DERA. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/30504/1/Raising-attainment-through-university-school-partnerships.pdf [2]Comunian, R., Dent, T., O'Brien, D., Read, T. & Wreyford, N. 2023. Making the Creative Majority: A report for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Creative Diversity on 'What Works' to support diversity and inclusion in creative education and the talent pipeline, with a focus on the 16+ age category. KCL. https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/projects/creative-majority-education [3]TASO evidence toolkit, on information, advice, and guidance: https://taso.org.uk/intervention/information-advice-and-guidance/ [4]TASO evidence toolkit on multi-intervention outreach: https://taso.org.uk/intervention/multi-intervention-outreach/ [5]TASO evidence toolkit on pre-entry study and soft-skills support: https://taso.org.uk/intervention/study-and-soft-skills-support-pre-entry/ [6]Robinson, D. & V. Salvestrini. 2020. The impact of interventions for widening participation to higher education. A review of the evidence. Education Policy Institute. https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Widening_participation-review_EPI-TASO_2020-1.pdf [7]Austen, L., R. Hodgson, C. Heaton, N. Pickering & J. Dickinson. 2021. Access, retention, attainment and progression: an integrative review of demonstrable impact on student outcomes. Advance HE. http://shura.shu.ac.uk/29312/ [8]Younger, K., L. Gascoine, V. Menzies & C. Torgerson. 2018. A systematic review of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions	The evidence on the impact of outreach activities like the ones we have planned for pre- and post-16 students, suggests that: • acting as an 'anchor' for local schools and colleges through sponsorship and provision of expertise, facilities and resources, professional development, and involvement in the governance, can help raise student aspirations for studying in HE[1]. • partnerships with schools and colleges are effective at widening participation into HE creative subjects[2]. • workshops, subject tasters, and campus visits that integrate information, advice, and guidance (IAG) on accessing HE, are all likely to have positive, albeit small, effects on attainment raising in knowledge and skills relevant to HE, attitudes and aspirations for studying in HE, confidence in the ability to achieve a sufficient entry qualification to enter HE, and a sense of belonging to HE[2,3,4,5,6,7]. • combining a variety of outreach activities may have a positive effect also on the rates of participants who apply to HE[8]. • outreach activities that focus specifically on attainment raising and preparing participants for applying to HE may be particularly effective for under-represented students like Global Majority students[9]. Our outreach activities will be designed to help: • disseminate information and guidance on HE. • facilitate development of relevant skills.

	organisations that seek to develop skills adjacent to circus skills, and whose work focuses on learners from our target groups.	and strategies for widening participation in higher education. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 43(6), 742–773. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1404558 [9]McCabe, C., K. Keast & M.S. Kaya. 2022. Barriers and facilitators to university access in disadvantaged UK adolescents by ethnicity: a qualitative study. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 46(10), pp. 1434-1446. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2022.2086037	
IS2 Pre-application support for students from the Global Majority and lower socioeconomic backgrounds	**Activities to help students prepare for applications and auditions** **Scope:** prospective applicants to the National Centre for Circus Arts. **Target**: students who are from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 and from the Global Majority. **What is it?** A combination of individual support and general information on applying to HE, e.g., • an Audition Toolkit for prospective applicants involving, for instance a, mock audition. • specific support activities and information included	[1] Comunian, R., Dent, T., O'Brien, D., Read, T. & Wreyford, N. 2023. Making the Creative Majority: A report for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Creative Diversity on 'What Works' to support diversity and inclusion in creative education and the talent pipeline, with a focus on the 16+ age category. KCL. https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/projects/creative-majority-education [2]Hayton, A., P. Haste &. A. Jones. 2015. Promoting diversity in creative art education: the case of Fine Art at Goldsmiths. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36(8), 1258-1276. [3]Barkat, S. 2019. Evaluating the impact of the Academic Enrichment Programme on widening access to selective universities: Application of the Theory of Change framework. Br Educ Res J, 45, pp. 1160-1185. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3556	Evidence of the effect of providing financial and other support with preparing to apply to HE indicates that: • prospective students from our target groups face social capital and cost-related challenges around preparing to apply to study creative subjects in HE[1]. • supporting under-represented students with preparation for the application process (e.g., putting together application portfolios, attending interviews) benefits them both in terms of preparing to apply, and success at applying, but such support may be prohibitively expensive if it requires students to attend on campus and/or pay a fee[1]. • offering guaranteed audition or interview to applicants from under-represented backgrounds <u>and</u> training staff involved with the auditions process around, e.g., unconscious bias, can help increase access for students from our target groups[2]. • including advice and guidance on, preparation for, and financial support with the application process as part of targeted support can enhance access to HE for under-represented students[3]. This activity will aim to: • deliver targeted support with preparing for our admissions process and increasing application success

	in youth training programmes. • tailored individual support to students from our target groups.		and enrolment rates of students from our target groups.

	Financial Support
	
	Scope: prospective applicants.
	
	Target: students who are from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 and from the Global Majority.
	
	What is it?
	Bursaries and scholarships aimed at successful applicants from our target groups, awarded on the basis of contextual evidence combining, e.g., financial hardship, with exceptional ability.
		[1]TASO. 2023. Financial support (post-entry). https://taso.org.uk/intervention/financial-support-post-entry/
		
		[2]OfS. 2020. Understanding the impact of the financial support evaluation toolkit: Analysis and findings. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/474c9580-e99a-4d24-a490-3474e85ae199/financial-support-evaluation-report-2016-17-2017-18.pdf
		
		[3]Harrison , N., S. Davies, R. Harris & R. Waller. 2018. Access, participation and capabilities: theorising the contribution of university bursaries to students' wellbeing, flourishing and success. Cambridge Journal of Education. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2017.1401586
		
		[4]Hordosy, R., T. Clark & D. Vickers. 2018. Lower income students and the 'double deficit' of part-time work: Undergraduate experiences of finance, studying, and employability. Journal of Education and Work 31(4), pp. 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2018.1498068
		
		[5]Thomas, L. 2012. Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: a summary of findings and recommendations from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme Summary Report. Paul Hamlyn Foundation. https://www.phf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-Works-Summary-report.pdf
		
		[6]Clark, T., & R. Hordósy, 2019. Social Identification, Widening Participation and Higher Education: Experiencing Similarity and Difference in an English Red Brick University. Sociological Research Online, 24(3), 353–369. https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780418811971
			Evidence on the effect of financial support on under-represented student groups' access and success in HE suggests that:
			• receipt of financial support increases continuation and completion (the effect on attainment is less clear)[1] and can close continuation gaps for disadvantaged students[2].
			• receipt of financial support also:
			   • increases recipients' capacity to focus on their studies[3].
			   • improves their social life[3].
			   • helps them build a social network[3].
			   • increases their self-esteem[3].
			   • reduces need for working during term time[4].
			   • increases the sense of belonging and mattering[5,6].
			• means-based financial support is more effective than merit-based support, particularly for disadvantaged students[7].
			• adopting an effective method for identifying students at a greater risk and therefore in greater need of financial support is necessary for the overall effectiveness of the financial support provision[8,9].
			
			This activity will aim to:
			• help us implement a strategy of financial support that emphasises pro-active targeting of students based on need.

[7]Herbaut , E. & K. M. Geven. 2019. What Works to Reduce Inequalities in Higher Education? A Systematic Review of the (Quasi)Experimental Literature on Outreach and Financial Aid Policy Research Working Papers. https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-8802

[8]Moores, E. & A P. Burgess. 2023. Financial support differentially aids retention of students from households with lower incomes: a UK case study, Studies in Higher Education. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2022.2125950

[9]Kaye, N. 2021. Evaluating the role of bursaries in widening participation in higher education: a review of the literature and evidence, Educational Review, 73:6. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2020.1787954

Fees, investments and targets

2026-27 to 2029-30

Provider name: National Centre for Circus Arts

Provider UKPRN: 10001444

Investment summary

A provider is expected to submit information about its forecasted investment to achieve the objectives of its access and participation plan in respect of the following areas: access, financial support and research and evaluation. Note that this does not necessarily represent the total amount spent by a provider in these areas. Table 6b provides a summary of the forecasted investment, across the four academic years covered by the plan, and Table 6d gives a more detailed breakdown.

Notes about the data:

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.

Yellow shading indicates data that was calculated rather than input directly by the provider.

In Table 6d (under 'Breakdown'):

"Total access investment funded from HFI" refers to income from charging fees above the basic fee limit.

"Total access investment from other funding (as specified)" refers to other funding, including OfS funding (but excluding Uni Connect), other public funding and funding from other sources such as philanthropic giving and private sector sources and/or partners.

Table 6b - Investment summary

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£40,000	£42,000	£42,000	£43,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£33,000	£33,000	£33,000	£33,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£6,000	£6,000	£6,000	£6,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£25,000	£26,000	£26,000	£27,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£15,000	£16,000	£16,000	£16,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (£)**	**£40,000**	**£42,000**	**£42,000**	**£43,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment (as % of HFI)*	**24.4%**	**24.9%**	**24.4%**	**24.6%**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment funded from HFI (£)*	**£40,000**	**£42,000**	**£42,000**	**£43,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)*	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£21,000	£21,000	£21,000	£21,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£12,000	£12,000	£12,000	£12,000
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (£)**	**£33,000**	**£33,000**	**£33,000**	**£33,000**
Financial support investment	*Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)*	**20.1%**	**19.5%**	**19.2%**	**18.9%**
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£6,000	£6,000	£6,000	£6,000
Research and evaluation investment	*Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)*	3.7%	3.6%	3.5%	3.4%

Fees, investments and targets

2026-27 to 2029-30

Provider name: National Centre for Circus Arts

Provider UKPRN: 10001444

Targets

Table 5b: Access and/or raising attainment targets

Aim [500 characters maximum]	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone	2029-30 milestone
To support access and pathways into higher education and to the National Centre for students from Global Majority Backgrounds (Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnicities), achieving 21.4% Global Majority enrolments by 2029-30.	PTA_1	Access	Ethnicity	Not specified (please give detail in description)		We have had a consistently low intake of students from the Global Majority enrolling on courses over the last 6 years, with a four-year aggregate of 13.9% (2019-20 to 2022-23). We are using Global Majority as a combination of Black, Asian, Mixed and other ethnicities. We are using enrolment data for the aggregate group, due to suppressed data for most groups at the disaggregated ethnicity level. Our baseline and annual milestones are 4-year aggregates, from the baseline years 2019-20 to 2022-23.	No	The access and participation dashboard	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage	13.9%	17.1%	18.6%	20%	21.4%
To support access and pathways into higher education and to the National Centre for students from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds (IMD Q1 and Q2), achieving 47.1% IMDQ1 & Q2 enrolments by 2029-30.	PTA_2	Access	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1 and 2	N/A	Our gap between IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 enrolments is 13.7pp (4-year aggregate). However, across the last 6 years of data there are fluctuations in our internal data. Given our small datasets and the impact on target setting, we are adopting a % increase target for the aggregate group of IMD Q1+Q2, to help mitigate data uncertainty. Our baseline and annual milestones are 4-year aggregates, from the baseline years 2019-20 to 2022-23.	No	The access and participation dashboard	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage	31.6%	37.1%	38.6%	40%	40%
	PTA_3														
	PTA_4														
	PTA_5														
	PTA_6														
	PTA_7														
	PTA_8														
	PTA_9														
	PTA_10														
	PTA_11														
	PTA_12														

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone	2029-30 milestone
	PTS_1														
	PTS_2														
	PTS_3														
	PTS_4														
	PTS_5														
	PTS_6														
	PTS_7														
	PTS_8														
	PTS_9														
	PTS_10														
	PTS_11														
	PTS_12														

Table 5e: Progression targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone	2029-30 milestone
	PTP_1														
	PTP_2														
	PTP_3														
	PTP_4														
	PTP_5														
	PTP_6														
	PTP_7														
	PTP_8														
	PTP_9														
	PTP_10														
	PTP_11														
	PTP_12														