SOCIAL MOBILITY & WIDENING PARTICIPATION

STRATEGY

2022-2025

Vision

We have the power to achieve social mobility and educational equality.

Mission

The opportunity for a great education is not distributed fairly.

We want to change this.

We work with learners from underrepresented backgrounds and their supporters, empowering them to access and succeed in higher education. We take an equitable approach to improve education equality and create a diverse community of learners at King's.

We promote social mobility by removing barriers to success throughout the school journey. Our actions help to create a world in which a young person's destination is not limited by their start in life.

Values

Our values shape how we behave and the decisions we make. Some are already present in our team culture. Others we need to develop.

We are courageous

We try new ways of doing things, even if we are the first. We take on challenges that help us achieve our vision and we are not afraid to make changes. We make bold decisions based on what we believe is right. We are always learning, and we value critical thinking and reflection.

We act with integrity

We are honest about university life, in the advice we give, and the outcomes our programmes can achieve. We deliver what we say we will and use our resources responsibly and sustainably. We look to evidence and data to find what works. We are honest and open with each other. We hold ourselves to a high standard, acknowledge our mistakes and use them to grow.

We focus on people

We consider others' contexts and needs. We listen. We champion our participants and amplify the voice of others. We are mindful of our communities' needs and we use student voice to make better decisions. We focus on wellbeing, and we are kind and understanding.

Background

The purpose of the Social Mobility & Widening Participation department is to increase the number of students from underrepresented backgrounds accessing university. This means students from low-income families, areas of low university participation, Black, and some minority ethnic backgrounds. It also means students who are care-experienced, estranged, forced migrants, or young carers.

Alongside improving access to all universities, our work is transforming King's College London's student body. In 2022, the proportion of UK undergraduate students from widening participation backgrounds enrolling at King's was 47%. But there is still further to go. Our access targets, agreed with the Office for Students in our Access & Participation Plan, show our ambition to do more. This strategy sets out how we will build on our successes to date and develop our work over the next three years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaped our strategy. The social isolation, grief, and remote learning of 2020 and 2021 will continue to affect young people for many years. We hope to reduce the long-term impact on social mobility and the focus on attainment and mental health within our strategy reflects this.

The launch of our strategy coincides with an ongoing rise in the cost of living. We will take action to ensure our young people and families do not face financial barriers to engaging in our programmes. Using our existing budget, we will continue to provide food at our summer schools, operate a travel fund, purchase digital devices for our pre-16 pupils, and give K+ students enrolling at King's a start-up bursary.
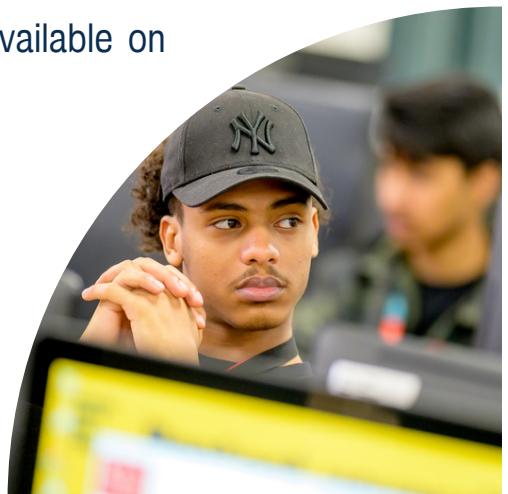
Access targets

The priorities in this strategy contribute to meeting targets agreed with the Office for Students through our Access & Participation Plan. These targets set out our ambition to increase representation at King's.

1 For 18 and 19-year-olds, increase the proportion of students entering King's from Acorn categories 4 and 5 by 2.5pp by 2024/25

2 For 18 and 19-year-olds, eliminate the access gap between students from Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles 5 and 1 by 2024/25

3 Close the gap in the proportion of students entering King's from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2 compared to quintiles 3 to 5 by 8pp by 2024/25

4 Increase the proportion of Black students entering King's from 9.5% to 11.5% by 2024/25.

More information about these target categories is available on King's website.

Outcome & impact measures

Every programme we deliver with young people and families is underpinned by an evaluation strategy and a theory of change. These identify specific outcome and impact measures that each programme is expected to meet. We use the results of this evaluation to strengthen our work.

Our strategy and King's

Strategy 2026

Our new strategy helps King's to deliver Strategy 2026. Over the next three years, we will use online technologies to engage young people outside of London. This supports Strategy 2026's aim of reaching new and increasingly diverse groups of learners through online and other technologies. Our aim to support the mental health of young people while they are at school and before they enroll, contributes to King's Strategy 2026 ambition of becoming a sector leader in student mental health and wellbeing.

Student Transitions & Outcomes

The Student Transition & Outcomes 2022-2026 Strategy shares our ambition of making King's more equitable. Together, our lifecycle approach to widening participation ensures King's is focused on access, successful transitions, and good graduate outcomes. The emphasis in this strategy on closing attainment gaps and supporting student mental health and wellbeing is mirrored in the strategic priorities of Student Transition & Outcomes.

Aim 1

Continue to increase the proportion of students from underrepresented backgrounds enrolling at university

Young people from the poorest backgrounds are four times less likely to progress to university than their more affluent peers. They are fifteen times less likely to progress to a high tariff university like King's. To address this, we will grow the number of young people from underrepresented groups and areas of deprivation entering King's and other universities.

Objectives

- Continually improve the effectiveness of our social mobility and widening participation programmes based on a lifecycle and long-term, multi-intervention approach

- Support priority group students to access university, including care-experienced students, estranged students, forced migrants, and young carers

- Partner with social mobility and widening participation organisations to extend our reach and capacity

- Work with parents, carers, teachers, and social workers so they can support their young people to access university

- Increase the proportion of students from underrepresented backgrounds in specific faculties by supporting academic and professional services staff to deliver effective widening participation initiatives

- Use contextual admissions to increase the proportion of students from underrepresented backgrounds gaining a place at King's

Aim 2

Raise the GCSE and A-Level attainment of learners from underrepresented backgrounds

Prior attainment is a key determiner of whether a student progresses to university. We will support our schools and communities to raise attainment. By doing this we will increase the number of learners from underrepresented backgrounds making competitive university applications.

Objectives

- Continue to grow and improve existing attainment raising activity, including King's Scholars, Scholars+, K+ Raising Attainment, and We Care Mentors

- Work with partners and schools to improve pupil subject knowledge

- Support high quality teaching by providing continued professional development for teachers

- Test whether embedding metacognition and academic skill development across our programmes can positively impact attainment

- Evaluate the effectiveness of our approach to attainment raising by generating causal evidence

Aim 3

Improve social mobility in regions with high deprivation and low university participation

Social mobility cold spots exist around the UK. Extending our widening participation engagement to these areas can impact university progression rates. We will work alongside local communities that are an accessible distance from our campuses and where there is an identified need. We will promote higher education pathways rooted in the local community.

Objectives

- Embed and further develop social mobility and widening participation activity in Essex, Kent, and Hastings to increase university progression in these areas

- Grow the number of young people able to make competitive applications to university by testing an attainment raising intervention in one or more of these areas

Aim 4

Support the mental health and wellbeing of our young people

The pandemic has exacerbated the number of young people struggling with their mental health. Poor mental health is a barrier to attainment and affects university progression and social mobility. We will work with schools, partners, and academics to ensure young people can thrive.

Objectives

- Use community organising to set up mental health hubs for parents and pupils in ten local schools

- Support participants with mental health conditions to thrive on our programmes and make a successful transition to university

- Encourage young people to develop self-efficacy, social-connectedness, help-seeking behaviours, and self-care practices which promote good mental health and wellbeing

- Set-up an advisory group of mental health experts to guide our work in this area

Aim 5

Increase knowledge of what works in widening participation

Despite many years of widening participation activity, there is limited causal evidence showing the effect of activities on student outcomes. We will generate causal evidence demonstrating what works and what does not when it comes to increasing university access.

Objectives

- Increase knowledge of what works in university access

- Ensure findings result in changes to practice

- Improve ability of practitioners to complete evaluation independently and to a high standard

- Be an example of how to adopt a 'What Works approach' within a university

Enablers

To deliver our strategy we will strengthen how we operate as a department. We have identified three key areas where we can improve. The actions outlined in each section are not exhaustive. Over the strategy period, the management team will identify further opportunities to embed these enablers.

Develop our ability to deliver high quality online provision

Between 2020 and 2021, remote learning demonstrated the need for high quality online provision. We want to continue building on the progress we have made in this area. Enhancing our use of online learning platforms will help us improve the quality and accessibility of existing programmes. It will help us engage young people and communities in London, Essex, Kent, and Hastings.

To develop our ability to deliver high quality online provision, we will explore the benefits of increasing our online information, advice and guidance resources. Staff will incorporate best practice in online learning into our programmes. We will continue to address the digital divide by providing devices to all King's Scholars participants who need one.

Streamline our programme offering and approach to project management

We will streamline our programme portfolio and project management processes so staff can deliver our new strategic priorities. By reducing the complexity of our programme offering, we will make it simpler for young people and their supporters to navigate our opportunities.

To achieve this streamlining, we will merge our post-16 programmes under K+. We will carry out an annual review of all our programmes to consolidate content and end interventions with less impact. We will reduce duplication in our project management processes through more cross-project working. We will free up time for project officers by recruiting a new office administrator.

Learn from others and self-reflect

We wish to spend more time learning from others and reflecting on our activities so we can strengthen our work. This strategy takes us into new areas, especially student mental health. It is important that we seek existing best practice from across the education sector.

To learn more from others, we will shadow widening participation colleagues from other universities. We will also find inspiration for new ways of working from outside of higher education. To improve our self-reflection, we will increase opportunities for constructive feedback and create a framework for staff members to reflect on their own practices. We will build on our reflective thinking "offline" days and find ways to protect staff time to make the most of these.

Strategy governance

Aim 1

Progress towards Aim 1 is monitored through project reports. These respond to the impact measures set out in each project's theory of change. Project reports will receive feedback from the Associate Director of Social Mobility & Widening Participation and are circulated to all department staff.

Aims 2–5

Responsibility for fulfilling Aims 2-5 of our strategy lies with the Social Mobility & Widening Participation Department's strategy implementation groups.

The strategy groups will create detailed objectives for each aim. They will set targets and milestones, against which progress is measured. Meetings are held three times a year, after which the chair will report on progress to the Social Mobility & Widening Participation Department leadership team. Twice a year, the strategy groups will share progress with the whole department at a dedicated in-person team meeting.

The Social Mobility & Widening Participation Department will provide an annual strategy progress summary for the Social Mobility & Access & Participation Plan Steering Group.

Enablers

The Social Mobility & Widening Participation Department management team will own and take accountability for delivering the enablers outlined in this strategy. The management team will share progress reports at the biannual strategy team meetings.

Student Voice

We will recruit from amongst our widening participation ambassadors a group of student partners. The student partners will attend strategy groups and progress meetings. They will challenge the decisions of staff, push for clarity in thought, and contribute their own ideas. Student partners are paid in excess of the London Living Wage.

Our student ambassadors will continue to play an important role in delivering content which reflects their experiences and insights during programme activities.

Students will participate in focus groups as we develop and test new ideas.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

Our strategy contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Goals of: