



Centre for Student and Community Engagement (CenSCE)

Annual Summary 2024/25



Nottingham Trent
University

Why Does CenSCE Exist?



NTU Student Mentors

About Us

The Centre for Student and Community Engagement (CenSCE) advances Nottingham Trent University's (NTU) widening participation and social mobility agenda. Our people, insights, and innovative approaches enhance engagement amongst our students and communities to create positive change.

CenSCE exists to tackle persistent disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes for underrepresented students, particularly those from lower income backgrounds. Research shows that inequalities often begin early in life and extend into higher education. Factors such as low income and the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the challenges faced by these groups.

Through innovative outreach, systemic reviews, and long-term partnerships, we are working to make higher education accessible and inclusive - not a privilege for a few, but available for all with the potential to succeed.

The department has an evidence-informed culture. All our access and student success provision is research based, effectively monitored and carefully evaluated. As one of the first institutions to enhance the evaluation of student success initiatives through improved data collection and analysis, our work continues to influence the sector.

NTU has a diverse student body. Since the 2019/20 academic year, the proportion of students at NTU from the most deprived neighbourhoods, traditionally underrepresented in higher education, has grown from 14% to 18% (source [APP data dashboard](#)); the proportion of Widening Participation (WP) students has risen from 30% to 36%; the proportion of ethnically diverse students (Black, Asian, Mixed, Other) has grown from 26% to 37%; and proportion of students declaring a disability has risen from 15% to 30% (internal sources). With this progress, comes significant challenge in terms of achieving educational equity across the student lifecycle for underrepresented students.

Our work is not just about access into our own institution; we collaborate with schools to support young people in achieving their aspirations to pursue higher education at a provider and location that best fits their needs - whether close to home or further afield. Reflecting national trends, data shows that young people from Nottinghamshire who are eligible for free school meals are considerably less likely to achieve good grades at Key Stage 4 (a key factor in future success) than their relatively more advantaged peers.

This disadvantage continues in access to higher education, success in higher education (e.g. retention, achievement of 2:1s or First-Class degrees) and progression from higher education (e.g. graduate level jobs).

CenSCE's work is dedicated to addressing these challenges. By removing structural barriers and creating targeted support we aim to close gaps in educational outcomes.

Our mission is to ensure that higher education becomes a viable and rewarding pathway for all students with the potential to succeed, regardless of their background. CenSCE works both locally and nationally to help achieve our aims. We are known for our evidence-based approach and are proactive at conferences and events, producing a range of media outputs from [blogs to academic papers](#). We co-established the national 'What Works' Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) and continue to serve on their governance board, as well as the governance board of the Higher Education Attainment Tracker (HEAT).

Our Approaches

The department facilitates engagement from early years through to graduation from NTU. Having oversight of access and participation activity across the entire education journey reflects the importance of viewing the student lifecycle as a whole. This approach provides valuable insight into our students of today and tomorrow. CenSCE facilitates engagement through two approaches; interventions and systems change.



“They were just very friendly and nice and seemed genuinely interested in how I was doing and what they could do to help me support-wise”

NTU student, Contact Engagement Service

1. Interventions

CenSCE delivers a wide-ranging and inclusive programme of interventions designed to provide direct support to pupils and students.

This includes a robust outreach programme targeting local primary and secondary schools, aimed at raising awareness of higher education, exploring pathways, supporting informed decision-making, and fostering essential skills development.

At NTU, CenSCE also play a vital role in enhancing student engagement, experience, and sense of belonging. It oversees the Welcome and Induction programme for both new and returning students, and coordinates a peer-mentoring service tailored to first-year students.

In 2024/25 the Welcome Call Campaign reached 7,781 incoming students, helping them prepare for university life. With the coinciding Welcome Online Induction module, 93% of surveyed students reported that it made them feel reassured, motivated, and excited to begin their journey at NTU.

A highlight of our work was a visit from Her Royal Highness [The Princess of Wales to Clifton Campus](#) where Student Mentors and Welcome Workshops were proudly showcased. Her participation in a “step-in circle” activity highlighted the programme’s emphasis on building confidence, promoting well-being, and increasing awareness of the support networks available to students.

Beyond this work, CenSCE leverages data from the Dashboard to identify students showing signs of disengagement. Colleagues then initiate coaching-style calls to explore underlying challenges and connect students with appropriate support. Last year, 12,420 call attempts were made, resulting in 2,650 meaningful conversations with some of NTU’s most hard-to-reach students.

2. Systems change

CenSCE brings together communities, school and university staff, pupils, students, and professionals to harness their collective power and co-create tailored programmes that address inequality.

The department facilitates three place-based initiatives in Bulwell, Clifton, and Mansfield which examine and transform systems that perpetuate disadvantage. In 2024/25, CenSCE secured £290,000 in external funding for these projects, and allocated additional resources to build on successful pilots and expand this work, with an aim to:

- Strengthen local communities through using innovative approaches in civic engagement and partnerships
- Increase access to higher education for underrepresented groups

Within NTU, the department helps shape the University’s approach to engagement and attendance, as well as extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, with a focus on underrepresented groups. This work is part of the University’s [Success for All initiative](#).

Case study: Getting School Ready

The Getting School Ready initiative recognises the importance of the early years in long term educational outcomes. The initiative takes a systems approach to tackling the issue of poor 'school readiness'.

CenSCE has used the University's neutral status and convening power to bring together key groups, including a school, parents, the council, and local services. These groups are all committed to improving school readiness by strengthening relationships. Families and professionals collaborate equitably, and shape service delivery which has created a better social ecosystem and improved outcomes.

We have seen significant results and as such, have been shortlisted for a Times Higher Award and UK Social Mobility Award (SOMO's). The school's Ofsted rating has improved from Inadequate to Good, key stage 2 reading scores have risen, year 1 phonics results are at their highest, and parental engagement has significantly increased. This demonstrates a low-cost, replicable, and self-sustaining solution to widening participation.



Case study: The Black Leadership Programme

Addressing the Black-White degree outcomes gap continues to be a priority at NTU. This year, NTU's Black-White outcomes gap reached its lowest in 10 years.

[The Black Leadership Programme \(BLP\)](#) empowers undergraduate students of Black heritage to build confidence and resilience as leaders. Extensive research on the BLP culminated in an [Enhanced Theory of Change](#) and an [Implementation and Process Evaluation](#), which provided evidence of the programme's impact.

"The Black Leadership Programme has been a place that pushed me to get to know myself through different events and individuals. The BLP has helped become part of a community, where I am seen and appreciated for being me."

BLP participant, 2024/25

Case study: NTU Pre-16 Widening Access Outreach Programme

"I found the role was a chance for me to advocate for what I believe in, support students from underrepresented backgrounds, and to help positively impact a wider community."

Outreach Ambassador, 2024/25

CenSCE's progressive outreach programme supports pupils from year 5 to year 11, combining whole year group assemblies, targeted workshops, and campus visits for pupils in receipt of free school meals. We aim to boost academic achievement and raise higher education awareness throughout our extensive offer.

As part of NTU's Access and Participation Plan, we aim to increase the number of Free School Meal (FSM) pupils from Nottinghamshire studying higher education. Through a sustained and progressive approach of working with pupils from local schools at yearly touch points throughout their KS2 and KS3 journey, and by using data to track this activity,

NTU's aim is to reach the national average of HE participation rates of Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Country FSM eligible pupils by 2028/29.



Warm Welcome event, part of the Oaktree project

Department Structure

CenSCE has four sections, each with a distinct focus:

The Widening Access and Community Engagement (WACE) section deliver outreach activities for primary and secondary schools within Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County areas. WACE also lead on the University's community engagement and volunteering activity and our emerging work in systems thinking and collective impact.

The Student Engagement (SE) section supports NTU students post-entry. This includes their transition into the University and at other key points, such as through a peer Student Mentoring programme for all first-year students.

The Student Engagement and Analytics Team (SEAT) manage the NTU Student Dashboard, a learning analytics system which supports students by providing information on their engagement with learning resources. This data helps academics and professional staff to support students and is used by a dedicated team who reach out to students and help them to re-engage.

The Access and Participation Research and Insights Team (RIT) provides analysis and interpretation of relevant internal and external data to influence and inform provision. RIT also develops new, as well as enhances existing, methodologies to monitor and evaluate the impact of CenSCE's interventions, as part of our Access and Participation Plan (APP) publishing commitments.

During 2024/25 CenSCE:

Delivered **360** pre-arrival outreach activities



Reached **26,246** pre-16 participants



Matched **1,167** student and staff volunteers to community and sport based projects



Recruited **797** students into paid employment. **142** with local schools and **655** as Student Mentors



Coordinated **79** Welcome activities



Made **12,420** calls to NTU's hardest-to-reach students, resulting in **2,650** meaningful conversations



Looking to the Future

CenSCE remains steadfast in its mission to advance equality of opportunity. Nottingham Trent University's bold **Access and Participation Plan for 2025-2029** reinforces our commitment to addressing inequalities in access, achievement, and progression.

As the higher education sector continues to shift, we will evolve our strategies to respond to both local and national priorities, champion innovation, and enrich the student experience. By working collaboratively and acting with intent, we aim to drive meaningful, lasting change - ensuring NTU continues to be a place where opportunity is open to everyone.



Get in touch

Centre for Student and Community Engagement

50 Shakespeare Villas
Nottingham
NG1 4FU

censce@ntu.ac.uk

ntu.ac.uk/community

