

AccessHE Year in Review 2024-25



Foreword

This report presents highlights from the work of the AccessHE network in 2024-25. The preceding 12 months have been bookended by national elections in July 2024, with a Labour government returned to power on the promise of putting 'opportunity' at the heart of policy, and announcements from the OfS in July 2025 about a next phase in collaborative outreach work, taken forward by proposed 'regional access partnerships'. Even for those of us working in the ever-fluid world of widening participation, the year has felt like one of transition and change.

We are pleased to offer a space for our members to navigate and lead that change. As a pan-London network, we have always championed collaboration and collective impact, though it feels worth restating the value of this as regional coordination becomes increasingly important for both government and the HE regulator.

As just some examples of how AccessHE has helped London HE to enhance its social mobility role through collaboration during 2024-25, we were delighted to:

- Launch a brand-new professional development offer (the Practitioner Programme) for widening participation staff, with a strong emphasis on peer learning across London and focus on the main equality of opportunity risks facing our members and their students.
- Deliver collaborative outreach projects that directly address several of these risks and extend support to HE outreach 'cold spots' in the capital.
- Bring together 100 of our members and London partners at our annual conference to consider long-term HE access trends in London and how best to address those both through Access and Participation Plans and through regional collaboration.
- Position our members for future impact by giving them a strong voice in shaping the next national collaborative access scheme (due to launch in September 2026) and London's inclusive talent strategy.

We can expect further change to come in 2025-26, including a new government post-16 strategy and further announcements on the proposed regional access partnerships. We will continue to champion and support our members through this evolving environment, and look forward to working with you in the year ahead.



About AccessHE

AccessHE is the widening participation arm of London Higher, the membership network for higher education (HE) providers across the capital.

We believe passionately that widening participation in higher education is a force for good, and that anyone with the ability and desire to pursue higher education study in London should be able to do so, irrespective of their background or circumstances. Our work to widen HE participation falls into three broad areas:

Upskilling staff in outreach and student support roles.

Coordinating collaborative outreach efforts regionally.

Providing a platform for our members to influence policy and develop place-based partnerships.

Our five-member team has strong relationships with government and the HE regulator, deep 'on the ground' networks in high-priority local areas of London, and extensive knowledge of the widening participation landscape across the city. We bring all of this to bear on the support we offer to our members.

All of our work is developed in partnership with our members and overseen by a Steering Group, chaired by Professor Frances Corner, Warden of Goldsmiths, University of London.

If you would like further information on any of the work outlined below, or want to discuss how AccessHE can support your widening participation goals, please contact us on accesshe@londonhigher.ac.uk.



Our Members

We work in partnership with a core membership of 22 higher education providers and a wider network of 200+ London schools, colleges, local authorities and third sector organisations. Collaborating in this way enhances impact and efficiency.

It has practice-sharing benefits, as members can come together and learn from near neighbours to address shared challenges and priorities. It improves coordination, in a region that can be complex to navigate (for students and HE providers alike). And it provides a crucial space for innovation, helping to address the most deep-seated and hyper-localised educational inequalities in London.

We would like to thank our members for their support and engagement in 2024-25.





Our Impact at a glance

90 staff supported via our practitioner programme

35+ hours of CPD activity delivered, spanning ten equality of opportunity risks and nine widening participation groups

852 young Londoners from widening participation backgrounds supported by our outreach programmes

ONE grade improvement in predicted GCSE outcomes for Free School Meals-eligible pupils on our attainment raising programmes

52% reduction in the POLAR4 access gap achieved by our programmes in low HE participation areas

45 external partners contributed to network activities

£1.56 Every £1 our members contribute via their subscriptions is leveraged by a further £1.56 in external funding

Upskilling staff in outreach and student support roles in London

Our [Practitioner Programme](#) – newly launched in 2024-25 – along with our other networks for widening participation professionals embed the latest knowledge and cutting-edge practice in access and participation work across London.

This year, the Practitioner Programme supported 90 staff across 24 AccessHE member institutions. It encompassed:

- A dedicated workshop with the OfS exploring effective delivery of newly-approved Access and Participation Plans and the regulator's expectations for providers.
- A joint session with TASO seeking early feedback on their Higher Education Evaluation Library whilst it was in the development phase, to ensure it serves our members' needs.
- Dedicated workshops on some of the least represented groups in London HE, such as *white, Free School Meals-eligible boys and Black Caribbean, Free School Meals-eligible boys; and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people*.
- A one-day CPD conference for staff supporting disabled/neurodivergent students.

“

'I found the programme to be very comprehensive and valuable in addressing key areas of widening participation and engagement with HE. I appreciated the variety of topics covered across the different terms, which provided a well-rounded view of innovative approaches to current challenges'

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We evaluate the Practitioner Programme to understand its impact as a capacity building tool. Evaluation insights from the pilot year will be published in September 2025.

Please contact us if you would like to receive this and/or would like information on your institution's engagement with the Practitioner Programme in 2024-25.

We also produce resources to support staff across our membership – both those in widening participation roles and those outside of WP teams who work with students from underrepresented or APP priority backgrounds in other capacity. This year we have launched:

- **A database listing named contacts for care-experienced students across the AccessHE membership**, to aid join up between the HE sector and other agencies supporting these young people. This was developed by our Care Experienced and Estranged Students Forum.
- **A guide on supporting under-served students through clearing**. It is particularly aimed at recruitment and admissions staff who may not have specialised expertise in widening participation, but whose choices will directly shape the experiences and outcomes of under-served students during the process.

Coordinating collaborative outreach efforts regionally

AccessHE has an important role in delivering **on-the-ground HE outreach projects** in London, both with and on behalf of our members. Our role in co-delivering the **Uni Connect programme** in the region means we are deeply embedded in place and our team understands what different local areas want and need from HE-led widening access work.

This offers our members a low-burden route for meeting stated priorities in their **Access and Participation Plans** and extending their widening access role into underserved communities.



We focus our work around two strategic priorities:

01

Intensive support for **numerically small and dispersed groups** (such as care leavers) who face risks to equality of opportunity in accessing higher education, where collaborative approaches create efficiency gains for our members.

Elevate Programme:

Our **Elevate programme** supported care leavers in five London boroughs with life skills workshops and peer mentoring this year. Elevate is delivered by a partnership of three AccessHE members, Chi Chi's Young Minds, and Become. An impact report for the 2024-25 programme will be circulated in September 2025.

Ahead of the full report, we can confirm the programme has delivered positive outcomes: 100% of attendees reported increased confidence and a better understanding of post-18 options.

One participant, previously unemployed and anxious about returning to education, secured a job by the programme's end and will resume studies this autumn, crediting life-skills and peer mentoring as key factors



02

Targeted outreach and attainment/skills-building programmes for London schools not supported through APP projects but where HE access risks are high. In this way, AccessHE helps our members to demonstrate a wider contribution to tackling regional risks to equality of opportunity in accessing HE.

Primary Futures Programme:

Our **Primary Futures** programme has enabled early intervention at scale in London primary schools. In 2024-25 it reached 540 Key Stage 2 pupils across 9 schools serving areas of high deprivation. For many of the schools this was the first time they had ever accessed HE-led outreach provision.

Young Lecturers Programme:

Our youth activism and HE preparation programme for Y12 students, **Young Lecturers**, reached 19 students across five schools in Haringey and Tower Hamlets this year, all of whom were from widening participation backgrounds. Evaluation indicates that the intervention increased HE aspirations, improved enabling skills (such as independent research) and boosted confidence - with a 46% increase in participants agreeing 'I feel confident sharing my opinions, even if not everyone agrees with me' by the end of the programme.

AccessHE Tutoring Projects:

The tutoring projects we run for Free School Meals-eligible pupils in London schools have led to a one grade improvement in predicted GCSE outcomes for participants.

Please get in touch with us if you would like further information on the programmes above and the impact they are having.



Where participants in our projects have now reached university entry age, we can gauge the impact of our work on HE access rates. The signs here are highly encouraging. We see that the access gap for our programme participants living in the lowest and highest HE participation areas (as measured by POLAR4 Q1 vs Q5) is 14.4pp, compared to a gap of 30.1pp nationally. This is a 52% reduction in the gap.

Similarly, looking at rates of HE progression, Londoners from the lowest participation neighbourhoods (as measured by TUNDRA Q1) who participate in our programmes are twice as likely to progress to HE as young people living in these areas nationally.

Overall in 2024-25, AccessHE's collaborative projects reached 1019 young Londoners (84% of whom were from widening participation backgrounds), spanning eight local authority areas.



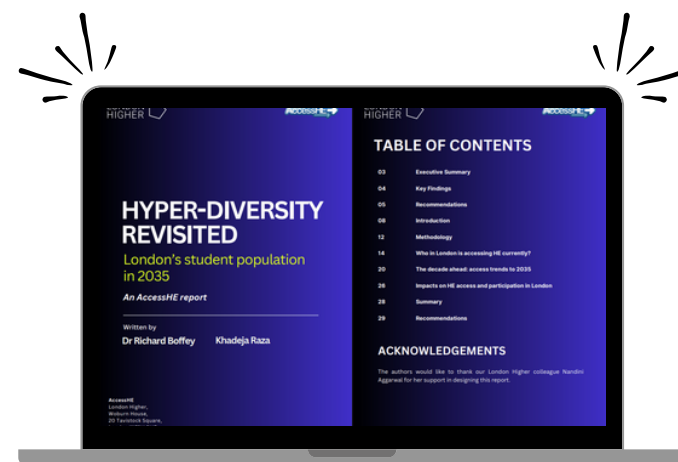
Providing a platform for our members to influence policy and develop place-based partnerships

We facilitate regular engagement opportunities and workshops with the OfS and with local and national government for our members. We also represent London's HE sector and advocate for our members in discussions with parliamentarians and government officials, to ensure education policymaking takes into account the priorities and contribution of London.

More broadly, we play a convening role to ensure our members can work strategically with local partners and play their part in 'whole system' efforts to tackle risks to equality of opportunity in education.

- Our **Preparing for Hyper-Diversity** report and annual conference identified the key ten-year priorities for widening participation work in the capital. Together they set out a clear roadmap for how London HE will support the government's Opportunity Mission, and they provide a basis for further political engagement in 2025-26.
- We coordinated **a response on behalf of London HE** to the GLA's planned Inclusive Talent Strategy, the integrated workforce plan for London. We are supporting associated work on a data methodology for the ITS, to ensure it informs and is informed by widening participation work undertaken by our members.

- Our **response to the OfS' Regional Access Partnerships call for evidence**, which was informed by a virtual roundtable with members, highlighted to the regulator how a future national access scheme could best work in and for London
- Our involvement in the pan-London **Care Leavers' Compact** has initiated work on a basic HE support offer for care leavers across the city, which will be taken forward via a roundtable event on 10 September. This directly responds to a recommendation made by the London Assembly in its recent **Careers After Care** report
- The brand new, non-clinical social mobility industry placement scheme we helped to set up with NHS London for undergraduate students is the first of its kind to exist in England. It has supported students from low-income backgrounds at Brunel University and the University of Westminster to access one-year paid work placements in London NHS Trusts.
- The local authority partnerships we have developed in Havering and Tower Hamlets create opportunities for our members to deliver outreach to primary and secondary schools across the two boroughs (as outlined on p.7).





Ambition for 2025-26

With government calling on the HE sector to strengthen its work on opportunity and economic growth despite a challenging financial outlook, we will redouble our efforts to find cost-effective ways to collaborate regionally in 2025-26. Key areas of work for the AccessHE network in the year ahead include:



Defining a place-based model of social mobility for London's HE sector and showing how our members play a leading role in this. Our 2026 conference in particular will look at how widening participation work boosts skills and drives inclusive growth across the city, and we will launch a report to coincide with this, putting forward a methodology for systematically tracking the growth impact of initiatives in our members' Access and Participation Plans.



We will scale up our Practitioner Programme to reach even more frontline outreach staff.



We will support our members to integrate the voice and perspectives of young Londoners into their widening participation work in a more systematic way, through a youth listening exercise and (pending the outcome of a recent funding bid) the launch of our pan-London youth voice panel for widening participation.

