

# Access and participation plan: student submission template

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<b>Name of university or college:</b>	Bournemouth University
<b>Date submitted:</b>	01/10/2024
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Please ensure that you maintain independence from your university or college when completing this submission.

## Summary

Are you satisfied that your university or college has provided you with access to sufficient information and data to complete the student submission?

We consider that overall, we have been provided access to sufficient information and data when BU had it available to share with us. SUBU's four Full Time Officers (FTOs), four Part Time Officers (PTOs), and some SUBU staff were members of BU's formal APP committees and strategy teams. SUBU staff and Officers also met with BU's Access and Participation Analyst who explained the datasets, the early versions of Risks to Equality of Opportunity and Intervention Strategies, pointed out data sources and answered SUBU's questions.

Individually, BU staff members who were working on elements of the APP's development were supportive in sharing and discussing data and plans with SUBU as soon as they were approved for sharing with students for feedback. These early versions are not substantially different from those in BU's draft APP, which was subsequently approved by BU's Board on 20<sup>th</sup> September. Although most of the intervention strategies were clearly stated and outlined (with the exception of financial specifics), the timelines for input were short and it would have been helpful for SUBU to have had a more advanced notice of the later versions of the APP plan to make a more informed student submission.

## Approach

Can you tell us briefly how this student submission was put together, for example your approach to gathering the views of different students?

This is how SUBU built our student submission:

- We identified and extracted APP-relevant feedback data from SUBU's own student feedback gathered through varied mechanisms and student voice initiatives throughout 2022-23 and 2023-24. This specific student feedback data was also shared with BU's Access and Participation Analyst as additional context for BU's APP development.
- During 2023-24, we gathered data through two focus groups with SUBU's APP Consultants, made up of our Executive Committee members which includes faculty-level elected Student Rep roles: President; Vice President Education; Vice President Welfare and Community; Vice President Opportunities; Asian, Arab and Ethnic Minorities Officer; Black Students' Officer; Disabilities, Accessibility and Neuro-Diverse Officer; LGBTQ+ Officer; Trans, Non-Binary, Intersex & Gender Identity+ Officer; Women's Officer; Business School Faculty Officer; Media and Communication Faculty Officer; Science and Technology Faculty Officer; and Health and Social Sciences Faculty Officer. The focus groups provided feedback specifically on BU's Risks to Equality of Opportunity and their proposed Intervention Strategies.
- We used information from the Bournemouth University Access and Participation data dashboard found on the OfS website.
- We referred to BU's data, information, Risks to Equality of Opportunity and Intervention Strategies, and also the draft APP document.
- It was agreed that SUBU's four Full Time Officers are members of five of BU's six Intervention Strategy Teams established in May 2024 with meetings taking place across May and June. Within such challenging timelines of BU's APP work, FTOs were constrained by their availability for meeting attendance, which limited their input somewhat. For the meetings they could attend, FTO feedback was actively sought and valued by BU.
- We sought approval from our 2024-25 Full Time Officers for the draft Student Submission, ahead of submission to OfS on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024.

## Evidence

Please list any evidence sources referred to in this submission:

SUBU's own evidence sources used in this submission are:

- Our online feedback tool SimOn, which provided qualitative comments from students (a total of 11,528 undergraduate comments in 2023-24 and 5,155 in 2022-23). SimOn is open throughout the academic year and is the main source of regular student feedback for our Student Reps.

- SUBU's Speak Week initiatives, which include running a survey twice each year across one week (once per semester). In 2023-24, 936 undergraduate (UG) home students responded to the surveys, with 810 doing so in 2022-23.
- SUBU's annual surveys for 2023-24 and 2022-23, which together provided feedback from 924 UG home students.
- The feedback from the two focus groups that we ran with SUBU's APP Consultants – a student group including all of SUBU's Full and Part Time Officer roles (our Executive Committee).

## Commentary

To what extent do the student body think that:

- Your university or college has identified and focused the plan on its greatest risks to equality of opportunity?

Based on the data and information shared with SUBU by BU, and against the context of our student feedback evidence, we agree that BU has identified and focused their APP on the greatest risks to equality of opportunity for the specific groups of UG home students.

- The intervention strategies outlined by your university or college seem a credible way to address these risks? For example, they are based on credible and relevant evidence and student insights.

SUBU has reviewed the data on access and attainment gaps and association between risk factors and characteristics and agrees that BU's Intervention Strategies are overall a credible way to address these risks. It appears BU has used evidence and insights in an appropriate way to inform these strategies. SUBU provided BU with APP-relevant student feedback data that had been collected via our own mechanisms over the last two academic years, and we believe the final version of the Intervention Strategies and whole provider approach have incorporated this feedback and reflects what SUBU are seeing as the top issues and aspects that are impacting on the student experience.

1. **Access and attainment raising** SUBU's APP Consultants considered that overall BU's ideas and plans for access were good. They did flag that BU should manage expectations and ensure the information given to students about support on offer is completely accurate and that the support is supplied consistently. They also considered that some 'basic' points should be covered with students in advance of their university journeys, and that the quality of interactions between staff and students before and after starting at BU is crucial in helping students feel confident and supported. In terms of attainment support, our March 2024 Speak Week survey shows that academic achievement is among the biggest worries students face with 88% of 350 UG home students stating they were Extremely to Somewhat worried about their academic achievement, and 76% were Extremely to Somewhat worried about their confidence levels. This indicates the importance for BU students of initiatives to support continuation, completion and attainment.
2. **Transitions and sense of belonging** Overall SUBU's APP Consultants considered the plans and ideas were relevant and well-planned. They flagged that not all students disclose a diagnosis or can access one, and some BU staff lack understanding of conditions and disabilities which means the support is lacking and compounds the issues for students. They welcomed BU's initiatives to support students moving from each level to the next (as this can

feel like a real 'step up'), and the 'Get Ready for University' events and the events targeted to specific student groups. SUBU's APP Consultants also considered that more consistency across different faculty and department approaches is needed (with flexibility where appropriate due to discipline/ student profile), so that students have a more comparable and equally supportive experience. SUBU's student feedback from our annual survey demonstrates that involvement with SUBU is valuable in supporting students, for example 80% of 648 UG home students considered their SUBU involvement to have supported their sense of belonging/ student community. Therefore joint initiatives focusing on seamless transitions, staged inductions and a rich programme of welcoming events and buddying activities captured in the plans are a welcome way forward and we would continue to explore more opportunities for collaborative projects enhancing the students' sense of belonging.

3. **Engagement, Skills and Academic Support** SUBU's APP Consultants were positive about the plans and use of attendance data, but also believed that the quality of staff contact with students is as important as attendance and engagement monitoring – it is critical that staff are considerate, empathetic and understanding of different types of students. SUBU were pleased to see that BU's draft APP introduced compassionate communication as part of the whole provider approach and hope that this will enhance the consistency of the support offered to students. SUBU's own student feedback gathered over the last two years demonstrates the prevalence of students undertaking substantial amounts of part-time work, which whilst beneficial to student budgets and work readiness, inevitably impacts on their learning, engagement and attendance. Our November 2023 Speak Week survey shows that 30% of 577 home UG students missed on-campus sessions to do part-time work, and 33% missed sessions due to the teaching not being engaging enough. 24% of the same 577 students missed one and 14% missed two or more sessions per week. Student engagement is a complex challenge and SUBU considers the possibility of changes to timetable structures as one of BU's most impactful wider organisational options to support increased student engagement as amongst other improvements this would help to facilitate BU students extracurricular and part-time working engagements. SUBU's SimOn feedback for 2023-24 shows that timetable-related comments (in particular, long gaps in teaching days and unsuitability for students' personal circumstances) account for 14% of 5,668 negative comments from UG students.
4. **Curriculum** SUBU APP Consultants considered the plans were good overall; in particular they suggested that the inclusive curriculum work should be expanded to cover neurodiversity and disability in addition to ethnicity as this would more accurately reflect the overall student population at BU. SUBU are pleased to see the expanded inclusive curriculum work in this Intervention Strategy in BU's draft APP. SUBU's APP Consultants also reflected that BU should focus on responding to/ acting on the student feedback provided through, for example, Student Reps via SimOn/ their Student:Staff Forums and through the National Student Survey, as in some cases very similar feedback is repeated each year.
5. **Welfare and Finance** SUBU APP Consultants thought the ideas were positive and also flagged that whilst communicating welfare information to every student is challenging, BU's support should be more visible to more students. As with Intervention Strategy 3, to help students financially they also wanted the timetable to better facilitate PT work due to student cost pressures. The level of concern that BU students have about their finances is shown by our March 2024 Speak Week survey, where 89% of 350 home UG students said they were Extremely to Somewhat worried about money (with 61% being Extremely/ Very worried), and our November 2022 Speak Week survey where 98% of 487 home UG students were Extremely to Somewhat worried about the rising cost of living (with 65% being Extremely/ Very worried). For this reason, we are pleased that BU has increased its APP low household income bursary threshold, and extended its care leavers' bursary to include estranged students. .
6. **Employability** SUBU Exec and the Full-Time Officers were positive about the plans and are keen for SUBU to work more closely with BU on employability, as there is much scope for students to enhance their employability through SUBU involvement as identified in our march

Speak Week feedback. They also considered students need more support to find placements; this feedback is also reflected in the last 2 years of SimOn UG home student feedback, and Placement focus groups completed by SUBU's Officers in 2023/24 as students are suggesting that to improve the placement experience BU needs to have a more flexible placement model, stronger industry connections and more tailored course and industry-specific support. The issue of unpaid placements not being inclusive for all students was also raised by SUBU APP Consultants, in addition to the financial barriers of travel, accommodation and potentially re-location in taking up placements.

- Your university or college's new plan represents a change in their approach?

Moderate change

- Please explain your answer:

This BU APP is more explicit than before in describing the detailed interventions, and the whole provider approach evidences a more holistic approach to supporting the students that have been identified as those with the greatest risks to equality of opportunity.

- Your university or college's access and participation plan is sufficiently ambitious in addressing the risks?

We consider that aspects of BU's whole provider approach are ambitious in addressing the risks, as they mark an institution-wide focus on consistency of staff communication and support and a new framework for more effective use of the student voice throughout the institution.

- Your university or college has engaged you effectively in the design of its access and participation plan?

BU has actively sought and welcomed the relevant student feedback data that SUBU has shared with them to help inform the APP development, and we can see that BU has incorporated some of this student feedback into the resulting APP draft. In this way, some of SUBU's student feedback has influenced the content of BU's APP. For example, BU has adjusted their Intervention Strategies and whole provider approach based on some of the student feedback from SUBU's focus groups.

BU were keen to obtain additional student engagement with the design of this APP, and in March a proposal from BU staff and SUBU to run a collaborative student consultation event for additional feedback on the Intervention Strategies was approved by BU. Unfortunately, the timing of when this could run (April/May 2024) meant that student engagement was challenging and the event could not successfully run.

SUBU would have preferred to have received BU's full draft APP earlier than 12<sup>th</sup> September, as this gave us 12 working days over the busy welcome period of the new academic year to review and respond to it. We believe BU and SUBU would have benefitted from BU's substantive work on the APP development beginning earlier on in the 2023-24 academic year.

- You have confidence that your university or college will involve the student body appropriately in the delivery and evaluation of the access and participation plan?

BU's plans under the Student Consultation section of their APP are positive, and we are looking forward to more regular reporting of progress against APP targets from BU so that our SUBU APP Consultants can be a key part of how students review and inform the delivery and evaluation of their APP.

How do you think your student body will hold your university or college to account for the delivery of their plan?

Students will be able to hold BU to account for the delivery of their APP through the work of our APP Consultants, and also through the APP reporting mechanisms that will be in place as described in BU's Evaluation of the plan section, as a range of our elected Officers have/will have membership of these.

Do you anticipate any negative outcomes will arise as a result of your university or college's new plan and any change in focus of their planned activities?

No.

Is there anything else the student body would like to add about access and participation at your university or college?

No.

What do you think worked well, and what suggestions for improvement do you have for the OfS regarding the student submission process, materials and support?

SUBU have found the submission date of 1<sup>st</sup> October to be a significant challenge in the annual cycle of a students' union. This is a busy time right at the start of the new academic year and it is challenging to bring new elected officers up to speed with APPs and student submissions, alongside all of the other training and induction duties that officers and students' unions have. I am in my second term of office for my role of Vice President Welfare and Community and so have the advantage of having worked with BU on the APP in the last academic year. SUBU's other three FTOs have just started in their roles and getting them all up-to speed has been challenging for this submission. For the future it would be preferable for students' unions if the submission deadline fell towards the end of an academic year rather than the beginning.

**Are you happy to be contacted by the OfS?**

Please check the boxes if you are happy for us to get in touch:

- To provide further information about this submission, if necessary?
- About your experience as a student contact to support improvements to our future guidance and support for students and their university and colleges?

Thank you for your student submission.