

# Access and Participation Plan 2024–25 to 2027–28 Evaluation

August 2025

\*This version is a draft, subject to final University committee sign off



## Context

- Committed Plan evaluation:
  - Annual report of interim findings published on the University of the Built Environment website
  - · End of Plan report on the University website
  - Further dissemination of the Plan and specific activities
- This evaluation provides an annual report of interim findings, as committed to in the Plan, and draws on more detailed raw data to assess the effectiveness of activities and determine whether the intended outcomes have been achieved.
- More interim and final findings on specific activities will also be published as part of the Higher Education Evaluation Library.
- Each Plan activity for each Intervention Strategy has a broader evaluation that provides a full documentation in relation to the Theory of Change intermediate outcomes.
- All activities have general ethical approval by the University Ethics Committee.
- The activities in the Plan in 2024-25 ran alongside the University's Widening Participation Strategy activities.
- Small number of participants and certain school data mean that not all statistics have been documented due to potential student/child identification.
- With regard to Intervention Strategies 3 and 4, at this stage, it is very difficult to ascertain whether specific activities are having any overall impact on student continuation.

# Summary of 2024-25

- First year of this Plan.
- All targets have been met at time of writing (based on public and internal University data).
- Activity went ahead across all Intervention Strategies, as documented in the Plan.
- This evaluation report encompasses a number of **different evaluative methods** including mixed method initial studies as well as implementation and process evaluations (IPE).
- In May 2025, the University changed its name to be University of the Built Environment and also merged with the London School of Architecture. Variations to the University of the Built Environment and London School of Architecture's Plans were created and approved by the OfS in July 2025.
- Due to changes in staffing and the ability of other team members to absorb certain elements of the project delivery, there was an underspend across both access areas—pre-16 and post-16 with regard to both physical resources and staffing costs. While these adjustments affected the distribution of planned activities and expenditure, they did not compromise the expected outputs or diminish the ambition of either strand of the project.

# Intervention Strategy 1

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

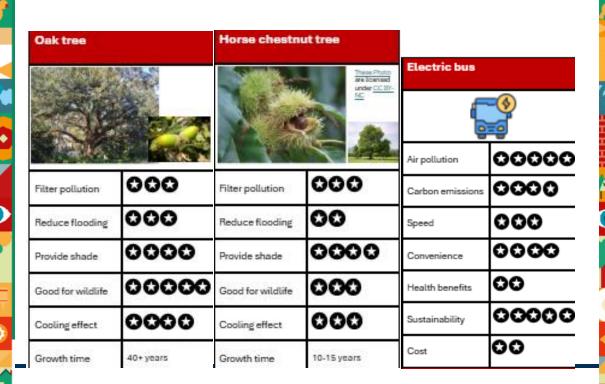
- Year one target met?
  - Yes 1 school
- Activities to be evaluated
  - Collaboration with the Chartered Surveyors Training Trust (CSTT) as part of their "My Environment, My Future" (MEMF) programme
  - "Adopt a School" scheme with Class Of Your Own to commit to funding an in-school programme: Design Engineer Construct! (DEC)
  - School governors programme to recruit and place University staff and alumni into school governor positions in disadvantaged areas and underperforming schools across Reading postcodes

# MEMF curriculum development

- Planned outputs for 2024–25
  - Develop school activities in collaboration with teachers
  - Draft impact surveys
  - Reach out to schools for a pilot for the next academic year

- Delivered outputs and key foci for 2024-25
  - Collaborated with material authors to generate ideas and agree on the overall approach, subject focus, and key themes
  - Created lesson materials, starting with the Year 6
     "Future Shapers" taster day resources (see
     snapshot on the next slide)
    - Two tailored resources have been developed specifically for teacher use
    - Aims to provide a smooth, engaging, and supportive transition experience
  - Initiated engagement with target schools in the Reading area, as well as proactive schools within the BEST network
  - Collected early feedback from both target schools and the wider BEST teacher network
  - Defined and documented the impact survey and establish clear criteria for measuring success and effectiveness

# MEMF curriculum resource examples



In this programme, you will explore how we can create towns and cities that are sustainable and enjoyable for everyone.



Let's embark on this exciting journey together!

### Designing a green space to improve urban areas

Trees provide many advantages in urban areas.



# MEMF curriculum development

- A summary of reflections from teachers on the created resources:
  - Resources are comprehensive with a real variety of activities including the quizzes
  - There may be too much here to fit into one shorter transition day
  - The resources would fit into the year 6 teaching curriculum

#### Key findings for IPE

- Advised to promote resources for general Year 6 classroom use, not just for transition days.
- Opportunity identified to develop a junior school-focused offer, potentially adding a new competition category.
- Resource development is led by or co-created with teachers, typically during school holidays.
- School engagement and piloting must occur during term time, creating a variable work and spending pattern.
- Current development is underway during the early weeks of the summer holiday.
- Teacher feedback has been very positive, with strong potential for future growth.
- Need to improve promotion to local schools—interest has come from Reading postcodes, but not from within Reading Borough

#### Recommendations for 2025-26

- Progress into year 2 of the project plan and continue to gather feedback from teachers.
- Based on discussions with the Trust, are there any further activities we can investigate including a more distinctive primary offering.
- Investigate whether we could look to work with schools beyond central Reading, if there are still similarities to deprivation figures found in the original Plan.
- Can the University request support from some of our own partner schools to review the materials?
- Investigate further how we can package the resources and promote them further.
- Utilise University students to take part in short videos to add to the resources.

# "Adopt a School" programme

- 1 school within Reading Borough has started the DEC programme
- Key findings
  - 56 students engaged with across two year 7 classes
- Key findings for IPE
  - Securing a participating school was difficult due to a limited pool in the targeted area (approximately 6 to 8 months lead-in time from initiation to implementation.)
  - The experience underscored the importance of flexibility—both in geographic reach and alignment with each school's curriculum and capacity.
  - Support extended beyond financial contributions to include practical resources and student recognition.
  - A strong foundation has now been laid for future partnerships, informed by these insights.

- Recommendations for 2025-26
  - Investigate whether we could look to work with schools beyond central Reading, if there are still similarities to deprivation figures found in the original Plan.
  - Continue to work to establish whether an additional school can be found for 2025-26.
  - Establish a number of the key dates to visit the DEC school for our rotation visits early on in the year.

## School Governors scheme

1 school governor placed at a school within Reading Borough (University member of staff)

### IPE findings

- The programme was delivered as intended, with one governor successfully placed in a local school.
- There is potential to build stronger connections with recent graduates, particularly those from widening participation backgrounds.
- Difficulties with accessing pupil outcome data in the first year and the need to align surveys with national standard.
- Recruitment processes were more easily tracked for university staff than alumni, highlighting a need for improved systems and clearer pathways for alumni involvement.
- Once onboarded, governor feedback indicated high satisfaction with the training and the overall experience.

## Governor data (themed qualitative data)

- Gratitude and Enthusiasm
- Commitment to Student Support
- Positive Onboarding and Training Experience
- Growth and Confidence Building

## Recommendations for 2025–26

- Work with Governors for Schools regarding the alumni sign-up process, so we are able to ascertain more accurately who is registering
- Promote governorship to staff
  - 'Ask a governor' type recruitment
  - Establish whether we have any other staff who are governors and whether we can support them (especially if they are within the target area).
- Investigate whether we could look to work with schools beyond central Reading, if there are still similarities to deprivation figures found in the original Plan.
  - Establish whether we could expand the programme to students.
  - With regard to evaluation, establish the feasibility of governor logbooks to enable the systematic documentation and evaluation of interventions.

# Intervention Strategy 2

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 the University'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

## Year one target met?

 There was no target for 2024-25 (as outlined in the University Plan's Fees, Investments and Targets document)

## Activities to be evaluated

 A combination of the four activities outlined in the Plan, including the creation of an equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) toolkit as well as collaborating with a number of Built Environment charities and organisations including Building People

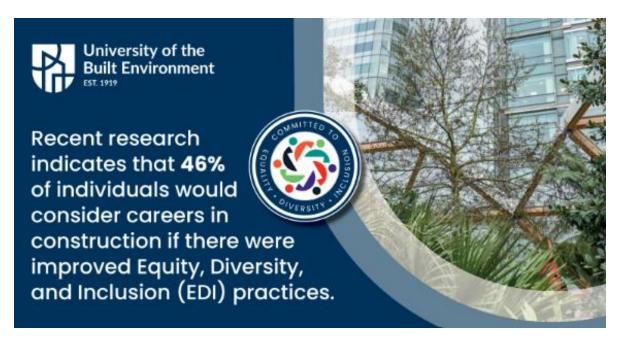
# Raising sector standards

- Work produced as part of the four activities outlined on the previous slide
  - Created an EDI toolkit for the University's medium-sized built environment employers.
  - Undertook a comprehensive review of current practices and arrangements across the sector.
  - Collaborated with partner organisations to identify existing data trends related to EDI within the built environment industry.
  - A dedicated research project was conducted to explore student perspectives on what they expected from employers' external communications and marketing, with the aim of informing strategies to enhance recruitment and support greater diversification across the sector.

# Summary of the trends, best practice and potential opportunities for the Built Environment

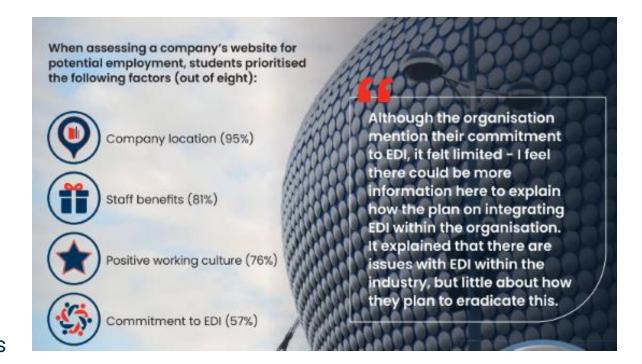
- First impressions matter: The company website is often a candidate's first interaction and should reflect a strong EDI commitment.
- Be transparent: Clearly communicate EDI initiatives, policies, and achievements to build trust and attract diverse talent.
- Use inclusive language and imagery: Avoid gendered terms, showcase diverse teams, and reflect varied identities.
- Highlight EDI success stories: Share employee testimonials and real examples of inclusion in action.
- Ensure accessibility: Make the website usable for all, including those with disabilities (e.g. alt text, readable fonts, assistive tech compatibility).
- Publish clear EDI goals: Share policies, progress, and metrics to demonstrate accountability and ambition.
- Integrating social value, equality, diversity, and inclusion into the built environment is vital for creating spaces
  that serve the needs of all communities. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are uniquely positioned to
  drive this transformation through innovative and inclusive design approaches. With appropriate support, they
  can become leaders in embedding these principles into practice. Future research should prioritise the
  development of robust assessment tools and tailored support mechanisms to strengthen SMEs' capacity for
  inclusive design and implementation.

# Assessing the attractiveness of employers, the impact of EDI research



The qualitative nature of this research offers useful conclusions about what webpages could include in the future. It also demonstrates that people today are looking for reasons to work at a company beyond just its commitment to the sector. Applicants value diversity, inclusion, and strong company values.

Research was published on the <u>National</u> <u>Education Opportunities Network blog</u>



## EDI toolkit

- The toolkit consists of a curated selection of existing resources from the Supply Chain Sustainability School, chosen for their reputation and relevance to SMEs.
- These resources are already integrated into the Fairness, Inclusion and Respect programme, making the creation of new materials unnecessary.
- A summary document is included, outlining:
  - Details about the badge that companies can display on their websites.
  - Suggested next steps and links to further resources available through the Supply Chain Sustainability School.
- The pathway also features:
  - A write-up of the university's research on how inclusive design influences the attractiveness of company web pages (referenced in the previous slide).
  - An introduction by the university's Student Officer for Inclusion, highlighting the importance of EDI in recruitment and retention strategies.



Thank you for completing this Fairness, Inclusion and Respect pathway with the University of the Built Environment and the Supply Chain Sustainability School. For completing the pathway you can download this digital badge which you can display on your company website and social media to demonstrate your commitment to Fairness, Inclusion and Respect, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and Social Value.

This pathway was created by the University of the Built Environment's Widening Participation team, whose aim is to increase equality of opportunity for students to access, succeed in, and progress from University of the Built Environment programmes. If you have any questions or would like to explore future collaboration, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

There's a wide range of excellent materials available through the Supply Chain Sustainability School that we would recommend you explore next, including the following:

SME Community Hub

## Recommendations for 2025–26

- Establish a steering group comprising engaged employers and key stakeholders, with a rotating steering group chair to ensure shared leadership and diverse input.
- Appoint FIR ambassadors within as many participating employers as possible, ideally selecting individuals who are University of the Built Environment students.
- Develop a branded initiative, such as a charter, pledge, or formal commitment, to promote visibility and shared values.
- Collaborate more closely with sector-specific charities and organisations to extend outreach and align with their guidance and networks.
  - Noting that some charities may request funding or donations in exchange for their support and promotion.

# Intervention Strategy 3

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

- Year one target met?
  - Data is not yet available via the most recent version of the OfS data dashboards
- Activities to be evaluated
  - Mature student transition support
  - Childcare Learning Fund (IS3 and IS4)
  - Student Officer for Mature Learners
  - Peer Assisted Learning (IS3 and IS4)
  - Space to Study (IS3 and IS4)

# Mature student transition support

### Activity overview

- This year has served as a foundational period of exploration and learning, laying the groundwork for development in the 2025–26 academic year, with the aim of full implementation for students in 2026–27.
- Student Officers for Mature Learners were consulted for their views and potential ideas, as well as University staff and a review of the Higher Education sector to establish key findings and actions for 2025-26.

#### Key Fundings

- The investigative component of this year's work has concluded with plans for continued development into the 2025–26 academic year.
- There is a lot of potential for deeper exploration and opportunities for collaboration between higher education institutions.
- The project has since evolved into a broader initiative focused on digital inclusion and digital poverty, drawing on current research being undertaken by colleagues at the Open University.

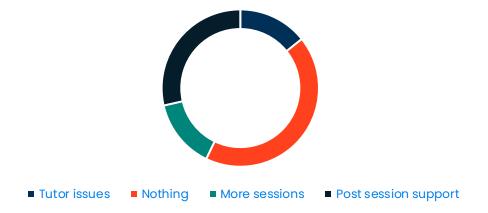
#### Recommendations and actions for 2025-26

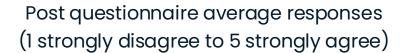
- A change of focus: Digital skills are not solely about technical proficiency; they are fundamentally about enabling digital inclusion
- Investigate joining the National Digital Inclusion network.
- Develop face to face sessions for certain APP groups prior to the start of semester 1 including a digital skills talk.
- Further enhance and add to the University's BE Ready induction module, including videos and infographics acting as an initial gateway to digital skills.
- Promote further academic skills workshops and ESOL activity/pages.

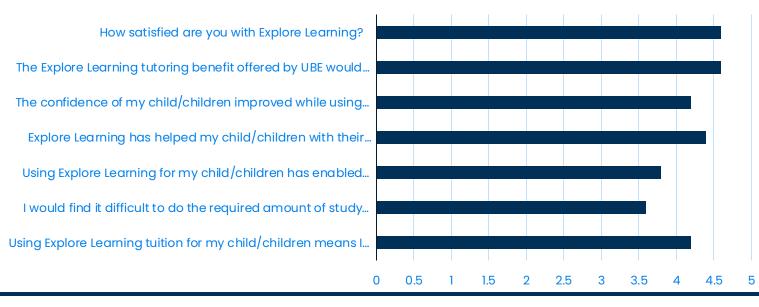
# Childcare Learning Fund (IS3/4)

- Key activity and outputs
  - A Childcare Learning Fund (provided as in-kind financial support) which enables students to apply online learning courses for their dependents
  - Covered five sessions for each child
  - Collaboration with Explore Learning
  - 10 students were supported via the Fund
  - These students had 17 children who were offered support across this academic year

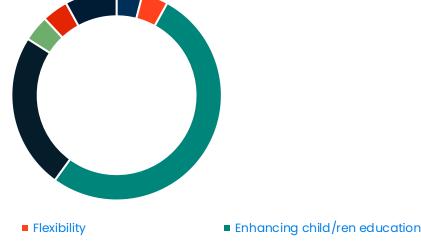
# What would you improve or change about Explore Learning?







# Combined Fund applications & what was the best thing about using Explore Learning?



■ Time to focus on studying ■ Feeling recognised as a parent ■ Spend time with children

■ Available resources

■ Benefits of online learning

It is important to note that the findings are based on a small sample size, which limits the robustness of the analysis. As such, the results should be interpreted with caution, as they do not carry statistical significance and may not be generalisable. These limitations should be considered when drawing conclusions or informing future decisions.

# Childcare Learning Fund (IS3/4)

## Recommendations and actions for 2025-26

- Launch targeted communications throughout the academic year, with a particular emphasis on the start of term. This will be supported by enhancements to the Autumn 2025 registration process, enabling more accurate identification of student parents.
- Actively promote the 10% discount available to all students for Explore Learning's online sessions to encourage greater participation.
- Consider offering any unused sessions at the end of the academic year to students who have completed or are nearing the completion of their studies.
- Explore additional partnership opportunities with Explore Learning and other relevant organisations to broaden the range of support available to student parents.

# Student Officers for Mature Learners

#### Key activity and findings

- Eight Officers were recruited, which was more than anticipated, but really encouraging to see student's wishing to engage.
- Officers helped raise student awareness of available support services while strengthening their sense of belonging within the university community.
- Staff have gained clearer insights into which services students value most, enabling more targeted improvements and fostering a more inclusive learning environment.
- Officers actively participated in university-wide consultations by contributing evidence on parent/carer support and digital skills development.
- They demonstrated leadership by chairing Climate and Social Action Week session on the topic of allyship, helping to spotlight and advance inclusive practices across the institution.
- Their involvement helped ensure that the voices of mature learners were represented in key strategic conversations.
- A greater number of Student Officers completed the pre-intervention survey compared to the post-intervention survey, with only a small number individuals completing both. As a result, it is challenging to draw any definitive conclusions regarding the impact of the programme over the course of the year.

#### Recommendations for 2025–26

- There are more activities to come for the next academic year to increase representation and lived experience.
- Better promotion of the Officers across all student platforms.
- Utilise online platform to have a direct link with the Officers and not just communication via email.
- Consider and consult about the key aims for officers for the year to see if there are any additional areas they would like to focus on.
- Review key themes across the NSS and SES surveys to support how key groups could be further supported.
- Continue to link to, and have Officers review, WP and APP activities.
- Evaluate and reflect upon student data from the NSS and SES (for both quantitative and qualitative results).
- Investigate a parents and carers network.

# Peer Assisted Learning (IS3/4)

## Overview for 2024–25

- Unfortunately, Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) progress was not as originally anticipated and so therefore whilst some small-scale analysis has been undertaken, it has been done for the longerterm evaluation over the duration of this Plan
- Instead, an IPE was undertaken to explore recommendations for the next academic year.

#### Key outcomes from the IPE

- Programme Delivery & Training: Delivered largely as planned, with minor adjustments for online delivery. Online training materials were more effective than face-to-face simulations, prompting suggestions to reverse the training order.
- Student & Leader Experience: Students valued peer support and a positive learning environment, though logistical confusion and low visibility limited participation. Leaders appreciated the experience but noted a lack of postprogramme continuity.
- Communication & Promotion: Inconsistent communication and limited promotion were key barriers. Improved visibility through emails, dashboard alerts, and integration into modules was recommended.
- Inclusivity & Engagement: Peer learning may not appeal to all demographics; rebranding could help broaden appeal.
   Evening sessions improved accessibility for students but not always for Leaders.
- Sustainability & Future Development: Embedding the programme into later modules and increasing ongoing promotion could enhance long-term impact. The initiative's unique blend of feedback, learning, and community-building remains a key strength.

# Peer Assisted Learning (IS3/4)

#### Recommendations for 2025-26

- Improve awareness via emails, 'what's coming up forum', post session summaries on module announcements weekly, share week I slides with names and contact details, post on the main student dashboard/forum and add session links to module activities.
- Increase awareness for students and arrange additional meetings with Module Leaders twice per semester.
- For PAL Leaders reduce the training to what is on the VLE and deliver more via online face to face training.
- Go into lectures to promote becoming a Leader.
- Establish a student-only forum that is free from tutors (moderated by Outreach and Inclusion staff)
- Post videos of PAL leaders throughout the year with hints and tips
- Allocate Zoom sessions much earlier and have the student sessions planned much earlier to promote the sessions.

# Space to Study (IS3/4)

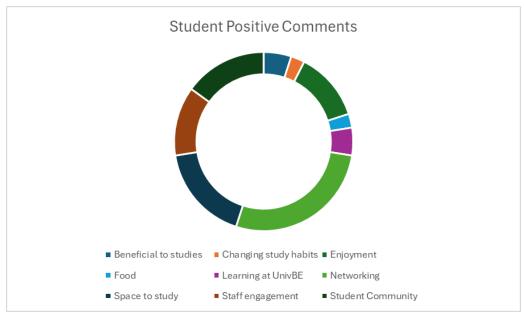
#### Overview

- Originally referred to in the Plan as a 'Shut up and Write' type activity but redesigned to be called 'Space to Study' to easily promote to students.
- For this academic year, students were invited to the University's head office in Reading to study for the day and their travel could be funded, if they requested it.
- Whilst student attendance was lower than expected, student feedback, (for those who attended) suggested that alternative days and locations would be a reason as to why they would attend more in the future.



## Key findings

- The pre survey was via the initial application form and the post survey took place whilst students were attending on the day.
- Student qualitative comments were thematically analysed:



It is important to note that the findings are based on a small sample size, which limits the robustness of the analysis. As such, the results should be interpreted with caution, as they do not carry statistical significance and may not be generalisable. These limitations should be considered when drawing conclusions or informing future decisions.

# Space to Study

- Key findings (continued)
  - In terms of the quantitative data, students
     answered ASQ questions that were the same in
     order to measure impact. They were asked to say
     how they felt in terms of how much they agreed
     with five statements. Paired t-tests then calculated
     if there was any significant change between
     pre/post the interventions.
  - Based on initial calculations, it can be argued that space to study can enhance student's sense of belonging, community and an awareness of what has been learned, however it will be important to analyse and compare this data further year-onyear to establish if there is actual impact.
  - This is a positive scheme, and it has potential to grow in terms of scale, location and the numbers of student groups it could be further expanded to (although it is important to recognise that more staff may need to be involved and more operational requirements).

#### Recommendations for 2025–26

- To better accommodate apprentices and students in remote regions, the programme should offer sessions on varied days and explore alternative venues beyond the current Horizons location.
  - Utilising facilities in cities like London and Birmingham—where free resources are available—can help ensure broader access and reduce barriers for students who cannot attend Monday sessions due to work commitments or geographic constraints.
- Embed structured transition activities within designated study environments.
  - This can help students—particularly those facing additional challenges—develop effective study habits early on. These activities should focus on familiarizing students with university services and academic expectations, fostering confidence and independence from the outset.
- Arrange further reasonable adjustments to support students especially if the eligible groups are invited and new locations are chosen.

# Intervention Strategy 4

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

## Year one target met?

 Data is not yet available via the most recent version of the OfS data dashboards

## Activities to be evaluated

- Childcare Learning Fund (IS3 and IS4)
- Female networking group
- Student Officer for female students
- Peer Assisted Learning (IS3 and IS4)
- Space to Study (IS3 and IS4)

# Female Networking Group

## Key IPE findings

- The programme was delivered largely as intended, with minor adjustments made to accommodate student needs and scheduling constraints.
- Although a fourth session was initially planned, it could not be delivered due to time limitations.
- Adaptations throughout the year aimed to enhance engagement, including a shift toward a more student-led format and the strategic integration of sessions into orientation and welcome weeks.
- These changes successfully increased participation, particularly when sessions aligned with the academic calendar.

## Key findings

- Student post attendance data at the female networking group were asked four questions based on the TASO ASQs to rank how much they agreed with each of the statements.
- The below table demonstrates the average responses value for each statement (1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree). Given that the majority of responses scored above 3 on a 1–5 scale, the overall sentiment can be interpreted as broadly positive.

I feel I belong at university	I feel supported by this university	I see myself as part of the university community	I enjoyed the session today
3.5	3.625	3.25	3.375

 This could increase compared when results are combined with future years. Any qualitative responses stated the importance of the session time and that the time chosen was the correct time.

# Female Networking Group

- Recommendations for 2025–26
  - Design a pre-event question as a matching question for the post-ASQ about belonging.
  - Arrange more sessions in the academic year.
  - Plan sessions dates and promote upfront, but ensure they avoid school half terms or assignment periods.
  - Ensure more structured sessions, including a variety of activities (e.g. speakers) as well as creating more of a collaborative group.

# Student Officers for female students

### Key activity and findings

- · Three Officers were recruited this year.
- Officers helped raise student awareness of available support services while strengthening their sense of belonging within the university community.
- Staff have gained clearer insights into which services students value most, enabling more targeted improvements and fostering a more inclusive learning environment.
- Student Officers for Women demonstrated strong communitybuilding leadership by running the Female Networking Group, creating a supportive space for peer connection and professional development.
- Additionally, they contributed to the Be Part of the Change Podcast for International Women's Day, amplifying diverse voices and experiences within the student body.
- A greater number of Student Officers completed the pre-intervention survey compared to the post-intervention survey, with only a small number individuals completing both. As a result, it is challenging to draw any definitive conclusions regarding the impact of the programme over the course of the year.

#### • Recommendations for 25/26

- Further promotion of the Officers across all student platforms.
- Utilise online platforms to have a direct link with the Officers and not just communication via email.
- Consider and consult about the key aims for officers for the year to see if there are any additional areas they would like to focus on.
- Review key themes across the NSS and SES surveys to investigate how key groups could be further supported.
- Continue to link to and have Officers review WP and APP activities...



# Overall Conclusion



# Overall Summary and Conclusion

## Key considerations for 2025–26

- The University has provisionally met its year one targets (subject to the updates to the OfS data dashboards in Autumn 2025).
- The University has delivered all the planned activities outlined in the Plan.
- Drawing on the findings from this evaluation, including insights from the Implementation and Process Evaluation and the analysed data, a series of key recommendations have been identified for each activity to support and enhance delivery in 2025–26.

## Additional activities for 2025–26

• In 2025–26, as part of the University's merger with the London School of Architecture, a variation process will be undertaken to integrate the APPs. This will ensure that the access and participation activities of both institutions are recognised and aligned from 2026–27 onwards.



# For further information

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