



**Brunel**  
University  
London

# Access and Participation Impact Report 2019-20 Summary



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## Introduction

This is the first Impact Report published on the University's Access and Participation work, and we have welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of what we do to support learners across the student lifecycle, from our work with key stage 1 pupils to adult learners, to supporting our students to achieve during their academic study, and preparing them for successful futures.

Brunel University London is proud to be a diverse community with students and staff from a variety of backgrounds. Over 80% of our undergraduate home/EU students are considered as underrepresented or disadvantaged, and it is these groups of students that are the focus of our Access and Participation work. Providing opportunities that are life-changing is therefore important to us as we seek to contribute to a more socially just society, and this report highlights the ways in which our work is progressing. We know that we are making a difference – in a recently published Social Mobility Index<sup>1</sup> of English providers Brunel University London is ranked 17<sup>th</sup>.

The 2019/20 year will always be remembered as the year when the pandemic started, and the national lockdown from March 2020 put an immediate halt to planned activities. But our staff were not deterred, quickly adapting to using technology and ensuring we could engage with students to deliver the activities as planned and support them in a time of need. It was therefore not a matter of stopping what we were doing, but of doing things differently. Our staff and Student Ambassadors that support our Access and Participation work embraced the challenge and deserve credit for the innovative ways in which our work has continued.

I want to thank all staff and students who share our vision of success for all; it is only with your dedicated work and support that we can make the difference we aspire to.



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Vice-Provost (Education)



**Connie Fernandes**  
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<sup>1</sup> D Phoenix (2021). Designing an English Social Mobility Index ([www.hepi.ac.uk](http://www.hepi.ac.uk)).



# 1. Our Impact in Numbers

We delivered **41** different access and participation interventions and initiatives

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Our outreach activity worked with **30,156** pupils, **1,417** parents and **52** teachers across over **100** schools and colleges

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We had **20,371** engagements with our success activities by students

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**666** students participated in our progression activities

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We invested **£1,082,149** in supporting disabled students and their learning

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We provided **£1,922,000** of financial support to students so they can succeed on their courses

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**925** students benefitted from our portfolio of scholarships and bursaries

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Hardship fund assisted **156** students and a further **109** students received an emergency loan

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Laptop Loan scheme expanded and over **700** laptops were purchased to support students to access their learning online

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We received **1** award: The Brunel Summer Internship Team won the *National Undergraduate Employability Awards 2020 Best Widening Participation Initiative*.

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**5** research papers were published related to our Access and Participation activities (see page 15 for details).

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## 2. Highlights and Key Activities

### 2.1 Widening Access and Outreach

This year we expanded our school work beyond the six west London boroughs and are now working with schools in the Thames Valley, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire. These schools have been chosen because they are situated in POLAR4 Q1 or 2 areas, which are those where the lowest number of young people go onto highest education, or where the school population has significant numbers of learners from these areas. All our target schools and colleges benefited from new online University-wide programmes, including GetUReady and Wednesday Webinars.

To counter disadvantage, the University adopted a contextualised admissions approach when reviewing applications, and a designated Contextual Admissions Officer has been actively engaging with applicants and reviewing their contextual data/information which may have impacted on their education. Applications from



students who would initially be rejected were reviewed by the Contextual Admissions Officer, resulting in 70-80% subsequently being made offers. Applicants who we believed would benefit from a transition year were offered a place with our partner, Brunel Pathway College. The cancelling of A-Level exams due to the pandemic had a disproportionate effect on those registered as private candidates, as they were unable to receive teacher-assessed grades. This affected mature students in particular, and to ensure that they could progress to higher education as planned the University put in place equivalency exam papers on which to base their admission. In addition to this, In-Sessional support for English was set up, allowing admission of students who achieved Grade D, short of our C-grade requirement.

Outreach work continued to expand for underrepresented and protected groups, and we engaged with 706 care leavers, adult carers, estranged, mature students and refugees. Examples of our engagement included online presentations, virtual open day sessions and taster sessions for mature students; individual advice and guidance for care leavers was complemented by the Inspire mentoring programme and the online Discovery Summer School.

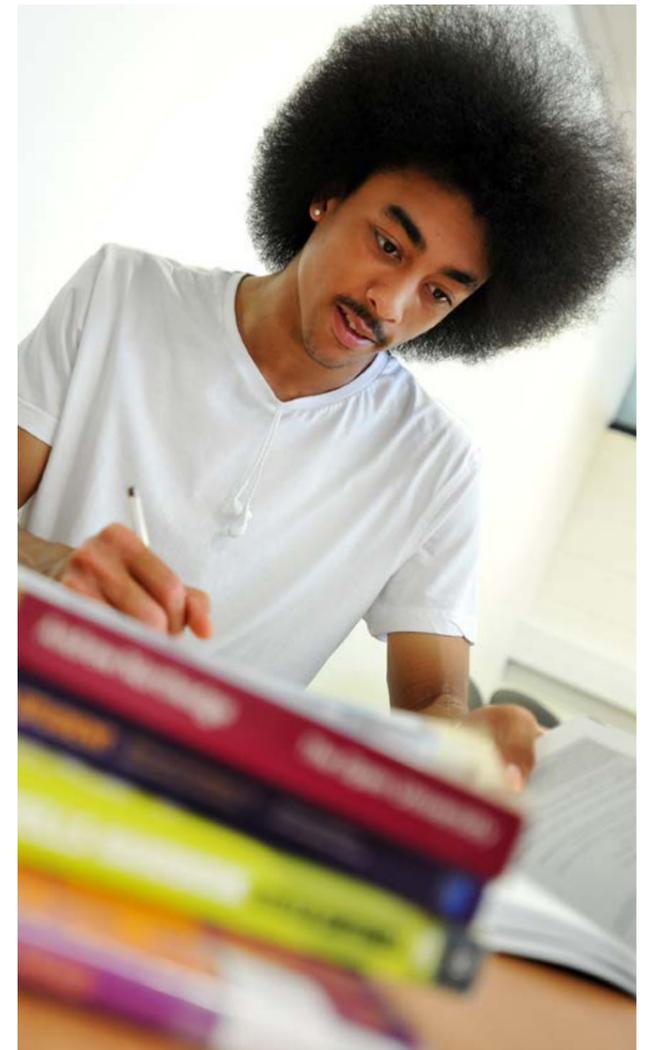
In 2019/20 we reviewed our *STEM Outreach Programme* and designed a new programme of sessions across key stages 2 to 5. We delivered 49 events supported by 60 STEM student ambassadors, who were trained to deliver sessions and input into programme development. Whilst we were unable to have a physical presence on campus, we developed online resources with the assistance of Computer Science, Computing Support, Bio-radiation and Engineering to provide STEM activities to schools. We also launched the Brunel Online STEAM Club, and our pilot programme has engaged four schools in the AI Artist and Tinkercad programmes.

Our particular focus on STEM is also evidenced by ongoing sponsorship of *Heathrow Aviation Engineering UTC*. Two Link Governors from the University sit on the Governing Board which oversees safeguarding, wellbeing and the quality of education. This year they were also able to monitor how guidelines published by the Department for Education on safeguarding children during the pandemic and remote teaching were followed and applied at the UTC.

*Urban Scholars* is a three-year intervention programme providing enriched learning experiences for students aged 12 -18 years from schools in London and Milton Keynes. The students are selected on the basis of their academic talent or the potential for high achievement. Many of the students come from socially deprived areas where students' talents may not lead to successful examination results and high aspirations. In 2019/20 the programme:

- Hosted activities for 300 students in receipt of pupil premium across 14 Saturdays, with activities taking place either on campus or virtually.
- Delivered Science and Technology sessions to all groups with some delivered in the Brunel STEM Centre and as a result 84% of students opted to choose STEM subjects at a higher level.
- Organised workshops including a July Summer Careers Festival, with more than 20 employees from our Moody's sponsor delivering employability skills and online communication skills.
- Supported 12 Scholars to attend the London University 2020 Virtual Summer School for Medicine, Economics and Maths.

Our *Young Scholars* programme focuses on raising aspirations and improving the life chances of primary school children through greater parental engagement.



It aims to increase aspirations, attainment and wellbeing that are all strongly inter-linked. The programme is based on the belief and evidence that it is vital to lay early foundations to prepare children to be intellectually confident which would ultimately influence their trajectories, especially their orientation to Higher Education. This year we provided 1,400 parents with resources, materials and face to face support. A link to Brunel University You Tube film in which Professor Valsa Koshy discussed seven ways to help children succeed was sent to all 20,000 Schools in England for them to share with parents.

## 2.2 Success

The *Hardship Fund* provides a discretionary additional source of financial support to students who find themselves in unexpected financial hardship due to a change in their circumstances. It is designed to prevent a student's financial circumstances interfering with their ability to study and thereby enabling them to continue to access their course and remain studying at the University. This year the hardship fund expanded to offer extra support to students during the pandemic, awarding an additional £52,000 and developing new processes to allow for rapid awards for students in crisis.

Broader support for students with advice on finance and budgeting, including 'Budgeting 101', is provided by *Blackbullion*, an online money advice and guidance platform that the University has partnered with. The platform is also available to applicants and offer comprehensive pre-application/arrival financial guidance and information on student funding. This overall aim is to equip our students with the knowledge to manage their finances in a way that contributes towards the completion of their degree whilst also providing skills for life after graduation.



This year we introduced a new role: a dedicated Student Support and Welfare Officer was appointed to support the participation and achievement of looked after children, care leavers, young carers, estranged, and mature students facing specific and significant barriers to educational progress. 104 students received intensive support, including practical support such as 'living-on-your-own' starter kits, laptops, book vouchers, funding for emergency accommodation and assistance with Unite Foundation Scholarship applications. Other activities included social events arranged by the University or students themselves, such as the popular Macmillan Fundraiser arranged by the Mature Student Society.

The *Wellbeing Service* at Brunel is a University-wide service that provides mental health and wellbeing support to all students. It is part-funded by Access and Participation to give expert advice and support to all disabled students, many of whom never think of themselves as disabled, so that they can fulfil their potential to become confident, talented and versatile graduates. We support those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, mental health conditions such as anxiety, and medical conditions such as epilepsy and arthritis. The Access and Participation funding also supports the cost of diagnostic assessments, support workers for students and upkeep of the Assistive Technology Centre.

The *Mental Health Project* completed its final year in 2019/20 and delivered a range of innovative activities, engaging 503 students in 2019/20. Activities included 'Mind the Gap', a pre-induction week programme for students with a declared mental health condition. Successful elements of the Mental Health Project will now be taken forward by the Wellbeing team and embedded into our standard support offering.

The *Peer-Assisted Learning programme (PAL)* has been running at the University since 2015 and is a well-established model of student-to-student learning that offers a wide range of potential benefits to students, including



supporting transition, retention, and attainment, and developing employability skills. The sessions are loosely based around academic skills development to foster independent learning and are run by PAL leaders drawn from peers in the subject discipline. This year PAL sessions were attended by 1,443 first year students across 21 disciplines, hosted by 93 PAL leaders.

*HeadStart* has been running at the University since 2008 and is now a three-day long induction programme that help care-leavers, disabled students and mature students to transition into university. Students are introduced to different University services, as well as skills to support independent learning and study. HeadStart participants have ongoing access to online study skills resources, allowing them to revisit information throughout the academic year, which has been well received. In September 2019, 55 care leavers, disabled and mature students attended the programme. The students felt that the most valuable aspects of HeadStart were in relation to the academic skills and library sessions, mindset/independent learning skills and awareness of the help and support services available at Brunel. The majority of students felt that their expectations

were met or exceeded during the three days and particularly valued the involvement of Student Ambassadors in the programme.

The *Student Success Project* was initiated in 2016 to tackle the awarding gap - the difference in first or 2:1 degrees awarded - between White students and Black and Asian students. Highlights from the fourth and final year of the project included supporting delivery of Black History Month activities for 495 attendees; creating four videos with alumni on 'How I got my good degree'; running a creative project competition; and delivering an online 'Race in HE' Symposium for 190 attendees (19 from Brunel, 171 external). Following a review of the project and to set the direction for the future, we are now appointing an anti-racism officer to lead on training for staff internally.

Three *Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion* Toolkits were developed with input from over 30 staff and students across Brunel; one designed to support lecturers, one to support work at departmental level and one for University level. The toolkits launched in July 2020 and are now being rolled out across Brunel. The intention is to embed the toolkits into the programme development process; include them in the Academic Professional Programme; and use them in workshops for staff involved in curriculum design.





## 2.3 Progression

The *Professional Mentoring Programme* has two main strands of career-focused mentoring, one focused on face-to-face mentoring and one focused on e-mentoring. Both strands draw on experienced professionals from private and public sector employers to mentor FHEQ Level 5 and Level 6 undergraduates from widening access backgrounds. Students engage with their mentor from November to May, and in 2019/20 285 students engaged with mentoring, a 50% increase compared to the previous year. In response to the challenges generated by the pandemic, our face-to-face mentors agreed to have e-mentoring added to their profile, which increased the number of mentors available to mentees.

The *Brunel Summer Internship Programme (BSIP)* is an employability focused project that has been running since 2014 and offers eligible first year undergraduate students a range of employability workshops and the opportunity of an eight-week paid internships during the summer. The programme had a successful year despite numerous challenges, with 209 of the 306 starters completing the programme of employability workshops and 87 students successfully completing summer internships (which is just five fewer than the previous year). A particular highlight for the BSIP team was winning the first *National Undergraduate Employability Awards 2020 Best Widening Participation Initiative*, an excellent achievement recognising the dedication of the team.

Following a successful pilot year, the *KickStart programme* continued in 2019/20 offering career coaching to recent graduates. The aim of the programme was to contact recent graduates from a targeted group of under-represented students 8-12 months after graduation and to offer them the opportunity to receive an extra nudge and further intensive support, advice and coaching to help them either to gain employment or improve their employment prospects. In 2019/20, 75 students engaged with Graduate Kickstart coaches which is a 27% increase compared to 2018/19. In future the scheme will expand with a trial of post-graduation internships.



The *READY Programme* is an employability activity exclusively for new Level 4 students starting at Brunel. Organised by the Professional Development Centre, the programme provides students with the opportunity to develop and learn various skills that will benefit their future career path. The programme focuses on the United Nations Development Programme's work in a refugee camp in Zambia, and activities include working in teams to explore innovative ideas and create solutions to benefit a refugee community. 246 READY participants (44% from underrepresented groups) had 10 weeks to research their subject from scratch, identify a compelling problem before presenting their sustainable design solution in a five-minute elevator pitch. Students had to demonstrate how their product addressed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and their targets.



## 3. Covid-19 Challenges and Our Response

### 3.1 Access

Whilst there were challenges in engaging schools and young people at a time when teachers were under immense pressure, we also discovered that moving our outreach activities online had some benefits. For example, we were able to participate in school assemblies and attend multiple schools in different parts of the country on the same day, thereby reaching many more young people than we otherwise would have done. We also developed a range of online resources from primary to sixth form, which can be shared with schools and accessed at any time.

### 3.2 Success

Our main concern during spring and summer 2020 was to continue offering support to those who needed it the most, and we took a proactive approach in contacting students. In this way we were able to provide a welcome touch-point for students, as well as assisting with financial emergencies or counselling and wellbeing issues. Moving to online delivery has resulted in some unexpected positive outcomes that will inform our approach going forward. These include the following examples:

At the time of lockdown in March 2020 most formal teaching was coming to an end, but with students preparing for exams and finalising their dissertation projects there was a great demand for our Academic Skills Service (ASK), who quickly moved their one-to-one consultations and group sessions online. This was very successful, and in some cases attendance and engagement was greater than at equivalent sessions previously held on campus. We will therefore consider how we can best utilise a blended approach in engaging students with their academic skills development going forward.

We used technology to our advantage when setting up a focus group to explore the experiences of BAME students and graduates. As we were not constrained by the physical campus, we were able to have alumni as well as current students in the virtual room, resulting in a very rich and enlightening conversation. We also found that the *Race in HE Symposium* attracted a larger audience than we would otherwise have expected, and our experience is that online events can be more inclusive than in-person events.

### 3.3 Progression

A particular challenge was the loss of employers offering internships due to the pandemic. However, our teams worked exceptionally hard to find 50 new employers who were able to offer virtual and remote internship opportunities for 87 students, including in law, engineering and biomedical sciences. We were able to build on existing activities: we extended our E-Mentoring scheme and doubled the numbers engaged with online mentoring; and our coaching proved to be very appropriate considering the circumstances, as many graduates were very demotivated and beginning to feel the hopelessness of their situation in relation to Covid-19 and the job market.



## Five research papers were published related to our Access and Participation activities

- Wainwright, E., Chappell, A. and McHugh, E. (2019) 'Widening participation and a student 'success' assemblage: the materialities and mobilities of university'. *Population, Space and Place*, 26(3). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/psp.2291>
- Al-Luhaybi M., Yousefi L., Swift S., Counsell S. and Tucker A. (2019) 'Predicting Academic Performance: A Bootstrapping Approach for Learning Dynamic Bayesian Networks', in: Isotani S., Millán E., Ogan A., Hastings P., McLaren B., Luckin R. (eds.) *Artificial Intelligence in Education. AIED 2019. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, vol 11625. Springer, Cham., 26-36. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23204-7\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23204-7_3)
- Deniozou, T., Dima, M. and Cox, C. (2020) 'Designing a Game to Help Higher Education Students Develop Their Note-Taking Skills. Proceedings of the Annual Symposium on Computer-Human Interaction in Play'. *Association for Computing Machinery*, 181-192. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3410404.3414230>
- Theodosopoulos, G. and Hardman, S. (2020) 'Perspectives On: A Case for Peer-Assisted Learning'. Chartered Association of Business Schools Publications. <https://charteredabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Perspectives-On-A-case-for-Peer-Assisted-Learning.pdf>
- Chappell, A., Wainwright, E., McHugh, E. and Gilhooly, K. (2020) *The Experiences of Undergraduate Commuter Students*. Place of publication: Brunel University London. <https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/21689>

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