ICON College of Technology and Management Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2026-27 to 2029-30

1. Introduction and strategic aim

ICON College of Technology and Management is an independent higher education provider committed to providing opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds to a wide range of academic and professional qualifications in Business, Health and Social Care and Education. ICON College offers three- and four-year Bachelor-degree courses and two Master-degree courses validated by Bishop Grosseteste University. The College also offers BTEC Level 5 and HND courses through Pearson.

Situated in Whitechapel, in the borough of Tower Hamlets, in the East End of London, ICON College serves an area of high deprivation and ethnic diversity[1]. Tower Hamlets is the most densely populated area in England (15,695 residents per square kilometre)[2]. Depending on the measure used, Tower Hamlets ranges from the third to the tenth most deprived area in England out of 326 local authority areas, and 60% of its population live within the 30% most deprived IMD areas of England. It is the most deprived borough in London on three of the five summary measures average scores; indeed, one quarter of Tower Hamlets residents are income deprived. Tower Hamlets has the youngest median age of any area (30 years) and is disproportionately comprised of working age adults (71% of all residents are aged 20-64), unemployment is higher than the national average for residents (4.6% compared to a national average 3.7%) and many lack the skills to succeed. Women in particular are much less likely to be employed (59.7% compared with 72% in Great Britain). While half of adult residents are highly qualified, 16% have no qualifications at all. 69% of the Tower Hamlets population belong to a minority ethnic group, and 34.6% of the population are Bangladeshi.

ICON College has a diverse student population of around 2500 students, the majority of whom are undergraduates:

- The proportion of new entrants from IMD Q1 and Q2 is consistently over 60%[3], which is well above the sector average of 45%, and reflective of the local area served.

---

[1] Deprivation in Tower Hamlets. Analysis of the 2015 Indices of Deprivation data, https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough_statistics/Income_poverty_and_welfare/Indices_of_Deprivation_Low_resolution.pdf, accessed 28/2/25

[2] https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough_statistics/State-of-the-Borough.pdf

[3] Office for Students access and participation data resources, 2018/19 – 2022/23

- The majority (96%) of entrants[4] are mature (aged 21 and over), which is 67 percentage points above the sector average (29%).

- In the last year 34% of entrants[5] were Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (B.A.M.E.)[6]; and the remainder were White Other, and speak English as an additional language (EAL)[7].

- In addition, 64% of entrants[8] had qualifications at Level 2 or below (compared to the sector average of just 2%).

- 89% of ICON College students entered higher education to improve their English skills[9].

- 90% of ICON College students entered higher education to get a better paid job[10] and 85% to secure a higher status job[11].

The College is demonstrably providing opportunities to groups who are under-represented in, and under-served by, UK higher education. The vocational qualifications that are delivered by the College are upskilling the local population and contributing to the economic activity and prosperity of the individuals, and to the local area.

The demographic characteristics of the student population reflect the mission and values of ICON College. The introduction of the BA (Hons) Business Studies with Foundation Year is an example of our commitment to extend access to students who do not have the standard academic qualifications or UCAS points for direct registration onto a degree programme. This has proved to be popular and highly valued by local mature students from a range of ethnic backgrounds. This is underpinned by additional IT and English language and academic writing support to develop student skills and support their success. We offer a block teaching model to enable students to combine studying and working and we run a subsidised café to enable students to eat and socialise together. We employ a highly qualified and diverse group of staff. All staff have either a master's qualification or a PhD in the subject they teach and over a third are Advance HE senior

[4] Percentage of ICON College's UK domiciled, undergraduate, full-time entrants in 2023/24, from 2023/24 HESA Student data.
[5] Percentage of ICON College's UK domiciled, undergraduate, full-time entrants in 2023/24, from 2023/24 HESA Student data.
[6] We recognise the limitations of the categorisations of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, or 'B.A.M.E.' and Asian, Black, Mixed and Other (A.B.M.O..), and the growing unease about the use of the term 'BAME' and similar. See for example: DaCosta, C., Dixon-Smith, S. and Singh, G. (2021) *Beyond BAME: Rethinking the politics, construction, application, and efficacy of ethnic categorisation*. London: Higher Education Research Action Group (HERAG); and Atherton, G. and Mazhari, T. (2021) *Higher Education awarding gaps and ethnicity in London: Going beyond BAME*. London: AccessHE. There is no consensus about the most appropriate terminology to use, but there is a general agreement that more granularity should be employed, to ensure more specificity about which ethnic groups are affected in particular ways, and to identify gaps between different ethnic groups, rather than just between 'BAME' and 'White' students. OfS draws attention to intersectionality, which multiplies disadvantage. This again requires more granular analysis of the experiences and outcomes of students with specific characteristics identified as APP priorities, e.g. socio-economic circumstances and ethnicity.
[7] While the UK government (https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity/, accessed 27/2/25) uses 'ethnic minorities' to refer to all ethnic groups except the White British group, in the data reported by OfS and HESA and used in this APP White minorities, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups and any other White background are included in the White category, and 'B.A.M.E' excludes White minorities
[8] Percentage of ICON College's UK domiciled, undergraduate, full-time entrants in 2023/24, from 2023/24 HESA Student data.
[9] ICON College 2024 APP survey, N= 378; (77% strongly agreed, and 12% agreed).
[10] ICON College 2024 APP survey, N=378
[11] ICON College 2024 APP survey, N=378

fellows, fellows or associate fellows. Almost all academic staff are on full-time permanent contracts, demonstrating our commitment to our staff and students.

ICON College's student population is composed of groups that are under-represented in higher education more generally, and the College adds a significant amount of value to its students and graduates. The College is committed to continually improving the outcomes of all students. The Access and Participation Plan (APP) focuses specifically on the target groups identified by the Office for Students, but it should be noted that these groups constitute the majority of the College's student population. This can create both a challenging and rewarding context in which to support and enable student success. The interventions described in this APP are embedded into our

provision, and benefit all of our students; they are designed to both close equity gaps and improve outcomes overall.

2. Risks to equality of opportunity

To identify risks to equality of opportunity ICON College has analysed a range of external and internal data sources, engaged the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) [12], consulted with staff and students to identify its own ICON College challenges or 'risks' and combined these insights to identify specific risks to equality of opportunity. Based on this extensive work, the College has identified six objectives, eight targets, five key risks and six intervention strategies.

2.1 Analysis of past performance

ICON College has reviewed the following student data:

- 2023/24 HESA student data.
- Office for Students (OfS) APP data dashboard (2024 data release).
- Internal data, particularly findings from the ICON College APP evaluation survey 2023 and 2024. (For more details see section 7 Evaluation plan).

Further details regarding the assessment of performance are available in Annexe A. In summary, the data indicate the following possible risks:

- Disabled students are at risk of not accessing ICON College and not continuing beyond their first study year in comparison to peers who do not declare a disability.
- Asian, Black, Minority and Other (A.B.M.O.) students are at risk of poor rates of continuation, completion and attainment compared to their White peers.
- Disadvantaged students from areas of multiple deprivation (IMDQ1&2) are at risk of not continuing or completing their programmes and of being awarded a lower degree in comparison to their more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5).
- Students who experience intersectional disadvantage, being from areas with high levels of multiple deprivation (IMDQ1&2) and from an ethnic minority group, are at greater risk of non-continuation than more advantaged peers who are White and from more advantaged areas (IMDQ3-5).
- It was identified through the assessment of performance that there is insufficient data to identify if specific groups are at risk of lower rates of progression on graduation from the College, in order to assess and support progression. Progression is therefore identified this as a risk to equity.

---

[12] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/

Table 1 summarises the student equity groups and lifecycle stages that ICON College is prioritising in this APP, and indicates additional groups and phases that will be monitored. (The targets are in the form PTA_ and PTS_, indicating access and success).

Table 1: Student group and lifecycle stage potentially at risk

Lifecycle stage / Student group	Access	Continuation	Completion	Attainment	Progression
Age (mature)					Monitor
Disability	PTA_1	PTS_4	Monitor		Monitor
A.B.M.O. Ethnicity	Monitor	PTS_1	PTS_5	PTS_7	
IMDQ1&2		PTS_2	PTS_6	PTS_8	Monitor
Intersectional: IMDQ3-5_White / IMDQ1&2_ABMO		PTS_3	Monitor	Monitor	

Given the relatively small numbers and the changing profile of students at ICON College, the data is partial and at times contradictory. It is, therefore, used as an indicator, rather than a dial[13], and is supplemented by data and knowledge from within the College and the UK HE sector. (See Annexe A).

2.2 Identification of risks

ICON College reviewed the risks to equality to its students over the last two years (since the OfS published the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)[14] in March 2023) at its biannual CPD training sessions (September and February) with all academic staff. ICON College students have also been involved in reviewing and discussing the risks to equality as part of the process of writing this APP. Staff and students raised a number of issues (see section 2.2 and 2.3 of Annexe A); these were synthesised to create five key risks for students at ICON College (ICR = ICON College Risks): Expectations; Skills; Learning and Teaching and Assessment Issues; Financial Context and Institutional Infrastructure. These risks are described in more detail in section 2.4 of Annexe A; they align with EORR risks 1,2,6,7,8,9,10,11 and 12, as is shown in Table 2 below. Table 2: ICON College risks mapped to EORR risks

---

[13] Carter, N. (2019). Performance Indicators: 'backseat driving 'or 'hands off' control? 1. In *Management of Healthcare* (pp. 243-250). Routledge.
[14] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/

ICON College Risks	EORR risks
ICR1 Student expectations: Students often have incomplete information and knowledge of what is required and expected of them to access and study successfully in higher education and progress into graduate roles, due to their family and educational background.	Risk 1 (knowledge and skills); Risk 2 (information and guidance).
ICR2 Student skills (IT, academic and language): Many students entering ICON College have skills gaps in relation to IT, academic studying and English. These low starting skills mean that the transition to HE is challenging, and there is lots of catching up or extra learning required especially during the first year of study, and can exacerbate mental health issues.	Risk 6 (insufficient academic support); Risk 8 (mental health); Risk 9 (ongoing impacts of coronavirus); Risk 11 (capacity issues).
Learning, teaching and assessment: The learning, teaching and assessment experience can be challenging for students due to previous learning experiences and knowledge and challenging personal circumstances, including their need to earn to support themselves and their family.	Risk 6 (insufficient academic support); Risk 7 (insufficient personal support); Risk 9 (ongoing impacts of coronavirus); Risk 10 (cost pressures); Risk 11 (capacity issues).
Financial context: The majority of students are lowincome and combine studying with a relatively high employment workload. Students are time poor and vulnerable to payment delays and unexpected changes to their financial circumstances. As they are already in employment, it takes longer to progress to graduate employment/roles.	Risk 7 (insufficient personal support); Risk 8 (mental health); Risk 10 (cost pressures); Risk 11 (capacity issues); Risk 12: Progression from higher education.
Institutional: Infrastructure, policies, processes and staffing issues contribute to the challenges students experience.	Risk 6 (insufficient academic support); Risk 7 (insufficient personal support).

2.3 ICON College risks to equality of opportunity

By combining the insights from the data analysis with understanding of risks developed with extensive input from staff and students, the specific risks to equality of opportunity that will be addressed in this APP are:

- **Disabled students' access and success**: Small number of disabled students access the College and have lower rates of continuation than students who do not declare a disability; students with cognitive or learning differences are particularly under-represented. The evidence suggests that this is related to student expectations of higher education study and

support: a lack of information, guidance and knowledge about higher education creates a reluctance to disclose a disability and to access the academic and personal support provided by the College. Institutional infrastructure, policies, processes and staff do not sufficiently compensate for this reluctance to declare a disability and seek support. Disabled students may also experience financial constraints, which do not enable them to seek a formal diagnosis of a disability or additional personal or technological support.

- **Continuation: Transition and support, including financial support**: At ICON College the overall rate of continuation, from first year of study to second year, is low compared to the sector, and there are gaps in relation to specific equity groups, particularly between students from ethnic minorities (A.B.M.O.) in comparison to White students; students from disadvantaged areas (IMDQ1&2) compared to their more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5), and students from disadvantaged areas and ethnic minority groups (IMDQ1&2_AMBO) compared to advantaged White students groups (IMDQ3-5_White). This risk is created by less-well informed expectations of studying in higher education; their comparatively low skill levels (including academic, IT and English language skills); their lack of experience of studying at a higher level; their understanding of assessment; and their financial context. Some students do not access academic skills and personal support to a sufficient degree. This risk is exacerbated by students combining studying with working.

- **Success: Academic experience, staff development and financial support**. Data indicate that ABMO, specifically Black and Asian students have lower rates of completion than White students, while disabled students and mature students have higher rates of completion than students with no known disability and young students respectively. There is an attainment gap between students from disadvantaged areas (IMDQ1&2) compared to peers from more advantaged areas (IMDQ3-5) and there is some limited evidence of an attainment gap between A.B.M.O. and White students. Many of the challenges identified above continue to influence the student experience beyond the first year of study. For example, students' skills continue to need to be developed, they experience challenges with understanding and applying assessment requirements and they continue to juggle employment and studying and experience financial challenges, which can be catastrophic for them. Staff are key to supporting students to be successful, and they will be developed and supported to promote positive and equitable outcomes.

- **Lack of information and skills for progression and different expectations and aspirations**. There are limited and variable data available about the progression of our students into graduate employment, but overall progression within 15 months is relatively low (under 50%). We feel this is a risk to equality, and we aim to find out more about the progression aspirations, experiences and outcomes of our students and work collaboratively with our students and alumni to design and pilot a programme of support.

These risks to equality are discussed and evidenced in Annexe A section 2.5.

3. Objectives and targets

Informed by the assessment of performance, the EORR and ICON College's risks to equality of opportunity, the College has identified six objectives to shape its APP work between 2026/27 and 2029/30, and nine specific, measurable and time bounded targets. These will be addressed through six intervention strategies, which are described in section 4. Table 3 (below) shows the relationships between objectives, targets, risks and intervention strategies.

3.1 Objectives

i. To understand and support more disabled students to access and succeed at ICON College by 2029/30.

ii. To improve the transition experience of ICON College students by informing expectations and developing skills to improve the continuation rates of all students and eliminate gaps between APP equity groups by 2029/30.

iii. To enhance the academic experience of students at ICON College to improve student continuation, completion and attainment rates and to close gaps between APP equity groups by 2029/30.

iv. To ensure that all staff have the awareness, knowledge, skills and time to induct, teach, assess and support all students to succeed at ICON College (ongoing).

v. To understand, monitor and improve the progression of all students and ensure there are no equity gaps between student groups at ICON College by 2029/30.

vi. To reduce the impact of financial hardship on disabled students and students from disadvantaged groups at ICON College (ongoing).

3.2 Targets

- PTA_1: Increase the percentage of entrants that declare a disability from 3% in 2023/24 to 12% in 2029/30.
- PTS_1: Reduce continuation gap between A.B.M.O. students and their White peers from 15 percentage points in 2021/22 to 5 percentage points in 2029/30.
- PTS_2: Eliminate the continuation gap between students from the most deprived areas (IMDQ1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-4) from 8 percentage points in 2021/22 to 0 by 2029/30.
- PTS_3: Reduce the continuation gap between the most disadvantaged groups (IMDQ1&2_ABMO) and more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5_White) from 15 percentage points in 2021/22 to 3 percentage points by 2029/30.
- PTS_4: Reduce the continuation gap between students who declare a disability and peers who do not declare a disability from 15 percentage points (based on the 4-year aggregate 2018/19-2021/22) to 3 percentage points by 2029/30.
- PTS_5: Eliminate the completion gap between A.B.M.O. students and their White peers from 8 percentage points in 2018/19 to 0 by 2029/30.
- PTS_6: Eliminate the completion gap between the most deprived students (IMDQ1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-5) from 6 percentage points in 2018/19 to 0 by 2029/30.
- PTS_7: Eliminate the awarding gap between A.B.M.O. students and White peers from 3 percentage points (based on the 2-year aggregate 2021/22 – 2022/23) to 0 by 2029/30.
- PTS_8: Eliminate the awarding gap between the most disadvantaged students (IMDQ1&2) and their more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5) from 3 percentage points in 2022-23 to 0 by 2029/30.

Table 2: Objectives, targets and risks and interventions

Objectives	Targets	Risks	Intervention strategies

To increase the access and success of disabled students.	PTA_1 PTS_4	Student expectations; Student skills; Learning, teaching and assessment; Financial context; and Institutional infrastructure, process and staffing.	IS 1; IS 3; IS 4; IS 6
To improve the continuation rates for all students and to	PTS_1 PTS_2	Student expectations; Student skills; Learning, teaching and assessment; Financial context; and	IS 1; IS 2; IS 3, IS 4; IS 6
eliminate gaps between groups.	PTS_3 PTS_4	Institutional infrastructure, process and staffing.	
To improve completion rates for all students and eliminate gaps between groups.	PTS_5 PTS_6	Student expectations; Student skills; Learning, teaching and assessment; Financial context; and Institutional infrastructure, process and staffing.	IS 3; IS 4; IS 6
To improve attainment and close awarding gaps between student groups	PTS_7 PTS_8	Student expectations; Student skills; Learning, teaching and assessment; Financial context; and Institutional infrastructure, process and staffing.	IS 2; IS3; IS 4; IS6
To improve the progression of all students.	No targets	Student expectations; Student skills.	IS 2; IS 5

4. Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

4.1 Intervention strategies[15]

This APP will deliver six intervention strategies (IS) to achieve our objectives and targets.

> IS 1. Disabled students access and support
> IS 2. Transition and support
> IS 3. Enhance the academic experience
> IS 4. Staff development and support
> IS 5. Career development, entrepreneurship and employability skills activities IS
> 6. Financial support

---

[15] Our community engagement, support and development work to raise attainment and aspirations is detailed in the whole provider section of the APP.

Intervention Strategy 1: Disabled students' access and support *Objective*

and targets:

To understand and support more disabled students to access and succeed at ICON College.

- Increase the percentage of entrants that declare a disability from 3% in 2023/24 to 12% in 2029/30 (PTA_1).
- Reduce the continuation gap between students who declare a disability and peers who do not declare a disability from 15 percentage points (based on the 4-year aggregate 2018/192021/22) to 3 percentage points by 2029/30 (PTS_4).

Risks to equality of opportunity:

- EORR 1 knowledge and skills; 2 information and guidance; 6 insufficient academic support; 7 insufficient personal support; 8 mental health; 10, cost pressures;11capacity issues.
- ICR1 Student expectations; ICR2 Student skills; ICR3 Learning, teaching and assessment; ICR4 Financial context; ICR5 Institutional processes (see Annexe A section 2.4).

Disabled student activities

- IS 1.1 Understand more about disabled students from other cultures: Literature review and qualitative research.
- IS 1.2 Disability training: Train and develop academic and professional staff and student reps to enable disability inclusive practice and to provide students with information, guidance and support.
- IS 1.3 Provide disabled students with practical and financial support and encourage them to use the support.

Activity and description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross IS?
IS 1.1 Understand more about disability in other cultures 66% of our students are from 'Other White' ethnic groups and 34% are from A.B.M.O. groups. A literature review and qualitative research with our students will develop understanding about attitudes towards different types of disabilities (including mental health), disclosure and inclusive education and discrimination in other cultures. Students will be involved in the design and implementation of the qualitative research. The output will be a report, which will include recommendations about the type of information and 'reassurance' students will need and the ways to deliver the key messages. This will be disseminated internally and externally. *New activity*	Staff research time to undertake a literature review. Students will be paid to develop the research questions and research tools. Staff and student researchers will be paid to collect the qualitative data. Data analysis and report writing costs by IS lead.	Increased understanding about the cultural barriers to accessing HE, disclosing disabilities, especially cognitive disabilities and accessing support. Increased understanding about support and reassurances that the College should provide to disabled students from different cultural backgrounds. Staff development is informed by the research findings.	Yes: IS 2, IS 3, IS 4

IS 1.2 Disability training Train and develop academic and professional staff and student reps in relation to inclusive practice and providing students with information, guidance and support. • Recruitment and admissions staff to build in information and support for student applying and enrolling into the College. • Academic staff will receive further training on reasonable adjustments, cognitive skills assessment, inclusive teaching, learning and assessment, and the financial and practical support provided by the College. • Student reps will be trained to signpost and encourage students to access disability and financial support. • IT Support staff will be trained to support students to use specialist software. *Existing activity*	Staff time to deliver training. Disability support training for staff Signposting training for student representatives Payment for student reps.	Staff and student-reps have better information around knowledge about disability issues and required support. Academic staff are able to make reasonable adjustments and teach inclusively. More students declare a disability. More disabled students access disability academic, personal and financial support.	Yes: IS 3, IS 4

IS 1.3 Practical and financial support for disabled students A range of activities to inform and support disabled students will continue to be delivered and will be extended. • An additional Disability Officer will increase capacity and lead the work relating to IS 1.3. • More information will be built into the recruitment, admissions and induction processes. • Review, clarify and publicise the process for self-declaring a disability and for formal assessment. • Review, clarify and publicise the process for taking a leave of absence rather than withdrawing. • Explore the availability of SpLD diagnostic assessments that takes account of English as a second language. • Disabled student bursaries to support diagnostic testing, specialist equipment etc. • The lift and toilet will be modified to better support students with mobility issues. To date in 2024/25 78 students have requested disability support[16], this this figure represents 5% of the student cohort. We will aim to engage more students on a 1-1 basis each year and reach all student through recruitment, induction and teaching. *Existing activity.*	Additional Disability Officer employed Payments for diagnostic testing and financial support for students[17]. Modifications to the lift and toilet.	Disabled students are well informed and supported practically and financially to access, disclose and thrive in HE. Disabled students access and continuation increase.	Yes: IS2, IS6

Total cost of activities and evaluation for IS 1:

£308,000.00

Summary of evidence base and rationale

UK research (TASO 2023[18]) finds that students with unseen or 'non-apparent' disabilities, including neurodiverse conditions, experience higher levels of discomfort when disclosing or sharing data on their disability, and more negative peer interactions than students with apparent conditions or non-

---

[16] Principal's report, 28th January 2025

[17] These costs are included in Intervention Strategies 6.

[18] TASO (2023) *Summary report. What works to reduce equality gaps for disabled students*; drawing on Evans, C., & Zhu, X. (2023). What works to reduce equality gaps for disabled students. TASO.

apparent learning difficulties (Clouder et al., 2019[19]; Cox et al., 2020[20]). This may be exacerbated when students come from other cultural backgrounds (Hefiela 2024[21], Gradea, 2018[22]). ICON College has high numbers of students with from other cultural backgrounds (ethnic minorities, including 'Other White) and low number of students disclosing disabilities. Our efforts to implement and publicise additional support have been partially successful, but mostly in relation to more apparent disabilities. Research with our students will allow us to better understand their experiences and to support them better; the findings will inform our staff training.

TASO (2023) identify the need for increased training and support for staff (to be able to support students, make reasonable adjustments and teach inclusively) and for effective communication with students. By better understanding the barriers many of our students face we will be better able to provide services and train staff to understand, inform students about disabilities, provide support directly or signpost students to support. This creates an institutional culture that addresses disabilities and cares about students, and there is some evidence that disabled students who use specialist support services have higher rates of continuation and attainment (Safer et al. 2020[23]). While there is limited evidence of the impact of reasonable adjustments, inclusive learning, teaching and assessment and assistive technology (TASO 2023), there are practices such as providing information in advance in various formats that can be helpful to students and equate with good quality learning and teaching, and so we will promote these approaches amongst our teaching staff.

ICON College will continue to develop infrastructure to provide practical and financial support to disabled students. This will be informed by the findings of the research designed and undertaken by our disabled students (IS1.1).

Evaluation

Intervention strategy 1 'Disabled students' access and success': activities 1.2 and 1.3 will be evaluated; evidence from all activities, including the research report (IS 2.1) will be disseminated.

[19] Clouder, L., Cawston, J., Wimpenny, K., Mehanna, A. K. A., Hdouch, Y., Raissouni, I., & Selmaoui, K. (2019) 'The role of assistive technology in renegotiating the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education in North Africa'. Studies in Higher Education, 44(8), 1344–1357. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1437721

[20] Cox, B. E., Nachman, B. R., Thompson, K., Dawson, S., Edelstein, J. A., & Breeden, C. (2020) 'An exploration of actionable insights regarding College students with autism: a review of the literature', The Review of Higher Education, 43(4), 935–966. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2020.0026

[21] Hefiela, A. (2024) Invisible Disabilities in Higher Education—A Cultural Comparison of Students' Experiences with Invisible Disabilities in Kuwait and Belgium. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, **12**, 320-374. doi: 10.4236/jss.2024.122020.

[22] Gradea, I. (2018) *Attitudes Towards Intellectual Disabilities in Romania. Looking at Linkages with Educational Policy and Integrated Youth Programming*. Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness https://www.socialconnectedness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Attitudes-Towards-Intellectual-Disabilities-in-Romania-Final-Report.pdf, accessed 1/5/25

[23] Safer, A., Farmer, L., & Song, B. (2020) 'Quantifying difficulties of university students with disabilities', Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 33(1), 5-21. doi: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1273641

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
IS 1.2 Disability training	Staff and student-reps have increased information and knowledge about disability issues and support. Academic staff: know what reasonable adjustments and inclusive learning are, and why they are important, and some key changes that they can make. Academic staff make key changes to their teaching to be more inclusive for all students. More students declare a disability. More disabled students access disability academic, personal and financial support.	Mixed methods Our evaluations of staff training will be informed by three levels: • Awareness • Application • Impact on learners (adapted from Kirkpatrick 1994[24] and Maccabe 2021[25]) Pre- and post-training surveys will be used. We will create a baseline of staff knowledge (see IS 4.1 evaluation plan) and survey this each year. This will be supplemented by feedback from staff and students. Type 2 evidence will be generated.	Evaluation findings will be to the Academic Board APP sub-group, to the Board of Governance and to staff via the CPD training. In the medium term an impact evaluation report will be produced, and will be available on the College website.

[24] Kirkpatrick, D. L. (1994). Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. [25] Maccabe, R. (2021). A whole provider approach to widening participation: a phenomenographic case study exploring the perceptions and experiences of staff and students working in a widening participation role. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, *23*(1), 5-30.

IS 1.3 Practical and financial support for disabled students	The aim is for disabled students to be informed and supported practically and financially to access, disclose and thrive in HE. • Increase in the number of students engaging with the Disability Officer. • Increase in number of students disclose a disability. • Increase in number of cognitive /learning differences diagnosed or disclosed. • Take up Bursary funding to support disabled students. • Increase in continuation rates. • Students report feeling more supported by the College.	Institutional data Disability officer usage data Student feedback via the APP Evaluation survey and data collected from student reps. Type 2 evidence will be generated.	Monitoring data (access, disability officer usage and continuation data) will be reviewed biannually at the Academic Board APP subgroup. The APP evaluation survey findings will be shared with the Academic Board APP sub-group, the Board of Governance and staff CPD training. This will include an analysis of the number of disabled students and their evaluation of the support they receive. The findings will be available on the College website and a synthesised analytical report will be submitted to TASO's Higher Education Evaluation Library.

Intervention Strategy 2: Transition and support *Objective*

and targets:

To improve the transition experience of ICON College students by informing expectations and developing skills to improve the continuation rates of all students and eliminate gaps between APP equity groups.

- Reduce continuation gap between A.B.M.O. students and their White peers from 15 percentage points in 2021/22 to 5 percentage points in 2029/30 (PTS_1).
- Eliminate the continuation gap between students from the most deprived areas (IMDQ1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-4) from 8 percentage points in 2021/22 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_2).
- Reduce the continuation gap between the most disadvantaged groups (IMDQ1&2_ABMO) and more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5_White) from 15 percentage points in 2021/22 to 3 percentage points by 2029/30 (PTS_3).

Risks to equality of opportunity:

- EORR 1 knowledge and skills; 2 information and guidance; 6 insufficient academic support; 7 insufficient personal support; 8 mental health; 9, ongoing impacts of coronavirus; 10, cost pressures;11capacity issues.
- ICR1 Student expectations; ICR2 Student skills; ICR4 Financial context; ICR5 Institutional processes.

Transition activities

- IS 2.1 Pre-entry and transition information provided by students for students
- IS 2.2 Early assessment of students' skills and personal development plan (PDP)
- IS 2.3 Additional skills support: English, IT and academic skills

Activity and Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross IS

IS 2.1 Pre-entry and transition information provided by students for students Existing students will lead on the development of new resources to inform potential and new students about issues such as academic expectations and practices, in-class and independent learning expectations and time commitments, flexibility and attendance requirements, financial support and processes, disability disclosure and support and careers and progression These resources will be available on the ICON College website and be delivered via in-person or online sessions to school and community groups, students who have been offered place and students who have accepted a place. These resources will be embedded into the course induction for foundation and level 4 students. Each year we expect around 500 preentry students, 1200 Foundation level students and 600 level 4 (first year undergraduates) to benefit from these resources. Existing students will also be available to answer potential and new students' questions. *New activity*	Students will be paid for the initial development work of the resources (one-off cost). Students will be paid for delivery.	Increased awareness of the academic expectations and realities of studying in higher education at ICON College. Increased understanding of the financial support available, when it is received, other academic and personal and disability support and help available. Increased knowledge about what disability is, the support available and reassurance of no discrimination. Increased confidence to enter HE. Increased continuation	Yes. IS1, IS3, IS5, IS6

IS 2.2 Early assessment of students' skills and personal development plans (PDP) During the induction period students' English, IT, cognitive and academic (communication and time management) skills will be assessed through in-class activities. The results will be used with students to develop an online personal development plan (PDP), which will be stored securely on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software system and added to throughout students' time at ICON College, thus creating a record of their learning gain and the development of their graduate skills. This will include taking advantage of the academic skills workshops (inc. time management and communication/presentation skills) and English and IT classes that are delivered on the days the students are already in College and through online self-service training sessions. In-person attendance will be monitored through the attendance monitoring system and online through the log-in function; non-attendance will be followed up by the attendance team. Lecturers will also provide feedback on student attendance and engagement. We expect all 1200 Foundation level and all 600 level 4 students to benefit from the assessments and all students to develop a personalised plan. *New activity* (integrated into induction)	Staff will be commissioned to develop the assessments (one-off costs). Teaching staff will administer the assessments during induction sessions the first teaching week and assist students to prepare PDPs. Attendance monitoring team will follow up.	Improved academic skills Improved English skills Improved IT skills Improved submission of assessments Improved academic attainment Improved continuation Improved completion	Yes. IS1, IS3, IS5

IS 2.3 Additional skills support: English, IT and academic skills Additional English language sessions will be delivered within the Foundation Year (each student will receive 3 hours per week for 2 semesters). This will include lists of frequently used vocabulary for each subject. A review and evaluation of the English language support provide to students in each year of study to consider whether additional English language teaching needs to be integrated into subsequent years. A review and evaluation of IT skills provided in each year of study, and consideration of the ways to encourage students to utilise the support available. Additional IT support will be provided if required. Academic skills workshops will be added for all Foundation level students and level 4 UG students. We will deliver 3000 additional hours of English language support for Foundation Year students (3 hours per week per student group for 28 weeks, semester 1 English language and semester 2 academic English); this will benefit around 700 students. We will deliver around 1200 workshop hours, benefiting all 1200 Foundation level and 600 level 4 students. (6 2-hour workshops per year delivered 100 times to reach all students). *New and existing activity*	Teaching time English language review by English teachers IT review	Improved English skills Improved academic skills (time management, communication, presentation, writing and referencing) Improved take up of IT skills Improved IT skills Improved continuation Improved completion Improved level of submission of assessments Improved attainment	Yes. IS3, IS5

Total cost of activities and evaluation for IS 2:

£999,000.00

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Feedback from our student representatives (focus group, 13/2/25) indicated that many student peers have poor expectations about the realities of studying in HE, and despite having significant gaps in academic skills, IT skills and English language proficiency, they do not always take advantage of the additional support provided by the College. Mature students, commuter students, racially minoritised students and students studying vocational courses have less well-developed skills than younger students from more privileged backgrounds studying academic disciplines (TASO 2020[25]). The low level of skills on entry is supported by our APP evaluation survey evidence and feedback from academic staff, including English language teaching staff. Indeed, poor 'skills' were identified as a key risk to equality of outcomes at ICON College. There is strong evidence that improving academic skills contributes to improved student success outcomes (de Henau 2024[26] and Smith& Baik 2021[27]), especially when embedded into the curriculum (Hattie, Biggs & Purdie 1996, Smith& Baik 2021[28]). Skills assessment will be used to help students develop understanding of their skills, and to plan how to meet these gaps. College data indicates that many disabled students either do not recognise or do not disclose learning differences and difficulties (APP evaluation survey 2023 and 2024), we will therefore build cognitive skills testing into our induction process. Personal development planning (PDP) provides a way of helping students to set their personal goals, identify the actions need to achieve them, and reflect on their progress towards their short, medium and longer-term outcomes (Bintani 2020[29]). While student engagement in PDP can be challenging (Bintani 2020 and Clegg & Bufton 2008[30]), this can be overcome by embedding the process into the curriculum (Bintani 2020), and by developing effective time management skills and a sense of a future selves (Clegg & Bufton 2008). Furthermore, older students have a stronger connection to their future selves (Mooney 2025)[31], and evidence from our APP evaluation survey indicates that students choose to study at ICON College for a range of reasons that are future oriented. The cognitive and academic skills support will therefore be embedded into the curriculum to maximise impact for all students, and the additional English will be timetabled for when students are already in College, and attendance will be monitored and followed up (including possible financial and registration sanctions). Some IT support will be embedded into the core curriculum and additional support will be available via the IT helpdesk. The review will examine whether this is sufficient.

---

[25] TASO (2020) Summary report: Understanding the impact of interventions to address inequality in the student experience. TASO's reflections on the evidence. https://cdn.taso.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/202011_Summary_Understanding-gaps-in-the-student-experience_TASO.pdf

[26] de Henau, J. (2024). The Impact of Academic Skills Development on Student Outcomes in Higher Education– Literature Review. University of Oxford. https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/ctl/documents/media/academic_skills_literature_review.pdf

[27] Smith, CD and Baik, C, 'High-impact teaching practices in higher education: a best evidence review', Studies in Higher Education, vol 46, Page 13 of 15 no 8, 2021, pp 1696-1713. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1698539

[28] Smith, CD and Baik, C, 'High-impact teaching practices in higher education: a best evidence review', Studies in Higher Education, vol 46, Page 13 of 15 no 8, 2021, pp 1696-1713. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1698539

[29] Bintani, K. (2020, August). Personal development plan as a guidance and counseling strategy in Higher Education. In *2nd International Seminar on Guidance and Counseling 2019 (ISGC 2019)* (pp. 18-22). Atlantis Press.

[30] Clegg, S., & Bufton, S. (2008). Student support through personal development planning: Retrospection and time. *Research Papers in Education*, 23(4), 435-450.

[31] Mooney, Laken A., "Back to the Future Self: Parsing Age Effects in Future Self-Continuity through Goal Orientation and Life Satisfaction" (2025). *Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports*. 12889. https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/etd/12889

Evaluation

For IS 2 all the activities will be evaluated. The findings will be combined to explore contribution as well as attribution.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
IS 2.1 Preentry and transition information provided by students for students	Increased awareness of the academic expectations and realities of studying in higher education at ICON College. Increased understanding of the financial support available, when it is received, other academic and personal and disability support and help available. Increased confidence to enter HE. Increased use of support services. Improved continuation	Mixed methods: • Qualitative feedback will be collected from student reps after the first year. • Questions about the preentry and transition resources will be added into the APP Evaluation survey. • Support service usage data and institutional data. • Feedback from staff. Type 2 evidence will be generated.	A process and short-term benefits report will be produced in the first year and be shared internally. In the medium-term an impact evaluation report will be produced. This will be available on the College website, submitted to TASO's Higher Education Evaluation Library and will be disseminated via an external conference.
IS 2.2 Assessment of students' skills and personalised development plan	Improved academic skills Improved English skills Improved IT skills Improved submission of assessments Improved academic attainment Improved continuation Improved completion	Mixed methods: • Qualitative feedback will be collected from student reps and staff after the first year. • Questions about skills are included in the APP Evaluation survey, and additional questions will be added about the personalised development plan and follow up support. • Support service usage data and institutional data. • Feedback from staff. Type 2 evidence will be generated.	A process and short-term benefits report will be produced in the first year and be shared internally. In the medium-term an impact evaluation report will be produced. This will be available on the College website and submitted to TASO's Higher Education Evaluation Library.

| IS 2.3 Additional skills | Improved English skills

Improved academic skills (time management, communication, presentation, writing and referencing)

Improved take up of IT skills

Improved IT skills

Improved continuation

Improved completion

Improved level of submission of assessments

Improved attainment | Mixed methods
- Institutional data
- Questions about English are included in the APP Evaluation survey
- Questions about IT skills are included in the APP Evaluation survey
- Feedback from teaching staff
- Feedback from English language teaching staff
- Feedback from IT support staff and teaching staff
- IT support desk usage data

Type 2 evidence will be generated. | A process and short-term benefits report will be produced in the first year and be shared internally.

In the medium-term an impact evaluation report will be produced. This will be available on the College website. |
|---|---|---|---|

Intervention Strategy 3: Enhance the academic experience

Objectives and targets

To enhance the academic experience of students at ICON College to improve student continuation, completion and attainment rates and to close gaps between APP equity groups identified below.

- Reduce continuation gap between A.B.M.O. students and their White peers from 15 percentage points in 2021/22 to 5 percentage points in 2029/30 (PTS_1).
- Eliminate the continuation gap between students from the most deprived areas (IMD • Q1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-4) from 8 percentage points in 2021/22 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_2).
- Reduce the continuation gap between the most disadvantaged groups (IMDQ1&2_ABMO) and more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5_White) from 15 percentage points in 2021/22 to 3 percentage points by 2029/30 (PTS_3).
- Reduce the continuation gap between students who declare a disability and peers who do not declare a disability from 15 percentage points (based on the 4-year aggregate 2018/192021/22) to 3 percentage points by 2029/30 (PTS_4).
- Eliminate the completion gap between A.B.M.O. students and their White peers from 8 percentage points in 2018/19 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_5).
- Eliminate the completion gap between the most deprived students (IMDQ1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-5) from 6 percentage points in in 2018/19 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_6).
- Eliminate the awarding gap between A.B.M.O. students and White peers from 3 percentage points (based on the 2-year aggregate 2021/22 – 2022/23) to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_7).
- PTS_8: Eliminate the awarding gap between the most disadvantaged students (IMDQ1&2) and their more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5) from 3 percentage points in 2022-23 to 0 by 2029/30.

Risks to equality of opportunity:

- EORR 6 insufficient academic support; 7 insufficient personal support; 8 mental health; 9, ongoing impacts of coronavirus; 10, cost pressures;11capacity issues.
- ICR1 Student expectations; ICR2 Student skills; ICR3 LTA; ICR4 Students' financial context; ICR5 Institutional processes.

Academic experience activities

- IS 3.1 Maximise learning support via the VLE
- IS 3.2 Student-led review of course induction
- IS 3.3 Improve clarity of assessment criteria and resubmission process and requirements.
- IS 3.4 Proactively target personal tutoring at students not engaging with personal development plan
- IS 3.5 Enhance knowledge about the continuation, attainment and completion of APP groups

Activity and Description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross IS?
IS 3.1 Maximise learning support via the VLE Student representatives will review the VLE to consider how it can maximise support for learning (it is not a substitute for in-person attendance at taught session). This will include consideration of (a) what the VLE should provide (e.g. accessible course materials in advance, independent learning resources, online library, student handbook, assessment guidance, assessment feedback, draft assignment checking, signposting and videos about how to access academic support and information about disability, finance, employment etc) and (b) an audit of courses to check the extent to which specific courses provide the learning resources and support. The student report will be used identify improvements overall and courses that need to make specific improvements. We expect all students (2500-3000) to benefit from this activity. *New activity*	Funding for student representatives Student recruitment and management Staff time to enhance VLE	Students feel VLE supports learning and access to personal and professional support. Increased engagement with support resources. Improved academic attainment. Improved continuation. Improved completion.	IS 1, IS 2, IS 4

IS 3.2 Student-led review of course induction Student representatives review course induction and make recommendations to course teams. Course teams continue to deliver and develop two-day induction to build academic expectations and skills, develop personal development plan and encourage students to access academic, personal and financial support. We expect all new students to benefit from this activity (there are around 1000 Foundation level students and 600 level 4 students annually). *Existing activity*	Funding for student representatives Recruitment and management time Staff time to develop and plan extended induction	Increased understanding of academic expectations. Improved skills (academic, English and IT). Greater up take of academic, personal and financial support. Improved understanding about assessment Improved continuation Improved completion Improved attainment Reduction in 'gaps' between equity groups and more advantaged peers	IS1, IS2
IS 3.3 Improve clarity of assessment criteria and resubmission process and requirements Annual training and additional standardisation meeting for staff to inform teaching (as well as marking) to ensure staff clearly and consistently communicate with students (and informs marking). This will be informed by the marking rubrics. Improve communication about resubmission process and requirements. Feedback will be informed by the summative feedback template. A checklist will be used to demonstrate learning outcomes met and those that still need to be met. We expect all students (2500-3000) to benefit from this activity. *New activity*	Staff time for training and participating in additional standardisation meetings	More transparency and understanding about assessment criteria Students have better understanding of assessment and resubmission requirements Increased rate of submission Improved attainment Reduced attainment gaps	IS4

IS 3.4 Proactively target personal tutoring within the Foundation Year at students not engaging with personal development plan Use the College's CRM system that monitors students' engagement with skills support (IS 2.3) to enable personal tutor champions to proactively target personal tutoring at Foundation Year students who have not engaged with personal development plan to increase the take-up and impact of personal tutoring. We expect this activity to target around 10% of foundation year students (~120) providing them with 2 additional personal tutoring sessions per semester. *New and existing activity*	CRM system and training Personal tutors time	At risk students attend more personal tutoring and personal development plan activities Improved academic skills Increase use of student support Increased continuation and completion	IS4
IS 3.5 Enhance knowledge about the continuation, attainment and completion of APP groups Monitoring of continuation rates extended to examine gaps between equity groups Completion rates and attainment monitoring is introduced Qualitative research undertaken to better understand the issues We expect all students (2500-3000) to benefit from this activity. *New and existing activity*	Data management training or consultancy to improve systems Staff time Staff or consultancy time to undertake the research	Improved real-time knowledge of success indicators in relation to APP target groups Able to intervene more quickly Improved knowledge about why APP target groups do not continue, complete or attain well Longer term outcomes of the activity	

Total cost of activities and evaluation for IS 3:

£236,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

ICON College students need to be supported to maximise their success in HE and ensure that there are no equity gaps.

The virtual learning environment (VLE) allows for asynchronous learning, allowing students to revisit study material at their own pace (which is useful for disabled students, speakers of English as a second language and mature students with conflicting priorities). VLEs can also enable students to test themselves and to interact with staff and students. "VLEs have transformed how we approach education, allowing us to create engaging, interactive content that meets diverse learning needs and enhances educational outcomes"[32]. Many VLEs however rely on text-based resources and are merely a file depository (Nunnington et al 2006[33]). There is scope to maximise the value of the VLE by building in more interaction and utilising multi-media resources. Research by Ademola (2020[34]) found 'significant positive correlations between VLE satisfaction, academic performance, and engagement, suggesting that students who are more satisfied with their VLE experience tend to achieve higher academic outcomes and exhibit greater engagement in their studies' (p110).

It is widely accepted that induction promotes good student retention and success[35]. According to Thomas 2012[36] induction activities have an impact on success through: a) socialisation and formation of friendship groups, which provide a support network and promote social integration; b) informing expectations of HE and helping students to be effective learners by developing their confidence and their academic skills; and c) developing relationships with members of staff, allowing students to approach them subsequently when they need to. An effective induction actively engages students rather than being a passive process of providing information, and it extends over a longer time period than a few days. The activities should allow students to make friends, get to know the academic staff, understand the expectations of the institution, department and programme and develop academic skills[38]. Induction processes should be inclusive of disabled students, and provide information on support services as students may not have disclosed impairments at the application or enrolment stages[37].

During the last APP period, ICON College introduced a course-based induction to help students understand more about the expectations of studying in HE and to develop the skills and knowledge required. Our evaluation of the extended induction in 2023 found:

---

[32] Connelly, M. (2024) Virtual Learning Environment: Maximising Educational Outcomes in the Digital Age, *Educational Voice*. https://educationalvoice.co.uk/virtual-learning-environment/, accessed 9/5/25.

[33] Nunnington, N., Middleton, A., Verrill, M. and James, M. (2006) Enriching virtual learning environments to enhance the student experience: A simple, practical methodology examined. Advance HE, https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-documentmanager/documents/hea/private/p1_nick_nunnington_1568036731.pdf. Accessed 9/5/25

[34] Ademola, R. (2021). The impact of virtual learning environments on student achievement. *Journal of Education Review Provision*, *1*(3), 110-121.

[35] Moore, J., Sanders, J., & Higham, L. (2013). Literature review of research into widening participation to Higher Education [Report to HEFCE and OFFA]. AimHigher Research & Consultancy Network; Harvey, L. and Drew, S. with Smith, M. (2006) The first year experience: a literature review for the Higher Education Academy. York: Higher Education Academy.

[36] Thomas, L. 2012 'What works? Facilitating an effective transition into Higher Education', *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 14, Special Issue, pp.4-24 [38] Ibid Thomas 2012

[37] Harrison, M., Hemingway, L., Sheldon, A., Pawson, R. and Barnes, C. (2009) Evaluation of Provision and Support for Disabled Students in Higher Education: a report to HEFCE and HEFCW. Leeds: Centre for Disability Studies and School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds.

- 77% of students strongly agreed or agreed that 'academic staff made it clear from the start what they expected from students'.
- 68% of students strongly agreed or agreed that 'from the moment I enrolled I was helped to get off to a good start academically'.
- 89% of students strongly agreed or agreed that 'I know the importance of good referencing'.
- 79% of students strongly agreed or agreed that 'I have received help to develop my academic skills'.
- 71% of students strongly agreed or agreed that 'after the first six weeks I knew how I was expected to learn'.
- 71% of students strongly agreed or agreed that 'after the first six weeks of study I knew how I was going to be taught and assessed'
- 84% of students strongly agreed or agreed that 'I understand what is required in assessments'.
- 87% of students strongly agreed or agreed that 'I am confident I will successfully complete this year'.

Since the course induction was developed and evaluated there have been changes to the courses and students, and the feedback from student reps (focus group February 2025) indicates that some students need greater understanding about expectations, skills and assessment. We therefore propose to use the student reps to review the induction, and identify additional ways in which students can be supported through core teaching sessions in the classroom.

Feedback from student reps (focus group February 2025) identified some issues in relation to clarity of assessment criteria and requirements. Assessment literacy contributes to confident, independent learners with academic integrity (QAA 2018[38]) and is key to transforming student success Elkington 2020[39], Price et al 2012[40], Smith et al 2013[41]). More recent research has also focused on the need to improve the assessment literacy of staff (e.g. Deeley and Bovill 2017[44], Forsyth et al 2015[42]) and external examiners (Medland 2018)[43] as well as learners. Staff training and an additional standardisation meeting (based on the rubrics) will be introduced to help ensure staff, and in turn students, have greater understanding of the criteria – and consistency between staff - leading to better attainment. Staff feedback during the preparation of this APP identified that the re-submission process causes some students issues as they amend the whole assignment, not just the elements that need to be addressed. Improved clarity and communication for students is intended to address this issue, and increase the number of students passing the second attempt. All of these steps aim to improve students' assessment literacy (of process and learning outcomes), levelling the playing field and improving attainment outcomes for students from equity groups.

---

[38] The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. (2018) UK quality code, advice and guidance: assessment. Available at: https://www.qaa.ac.uk//en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/assessment. Accessed: 16/3/22.
[39] Elkington, S. (2020) Essential frameworks for enhancing student success: Transforming Assessment. Advance HE. Retrieved from: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/essential-frameworks-enhancing-student-successtransforming-assessment
[40] Price, M., Rust, C., O'Donovan, B., Handley, K. & Bryant, R. (2012). Assessment literacy: the foundation of improving student Learning. Oxford, The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development.
[41] Smith, C.D. et al., 2013. Assessment literacy and student learning: the case for explicitly developing students 'assessment literacy'. Assessment and evaluation in higher education, 38(1), pp.44–60. 10.1080/02602938.2011.598636 [44] Deeley, S. J., & Bovill, C. (2017). Staff student partnership in assessment: enhancing assessment literacy through democratic practices. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *42*(3), 463-477.
[42] Forsyth, R., Cullen, R., Ringan, N., & Stubbs, M. (2015). Supporting the development of assessment literacy of staff through institutional process change. *London Review of Education*, *13*(3)
[43] Medland, E. (2018). 'I'm an assessment illiterate': towards a shared discourse of assessment literacy for external examiners. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 44(4), 565–580. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1523363

Early intervention personal tutoring can improve student confidence, engagement, continuation and success (Evans 2013[44], Levy et al 2009[48], Thomas 2012[45]). A more proactive approach is effective at reaching students (Varney 2013[46]), especially those who are struggling academically (Robbins 2012[47]), this involves staff contacting students directly and arranging meetings, rather than waiting for students to contact them and request sessions. While the new CRM will be used to log students' attendance and engagement with their skills session, and this will be monitored by teaching staff, a pilot will be used with personal tutor champions taking the information from the CRM and using personal tutors to proactively contact and engage with students to provide them with additional support. The research evidence about personal tutoring points to the importance of an effective personal tutor (McFarlane 2016[48], hence the pilot will work with volunteer champions.

Evaluation

Each of these interventions will be evaluated to generate 'type 2 evidence', and the findings will be disseminated within the College and externally.

[44] Evans, J. (2013). Personal tutor support from the start reduces student attrition. *Nursing Standard*, *27*(2), 6. [48] Levy, J., Tryfona, C., Koukouravas, T., Hughes, N., & Worrall, M. (2009). Cardiff School of Management personal tutors: Building student confidence. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, *11*(3), 36-39.

[45] Thomas, L. (2012). Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change. *Paul Hamlyn Foundation*, London.

[46] Varney, J. 2013. "Proactive Advising." Academic Advising Approaches: Strategies That Teach Students to Make the Most of College, 137–154

[47] Robbins, S. (2012). "PASS Intervention: Mentoring Poorly Performing First-Year Students in Turning Their Academic Performance around from Failure to Success." In Andrews, J. et al (eds) *Compendium of Effective Practice in Higher Education Retention and Success*. Birmingham: Aston University and Higher Education Academy.

[48] McFarlane, K. (2016). "Tutoring the Tutors: Supporting Effective Personal Tutoring." *Active Learning in Higher Education* 17 (1): 77–88. doi:10.1177/1469787415616720.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Maximise learning support via the VLE	Students feel VLE supports learning and access to personal and professional support. Increased engagement with support resources. Improved academic attainment. Improved continuation. Improved completion.	• Feedback from student reps • VLE question on student survey • Usage data from VLE and support services • Institutional data Type 2 evidence will be generated.	A process and short-term benefits report will be produced in the first year and be shared internally. In the medium-term an impact evaluation report will be produced. This will be available on the College website and be submitted to TASO's Higher Education Evaluation Library.
Student-led review of coursebased induction	Increased understanding of academic expectations. Improved skills (academic, English and IT). Greater up take of academic, personal and financial support. Improved understanding about assessment.	• Feedback from student reps and staff • APP evaluation survey • Usage data from support services including assessment data and first-time pass rates Type 2 evidence will be generated.	A process and short-term benefits report will be produced in the first year and be shared internally. In the medium-term an impact evaluation report will be produced. This will be available on the College website.
Improve clarity of assessment criteria and resubmission process and requirements	More transparency and understanding about assessment criteria Students have better understanding of assessment and resubmission requirements Increased rate of submission Improved attainment Reduced attainment gaps	Mixed methods • Feedback from staff and student reps • APP evaluation survey • Institutional data Type 2 evidence will be generated.	A process and short-term benefits report will be produced in the first year and be shared internally. In the medium-term an impact evaluation report will be produced. This will be available on the College website, submitted to TASO's Higher Education Evaluation Library and will be disseminated via an external conference.

Target proactive personal tutoring at foundation year students at risk	At risk students attend personal tutoring sessions These students engage with their personal development plan activities more Improved academic skills Increased use of student support Increased continuation Increased completion Improved attainment	Mixed methods • Qualitative feedback from staff, tutors and students • Institutional data Type 2 evidence will be generated.	A process and short-term benefits report will be produced in the first year and be shared internally. In the medium-term an impact evaluation report will be produced. This will be available on the College website and submitted to TASO's Higher Education Evaluation Library.
Enhance knowledge about the success of APP groups	Improved real-time knowledge of success indicators in relation to APP target groups Able to intervene more quickly Improved knowledge about why APP target groups do not continue, complete or attain well	Review of processes and learning at the end of year 1. Type 1 evaluation evidence.	A process and short-term benefits report will be produced in the first year and be shared internally and published on the website. The research report will be published on the College website and disseminated via a peer-reviewed conference or journal article.

Intervention Strategy 4: Staff development and support

Objective and targets

To ensure that all staff have the awareness, knowledge and skills to induct, teach, assess and support all students to succeed at ICON College.

- Reduce continuation gap between A.B.M.O. students and their White peers from 15 percentage points in 2021/22 to 5 percentage points in 2029/30 (PTS_1).
- Eliminate the continuation gap between students from the most deprived areas (IMDQ1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-4) from 8 percentage points in 2021/22 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_2).
- Reduce the continuation gap between the most disadvantaged groups (IMDQ1&2_ABMO) and more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5_White) from 15 percentage points in 2021/22 to 3 percentage points by 2029/30 (PTS_3).

- Reduce the continuation gap between students who declare a disability and peers who do not declare a disability from 15 percentage points (based on the 4-year aggregate 2018/192021/22) to 3 percentage points by 2029/30 (PTS_4).
- Eliminate the completion gap between A.B.M.O. students and their White peers from 8 percentage points in 2018/19 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_5).
- Eliminate the completion gap between the most deprived students (IMDQ1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-5) from 6 percentage points in in 2018/19 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_6).
- Eliminate the awarding gap between A.B.M.O. students and White peers from 3 percentage points (based on the 2-year aggregate 2021/22 – 2022/23) to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_7).
- Eliminate the awarding gap between the most disadvantaged students (IMDQ1&2) and their more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5) from 3 percentage points in 2022-23 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_8).

Risks to equality of opportunity:

- EORR 1 knowledge and skills; 2 information and guidance; 6 insufficient academic support; 7 insufficient personal support; 8 mental health; 9, ongoing impacts of coronavirus; 10, cost pressures;11capacity issues; 12 progression from higher education.
- ICR 2 Student skills; ICR3 Learning, teaching and assessment; ICR5 Institutional processes; ICR6 Students' financial context.

Staff development and support activities

- IS 4.1 Staff survey to understand more about staff training, experience, confidence, knowledge and skill gaps and support needs.
- IS 4.2 Staff development and sharing of practice between staff.
- IS 4.3 Foundation year teaching and learning group.

Activity and description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross IS?
IS 4.1 Staff survey Survey to understand more about staff training, experience, confidence, knowledge and skill gaps and support needs to enable them to fully contribute to APP objectives and targets. (This will be designed to be non-threatening and to encourage participation in training and other development activities). We expect all students (2500-3000) to benefit from this activity in due course. *New activity*	Staff time for survey design and piloting Staff time for survey data collection and analysis	Staff expertise and gaps identified Training needs identified and prioritised	IS 1, 2, 3

IS 4.2 Staff development and sharing of practice Biannual training sessions for all academic staff to raise awareness about APP and training to enable staff to deliver the APP interventions. Some topics already identified are: • Disability awareness and support • Inclusive learning and teaching • Assessment and feedback training • AI, student assessment and graduate skills Additional needs will be identified by the survey. *Existing activity* Forum for sharing effective practice A forum for the sharing of effective practice between staff, this will include sharing evaluation findings from APP interventions We expect all students (2500-3000) to benefit from this activity. *New activity*	External training and facilitators Staff time to share and learn from each other (3 hours per year)	Staff have increased awareness of APP and diverse student needs. Staff develop skills and knowledge to teach and support students Staff have confidence to apply skills and knowledge in their teaching Improves student learning and outcomes Improved continuation, completion, attainment and progression	IS1, IS2, IS3
IS 4.3 Foundation year teaching and learning group A group of staff to specialise in teaching foundation year modules will be established, and they will receive regular training and support (e.g. every two weeks) to help nurture specialist expertise for these learners over a two-year period. We expect all Foundation year students to benefit (~1200 per year). *New activity*	Time of staff selected External input 4 times per year	Staff have increased awareness of foundation year student needs. Staff develop skills and knowledge to teach and support foundation year students Staff have confidence to apply skills and knowledge in their teaching Improves student learning and outcomes Improved continuation, completion, attainment and progression	IS1, IS2, IS3

Total cost of activities and evaluation for IS 4.1:

£69,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

Concern about foundation year programmes has led to a reduction in the fee charged to students, and associated concerns that this will result in lower quality provision for these students (Freeman 2024[49]). ICON College is committed to providing students with low and non-traditional qualifications entry to vocationally relevant higher education, and we will not compromise on quality. Instead, we are going to invest in training a sub-set of our staff to be experts in teaching on the Foundation Year. These students are predominantly mature and have been out of education for some time and many have low prior educational attainment. Many of these learners speak English as an additional language and the majority have other commitments and responsibilities, including working long hours and caring. (See details above of our student profile). These students deserve high quality teaching from experts.

Evaluation

Intervention strategy will be evaluated at the level of the intervention strategy and reported and disseminated at this level. The learning will be disseminated internally and externally.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan

[49] Freeman, J. (2024). Cracks in our foundations: evaluating foundation years as a tool for access and success. London: HEPI.

Staff development: Staff survey, staff training and sharing of practice	Staff expertise and gaps identified Training needs identified and prioritised Staff have increased awareness of APP and diverse student needs. Staff develop skills and knowledge to teach and support students Staff have confidence to apply skills and knowledge in their teaching Improves student learning and outcomes	Mixed methods The evaluation of the staff development intervention strategy will be informed by three levels: • Awareness • Application • Impact on learners (adapted from Kirkpatrick 1994[50] and Maccabe 2021[55]). The staff survey in the first year will create the baseline, collecting information about training, experience, awareness, knowledge and skills, confidence to induct, teach and support students from different backgrounds. The survey will be repeated annually, with additional questions considering relating to application and impact. The evidence will be triangulated with data from the APP evaluation survey and supplemented by feedback from student representatives. Type 2 evidence will be generated.	An annual report of the survey findings will be presented to the Academic Board APP sub-group, to the Board of Governance and to staff via the CPD training. A high-level summary and training plan will be published on the College website. In the medium term an impact evaluation report will be produced. This will be available on the College website, submitted to TASO's Higher Education Evaluation Library and will be disseminated via an external conference or a peer-reviewed journal.

[50] Kirkpatrick, D. L. (1994). Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. [55] Maccabe, R. (2021). A whole provider approach to widening participation: a phenomenographic case study exploring the perceptions and experiences of staff and students working in a widening participation role. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, *23*(1), 5-30.

Intervention Strategy 5: Career development, employability and entrepreneurship skills

Objectives and targets

To understand, monitor and improve the progression of all students and ensure there are no equity gaps between student groups at ICON College.

No targets have been set.

Risks to equality of opportunity

ICR1 Student expectations; ICR2 Student skills; ICR5 Institutional processes

Career development, entrepreneurship and employability skills activities

- IS 5.1 Undertake a review of graduate aspirations and outcomes of ICON College students and identify differences and gaps between student groups and ongoing monitoring
- IS 5.2 Develop the ICON College Universal Success Programme (USP), focusing on:
- Graduate skills, especially in a rapidly changing external environment[51]
- Employer and Alumni networking
- Enterprise Development and Business Start-up (EDBS) support programme

---

[51] The Board of Governance and the Senior Leadership Team are particularly alert to the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the labour market and economy. AI may reduce job opportunities and graduates will need new AI-related skills as well as resilience to prosper. See for example the article by Isabel Woodford in the Observer, 12th July 2025: 'UK graduates lose out as AI 'fills' entry-level jobs' (https://observer.co.uk/news/business/article/uk-graduates-lose-out-as-ai-fills-entrylevel-jobs, accessed 20/7/25).

Activity and description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross IS?
IS 5.1 Review institutional survey data about graduate aspirations by APP target groups. Review data from the Graduate Outcomes survey in relation to APP target groups Prepare a report on aspirations, outcomes and gaps by APP target groups Develop a system for ongoing monitoring and reporting We expect all students (2500-3000) to benefit from this activity in due course. *New activity*	Data expertise to undertake the analysis and write the report. Annual monitoring of performance	Increased information about student aspirations and outcomes Increased information of progression gaps between student groups Improved support for progression beyond HE	No

IS 5.2 ICON College Universal Success Programme Three inter-related strands to improve the progression and success of all ICON College graduates. (a) Graduate skills A programme of practically oriented sessions for degree students to develop graduate skills to support success in study, employability and progression. Indicative topics include organisational and time management skills; analytical and critical thinking skills; creative thinking and problem-solving; communication and presentation skills; appropriate use of GenAI; marketing and effective use of social media; CV building and writing; identifying suitable job and business opportunities, interview and assessment skills, mock interviews, team working, collaboration and relationship building, the role of AI in the workplace; resilience and wellbeing. These will be available to all degree students. (b) Employer talks: local and national employers and entrepreneurs, including ICON College Alumni share insights into their careers and businesses and tips for others; will include visits to employer sites, graduate fairs and similar. Students will lead on choosing types of employers to engage. All degree students will be able to participate, although priority will be given to final year students. Participants will receive a certificate of attendance, and the sessions will be recorded in their personal development plan (IS 2.2). Students who have reached a threshold attendance rate in (a) and (b) will be eligible to participate in the Enterprise Development and Business Start-up (EDBS) support programme. (c) EDBS: Workshops and online activities will support participants to develop a new business. Ongoing mentoring and support	Staff co-ordinator External facilitators, speakers and mentors Cash prizes	Increased awareness of graduate skills Enhanced graduate skills Ability to evidence graduate skills through written and verbal communication Students are better prepared to make more informed decisions about progression from undergraduate study to the next stage. Some students develop business ideas Improved progression beyond HE	IS 2.2

| will be provided. Participants must have attended a prescribed number of skills sessions and employers' talks; final selection will be competitive based on preparatory work, attendance and behaviour in College and APP student characteristics. A cash prize will be available to support one or more business each year. This will be run as a pilot in the first instance.

The skills sessions and employer talks will be open to all students, and will be spread throughout the UG experience, at times when students are at the College. Eligibility to participate in the EDBS support will incentivise attendance.

This practical sessions and employer talks will be open to all students. The first iteration of the programme will be run as a pilot, which will be evaluated and reviewed before being rolled out (or stopped).

While open to all students, we anticipate around 100 students in the first year and up to 500 students per year afterwards will participate and benefit from this activity. The EDBS will offer places to 20 students; more sessions may be offered if the initiative is successful.

New activity			

Total cost of activities and evaluation for IS 5:

£287,000.00

Summary of evidence base and rationale

This intervention is informed by research by Dr David Sexton[52] "Building graduate employability within a widening participation Higher Education Provider setting", as the learners have much in common with the students at ICON College (mature, in employment and from non-traditional backgrounds). Sexton's research found that the most useful part of the scheme was the practical elements (p221), which have been amplified in this programme. The employability sessions were delivered between teaching sessions to maximise engagement, and utilised an Employability Passport to incentivise engagement (Sexton 2023). We are incentivising participation by

---

[52] Sexton, D. (2023) *Building graduate employability within a widening participation Higher Education Provider setting*. PhD Thesis, Anglia Ruskin University

https://aru.figshare.com/articles/thesis/Building_graduate_employability_awareness_within_a_widening_participation_higher_education_provider_setting/23770332?file=42210969

certificates of attendance and the PDP, and the need to complete a specified number of sessions to be eligible for the EDBS support. College research (APP evaluation survey 2024) indicates that while 82% of students are looking to secure a graduate job, only a slightly smaller proportion (70%) are interested in starting their own business or expanding a family business. This may be a feasible alternative for mature students/graduates to do whilst continuing to be employed in their existing non-graduate jobs. Skills such business planning, marketing and sales, customer relationships and financial management, as well as being able to secure financial backing and recruit a good team, contribute to the success of microbusinesses[53].

Evaluation

The evaluation of this intervention strategy will focus on the ICON College Universal Success Programme, which will be informed by IS 5.1 (review of graduate aspirations and outcomes and ongoing monitoring). The first year of the programme will be run as a pilot; the findings will be shared internally and externally.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
ICON College USP	Increased awareness of graduate skills Improvements in graduate skills Increased ability to demonstrate and evidence graduate skills through written and verbal communication Students are feel better prepared to make an informed and effective transition from undergraduate study to the next stage Some students develop and test out business ideas Improved progression beyond HE	Mixed methods • Feedback from student reps, staff and externals contributors • APP evaluation survey • Qualitative feedback/case studies from EDBS support participants • Institutional data • Graduate outcomes survey data Type 2 evidence will be generated.	In the first year (2026/27) a baseline report (based on outputs of IS 5.1) will be presented to the Academic Board APP subgroup, to the Board of Governance and to staff via the CPD training. In the medium term an impact evaluation report will be produced. This will be available on the College website, submitted to TASO's Higher Education Evaluation Library and will be disseminated via an external conference or a peer-reviewed journal.

[53] Elliott, R. (2022) Four ways to grow your small business, Companies House
https://companieshouse.blog.gov.uk/2022/01/11/4-ways-to-grow-your-small-business/

Intervention Strategy 6: Financial support

Objective and targets

To reduce the impact of financial hardship on disabled students and students from disadvantaged groups at ICON College.

- Increase the percentage of entrants that declare a disability from 3% in 2023/24 to 12% in 2029/30 (PTA_1).
- Eliminate the continuation gap between students from the most deprived areas (IMDQ1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-4) from 8 percentage points in 2021/22 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_2).
- Reduce the continuation gap between the most disadvantaged groups (IMDQ1&2_ABMO) and more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5_White) from 15 percentage points in 2021/22 to 3 percentage points by 2029/30 (PTS_3).
- Reduce the continuation gap between students who declare a disability and peers who do not declare a disability from 15 percentage points (based on the 4-year aggregate 2018/192021/22) to 3 percentage points by 2029/30 (PTS_4).
- Eliminate the completion gap between the most deprived students (IMDQ1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-5) from 6 percentage points in in 2018/19 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_6).
- Eliminate the awarding gap between the most disadvantaged students (IMDQ1&2) and their more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5) from 3 percentage points in 2022-23 to 0 by 2029/30 (PTS_8).

Risks to equality of opportunity:

- EORR 10 cost
- ICR 4 Financial context

Financial support activities

- IS 6.1 Provide bursaries of between £500 and £1000 for disabled students to support diagnostic testing, purchase of IT equipment and specialist software and other needs to support access and success in higher education.
- IS 6.2 Increase the Hardship Fund and to provide funds more quickly to address a wide range of financial hardships that impact on student experience and success (including travel, childcare and placement costs, IT equipment and unexpected emergencies). Processes will be streamlined to provide a quicker response. Students will be able to apply a maximum of twice per year, and a maximum of £500 per application. Eligibility criteria will be published on the website, available on the VLE and details will be provided pre-entry and during induction and from personal tutors.
- IS 6.3 Fee waivers (discounts) for students who transfer to ICON College having withdrawn from another institution, and who are not eligible for an additional year of funding from the Student Finance England (SFE).

Activity and description	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross IS?

IS 6.1 Financial support for disabled students[59] Provision of bursaries of up to £1000 for disabled students to support diagnostic testing[60], purchase of IT equipment and specialist software and other needs to support access and success in higher education. These will be based on the recommendations of the Disability Officer, and will take into account need and eligibility for other disability funding (e.g. DSA). Students will also be eligible to apply to the Hardship Fund. Recruitment and teaching staff, and personal tutors, will promote the bursaries. We are aiming to support around 300 disabled students annually (around 12% of our student population). *Existing activity*	Funding for up to bursaries, hardship fund and fee discounts Staff time to administer the bursaries	More students identify a disability More students are diagnosed with a specific learning difference More students access financial support from the College and from DSA More students able to access disability equipment, software and support. Increased access and continuation for disabled students	IS 1
IS 6.2 Hardship Fund Increase the Hardship Fund, and provide funds more quickly to address a wide range of financial hardships that impact on student experience and success (including travel, childcare and placement costs, IT equipment and unexpected emergencies). Processes will be streamlined to provide a quicker response. Students will be able to apply a maximum of twice per year, and a maximum of £500 per application. We anticipate between 300 and 500 students benefiting from the Hardship Funding annually. *Existing activity (extended)*	Hardship funding Staff time for administration	Funds are allocated quickly to students in financial need Students use the money to enable them to continue in higher education and achieve good grades	

Fee waivers for transfer students [54] Fee discounts will be available for students who transfer to ICON College having withdrawn from another institution, and who are not eligible for an additional year of funding from the SFE. We anticipate around 20 students will benefit from this each year. *New activity*			

Total cost of activities and evaluation for IS 6:

£1,769,000

Summary of evidence base and rationale

ICON College has a low rate of students who identify a learning difference or disability. This is likely to be in part as they do not have a formally diagnosis (e.g. because they are mature students or were previously educated outside of the UK). Financial support will enable them to have a formal diagnosis (if appropriate) and benefit from reasonable adjustments, and to buy assistive technology (IT equipment and software) to support their learning success. Feedback from College staff indicates that some students only disclose a disability when accessing financial support.

A large number of our students are from lower income/multiply deprived backgrounds (nearly twothirds are from IMD Q1 and Q2), and most of our students (around 80%) are in employment (APP evaluation survey 2023 and 2024) to support themselves whilst studying. Students in financial precarity may by particularly disadvantaged when they experience sudden and unexpected financial shocks. Our scheme is designed to be responsive and fast to support students with unexpected financial difficulties to survive and continue to study and achieve in HE. A systematic review (Younger et al 2018[55]) finds (mostly international) evidence that financial support contributes to remaining enrolled in College (continuation) especially amongst the poorest families (Solis 2012[56]).

Every year around 20 students enrol at ICON College having withdrawn from another higher education provider. The majority of these students are not entitled to a proportion of their student fees from SFE for their new course, and this creates additional financial strain. We are able to offer a number of fee waivers or discounts to students in this situation to ease the financial burden and help them to continue to the next study year.

---

[54] This year there are 78 disabled students (5.2%). Across the sector 18.3% of students disclose a disability. In our APP survey 2024 7.7% of students said they have a disability. 4.0% said may be and 7.1% said 'prefer not to say'. This suggests we could meet the sector average. [60] A SpLD diagnostic assessment would cost £375.

[55] Younger, K., Gascoine, L., Menzies, V., & Torgerson, C. (2018). A systematic review of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions 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

[56] Solis, Alex. 2012. "Credit Constraints for Higher Education." Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness. 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208. 1011395753; ED530415. Eric. http://search.proquest.com/docview/1011395753?accountid=14533

Evaluation

Questions from the Office for Students financial support evaluation toolkit are built into our APP evaluation survey. We will undertake some additional evaluation, as described in the table below, including using the OfS financial evaluation survey directly with beneficiaries of the Hardship Fund.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
Disabled student bursaries	More students identify a disability More students are diagnosed with a specific learning difference More students access financial support from the College and from DSA More students able to access disability equipment, software and support. Improved continuation (and completion, attainment and progression).	Mixed methods • Feedback from Disability Officer • Student feedback • Institutional data Type 2 evidence	An annual report of the findings will be presented to the Academic Board APP sub-group and the Board of Governance. The findings will not be published to ensure that the identify of students is not disclosed,
Hardship funds	Funds are allocated quickly to students in financial need Students use the money to enable them to continue in higher education and achieve good grades	Mixed methods • Feedback Finance Committee on the process and time taken • Student feedback via OfS Financial Evaluation survey Type 2 evidence	An annual report of the findings will be presented to the Academic Board APP sub-group and the Board of Governance. The findings will be available on the College website.
Fee waivers	Transferring students who do not have access to Student Finance England (SFE) loans are able to access and succeed	• Institutional data	An annual report of the findings will be presented to the Academic Board APP sub-group and the Board of Governance. The findings will be available on the College website

5. Whole provider approach

Our APP journey

ICON College submitted its first APP to commence in 2022/23. As part of the process the College took a whole institutional approach to assess performance, review practices and engage with internal and external evidence, and to develop interventions that operated across the College and benefitted students in all parts of the institution throughout their lifecycle. During the past APP period we have engaged more with the local community, organisations and schools, introduced an extended induction, reviewed the personal tutoring system, developed inclusive learning approaches, embedded additional disability, English and academic and pastoral support and begun engaging with students about their progression beyond ICON College.

From 2022 ICON College has increased its involvement with the local community and is an active contributor to raising achievements and aspirations. The College is based in Whitechapel, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, which on ranks highly on a range of deprivation and diversity indicators, and neighbouring boroughs include Hackney, Islington, Newham, Lewisham and Southwark. The College has been supporting the community in a range of ways, including:

- **Promoting academic excellence in Tower Hamlets**: Working with the Mayor of Tower Hamlets, ICON College co-sponsored a ceremony 2024 for high academic achievers in state schools in Tower Hamlets, to reward and encourage excellence and further study. The College hope to do this annually.
- **Developing IT skills in schools**: ICON College has supported the development of IT infrastructure in a primary school in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in 2023-2024.
- **Facilitating parental engagement in education**: ICON College has sponsored projects for parents in Tower Hamlets to facilitate engagement in education – by developing IT and English skills of predominantly mothers from migrant backgrounds the project encourages parents' engagement directly in education and also enables them to support their children's education.
- **COVID 19 Vaccination Centre:** Sponsored and launched COVID 19 Vaccination Centre in the College premises during 2022-2023 post-pandemic years.
- **Leadership and role model development for community football team managers**: To date ICON College has run two training programmes to date for community football team managers to develop their skills in running a grassroots club and for the managers to become educational role models to the players and their families.
- **Hockey Club**: The College has provided funding to Tower Hamlets Hockey Club for training young hockey players and support for their accessories.

In terms of outcomes, of particular note, is that we have:

- Increased the percentage of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups accessing the College from 9% (2020/21 baseline) to 34% (HESA 2023/24);
- Increased the percentage disadvantaged ethnic minority students (IMDQ1&2 and B.A.M.E.) accessing the College from 7% (2021/22 baseline) to 24% (APP data dashboard 2024 release);
- Increased the percentage of disabled students accessing the College from 2% (2020/21 baseline) to 3% (HESA 2023/24), with 8% disclosing a disability in the most recent APP evaluation survey 2024.

Community Engagement, Support and Development

During the current APP period there have been some changes to the College's portfolio (including the introduction of Foundation year programmes, see in introduction), in the student profile (see

above, introduction and appendix A1) and in staffing. This changed context informs and shapes our current APP assessment of risks and intervention strategies. In particular, we do not have any intervention strategies designed to raise aspirations and engagement with students from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, except disabled students (see IS 1). The College is however committed to being a leader and champion in our borough and neighbouring boroughs to engage young people and their families in education and learning. The College will therefore continue to engage with, and support primary and secondary schools, and the community in around the London Borough of Tower Hamlets as detailed above. In addition, the College has recently appointed a co-ordinator for Community Engagement, Support and Development (CESD). The following initiatives have been proposed to the Board of Management by the newly appointed coordinator:

- Short courses to develop English language and IT communication skills (which underpin participation in HE, and many of our mature students struggle with).
- Workshops to boost and develop personal, professional and employability skills, as many people in the local area aspire to improved employment opportunities and work-life balance.
- Workshops and mentoring for enterprise development and business start-ups.

According to the ONS data, 1 in 8 young people in Britain are not at work or in education/training and most of these come from lower socio-economic background. With the government effort to boost employment potential among those who seek to work and able to work with incentives and employability skills development, the College will engage in the community by offering the proposed workshops and short courses to job seekers. The sessions will target unemployed youth and other jobseekers in the community and will address a range of soft and practical skills associated with securing employment.

Review of our whole provider approach

Turning to the College itself we have undertaken a review of our whole provider approach[57]. There is strong and ongoing commitment to the widening access and student success from the senior leadership team and the Board of Governance. APP is constituted as a sub-committee of the Academic Board, with membership from all the senior leaders and Heads of Department as well as other key individuals/roles. A presentation is made annually to the Board of Governance about progress towards achieving APP targets, and to consider amendments or additional interventions that may be required.

The structure of the College is aligned with our goals to widen access to traditionally excluded and disadvantaged students. In particular, all of our teaching is on a condensed timetable consisting usually of two three-hour blocks of learning on campus. Personal tutoring, language and academic support, IT assistance, disability services and pastoral care are provided during these times when students are on campus. Independent learning is support by our VLE. Attendance monitoring of all in-person session is in place, and combined with individual follow-up to ensure that students attend and progress as expected. Our learning and teaching strategy (2021-25) is informed by the inclusivity principles set out in the 'Framework for Student Access, Retention, Attainment and

Progression developed by Advance HE[58]. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is built into all of our policies and processes, as all of our students can be viewed as non-traditional (being

[57] Thomas, L. (2024) What is a whole provider approach to widening access and student success? Wonkhe, 5th June 2024, https://wonkhe.com/blogs/contributor/liz-thomas/
[58] Framework for Student Access, Retention, Attainment and Progression; Advance HE available at https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/Student%20access%2C%20retention%2C%20attainment%20and%20progression%20in%20higher%20education%20framework.pdf

predominantly mature, B.A.M.E. and 'Other White' ethnicities and from lower IMD quintiles), and we take account of the needs of students with protected characteristics[59].

As a relatively small institution, we have been able to involve all staff in developing awareness and understanding about our APP aspirations, interventions and targets; of particular note is the provision of biannual (September and February) two-day staff development sessions for all academic staff and key professional service colleagues, raising awareness and developing capacity. We have an elected group of around 90 student representatives, who actively contribute to the development of the College, providing a student perspective on many issues. 40 representatives have been involved in developing our understanding of risks and shaping the intervention strategies included in the APP.

We are making significant steps to improve our data, evidence and evaluation capacity. We have improved our enrolment data collection and our internal data systems, including the introduction of a new CRM system, which will help us utilise real-time data and engage with students more effectively. We have introduced the annual APP evaluation survey, which collects consistent evidence to allow comparisons over time in relation to all aspects of the student lifecycle, and relating to the key areas where we have APP interventions. We have introduced a staff evaluation and research committee and funding process, which allows staff to identify specific pedagogical, and student experience projects that align with our strategic goals that they would like to investigate. This initiative contributes to the development of our capacity to undertake and utilise research and evaluation to improve the student experience, outcomes and equity.

Our exploration of ICON College risks to equality ICR5 Institutional infrastructure, processes and staffing point to some aspects of our enabling environment[66] that need to be addressed to contribute to widening access and student success. In particular, there are some aspects of the current building that present physical accessibility challenges, most noticeably the lift which needs to be operated by a member of staff; students find some processes to be unclear or difficult to follow; and there are some staff issues relating to professionalism, experience and training to teach Foundation Year students and understanding of College processes and ability to advise students. These issues have been addressed in our intervention strategy: IS 1 addresses physical accessibility in general and the lift in particular; IS 2 focuses on developing students' knowledge and skills to succeed in HE (including processes), and this is reinforced by some interventions in IS 3; and IS 4 addresses the most significant issue relating to staff capability to deliver an effective learning experience for all students. (We have also changed our staff recruitment practices to only recruit full-time staff who are employed exclusively at ICON College; this improves commitment to the College and its students and understanding of our students, curricula, assessments and processes). We have also included several interventions that are intended to develop our knowledge and use of data and evidence to support equity in experience and outcomes (IS 1.1; IS 2.2; IS 3.5; IS 4.1; IS 5.1), as well as our APP evaluation strategy.

---

[59] As set out in the Equality Act 2010. [66] Ibid Thomas 2024

6. Student consultation

The College elects a large number of student representatives (around 90), and approximately half of these were invited to contribute to the development of this APP; the meeting was held using MS Teams to facilitate participation by students across all the programmes at the College, and was led by two external facilitators to encourage honesty and openness. The students met in February 2025 for a facilitated discussion about the key issues associated with access, continuation and completion, attainment and progression, and particularly identifying the barriers and factors that would assist students. The risks were collated and shared and discussed with staff the following day. The staff and student risks, together with evidence collected during the process of reviewing and preparing this APP, were used to create the ICON College risk (ICR 1-5). Of particular significance here was the emphasis that the students placed on 'peers', particularly behaviour and respect in the classroom, and their lack of understanding and autonomy to access the additional support provided by the College. This informed a number of interventions directly, particularly IS 2 which is focused on preparing students to succeed; it also feed into IS 4, developing and supporting staff to teach more diverse student cohorts.

The second student consultation took place in May 2025. The student representatives were sent details of the intervention strategy a week ahead of the session, and then an external colleague facilitated the discussion again, drawing attention to the interventions and providing opportunities to discuss and amend these. Student representatives were very keen to play an active role in the delivery of the interventions to support and assist their peers, and this is reflected in this APP. In a similar vein, they also encouraged the use of alumni to support IS5, which focuses on career development and employability and entrepreneurship skills. Student feedback was positive about all the interventions, but they particularly endorsed the proposed research focusing on disabled students from other cultural backgrounds (IS 1.1) and the renewed focus on career development (IS 5).

Students and student representatives are explicitly built into the design and delivery of many of our APP intervention strategies. Students are involved in designing and conducting research with and about disabled students (IS 1.1); being trained to act as additional guides to signpost students to services and processes (e.g. IS 1.2); developing new resources and engaging with incoming students (IS 2.1); and reviewing provision such as the VLE (IS 3.1) and course induction (IS 3.2). All students who contribute to this work will be paid, using the standard rate of pay for all student contributions at the College. Students will also be involved in the evaluation of the interventions, which will use both surveys and qualitative methods, as well as staff feedback and institutional data.

Student representatives attended Academic Board and Board of Governance meetings where the APP was reviewed and discussed.

7. Evaluation of the plan

ICON College has developed a whole provider approach to the development and implementation of its APP, and this extends to the evaluation of our interventions and practice. The College has made a significant financial commitment to research and evaluation in three ways. First, all the interventions are evidence informed; second research and review activities are built into the intervention strategies (ISs 1.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.5, 4.1, 5.1) to generate additional evidence, and thirdly, around 15% of the total APP spending is committed to research and evaluation.

Each of our interventions is evidence-informed, drawing extensively on evidence from the English higher education sector and more widely if appropriate. We have also drawn on survey evidence from our students and feedback from staff and students.   In 2023, ICON College introduced its tailor-made APP evaluation survey. This comprises of sections that cover all stages of the student lifecycle and areas where we are intervening (e.g. access, induction, learning and teaching, personal tutoring, progression, financial support) and demographic information. The questions use a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree). The questions were piloted in 2023, and revised; but each year they have remained largely the same, to facilitate comparison between years and the development of trend data. This evidence base has helped us to evaluate our APP interventions and prepare this APP plan, and its continued use will contribute to building up longitudinal evidence of progress and impact.

Each of our interventions and intervention strategy has identified a set of student-outcome indicators that contribute directly to our APP targets. These form the basis of our theories of change for each intervention strategy or activity. We have also identified our evaluation research methods; we are committed to mixed methods to triangulate evidence and contribute to reassuring us that interventions are effective, or provide understanding as to why the interventions are not effective. Methods include qualitative research with students and staff, surveys and institutional data. We aim to limit the use of student surveys to the APP evaluation survey, to avoid survey fatigue, although we will explore the use of TASO survey tools to improve the quality of evidence collected. This approach will generate 'type 2 evidence' (drawing on the OfS standards of evidence framework) for each of our interventions and intervention strategy. In 2025-26 we will further develop the theories of change for each of our intervention strategy; these will have shared student indicators across the interventions within a specific intervention strategy, as well as shortterm benefit indicators and medium-term outcome indicators for each intervention, which contribute to our longer-term impact and APP targets.

Our evaluation is intended to generate evidence for different purposes and audiences; our primary goal is to improve equity for students at ICON College. Our evaluations will generate process evidence that will lead to amendments to implementation by staff (and student) teams and ultimately outcomes; the impact evidence will be used for both attribution and contribution. We acknowledge that some activities will contribute to impact, rather than generate impact independently. We will focus on using evidence internally to achieve our objectives and targets, but we will disseminate our findings to the wider sector (and learn concomitantly) as appropriate. Table 4 provides an overview of the implementation of the APP plan, and the evaluation and dissemination of the APP outputs.

Table 4: Overview of implementation and dissemination of research and evaluation outputs

Ref	Activity	Implementation	Research report	Process evaluation	Summative evaluation
IS 1.1	Disability research	2026/27	2028	N/A	N/A
IS1.2	Disability training	Annual	N/A	Annually	2029
IS 1.3	Practical and financial support	2026/27	N/A	2027	2029

IS 2.1	Transition information	2026/27	N/A	2027	2030
IS 2.2	Assessment of skills and PDP	2026/27 pilot 2027/28 rollout	N/A	2028	2030
IS 2.3	Additional skills support	2026/27	N/A	2027	2028
IS 3.1	VLE review	2026/27	2027	2027	2029
IS 3.2	Review of induction	2026/27	N/A	2027	2029
IS 3.3	Assessment processes	2027/28	N/A	2028	2030
IS 3.4	Proactive personal tutoring	2027/28	N/A	2028	2030
IS 3.5	Research about student success	2027/28	2028	2028	2030
IS 4.1	Staff survey	2026/27	2027	N/A	N/A
IS 4.2	Sharing practice	From 2027/28 onwards	N/A	2028	2030
IS 4.3	Foundation year T&L groups	2026/27	N/A	2028	2030
IS 5.1	Progression review	2027/28	2028	2028	2030
IS 5.2	ICON College USP	2028/29	N/A	2029	2030
IS 6.1	Bursaries for disabled students	2026/27	N/A	2027	2030
IS 6.2	Hardship Funding	2026/27	N/A	2028	2030
IS 6.3	Fee Waivers	2026/27	N/A	2029	2030

The APP evaluation evidence is regularly shared with the College's Senior Management Team (SMT) through the Academic Board APP sub-group, and annually with the Board of Governance. An annual APP away day reflects on the year, reviews the internal evaluation evidence and wider

evidence and context, and updates and finalises plans for the coming year. All academic staff, and professional service staff involved in the delivery of APP interventions, are updated twice a year (at the CPD sessions in September and February) about the implementation of the interventions, the evaluation findings and progress towards targets. Specific aspects of the APP are selected at

each CPD session, and expert training is delivered together with participatory group activities to review and further develop the interventions (in response to evidence and drawing on delivery experience). This helps to develop awareness, understanding and improve practice, and ultimately contributes to improvements to the student experience and outcomes, and greater equity.

We are increasingly cognisant that the available external evidence base does not always translate directly into the context of our institution, including high levels of student diversity, predominantly mature age students, from ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and lower income groups, and with low entry qualifications. This, together with encouragement from the Office for Students and our own commitment to undertaking more applied research, mean that we are strongly motivated to not only understand more about our students and our interventions, but to disseminate the learning. We will set up a webpage that will act as a repository for all of our theory of changes and associated evaluation reports; this will facilitate sharing between staff, but also the wider sector. We have identified a number of interventions that are innovative and will select their theory of change and evaluation report to the TASO Higher Education Evaluation Library. In addition, we have selected four evaluations that we think may be useful and suitable for wider dissemination, initially through practitioner conferences, and possibly through academic conferences or peer reviewed journals.

In 2024 we introduced the ICON College Staff 'Student experience research and evaluation' scheme, designed to encourage, guide and support staff to undertake small research and evaluation studies to understand and enhance the student experience, to widen access and diversity, to improve the success of students and to promote equity. This involved the establishment of a Research Committee to review research proposals, allocate funding and undertake the ethical review process. A list of indicative topics is intended to assist staff to identify suitable topics. Staff are encouraged to prepare an application using a simple form, and they can access support with this process. Successful applicants are allocated time, funding and support.

We undertook the OfS evaluation self-assessment tool, and we are 'emerging' in all dimensions. We note that we particularly need to build capacity of staff and student representatives to lead the design and evaluation of interventions. We will build questions relating to evaluation and theory of change into our staff development survey (IS 4.1), and will provide training to staff and students biennially. We believe that by building on our foundations, particularly our APP evaluation survey, evidence-informed interventions, nascent theory of changes, and structures that share and learn from our evaluation findings, we will be able to further develop the capacity and engagement of more colleagues and students in designing and undertaking evaluation work. In due course, we expect to be able share our learning more widely in the higher education sector through a range of networks, conferences and publications.

8. Provision of information to students

Tuition fees for prospective students:

The tuition fee of the courses are published on the ICON College website and in marketing materials, as well as being available in response to inquiry by telephone or email. The tuition fee

may increase each year during the study period in line with the inflation rate using Retail Price Index (RPI-X).

Financial support for students

ICON College provides a significant amount of financial support to students.

Attendance, engagement and behaviour expectations for all financial support:

Attendance: The College expects high levels of attendance in taught sessions. Attendance at taught sessions at ICON College is recorded via electronic fingerprint authentication reader; this is a biometric security method that verifies the identify of each student and logs their attendance. Students must attend classes on time; they cannot be signed in after 15 minutes of the start of the class, but they are allowed in for another 15 minutes. Any student who comes in after 30 minutes will be required to enter the class after the break when they will be allowed to sign in via the fingerprint reader only. If a student misses a class or contact session without providing a valid reason for this absence, then this will be recorded as an Unauthorised Absence ("A") on the attendance register. (Full details are available in the College Attendance Policy and in the Student Handbook). To be eligible for financial support from the College, students are expected to have an attendance rate at least 80% during the previous semester.

Engagement: The College expects students to engage in all aspects of the learning experience. Engagement includes a number of indicators: contributing to class discussions (based on lecturer feedback); logging into the VLE at least once per week (based on VLE records); attendance at personal tutoring sessions at least once per semester (based on CRM records) and submission of assessed work on time or using the extensions process (based on assessment submission data. Other indicators of positive engagement include being an elected student representative, contributing to student surveys, and making suggestions via the Student Suggestions Box. (See the Student Handbook for further details). To be eligible for financial support from the College, students must be judged to be actively engaging in their studies by the Hardship Fund Panel.

Behaviour: The College expects students to exhibit an appropriate standard of behaviour, including not smoking in College buildings, switching off mobile phones in taught sessions and in the library and being respectful to staff and students, and avoiding 'unreasonable behaviour'. These expectations are fully laid out in the Student Handbook, along with the Disciplinary Procedure. Before any disciplinary action is initiated, there will be a full investigation of the facts by the College Misconduct Committee to establish if there are justifiable grounds to invoke the disciplinary procedure. To be eligible for financial support from the College, the student should not have any pending or recent disciplinary actions.

Hardship Fund:

Students are provided with information about hardship fund during the College Induction session, and full details and an application form are available on the College website.

Eligibility Criteria

1. Students must be an active registered current student, except Year 1 first semester studying at ICON College of Technology and Management.

2. The Hardship Fund is for students from low-income backgrounds (household income below £42,875), studying on full time accredited FE or HE courses

3. Students are expected to have maintained an appropriate standard of behaviour, attendance and engagement (including online teaching provision) throughout the course of study. If students are currently facing disciplinary action, they may not be eligible for this support. (See attendance, engagement and behaviour expectations above).

4. The usual study location of the course must be in the UK.

5. Students must have a bank account into which a BACS payment can be made.

6. Students must have completed the application form honestly and declared any reasons they may not be eligible for the award. Fraudulent claims may lead to disciplinary action and/or the refunding to the College by the applicant of any monies awarded from the Hardship Fund.

7. If the Hardship Fund is exhausted, no further application will be processed or granted any fund beyond that point.

8. Students may not be considered for second award withing a year if they were awarded hardship funding in an earlier distribution.

9. The decision of the ICON College Hardship Fund Panel will be final, and no correspondence will be entered into with a student once a decision has been made as to the eligibility of each student's claim.

10.   All decisions regarding the award (or not) of a Hardship Fund grant will be communicated to each applicant by email.

Amount of Hardship Fund

The range of hardship fund will vary from £500 to £1000 depending on personal circumstances including having a disability.

Frequency of Entitlement

Students will usually apply for Hardship Funding once per year. However, if financial hardship persists, a student may apply a second time within one academic year.

Bursaries for disabled students

Students with a disability are eligible to apply for Bursary annually. Support is provided for no more than four years of study even, if the course is longer. Please note that a Foundation Year counts as one year of study towards the maximum of four years of bursary support. Although an award may be granted for a period of four years, the continuing entitlement to the award will be assessed on an annual basis.

Eligibility criteria

The College requires evidence of the disability if a student is to receive a bursary of disabled students. The nature of this evidence will vary depending on the disability and circumstances. Examples of appropriate evidence include: a diagnostic assessment from an appropriate externally recognised organisation; a verifiable letter (in English) from a doctor or consultant; an online assessment undertaken under the supervision of the Disability Officer in the College; or a recommendation from the College's Disability Officer. If students are unsure about suitable

evidence of their disability, they should consult the College's Disability Officer before making an application for financial support.

To be eligible for a Bursary, students must have some kind of disability assessment (as described above) and:

1. have a household[60] income between £0-£25,000, as assessed by the College Financial Support Panel

2. have had a full financial assessment carried out by the Panel

3. be registered on a full-time course

4. have UK home status for funding purposes

5. meet the attendance, engagement and behaviour expectations of the College (see above)

6. be a student with ICON College, have completed at least a full semester, and paid the first instalment of the tuition fees.

To enable the College to assess the eligibility for a bursary award it is important that students complete the Bursary Award Application Form and submit with all the required information, along with relevant supporting documents – for example, evidence of low family income, rent/mortgage details for the household, salary/wages earned for full and part-time work for both the student and other household members. It is the applicant's sole responsibility to provide the information required at the time of application. Where information required by the College is not submitted by the applicant by the closing date for the receipt of applications, the application will be treated as void.

Amount of Bursaries

Bursaries for disabled students will be between £500 and £1000 per year.

Frequency of Entitlement

Disabled students may apply for a bursary annually, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria.

Fee waivers (discounts) for transferring students

Eligibility criteria

Students who pay their tuition fees by themselves and having financial difficulties in paying full fee can apply for the fee waiver. This includes students who transfer into ICON College, having left another higher education provider and so are responsible for a proportion of their tuition fees; and

---

[60] For students under the age of 21 upon entry 'other household members' refers to parents (including step-parents) or legal guardians; for mature students (over the age of 21 on entry) 'other household members' refers to spouse or partner who lives predominantly at the same address, but excludes parents, other relatives and adult children who live at the same address.

it applies to any student has completed their course but could not pay their full fee and are unable to claim their certificate due to outstanding fees.

1. Students must provide evidence that they are responsible for paying all or a proportion of their tuition fees themselves.
2. Fee waivers are for students from low-income backgrounds (household income below £42,875), studying on full time accredited FE or HE courses. Students will be required to submit proof of income to support their application.
3. Students must be an active registered current student, except Year 1 first semester studying at ICON College of Technology and Management.
4. Students are expected to have maintained an appropriate standard of behaviour and attendance (including online teaching provision) throughout the course of study. If students are currently facing disciplinary action, they may not be eligible for this support. 5. The usual study location of the course must be in the UK.
6. Students must have a bank account into which a BACS payment can be made.
7. Students must have completed the application form honestly and declared any reasons they may not be eligible for the award. Fraudulent claims may lead to disciplinary action and/or the refunding to the College by the applicant of any fee waiver awarded.
8. The decision of the ICON College Financial Support Panel will be final, and no correspondence will be entered into with a student once a decision has been made as to the eligibility of each student's claim.
9. All decisions regarding the award (or not) of a Fee Waiver will be communicated to each applicant by email.

Amount of Fee Waivers

Fee waivers can vary from £500 to the full fee for one year, depending on individual circumstances, which will be assessed by the ICON College Financial Support Panel.

Frequency of Entitlement

A student can apply for a Fee Waiver once per year. Only in exceptional circumstances will more than one Fee Waiver per student, throughout the duration of their undergraduate programme, be considered.

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

A1: Analysis of past performance

ICON College has reviewed its data. Analysis of the 2023/24 HESA Student data was used to explore (a) the College's portfolio and access profile (programmes and student body demographics), (b) students who left without being awarded a qualification or credits (withdrawal rates) and (c) first or upper second-class qualifications awarded (good honours rates). The analysis uses OfS APP student target groups. The College has approximately 2000 students, including a large proportion of non-standard students and therefore the data does not fit neatly into HESA standard reporting. Furthermore, the College has significantly changed its portfolio in 2022/23 with the introduction of Bachelor's programmes with an integrated Foundation Year which currently accounts for more than 80% of new entrants (2023/24). We, therefore, undertook additional analysis of the OfS APP dataset (2024 data release), as this examines student data/outcomes across multiple years; this contributes to identifying trends that help to highlight risks to equality of opportunity. Given the small numbers, the changing student profile and the data time lags, the formal data analysis only tells a partial story. The OfS/HESA data is supplemented by ICON College's APP evaluation survey. This was introduced in 2023 as part of our APP commitment to improve data, monitoring and evaluation. The survey was completed again in 2024 and will be repeated annually. In 2023, 430 students responded, and in 2024, 378 students responded, and this represents a good response rate.

In addition to OfS/HESA data and our internal APP evaluation survey data, we have undertaken extensive consultation with staff and students to understand the risks to equality of opportunity that our students experience. We began this at our February 2024 CPD training for all academic staff, and extended the discussion at the September 2024 CPD training for all staff. Staff collectively identified and agreed twelve areas of risk to equality of opportunity for students (see section A 2.1). In February 2025, we delivered an online session with 40 student representatives from the College; while they pointed to the opportunities the College provides and identified many positives, they also discussed factors that may inhibit access and success, and ten themes were identified (see section A 2.2). The risks identified by staff and students were compared and related to the analysis of performance data to identify a set of key risks for ICON College (set out in section 2.3 of the main body of the APP). The ICON College risks were mapped to the EORR risks (see section A2.3) and this is presented in table 18 in section A 2.4).

1.1 Portfolio and access profile

This section explores the College's UK domiciled, undergraduate, full-time entrants in 2023/24, drawing on HESA data (see Table 4). The College's demographic data is compared to all higher education providers using data sourced from the OfS APP data dashboard or Heidi Plus. In summary:

- **Portfolio**: 82% of the College's new entrants in 2023/24 were enrolled onto BA (Hons) Business Studies with Foundation Year. This programme is designed for students who do not have the usual academic qualifications or UCAS points for direct registration onto a degree programme; it contributes significantly to the College meeting its access targets.

- **Ethnicity**: 34% of entrants were Black or Minority Ethnic (B.A.M.E.). While this is 2 percentage points (pp) below the sector average (36%), this represents a significant

change and exceeds targets set in the 2022/23-2026/27 APP. The College will monitor the access of students from ethnic minority groups to ensure it remains in line with the sector.

- **Disability**: 3% of entrants disclosed a disability, which is 15pp below the sector average (18%). Most disabled entrants (71%) disclosed 'sensory, medical and physical' impairments e.g. vision loss, hearing loss, Autism, ADHD, rather than unseen cognitive and learning differences.

- **Sex**: 54% of entrants were male, which is 10pp above the sector average (44pp) and 46% were female, which is 10pp below the sector average (56%).

- **Age**: 96% of entrants were Mature (aged 21 and over), which is 67pp above the sector average (29%).

- **Socio-economic**: 62.2% of new entrants were from IMD Q1 and Q2 (higher deprivation) in 2022/23[61], well above the sector average of 45.0% (see table 5)

- **Entry qualifications**: 64% of entrants held qualifications at Level 2 or below (e.g. GCSEs grade 9-4 (A* to C), BTEC Level 2 Award/Certificate/Diploma, NVQ Level 2, which is 62pp above the sector average (2%).

- **Domicile region**: 77% of entrants were from London.

- **Mode and level of study**: 100% full-time, first degree.

In summary, the College's entrants in 2023/24 were mainly enrolled onto the BA (Hons) Business Studies with Foundation Year programme, predominantly local to the College (77% from London), mature (aged 21 or over on entry, 96%), and the majority held entry qualifications at Level 2 or below (64%). They were much less likely to disclose a disability (3%) than the sector average (18%). This analysis is complemented by analysis of the OfS database, which confirms that disabled students are persistently under-represented at the College for the previous four years (see table 6). Over the past 4 years aggregated data for 2540 students showed that only 1.5% of students have disclosed a disability to the College.

Table 4: 2023/24 Access Profile (UK domiciled, undergraduate, full-time entrants only)

		ICON College	All HEPs*	Compared to all HEPs
Total entrants				
Ethnicity (broad)	B.A.M.E.	34%	36%	-2pp
	White	66%	64%	+2pp
Ethnicity (detailed)	Asian	8%	16%	-8pp
	Black	11%	11%	-0pp
	Mixed	4%	6%	-2pp
	Other	11%	3%	+8pp
	White	66%	64%	+2pp
Disability (broad)	Disabled	3%	18%	-15pp

---

[61] Data from the OfS APP data dashboard

	No known disability	97%	82%	+15pp
Disability (detailed)	Sensory, medical and physical	2%	2%	-0pp
	Cognitive and learning	-	6%	-
	Mental health	-	5%	-
	Multiple impairments	-	4%	-
	Social and communication	-	1%	-
	No known disability	97%	82%	+15pp
Sex	Female	46%	56%	-10pp
	Male	54%	44%	+10pp
Age on commencement (broad)	Young (under 21)	4%	71%	-67pp
	Mature (21 and over)	96%	29%	+67pp
Age on commencement (detailed)	Under 21	4%	71%	-67pp
	21_25	12%	9%	+3pp
	26_30	15%	5%	+10pp
	31_40	32%	8%	+24pp
	41_50	24%	5%	+19pp
	51 and over	12%	2%	+10pp
Highest qualification on entry	Level 3 qualification (inc. A levels and Highers)	24%	79%	-55pp
	Qualifications at Level 2 and below	64%	2%	+62pp
	Other undergraduate qualification	5%	7%	-2pp
	Not applicable or not known	7%	8%	-1pp
Care leaver	Prefer not to say	2%	-	-
	Not known / NA	98%	-	-
Domicile region	London	77%	-	-
	East of England	10%	-	-
	South East	10%	-	-
	East Midlands	2%	-	-
	North West	-	-	-
	South West	-	-	-
	West Midlands	-	-	-
	Yorkshire and The Humber	-	-	-
Mode of study	Full time	100%	-	-
Level of study	First degree	100%	-	-
	HND or DipHE	-	-	-

Source: HESA student record. Registration population.

* All HEPs data is taken from either the Official OfS Access and Participation dashboard 22/23 access figures or HEIDI-Plus.

Table 5: Access rates by Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintiles 2022/23 (UK domiciled, undergraduate, full-time entrants)

		2022/23			Sector 2022/23	Gap 2022/23
		Numerator	Denominator	%	%	pp
Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	IMD Q 1	150	670	22.1	23.6	1.5
	IMD Q2	270	670	40.1	21.4	-18.7
	IMD Q3	170	670	24.8	18.4	-6.4
	IMD Q4	70	670	10.1	17.5	7.4
	IMD Q5	20	670	3.0	19.1	16.1

Source: Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard, July 2024 release

Table 6: Disability: All undergraduate full-time entrants by year at ICON College

Year	No Disability	Disability
2019-20	99.1%	0.9%
2020-21	98.3%	1.7%
2021-22	98.1%	1.9%
2022-23	98.3%	1.7%

Source: OfS data dashboard, July 2024 release

1.2 Continuation

Drawing on HESA data (2023/24) this section explores the proportion of the College's UK domiciled, undergraduate, full-time student entrants who left in 2023/24 without being awarded a qualification or credits (see Table 7, entrants).

- **Ethnicity:** Black entrants (9%) were more likely to leave than White entrants (5%), which may indicate a risk to equality of opportunity. Analysis of the OfS APP data dashboard demonstrates annual variations by ethnicity (see Table 8 below) and so the target will focus on all ethnic minorities, while we monitor the performance of specific groups.

- **Disability:** Disabled entrants (9%) were more likely to leave than non-disabled students (5%), which may indicate a risk to equality of opportunity. This is reflected in the trend data available in the OfS APP data dashboard (see Table 9 below).

- **IMD:** There are no equality risks comparing IMDQ5 and IMDQ1, but this data is further explored through the OfS data dashboard (see Table 10 below).

Table 7: Students who left without an award, 2023/24 (UK domiciled, undergraduate, full-time students)

	Entrants	Not an entrant

	Overall	5%	16%
Ethnicity (broad)	B.A.M.E.	6%	14%
	White	5%	16%
	Gap	**+1pp**	**-2pp**
Ethnicity (detailed)	Asian	8%	12%
	Black	9%	16%
	Mixed	-	-
	Other	-	-
	White	5%	16%
Disability (broad)	Disabled	-	-
	No known disability	5%	16%
	Gap	-	-
Disability (detailed)	Sensory, medical and physical	-	-
	Cognitive and learning	-	-
	Mental health	-	-
	Multiple impairments	-	-
	Social and communication	-	-
	No known disability	5%	16%
Sex	Female	6%	20%
	Male	5%	11%
	Gap	**+1pp**	**+9pp**
Age on commencement (broad)	Young (under 21)	-	-
	Mature (21 and over)	5%	16%
	Gap	**+1pp**	**-16pp**
Age on commencement (detailed)	Under 21	-	-
	21_25	10%	18%
	26_30	6%	18%
	31_40	5%	14%
	41_50	3%	16%
	51 and over	6%	17%
Highest qualification on entry	Postgraduate (excluding PGCE)	-	-
	PGCE	-	-
	First degree	-	-
	Level 3 qualification (including A levels and Highers)	6%	10%
	Qualifications at Level 2 and below	6%	13%
	Other undergraduate qualification	-	27%

	Not applicable or not known	-	-
Care leaver	Prefer not to say	-	-
	Not known / NA	5%	16%
Domicile region	London	5%	15%
	East of England	5%	22%
	South East	7%	13%
	East Midlands	-	-
	North West	-	-
	South West	-	-
	West Midlands	-	-
	Yorkshire and Humber	-	-
Mode of study	Full Time	5%	16%
Level of study	First degree	5%	5%
	HND or DipHE	-	24%

Source: HESA Student record. Session population.

These findings are further explored through analysis of the OfS data dashboard (see Tables 8, 9, 10 and 11). In relation to continuation data, this shows the following risks to equality:

- **Ethnicity**: Asian, Black, Mixed and Other; Black; and Asian students generally have lower rates of continuation over the last four years. This varies annually between groups, and so we have decided to focus on the A.B.M.O. group in our targets.
- **Disability**: There is limited data available but the aggregated data from the last four years suggests a continuation gap for disabled students compared to students who do not declare a disability.
- **IMD**: Comparing IMDQ3-5 with IMDQ1&2 demonstrates a persistent (although variable) equality gap between these two groups.
- **Intersectional analysis IMDQ345_White / IMDQ1&2_ABMO**: there is a generally persistent, but variable, gap between these intersectionally advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

Table 8: Student Continuation by ethnicity, percentage and percentage point gap compared to White students

Year	White	A.B.M.O.	Asian	Black
AGG last 4 years	82.6%	69.2% (13.4pp)	73.9% (8.7pp)	67.3% (15.3pp)
AGG last 2 years	72.2%	55.4% (16.7pp)	58.9% (13.3pp)	57.7% (14.5pp)
2016-17	85.4%	79.4% (6pp)	71% (14.4pp)	81.9% (3.5pp)

2017-18	89.0%	86.3% (2.7pp)	84.8% (4.2pp)	86.8% (2.2pp)
2018-19	90.1%	81.5% (8.6pp)	84.8% (5.3pp)	78.1% (11.9pp)
2019-20	89.2%	79.2% (10pp)	84.2% (5pp)	69.2% (19.9pp)
2020-21	77.3%	78.7% (-1.4pp)	83.3% (-6pp)	70.8% (6.5pp)
2021-22	58.2%	43.0% (15.2pp)	35.1% (23.1pp)	51.9% (6.4pp)

Source: APP data dashboard, July 2024 release

Table 9: Student Continuation by declared disability and percentage point gap.

Year	No Disability	Disability	Gap
AGG last 4 years	80.8%	65.8%	15pp
AGG last 2 years	69.7%	SUP	N/A
2016-17	83%	SUP	N/A
2017-18	88.3%	SUP	N/A
2018-19	88.9%	SUP	N/A
2019-20	88.0%	SUP	N/A
2020-21	77.6%	SUP	N/A
2021-22	53.8%	SUP	N/A

Source: APP data dashboard, July 2024 release

Table 10: Student continuation by IMD quintile and gap (Q3-5 compared to Q1&2)

Year	IMDQ3-5	IMDQ1&2	Gap
AGG last 4 years	82.4%	79.5%	2.9pp
AGG last 2 years	71.6%	68.0%	3.6pp
2016-17	88.7%	80.9%	7.7pp

2017-18	92.3%	86.9%	5.4pp
2018-19	91.3%	87.3%	3.9pp
2019-20	90%	86.9%	3.1pp
2020-21	77.5%	77.3%	0.2pp
2021-22	58.3%	50.4%	7.9pp

Source: APP data dashboard, July 2024 release

Table 11: Student continuation: intersectional analysis (IMDQ3-5/White compared to IMDQ12/A.B.M.O.)

Year	IMDQ345_White	IMDQ12ABMO	Gap
AGG last 4 years	82.9%	69.3%	13.6pp
AGG last 2 years	71.9%	57.4%	14.6pp
2016-17	88.0%	79.6%	8.4pp
2017-18	90.8%	86.2%	4.6pp
2018-19	90.9%	81.1%	9.9pp
2019-20	90.5%	75%	15.5pp
2020-21	76,3%	78.7%	-2.4pp
2021-22	60.0%	45.1%	14.9pp

Source: APP data dashboard, July 2024 release

1.3 Completion

The HESA data (Table 7) indicates no obvious risks to equality of opportunity for returning students, with B.A.M.E. (14%) and disabled (10%) students less likely to leave than White (16%) and non-disabled (16%) respectively. Completion data is explored further in the OfS data dashboard (see tables 12 and 13 below). No data is available for disabled students. This data suggests that ethnic minority groups have lower rates of completion than White students and students from disadvantaged areas (IMD Q1&2) have lower rates of completion that more advantaged students (IMD Q3-5).

Table 12: Student Completion by ethnicity

Year	White	A.B.M.O.	Asian	Black

AGG last 4 years	73.3%	71.5% (1.8pp)	66.1% (7.2pp)	72.6% (0.8pp)
AGG last 2 years	73.3%	68.4% (4.9pp)	69.8% (3.5pp)	66.1% (7.2pp)
2024-15	77.6%	70.6% (6.9pp)	44.4% (33.1pp)	76.6% 1pp)
2015-16	74.3%	73.3% (1pp)	58.3% (16pp)	74.9% (-0.6pp)
2016-17	72.3%	73.7% (-1.5pp)	64.3% (8pp)	76.4% (-4.1pp)
2017-18	75.0%	70.9% (4.2pp)	71.6% (3.4pp)	68.4% (6.6pp)
2018-19	71.7%	64.0% (7.8pp)	66.7% (5.1pp)	61.7% (10.1pp)

Source: Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard, July 2024 release

Table 13: Student completion by IMD quintile (Q3-5 compared to Q1&2)

Year	IMD3-5	IMDQ1-2	Gap
AGG last 4 years	76.5%	71.3%	5.2pp
AGG last 2 years	76.0%	70.1%	5.9pp
2014-15	71.6%	73.8%	2.1pp
2015-16	75.2%	73.3%	1.9pp
2016-17	72.2%	73.0%	-0.8pp
2017-18	81.3%	71.3%	10pp
2018-19	74.5%	68.4%	6.1pp

Source: Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard, July 2024 release

1.4 Attainment

This 2023/24 HESA data (see Table 14) finds158 students in the qualifiers' population in 2023/24.

- 37% (19/52) of students who were awarded a classified degree received a first or upper second-class honours. All were White and had no known disability.

Analysis of the OfS APP data dashboard (2024 release, see Tables 15 and 16) finds that:

- **Ethnicity**: Asian, Black, Mixed and Other students are slightly less likely to get a first or upper second-class degree than White students (see table 15)
- **Socio-economic status**: Students from disadvantaged areas (IMDQ1&2) are less likely to get a good degree (first or 2:1) than students from more advantaged areas (IMDQ3-5), (see table 16)

Table 14: 2023/24 Proportion of students awarded a 1st or 2:1 classification (UK domiciled, undergraduate, full-time students

Group	Student group / Gap	% 1st or 2:1
	Overall	**37%**
Ethnicity (broad)	B.A.M.E.	0%
	White	38%
	Gap	**-38pp**
Ethnicity (detailed)	Asian	0%
	Black	0%
	Mixed	-
	Other	-
	White	38%
Disability (broad)	Disabled	-
	No known disability	37%
	Gap	**-**
Disability (detailed)	Sensory, medical and physical	-

	Multiple impairments	-
	No known disability	37%
Sex	Female	25%
	Male	50%
	Gap	**-25pp**
Age on commencement (broad)	Young (under 21)	-
	Mature (21 and over)	37%
	Gap	-
Age on commencement (detailed)	Under 21	0%
	21_25	33%
	26_30	55%
	31_40	33%
	41_50	33%
	51 and over	0%
Care leaver	Not known / NA	37%
	Prefer not to say	-
Highest qualification on entry	Level 3 qualification (including A levels and Highers)	38%
	Other undergraduate qualification	0%
	Qualifications at Level 2 and below	50%
Domicile region	East Midlands	0%

	East of England	40%
	London	30%
	South East	80%
	South West	100%
	Yorkshire and The Humber	-

Source: HESA 2023/24 data

Table 15: Proportion of students awarded a first/upper second-class degree, comparing White and Asian, Black, Mixed and Other students

Year	Overall	White	A.B.M.O.	Gap
AGG last 4 years	43.8%	38.7%	35.5%	3.2pp
AGG last 2 years	43.8%	38.7%	35.5%	3.2pp
2021-22		33.6%	SUP	N/A
2022-23	47.7%	41.8%	SUP	N/A

Source: Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard, July 2024 release

Table 16: Awarding gaps (proportion of students awarded a first/upper second-class degree) between IMD quintiles Q3-5 compared to Q1&2

Year	AGG 4	AGG 2	2021-2022	2022-23
Gaps between IMDQ3-5 and IMDQ1&2	5.4	5.4	12.6	3.1

Source: Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard, July 2024 release

1.1 Progression

Data relating to progression beyond HE are limited and variable, and the numbers are small. This is summarised in Table 17 (from the OfS Data Dashboard 2024 data release). The College is not therefore setting any progression targets, however it committed to understanding more about progression and intervention strategy 5 focuses on progression.

Table 17: Summary of gaps in relation to target groups and progression

Year Group	AGG 4	AGG 2	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-2022

Young / MATURE	10.8PP	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW
NKDIS/DIS	LOW	LOW	NONE	LOW	LOW	NONE	LOW
WHITE / A.B.M.O.	-7.8	LOW	-12	-4.1	-19	LOW	LOW
MALE / FEMALE	-5.2	8.4	-13	-12	-11	9.2	4.7
IMDQ3-5/IMDQ12	-1.7	1.6	18.8	0.4	-6.1	LOW	0.6
IMDQ345_MALE / IMDQ12_FEMALE	-5.6	13.8PP	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW
IMDQ345_WHITE/ IMDQ12_ABMO	-7.4	LOW	LOW	-5.2	-19	LOW	LOW

Source: Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard, July 2024 release

1.6 Notes on HESA data population

Analysis undertaken from an OfS Access and Participation (APP) data perspective. In the absence of the OfS APP dataset and markers, a proxy APP population was created:

Access profile:

- Registration population (Z_POPSR_CYC = 1)

- All undergraduates (Z_LEVELGRP1 = 2)

- UK domiciled (4 home nations) (Z_PERMADDGRP4 = E, N, W, S)

- Full-time (Z_MODEGRP1 = 1)

- Entrants (Z_ENTRANT_CYC = 1)

Left without being awarded a qualification or credits:

- Session population (Z_POPSES_CYC = 1)

- All undergraduates (Z_LEVELGRP1 = 2)

- UK domiciled (4 home nations) (Z_PERMADDGRP4 = E, N, W, S)

- Full-time (Z_MODEGRP1 = 1)

- Entrant marker (Z_ENTRANT_CYC)

- Reason for engagement ending (RSNENGEND)

First or upper second classifications awarded:

- Qualifiers population (Z_POPQUAL_CYC = 1)

- First degree (Z_QLEVELGRP2 = 3)

- UK domiciled (4 home nations) (Z_PERMADDGRP4 = E, N, W, S)

- Full-time (Z_MODEGRP1 = 1)

- Classification of award (Z_QCLASS_CYC)

Demographic splits presented reflect the OfS Access and participation splits where it is possible to recreate them using the HESA data. Sector comparison data is taken from either the official APP access data or HEIDI-Plus.

1.7 Notes on OfS APP data dashboard analysis

The analysis has used the Office for Students Access and Participation Data Dashboard, July 2024 release. The data presented relates to all FT undergraduates.

A2: Identification of risks

2.1 Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) identified by the Off[62]

- Risk 1: Knowledge and skills. Students may not have equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto HE courses that match their expectation and ambitions.

- Risk 2: Information and guidance. Students may not have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, or to make informed choice about their HE options.

- Risk 3: Perception of higher education. Students may not feel able to apply to HE, or certain types of providers within HE, despite being qualified.

- Risk 4: Application success rates. Students may not be accepted to a higher education course, or may not be accepted to certain types of providers within HE, despite being qualified.

- Risk 5: Limited choice of course type and delivery mode. Students may not have equal opportunity to access a sufficiently wide variation of HE course types.

- Risk 6: Insufficient academic support. Students may not receive sufficient personalised academic support to achieve a positive outcome.

- Risk 7: Insufficient personal support. Students may not receive sufficient personalised nonacademic support or have sufficient access to extracurricular activities to achieve a positive outcome.

- Risk 8: Mental health. Students may not experience an environment that is conducive to good mental health and wellbeing.

---

[62] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/equality-of-opportunity-riskregister/

- Risk 9: Ongoing impacts of coronavirus. Students may be affected by the ongoing consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

- Risk 10: Cost pressures. Increases in cost pressures may affect a student's ability to complete their course or obtain a good grade.

- Risk 11: Capacity issues. Students may not have equal opportunity to access limited resources related to HE, such as suitable accommodation.

- Risk 12: Progression from higher education. Students may not have equal opportunity to progress to an outcome they consider to be a positive reflection on their HE experience. This may affect a wide range of WP target group students/graduates.

2.2 Risks to equality of opportunity identified by staff at ICON College

- Cost /financial issues

- Academic skills/ previous educational experiences

- English Language skills and academic writing skills

- IT Skills

- Students do not use personal tutoring

- Limited sense of community and belonging

- Employment while studying

- Other responsibilities

- Facilities and attitudes towards disabled students

- Staff lack experience of teaching students at Foundation Level

- Time lags in securing Graduate employment

- Admission of students not able to succeed

2.3 Risks to equality of opportunity identified by ICON College students

- Limited understanding and commitment to studying

- Computer skills and access to laptops

- Assessment guidance and delays

- Staff absences and changes

- Setting up placements (Health and Social Care)

- Inadequate facilities and services for disabled students (lift, toilets)

- Poor behaviour management / disrespect for teachers

- Academic and language skills and reliance on mother tongue by dominant groups

- Complex processes

- Delays receiving financial support

2.4 ICON College Risks

Based on thematic analysis and combining the risks identified by staff and students we have identified the key risks for students at ICON College.

- **ICR1: Expectations.** Students often have incomplete information and knowledge of what is required and expected of them to access and study successfully in higher education and progress into graduate roles, due to their family and educational background. In particular many do not understand the commitment and autonomy necessary for higher education study. This can result in low rates of attendance, poor behaviour during teaching sessions, insufficient engagement with teaching and support to develop HE skills and development (including personal tutoring), poor quality, late or non-submission of assessments, difficulties setting up placements due to forward planning and limited understanding of how to secure a graduate role.

- **ICR2: Skills**. Many students entering ICON College have skills gaps in relation to IT, academic studying and English. In 2023/24, 96% of entrants were Mature (aged 21 and over) compared to the sector average (29%); 64% of entrants held qualifications at Level 2 or below (compared to the sector average of 2%); and 66% were of White other and had English as an additional language (EAL). These low starting skills mean that the transition to HE is challenging, and there is lots of catching up or extra learning required especially during the first year of study. This can feel daunting and overwhelming, and the skills gaps can continue to create challenges.

- **ICR3: Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) issues**. The learning, teaching and assessment experience can be challenging for students, and in turn staff. Students entering ICON College have different previous learning experiences and knowledge and challenging personal circumstances. Some may miss taught sessions, and have different understandings about the personal and autonomous responsibilities of studying in HE and the assessment requirements. Staff have to play multiple roles, helping students to attend, engage and succeed, teaching at a range of levels and intervening to improve the experience and outcomes of students at risk of poorer outcomes.

- **ICR4: Financial context:** the majority of students are low-income and combine studying with a high employment workload. In 2022/3 more than 60% of ICON College students were from IMDQ1&2, compared to 45% in the sector. Our internal APP survey found in 2024 that more than 60% (63%) of respondents worked more than 16 hours per week. The burden of working long hours makes students time poor and vulnerable, especially to payment delays and extra costs. In addition, as they are already in employment, it takes longer to progress to graduate employment/roles.

- **ICR5: Institutional** infrastructure, policies processes and staffing issues contribute to the challenges students experience (e.g. accessible classrooms, sickness and leave of absence, staff attendance and turnover and staff capacity to engage and support diverse

and challenging cohorts). We are committed to identifying and addressing our own institutional context that may contribute to inequality.

2.5 Discussion of ICON College risks to equality

(a) <u>Disabled students' access and success (ICR</u>

There are only a small number of students recorded as declaring a disability. According to the OfS APP data dashboard 1.7% of entrants declared a disability in 2022/23 and HESA data for 2023/24 indicates that 3% of entrants declared a disability in 2023/24. Our APP evaluation survey suggests that more students have a disability, and the number is increasing. In our 2023 survey (N=430) 3% of students said they had a disability and 8% preferred not to say; in our 2024 survey (N=378) 8% (29) said they had a disability and 7% (27) preferred not to say.

The data show that of the students who declare a disability to ICON College, these are largely NOT cognitive or learning differences. For example, aggregated data from the last two years for all undergraduate entrants (APP data dashboard July 2024 release) shows that they were most likely to identify 'multiple impairments' (0.7%); sensory, medical or physical impairments (0.6%) and mental health issues (0.3%); fewer than two students disclosed a cognitive difference or learning difficulty (similar trends are seen in the aggregated data from the last four years for all undergraduate entrants). These patterns differ from English national data (TASO 2023[63]) which finds the following percentages of students declaring specific disabilities: cognitive or learning difficulties (5%); mental health conditions (3.9%); multiple impairments (2.6%); sensory, medical or physical impairments (2.2%) and social or communication impairment (0.6%).

There is limited data available about the continuation rate of disabled students, but the aggregated data from the last four years for all undergraduates shows a continuation rate of 65.8% for students who disclose a disability compared to 80.8% for students with no known disability. The aggregated data from the last two years and four years suggest that students who declare a disability have a higher rate of completion than students with no known disability. There is currently no data available about the attainment of students who declare a disability.

Students with disabilities are not accessing ICON College, or are not declaring disabilities, especially students with cognitive differences. The evidence suggests that this is related to student expectations of higher education study and support: a lack of information, guidance and knowledge about higher education creates a reluctance to disclose a disability and to access the academic and personal support provided by the College. Institutional infrastructure, policies, processes and staff do not sufficiently compensate for this reluctance to declare a disability and seek support. This lack of awareness and reluctance may be a legacy of growing up outside of the UK and/or in a different culture and education system, and not receiving a diagnosis and support in the school sector. Different countries and cultures have different views and beliefs about disability (Nurjannah et al 2021[71]), which impact on students' willingness to disclose and discuss disabilities to higher education providers, as is demonstrated in this South African study (McKinney and Swartz,

[63] TASO (2023) Summary report: TASO - Document subtitle What works to reduce equality gaps for disabled students https://taso.org.uk/libraryitem/report-what-works-to-reduce-equality-gaps-for-disabled-students/, last accessed 27/6/25. [71] Nurjannah, A. P. L., Rahajeng, U. W., & Arawindha, U. (2021, June). Disability is Diversity: A Multiculturalism Perspectives on Disability Inclusion in Higher Education. In *ISCS 2020: Proceedings of the 1st International Seminar on Cultural Sciences, ISCS 2020, 4 November 2020, Malang, Indonesia* (p. 266). European Alliance for Innovation.

2020[64]). A study exploring attitudes towards intellectual disabilities and inclusive educational

practices in Romania found that the educational system remains heavily segregated (Gradea[65], 2018, p2). Comparative research examining Kuwait and Belgium found that hidden disabilities in particular inhibit academic success (Hefiela 2024[66]). Without information, guidance and knowledge about the opportunities and support provided by ICON College, students may be less likely to access the College, or to declare a disability (especially unseen disabilities) and utilise the support provided, leading to lower rates of access and continuation. Disabled students who do access the support and persist beyond the first year, appear to have higher rates of completion that students who do not declare a disability. Disabled students may also experience financial constraints, which do not enable them to seek a formal diagnosis of a disability or additional personal or technological support.

(b) <u>Continuation: Transition and support, including financial support</u>

At ICON College, the overall rate of continuation, from first year of study to second, is low compared to the sector, and there are gaps in relation to specific equity groups, particularly between students from ethnic minorities (A.B.M.O.) in comparison to White students; students from disadvantaged areas (IMDQ1&2) compared to their more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5). Furthermore, students from disadvantaged areas and ethnic minority groups (IMDQ1&2_AMBO) have lower rates of continuation that more advantaged White students groups (IMDQ3-5_White). Data in relation to the continuation rates of other groups paint a varied picture due to small numbers.

The evidence suggests that our students have comparatively low rates of continuation due to their less-well informed expectations of studying in higher education; their comparatively low skill levels (including academic, IT and English language skills); their lack of experience of studying at a higher level and their financial context. Some students do not access academic skills and personal support to a sufficient degree. Our student representatives were very clear that many students do not comprehend the commitment and individual autonomy required to engage with their studies, utilise the opportunities provided and maximise their success. Student-led work to help new students to understand these expectations, underpinned by clear information about support available, and the provision of additional support to meet the skills shortages identified are essential to help students plan and maintain their engagement in learning and related activities. Early assessment of students' skills will reinforce the need to utilise the support available, and will be used within the core academic teaching to develop a personalised development plan (PDP). Student attendance, due to poor study habits and financial pressures can result in students falling behind. The VLE will be improved to support independent learning – preparatory and follow-up study, and accessing additional information and guidance. Proactive personal tutoring will follow up

[64] McKinney, E. L., & Swartz, L. (2020). Integration into higher education: experiences of disabled students in South Africa. *Studies in Higher Education*, *47*(2), 367–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1750581
[65] Gradea, I. (2018) Attitudes Towards Intellectual Disabilities in Romania. Looking at Linkages with Educational Policy and Integrated Youth Programming. Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness https://www.socialconnectedness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Attitudes-Towards-Intellectual-Disabilities-in-Romania-Final-Report.pdf, accessed 1/5/25
[66] Hefiela, A. (2024) Invisible Disabilities in Higher Education—A Cultural Comparison of Students' Experiences with Invisible Disabilities in Kuwait and Belgium. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, **12**, 320-374. doi: 10.4236/jss.2024.122020.

students not utilising the support that has been collaboratively identified in their PDP as helping them to succeed.

Student representatives also identified issues relating to understanding what is required in assessments, and staff indicated that this problem is particularly acute with resubmissions. The course-based induction (introduced as part of our previous APP) will be reviewed by students to ensure that it is providing students with the information, skills and understanding to succeed in

learning and assessment in HE. Effective communication about assessment, feedforward and feedback and resubmission will be addressed through staff development.

In addition, many of our students are combining studying with working. In our 2024 APP evaluation survey 21% of respondents said they were not engaged in any paid employment, while 16% work up to around the equivalent of two days per week, and over 60% work more than 16 hours per week. The WonkHE belonging survey (December 2024)[67] found that around half the respondents were in paid employment; of those in work, around 50% were working more than 15 hours per week, and this increased to more than 70% for students from lower socio-economic groups. Feedback from student reps, and applications for financial assistance, demonstrate that many students experience difficulties when they encounter unexpected financial challenges and they need quick access to hardship funding to enable them to continue their studies.

(c) Success: Academic experience, staff development and financial support

The completion data indicates that A.B.M.O., specifically Black and Asian students have lower rates of completion than White students, while disabled students and mature students have higher rates of completion than students with no known disability and young students respectively. There is an attainment gap between students from disadvantaged areas (IMDQ1&2) compared to peers from more advantaged areas (IMDQ3-5). There is some limited evidence of an attainment gap between A.B.M.O. and White students (aggregated data from the last four years for all undergraduates demonstrates a 3.2pp gap). These data are limited, but we feel that understanding and improving continuation, completion and attainment rates are important equality priorities for the College.

Many of the challenges identified above continue to influence the student experience beyond the first year of study. For example, students' skills continue to need to be developed, they experience challenges with understanding and applying assessment requirements and they continue to juggle employment and studying and experience financial challenges, which can be catastrophic for them. Evidence suggests that the majority of on-course issues experienced by students are most effectively addressed through the course, rather than through additional support services. The most important resource we have are our staff, and we will continue to develop their understanding, skill and capacity to support our students to thrive and succeed in HE, especially in relation to transparency and support for assessment. The lack of secure trend data (due to small numbers and a significantly changed student profile) means that we need to continue to monitor our students' experience and outcomes to ensure that gaps do not 'appear' and that we address issues arising. We will also offer a more responsive financial support system to address unexpected challenges.

---

[67] https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2024/12/Students-at-work-Belong-December-2024.pdf,

(d) <u>Lack of information and skills for progression and different expectations and aspirations</u>

There are limited and variable data available about the progression of our students into graduate employment. From our 2024 APP evaluation survey we know that more than 80% wish to secure a graduate job and around 70% are interested in starting their own business or expanding a family business. The limited data we have available suggest that progression within 15 months is relatively low (under 50%) and mature students do less well than young students. White students (who at ICON College are predominantly 'White Other' and non-native speakers of English) have lower rates of progression than students from A.B.M.O. groups, indeed Black students have the

highest rate of progression by ethnic group (Black = 53.0%, Asian = 49.8%, A.B.M.O. = 52.9%, White = 45.1%, based on four-year aggregated data of all undergraduates). The evidence suggests that this may be due to the fact that the majority (80%) of students are in employment whilst studying (due to financial constraints), that they may have less well-informed expectations about the process and requirements for securing graduate employment, and they may lack the skills to effectively apply for graduate roles. In addition, many aspire to some form of entrepreneurship or self-employment rather than a more traditional graduate job; this may be partly related to their age. While we could set targets to improve progression, we prefer to find out more about the progression aspirations and experiences of our students and work collaboratively with our students and alumni to design and pilot a programme of support.

Annexe B: Further information that sets out the rationale, assumptions and evidence base for each intervention strategy that is included in the APP

The evidence base informing and underpinning our intervention strategies is set out in the main body of the APP and in the footnotes to make the evidence accessible to readers. The rationale and any assumptions are also spelt out in the text. A theory of change for each activity or intervention strategy will be developed in 2025/26. The theories of change will draw on the knowledge generated in assessing our risks, the internal and external evidence base cited in the APP and on the objectives, activity descriptions, outcomes and targets that inform this APP.

Fees, investments and targets
2026-27 to 2029-30

Provider name: ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd

Provider UKPRN: 10003239

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.

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£200,000	£221,000	£185,000	£167,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£459,000	£504,000	£424,000	£382,000

Table 6b - Investment summary

Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£143,000	£158,000	£133,000	£119,000

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£30,000	£33,000	£28,000	£25,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£50,000	£55,000	£46,000	£42,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£120,000	£133,000	£111,000	£100,000
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (£)**	**£200,000**	**£221,000**	**£185,000**	**£167,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment (as % of HFI)*	**3.5%**	**3.5%**	**3.5%**	**3.5%**
Access activity investment	**Total access investment funded from HFI (£)**	**£200,000**	**£221,000**	**£185,000**	**£167,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)*	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£138,000	£151,000	£127,000	£115,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£46,000	£50,000	£42,000	£38,000
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£275,000	£303,000	£255,000	£229,000
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (£)**	**£459,000**	**£504,000**	**£424,000**	**£382,000**
Financial support investment	*Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)*	**8.0%**	**8.0%**	**8.0%**	**8.0%**
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£143,000	£158,000	£133,000	£119,000
Research and evaluation investment	*Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)*	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Office for Students

Fees, investments and targets

2026-27 to 2029-30

Provider name: ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd Coll

Provider UKPRN:9
1000323

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
Increase the number of students at ICON College who have a declared disability.	PTA_1	Access	Reported disability	Disability reported		Percentage of entrants that declare a Disability: increases by 2+pp per year	No	HESA publications (please include details in commentary)	2023-24	Percentage	3	5	7	10	12
	PTA_2														
	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
Reduce continuation gap between ABMO students and their White peers.	PTS_1	Continuation	Ethnicity	Not specified (please give detail in description)	White	Asian, Black, Mixed and Other (A.B.M.O)	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	15	13	11	8	5
Eliminate the continuation gap between students from the most disadvantaged areas (IMDQ1&2) and their more affluent peers (IMDQ3-4)	PTS_2	Continuation	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1 and 2	IMD quintile 3, 4 and 5		No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	8	6	4	2	0

Aim	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone	2028-29 milestone	2029-30 milestone
Reduce the continuation gap between the most disadvantaged group ethinic groups (IMDQ1&2_ABMO) and more advantaged peers (IMDQ3-5_White)	PTS_3	Continuation	Intersection of characteristics	Other (please specify in description)	Other (please specify in description)	IMDQ1&2_ABMO compared to IMDQ3-5_White	No	The access and participation dashboard	2021-22	Percentage points	15	13	10	7	3
Reduce the continuation gap between students who declare a disablity and peers who do not declare a disablity	PTS_4	Continuation	Reported disability	Disability reported	No disability reported	Baseline is the 4 year aggregate (2018/19-2021/22)	No	The access and participation dashboard	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	15	13	10	7	3
Eliminate the completion gap between the most disadvantaged students (IMDQ1&2) and their more advantaged peers (IMDQ35)	PTS_5	Completion	Ethnicity	Not specified (please give detail in description)	White	Asian, Black, Mixed and Other (A.B.M.O)	No	The access and participation dashboard	2018-19	Percentage points	8	7	5	3	0
Eliminate the completion gap between the most disadvantaged students (IMDQ1&2) and their more advantaged peers (IMDQ35)	PTS_6	Completion	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1 and 2	IMD quintile 3, 4 and 5		No	The access and participation dashboard	2018-19	Percentage points	6	5	4	3	0
Eliminate the awarding gap between ABMO students and White peers	PTS_7	Attainment	Ethnicity	Not specified (please give detail in description)	White	Asian, Black, Mixed and Other (A.B.M.O), baseline is the 2 year aggregate (2021/22 - 2022/23)	No	The access and participation dashboard	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	3	3	2	1	0
Eliminate the awarding gap between the most disadvantaged students (IMDQ1&2) and their more advantaged peers (IMDQ35)	PTS_8	Attainment	Deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivations [IMD])	IMD quintile 1 and 2	IMD quintile 3, 4 and 5		No	The access and participation dashboard	2022-23	Percentage points	3	3	2	1	0
	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														