

What is an Access and Participation Plan?

All universities are required to produce Access and Participation Plans (APPs), which are approved by the universities' regulator, the Office for Students (OfS). St Mary's University's Access and Participation Plan sets out how we will take meaningful and effective action to promote equality of opportunity for traditionally disadvantaged or underrepresented groups (as determined by the OfS) to access, succeed in and progress from higher education.



You can see the full Access and Participation Plan for St Mary's University [here](#).

KEY POINTS (pg 10-13 of the full APP)

The focus of our APP is on improving outcomes for specific groups of students. Careful analysis of our data and performance shows that, historically, outcomes can be different for some groups of students compared to their peers; and the demographic characteristics most often linked with disparities in outcomes are: Prior educational experience (qualification type); Ethnicity; Gender; Socio-economic deprivation indicators and Multiple disadvantage (e.g. care experience/ caring responsibility/ asylum-seeking or refugee experience). Based on these, our key objectives over the next few years will be to:

- Increase the number of Asian students entering SMU.
- Remove any disparities in outcomes between students entering with BTEC or A level qualifications, in relation to continuation and completion rates, and the proportions of students graduating with a 1st or 2:1 degree
- Remove any racial disparities in the proportions of students completing their degrees, graduating with a 1st or 2:1 and progressing to graduate level employment or post-graduate study.
- Address gender differences by increasing the proportion of male students completing their degrees and graduating with a 1st or a 2:1
- Increase the likelihood that students who were previously eligible for Free School Meals will graduate with a 1st or 2:1 degree.

Whilst we are working hard to address and eliminate any gaps and have made progress in many areas over recent years, we still have further to go and so we will continue to examine what we offer and make changes to what we do to address inequalities.

FEES WE CHARGE

At St Mary's University, the current **maximum** undergraduate fees charged for UK students are: • £9,250 per year for full-time study • £6,935 for part-time study • £11,100 for accelerated degree study, though this will change for students beginning their studies in 2025/26.



You can see the most up-to-date fees for courses [here](#).

FINANCIAL HELP AVAILABLE (pg 33 of the APP)

We offer financial support to students from households in socioeconomic disadvantage, to help them access higher education and continue studying until their course is completed. The support includes:

- An annual [bursary](#) of £2,000 for each year of undergraduate study for students eligible for Free School Meals during their secondary education, or other significant financial disadvantage
- A comprehensive package of financial and practical support for students with experience of the care system, or who are permanently estranged from their families, through our [St Mary's Cares scheme](#):
- A [hardship fund](#) to support students who are experiencing extreme unforeseen financial difficulty or unexpected financial crisis during their time at university
- An [engagement fund](#) to help students with in financial need to access extra-curricular activities which enhance their studies and promote their 'sense of belonging' with St Mary's.



You can find information about the full range of financial support [here](#).

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS (pg 36 of the APP)

Prospective students receive information on fees and financial support at in-person and virtual events, such as our open days, and by email communications.

Current students receive information about fees and the financial support available through our student portal, internal communications campaigns and emails.



All of the most up-to-date information is on our university website [here](#):

WHAT WE ARE AIMING TO ACHIEVE (pg 10-13 of the APP)

Our overall aim is to support students to access higher education and create an environment where all students at St Mary's can achieve their full potential, regardless of their background or prior experiences.

To this end we are constantly trying to identify and remove barriers and improve our academic, engagement and support offer for students, so we have developed four over-arching themes on which to focus our work: We will:

- **Collaborate with schools, colleges and other appropriate partners to raise attainment, clarify education, and career pathways and improve teaching and learning consistency and expectations, between pre-HE and undergraduate qualifications.** This will include WP outreach work, admissions and transition support and academic programme development.
- **Increase students' sense of belonging, confidence, and well-being, to address barriers and improve success.** This will include WP student engagement and enhancement activity both embedded in programmes and in extra-curricular activity, including student services, SMSU, and direct financial support.
- **Enhance students' opportunities for academic skills development and personalised support.** This will include increasing the inclusivity of our curricula, a focus on authentic and inclusive assessments, and support available through personal tutoring, learning development and student engagement and success staff.
- **Prepare students for excellent progression after university.** This will include opportunities within the curriculum and beyond, to recognise and enhance transferable skills for career development and/or postgraduate study.

WHAT WE ARE DOING TO ADDRESS KEY RISKS TO EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY (pg 14-33 of the APP)

We have identified a number of programmes of activity to support achievement of our aims and targets:

- **Continue to expand our sustained engagement programmes** with schools and colleges to raise pupil attainment and increase their expectations to study for HE qualifications. By working with collaborative partners, we will improve our targeting and reach with local schools and colleges and support more pupils from underrepresented groups to progress to higher education.
- **Continue to improve the quality and availability of data** to monitor students' progress and use this data to scrutinise outcomes, drive initiatives and target resources.
- **Diversifying provision** by continuing to evaluate our current degree offer and explore different study options, including growing our partnerships, apprenticeships and accelerated degrees.
- **Develop more structured, consistent and inclusive induction, engagement and transition programmes** focusing on both academic and social integration for different student groups.
- **Ensure that our course design and review processes focus on continually improving inclusivity** in curriculum content, delivery and assessment, and address diverse student experiences.
- **Develop more opportunities with FE and HE partners** to provide more flexible and diverse ways to access and succeed in HE and improve progression to employment or further study.
- **Embed effective and inclusive teaching and authentic assessment approaches**, student academic support and employability into programme design, delivery and assessment.
- **Offer meaningful financial support, advice and practical help**, including bursaries, hardship and engagement funding for eligible students.

- **Most disadvantaged or vulnerable student groups.** We will also focus on the experiences of students who may have faced many educational disadvantages, and endeavour to improve their access to our programmes, their experiences with us and their progression to life after education, through the strategies and initiatives we deliver. This includes those with experience of the care system, or permanently estranged from their families, students who would have been identified as 'young carers' whilst in compulsory education, refugee or asylum-seeking students, and students of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma heritage.

HOW STUDENTS CAN GET INVOLVED (pg 27-28 of the APP)

We collaborate with a diverse range of students through our Students' Union and Student Societies, Student Ambassadors and Student Reps, to support us with the effective delivery of our APP. We are always looking to engage with new student voices groups and new types of student representation to help us further increase the diversity of our collaborators and ensure they represent many backgrounds.



To give feedback, or become involved in this work, email our Widening Participation Team at wideningparticipation@stmarys.ac.uk find out more through our [Widening Participation](#) or [Student Engagement webpages](#), or contact our [Students' Union](#).

EVALUATION: HOW WE WILL MEASURE WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED (pg 28-29 of the APP)

Our programmes of activity are informed by the best available evidence about what works for students. We will collect quantitative data about student outcomes, qualitative data about the student experience and use a wide range of feedback to evaluate:

- How well our programme design, delivery and assessment reflect the diversity of our population and supports the success of our students from different backgrounds
- How the different activities we are undertaking impact on aspects of student life, and help us to improve the university experience for all students in our target groups
- How the general strategies and targeted actions we deliver impact on our overall aims of improved access, success and progression for traditionally disadvantaged or underrepresented groups

The Head of Widening Participation, together with the dedicated WP Research and Impact Evaluation Officer, will drive and lead the evaluation of the implementation of the APP, working with relevant departments across the university, including academic departments, Student Services and Strategic Planning. The Learning, Teaching and Student Outcomes Committee will monitor, evaluate and report on these processes to all other appropriate committees. We will scrutinise the implementation of actions, monitor their impact on target groups and examine ongoing progress against yearly milestones to ensure we are addressing our aims and understand where resources should be targeted. We will use the best sector evidence to inform our decisions and incorporate appropriate impact evaluation methodologies, including the work of NERUPI and TASO.



We will publish evidence from our evaluations on our website. Find out more about current projects and how we evaluate impact [here](#).

Contact details for further information



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