

University of Birmingham

Outreach Report 2023-2024

1. Purpose of Report

This report summarises the University of Birmingham's Outreach and Access activity for the academic year 2023-2024. It includes data on the outputs and outcomes on access activity related to the Birmingham Scholar, and on broader outreach and pre-16 activity, as set out in the Access and Participation Plan approved by the Office for Students.

Context

The start of the 2024-25 academic year marks the end of the Access and Participation Plan, and the university has successfully met or exceeded all of its access targets across those five years. 2023-24 has seen the strategic development of the new APP for 2025/26-2028/29 and therefore the Outreach Team has been looking closely at its current activity and previous targets to formulate stretching but realistic targets for the next four years.

Key achievements against APP targets

- There were 743 entrants through all outreach programme routes. This includes 670 through our institutional P2B programmes (including 534 through A2B), 39 Realising Opportunity students and 24 verified Care Leaver/Care Experienced students. This represents 11% of our home UG intake, exceeding our target with the OfS 5-year target of 10%.
- Early UCAS data suggests a Polar 4 Q5:Q1 ratio of 4:1, against a target of 5.5:1 and surpassing the 2025 target set with the OfS.

2. Evaluation of Outreach Activity

Programme Leads continue to be responsible for their own annual evaluation reports and gives them a chance to reflect on their entry cohort (those entering UoB in 2024-25 academic year) and their current cohort (those who took part in the programme in 2023-24 academic year) to ensure that the evidence collected through surveying and other evaluative activity is feeding through to their programme delivery.

To ensure that our attainment raising activity (academic mentoring and online tutoring programmes) evolve in-line with the

Overall, our outcomes-based monitoring and evaluation approach informs our reporting on our departmental and APP targets to help demonstrate our progress on closing the gaps between different groups of students.

3. Post-16 Pathways to Birmingham (P2B)

Our 2020-2025 Access and Participation Plan set out the University's 'Birmingham Scholar' with the access element represented by our Pathways to Birmingham programme. This includes our longstanding Year 13 A2B programme, supplemented by a number of other streams, which students can complete in Year 12 and which afford students the alternative offer and financial support. These include Routes to Professions (R2P), Inspired@Birmingham (I@B), Academic Enrichment Programme (AEP) and the National Access Summer School (NASS).

Entry by students who completed an institutional P2B programme was 743. This represents 10% of the UG Home intake, meeting our overall five-year target of 10% - when including RO students this jumps to 11%. A comprehensive Pathways to Birmingham report provides more detail and data on activity, engagement and outcomes for 2024 entry.

In addition to our institutional programmes, we are a longstanding partner and founding member of the Realising Opportunities Programme coordinated by Newcastle University. This year there were 39 entrants to UoB from RO applicants. Destinations data for Cohort 14 is current being collated by the central RO team.

4. Academic Attainment Support

We are in the process of completing an in-depth evaluation of our academic attainment programmes in response to changes in the year groups being tutored. These modifications to the programme were made in response to the Office for Students requesting that HEIs work in partnership with schools to deliver attainment-raising activity with pre-16 cohorts. The analysis for the two programmes is ongoing, but preliminary findings for 2022-23 are detailed in the below sections.

4.1 MyTutor

In previous years, online tutoring via MyTutor has been offered to Year 13 learners in an A-Level subject of their choice. For the 2023-24 cohort, online tutoring via the platform was offered to Year 11 learners who had taken part in the Year 10 Summer School in the previous academic year (2022/23). 82 learners signed up for the programme, which entailed attending weekly online tutoring sessions in their chosen GCSE core subject (either English, Maths, Biology, Chemistry or Physics) for 10-14 weeks. The aim was to help learners attain their target GCSE grades in their chosen subject.

The tutoring was administered through the MyTutor platform on a one-to-one basis. MyTutor is an online tuition platform which matches learners with tutors from UK universities. MyTutor sessions typically aim to reinforce classwork, fill gaps in learning and boost attainment. Their most recent Funding Report (2022) reported that MyTutor students typically make one grade of progress over the course of a term of lessons.

Reporting for this intervention is ongoing, but initial data show that:

- In total, **82** students were signed up for MyTutor support
- All the students were WP students meeting A2B criteria
- **15%** (12) of students did not attend any sessions
- **85%** (60) of students attended one or more sessions
- **61%** (50) attended seven or more sessions.
- **39%** (32) attended 10 or more sessions (some students were offered up to four additional sessions if they had acceptable levels of attendance)

Learners were surveyed before and after taking part in the MyTutor programme, and findings include:

- **100%** of learners who took part in the post-programme survey were either very satisfied or satisfied with their tutoring experience and **92%** reported that they found the programme worthwhile
- **86%** of learners strongly agreed or agreed that their tutoring sessions improved their confidence in their tutored subject. **89%** of learners also strongly agreed or agreed that their tutoring sessions improved their knowledge and understanding of the subject.
- There was a **41%** uplift in the number of learners who felt 'extremely confident' in their tutored subject after the tutoring (from **0%** to **41%**) and a **25%** uplift in learners reporting they were 'somewhat confident' (from **25%** to **50%**). No learners were 'extremely not confident' in their chosen subject after the tutoring.
- There was also an increase in the proportion of learners reporting that their knowledge was 'very good' or 'good' after partaking in tutoring, increasing by **34** percentage points (from **0%** to **34%**). No learners felt that their knowledge was 'poor' or 'very poor' in their tutored subject after participating in the programme.
- **67%** of learners strongly agreed or agreed that their tutoring sessions improved their study and/or revision skills.

As of November 2023, analysis is still being undertaken to examine how learners' GCSE results compare to their target grades.

4.2 Academic Mentoring

For 2023-24, academic mentoring focused on English and Maths for Years 7, 8, 9 and 11 across four local schools. These year groups were selected in consultation with teachers and school co-ordinators, who felt that these cohorts would benefit the most from additional tutoring. The mentors were University of Birmingham undergraduate students who were recruited by the University's Outreach Team. These mentors were required to have at least A-Level subject knowledge of their tutoring subject and have achieved a minimum of an A grade.

School co-ordinators were responsible for working with subject teachers to select up to 15 widening participation students who would benefit from additional subject support lessons. For the most part, these were chosen from those in the 'middle to lower' ability groups. School co-ordinators gave some of the following reasons for choosing specific students:

- Selected students were mid to low ability and required confidence-building
- Selected students were eligible for Pupil Premium funding and therefore were considered disadvantaged by the Department for Education (DfE)

Learners on the programme reported the following:

- **93%** of learners attended seven or more sessions, **53%** of learners attended 10 or more sessions.
- There was more of an uplift in the number of learners reporting they felt 'extremely confident' or 'moderately confident' in their tutored subject after the mentoring for English than for Maths (for English **46%** pre-programme to **71%** post-programme and for Maths **34%** pre-programme to **38%** post-programme)
- **80%** of learners strongly agreed or agreed that their mentoring sessions increased their subject knowledge. **67%** of learners reported that mentoring had motivated them to work harder to achieve higher grades.
- There were mixed outcomes in terms of school behaviour, with **36%** of learners reporting they always completed their homework in the pre-programme survey vs. **45%** post-programme. The proportion of learners reporting they 'always' contributed to lessons fell from **27%** pre-programme to **9%** post-programme.
- There was a **1%** uplift in the proportion of learners reporting they were planning to go to College/Sixth Form between the start and end of the programme (**46%** pre-programme, **47%** post-programme) and a **19%** uplift in those reporting they were planning to go to university (**36%** pre-programme, **55%** post-programme)

Please note that no causal relationship could be found between variables and there were likely other factors at play that may have impacted some of these outcomes.

For 2024/25 the Outreach Team are working with the National Literacy Trust to help improve reading age for Year 7 students.

5. Closing the Polar4 Q5:Q1 Gap

Early admissions data from UCAS indicates that we have maintained our Polar 4 Q5:Q1 gap at 4:1 for the fourth year running (against a target of 5.5:1) for 2024 entry, achieving our 5-year target with the OfS.

In order to drive progress against this target, each of our Outreach programmes focused on engaging with Polar 4 Quintile 1 learners, alongside the use of our Widening Participation basket of measures. This is also the case in our partnership activity. Our National Access Summer School (NASS), which is one of our P2B strands, targets schools from outside of the area where there are high numbers of P4Q1 learners, and this will be supplemented in future years by our Belong at Birmingham programme.

While the Polar 4 Quintile of learners is still one of the eligibility criteria for our Pathways to Birmingham programmes, the university's contextual offer scheme has changed its criteria to having been in receipt

of Free School Meals in the last six years rather than their Polar 4 Quintile. This is to recognise that while both measures have their weaknesses, that FSM is a more individualised measure. The team are also moving away from P4Q as the only postcode-based criteria for P2B, with IMD and TUNDRA measures also being used to check learner eligibility to make the programme fair and accessible for learners from low participation areas.

6. Pre-16 Programmes

6.1 Forward Thinking

Forward Thinking is a progressive programme of higher education awareness activity to encourage and support future application to higher education, and more specifically to a research-intensive university. It has been designed to support appropriate subject choices in year 9 and 11 and aid attainment raising, whilst also informing students about higher education pathways, courses, and student life and employment opportunities.

The tracking data for cohort 12 (entry year 2024) revealed that:

- **84%** of students applied to HE, with **69%** of these students applying to University of Birmingham.
- **59%** of the Forward Thinking students who applied to Birmingham were made offers to study at the University of Birmingham.
- **6%** of the Forward Thinking students who applied to Birmingham applied to a Pathways to Birmingham programme; all were accepted. It should be noted at this time the Forward Thinking and Pathways to Birmingham eligibility criteria were not aligned.
- **58%** progressed to university in 2024.
- **10%** of cohort 12 students progressed to studying at the University of Birmingham.

KS4 data was obtained for 127 of 165 students (85%). The analysis of attainment data revealed that of the 127 students:

- **83%** achieved 5 or above in GCSE English Language
- **81%** achieved 5 or above in GCSE English Literature
- **78%** achieved 5 or above in GCSE Mathematics
- **73%** achieved 5 or above in both English and Maths.
- **87%** of students achieved five or more GCSEs at grades 9-4
- **83%** achieved five or more GCSEs at grades 9-4 including Maths and English.

6.2 Year 10 Summer Schools

A total of **114** learners attended and completed the 2023-24 summer school from **36** local target schools. The streams this year were split by subject:

- Discover Health: Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, Biomedical Science, and Biology.
- Explore University : History, Psychology, Law, Engineering, and English.
- Innovate in Business: Business Management, Accounting and Finance, Economics and Business Marketing.

Each stream is a two-night, three-day residential experience, taking place during term time and is offered completely free of charge to schools and students. Each stream follows the same programme of personal and social development activities, which prove to be effective at raising aspirations to future learning and higher education and only differs for different academic subject sessions.

In terms of progression to Higher Education, the 2021 Summer Schools were significantly affected by COVID-19. Of the **71** students who took part in the virtual experience, **66%** applied through UCAS. **40%** applied to the University of Birmingham with **9%** achieving a place after results day. **50%** achieved a place at other universities.

7. Other non-programme schools activity

7.1 Masterclasses

Our annual Masterclass programme provides school pupils in Years 7-13 with fun, engaging and interactive insights into what it is like to study at a selective university. Our expert academics lead sessions in a range of subjects and topics, from Engineering to Economics to Psychology. Pupils take part in activities, workshops and lectures which aim to advance their understanding of a particular topic and motivate them to pursue further study in the field.

In 2023/24, **25** face-to-face Masterclasses took place (a further four classes were scheduled but cancelled). **1113** places were booked on the classes and **761** students attended the masterclasses, which is a **68%** attendance rate (compared to **46%** in 2022/23). Students attended from **65** different schools and colleges (data missing from three classes), compared to attendance from **55** schools in 2022/23.

Due to staffing changes in the Outreach Team, Masterclasses are postponed for the 2024-25 academic year and it is intended will instead be moved to an Autumn schedule and restart in 2025-26.

7.2 School visits

The Outreach Team attended **257** events (**-2%** compared to last year) across **175** schools (**+13%** compared to last year) with over **10,632** attendees. However, there has been more demand this academic year in comparison to the previous years and differences in staffing which led to **59%** of requests being delivered. To keep up with demand this year, **13** student ambassadors were trained to attend Higher Education (HE) Fairs on behalf of the Outreach Team. There were **4** events where ambassadors attended an event this academic year. In 2024-25 we will continue to send trained ambassadors to appropriate fairs. Table 2 (see Appendix) shows a breakdown of school-related activity and a comparison to 2022-23.

The Outreach team also deliver large-scale events annually which involve multiple schools including Christmas Lectures and a number of different subject-themed quizzes. In total, **1500** students attended these activities from over **50** schools.

8. Departmental Outreach Activity

Each of the Colleges supports University wide Outreach/Access activity through delivery of academic workshops masterclasses and tutors for the A2B scheme.

CMH also delivers additional activity for students interested in the Health Professions. This year we again ran a programme of support for students from widening participation and BAME backgrounds interested in applying to university subjects, which use an interview as part of the admissions process.

9. Aimhigher – Regional Partnership

We continue to lead the Aimhigher Partnership, including Aston, BCU, UCB and Worcester, with APP-linked activity. In addition to this we manage the OfS funded UniConnect Programme in which Newman is also a partner. We delivered all of the associated targets with UniConnect for 2023-2024 but this year the Partnership has entered a new phase where all activity is focussed on attainment raising activities. They continue to face considerable uncertainty as this current phase of funding finishes in July 2025.

Appendices

Table 1: PTB application and entry data, 2015-16 to 2023-24

Admissions cycle	P2B applicants*	P2B applications*	P2B offers*	Firm offer holders*	Entrants**	Application to offer	Offer to CF	% app: entrant
2015-16	1324	1559	941	728	340	60%	77%	26%
2016-17	1234	1512	912	686	347	60%	75%	28%
2017-18	1307	1499	1000	725	378	67%	73%	29%
2018-19	1841	2161	1660	1032	497	77%	62%	28%
2019-20	1950	2382	1803	1163	662	76%	65%	34%
2020-21	2212	2755	1940	1248	794	70%	64%	36%
2021-22	2068	2573	1573	994	534	61%	63%	26%
2022-23	2073	2504	1605	1011	556	64%	63%	27%
2023-24	2378	2933	2057	1308	670	70%	64%	28%

Table 1

Table 2: School Activity and engagement figures - three-year comparison

Activity	Number of Events Attended			Number Attending		
	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
School visits onto campus	77	91	81	2,765	1,868	3,498
P2B Talks-a2b etc	11	18	22	562	767	1,713
Talk or presentation	33	47	28	1,606	2,175	1,845
Open Evening/ Parents evening	13	15	N/A	243	1,868	N/A
HE Fairs	105	86	59	5,115	11,401	4,678
Other e.g Bespoke or off menu visit/ Teacher session or CPD	4	4	22	95	24	785
Hosted activity (e.g. Debatemate, Future Leaders, Coachbright, Brilliant Club)	6	N/A	N/A	215	N/A	N/A
Student ambassador UoB School tour	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Total	257	261	212	10,632	18,103	12,519
-------	-----	-----	-----	--------	--------	--------