University College of Estate Management

Access and participation plan 2024-25 to 2027-28

Introduction and strategic aim

University College of Estate Management (UCEM) is the leading provider of supported online education for the built environment sector, with over 100 years' worth of experience in providing learning opportunities of the highest quality. UCEM was founded in 1919 and granted a Royal Charter (RC000125) on 22nd August 1922, and has been a registered independent charitable institution in England and Wales since 24 May 1963. In 2022, UCEM was granted permanent degree awarding powers by the Office for Students (OfS).

UCEM's core purpose is: *"to provide truly accessible, relevant and cost-effective education, which enhances careers, increases professionalism and contributes to a sustainable built environment."* This purpose drives UCEM's commitment to equality of opportunity and delivering programmes that are accessible to all students, regardless of age, location, or protected characteristics, as well as ensuring its education model is flexible enough that it enables students to have transformative learning experiences. UCEM's drive to contribute to a sustainable built environment is synonymous with a diverse and inclusive industry, and it promotes inclusion and diversity in all aspects of its offering, continuing to break down barriers to engagement and ensuring successful outcomes.

The institution provides educational courses from FHEQ Level 4 to Level 7, a key component of which is the institution's complete online learning offering, providing a key access route for students from across the UK and the world. UCEM currently has over 3500 students worldwide, with a current average age on entry at 28.

Further supporting UCEM's core purpose is the institution's long-term vision and strategy: *"To be the Centre of Excellence for Built Environment Education"*, within which a core tenet and a key focus is widening participation. UCEM's Access and Participation Plan (APP) sits alongside the institution's broader Widening Participation Strategy (2024-28), outlining the vision for how UCEM will deliver its commitment to increasing equality of opportunity for all students to access, succeed and progress from UCEM programmes and to support a more diverse and inclusive built environment.

UCEM is well respected within the built environment sector and collaborates with a number of key organisations, charities, partners, professional bodies, and industry representatives to drive change in the sector, which the institution will look to develop as part of this APP.

In writing this APP, UCEM has been mindful of its requirements under the Equality Act 2010. This Plan has been designed to be ambitious, consistently paying due regard to the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) but is realistic within the institution's built environment-focused remit and capabilities as a small and specialist online provider.

Risks to equality of opportunity

This Plan will address a number of key risks to equality of opportunity that pertain to UCEM's offering (see Annex A for details, and Annex B for intervention strategy rationale around each type of risk). It should be noted that UCEM is an institution with a high proportion of degree apprentices, which is anticipated to grow further in the next few years, and consequently a declining number of students who study part- and full-time (as defined in the OfS access and participation dashboard dataset) at undergraduate level. All students access learning via a purely online teaching model, which provides a flexible and accessible approach to learning for a broad range of students.

Finally, UCEM specialises in built environment education only[1], and it is therefore vital as part of this assessment of risk to identify risks within the context of the sector the institution operates within.

As outlined in Annex A, UCEM's datasets on the OfS data dashboard are small, and it is not possible to set meaningful targets where student groups are particularly small. UCEM has taken the approach of only considering setting meaningful numerical targets derived from the OfS data dashboard. As UCEM is dedicated to widening participation, any under-represented groups that cannot achieve meaningful targets will be acknowledged and incorporated into the Widening Participation Strategy, which supports the APP, to ensure the institution continues to support all students to be successful (see "Whole provider approach" for further information).

A key change in UCEM's provision since the last Plan submission is the increasing proportion of students studying as part of an apprenticeship. Based on the APP data dashboard, 72% of UCEM's 2021-22 UK-based intake enrolled on an apprenticeship route, and this trend is likely to continue. As detailed in the Assessment of Performance, it has been challenging to properly ascertain risk based on the low numbers of under-represented groups.

For the risk associated with PTA_1, UCEM will look to build partnerships and collaborate to support raising prior attainment, as the risk identified pertains to information and guidance, and knowledge and skills. This will include local activities, targeting key under-represented groups in the built environment. UCEM's UK offices are based in Reading, where interventions will primarily focus. National statistics show that the Reading borough area is nationally one of the most deprived, with 8.4% of pupils persistently disadvantaged, and 15.9% as the mean percentage of pupils' school lives for which they are disadvantaged in this area[2]. Locally, the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index Deciles show that 28% of Reading borough wards are in the most deprived categories[3] and 32% of wards are in the most deprived areas for education, skills and training[4].

With regard to the risk for PTA_2, UCEM has identified that low proportion of females and ethnic minority students are accessing UCEM's apprenticeship programmes. For female students over the four-year aggregated data, the dashboard shows that UCEM's apprenticeship intake is proportionally 69.2% male and only 30.8% female, though the proportion of apprenticeship female students is recorded as 32.4% in the latest year of data. For ethnic minority students, four-year aggregated data shows that UCEM's apprenticeship intake is proportionally 84.6% white and 15.4% from an ethnic minority background. Significantly, both these groups are recognised as under-represented in the built environment sector.

A significant risk to apprentice students from these groups includes information and guidance, as there is a lack of information given to both school-age and mature students on modes of study and non-traditional routes, such as online learning, degree apprenticeships, and alternative sectors such as the built environment (see Annex B for further details). Nevertheless, an additional risk for UCEM and the built environment is a lack of information and guidance about how diversity can strengthen recruitment and to make employers more aware of how EDI can impact upon positive recruitment. The built environment has a lack of diversity across the sector, and whilst some companies are striving to improve this, there are still significant gaps. The largest gaps are found in construction, with the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) stating that those from ethnic minorities who are working in the construction industry make up 6% of the workforce, with women at 15%, and only 2% of those women working on-site[5]. Whilst female students do not usually form an under-represented group in higher education, representation is an issue within the built environment sector, and it is a key aim across the sector to increase the recruitment for candidates from ethnic minorities and female groups.

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[1] For UCEM, "built environment" refers to construction, real estate, as well as chartered, building and quantity surveying disciplines.
[2] Education Policy Institute, 2020.
[3] Reading Borough Council (IMD), 2019.
[4] Reading Borough Council (Education, Skills and Training), 2019.
[5] Chartered Institute of Building, 2023.

For the risk against target PTS_1, UCEM has identified an on-course continuation gap between mature and young apprenticeship students as an indication of risk. Four-year aggregated data records a continuation rate of 95.8% amongst young apprentices and 88.2% amongst mature apprentices, representing a gap of 7.6 pp. In comparison, the data dashboards shows all providers in England with a continuation rate of 92.6% of young apprentices and 87.2% (for 2021-22) amongst mature apprentices, representing a gap of 5.4 pp. Mature students could be affected by up to ten different risks throughout their student journey according to the EORR, but in the case of UCEM's mature student population, three risks were identified as barriers to equality of opportunity: cost pressures, mental health and academic support. These risks were further justified by responses to the student consultation and evidence base for activities (See Annex B). Many UCEM mature students are working full-time and are often responsible for dependents, leading to less time to study and impacting on their sense of belonging to a student community and the risks can interlink. These risks can negatively impact continuation, particularly if issues build up over time.

For the risk against target PTS_2, UCEM has identified an on-course continuation gap for female apprentice students. Four-year aggregated data records a continuation rate of 93.2% amongst male students and 90.6% amongst female students, representing a gap of 2.6pp. As previously detailed, female students are not traditionally a singular area for disadvantage in higher education, but in the built environment sector there is a risk to both their access and success in the industry. As many UCEM female apprentices are also mature students, many face the same risks within PTS_1, particularly considering how the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how women take on the majority of care responsibilities at home[6]. Within the built environment there can also be further areas of risk, such as a lack of role models or a community of peers to fall back on for support, thus influencing academic performance and negatively impacting continuation rates. For example, a report by Randstad identified that in 2019 72% of women in construction experienced gender discrimination in the workplace in some shape or form. It also reported that 15% of organisations surveyed had never promoted a woman to a senior position[7].

Objectives

As part of working to address risk one and two, the objective and intervention strategy one (IS1) look to take a dual approach to mitigating the recognised risks. Firstly, to collaborate with two key partners to work with schools to raise pre-16 attainment. This will primarily focus on improving knowledge and skills relating to Geography and the "Design Engineer Construct!" programme. For the second approach, UCEM staff and alumni will provide information and guidance to schools to encourage learning and help shape the direction of that institution.

For risk two, a numerical target or objective relating to increased access for female and ethnic minority students to UCEM programmes is not set, as UCEM does not have control over individual employers' recruitment processes. However, UCEM retains an ambition to effect change and diversify the built environment sector, and for this reason an objective has been set that targets the employers themselves, by ensuring that they have suitable access to and awareness of information and tools. UCEM will also focus on influencing these employers to effect a change in the diversity of their apprentices, impacting the diversity of students sent to UCEM in the future (see Annex A and B for further details). Medium-sized employers will be targeted to have the greatest impact (larger employers are more likely to already have EDI strategies and targets in place). UCEM's medium-sized businesses[8] whilst still having a sizeable staff base, were identified as not demonstrating any formal EDI targets or strategies in their outward-facing marketing and websites. UCEM currently works with approximately 60 medium-sized employers, and will therefore develop the knowledge for, collaborate with, and influence those employers to drive the change needed in the built environment sector.

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[6] Frederiksen, R., et al., 2021.

[7] Randstad, 2020.

[8] Medium-sized employers are defined in line with the UK Government's definition of a medium-sized business, of between 50 and 250 employees, and with an annual turnover under €50 million.

The resulting objective for risk three (IS3), will look to further reduce the gap for mature apprentices by supporting them to succeed throughout their studies. As there are many factors involved in the risks identified, UCEM has decided to focus this support at key times in the academic cycle (transition, first year, and around assessment periods) as these points have been identified as crucial in terms of success. In addition, UCEM will provide more practical support (including childcare learning support, further representation and distinct spaces to study) throughout the student journey to reflect the needs of this particular group of students, which should reduce the gap.

The resulting objective for risk four is set out in intervention strategy four (IS4) and will look to further reduce the gap for female apprentices by supporting them to succeed on course. As there are many factors involved in the risks identified, UCEM has decided to focus this support at key times in the academic cycle (transition, first year, and around assessment periods) as these points have been identified as crucial in terms of success to provide support (such as childcare learning support and safe spaces to talk).

Intervention strategies and expected outcomes

Intervention strategy 1: Objectives and targets

Objective: To enhance the curriculum and training of teachers for KS3 Geography and Level 1 and 2 "Design Engineer Construct!" in order to raise attainment of secondary school pupils in deprived Reading based postcodes by 2028.

Target: PTA_1 To support and collaborate with five secondary schools within Reading based postcodes by 2028.

Risks to equality of opportunity

Knowledge and skills, information and guidance.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
ID 1.5.[9] To collaborate with the Chartered Surveyors Training Trust (CSTT) as part of their "My Environment, My Future" (MEMF) programme to develop a Geography curriculum for school teachers to deliver. Resources will include years 7 to 9, as well as transition 'taster day' content to support the transition between primary and secondary school.	Sponsorship funds for MEMF, administrative staff support, HEAT subscription, academic staff support, staff travel costs, developing materials and resources.	Improved teacher confidence in curriculum and resources within the school environment, improved attainment at Years 7, 8 and 9.	
ID 1.6. "Adopt a School" scheme with Class Of Your Own to commit to funding an in-school programme that supports specialist teacher training to develop student opportunities for them to achieve recognised "Design Engineer Construct!" qualifications.	Sponsorship of a school over the Plan duration, administrative staff support, HEAT subscription, staff travel costs, enhancing materials and resources.	School teachers trained in new pupil engagement practices, increased STEM teacher capacity and quality, increasing STEM student ability and attainment.	
ID 1.3. School governors programme to recruit and place UCEM staff and alumni into school governor positions in disadvantaged areas and underperforming schools across Reading postcodes. Informing key decisions to encourage school performance. In partnership with Governors for Schools.	Governors for Schools: training materials, Skills, knowledge and time of Governors for Schools staff, associated delivery costs. UCEM: UCEM staff and alumni to act as governors, creation of additional training materials, administrative staff time.	Improved pupil outcomes including attendance, behaviour, and academic performance, reduced attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils.	
Total cost of activities: £158,000 (estimate)			

Evidence base and rationale: UCEM has conducted a literature review and gathered opinions across the student body, staff and representatives across the built environment sector, in order to develop these activities. As a small and specialist institution, UCEM does face challenges in terms of

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[9] Internal UCEM Activity ID numbers

the scope, reach, and the likely impact of its access activities compared to other, larger institutions with more resources and a broader remit. See Annex B for further information.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
MEMF curriculum development	Improved teacher confidence in curriculum and resources within the school environment, improved attainment at Years 7, 8 and 9.	From the 2024-25 academic year, a Type 1 (for work with partners) and Type 2 mixed method longitudinal study of the MEMF to assess the success of the resources within schools. This will include using HEAT and Department for Education data to assess changes to the schools.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
"Adopt a School" programme	School teachers trained in new pupil engagement practices, increased STEM teacher capacity and quality, increasing STEM student ability and attainment.	From the 2024-25 academic year, a Type 1 (for work with partners) and Type 2 mixed method longitudinal study of teachers to assess their development. This will include using HEAT and Department for Education data to assess changes to the schools. Requesting further school data to assess data regarding attainment.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 1.3. School governors scheme	Improved pupil outcomes including attendance, behaviour, and academic performance, reduced attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils.	From the 2024-25 academic year, a Type 1 (for work with partners) and Type 2 mixed method longitudinal study of the governors to assess the success of the outcomes with regard to changes within the school. This will include using HEAT and Department for Education data to assess changes to the schools where volunteers are placed. Requesting further school data to assess data regarding attainment.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.

Intervention strategy 2: Objectives and targets

Objective: To work with medium-sized built environment sector employers to adopt formal equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategies or numerical targets by 2028.

Target: PTA_2 By 2028, 20% of UCEM's medium-sized employers will have published formal EDI strategies and targets.

Risks to equality of opportunity

Information and guidance for potential students considering the built environment sector.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
ID 2.9. To create an EDI toolkit for UCEM's medium-sized built environment employers, in order to influence change and encourage formal EDI strategies and targets. The toolkit will be in line with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) apprenticeship toolkit, as well as the built environment professional bodies (PSRBs) memorandum of understanding. The toolkit will primarily focus upon strategies for potential female and ethnic minority students as part of the wider access journey.	Staff and administration costs for resource creation and dissemination (i.e. liaising directly with employers), influencing costs.	Increased numbers of medium-sized employers considering publishing formal EDI targets and strategies, leading to long-term increased recruitment of diverse apprentices (with a focus on ethnic minority and female apprentices).	IS4
ID 2.3. To investigate opportunities to collaborate with built environment charities and organisations who work with or represent women and those from ethnic minorities, and also champion EDI and degree apprenticeships in areas relevant to them within the sector.	Administrative support, resource creation including staff resource.	Increased access to EDI knowledge and tools, supporting development of formal EDI targets and strategies.	
ID 2.5. Collaboration with PSRBs and other built environment organisations to make EDI knowledge (with regard to ethnic minority and female students) and tools more accessible to their membership.	Administrative support, travel costs.	Increased awareness and access to EDI knowledge and tools, influencing stakeholders to develop formal EDI targets and strategies, leading to longer term change in the built environment.	IS1
ID 2.6. Working with Building People to influence employers and to create new industry connections, in	Administrative support, travel costs.	Increased awareness and access to EDI knowledge and tools,	

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
order to influence them to consider formal recruitment strategies for key groups (including female and ethnic minority groups). (See "Whole provider approach" for further information on Building People).		utilising Building People's networks to influence and collaborate with stakeholders to develop formal EDI targets and strategies, leading to longer term change in the built environment.	
Total cost of activities: £108,000 (estimate)			

Evidence base and rationale: The OfS recommends that smaller and specialist providers collaborate in order to have the greatest impact. To diversify the sector, UCEM will work with its employers in order to influence their apprenticeship recruitment and selection processes, ultimately leading to long-term change. UCEM recognises that IS2 does carry a risk that the institution might not be able to influence employers to make a change without the support of formal industry regulation, particularly given the capacity of those in medium-sized companies and how much work they are willing or able to undertake. See Annex B for further information.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
ID 2.9. Data and Evaluation activity: EDI toolkit	Increased numbers of medium-sized employers publishing formal EDI targets and strategies, leading to long-term increased recruitment of diverse apprentices (with a focus on ethnic minority and female apprentices).	For 2024-25 a wide scale evaluation of the sector will be undertaken to assess the full EDI spectrum across the built environment, and to set a baseline. From 2025-26, UCEM will begin tracking change against this baseline.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, dissemination to relevant built environment sector organisations and employers, via the EDI blog, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 2.3. Charity collaborations within the built	Increased access to EDI knowledge and tools, supporting development of formal EDI targets and strategies.	From 2024-25, Type 1 longitudinal study with analysis of the interactions and reach that have come with sector collaborators.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, dissemination to relevant built environment sector organisations and charities, and examples of

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
environment to champion EDI			further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 2.5. Built environment sector collaboration	Increased awareness and access to EDI knowledge and tools, influencing stakeholders to develop formal EDI targets and strategies, leading to longer term change in the built environment sector.	From 2023-24, Type 1 longitudinal study with analysis of the interactions and reach that have come with sector collaborators.	From 2024-25 an annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document, and dissemination to relevant built environment sector organisations and employers.
ID 2.6. Continuing to work with Building People to influence the sector	Increased awareness and access to EDI knowledge and tools, utilising Building People's networks to influence and collaborate with stakeholders to develop formal EDI targets and strategies, leading to longer term change in the built environment.	From 2023-24, Type 1 longitudinal study with analysis of the interactions and reach that have come with sector collaborators.	From 2024-25 an annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.

Intervention strategy 3: Objectives and targets

Objective: To ensure mature students are supported to continue with their studies and succeed on programme, resulting in a reduced gap in continuation of 5.5 percentage points by 2028.

Target: PTS_1 To reduce the gap in continuation between apprenticeship mature students and apprenticeship young students to 5.5 percentage points by 2028.

Risks to equality of opportunity

Cost pressures, mental health, academic support.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
ID 4.6. Mature student transition support provides additional digital skills support for students as part of the university pre-entry transition process.	Staff time to design and develop resources, administrative support.	Increased mature student motivation, confidence, and resilience, improved professional and transferable skills, an increased sense of belonging and self-efficacy, and improved awareness of the skills needed to study successfully online.	IS4
ID 4.7. An additional childcare learning fund (in-kind financial support), allowing students to apply for funding to enrol dependents on online learning courses. The funding will cover one month of tuition, to cover the assessment periods in autumn/spring so parents have more time for their studies.	Financial cost of learning courses, staff administrative support.	Decreased financial concerns for students, leading to increased continuation rates for mature students who have dependents. Increased time to focus on their studies also leading to increase continuation rates. Providing children with additional learning support to raise attainment.	IS4
ID 4.2. Introducing a specific Student Officer for mature students, to develop supportive student networks around their shared interests and challenges. Officers are supported by UCEM staff to work on campaigns and causes within widening participation.	Staff administrative time.	Increased representation for mature students, increased awareness of UCEM staff to specific mature student challenges, leading to increased continuation rates of mature students, supported by increased communication between students and UCEM staff.	IS4
ID 4.3. Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is a scheme that fosters cross-modular support between students on the same programme. PAL encourages students to support each other and to learn collaboratively under the guidance of trained students from the years above.	Staff administration, staff facilitation, training time and costs, creation of training resources.	Improved academic and transferable skills, increased student awareness of pastoral, financial and academic support available to students and PAL support will increase students' sense of belonging, also contribute to improved academic performance.	IS4
ID 4.4. A Shut up and write type activity that brings student groups together to a quiet, dedicated time and place for writing, but also providing separate spaces for students to collaborate and exchange ideas. Initially this will be hosted at UCEM's offices in Reading (and	Staff administration of rooms and coordinating travel, funding travel for APP student groups, cost of refreshments	Increased continuation rates for mature students and improved academic performance, and increased students' sense of belonging.	IS4

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
remotely in order to make it accessible to UCEM's student base) and students can apply for funding to travel to Reading for the event.	and lunch for attendees.		
Total cost of activities: £336,000 (estimate)			

Evidence base and rationale: UCEM students are typically in full-time employment and can be balancing their work and studies against family commitment, which are particularly likely to impact the academic performance of mature students (see Annex A and B). Student feedback also suggests that studying online can result in feelings of isolation due to a lack of a physical student community, which can also contribute to poor mental health, which UCEM has sought to mitigate through the activities below. See Annex B for further information.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
ID 4.6. Mature student digital skills transition	Increased mature student motivation, confidence, and resilience, improved professional and transferable skills, an increased sense of belonging and self-efficacy, and improved awareness of the skills needed to study successfully online.	From 2026-27, a Type 2 quasi, mixed method longitudinal study will be utilised to assess the success of the outcomes (full and interim). Students will answer pre- and post-survey questions to assess knowledge prior to starting their course and then quantitative analysis will be undertaken to measure their progress. Financial incentives will be used to encourage survey responses that is specific to this activity as well as using other wider surveys to supplement data collection.	From 2025-26 an annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 4.7. Additional childcare learning fund	Decreased financial concerns for students, leading to increased continuation rates for mature students who have dependents. Increased time to focus on their studies	From 2024-25, Type 2 quantitative analysis will be undertaken to measure mature students' progress in terms of their continuation and assess those students in receipt of learning	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
	also leading to increased continuation rates. Providing children with additional learning support to raise attainment.	support. Providing Type 1 evaluation by liaising with the learning provider to ascertain learner attendance and possible success.	dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 4.2. Student Officer for mature students	Increased representation for mature students, increased awareness of UCEM staff to specific mature student challenges, leading to increased continuation rates of mature students, supported by increased communication between students and UCEM staff.	From 2024-25, Student Officers will undertake Type 2 evaluation for the duration of their role. Wider mature student qualitative feedback will be gathered by data from wider institutional student surveys and via UCEM's student representation system.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 4.3. Peer Assisted Learning	Improved academic and transferable skills, increased student awareness of pastoral, financial and academic support available to students and PAL support will increase students' sense of belonging, also contribute to improved academic performance.	From 2024-25, a Type 2 quasi, mixed method longitudinal study will be utilised to assess the success of the outcomes (full and interim). Specific analysis of mature student continuation for participants versus non-participants where numbers permit. Mature student qualitative feedback will be gathered by data from wider institutional student surveys and via UCEM's student representation system. Financial incentives will be used to encourage survey responses that is specific to PAL as well as using other wider surveys to supplement data collection.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 4.4. Shut up and Write type activity	Increased continuation rates for mature students and improved academic performance, and increased students' sense of belonging.	From 2024-25, a Type 2 quasi, mixed method longitudinal study will be utilised to assess the success of the outcomes (full and interim), gathering mature student qualitative feedback as to their progress and awareness of academic skills. Financial incentives will be used to encourage survey responses.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
		Specific analysis of mature student continuation of participants versus non-participants to be evaluated where numbers permit.	

Intervention strategy 4: Objectives and targets

Objective: To ensure female students are supported to continue with their studies and succeed on programme, resulting in a reduced gap in continuation of 2 percentage points by 2028.

Target: PTS_2 To reduce the gap in continuation between apprentice female students and apprentice male students to 2 percentage points by 2028.

Risks to equality of opportunity

Cost pressures, mental health, academic support, gender discrimination.

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
ID 4.7. An additional childcare learning fund (in-kind financial support), allowing female students to apply for funding to enrol dependents on online learning courses. The funding will cover one month of tuition, to cover the assessment periods in autumn/spring so parents who are female have more time for their studies.	Financial cost of learning courses, staff administrative support.	Decreased financial concerns for students, leading to increased continuation rates for female students who have dependents. Increased time to focus on their studies also leading to increase continuation rates. Providing children with additional learning support to raise attainment.	IS3
ID 4.16. Female student networking group will meet virtually across the academic year and will be available for students to share lived experiences of studying and working in the built environment, in order to provide a sense of community, encouragement, and collaboration.	Staff administrative time.	Increased continuation rates for female students, resulting from an increased sense of belonging.	IS3
ID 4.2. Introducing a specific Student Officer for female students, to develop supportive student networks around their shared interests and challenges. Officers	Staff administrative time.	Increased representation for female students, increased awareness of UCEM staff to specific female student challenges, leading to increased	IS3

Activity	Inputs	Outcomes	Cross intervention?
are supported by UCEM staff to work on campaigns and causes within widening participation.		continuation rates, supported by increased communication between students and UCEM staff.	
ID 4.3. Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is a scheme that fosters cross-modular support between students on the same programme. PAL encourages students to support each other and to learn collaboratively under the guidance of trained students from the year above.	Staff administration, staff facilitation, training time and costs, creation of training resources.	Improved academic and transferable skills, increased student awareness of pastoral, financial and academic support available to students and PAL support will increase students' sense of belonging, also contribute to improved academic performance.	IS3
ID 4.4. A Shut up and write type activity which brings student groups together to a quiet, dedicated time and place for writing, but also providing separate spaces for students to collaborate and exchange ideas. Initially this will be hosted at UCEM's offices in Reading (and remotely in order to make it accessible to UCEM's student base) and students can apply for funding to travel to Reading for the event.	Staff administration of rooms and coordinating travel, funding travel for APP student groups, cost of refreshments and lunch for attendees.	Increased continuation rates for female students and improved academic performance, and increased students' sense of belonging.	IS3
Total cost of activities: £15,000 (estimate) (due to activities being shared within IS3, the costs of duplicated activities will be across both interventions, and have therefore not been duplicated here, but counted within IS3)			

Evidence base and rationale: UCEM students are typically in full-time employment and can be balancing their work and studies against family commitment, which are particularly likely to impact the academic performance of female students (see Annex B). Further, extensive research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that the majority of childcare and other family responsibilities can fall on women, which can impact their studies. The built environment sector is under-represented in terms of women, and student feedback also suggests that studying online can result in feelings of isolation due to a lack of a physical student community, which can also contribute to poor mental health, which UCEM has sought to mitigate through the activities below. See Annex B for further information.

Evaluation

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
ID 4.7. Additional childcare learning fund	Decreased financial concerns for students, leading to increased continuation rates for female students who have dependents. Increased time to focus on their studies also leading to increased continuation rates. Providing children with additional learning support to raise attainment.	From 2024-25, Type 2 quantitative analysis will be undertaken to measure mature students' progress in terms of their continuation and assess those students in receipt of learning support. Providing Type 1 evaluation by liaising with the learning provider to ascertain learner attendance and possible success.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 4.16. Female student networking group	Increased continuation rates for female students, resulting from an increased sense of belonging.	From 2024-25, a Type 2 quasi, quantitative longitudinal study will be utilised to assess the success of the outcomes (full and interim), to assess female student qualitative feedback of the networking sessions and their impact. Quantitative analysis will be undertaken to measure female student's progress in terms of their continuation rates.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 4.2. Student Officer for female students	Increased representation for female students, increased awareness of UCEM staff to specific female student challenges, leading to increased continuation rates, supported by increased communication between students and UCEM staff.	From 2024-25, Student Officers will undertake Type 2 evaluation for the duration of their role. Wider female student qualitative feedback will be gathered by data from wider institutional student surveys and via UCEM's student representation system.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 4.3. Peer Assisted Learning	Improved academic and transferable skills, increased student awareness of pastoral, financial and academic support available to students and PAL	From 2024-25, a Type 2 quasi, mixed method longitudinal study will be utilised to assess the success of the outcomes (full and interim), gathering female student qualitative feedback as to their progress and awareness of academic skills.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website; end of Plan report on the UCEM website; and examples of further dissemination can be found in the

Activity	Outcomes	Method(s) of evaluation	Summary of publication plan
	support will increase students' sense of belonging, also contribute to improved academic performance.	Financial incentives will be used to encourage survey responses that is specific to this activity as well as using other wider surveys to supplement data collection. Specific analysis of female student continuation of participants versus non-participants to be evaluated where numbers permit.	Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.
ID 4.4. Shut up and Write type activity	Increased continuation rates for female students and improved academic performance, and increased students' sense of belonging.	From 2024-25, a Type 2 quasi, mixed method longitudinal study will be utilised to assess the success of the outcomes (full and interim), gathering female student qualitative feedback as to their progress and awareness of academic skills. Financial incentives will be used to encourage survey responses that is specific to this activity as well as using other wider surveys to supplement data collection. Specific analysis of female student continuation of participants versus non-participants to be evaluated where numbers permit.	Annual report of interim findings published on the UCEM website, end of Plan report on the UCEM website, and examples of further dissemination can be found in the Evaluation of the Plan section of this document.

Whole provider approach

Equality of opportunity

UCEM is subject to the Equality Act 2010, which requires it to pay due regard to the need to: "advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it", a thread that runs across all institutional policies and thus throughout each students' journey. Furthermore, changes to policies and practices are assessed against Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) to ensure that students with protected characteristics are not adversely affected as a result of the changes, with a range of staff taking part in these processes. This section will reference different elements of UCEM's Code of Practice, including Equality and Diversity, Neurodiversity, Disability and Wellbeing, Safeguarding and Prevent, as well as other significant institutional documentation, such as the Widening Participation Strategy and UCEM's Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy. These documents were consulted as part of the Assessment of Performance (see Annex A), in reviewing the EORR and in the creation of the Intervention Strategies, as well as part of wider consultation with staff across UCEM to utilise their expertise on widening participation, evaluation, and EDI.

Strategic approach

Strategically, UCEM aligns the APP with the institution's overarching Strategic Plan 2020-25 and continuous improvement framework, including the UCEM Enhancement Plan (initiatives intended to enhance student learning across the institution), the Institutional Risk Register, Scorecard, all institutional metrics and KPI management systems, with widening participation forming a foundation tenet of UCEM's vision and strategic plan. UCEM's commitment to access and participation and widening participation is present across all levels of the institution, including at Board of Trustees and Executive level. UCEM's APP sits alongside the institutional Widening Participation Strategy, which covers a much broader remit of advancing equality of opportunity for under-represented groups across UCEM's entire UK undergraduate and postgraduate provision. The Widening Participation Strategy ensures that all under-represented groups are acknowledged and continue to access UCEM programmes, are supported to succeed in their studies, and progress into relevant careers in the built environment sector. Further, UCEM's commitment to championing sustainability via the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals is demonstrated by the change to the institution's core purpose to contribute to a sustainable built environment, which is synonymous with a more inclusive and diverse sector, and will ensure that widening participation continues to be a key focus of the institution going forward.

The Board of Trustees will continue to invest, to enable UCEM to launch new programmes which meet the approved apprenticeship standards. This work commences with the introduction of the Level 4 Construction Site Management in 2024-25. To enable successful delivery of these apprenticeship courses, UCEM will continue to work closely with employers to support the institution's apprenticeship provision as part of encouraging widening participation in the sector.

UCEM monitors continuation and completion rates for under-represented groups as part of module evaluation and programme review processes. This review process feeds into programme-level and institutional-level enhancement plans. Within the institutional enhancement plan, all activities linked to widening participation are coded and monitored by the Widening Participation Project Board, and at Deliberative Committees (the Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee (QSEC) and Academic Board).

As part of institutional work to develop UCEM's data capabilities, it is intended that work will be undertaken to ensure the visibility of students within the remit of this Plan. By ensuring that these student groups are visible on institutional data reports and as part of formal reporting requirements, it is intended that institutional initiatives and day to day support activities will be better able to target these groups. In this way, support to these student groups will be ongoing and effectively adapted to individual student circumstances.

Working with staff

The significance of a whole provider approach is vital to encouraging collaboration on the APP across the institution. In recent years, there has been a particular focus on ensuring UCEM staff awareness of APP targets, the OfS regulatory requirements, encouraging staff involvement in APP activities, and improving awareness of evaluation activities and methodologies. This staff awareness campaign has included a combination of presentations periodically to all staff, the UCEM Bulletin publication, resources available via the institutional SharePoint, training sessions delivered as part of the APP activity workstreams, and sessions with key departments across the institution. This work has seen an increase in staff understanding as to how the APP impacts their work and is relevant to their role and has demonstrated more staff involvement in interventions, drawing on an institution wide wealth of experience through access, success and progression.

The Widening Participation Project Board is accountable for monitoring the delivery of this Plan and ensuring that targets are met. There is an established cycle of activity at this Board throughout the academic year, with delivery teams encouraged to report on progress, evaluation of activities, and to put forward additional supplementary activities where a gap or need has been identified. The Board meets regularly to discuss the current activities and future direction of the Plan, and its membership is made up of a cross-section of relevant staff members from across the institution, including from the Education, Apprenticeships, Regulation, Student Services, and Marketing Departments. A member of the UCEM Executive oversees the primary delivery of the APP is within

the Student and Registry Services department, which contains a number of central student-based services, Academic Quality and Academic Registry, but also works collaboratively across the institution and is represented on institutional strategic committees.

With regard to EDI, the UCEM Widening Participation Strategy aligns with the institution's EDI strategy and has committed to running staff training on key EDI topics to ensure that student-facing staff fully understand the needs and requirements of different groups of students, including typical barriers they might face. UCEM academic staff regularly engage in internal and external EDI talks and activities to enhance their professional development as well as teaching practice.

Working with the higher education sector

UCEM is a member of the Access and Participation Plan Special Interest Group (SIG) within the Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE) network. The Group provides a space for institutional leads for widening participation to share findings, best practices and approaches to supporting students from under-represented groups. Over the course of this Plan, the Group will be working collaboratively to provide peer support, professional opportunities and advocacy for widening participation across the country. UCEM is a member of the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON), with staff attending working groups and conferences as part the UCEM research commitment, as well attending GuildHE meetings including EDI focussed sessions as UCEM looks to streamline and draw together its staff and student EDI practice.

Influencing the built environment sector

As part of UCEM's ambitious Sustainability Strategy, the institution aims to influence the built environment sector, as a sustainable built environment is synonymous with a more diverse one. UCEM recognises that there is much to do to support the diversification of the built environment and keep up to date with EDI reports and findings, in order to generate a diverse and inclusive industry that is fit for the future and the challenges facing it. UCEM will play a key role in collaborating, influencing and advocating for change as part of its ambitious Sustainability Strategy.

As part of UCEM's commitment to having a positive effect upon the built environment industry, the role of the institution's Executive Director for Innovation and Partnerships is to engage, educate & collaborate. The Executive Director supports, connects and interacts with a wide variety of stakeholders to actively influence (and be influenced by) UCEM's communities to inform policy and practice. The Executive Director works to collaborate and partner with existing networks that include national industry agencies such as Construction Leadership Council (CLC), Construction Industry Council (CIC), government agencies (DfE, IfATE), professional institutions and education providers, and acts in high profile roles of influence, such as CIC Champion, Education and Co-ordinator; CIC Climate Change Action Plan (Education & Qualification Workstream), Chair, Council of the Heads of Built Environment (CHOBE), Member of the CLC, People & Skills Network, Chair of the CLC Education Sprint Group, and Member of the Construction Skills Delivery Group which contributes to the UK Government's 'Project Speed' initiative.

UCEM works with over 500 employers to train their staff who wish to achieve a professional qualification. These employers include central government departments, local authorities, commercial real estate agents, major construction firms and housing associations. UCEM also works with small and medium sized firms in addition to large corporate clients. All institutional degree programmes (excluding the MSc Innovation in Sustainable Built Environments) are accredited by one or more of the leading professional, statutory and regulatory bodies for the built environment, such as the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) and Chartered Association of Building Engineers (CABE). In the case of UCEM's degree apprenticeship programmes, the institution works with the relevant professional body and the apprentices' employer to ensure that that they not only meet the knowledge requirements for chartered membership, but also acquire the workplace experience necessary.

The institution is also collaborating with Building People as part of its strategy to improve diversity within the built environment sector. Building People is a hub for EDI in the built environment sector and provides insight, guidance and resources to help employers create inclusive cultures as well as lobby industry groups to signpost to exemplary practice in the sector. UCEM is a Founding Partner of Building People before it became a successfully independent organisation. The UCEM

Principal Chairs the Building People Board, with UCEM representation also on the Building People Advisory Committee, supporting the organisation and contributing to its development. The organisation's Search Portal aggregates information on hundreds of mission groups and initiatives all aimed at helping under-represented groups into relevant employment, including current UCEM students.

UCEM also collaborates with the CSTT, which has a mission to improve access to the surveying profession and other built environment careers for people from all backgrounds.

Student journey

The below section maps out the student journey at UCEM and provides an overview of how students are supported to succeed.

Supporting potential learners from primary age upwards

As part of UCEM's commitment and engagement with schools and further education colleges, the UCEM Code of Practice and Policy for Safeguarding and Prevent in the context of UCEM states it is the institution's duty to establish appropriate arrangements for the protection from abuse of children and young people under the age of 18, and of vulnerable groups. The Safeguarding and Prevent policy covers all instances where UCEM staff may have contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults. All staff members working for UCEM are in a position of trust and have a responsibility to ensure that students and other young people who they encounter in the course of their work are protected, in accordance with Safeguarding and Prevent legislation. All suspicions and allegations of abuse, concerns for health, safety or welfare, or concerns about radicalisation are taken seriously by UCEM and will be responded to appropriately. Referrals to external agencies are made when deemed necessary, in accordance with UCEM procedures.

Student admissions

UCEM seeks to attract a broad range of applicants and ensures all students are given the opportunity to achieve their potential in relevant subjects at appropriate levels. Decisions are made based on the published entry requirements and includes using evidence–based approaches to inform UCEM's activities to increase equality and diversity with relation to staff and students.

The UCEM Admissions team manages UCEM's contextual offer scheme, which exists to provide fairness and equality of opportunity by ensuring that steps are taken to address differences between applicants, including differences in their experience of educational opportunities. The scheme uses additional information provided via the UCAS and UCEM application forms to recognise the potential of students whose personal circumstances may have restricted their achievement at school or college. Eligible applicants (with a home postcode within an Index of Multiple Deprivation or participation of quintiles 1 and 2, or have disclosed a disability or long-term health condition, or have spent any time in care under a local authority) will receive an adjusted offer, up to two A level grades (or equivalent) below the published typical offer level for the programme(s) applied for. At present, if an applicant has a minimum of 72 UCAS points, then they can be put forward to the Programme Leader for a decision on entry (usually supported by a CV, personal statement, and sometimes an employer reference). Alternatively, students are offered the BSc Access Module programme as a means for access.

UCEM continuously assesses procedures to remove unnecessary barriers for prospective students and ensure that the Admissions Policy and Procedure is inclusive and fair to everyone, regardless of background. Furthermore, the institution works directly with employers to expand the depth and breadth of UCEM's apprenticeship provision, as well as supporting partner employers who sponsor students to study an accredited degree, i.e. not funded through the Apprenticeship Levy. UCEM's online delivery model offers these employers a flexible route which enables their workforce to fit study around their work commitments without being required to attend a university campus, as they would with a traditional day release model.

Continuous collaboration and awareness are vital for UCEM's student population as part of the whole provider approach. During New Student Orientation and Welcome Back weeks (during the two intake points in September and March), students can hear and discuss activities associated

with the APP, hear about the wider EDI contributions UCEM is making in the built environment, as well as contribute to those conversations and have opportunities to be involved further.

UCEM's educational model and flexible provision

UCEM's transition and orientation programme looks to provide a longer-term experience which will support students through each semester cycle. The aim is to create an environment where students gradually build on the skills and knowledge they need for their degree throughout their studies, avoiding too much information overload at the start of the semester, which can be overwhelming (especially for new students). This includes a dedicated orientation area as part of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) which is always open to new and returning students but is tailored to their programme and level of study. These activities are a cross-department initiative (including Digital Education, Student Services and the Academic Support and Enhancement team (ASET)), providing staff expertise to support and keep the information up to date during the September and March student transition periods. These transition initiatives particularly benefit groups of students that experience higher rates of drop out and will be enhanced through new transition activities planned as part of the APP and Widening Participation Strategy, such as mature students, and those students who have declared a disability or a mental health condition.

UCEM wishes for its students to be sustainable citizen's (in line with UCEM's vision) and inclusive practitioners as part of the institution's commitment to EDI. This is in line with relevant PSRB competences and QAA Subject benchmark statements. Examples of inclusive practice includes authentic assessment, this includes assessments that enable students to contextualise their assessment responses within their own locality. Assessments also use inclusive language and examples. The Academic team work with the Digital Educational team to ensure resources are accessible and inclusive. Students are supported in managing their workload by clear signposting of indicative time. This time is calculated by using a bespoke learning time calculator developed by the Education team. All of the institution's programmes are designed to have flexible study options that mean students can study whilst remaining in full-time employment, encouraging participation through inclusivity and accessibility.

The institution specialises in delivering fully supported online learning, as outlined in the Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The institution's educational framework provides a consistent and high-quality learning experience for students, and all modules meet baseline standards which are designed to provide the best structure for the learning experience. Module learning outcomes, accessibility, and learning activities are thoughtfully built and embedded into every module, in order to engage each student throughout their learning journey and encourage an inclusive experience. Learning Technologies are utilised (such as the VLE, Padlet and Zoom), supporting students and guiding their learning through flexible digital activities that suits different students' needs.

Widening participation is a key strategic aim of the institution's approach within its teaching, and offers equality of opportunity to students via:

- Adopting a broad range of learning materials and assessment formats in every module.
- Ensuring learning resources and assessments are provided in accessible formats and are culturally and socially responsive.
- A commitment to reflecting the diversity of UCEM's staff and students within learning, teaching and assessment.

UCEM's flexible provision enables students to choose courses at any stage of their life and diverse options whilst on-course, including:

- Online and distance learning.
- Different programme pathways to meet the different needs of students in varied individual circumstances.
- An entry-level route to access undergraduate programmes.
- A Level 4 Construction site supervisor apprenticeship from September 2023.

Supporting students during their studies

New students to UCEM are invited to attend a series of online events during New Student Orientation as part of their induction. These events include an introduction to the ASET and a tour of the VLE, to help students with navigation of the virtual learning space and introduce them to the team of Academic Support Tutors (ASTs). The ASTs run weekly academic skills webinars during the first seven weeks of each semester to support new students to develop the academic skills they need, in preparation for their first assessments.

Throughout the academic journey, ASTs are available for 1:1 tutorials with students to help with any elements of studying students may find challenging and run weekly drop-ins after teaching sessions. ASET proactively monitor identified cohorts of academically "at risk" students and offer a support intervention if they are concerned about their lack of engagement. The team also manages the Study Skills area of the VLE, which hosts a range of self-serve learning materials to support students to understand the requirements of study at higher education level, which includes templates and activities to help students develop academic writing and referencing skills.

UCEM is committed to supporting individual student circumstances as part of equality of opportunity, and as a result, the Right Student, Right Journey, Right Delivery, Right Experience, Right Outcome initiative has been implemented to ensure each student's individual journey and experience is considered and used to inform support activities that encourage positive student outcomes. Furthermore, whilst the Intervention Strategies as part of this Plan are highly targeted, a number of activities (for example the Shut up and Write type activity and PAL) are embedded across the provider as part of UCEM's commitment to addressing risks to equality of opportunity that come to studying online with distance learning including academic support and mental health.

The Student Engagement team provides information and advice to students on programme. They provide a flexible, problem-solving service, supporting students to access university processes and providing solutions that remove barriers to learning and assessment submission. The team provides bespoke support in line with the needs of each student and the situation they are experiencing. This support might include direct advice, referral to other services or practical help in using and understanding university systems. Through advocacy, appropriate signposting and active listening, they aim to ensure every student has the opportunity to eliminate any barriers they face during their programme, whether those barriers are personal, financial or academic, irrespective of the student's ability and life experiences.

Degree apprentices receive direct support in order to encourage success; each apprentice is allocated an Apprenticeship Outcomes Officer (AOO) to act as their key point of contact throughout their apprenticeship journey. AOOs undertake progress reviews at 12-week (maximum) intervals. Each apprentice is risk-rated throughout their journey, based on specific criteria. Risk ratings allow the Apprenticeship team to highlight where additional support is required and, through cross-collaboration with a variety of teams (for example ASET), enables this support to be facilitated. During a review of progress, the apprentice's health, safety, and wellbeing is monitored closely. Based on the content of these discussions, some apprentices may require a referral to the Disability and Welfare team. The Apprenticeship team works across the whole of the apprentice journey, running workshops for specific programmes to orientate students and encourage them to see their journey through to their End Point Assessment (for Chartered Surveyors this will be the Assessment of Professional Competence). The Apprenticeship team also collaborates with the Business Development team to meet with approximately fifty of UCEM's larger apprenticeship employers, to review apprentice performance data and risk ratings, so those employers can put in place any further support required for their employees.

The Disability and Welfare team provides information, advice, and guidance to prospective and current students on the support and reasonable adjustments that can be made for students. All students can contact the Disability and Welfare team at any stage of their journey to disclose a disability or mental health condition, and the team provides guidance to students and applicants on disability support including setting up additional support plans, assisting with Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) applications, providing Neurodiversity funding and supporting students to obtain diagnostic evidence of their disability. Students with diagnosed mental health conditions are eligible to receive reasonable adjustments to reduce any barriers they may be facing with their

studies, and these are agreed with each student on a case-by-case basis to find the arrangements that best suit their needs. This ensures that all UCEM students can achieve their full academic potential and that no student is disadvantaged because of a disability, neurodiversity or mental health condition.

The UCEM Safeguarding team has access to the safeguarding portal which shifts the way UCEM tracks and monitors safeguarding cases via the student management system. The team is able to assign cases and case workers to students, assign 'categories' to state the type of safeguarding case and add notes on those cases. Predominantly this is used to allow the team to keep track of their case load, view a student's "past history" to help them better understand the context behind and case, and to support referral making to external partners like social services.

Student Representation has a very important and valued role in providing feedback to UCEM on issues that are important to its student community, thus helping to shape the student learning experience. UCEM has different levels of student representation including a Lead Student Representative, Programme Student Representatives (PSR), Student Trustee, and an Academic Board Student Representative.

The Lead Student Representative plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the student voice is championed at the highest levels within UCEM, including at the Board of Trustees. The role works closely with all student representatives and UCEM staff to discuss key issues affecting the student experience. They also work with UCEM on initiatives and communicate information on decisions made to students via the VLE and informal channels. Programme Student Representatives provide a link between UCEM staff and students, represent students on issues relating to teaching, learning, assessment and student support, signpost students to appropriate information and support, and campaign effectively on relevant issues. Having a formal Student Trustee ensures that there is a focus on the student experience at Board of Trustees level, providing non-executive oversight of all UCEM activities and to contribute to the development of strategy and the institution's future vision. Academic Board Student Representatives sit as members of UCEM's Academic Board, the supreme academic authority and guardian of the academic quality and standards of its higher and further education awards. The Academic Board is a standing committee of the Board of Trustees. The student representatives on this board provide insight and feedback on the student experience.

The creation of the Student Community team has enabled the opportunity to communicate changes and actions UCEM has taken based on student feedback, in particular, a "You Said, We Did" area on the VLE and UCEM website. Items in these areas clearly describe how improvements to the student experience have been made, with new items regularly added as part of closing the feedback loop, which is a priority for the team. The Lead Student Representative works with the team to create a resource to help students understand this feedback process. This resource is available on the VLE, and Student Representatives are encouraged as part of their training to ensure they are familiar with it. UCEM has built student consultation into all significant processes, which is used to inform institutional strategy and operational plans. As well as utilising student representation, students have a number of other ways to feedback to the institution, including speaking directly with staff, communicating via Student Central and answering module questionnaires staggered throughout each academic module.

Supporting student mental health

UCEM works to support all students who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health, which could be pre-existing or have developed during a student's studies and can declare this at any stage. UCEM has seen an increase in the number of students declaring mental health conditions, and will therefore enhance its current provision through additional support during the transition period into higher education, as well as providing specialist funding to recognise the extra financial hardship disabled, neurodivergent students, and those with mental health conditions face. With regard to UCEM's current provision, a self-care guide is available on the UCEM website, which aims to support current and prospective students prepare for any stress they may face whilst studying. Throughout their studies, students are encouraged to engage with a number of resources aimed at improving wellbeing, including the out of hours listening service provided by London Nightline, webinars and mental health support provided by Lionheart, mental health awareness

events across the year, an area of the VLE dedicated to providing news and updates on mental health, representation through the Student Officer for Disability and Mental Health (from 2024), and supported and self-help versions of the i-CBT platform Silvercloud (an online resource recommended by the NHS). Since launching Silvercloud in November 2022, 72 students have utilised the service reporting a 78% improvement upon their mental health since starting. The most commonly accessed programme from the platform was *Space for Stress*, and across all programmes there is an overall user satisfaction rate of 96%.

All members of the UCEM Safeguarding team (staff volunteers from across the institution), the Apprenticeship Outcomes Officers and Academic Support Tutors complete Mental Health First Aid training, offering an additional informal listening and signposting service to all students.

Assessment support

The Assessment team offers support to all students from the point of submission – including helping students to troubleshoot, combine files and submit work – through to the release of their assessment marks. The team administers the marking and moderation of all assessments and manages student queries, as well as ensuring that late penalties are applied, amended, or lifted, as necessary. The team is also involved in the handling of academic misconduct and mitigating circumstances cases and works with the other Academic Registry teams to ensure the best possible outcome for students in all cases.

With regard to mitigating circumstances, UCEM appreciates that sudden or unforeseen circumstances – outside of a student's control – can affect their studies. For students with mitigating circumstances relating to assessments, all cases are reviewed and considered based on an individual's circumstances.

Graduation and progression into industry

UCEM provides career preparation in addition to learning content with the intent that any student who successfully studies with UCEM will be ready to seek and gain employment within the industry and progress towards appropriate professional accreditation. Online resources provided on the VLE create a central space for students to access careers information and advice on finding work and work experience, applications and career management, as well as further information about professional bodies, employability events and becoming accredited. 1:1 careers guidance with a qualified Careers Consultant is available throughout the student journey.

As outlined in the Assessment of Performance, UCEM has small proportions of under-represented groups, and an even smaller proportion of these complete the Graduate Outcomes survey, which means no meaningful data is available to inform numerical targets. This Plan will not include an objective or numerical target in relation to this but will acknowledge and detail key activities and objectives within UCEM's Widening Participation Strategy, which, in support of the APP, aims to build the experience, skills and knowledge for traditionally under-represented students in the built environment to take the next step beyond UCEM, influencing change to diversify the sector.

A number of new activities will be instigated throughout the duration of this Plan. Driving diversity in the built environment sector is a crucial aim of both UCEM's Widening Participation Strategy and as part of the Sustainability Strategy. To do so, UCEM students must be given effective role models and support, in order to raise their aspirations and assist their progression into the industry. This will include building awareness of and mapping the journey to achieving chartership with relevant PSRBs, as well as continuing to partner with charities and organisations to offer mentoring to a range of under-represented groups and look to extend this activity to further groups over the duration of this Plan.

Student consultation

A separate Student Submission will be included as part of this Plan, completed by UCEM's Lead Student Representative and Student Trustee. UCEM does not have a Student's Union and due to its online nature utilises the student voice through specific student groups to help support and provide feedback on initiatives and interventions, alongside its formal student representatives. UCEM's Student Ambassadors form a cross-section of the student body and includes students from mature and ethnic minority backgrounds who volunteer to take on this role. Student

Ambassadors have been consulted at key development points of this Plan, including being given the opportunity to shape new interventions whilst considering risks to equality of opportunity.

The group discussions provided responses on a range of areas but primarily included students broadly agreeing with the initial plans, but felt there should be more opportunities to receive childcare financial support, academic skills and peer support (such as PAL). As part of the follow-up, group meetings and consultations with the Ambassadors took place. Their overwhelmingly positive response reflected their involvement in the process. Ambassadors particularly emphasised their support for placing built environment resources within schools to raise awareness of industry careers as part of UCEM's raising attainment plans. PAL and Student Officer roles were seen as beneficial to students both in receipt of the support and for those students participating in leading the interventions, as personal development opportunities.

As part of the evaluation, the Ambassadors were asked five key questions (based on the TASO widening participation questionnaire scales) surrounding belonging and awareness of the APP. Between the first and final meetings, Ambassadors' responses demonstrated that their knowledge had increased positively or stayed moderately the same in terms of their awareness of the APP, and all strongly agreed that *'UCEM listens to my views and acts upon them'* which has been demonstrated by including their suggestions in the final interventions within this Plan.

UCEM's student representatives (a diverse group of students representing their programmes, including apprentices, mature, ethnic minority, part-time and full-time students) are regularly updated on the current and future Plan activities, and were also consulted on the Plan's direction and activities. Each of the activities detailed as part of the intervention strategies were presented to the group, and positive comments were received on planned activities. In addition, students who volunteered to be a part of the regular series of Learning Experience Panels were asked to read the first draft of the APP for their feedback. Their responses felt that UCEM should be more specific as to the location of access activities (therefore IS1 was reviewed to be more specific to Reading) and praised UCEM's commitment to student mental health.

Finally, Deliberative Committee student representatives were given the opportunity to review and provide comments and feedback on the draft Plan as part of the review and approval process, via UCEM's Academic Board and Board of Trustees review.

As part of the plan for future monitoring of the APP, student representatives will be regularly updated on the Plan, so that they can report back to the students they represent. Student oversight and representation of the APP will be the responsibility of the Lead Student Representative and the Student Officers (who will replace the current Student Ambassadors). This will be undertaken through regular meetings and discussions throughout each academic year, with previous Officers providing training documentation for successors about the APP and Widening Participation Strategy, and their significance to the organisation.

Evaluation of the plan

UCEM welcomes TASO's support of higher education institutions and has become a member of its sector network, in order to play a role in advancing TASO's mission. As members of NEON, UCEM has been able to actively collaborate and learn from other providers as part of the NEON Establishing Evidence and Measuring Impact Working Group. UCEM particularly values the development of TASO's '*Impact Evaluation with Small Cohorts: Methodology Guidance'* report, which recognises smaller data groups and smaller, specialist institutions. UCEM will look to develop further evaluation opportunities including this report.

UCEM commits to consistently using type 2 evidence through the majority of reported activities (outlined further within the Intervention Strategies), utilising mixed, longitudinal and quasi methodologies to ensure robust evaluation, and will continue to invest in APP research and evaluation, in order to enhance evaluation and dissemination of best practice throughout the lifespan of this APP. Research ethics will be considered throughout all evaluation stages, regardless of whether research methodologies relate to adults, young people or children. The Associate Dean – Research is a member of the Widening Participation Project Board and the Research Ethics Committee, in order to influence and communicate relevant institutional changes to research ethics and data management processes. Initially each evaluation methodology will be

assessed by the Research Ethics Committee, with annual additional information included for each intervention evaluation round. Should it be required over time, more advanced and additional evaluation methodologies would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Since the development of the APP Evaluation Framework in 2022, a wider approach to evaluation has been taken, with a more cohesive general evaluation framework created at an institutional-level, and training is currently underway to support this work further.

As part of an annual cycle of review at the Widening Participation Project Board, all activities carried out during each academic year will require an evaluation to be undertaken. The evaluation of each activity encourages the lessons learned to be drawn out in order to enhance and develop the future of each activity. These lessons – alongside the activity's evaluation results – will be reported to the Board to determine whether a certain activity should continue in its current format and approach, and the appropriacy of the evaluation measures will be reviewed. UCEM's regular reporting cycle will encourage reflection on the success of the activity as well as the opportunity to investigate more effective and develop further evaluation methodologies.

The Board of Trustees formally approved the four-year Plan and will receive quarterly updates on performance as part of standard reporting. This will align with the overall institutional monitoring of the UCEM Strategic Plan 2020-25, including the key tenet of widening participation, which will lead the focus on this area. Further, as part of work on APP KPIs and metrics, results will be reported at quarterly business review (QBR) meetings, to ensure visibility and dissemination of best practice across the institution.

As part of the Intervention Strategies, various opportunities were listed as ways to disseminate evaluation findings as part of UCEM's commitment to share best practice and key lessons learned from delivering APP interventions. UCEM plans to utilise provider groups and sector specialists to share successes and further improvements, as well as using internal channels to share outcomes and developments within the institution itself. This is all to be undertaken with three key aims: raising awareness, enhancing understanding or engagement, and producing action, leading to overall change.

Listed below are further details of dissemination that UCEM will likely undertake throughout the duration of this Plan:

- **A webpage hosted on the UCEM website:** continue to develop a dedicated EDI webpage containing information and full details of dissemination of key interventions over the course of this Plan. All activities will be detailed as part of an annual overview report to be published in August each year, starting from August 2025, as well as the final end of Plan report in August 2028.

- **External blogs:** the blog function on the UCEM website will be used to communicate on the outcomes of key intervention strategies and activities, which will be of particular interest to EDI sector development.

- **Internal dissemination:** internal activity will be undertaken to share APP developments to staff, including via staff training, weekly all staff briefings, via the all-staff weekly Bulletin publication, or at staff departmental or team meetings. Students will receive information via student representatives and Student Officers (as well as other outlets previously outlined in this Plan).

- **Higher education networks:** UCEM will seek opportunities to present at and network with a number of key groups, including Guild HE, NEON, FACE, TASO, and others.

- **Broader networks**: UCEM will seek opportunities to present at relevant conferences and working groups, as well as at relevant meetings and events, in order to inspire and influence change amongst the wider higher education and built environment sectors.

- **Academic journals:** submitting evaluation and research outcomes to academic journals with Open Access availability.

- **Built environment sector:** publicising best practice and key learning to partners and employers within the built environment, for example via Building People's networks,

PSRBs, or amongst UCEM's network of employers who support, as part of an apprenticeship or through sponsorship, students on its courses.

Measuring the impact of these dissemination methodologies will be fundamental to continuously adapting institutional practices to ensure information is shared most effectively with others. This will be done through a number of methods, including tracking citation rates, blog clicks, and qualitative responses.

Provision of information to students

This APP will be communicated to students with regard to fees and financial support to prospective and current students in the following ways:

a) Prospective students will be provided with information on the fees for the duration of their programme in their UCEM Offer Letter, which includes a detailed fee schedule for the entire course. Enquiries are provided with fee information on the relevant programme pages of the website including the financial support available.

b) Prospective and current students can access information on financial support available on the UCEM website. In addition, this is also found in the UCEM Offer Letter, and information that is issued to current students inviting them to re-register signposts students to financial support options.

c) A full version of the Plan and its Executive Summary will be made available to all prospective students on the website.

d) A full version of the Plan and its Executive Summary will also be made available to all current students on UCEM's VLE.

e) UCEM will ensure its Student Officers understand the Plan, so they can provide feedback in due course and support others who wish to take up opportunities.

Annex A: Assessment of performance

This summary is an analysis of UCEM's data and how it can relate to the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR). As part of this process, UCEM has complied with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 with regards to using and publishing information that does not identify any individual students.

UCEM's datasets show that most of its students covered by the APP enrol on one of its apprenticeship programmes, with numbers generally increasing year-on-year. This has resulted in decreases in its 'part-time' (as defined in the OfS data dashboard dataset) intake, whilst its 'full-time' intake remains low (see "Risks to equality of opportunity" in the Plan for further details). The institution anticipates that this trend will continue in the next few years as a consequence of the continued growth and development of UCEM's degree apprenticeship offering and of the uptake from employers in the built environment industry.

To assess the access and participation performance of UCEM, several datasets have been analysed, as follows:

- OfS Access and Participation Dashboard: The dashboard provided up to six years' worth of UCEM data (2016-17 to 2021-22) from HESA returns and the Graduate Outcomes Survey. Not available ('N/A') is shown where the figure is suppressed in order to prevent the disclosure of sensitive data, and this was common across many of the student groups across the lifecycles of data. Insufficient numbers of students mean that disaggregating the data by key groups was rarely feasible, including mental health conditions and further ethnicity groupings. It is also worth noting that a portion of the data shown covers a period that coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic which, much like the rest of the higher education sector, creates challenges with interpreting the results reliably.

- **Sector level data:** Released by the OfS and used to benchmark UCEM's current position against comparable higher education sector lifecycle data.

- **Institutional raw data:** Raw data was utilised to analyse the performance of very small groups of students to the extent possible with these small datasets.

- **Sector data publications:** Providing data and statistics surrounding areas of deprivation in relation to access within UCEM's local, geographical location.

- **Other built environment sector data:** As a specialist institution supporting the built environment sector, work was undertaken to identify specific gaps and risks within areas of this sector, to illustrate how this can be aligned to UCEM's own targets.

Institutional approach to the assessment of performance

UCEM is a small, specialist institution (see "Introduction and strategic aim" section of the main Plan), and as a result the datasets drawn from the OfS data dashboard are small, and it has therefore not been possible to set meaningful targets where student groups are particularly small. As noted above, an increasingly high proportion of students covered by the APP enrol on one of the institution's apprenticeship programmes, which means a reduction in the number of students studying 'part-time' and a continued limited number of students studying 'full-time'. Consequently, this annex focuses solely on UCEM's apprenticeship provision and does not detail the assessment undertaken in relation to its part-time and full-time students, on account of the small population sizes. However, small population sizes are also an issue within the apprenticeship dataset itself. When working with such small numbers, statistical uncertainty is an important factor to consider.

UCEM does not have statistical significance due to the small numbers within the data dashboard and recognises the limitations of this approach. For the analysis of the data dashboard, UCEM students were measured based on the actual population and this value was solely relied upon due to the small number of students that UCEM has. UCEM is aware that some of the data in the dashboard is suppressed on account of the length of the student journey; for example, a relatively low number of the institution's apprenticeship students have successfully completed their studies due to the relatively recent introduction of this type of provision, meaning limited attainment data

and progression data is available for this group. UCEM is committed to reviewing this data each year as part of the evaluation process and cycle to assess and identify any gaps.

Institutional context to the equality of opportunity risk register

UCEM has distinct institutional challenges on account of its specialism and mode of delivery, with students studying wholly online, a high proportion of degree apprentices, a relatively high average student age on entry, and small student population sizes. When first analysing the OfS data dashboard, it was fundamental to also take into account these specific challenges alongside the risks that had been ascertained by consulting the EORR.

Identified EORR risks to equality of opportunity include (also see "Risks to equality of opportunity" section of the main Plan for further details):

- **Risk 1: Knowledge and skills:** Students (particularly in the Reading borough where UCEM's UK office is located) may not have the opportunity to develop skills, choose less 'popular' subjects and realise their ambitions, due to where they live or their personal circumstances.
- **Risk 2: Information and guidance:** Students might not be given the opportunity to receive the information and guidance relating to different types of study options (such as part-time or degree apprenticeships) or methods of study (for example online learning).
- **Risk 6: Academic support:** Students studying online may struggle to transition to higher education or find it difficult asking for support or guidance from staff or peers.
- **Risk 8: Mental health:** Financial constraints, lack of peer-to-peer support via a student community, not having a suitable place to study at home or time set aside at work for studies might contribute to a decline in a student's mental health, causing them to not continue studying.
- **Risk 10: Cost pressures:** Increase in costs, family commitments or redundancy might affect a student's ability to continue on their programme.

Once the data was analysed, the following additional risks for specific identified groups were determined (see "Risks to equality of opportunity" section of the main Plan for further details):

- **Information and guidance for the built environment sector:** School students might not be given the opportunity to receive the information and guidance around different types of careers and sectors available to them, the skills needed to succeed in these sectors, and the routes to those careers.
- **Gender discrimination:** Female students are more likely to be at risk from gender discrimination when working in the built environment sector as an apprentice (for example pay, inappropriate behaviour, harassment, or limited progression opportunities) which impacts upon their mental health and motivation to study.

The initial risks and the further specific identified risks were then analysed against the data dashboard analysis to discover which groups have the highest risks, and where UCEM would be able to set meaningful targets and deliver measurable impact for these groups.

Access to higher education

Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

Due to small population sizes, UCEM grouped quintiles together in an attempt to identify meaningful gaps and targets. Across the last four years of data, 74.3% of apprentice students were from IMD quintiles 4-5, against 25.7% quintiles 1-2. UCEM has no direct control over employer recruitment and therefore the types of students that enrol onto its apprenticeship programmes (see Annex B for further information), and it is therefore considered inappropriate to set numerical targets relating to programme enrolment.

UCEM considered how best to address these gaps, given that a growing majority of students are apprentices, the diversity of which is dictated by the recruitment process of individual employers and the fact that IMD is not a built environment sector recognised EDI metric to improve diversity. It

was identified that a meaningful way to diversify the built environment sector in this regard would be to ensure that this student group were considering built environment careers earlier, and had the necessary skills in place to take up those careers (see rationale in Annex B). As a result, an analysis of national statistics was undertaken, which identified the Reading borough (the location of UCEM's UK office) as an area of relative deprivation (8.4% of pupils persistently disadvantaged, and 15.9% as the mean percentage of pupils' school lives for which they are disadvantaged in this area[10]). As a result, UCEM will primarily focus collaboration to raise attainment activities in the local Reading area. UCEM will partly target schools within areas defined internally as "deprived wards", (as well as supporting groups including sex and ethnicity, see below for further information) in the Reading area (as part of Intervention Strategy 1 – IS1) collaboration to raising attainment activities.

The IS1 objective relates to enhancing the support of schools through teacher training, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and curriculum development through specific subjects in Reading-based postcodes. The target was developed to specifically target small groups of teachers to increase impact and based on what could be achieved relative to UCEM's size. Therefore, the number of schools that UCEM would be working with gradually increases throughout the duration of this Plan from one school in first year to five in the final year. The number of schools UCEM is supporting are based on the number supported in that year, inclusive of any that UCEM had worked with from the previous year. UCEM's previous outreach has focused more on the number of FE colleges and organisations engaged with, not individual teachers or schools in a more focussed context. As a result time is required to build relationships and establish contacts, which is why the baseline is set at zero.

Sex

There is a desire within the built environment sector to address the low proportion of female employees within the sector, which is down to both recruitment and retention issues, and UCEM is committed to supporting this.

The OfS data dashboard identifies a gap in the proportion of male and female apprentices accessing UCEM programmes. The dashboard shows that four-year aggregated data for UCEM's apprenticeship intake is proportionally 69.2% male and only 30.8% female. The proportion of female students is recorded as 32.4% in the latest year of data. As the graph below demonstrates, since 2018, the gap has narrowed on occasion but has remained generally consistent.

Figure 1: UCEM degree apprentice access rate by sex 2018-19 to 2021-22

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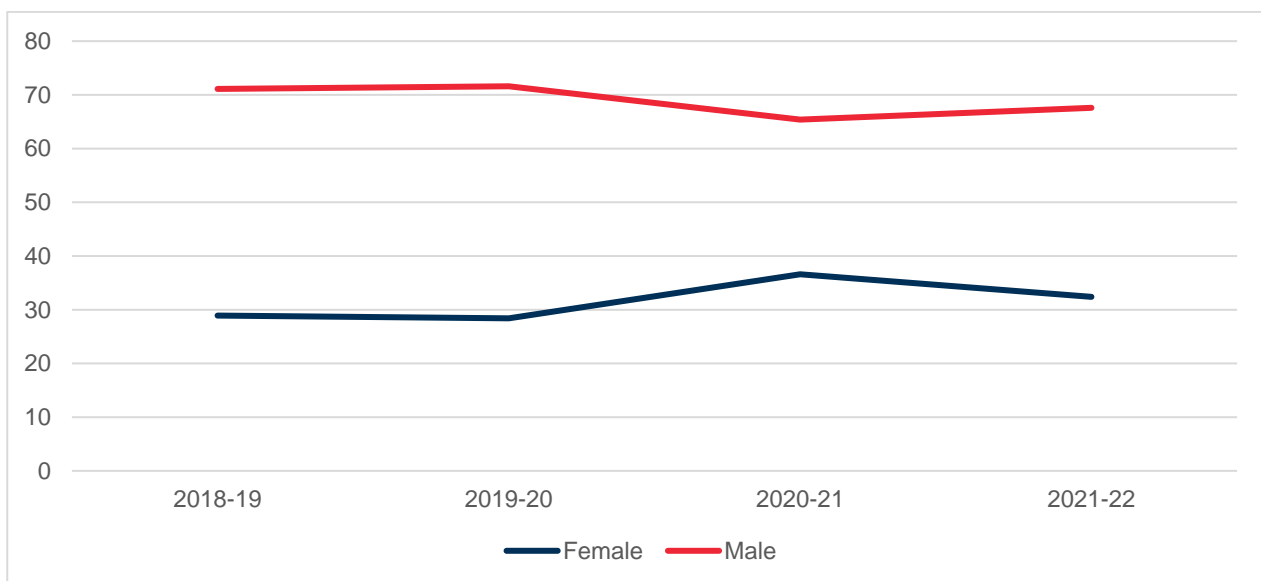
[10] Education Policy Institute, 2020.

As specified in the section above, the institution cannot control employer recruitment of apprentices (see Annex B for further information), and it is therefore considered inappropriate to set numerical targets relating to programme enrolment. However, the institution is committed as part of its Sustainability Strategy to inspire a diverse student population to take up learning and professional pathways in the built environment sector. Promoting inclusion and diversity in all aspects of the institution's offer, UCEM will continue to break down barriers to engagement, ensuring successful outcomes. Shaping a sustainable and inclusive built environment sector is essential for society both now and in the future, and UCEM will act as a vital custodian by developing the skills and the professional people needed to deliver a sustainable built environment.

Therefore, for IS1, UCEM will engage with schools to support their teachers to raise attainment in Geography via the "Design Engineer Construct!" scheme, focusing particularly on key under-represented groups in the built environment, including girls. It is important to acknowledge that by working with teachers who teach a range of students in their classrooms, it cannot always be guaranteed that just girls will benefit from this work. However, for the "Adopt a School" programme, UCEM will work with the school to target and encourage more girls to consider alternative qualifications at Level 1 and 2.

UCEM can additionally generate impact by supporting and influencing the wider built environment sector by collaborating with its medium-sized employers to enhance sector EDI practices and, as part of this, help attract more women to consider a built environment career (for more details see IS2 within Annex B). A review of externally available information from UCEM's medium-sized employers showed that few, if any, of these employers currently have formal EDI strategies or numerical targets in place (that are available externally). The target in this area will therefore be that by 2028, 20% of UCEM's medium-sized employers will have published formal EDI strategies and targets, starting from 10% in year 2 and 15% in year 3. There will be no target for year 1 as few, if any, medium-sized employers have EDI commitments on their outward facing webpages. Not having a target in the first year will give UCEM time to undertake a project of this scale, including creating the necessary materials, liaising with students, testing its potential impact and building the relationships necessary to influence employers across the duration of the Plan.

Ethnicity

The four-year aggregated data shows that UCEM's apprenticeship intake is proportionally 84.6% white and only 15.4% are from an ethnic minority background, although it is showing as 19.1% in the latest year of data. As per the section on sex, the distinct challenges of the built environment sector impact upon this student group, and as the graph below demonstrates, there has been a consistent gap over time, albeit one that has been narrowing due to the work of the current APP.

Figure 2: UCEM ethnicity degree apprentice access rate 2018-19 to 2021-22
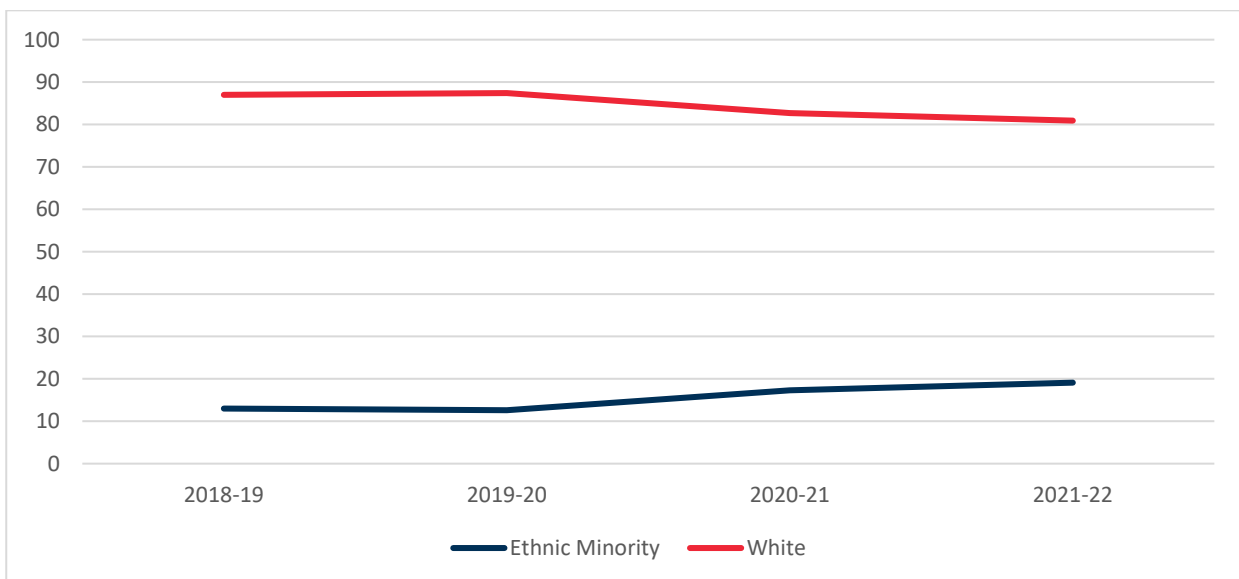
When disaggregating the ethnicity data to analyse certain ethnic minorities over four-year aggregated data, the numbers are small but mostly consistent across students from Black, Mixed and Asian backgrounds but all disaggregated groups had either suppressed data or numbers that were too small to accurately compare or accurately determine any risk or gap.

Similarly to sex, ethnic minorities are significantly under-represented in the built environment sector and this risk is widely recognised within the sector. UCEM has no direct control over employer recruitment and therefore the types of students that enrol onto its apprenticeship programmes (see Annex B for further information) and it is therefore considered inappropriate to set numerical targets relating to programme enrolment.

As per the above section, UCEM will collaborate with teachers in order to raise attainment including young people from ethnic minorities as part of IS1. It is important to acknowledge that by working with teachers who teach a range of pupils in their classrooms, it cannot always be guaranteed that just students from ethnic minorities will benefit from this work. UCEM hopes that as part of the Adopt a School programme, it will work with the school to target and encourage more of this group to consider alternative qualifications at Level 1 and 2.

Furthermore, in order to increase diversity in the sector, the institution will seek to influence the wider built environment sector, by collaborating with its medium-sized employers to enhance sector EDI practices and, as part of this, help attract more ethnic minority students to consider a built environment career (for more details see IS2 within Annex B). A review of externally available information from UCEM's medium-sized employers demonstrated that few, if any, of UCEM's medium-sized employers currently have formal and externally available EDI numerical targets or strategies in place. As stated above, the target in this area will therefore be the same as the sex target, and will particularly focus on both these under-represented groups; that by 2028, 20% of UCEM's medium-sized employers will have published formal EDI strategies and targets, starting from 10% in year 2 and 15% in year 3, with no target in year 1 to give the institution time to create the necessary materials and to start to influence employers.

Age

Most UCEM students are aged 21 or over on entry. Traditionally, UCEM students are mature due to the institution's core provision of flexible and accessible higher education programmes, which is attractive to students who are already in employment and seeking either a change in career or promotion in their existing career.

A recent uptake of employers choosing the UK Government's apprenticeship scheme, coupled with an increase in the number of degree apprentices offered by UCEM, has seen a decrease in the average age of the institution's students. Young students have made up an increasing proportion of UCEM new apprentice students since 2016. This change is expected to continue, given that employers are currently recruiting younger students as a more attractive route (as per UK Government's advice) to earn and gain experience whilst studying, serving to further diversify the built environment sector by bringing in new, younger students from non-traditional routes. However, given that a high proportion of UCEM's apprenticeship students are mature, UCEM will instead direct resources towards supporting mature students to succeed on the programme, as discussed below.

Disability

The OfS data dashboard provided a full dataset with regard to apprentices. Four-year aggregated data showed that UCEM's disabled student intake was 12.2%. However, over four years, the data was considered too small to base a meaningful target upon. UCEM acknowledges that disabled students feature in the EORR with a number of access risks to equality of opportunity. However, as previously mentioned, UCEM has no direct control over employer recruitment and therefore the types of students that enrol onto its apprenticeship programmes. When the data was broken down to further mental health intersections, there were students who had declared Cognitive and Learning conditions, but the numbers were suppressed or too small in order to properly ascertain a risk.

Other under-represented groups

With "other" under-represented student groups, the population sizes were consistently too small and the data was suppressed for GDPR reasons; consequently, meaningful analysis and accurate assessment of any gaps was not possible. This included ABCS and Free School Meals (FSM). Similar to the IMD quintiles, TUNDRA 1-2 with 4-5 were combined for comparison purposes, but population sizes were considered too small to ascertain if there was a risk to equality of opportunity.

Continuation in the study of higher education qualifications

Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

Due to small population sizes, UCEM grouped quintiles together in an attempt to determine meaningful gaps and targets. Across the last four years of data, a gap of 3pp is identified in the continuation rates of students from IMD quintiles 1-2 versus 4-5, which has narrowed and widened variably over time (most likely due to the small population sizes involved).

As the gap is not consistent and the student population sizes are too small to set meaningful targets, UCEM has taken the decision as a small and specialist institution to direct the limited resources available to where the institution can generate the greatest impact to risks to equality of opportunity. UCEM feels that there are other under-represented groups (see below) where the institution can have greater impact based on the original risks established in the EORR.

Sex

The four-year aggregated data records a continuation rate of 93.2% amongst male apprenticeship students and 90.6% amongst female apprenticeship students, representing a gap of 2.6 pp, although in three of the four years of data, a gap of at least 3.8 pp is present. There was no comparable data available to provide a higher education sector comparison as it is not a risk specific to this sector, but instead one within the built environment sector (see Annex B for further information). As discussed in the main Plan, the built environment sector has a low proportion of female employees, on account of both recruitment practices and retention. UCEM is committed to help address this. This includes UCEM supporting female students throughout their student journey and further develop its understanding of what more it can do to promote a consistent student experience. This also aligns with wider UCEM work around student success initiatives which should support the achievement of this target.

UCEM will attempt to reduce the gap in continuation between apprenticeship female students and apprenticeship male students to 2 pp by 2028 (by 0.5 pp each year, starting from 3.5 pp in year 1 of the Plan). As the pp gap is small, UCEM will look to reduce the gap steadily over the four-year lifecycle of this Plan, rather than committing to closing the gap entirely. Were UCEM to commit to completely closing the gap, a significant investment in institutional resource would be required to focus on this target student group, which would restrict the institution's ability to provide resource for other targets and activity areas.

UCEM is ambitious in trying to reduce the gap to 2 pp, especially as a small institution, and considering the under-representation of women in the built environment. This activity does have a crossover with the PTA_2, as improved EDI strategies and practices will mean that more built environment employers will recruit more female apprentices, which is anticipated would result in a higher proportion of female students enrolling on UCEM apprenticeship programmes. The activities that will be implemented via intervention strategy 4 (IS4) will most likely continue beyond this Plan, and this, as well as employer support for female students, would be key in ensuring their success and continuation and further reduce the gap between the target and comparator group here.

Ethnicity

Across the latest four years of data for apprentices, 93% of white students are recorded as continuing, against 89.2% ethnic minority students. However, year-by-year analysis of the data shows that population sizes frequently fluctuate and are small, which means it is not possible to identify any as accurate and therefore not set a meaningful target for this under-represented group.

UCEM will seek to support traditional under-represented groups in the built environment sector as part of its Widening Participation Strategy, and will deliver key activities to do so alongside ongoing student success initiatives across the institution. This is as part of UCEM's commitment to delivering excellent education for all students.

Age

The four-year aggregated data records a continuation rate of 95.8% amongst young apprentices and 88.2% amongst mature apprentices, representing a gap of 7.6 pp. The numbers for both young and mature students have remained consistent over the 4 years of data. Whilst the gap has narrowed due to UCEM's ongoing student success initiatives, there is concern that this gap may widen again. This is particularly with the lingering impact of COVID-19, the cost of living crisis, and the fact that mature students are more likely to be impacted by these economic challenges and face other, additional pressures (see Annex B for further information) as highlighted in the EORR.

UCEM will therefore attempt to reduce the gap in continuation between apprenticeship mature students and apprenticeship young students to 5.5 pp by 2028 (by 0.5 pp each year, starting from 7 pp in year 1 of the Plan using the 4-year aggregate). As the gap is already small, UCEM will look to reduce the gap steadily over the four-year lifecycle of this Plan, rather than committing to closing the gap entirely. Were UCEM to commit to completely closing the gap, a significant investment in institutional resource would be required to focus on this target student group, which would restrict the institution's ability to provide resource for other targets and activity areas. UCEM is committed to support success amongst this group of students and will continue to work beyond the life of this Plan on closing this gap.

Disability

For apprenticeship students recorded as disabled, across the latest four years of data, 93% of non-disabled students are recorded as continuing, against 88.6% disabled students. However, year-by-year analysis of the data shows that population sizes frequently fluctuate and are small, which means it is not possible to identify and set a meaningful target for this under-represented group. However, as an accessible provider of online built environment education, UCEM is dedicated to supporting its disabled student population and providing student mental health support, and details of what arrangements are in place to do so can be found in the "Whole provider approach" section of the main Plan.

Other under-represented groups

Across a number of "other" under-represented groups of students such as those measured by TUNDRA, FSM and ABCS, a significant amount of UCEM's data was suppressed, and there were no complete datasets, nor any significant gaps or risks identified across the four individual years or via aggregated data.

Completion of the study of higher education qualifications

UCEM will not set completion targets as its performance data is based on suppressed data (FSM, TUNDRA, IMD quintiles), incomplete data (ABCS) or small population sizes. Where data is available, namely age and sex, setting targets would duplicate the numerical targets already set in relation to continuation within the Plan. Progress will be measured via continuation rather than completion as the former allows for a timelier assessment.

Attainment

UCEM will not set attainment targets as its performance data is based on suppressed data (TUNDRA, ethnic minorities), no gap (age) or the population sizes were considered too small (IMD quintiles) across all four years or as part of aggregated data, as well as study levels.

For disabled students, there were smaller numbers for part-time and apprentice students, and very little data to set a meaningful target. It was also felt that with much of the other years' data being suppressed, the aggregated showed a more inflated picture and it was not felt that this was where UCEM could make the biggest impact in dealing with small year-on-year numbers. However,

UCEM is committed to supporting its disabled student population and delivering student mental health support (an identifiable risk within the EORR), and further details of the arrangements in place can be found in the "Whole provider approach" section of the main Plan.

For sex, there was an inconsistent, narrowing gap with only two years' worth of data, which meant that the aggregated data was not a reflective picture and was not enough to ascertain any risks.

As an institution, UCEM prioritises positive learning outcomes for all students with its institutional focus on module and programme engagement and success rates. There are clear institutional targets on module engagement and success and on programme completion. Progress towards these targets is monitored by the Senior Leadership team, by academic Deliberative Committees and programme quality assurance processes. At a programme level, module and programme outcome data is reviewed in detail to monitor the performance of different groups of students, for example students with a declared disability or students studying as part of an apprenticeship programme, to ensure that all groups of students can be successful. If required, additional support or enhancements are put in place to support specific groups of students. UCEM also undertakes an annual review of degree outcomes data which monitors the classification outcomes for different groups of students. This process culminates in the production of a degree outcomes statement which highlights the actions taken that have influenced UCEM's degree outcomes.

Progression

Insufficient data is available in the OfS data dashboard to allow UCEM to set targets in relation to progression. UCEM already has very small population sizes of under-represented student groups, and an even smaller proportion of these groups complete the Graduate Outcomes Survey. However, overall UCEM's progression rates are very strong, and therefore progression is not considered an area of risk for the institution.

The EORR demonstrates that many under-represented groups do not have an equal opportunity in relation to progression into further study or the workplace. So, despite the lack of available data, UCEM will seek to support traditionally under-represented groups in the built environment sector as part of its Widening Participation Strategy and will deliver key activities to support progression in order to do so. High-level progression support information is therefore outlined in the "Whole provider approach" section of the main Plan, but it does not include an objective or numerical target in relation to progression.

Intersections of disadvantage

UCEM's student population size makes it very difficult to undertake any meaningful intersectional analysis. UCEM did attempt to cross-reference certain datasets (particularly with regards to mature students, as one of the largest groups of students) as well as using the disaggregated data as a method of further intersectional analysis, but the smaller numbers did not demonstrate any particular strong evidence of risks to equality of opportunity. As with all institutions across the sector, UCEM will be constrained by what students are prepared to divulge alongside the relevant, standard information gathered.

Other groups who experience risks to equality of opportunity in higher education

Care leaver students were also analysed as part of this assessment using UCEM internal data, as such data was not available in the OfS dashboard on account of UCEM completing the Student Alternative, rather than the Student Return. Despite gathering data and working to place more support for care leaver students since the last iteration of the Plan, numbers of such students remain small at UCEM. The institution recognises that when reviewing the EORR, care leaver and experienced students are less likely to experience equality to opportunity with regards to access, success and progression. UCEM will look to continue to support these students but will not be developing a specific risk, objective or target, due to their distinctly small numbers.

Annex B: Evidence base and rationale for intervention strategies (further detail)

Intervention strategy 1: raising attainment

Intervention strategy 1 (IS1) relates to building partnerships to support raising prior attainment, as a child's lower attainment impacts upon higher education access and later outcomes (including their potential for higher earnings), and research shows this particularly impacts on the lowest social classes[11] [12]. Research also suggests that this gap will widen over time, and that poverty allows for extensive and persistent barriers to achievement'[13] with attainment gaps further widening during the COVID-19 pandemic[14]. Universities can play a role in reducing continuation and attainment gaps in schools through specific activities. This includes supporting school teacher development, with the Sutton Trust finding that 'for poor pupils the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher is a whole year's learning'[15].

Enhancing the curriculum is one way that higher education providers may wish to support attainment raising for pupils. It can support schools to further foster, enrich, and create a developmental and progressive subject-specific curriculum. This can range from additional learning tools for use in the classroom, through to more strategic interventions with schools or groups of schools. Curriculum enhancement and development is a recommended raising attainment activity to foster teacher enrichment; in this case, through additional learning tools to further engage children[16]. This is further linked to teacher CPD. The OfS has identified that higher education institutions can support raising attainment through this type of activity. Evidence indicates that high quality CPD, (especially if developed by other teachers) has a positive effect on educators as well as student attainment, equivalent to an additional month of learning[17]. This demonstrates the importance of strong pedagogical knowledge leading to strong student outcomes[18].

UCEM's Sustainability Strategy outlines that by 2030, UCEM will be *"delivering a positive impact in the field of sustainability as a local and global civic institution by participating in meaningful outreach activities and partnerships".* This aligns with the OfS' ambitions around local outreach to raise attainment. The curriculum development collaborative activity with the CSTT will focus specifically on raising attainment as well as supporting the institution's ambitious Sustainability Strategy, and will build on the academic review undertaken of MEMF curriculum resources in 2023-24.

MEMF is a fully funded schools programme which embeds knowledge, resources and guidance on careers within the built environment sector directly into the delivery of the GCSE and A-level Geography curriculum. The programme is created in collaboration between teachers and industry professionals, and meets the exam specifications for all major UK awarding bodies. The programme includes lesson plans, PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, and industry curated resources to complement the delivery of the curriculum[19]. Since launching in May 2020, the resources have supported over 500 teachers and plan to reach over 1,500 teachers by the end of 2024. With the available evidence and commitment to raise attainment for pre-16 pupils, this curriculum development activity will look to enhance the current MEMF GCSE and A Level provision. UCEM and the CSTT will work with teachers in Reading-based postcodes to develop new resources for Years 7, 8 and 9, as well as 'taster day' activities to be developed to support late primary and early secondary teaching staff with interactive activities to support key points in a child's school journey.

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[11] Social Mobility Commission, 2017.
[12] Russell Group, 2020.
[13] Social Mobility Commission, 2017.
[14] Education Policy Institute, 2022.
[15] Sutton Trust, 2015.
[16] Causeway Education, 2022.
[17] Education Policy Institute, 2021.
[18] Sutton Trust, 2014
[19] My Environment, My Future, 2023.

Lesson plans will be accessible to students to deliver additional information (provided as part of a collaboration with employers in the built environment sector), to encourage engagement and interest by providing real world application and careers knowledge, which would look to improve pupil attainment. Developed lessons will foster a collaborative design informed by higher education, the built environment, current teacher pedagogy, as well as any specific school contexts. The transition between primary and secondary for students is often difficult and can affect child resilience and attainment[20]. Therefore, supporting and developing resources for teachers can provide additional materials to increase confidence in this crucial transition period. It is important to recognise that the theory of change for each of these activities aligns just with secondary schools.

With pre-16 attainment proving to be so crucial to student success[21] it also can determine whether young people will go onto study in higher education[22]. As previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic further widened the attainment gap for pupils who are from disadvantaged backgrounds[23] [24] including regional disparities[25]. It is therefore important for UCEM to support raising attainment work, especially at a local level, to provide specific support to schools and teachers facing this challenge. The development of this activity will initially involve working with teachers to develop resources within the Reading area. The activity will work with more schools for each year of the Plan to spread the curriculum development to more schools to increase impact.

It will be important for UCEM to work with a specific area for its specific attainment activities. With regard to Reading, the Education Policy Institute identified Reading as one of the key regions with the biggest disadvantage gap[26] and with UCEM's central UK office based there, key outreach activities will look to focus on this area, although outreach in broader areas across the UK is possible due to the wider reach of UCEM, and will also form part of the institution's Widening Participation Strategy. The Social Mobility Commission states that the area of deprivation a student lives in is regardless with regard to the location of their school,[27] but as the "Risks to equality of opportunity" section of the main Plan states, the Reading borough has a number of key areas of deprivation including education, skills and training, and household income. UCEM will therefore primarily focus on targeting schools within areas (defined internally as "deprived wards"), as well as key under-represented groups in the built environment (primarily girls and those from ethnic minorities).

The sector that UCEM works within is the built environment, which is a very broad sector and covers a wide range of disciplines and subjects that span across numerous national curriculum subjects. Geography was chosen here as the key subject of outreach focus, as its curriculum intrinsically links to sustainable practices and the built environment sector. As a subject, Geography is less likely to be taken by students from disadvantaged backgrounds and has much larger disadvantage gaps compared to other humanities subjects[28]. There are a number of key areas in the Geography curriculum that focus on sustainability and urban planning, which align with UCEM's own expertise, teaching skills, and key sustainability aspirations. Urbanisation is one of the most significant trends around the world, and there is huge demand and opportunity in the construction and real estate sectors. However, this demand coincides with an ever-increasing pressure on the planet, as around 39% of total carbon emissions come from buildings, so raising awareness of this practical way for a subject to impact upon such a key international issue could encourage students to engage with it more successfully, to understand its real-world applications, and potentially improve their aspirations to apply to higher education in the future.

With regard to the "Adopt a School" programme with Class Of Your Own, sponsoring a school has demonstrated a clear impact on raising attainment. The University of Kent's case study (acting as lead sponsor of Brompton Academy) has led to 48% of pupils achieving grade 4 or above in key

[20] Education Endowment Foundation, 2021.
[21] Office for Students (raising attainment insight brief), 2022.
[22] Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015.
[23] Office for Students (raising attainment insight brief), 2022.
[24] Education Policy Institute (Pupil Learning Loss), 2021.
[25] UK Government, 2021.
[26] Education Policy Institute, 2020.
[27] Social Mobility Commission, 2017.
[28] Education Policy Institute, 2020.

subjects in 2022[29]. They used a number of approaches to raising attainment, including targeted academic support, non-academic support, role modelling and teacher development, all of which UCEM would support through working with Class Of Your Own. Based on its size, UCEM feels it can have more of an impact in supporting the development of one specific programme over the duration of the Plan.

Class Of Your Own is a social enterprise established in 2009, which developed the "Design Engineer Construct!" scheme, an accredited learning programme for secondary-school pupils with a mission to improve the skills and knowledge of teachers[30]. UCEM's sponsorship will look to provide Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications for teachers, which will in turn support students between ages 11 and 16 to study as part of a portfolio-based learning programme. The "Design Engineer Construct!" Level 2 is a recognised qualification comparable to GCSE level, which affords students the opportunity to progress to further education and A Levels[31].

"Design Engineer Construct!" is predominantly taught by Design Technology teachers, many with no prior experience of teaching in this area and the built environment sector. Therefore, the support and training of teaching professionals is provided throughout the duration of the "Design Engineer Construct!" programme across a range of areas, including focusing on new pupil engagement techniques, and methods for raising attainment in numeracy and literacy. As part of this partnership, it will be important to take into account the needs of the school, its resources and local context, as this has been found and recommended to be particularly important as an indicator of success[32].

With both the MEMF and Adopt a School activities, it is important to support teachers and their development as much as possible. Coe et al. reviewed research to find that there were six teacher characteristics that are associated with raised attainment, these include:

- Strong pedagogical knowledge,
- Quality of instruction,
- Classroom climate,
- Classroom management,
- Teacher beliefs,
- Professional behaviours[33].

Furthermore, Gibbons et al[34] found that teacher retention has a particular impact on attainment in disadvantaged schools where teacher turnover is much higher. Therefore, by collaborating with two experienced partners to support teacher retention and a number of the key six characteristics listed above, this will lead in the long-term to raising attainment within schools.

Overall, school improvement is vital to raising standards and improving student attainment, which can be achieved via effective school governance. Whilst widely acknowledged that the evidence base for this activity is weak in relation to attainment, there are examples (The University of Manchester and the London School of Economics' work with TASO) that have demonstrated a scope for more causal, longitudinal research in this area to determine impact[35]. Effective school governance has shown to be fundamental when encouraging school improvements, especially working to support senior teachers. Nevertheless, there can be a lack of diversity or expertise among school governance bodies and those schools in the most disadvantaged areas (especially those outside of London), and some schools struggle to recruit volunteers with the appropriate skills and expertise[36]. By partnering with an already established charity – Governors for Schools – that supports companies and higher education providers, this allows UCEM to provide support

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[29] Office for Students, 2023.
[30] Class Of Your Own, 2023.
[31] Design Engineer Construct, 2023.
[32] Universities UK, 2017.
[33] Sutton Trust, 2014.
[34] Centre for Economic Performance, 2018
[35] Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (Raising Attainment), 2023.
[36] Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education, 2023.

from a wealth of staff and alumni experience to sit in school governance positions within Reading-based postcodes, in order to collaborate and support teachers during their tenure.

Intervention strategy 2: raising sector standards

As described in the Plan, a substantial proportion of UCEM's undergraduate students are apprentices. This means that UCEM does not control which students access the institution's programmes, as apprentices are chosen by each individual employers' recruitment process. This makes it challenging to widen the proportion of students enrolling on UCEM's apprenticeship courses. It is also worth noting that UCEM's larger employer recruitment processes may be affected in the next few years as they reach their capacity for apprentices until existing students graduate. As a specialist institution, it was therefore felt that UCEM could have a greater impact by influencing the built environment sector, working with its current employer base to support a change to current, and future inclusion (EDI) practices. The built environment has struggled to bring further diversity into the sector (including women and ethnic minorities), for example, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) ascertained that the number of female surveyors was 22% in 2021[37] [38]. UCEM is however well placed to contribute to and influence this work.

There will be four activities within intervention strategy 2 (IS2), forming two key strands: influencing the sector and directly supporting UCEM's employers (who supply apprentices to the institution). The EDI toolkit will be a practical guide offering support and resources to medium-sized built environment employers[39], to influence them to create and publish formal EDI strategies and numerical EDI targets for recruitment. This will build on the work already undertaken by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), to broaden the reach and appeal of the toolkit. To create the EDI toolkit, UCEM will use the first year of this Plan to conduct an analysis of current sector practices and arrangements, working with other organisations to discover current data trends surrounding EDI in the built environment sector and undertaking a research project as to what students would like to see from employers in their outward-facing media and marketing in order to impact recruitment and diversification of the industry. UCEM has therefore not set a target for the first year of this Plan in order to undertake this research and to begin influence work, but will then start to formally collaborate with medium-sized employers from year two of this Plan (2025-2026).

The above and below listed activities will be supporting potential students from female and ethnic minority backgrounds. UCEM's theory of change outlines how the institution can directly support these students, which will include working with students from these groups to help shape the EDI toolkit. Furthermore, working with built environment organisations to raise the profile of these groups with their members will improve UCEM's ability to influence organisations and businesses in making change.

UCEM has specifically chosen to support medium-sized employers because it is felt that this is where the institution can have the greatest impact as a small, specialist provider. Initial benchmarking suggests that larger employers are already beginning to set EDI targets and strategies, whereas micro and small employers have much smaller staff numbers (sometimes only ten employees) and do not see the turnover of staff that a larger organisation would have, which would therefore reduce UCEM's impact on the wider industry. As a result, medium-sized employers were selected, as – in line with the UK government's definition of a medium sized business[40] – these employers have between 50 and 250 employees, vastly increasing the potential reach the institution could have in the industry. UCEM currently has apprentices with approximately sixty different medium-sized employers, with initial research suggesting that very few of these employers have an externally published EDI strategy or commitment on their websites. UCEM researched the possible access routes for potential new students from less represented groups in the built environment and found that many students were more likely to work for larger employers. These organisations were more likely to have a clear plan and commitment to EDI in their outward

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[37] Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, 2021.
[38] Building, 2020.
[39] This refers to employers that UCEM already has a working relationship with, as they provide apprentices to UCEM programmes.
[40] Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 2023.

facing webpages. Therefore, by providing EDI support to more medium-sized employers, this could help to widen the access route for key groups, by expanding it beyond only large employers. UCEM recognises that IS2 does carry a risk that the institution might not be able to influence employers to make a change without the support of formal industry regulation, particularly given the capacity of those in medium-sized companies and how much work they are willing or able to undertake.

Collaboration is a significant element of the second strand of this intervention strategy, which will look to utilise current partnerships and develop newer opportunities to maximise reach and impact. The OfS has encouraged collaboration as much as possible for access and participation, and working within such a broad sector as the built environment means there are plenty of collaborative opportunities. Whilst regulatory change of the sector is unlikely at this stage, the development of the recently published memorandum of understanding between the built environment professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) in 2022[41] does provide support for and a commitment to EDI from key stakeholders, as well as supporting sector data collection.

Collaborating with charities will establish links with communities and raise the awareness of potential students and apprentices who have no prior engagement with the sector (particularly for mature female and ethnic minority students). By creating bespoke information-based resources with a significant EDI focus for charities, potential students would be able to "see" themselves in and consider careers in the built environment sector.

A further continued collaboration will be through Building People (as referenced in the Plan), who are a hub for accessing careers in the built environment, bringing together different sector organisations to develop ideas and share platforms. UCEM will utilise its existing relationship (see the "Whole provider approach" section of the Plan for full details) with Building People and their wide-ranging networks in order to share EDI knowledge and tools, and to continue the campaign to influence the wider sector to affect change in this area.

Intervention strategy 3: mature students continuation

For intervention strategy 3 (IS3), the objective is to support mature apprenticeship students to continue with their studies and succeed on programme, as a 7.6 percentage point gap has been identified between mature and young apprentice students (see Annex A). The range of activities does have an overlap with IS4, as a number of students would be a part of both groups or are affected by similar challenges, as outlined below. UCEM's mature students are typically in full-time employment or are employment-based as part of their apprenticeships, and are often trying to balance family commitments around work and studies.

UCEM has a sizable number of mature students enrolling onto its programmes, but higher education sector analysis indicates that there is an increased risk to continuation for these students[42]. It was therefore vital to establish where certain 'pain points' could be found during the student journey and as part of initial transition to higher education learning. Student transition at UCEM has a number of additional challenges, with students attending via an online mode of study, which could mean that digital literacy and digital awareness is a further challenge to accessing and engaging with higher education activities and learning. Mature students entering higher education often feel more anxious about technology and could try to avoid using it if possible[43], particularly if they are upskilling or reskilling, which is common amongst this student group[44] and typical of the type of students attending UCEM programmes.

Students often choose to enrol at UCEM because the online model provides greater flexibility for fitting learning around work and family commitments, but it means that technology cannot be avoided. However, studies have found that digital inclusion activities do encourage student engagement online as well as increase their engagement in academic spaces, reducing isolation

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[41] Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, 2022.
[42] Office for Students, 2021.
[43] Staddon, R.V., 2020.
[44] Office for Students, 2021.

and enhancing their sense of belonging[45] [46]. This intervention strategy will provide additional resources designed in collaboration with UCEM's Academic Support and Enhancement team, so that students can learn in their own time and at their own pace from the four weeks prior to the start of the academic year. Taking part in this activity as part of the initial transition period will look to remove the stigma that could be associated with a lack of digital skills awareness and help improve students' sense of belonging and confidence moving forward into the academic year.

Another activity within this intervention strategy is the additional childcare learning fund, as mature learners are often more likely to have more complex needs[47], particularly if they are an apprentice and working concurrently alongside studying over a prolonged period. This can lead to a disconnection from those students managing further family responsibilities, including increased demands on their time and potential financial concerns, all of which create barriers to completion[48]. There are numerous recent studies relating to the effect of financial support on student continuation, despite their lack of a clear causal effect. TASO has found research from the United States that demonstrates that needs-based financial support can boost retention[49], whilst Hoare & Lightfoot (2015) and O'Brien (2015) have also demonstrated in a UK context that financial support can be positive[50] [51], particularly as mature students are more likely to suffer from financial hardship during their studies[52].

On-site childcare is a consistent recommendation to provide valuable support for mature students across higher education[53] [54] [55]. UCAS guidance states that childcare is particularly important during assignment periods and that working when childcare cannot be found can cause significant stress to students[56]. Therefore, providing learning support is important to give parents piece of mind, allowing them to complete their assignments and continue in higher education[57].

Whilst there is little direct literature in relation to online childcare support, UCEM is eager to explore childcare support that is in-keeping with its commitment to education and online provision, and will evaluate its effectiveness.

On-site campus childcare support at 'place based' higher education institutions are Ofsted approved and that would be the case with this online scheme. This is designed to ensure the online safety of young people and allow student parents to feel reassured that their dependents would be taking part in a safe learning environment as well as benefiting from good learning practices.

UCEM knows that many on-course students have dependents, so providing financial assistance can be beneficial to students, and childcare assistance[58] is one of the most significant ways to increase mature student success. The additional childcare learning fund will provide funding to enrol students' dependents on National Curriculum-aligned online courses from external providers, around each assessment point in the academic year. This serves the dual purpose of freeing up students' time to focus on their studies during critical assessment and revision points in the academic year, as well as providing raising attainment-related support to their dependents. The OfS has identified that mature students are more likely to have come from deprived areas[59] and – should they have remained in a similar area – may be the case that their children are learning in a school of similar deprivation. By funding one month's worth of online tutoring in subjects such as

[45] Abbas, N., 2022.
[46] Muñoz-Chereau, B., & Timmis, S., 2019.
[47] MillionPlus, & National Union of Students, 2012.
[48] Abbas, N., 2022.
[49] Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (Financial Support post-entry), 2023.
[50] Hoare, T., & Lightfoot, J., 2015.
[51] O'Brien, M., 2015.
[52] MillionPlus, & National Union of Students., (Key Findings), 2012.
[53] Trotter, L., 2023.
[54] National Union of Students, 2009.
[55] Derrick, G.E., et al., 2022.
[56] Todd, A., 2023.
[57] Todd, A., 2023.
[58] Boyd, D., & Shea, R., 2015.
[59] Office for Students, 2021.

Maths and English, the burden on parents to supplement school-learning and occupy their dependents will be reduced during critical pinch points in the academic year, as well as targeting young people who could benefit from raising attainment activities related to IS1.

As well as targeted schemes, two institution-wide schemes will be evaluated to demonstrate whether they have any impact on the on-course continuation of mature students, with particular regard to academic skills and providing spaces to study (further areas that UCEM has identified can be an adjustment for mature apprentice students entering higher education). Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) fosters cross-year support between students, encouraging students to learn collaboratively and support each other under the guidance of trained students (PAL Leaders[60]). There is much emerging evidence to demonstrate the impact of peer learning and, whilst PAL is designed to be an activity for all students at Level 4, has been proven to provide additional support and be beneficial for a number of key APP student groups, including mature students[61] [62]. This is as well as providing support for student continuation[63]. PAL in the UK is most commonly face-to-face, but has successfully been an online programme in Australia, New Zealand, China and the United States, and was utilised online effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK to provide academic skills support[64] [65].

Research suggests that there is a 'second-class' type stigma attached to studying a degree apprenticeship compared to more traditional university degrees, and students can sometimes mistakenly believe that fewer academic skills[66] are needed. It is important therefore to emphasise the importance of academic skills and how a scheme such as PAL can support professional development, which can have more credibility when coming from more experienced students. Evidence suggests that using more innovative pedagogy such as peer-based learning additionally develops individual and team working skills[67] (both of which will be fundamental to students in both their studies and their careers).

The second institution-wide activity will provide mature students with a distinct and quiet place to study. Students will have the opportunity to come and write alone or to meet in smaller groups to collaborate and write. Students would be encouraged to use the Pomodoro technique[68], where students write in 25-minutes stretches with short breaks in between.

Commonly known across the higher education sector as 'Shut up and Write'[69], this scheme is most associated within postgraduate study[70], so it has been necessary to adapt it to undergraduate level whilst considering current student needs and feedback. As UCEM is an online institution, students often meet online, but have fed back that they would like more face-to-face interaction and the opportunity to meet in learning spaces. Therefore, this activity provides dedicated time and spaces for both focused and collaborative studying, which mature students can find challenging to secure[71] [72] alongside balancing employment and family commitments[73]. In order to support student groups that could face financial barriers to accessing this opportunity, travel expenses will be paid for key Plan target groups upon application, and refreshments for students will be available on the day.

The final activity under this intervention strategy seeks to address student representation, as UCEM does not have a student union. This activity will therefore look to formalise more student representative groups with the creation of key Student Officers, in order to understand the needs of those students from their lived experiences. It is recognised by the institution that the student voice

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[60] Bournemouth University, 2023.
[61] Bermingham, N., et al., 2022.
[62] Bowman, N., et al., 2021.
[63] Davis, K., 2021.
[64] Hargreaves, J., et al., 2022.
[65] Oluwafolakemi, G., et al., 2021.
[66] Hughes, C., & Saieva, G., 2021.
[67] Hughes, C., & Saieva, G., 2021.
[68] Cirillo, F., 2023.
[69] A more student-friendly name will be used to advertise the scheme to students.
[70] Preece, K., 2019.
[71] Kahu, E., et al., 2014.
[72] Kahu, E., et al., 2013.
[73] Chapman, A., 2015.

is crucial – particularly lived experience – when planning activities around access, success or progression. As a result, Student Officers will provide that experience and share views on how UCEM could deliver its Plan and widening participation commitments, as well as informing wider EDI discussions. As mentioned throughout for IS3, as mature student apprentices are more likely to have more family commitments that could affect their study and work to prevent their continuation[74], representation of their experience and particularly their needs are important to highlight during any institutional change (such as curriculum development). It is acknowledged that traditionally, mature students do not as often apply for recruitment for this type of role[75], however, UCEM's current Student Ambassador and Student Representative groups do not follow this higher education sector trend, with many mature students putting themselves forward to represent their peers.

Intervention strategy 4: female student continuation

IS4 relates specifically to which interventions UCEM can introduce to support the on-course continuation of female students as it has been identified that the gap is widening over time between male and female apprentices (to 3.8 pp in 2020-21: see Annex A). UCEM recognises that many female students are also mature students and so will be recipients of the interventions outlined in IS3. However, due to the number of young apprentices coming on-course who are also female, and with the desire in the built environment sector to improve the number of women across the industry, it is vital that these students (regardless of age) continue and succeed on course.

As detailed in the "Risks to equality and opportunity" section of the main Plan, UCEM has identified a further risk to these students in that female apprentices can experience gender discrimination in the built environment sector. For example, in construction, 72% of women experienced some form of gender discrimination, and in a response to a poll, Randstad found that 15% of organisations had never promoted a woman to a senior position[76]; something that could lead them to leave their role and apprenticeship. In 2020, the Female FTSE Board Report revealed the number of women directors in the sector was proportionally 34.5%[77], and that a continuous gender pay gap has not only long existed between men and women across the whole sector, but has also appeared to have widened by 10% since 2019[78]. It is widely accepted that a widespread culture change across the sector is vital for this to be addressed[79]. This risk will impact female apprentices' ability to progress and focus on their studies, and has been given as a reason as to why they might choose to leave the sector (and therefore their apprenticeship and studies with UCEM).

Female students who have dependents will also significantly benefit from the opportunity to apply for the additional childcare learning fund. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that women were most likely to be the primary care givers to dependents in the household[80] [81]. Nevertheless, prior research has shown the trend for some time that women are more likely to be care givers or undertake the majority of domestic work[82], and therefore have significant additional responsibilities alongside their work and studies. UCEM recognises that due to the online nature of its courses, whilst on-site childcare cannot be provided (as has previously been recommended[83]), it can provide additional funds to support learning activities for children over a concentrated period (see IS3 for further details on the rationale for this activity).

UCEM apprentices often cite that they are seeking developmental opportunities and the opportunity to network with other apprentices. Therefore, as part of IS4 UCEM will develop a network specifically for women, in order for students to support each other in a peer network and to

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[74] Smith, S., et al., 2021.
[75] Brooks, R., et al., 2015.
[76] Randstad, 2020.
[77] GLD Technical Consulting, 2021.
[78] MacDonald & Company, 2021.
[79] McCulloch, C., 2023.
[80] Wu, J., 2021.
[81] Thomas, L., et al., 2021.
[82] Moreau, M- P., 2012.
[83] National Union of Students, 2019.

recognise their own 'social and cultural capital', as well as each other's experiences[84]. These groups are common across many other institutions and are usually found within Student Unions, although the evidence to support their impact is limited. This group is designed to be for female students to meet virtually and discuss a variety of topics, but mostly as a distinct space to speak freely about issues relevant to them, whether personal or professional. This would link to the planned activity to provide a Student Officer for female learners (similar to the mature student role within IS3). The Officer will form a key part of this group and act as a role model, particularly as in the built environment sector and across society there is a lack of women in leadership positions[85].

Further to IS3, there is a small evidence base in Australia to demonstrate that female students specifically benefit from group peer learning, including a shift in academic mindset[86] and an improvement in attainment[87]. "Shut Up and Write"[88] will also be offered to all female students (with the travel expenses fund available for application) and will be of particular benefit to this group with many female students being care providers (as with mature students more generally) who require a quiet or private space for study[89]. This can also positively affect student mental health which (as reported by the OfS) is more likely to affect women, particularly young women[90], with research demonstrating that social learning spaces can enhance belonging and engagement[91]. As a result, it is anticipated that these sessions could not only alleviate potential social challenges around supporting dependents and families, but also support student mental health, all of which could contribute to female apprentice student continuation.

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[84] Hughes, C., & Saieva, G., 2021.
[85] NUS Charity, 2023.
[86] Hoiland, S., et al., 2020.
[87] Geerlings, P., et al., 2016.
[88] A more student-friendly name will be used to advertise the scheme to students.
[89] Kahu, E., et al., 2013.
[90] Office for Students, 2019.
[91] Matthews, K., et al., 2011. (Full PDF version available upon request)

Fees, investments and targets 2024-25 to 2027-28

Provider name: University College of Estate Management

Provider UKPRN: 10008173

Summary of 2024-25 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflation statement:

We will not raise fees annually for 2024-25 new entrants

Table 3b - Full-time course fee levels for 2024-25 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	'Course fee' represents the maximum fee this cohort will be charged per year (for example, the fee will be lower for those students that register on fewer than six full-fee modules per year).	N/A	9000
First degree	2024-25 part-time intake that register for a larger number of modules and become eligible for full-time student support (by transferring to a full-time course).	N/A	9000
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	'Course fee' represents the maximum fee this cohort will be charged per year (for example, the fee will be lower for those students that register on fewer than six full-fee modules per year).	N/A	9000
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 3b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2024-25

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 4b - Part-time course fee levels for 2024-25 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	'Course fee' represents the maximum fee this cohort will be charged per year (for example, the fee will be lower for those students that register on fewer than four full-time modules per year). Students that wish to register on more than four modules per year must transfer onto our full-time course, at which point they are eligible for full-time student support.	N/A	6750
Foundation degree	*	N/A	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	N/A	*
HNC/HND	*	N/A	*
CertHE/DipHE	'Course fee' represents the maximum fee this cohort will be charged per year (for example, the fee will be lower for those that register on fewer than four full-fee modules per year).	N/A	6750
Postgraduate ITT	*	N/A	*
Accelerated degree	*	N/A	*
Sandwich year	*	N/A	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	N/A	*
Other	*	N/A	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2024-25

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Sub-contractual provider name and additional information:	Sub-contractual UKPRN:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*	*
Turing Scheme and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Fees, investments and targets
2024-25 to 2027-28

Provider name: University College of Estate Management

Provider UKPRN: 10008173

Investment summary

A provider is expected to submit information about its forecasted investment to achieve the objectives of its access and participation plan in respect of the following areas: access, financial support and research and evaluation. Note that this does not necessarily represent the total amount spent by a provider in these areas. Table 6b provides a summary of the forecasted investment, across the four academic years covered by the plan, and Table 6d gives a more detailed breakdown.

Notes about the data:

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Yellow shading indicates data that was calculated rather than input directly by the provider.

In Table 6d (under 'Breakdown'):

"Total access investment funded from HFI" refers to income from charging fees above the basic fee limit.

"Total access investment from other funding (as specified)" refers to other funding, including OfS funding (but excluding Uni Connect), other public funding and funding from other sources such as philanthropic giving and private sector sources and/or partners.

Table 6b - Investment summary

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Breakdown	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Access activity investment (£)	NA	£71,000	£71,000	£62,000	£62,000
Financial support (£)	NA	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000
Research and evaluation (£)	NA	£18,000	£16,000	£16,000	£17,000

Table 6d - Investment estimates

Investment estimate (to the nearest £1,000)	Breakdown	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Access activity investment	Pre-16 access activities (£)	£43,000	£43,000	£36,000	£36,000
Access activity investment	Post-16 access activities (£)	£28,000	£28,000	£26,000	£26,000
Access activity investment	Other access activities (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Access activity investment	**Total access investment (£)**	**£71,000**	**£71,000**	**£62,000**	**£62,000**
Access activity investment	*Total access investment (as % of HFI)*	23.7%	15.8%	11.3%	10.3%
Access activity investment	*Total access investment funded from HFI (£)*	£71,000	£71,000	£62,000	£62,000
Access activity investment	*Total access investment from other funding (as specified) (£)*	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Bursaries and scholarships (£)	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000
Financial support investment	Fee waivers (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	Hardship funds (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Financial support investment	**Total financial support investment (£)**	**£5,000**	**£5,000**	**£5,000**	**£5,000**
Financial support investment	*Total financial support investment (as % of HFI)*	1.7%	1.1%	0.9%	0.8%
Research and evaluation investment	Research and evaluation investment (£)	£18,000	£16,000	£16,000	£17,000
Research and evaluation investment	*Research and evaluation investment (as % of HFI)*	6.0%	3.6%	2.9%	2.8%

Fees, investments and targets
2024-25 to 2027-28

Provider name: University College of Estate Management

Provider UKPRN: 10008173

Targets

Table 5b: Access and/or raising attainment targets

Aim [500 characters maximum]	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2024-25 milestone	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone
To enhance the curriculum and training of teachers for KS3 Geography and Level 1 and 2 Design Engineer Construct in order to raise attainment of secondary school pupils in deprived Reading based postcodes by 2028.	PTA_1	Raising attainment	Other	Other (please specify in description)		The Characteristic and Target groups primarily supports schools in deprived Reading postcodes as well as girls and those from ethnic minorities within those schools. The headcount will be the number of schools supported in that year, inclusive of any that we continue to work with from a previous year. Data kept internally. The baseline is the number of schools UCEM currently supports in this context. Collaborations include CSTT, Governors for Schools and Class of your own.	Yes	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	Other (please include details in commentary)	Headcount	0	1	3	4	5
To work with medium-sized built environment sector employers to adopt formal equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategies or numerical targets by 2028.	PTA_2	Access	Other	Other (please specify in description)		The target group is approximately sixty built environment medium-sized employers and the characteristic are female and ethnic minority students. The milestones represent the percentage of employers that have an EDI strategy on their outward facing website. Data will be held by UCEM internally. Milestones and baselines were calculated based on a review of the current proportion of employers that have an EDI strategy on their outward facing website.	No	Other data source (please include details in commentary)	2022-23	Percentage	0%	0%	10%	15%	20%
	PTA_3														
	PTA_4														
	PTA_5														
	PTA_6														
	PTA_7														
	PTA_8														
	PTA_9														
	PTA_10														
	PTA_11														
	PTA_12														

Table 5d: Success targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2024-25 milestone	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone
To ensure mature students on an apprenticeship are supported to continue with their studies and succeed on programme, resulting in a reduced gap in continuation of 5.5 percentage points by 2028.	PTS_1	Continuation	Age	Mature (over 21)	Young (under 21)	To reduce the percentage point gap in continuation between apprenticeship mature students and apprenticeship young students to 5.5 pp by 2028 (by 0.5 pp each year, starting from 7 pp in year 1 of the Plan). As the current gap is small, UCEM will look to reduce the gap steadily over the lifecycle of this Plan, rather than committing to closing the gap entirely. The baseline year and milestones are the combined 4-year aggregate data.	No	The access and participation dataset	Other (please include details in commentary)	Percentage points	7.6	7.0	6.5	6.0	5.5

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2024-25 milestone	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone
To ensure female students on an apprenticeship are supported to continue with their studies and succeed on programme, resulting in a reduced gap in continuation of 2 percentage points by 2028.	PTS_2	Continuation	Other	Other (please specify in description)	N/A	To reduce the percentage point gap in continuation between apprenticeship female students and apprenticeship male students to 2 pp by 2028 (by 0.5 pp each year, starting from 3.5 pp in year 1 of the Plan). As the current gap is small, UCEM will look to reduce the gap steadily over the four-year lifecycle of this Plan, rather than committing to closing the gap entirely.	No	The access and participation dataset	2020-21	Percentage points	3.8	3.5	3.0	2.5	2.0
	PTS_3														
	PTS_4														
	PTS_5														
	PTS_6														
	PTS_7														
	PTS_8														
	PTS_9														
	PTS_10														
	PTS_11														
	PTS_12														

Table 5e: Progression targets

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Lifecycle stage	Characteristic	Target group	Comparator group	Description and commentary [500 characters maximum]	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Units	Baseline data	2024-25 milestone	2025-26 milestone	2026-27 milestone	2027-28 milestone
	PTP_1														
	PTP_2														
	PTP_3														
	PTP_4														
	PTP_5														
	PTP_6														
	PTP_7														
	PTP_8														
	PTP_9														
	PTP_10														
	PTP_11														
	PTP_12														