

UCL
















Social mobility and student success

UCL ACCESS AND SUCCESS GUIDE

ENABLING STUDENTS TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

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INTRODUCTION

This guide has been created to help academic and departmental colleagues support prospective applicants and students from underrepresented/widening participation (WP) backgrounds.

By including spotlights of the different student profiles, as well as the barriers they face within higher education, this guide aims to provide you with the information you need to help support the students in your department.

How to use the guide:

The guide includes contextual information, advice and resources about the diverse groups the Student Success Office works with and how you can best support your students.

The term WP covers a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences and there is no 'typical WP student'. While all sections may not be relevant to your specific needs, we hope it is a useful tool to refer to when advising and supporting your students.

Get involved:

If you are interested in working with the Access and Widening Participation Office (AWPO) at UCL, please see the webpage for UCL staff.

If you are interested in working with the Student Success Office, get in touch via email at smss.studentsuccess@ucl.ac.uk.

To join the WP and Student Success Community of Practice, please search for 'COP-Widening Participation' on Microsoft Teams

The Student Success team will also be hosting virtual Student Success information sessions throughout the academic year. These will provide an opportunity for you to learn more about supporting your students, learn best practice from other departments and ask any questions.



ACCESS UCL (CONTEXTUAL OFFERS)

[Access UCL](#) is UCL's contextual offer scheme for students who are underrepresented at UCL. Eligible applicants may receive an offer that is lower than the standard UCL entry requirements from the programme they have applied for. The contextual offer for each programme can be found on the [UCL undergraduate prospectus](#).

Why does UCL give contextual offers?

In recent years, UCL has made positive steps towards improving access, retention, progression and the success of its students. However, there is a relatively low proportion of students from key underrepresented groups in each academic intake. Access UCL was introduced to create an impact on the application and enrolment numbers of students from these backgrounds and aims to level the playing field by looking at the context in which an applicant has achieved their exam results.

Who is eligible for a contextual offer?

Eligibility is assessed based on school and postcode data that is taken from the UCAS application form. Up to date eligibility criteria can be found [here](#).

Care experienced students, young carers, and estranged students are also eligible for Access UCL. Care experienced students are eligible whether they attend(ed) a UK state or independent school.



BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

WP students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and as such, there is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to supporting them. In some cases, WP students may not need any additional support from UCL. In fact, more than half of the Access UCL cohort consistently meet the standard entry requirements for their chosen programme of study.

However, UCL is aware that many WP students may need extra help. The following section provides you with some general information to enable you to support WP students within your department.

“ It always felt really challenging not feeling like I had the right transition into university, it left me thinking I wish there was some sort of support to begin with. ”



TYPES OF SUPPORT

Academic support:

The Academic Communication Centre (ACC) supports UCL students in developing effective academic communication and language skills. This can include support in understanding assignments, reading and note-taking, planning and writing coursework and preparing presentations. The ACC is also piloting ACCess in some faculties: a new programme to support Access-UCL offer holders in their transition to higher education, helping them to develop a sense of belonging and equipping them with the relevant academic literacies and skills to undertake their studies with more confidence and competence.

UCL also has a variety of online self-access resources to support students in their academic learning:

- A general guide to academic support at UCL, including guidance for learning and studying effectively, can be found [here](#)
- [UCL Library Services](#) offer a range of guides, training, and support in their [LibrarySkills@UCL](#) online resource hub. Topics include essential library skills, referencing, and evaluating information
- [Transition Mentors](#): every first-year undergraduate is matched with a transition mentor, who is a second or third year student from their degree programme. Mentors can give guidance on academic topics, (such as referencing and selecting modules), direct mentees to support services, such as financial adviser appointments and disability services, or answer administrative questions.



Financial support:

If students are worried about any element of funding their studies or have questions about how to manage their finances, they can contact a [Student Funding Advisor](#). Support is available by phone, email or in a confidential one-to-one appointment. General information about the funding available to students can be found on the [UCL Scholarships and Funding website](#).

[UCL Undergraduate Bursary](#): UCL undergraduates from the UK with a household income below a certain amount per year may be eligible for the UCL undergraduate bursary for each year of their study. As this is a bursary, they are not required to pay it back.

Students do not need to apply for the bursary. When they apply for a maintenance loan from Student Finance, they provide their household income, and this is used to calculate any bursary, if eligible.

[UCL Financial Assistance Funds](#) are there to help students get back on course who start the year in a good financial position but unexpectedly found themselves in financial hardship. Some of the funds that UCL students can access include:

- [UCL Financial Assistance Fund](#) – this hardship fund is for all UCL students who find themselves in unexpected hardship
- [Medical School Student Money](#) – UCL's medical school has some financial support available for its students including hardship and travel funds
- [Royal Medical Benevolent Fund](#) – provides grants for medical students in their final two years
- [RIBA Student Support Fund](#) – for architecture students on RIBA part 1 or 2 courses
- [Pharmacist Support](#) – financial support for MPharm students in hardship.

Mental health and wellbeing support:

At UCL, there is a wealth of [mental health and wellbeing support](#) for students.

If you are worried about a student you can contact [Student Support and Wellbeing](#) (SSW) and complete a [Student of Concern Form](#). SSW does not offer emergency support so if a student is in immediate danger or requires urgent support, please ask them to go to their local A&E, phone 999, contact their GP or dial 111 for out of hours medical support. Alternatively, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 or [Nightline](#) can be contacted on +44 (0)207 631 0101.

UCL also has a 24/7 [Student Support Line](#), where students can call and speak to an advisor who will help them through any issues that they are facing. This service is free to use, confidential, and is available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Alternatively, students can [register](#) for [Student Psychological and Counselling Services](#).

Every first-year undergraduate student at UCL also has a [Student Adviser](#) who is their key contact in their department for any wellbeing, support, and student experience matters.

Disability support:

UCL's Disability, Mental Health and Wellbeing team understand the barriers that disabled students face and can offer appropriate help, reasonable adjustments, and personalised support.

If a student feels that they might have a disability (including a Specific Learning Difficulty like dyslexia or dyspraxia) that has not been diagnosed, please ask them to [contact the team](#) so that they can advise them further.

UCL strongly encourages students to contact the Student Support and Wellbeing team about their disability or long-term health condition so that they can benefit from all the available support options as early on as possible. Students may have disclosed their disability in their UCAS form and will have been asked to complete an Applicant Support Questionnaire. But if not, they can disclose their disability by contacting the [askUCL student enquiries system](#).



Social Support:

[UCL Students' Union](#) has volunteering opportunities, clubs and societies, sports, and skills sessions to get involved in. They also offer a free [advice service](#) and can advise on academic issues, housing, employment, money, debt, and other personal or university matters.

WP students may be the first generation in their family to attend university. 'First Gen' students may have less knowledge about higher education in general and they may experience less support from family, which can lead to them feeling marginalised and out of place on campus. The [UCL First Gen Society](#) offers pastoral, social and skills-focused support through an online community.

“ At school, if you had difficulties, it felt like something you had to deal with personally... Coming into university, I was surprised at how much was available to me. ”

Careers:

[UCL Careers](#) provides a wide range of activities and support to help students explore career ideas throughout their time at UCL and beyond. [UCL Careers Extra](#) is a programme of enhanced careers support for UK (home fee status) undergraduates from groups under-represented at UCL.

The programme includes paid internships, a bursary scheme to support students in gaining career-useful work experience, alumni mentoring, and a buddy scheme. Students also have priority booking for some UCL Careers activities and extended one-to-one appointments with the Careers Extra team to discuss career ideas, work on applications and prepare for interviews.

Students who [sign up](#) to Careers Extra are also included on a circulation list for events and programmes that may be of particular interest.

Although those who received Access UCL offers are automatically eligible to join, they do need to [sign up](#) to opt in to Careers Extra. UK undergraduates can also join if they belong to one or more of the following groups:

- **first in family to go to university (and attended a UK state school)**
- **have a household income below £25,000**
- **disabled**
- **care experienced/estranged**
- **carer**
- **Black heritage (Black British African, Black British Caribbean, British Black Other, British Black Mixed).**



THE ACCESS UCL COHORT



While young carers, care experienced and estranged students are eligible for the Access UCL contextual offer scheme, the majority of the Access UCL cohort are students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

There are various measures used across the sector to flag students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds as universities do not have access to income data through UCAS.



THE ACCESS UCL COHORT

WHY ARE THEY A 'WIDENING PARTICIPATION' GROUP?

Students in receipt of free school meals (FSM) are significantly less likely to go on to university compared with their peers.

- Only 26% of FSM students continue to higher education compared with 45% of non-FSM students
- Progression rates are particularly low for White British FSM students, with rates of 18.5% for females and 12.8% for males
- Just 2% of White British FSM students enter a high tariff university (like UCL), compared with 12% of White British non-FSM students.

Across the sector, the following measures are primarily used to flag students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds:

- **POLAR (Participation of Local Areas)** - This measures the percentage of young people from each area that progress to higher education. Postcodes across England are divided into quintiles, with postcodes in POLAR quintile 1 having the lowest progression rate.
- **IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation)** - This is the official governmental measure of relative deprivation for small areas in the UK. Each small area is ranked from most to least deprived and divided into deciles with IMD decile 1 being the most deprived

- **Acorn** - Acorn categorises postcodes into 62 types. By analysing social factors and population behaviours, it provides precise information and in-depth understanding of the types of people living in a neighbourhood
- **Free school meal data** - There is growing acknowledgement that POLAR is now a poor proxy for income, with the correlation between POLAR quintile 1 postcodes and those on free school meals being low. Universities have been lobbying for access to free school meal data through UCAS and this information will be available soon. It is likely that Access UCL eligibility will be updated in subsequent years to take this into account.



When I came in on a contextual offer, it was very overwhelming. I had severe imposter syndrome... and I felt like I was really struggling.



WHAT BARRIERS DO THEY FACE?

- **Often the first in their family to go to university**
 - [Research](#) by UCL's Centre for Longitudinal Studies shows that young people who are the first in their family to attend university are less likely to attend an elite institution and are more likely to drop out than those with graduate parents
 - First generation university students may require more information and support to navigate the university system and make the best choices as they don't have people at home to pass on first-hand knowledge and may lack a direct contact in higher education to ask for advice.
- **Imposter syndrome/belonging**
 - While anyone can experience 'imposter' feelings, minority groups can be particularly vulnerable to self-doubt and feeling that they do not truly belong in high achieving environments
 - For students from underrepresented groups, a sense of belonging – or lack thereof – can have a real effect on educational success. They may not have the cultural capital to know about non-explicit expectations, are less likely to see themselves represented among academic staff and within the student population, and may struggle with a lack of awareness towards their culture.



THE ACCESS UCL COHORT

RESOURCES AND FURTHER SUPPORT

- Students can access all the support highlighted in the 'Types of Support' Section ([pg. 6](#))
- UCL Psychodynamic counsellor Richard Harrison offers advice on managing imposter syndrome.



STUDENT SUCCESS OFFICE INTERVENTIONS

Offer holder communications

The Student Success Office begins contact with the Access UCL cohort at the application stage. Offer-holders receive emails about student support services and funding at UCL (highlighted in the 'Types of Support' and 'Funding' sections.)

Pre-enrolment events

After A level confirmation, incoming first year students are invited to an online pre-enrolment event where staff from various support services introduce their departments and outline what students can expect when they join UCL.

Access UCL and Student Success Event Series

The Student Success Office has partnered with Louis Howell from [7PK](#) to deliver a series of events working on success, leadership, confidence, and belonging. Events will be advertised to students via email and the Student Success Office social media channels. Please contact smss.studentsuccess@ucl.ac.uk for more information.

Newsletter

Students in the Access UCL cohort will receive regular newsletters from the Student Success Office with information about opportunities that are available to them from across the university.



CARE EXPERIENCED STUDENTS



UCL defines a care experienced person as someone aged under 25 who has been looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks (not necessarily consecutive) in their life.

The terms 'care experienced' and 'care leaver' are sometimes used interchangeably, however a care leaver is a person who has turned 18 and has technically left care but will continue to be supported by their local authority until 21, or longer (until 25) if they are in training or education. It is also important to note that some young people will leave care as early as 16.



CARE EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

WHY ARE THEY A 'WIDENING PARTICIPATION' GROUP?

Those with care experience have significantly poorer educational and life outcomes than the general population on average.

- Only 13% of care leavers will enter higher education
- In 2017-18, the continuation rate of care experienced students was 5.6 percentage points lower than for students who had not been in care
- In 2018-19, the rate of achieving a first or upper-second class degree was 12.1 percentage points lower for care experienced students when compared to students that were not in care.

The OfS encourages universities to prioritise the needs of care experienced students and to ensure they have access to high quality pastoral and emotional support.

Any applicant to UCL who has spent 13 weeks (not necessarily consecutive) under the care of their local authority is automatically eligible for [Access UCL](#), regardless of whether they have attended a UK state or independent school.



CARE EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

WHAT BARRIERS DO THEY FACE?

- Lower school attainment, particularly at Key Stage 4
- Frequent placement and school moves, as well as being taken out of school regularly for meetings can impact care experienced students' confidence and ability to learn
- Traumatic experiences before entry into care also cause difficulties, which may affect their behaviour, self-esteem or trust in authority figures which makes it more challenging to achieve academically
- A lack of positive role models, information and advice when applying to higher education and low expectations from carers and advisers
- Care experienced students are often unaware of what opportunities are available to them and can believe that university is not the right place for them due to the lack of appropriate support, advice and guidance
- Low aspirations and concerns about being able to afford higher education
- Care leavers often must balance their study commitments while living independently for the first time at age 16-18. Juggling paying bills, running a house, earning enough money to live and coping with loneliness all distracts from homework and studying for exams
- Difficulty accessing the financial support they need and problems with accommodation
- Care leavers do not normally have access to financial support from parents and so rely on financial support provided by their local authority. They are more likely to have to take up part time work to cover accommodation and associated study costs such as laptops and books

- Lack of support networks
- Loneliness and isolation are among the biggest problems reported by care leavers. They may feel that they do not fit in with their peers who are not from a care experienced background and may not feel confident in asking for help and support.



CARE EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Finance:

Local councils and authorities often provide financial support to students who were in their care and who go on to attend university. To apply for support, students should contact their personal advisor, social worker, or case worker.

Students who have entered UCL from a care environment are given priority if applying to the [Financial Assistance Fund](#). Financial awards can be given to help with living costs. Students are not expected to pay back the amount they are given.

Care leavers are eligible for the [UCL Care Leaver Bursary](#) of £1000 per year.

UK undergraduate students who are assessed as care leavers by Student Finance are also automatically assessed as being eligible for the maximum [UCL Undergraduate Bursary](#) for each year of study.

Accommodation:

UCL provides 365-day accommodation for care experienced students in their first year and, if needed, 365-day accommodation will be provided for subsequent years of study. If students need 365-day accommodation and/or accommodation beyond their first year at UCL, they should contact the Accommodation team by [email](#) or through the [askUCL student enquiries system](#).

UCL also has a partnership with the Unite Foundation, which offers a scholarship covering three years of accommodation and bills for care leavers. For further information please see the [Unite Foundation website](#).

Charities/External organisations:

- [Become](#) is a charitable organisation that provides support for young people in care and care leavers
- [Buttle UK](#) is a charitable organisation providing grant aid to vulnerable young people to provide the best possible opportunity in meeting their educational needs
- [The Care Leavers Association](#) is a network of care leavers that provides support, advice, information, and guidance for care leavers
- [The Rees Foundation](#) exists to provide life-long help and support to those with care experience.



CARE EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

STUDENT SUCCESS OFFICE INTERVENTIONS

We have a member of staff within the Student Success Office who is the key contact for care experienced and estranged undergraduate home students at UCL. This contact is there for students from the pre-application stage all the way through to graduation, to ensure a smooth journey through UCL for these students:

- The key contact gets in touch with applicants once they have been made an offer by UCL and is in touch with them throughout the transition period into joining us in September. They run online Q&A sessions for offer holders, send out emails outlining the support available to them, and can advise and signpost support services to them throughout their time at UCL
- All care experienced students are welcome to join an MS Teams area specifically for care experienced and estranged students, where any opportunities – for example events, jobs, and careers-related opportunities – will be advertised
- A peer support group for care experienced and estranged students is an informal opportunity for students across the university who are studying, without the support of their family, to meet others in a similar situation.

If you are supporting a care experienced student who hasn't yet been contacted by the Student Success Office key contact, or is interested in any of the above opportunities, please [email](#) the team with their information.

The Student Success Office has also employed a current student with a background of studying without the support of their family to help research and devise recommendations to improve the provision and experience for care experienced and estranged students at UCL.



Every time I had an issue, I had to sit down with a different person and explain it all again... it can be a triggering experience.



ESTRANGED STUDENTS



The term estranged applies to students who no longer have the support of their family due to a breakdown in relationships which has led to ceased contact.

Estranged students no longer have contact with their biological, step or adoptive parents, or wider family members who have been responsible for supporting them in the past.



ESTRANGED STUDENTS

WHY ARE THEY A 'WIDENING PARTICIPATION' GROUP?

There are an estimated 8,000 university students in the UK who are estranged from their families. It is more difficult for estranged students to access higher education due to a lack of support, both emotional and financial.

Research by the Stand Alone charity suggests that 30% of estranged students have faced homelessness and are three times more likely to drop out of university.

This is a broad group that encompasses students from a variety of backgrounds. For example, they may be a refugee and have lost contact with their parents, they may have escaped an forced marriage, or they may have been ostracised by their family for reasons relating to religion, sexuality, or gender.

I found that though staff were understanding about my circumstances, it would've been more helpful if they had directed me to the support services when I had first mentioned my difficulties to them.



ESTRANGED STUDENTS

WHAT BARRIERS DO THEY FACE?

Finance:

- Financial stress is the main reason for estranged students to withdraw from their studies.
 - The financial support available is often not enough to meet living costs. They are more likely to consider pay day loans or credit cards and be reliant on university financial assistance funds. Estranged students have to stretch their finance package for 52 weeks of the year, not just term time, due to the lack of family support over the holidays
 - Student Finance considers students aged under 25 as 'dependent' and requires them to declare their parents' income to means test their finance application. If these details are not provided (for instance, due to the student being estranged from their family) only the minimum level of financial support will be awarded. Estranged students, however, can apply as 'independent students' so that their finance is calculated on their own income rather than their parents, allowing them access to full financial support
 - Unfortunately, proving estranged or 'independent' status can be difficult as students are asked to prove that they have not had verbal or written contact with both parents (biological or adoptive) for a significant period of time and the estrangement is irreconcilable. Student Finance requests as many supporting statements as possible from trusted independent parties, with good standing in the community and who have known about the students' circumstances for a substantial amount of time, to verify that students are irreconcilably estranged
 - This evidence can be difficult to obtain and the process can be stressful and traumatic.

Accommodation:

- Estranged students are more likely to struggle to secure suitable accommodation
- They are less likely to be able to source rental deposits and a suitable guarantor for a new tenancy, which means they may resort to unsafe or unsuitable accommodation
- They require 52-week accommodation as they don't necessarily have a home to return to outside of term time.

Wellbeing:

- Estranged students are more likely to struggle with their mental health and wellbeing
- They may have feelings of shame, blame and stigma relating to their personal circumstances
- They may fear being judged or misunderstood, which leads to a risk of social isolation
- They have an increased likelihood of developing mental health difficulties due to the stress and anxiety caused by the estrangement. Due to this, they are at an increased risk of withdrawing or suspending their studies due to mental health difficulties.



ESTRANGED STUDENTS

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Finance:

Estranged students are eligible for the Estranged Student Bursary. Prospective students should apply for this via the [Undergraduate Funding and Access Awards](#). If students miss the deadline for this, or become estranged while on their course, they should get in touch with the Student Funding Office via [askUCL](#).

UK undergraduate students who are assessed as estranged by Student Finance are automatically assessed as being eligible for the maximum [UCL Undergraduate Bursary](#) for each year of study.

Students who are estranged are given priority when applying to the [Financial Assistance Fund](#). Financial awards can be given to help with living costs. Students are not expected to pay back the amount they are given.

Accommodation:

UCL provides 365-day accommodation for estranged students in their first year and, if needed, 365-day accommodation will be provided for subsequent years of study.

If students need 365-day accommodation and/or accommodation beyond their first year at UCL, they should contact the Accommodation team by [email](#) or through the [askUCL student enquiries system](#).

UCL also has a partnership with the Unite Foundation, which offers a scholarship covering three years of accommodation and bills for estranged students. For further information please see the [Unite Foundation website](#).

Charities/external organisations:

[Stand Alone](#) is a charity that supports people who are estranged from their family and they have a [Student Finance Guide](#) to help students navigate the student finance application process.

[Buttle UK](#) is a charitable organisation providing grant aid to vulnerable young people to provide the best possible opportunity in meeting their educational needs.



ESTRANGED STUDENTS

STUDENT SUCCESS OFFICE INTERVENTIONS

The Student Success Office has a key contact for care experienced and estranged undergraduate home students at UCL. This contact is there for students from the pre-application stage all the way through to graduation, to ensure that these students' journey through UCL is as smooth as possible:

- This contact gets in touch with applicants once they have been made an offer by UCL and is in touch with them throughout the transition period into joining us in September. They run online Q&A sessions for offer holders, send out emails outlining the support available to them, and can advise and signpost support services to them throughout their time here
- All estranged students are welcome to join an MS Teams area specifically for care experienced and estranged students, where any opportunities – for example events, jobs, and careers-related opportunities – will be advertised
- A peer support group for care experienced and estranged students is an informal opportunity for students across the university who are studying, without the support of their family, to meet others in a similar situation.

If you are supporting an estranged student who hasn't yet been contacted by the Student Success Office key contact, or is interested in any of the above opportunities, please [email](#) the team with their information, and they will be in touch.

The Student Success Office has also employed a current student with a background of studying without the support of their family to help research and devise recommendations to improve the provision and experience for care experienced and estranged students studying at UCL.



DISABLED STUDENTS



Disabilities can be physical or mental. At UCL, support is provided to all disabled students who meet the [Equality Act \(2010\) criteria](#).

Students eligible for this support include those with the following:

- A sensory impairment, such as individuals certified as blind or severely or partially sight impaired, and those who are D/deaf
- A mobility impairment and physical impairments
- A musculoskeletal condition such as arthritis
- A long-term health condition such as diabetes or epilepsy, including those of a fluctuating or progressive nature
- A long-term mental health condition such as depression or an eating disorder
- A Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D
- A social or communication difficulty such as an Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC).

Students may experience a combination of the above – those with physical impairments, for example, are more likely to experience mental health difficulties.



DISABLED STUDENTS

WHY ARE THEY A 'WIDENING PARTICIPATION' GROUP?

There is a large range in rates of students with different disabilities attending university, and the issues that each group may face are very different. However, despite the rise in the proportion of students disclosing themselves as disabled, this group remains underrepresented in higher education.



I got more support coming to UCL, but when I got here, it felt like I was kind of on my own.



DISABLED STUDENTS

WHAT BARRIERS DO THEY FACE?

UCL subscribes to the 'social model' of disability. This means that we acknowledge that barriers experienced by disabled people are what disables the individual, rather than the conditions themselves. For example, in making buildings accessible, a wheelchair user can participate fully in education. Removing barriers through reasonable adjustments enables full participation of disabled students.

Barriers for disabled students vary greatly depending on the type of condition a student may have. If students have declared their disability on their UCAS application, the Disability, Mental Health and Wellbeing team will get in touch with them before enrolment to discuss how best they can be supported during their time at UCL. If a student has not yet been in touch with the team, then they can do so once they arrive, via [askUCL](#).

“Someone doesn't need to have a specific condition to be in need of help. I've had a condition for the last few years and only got diagnosed last month.”



DISABLED STUDENTS

RESOURCES AND FURTHER SUPPORT

- [Student Triage and Referral Tool](#): if you have any concerns about a student (in relation to anything from accommodation to mental health, financial difficulties, engagement with their course, radicalisation)
- [UCL Student Support and Wellbeing](#): provides a range of support for students
- [Disabled Students Allowance](#): support to cover the study-related costs disabled students have
- [Disabled Students' Network UCL](#): a support network for disabled UCL students
- [Disabled Students' Officer](#): represents the needs and interests of disabled students in the Union, the University and beyond
- [Disability Support](#): information on disability support, including Summaries of Reasonable Adjustments (SORAs), physical accessibility, assistive technology, and lots more
- [AccessAble](#): accessibility information on buildings across London, including on UCL's campus.

STUDENT SUCCESS OFFICE INTERVENTIONS

The term 'disability' covers a broad spectrum of needs and a variety of lived experiences within our student population. There is also great variation in the data UCL has on students with different disabilities. For example, neurodivergent students demonstrate a larger awarding gap than students with hearing disabilities.

The Student Success team intend to carry out further research and analysis to design and deliver targeted interventions for disabled students that meet their needs. The team works closely with other services across UCL to ensure programmes and initiatives are valuable for both students and the staff who will be supporting them.



MATURE STUDENTS



UCAS uses the term 'mature' to mean any student starting their undergraduate course at the age of 21 or over, having had a period of time out of full-time education.

Across the UK, over half of mature students are between 21 and 24 years old. Using the term 'mature' to cover anyone from age 21 and upwards means that this is an incredibly diverse group, with differing needs. Advice and guidance for mature students should be tailored for individuals.



MATURE STUDENTS

WHY ARE THEY A 'WIDENING PARTICIPATION' GROUP?

Below are some barriers to university or difficulties while at university, that mature students may face to a greater extent than 18-year-old students:

- **Life commitments:**
 - Starting a full-time undergraduate course later in life is often more of a challenge. They are more likely to juggle studying with caring responsibilities (whether this is children or other family members), have more settled financial responsibilities and be leaving current employment
 - There are very few part-time or evening study options, which can suit mature students better than full-time options.
- **Application process:**
 - Mature students are more likely to be applying without the help of school or college staff: they do not get the same level of advice or guidance on choosing universities or the UCAS application that 18-year-olds may receive
 - Mature students are more likely to apply to university with qualifications that are not necessarily advertised as meeting the entry requirements, or with a mix of qualifications.
- **Not having studied for a while:**
 - Mature students, by definition, do not come to university straight from school or college like a 'traditional' 18-year-old student. They may have been out of education for a couple of years, or it may have been a much more significant amount of time. This can lead to both perceived and real barriers in terms of being 'out of practice' with regards to study skills.

- **Fitting in/belonging:**
 - There may only be one or two mature students on certain courses, meaning that mature students can be more anxious about finding like-minded course-mates. Mature students may often be concerned about fitting in with their course mates
 - If mature students have other life commitments, they may have less time or opportunity to get involved in student societies or social events.



MATURE STUDENTS

RESOURCES AND FURTHER SUPPORT

- Mature students' interests are represented by the Mature and Part-time Students' Officer within the Students' Union. They can be contacted at [via email](#) and there is also a mature students' WhatsApp group students can join
- Student Support and Wellbeing have a dedicated [page](#) outlining support available for students with children
- UCAS has a [page](#) detailing student finance for mature students
- There is a pre-entry contact for mature students in [Widening Participation](#), and a current, undergraduate mature student contact in the [Student Success Office](#).

“ A lot of things I wasn't told about, I found out about them by accident as I went along. ”

STUDENT SUCCESS OFFICE INTERVENTIONS

The mature student key contact is there for when they accept their offers to UCL, all the way through to graduation, ensuring that these students' journey is as smooth as possible.

- The key contact gets in touch with applicants once they have accepted an offer from UCL and is in touch with them throughout the transition period. They outline support available to them and can advise and signpost support services to them throughout their time here, as well as highlight any opportunities available e.g. events, careers-related opportunities etc
- All mature students are welcome to our Mature Student Lunch where they will have the opportunity to meet other current and new mature students and hear from Careers Extra and the Academic Communications Centre at UCL. We also hope to organise a social during the year for mature students.

If you are supporting a mature student who hasn't yet been contacted by the Student Success Office key contact, or is interested in any of the above opportunities, please [email](#) the team with their information.



BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNICITY STUDENTS



The term Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) is used as an umbrella definition for all ethnic groups, excluding white ethnic groups.

Advice and guidance for BAME students should be tailored for individuals. Students within this group may also demonstrate intersectionality with other widening participation groups.



BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNICITY STUDENTS

WHY ARE THEY A 'WIDENING PARTICIPATION' GROUP?

There is a large range of rates of students from different ethnic backgrounds attending university. However, Black African and Black Caribbean students are currently underrepresented at UCL.

UCL data shows that there is a small but statistically significant discrepancy in the rate of 'good' degrees ($\geq 2:1$) achieved by BAME students compared with white students, despite entering UCL with the same high entry requirements. There is a wide discrepancy amongst individual disaggregated groups of students with the largest 'good' degree gaps being seen with Black students.

As an institution, UCL must remain aware that there are systemic elements in its approach that impact the experiences and outcomes of BAME students including existing structural inequalities; institutional racism; and lack of an inclusive environment/curriculum. These are all factors that can lead to the underrepresentation of Black students, and the degree awarding gaps in BAME students at UCL.



BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNICITY STUDENTS

STUDENT SUCCESS OFFICE INTERVENTIONS

The BAME Awarding Gap Project was established in 2018 to address the disparities in outcome and experience of undergraduate BAME students at UCL. This project team has since expanded to create the Student Success Office but specific work and strategies to support BAME students will continue and grow. This work includes:

- [BAME Awarding Gap Faculty Leads](#): academic members of staff who are recruited to deliver local interventions to close the awarding gap. They carry out work within faculties such as implementing changes to curriculum, teaching, and assessment; staff training; developing resources; and data analysis
- Inclusion Training Programme: an online training tool that goes beyond unconscious bias and looks specifically within a teaching and learning context
- [Resource Bank](#): a growing collection of guides, case studies and other resources to inspire and advise on ways to reduce the BAME awarding gap and embrace inclusivity.

“ I think I’m in a much better place mentally coming towards the end of university than I was coming in, and I think that is largely due to the support I’ve been able to receive. ”



YOUNG CARERS



UCL's definition of a young adult carer is someone aged up to 25 who provides unpaid support to a family member who they live with and who could not manage without this help.

Young carers are usually looking after a parent or caring for a brother or sister. This applies to students whose lives are adversely affected by caring for a family member who has a chronic illness, which can include the following: physical or sensory disability, learning disability, medical conditions, mental health difficulties, or has an addiction.

Around 8% of UCL's student body has some form of declared caring responsibility, but support provisions for this group remain low at UCL.

Young adult carers are not under the remit of the Student Success Office but identified as groups of interest for the AWPO. These students will experience a different journey to and through their time at UCL and require enhanced support from departments and faculties.



YOUNG CARERS

WHY ARE THEY A 'WIDENING PARTICIPATION' GROUP?

There are over 375,000 young adult carers in the UK, and they are an often-overlooked group with little awareness about the challenges they face and limited services that meet their needs. The Office for Students and the Carers Trust highlights the following barriers:

- There is no national data on the number of carers in higher education as not all disclose their caring responsibilities, and their carer status can change
- Young adult carers are often a hidden population and so can be harder to reach and encourage into higher education. Support is not generally targeted at this group
- Young adult carers may feel less able to access higher education due to their caring responsibilities at home and may require more support when they do engage
- Issues with lateness or absence, balancing caring responsibilities alongside academic commitments and a high prevalence of self-reported mental health problems are some of the difficulties that many young carers face in higher education.



YOUNG CARERS

WHAT BARRIERS DO THEY FACE?

- The significant additional responsibilities young adult carers take on can make the transition from childhood to adulthood complex and challenging
- The difficulties they experience because of their caring role can have significant and long-term negative impacts on their engagement with education and employment and their overall physical and emotional wellbeing.



- High numbers of young adult carers go on to higher education, but evidence shows that once enrolled, they experience considerable difficulties:
 - Many young adult carers consider dropping out of their studies due to their caring role. Young adult carers are four times more likely to drop out of college or university than their peers
 - They may experience issues with lateness and absence which can be interpreted as laziness or disengagement. Young carers miss an average of 48 days of school because of their role and 68% have been bullied at some point directly because of having to care for someone
 - Balancing caring responsibilities with academic commitments can mean they have less time to devote to their studies
 - There is a high prevalence of self-reported mental health problems amongst young adult carers
 - Young adult carers' experience of university life can be very different to that of their peers. Their choice of university may be restricted to enable them to stay at home to care for a relative, they may miss out on the social aspect of university and face elevated financial hardship due to being unable to take up part time work.



YOUNG CARERS

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Charities:

[Carers Trust](#): support carers in their homes through the provision of replacement care. They also provide information, advice, emotional support, practical help and access to breaks.

[The Children's Society](#): have a range of publications and resources to improve understanding of the young carers. They also provide support and advice to young adult carers themselves.

Finance:

Young adult carers may be eligible for an [Adult Dependant's Grant](#) if an adult depends on them financially.

Young adult carers can access UCL's [Financial Assistance Fund](#).

Young adult carers may be able to access help with costs of caring from the government if they undergo a [financial assessment](#).

Information about financial support for young carers can be found on the Money Advice Service [website](#).

Help and support:

Academic support can be provided by students' departments and personal tutors: young adult carers may benefit from flexible deadlines and help with managing their workload.

UCL's Students' Union has a [Student Parents and Carers Network](#) as well as an [Officer for Students with Caring Responsibilities](#).

If a young adult carer is struggling with their responsibilities they can undergo a [carer's assessment](#) to see what might make their life easier in terms of practical help and assistance, advice, and financial assistance.

The [NHS](#) has useful guidance on the rights that a young carer has access to.



If we're not attending lectures, it doesn't mean we're not passionate about the course – there may be things going on. Just understanding that a student's participation isn't necessarily a reflection of their commitment to the course.



FORCED MIGRANT STUDENTS



This term defines any person with a background of involuntary immigration, for example refugees or asylum seekers.

There are several immigration backgrounds that are included under the term Forced Migrant Students, for example unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), those with humanitarian protection, or those with limited leave to remain.

Forced migrants are not under the remit of the Student Success Office but identified as groups of interest for the AWPO. These students will experience a different journey to and through their time at UCL and require enhanced support from departments and faculties.

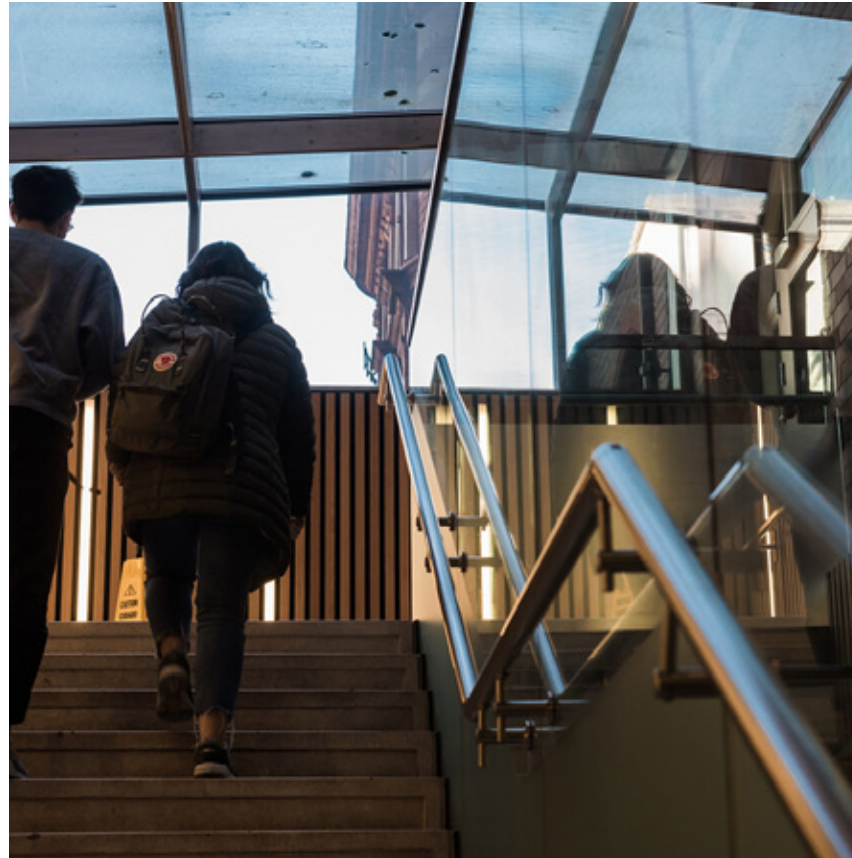


FORCED MIGRANT STUDENTS

WHY ARE THEY A 'WIDENING PARTICIPATION' GROUP?

Very little is known about the exact numbers of forced migrants in higher education in the UK. This is partly due to the lack of data collected at the application stage, the complexity of immigration statuses and definitions and the fact that a student's immigration status can change during their degree.

“ Understanding that we may find things harder, we might not always be able to talk about it, but just having empathy on the other side, that would be really helpful. ”



WHAT BARRIERS DO THEY FACE?

Finance:

- Refugees and those with humanitarian protection will be charged 'home' fees, while asylum seekers and those with limited leave to remain will be charged 'international' fees (although some universities, including UCL, do opt to charge asylum seekers 'home' fees).
- Certain forced migrants, including asylum seekers, will not be able to access Student Finance. This means that, even when charged 'home' fees, the cost of university can be prohibitively expensive. Some students are able to find sources of funding, but these can sometimes fall through, leaving students in precarious financial positions during their course.
- Some forced migrants are not permitted to work, meaning they cannot take on part-time jobs to help finance their studies or living costs.

Uncertainty regarding immigration status:

- Receiving refugee status is often seen as the end 'goal' for anyone seeking asylum, however in the UK this status only lasts for 5 years. At this point, refugees are eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain – but there is no guarantee that they will receive this
- Documentation is often held by the Home Office for months or even years while immigration cases are processed, which can cause problems when students need to provide this to universities.

Qualifications:

- When young people arrive in the UK, they may experience delays accessing education – sometimes due to officials trying to verify their age - or finding an appropriate educational institution for them

In addition, teachers will often equate English ability with their general academic ability, meaning that they may not be informed about appropriate or relevant progression routes, or leaving them in lower sets at school or college

- Students may have left their original countries without documentation, making it difficult to prove any previous qualifications they have completed
- Students may need to take English language tests to get into university; both the tests and preparation classes can cost a lot of money.

Inaccurate or inaccessible advice:

- Immigration is a hugely complex, and forever changing, area. A forced migrant's circumstances may be very complex, and they may have been given conflicting information or advice by schools, colleges, local authorities, or universities.

Mental health issues:

- Forced migrants are far more likely to have mental health problems than the rest of the UK population. They may have lived through incredibly traumatic events in their country of origin or during their journey to the UK, or experienced losing family, friends, homes, livelihoods and community. Once in the UK, they are often living with the constant worry of their asylum claim being rejected, and fear for the future. These issues, alongside the above education-specific issues, may mean that forced migrant students are more likely to require support from mental health and wellbeing staff once at university.



FORCED MIGRANT STUDENTS

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

- [Refugee Education UK](#): a charity providing services helping young people seeking safety in the UK to access and succeed in education (e.g. educational mentoring and wellbeing support)
- [Student Action for Refugees \(STAR\)](#): a charity made up of students across 50 UK universities and colleges
- [Coram Children's Legal Centre](#): offer free specialist legal information, advice and representation on issues affecting forced migrant young people
- [Refugee-related research and activities at UCL](#)
- There is a pre-entry contact for forced migrants in [Widening Participation](#).



ACCESS AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION AT UCL

UCL's Access and Widening Participation Office (AWPO) works to address patterns of under-representation in higher education and works with prospective students from underrepresented groups at UCL. Target groups include those who are:

- **from lower socioeconomic backgrounds**
- **first in their family to attend university**
- **Black African and Black Caribbean heritage**
- **care experienced and estranged**
- **young carers**
- **forced migrants**
- **disabled students.**

AWPO's work is governed and funded through [UCL's Access and Participation Plan](#) (APP). The Office for Students (OfS) sets national targets to improve equal opportunities for underrepresented groups. This information is then used to set UCL's own targets to address areas where there are specific gaps in equality of opportunity.

The AWPO team delivers a wide range of interventions to tackle the key barriers to university entry. This includes:

Prior attainment:

- [UCL Scholars](#): a literary skills programme for year 9 students delivered in partnership with the National Literary Trust
- KS4 Maths support programme with the UCL Academy.

Information, advice and guidance:

- A comprehensive schools engagement programme with campus visits, workshops and visits to schools
- [Envision](#): an event for young people of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage in Years 10-13 who are interested in learning more about university and future career options
- [Discover UCL](#): a Summer School for D/deaf and hard of hearing students in Year 12.

Geography:

- [Summer Schools](#): a large residential summer school programme for Year 12 state school students from across the UK, in partnership with academic departments
- [East London schools engagement programme](#): a holistic programme with five partner schools, complementing a varied menu of outreach opportunities for all East London schools.



STUDENT SUCCESS OFFICE

Starting university is a very exciting time, but it can be overwhelming for WP students who may face certain challenges that other students may not experience. Established in March 2022, the Student Success Office focuses on initiatives that enable all UCL students to be successful, regardless of their background.

The team leads on the development and implementation of UCL's strategies to support academic success and close awarding and retention gaps. They work in conjunction with UCL Arena, the Academic Communications Centre, Vice President (Education and Student Experience) Office and faculties and departments to develop and deliver interventions to address disparities in outcomes.

The team takes an institution-wide approach to delivering initiatives and resources for staff and students which lead to culture change. There is a strong focus on evaluation and research and adopting an evidence-led approach to ensure success for student groups where there are unexplained gaps.

The Student Success Office works with the following UK undergraduate students:

- **The Access UCL cohort**
- **Care experienced and estranged students**
- **Disabled students**
- **Mature students**
- **Black, Asian and minority ethnic students.**

They also deliver a range of targeted interventions for each of these groups. However, there are also several interventions that span and benefit all students, including:

- **[Inclusive Curriculum Health Check](#)**: a tool to support UCL staff in reflecting on how to embed the principles of inclusivity into all aspects of the academic cycle
- **Student Curriculum Partners**: an opportunity for students to review modules and share feedback, regarding inclusivity, accessibility, and learning experience
- **Student Success Interns**: each summer, the team hires several students from UCL's target backgrounds to work on the strategy and interventions. This ensures the provision of the student voice and perspective.



UCL SOCIAL MOBILITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS

For queries surrounding Student Success please contact:

 smss.studentsuccess@ucl.ac.uk

 [ucl_success](https://www.instagram.com/ucl_success)

 [ucl_success](https://twitter.com/ucl_success)

For queries surrounding Access and Widening Participation, please contact:

 wp@ucl.ac.uk

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