



**The
Access
Project**

Accelerating Ambition

Growth strategy 2024-2029

We support young people from under-resourced backgrounds to raise their aspirations, access top universities and achieve social mobility.

Foreword from our Chief Executive Officer

Sixteen years ago, The Access Project started to address the educational barriers faced by state school students in an under-resourced area of London. Despite their talent, motivation and ambition, they did not have the additional support, resources and guidance to help them on their pathway to a top third university.

Today, sadly, the situation has not improved. Students from under-resourced backgrounds are still three times less likely to attend top universities in comparison to more advantaged students.

We are steadfast in our belief that our mission is critical to combat educational inequality and improve social mobility. We work with schools passionate to support their students to progress to a top university. A 2021 report, 'Which university degrees are best for intergenerational mobility?', shows that under-resourced young people are four times more likely to become socially mobile and end up as a high earner if they attend university.

In the last 16 years, we have supported over 10,000 students and externally verified evidence confirms that those young people supported by The Access Project are 50% more likely to attend a top university through our benchmark-leading intervention. But the scale of the challenge means we need to do more.

In our new growth strategy, *Accelerating Ambition*, our focus shifts towards scaling this intervention to amplify our impact and drive systemic change, with a new programme model to enable growth, and a wide network of supporters and advisors to guide our organisation forward.

With the support of our partners, funders, our dedicated staff and community of volunteers, and the hard work and resilience of young people on our programmes and the staff in our partner schools, we look forward to an exciting time ahead.

Anna Searle
Chief Executive Officer at The Access Project



In the last 16 years, we have supported over 10,000 students



¹'Which university degrees are best for intergenerational mobility', IFS 2021.

About us

The Access Project was established in 2008 to help talented young people from under-resourced backgrounds to gain access to an education at one of the UK's top universities. Through our tailored widening participation programmes, we aim to help these students unlock their potential and transform their prospects.

In the 2023/24 academic year, we supported over 1,900 students across London, West Midlands, East Midlands, West Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria.

We partner with eligible secondary schools and colleges who share our belief that high potential students, regardless of their background, should have equitable access to higher education.

Students enrolled on our programmes receive expert support from our University Access Officers: mentors embedded in schools to guide pupils through their education options, university applications and student life topics such as navigating student finance.

Many of our students also receive GCSE or A level tuition, helping them raise their grades and increase their chances of getting into a top university. Additionally, we work with students to develop essential skills and prepare them for academic study and for the further world of work, as well as offering enrichment opportunities such as university visits.



Our staff and volunteers

As a values-driven organisation, we recognise the importance of supporting our staff team to be the best that they can be. We offer a rich culture of staff development, and our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy was launched in 2023 to demonstrate our commitment to being an organisation where everyone is welcomed, appreciated and respected. Alongside our staff team, we offer bespoke training, resources and guidance to the community of over 1,000 volunteers who provide tuition and coaching support to the young people on our programmes. We are indebted to these volunteers for their passion, hard work and enthusiasm.



Our partners and supporters

We would not be able to carry out our mission without the support of many valued corporate partners, university partners, donors, trusts and foundations. Our fundraising contributes to over three quarters of our expenditure, meaning we can significantly subsidise the packages we offer to our partner schools, enabling us to reach the schools where we are needed most.



Spotlight on our impact

Going to a top university gives students the best chance of social mobility. Higher education opens doors to better job opportunities, higher earning potential, and ultimately, a shift in the socioeconomic landscape.

Our students are **50% more likely to attend top universities** than statistically similar peers*



93% of our students said they feel more motivated to attend a top university and feel more positive about their future

In 2022/2023, The Access Project **supported 220 students** to place at top universities*



Meet our students: **Imaani**

Imaani joined The Access Project in 2022, during a crucial time in her life. Having missed three years of school due to ongoing health issues that required frequent hospital stays, Imaani found herself in a challenging situation that put her education in jeopardy.

Being part of The Access Project transformed Imaani's education outlook. Now, Imaani dreams of becoming a doctor and building a career in healthcare. She said:



“ The Access Project has helped me in many ways. Just being on the programme and receiving support has helped me improve. I have felt doubted by many teachers as I have missed school a lot due to my health, but the support I have received through The Access Project has helped me gain my confidence back. It has helped me with my goals, my applications, and my grades. ”

Our vision

This is a critical time for widening participation. The combination of the long-lasting effects of the pandemic on educational outcomes, the cost-of-living crisis on the opportunities of young people, and constrained government spending on school budgets have combined to create real challenges for university access and social mobility. Structural inequality prevents young people from fulfilling their potential and limits their life opportunities.

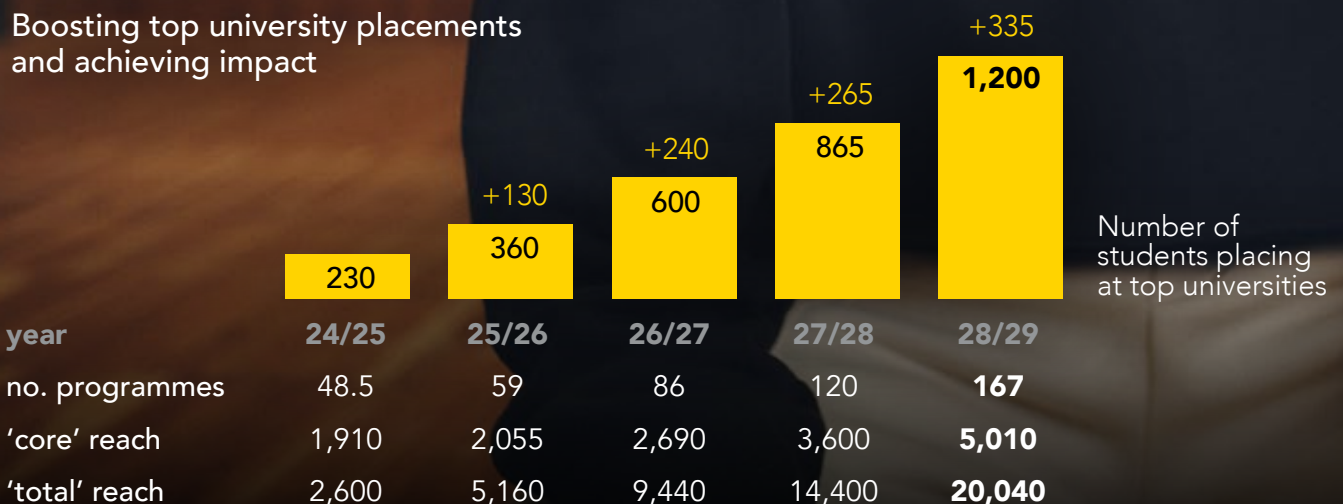
Our intervention is consistently shown to have a benchmark-leading impact, with students on The Access Project being 50% more likely to attend a top university than statistically similar peers. To truly reduce the scale of the access gap in the UK, we know we need to work with more young people across more areas of the country.

Our exciting and ambitious new strategy sets out our plans to achieve this over the next five years. In 2022/2023, we supported 220 young people to place into top universities. By 2028/2029, we will support 1,200 young people to place into a top university each year, increasing our organisational impact by more than five times.

As we scale our intervention, we're committed to making the case to institutionalise our intervention. We believe that access to professional mentoring and development support should be embedded within every school across the country. We are committed to advocating for a future in which The Access Project no longer needs to exist.

By 2028/29, we will support **1,200** young people to place into a **top university each year**

Boosting top university placements and achieving impact



'Core' reach = students enrolled on our main programmes, 'Total reach' = Students enrolled on our main programmes and light-touch Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 support

Driving change in the sector

Alongside our mission to support more under-resourced young people, we will be a leader in the higher education and social mobility sectors.



Sustainable fundraising

Our growth plans have been made to ensure the sustainability of our programme and allow for long-lasting, meaningful impact. Developing our income streams will be pivotal to our programme's success. We will focus on strengthening our relationships with our existing partners and building new relationships with potential funders.

Recognising the tight budgets of many of our school partners, we aim to reduce their contribution to funding our programmes over time.

Amplifying voice

We will develop The Access Project's external voice, growing our network and student voice channels thus enabling us to have a respectable input on policies and shifts within the sector.

We will:

- Build a high-profile advisory council to strengthen our network, support entry into new regions and advise on how we maximise our impact
- Strengthen student and school voice in discussions, putting student perspective at the centre of growth
- Take clear, informed stances on issues affecting the young people on our programme
- Build sector engagement through greater focus on research and policy



Our new programme

Throughout our 16 years of operation, we've learnt a lot about what drives impact, and specifically which aspects of our programme drive higher university placement rates.

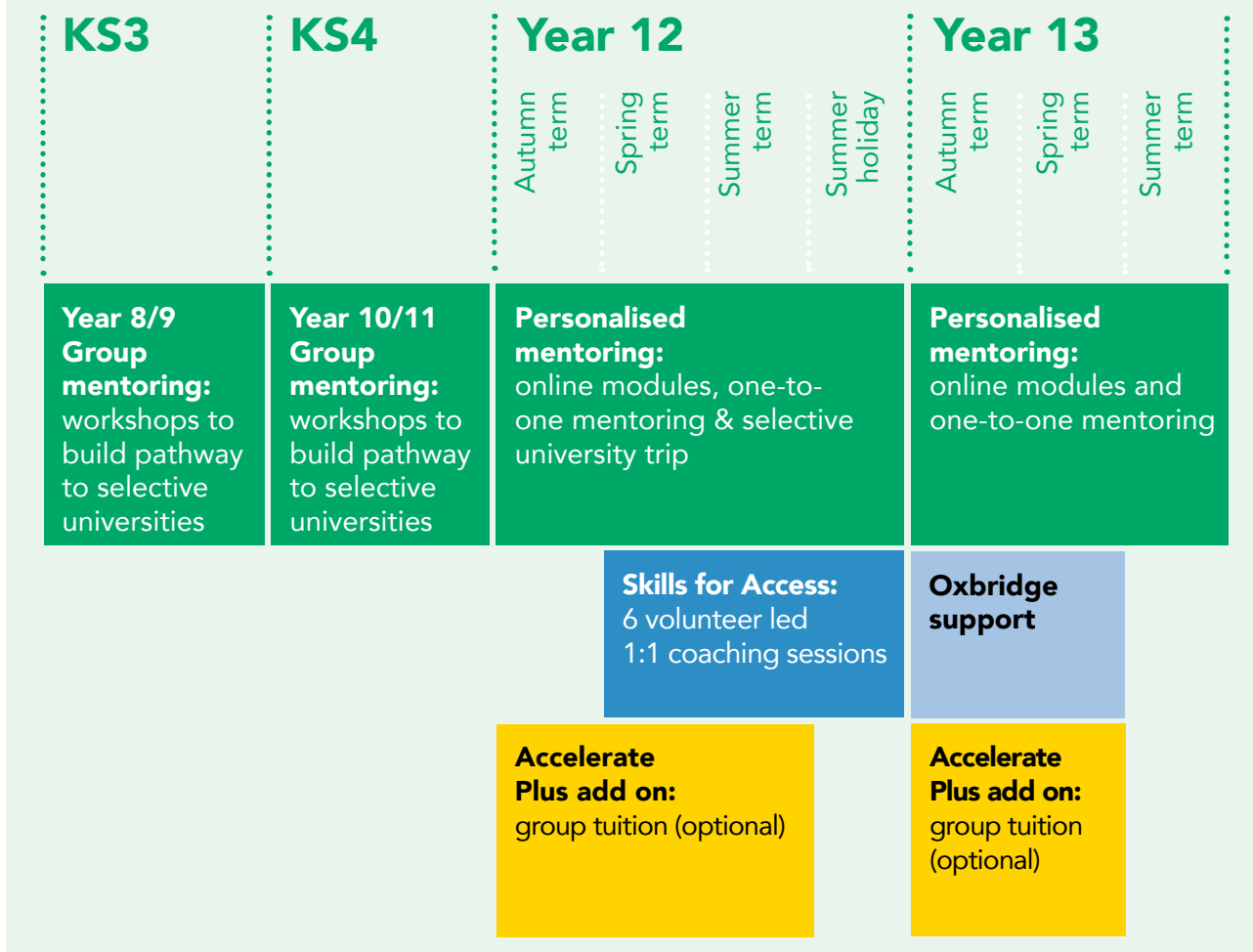
Through our new programme, Accelerate, we take the most impactful components of our model and combine them into a bespoke package that focusses on university readiness, personalised mentoring and essential skills development.

At the heart of our new model is 1:1 mentoring for year 12 and year 13 students. We'll also be providing support for younger age groups, with workshops and assemblies for young people in years 8-11.

We launched the Accelerate programme in seven new schools in September 2024, and plan to expand this programme across the country over the coming years.

At the heart of our new model is **1:1 mentoring** for year 12 and 13 students

Our new programme model: Accelerate



- University readiness programme
- Volunteering programme
- Volunteering programme (Oxbridge)
- Group tuition offer

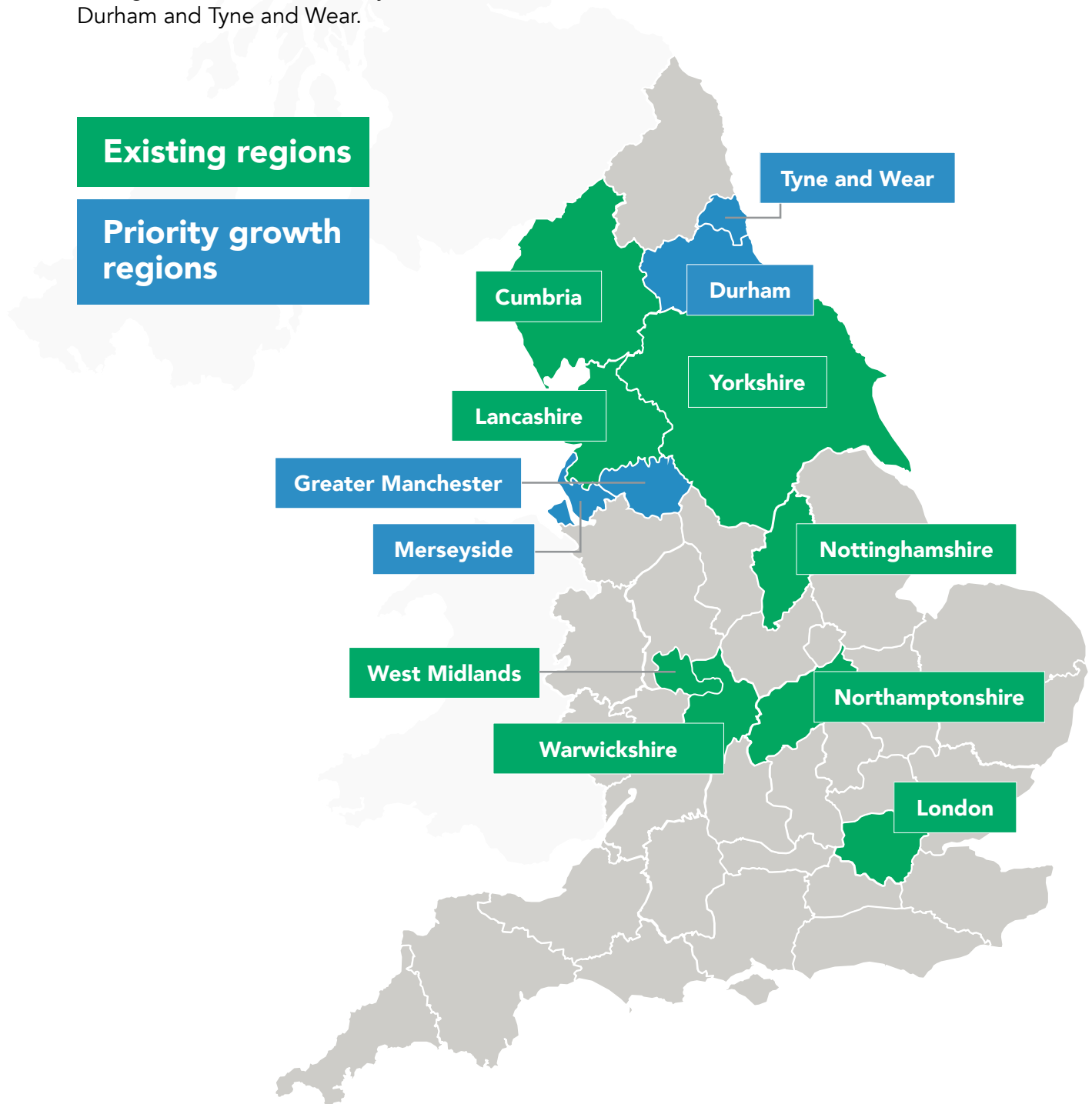
Our approach to regional growth

Our new programme is targeted towards state-funded, non-selective Key Stage 5 education providers with high numbers of under-resourced students.

Our strategy is to enter all major urban areas of the country. We will establish ourselves in areas of high school density, which will allow our mentors to work across multiple schools in one area. This gives us a target market of approximately 750 schools in England.

Through 2024-2026, we aim to focus growth on increasing scale in existing locations. Our high-priority areas for growth through 2026-2029 are Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Durham and Tyne and Wear.

Our strategy is to enter all **major urban areas** of the country



People and organisation strategy

Our growth ambition goes hand in hand with our dedication to building strong working structures and investing in our people. We will develop colleague capability through a strengthened learning and development programme, upskilling our senior management group, diversifying colleague skills, and drive our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion vision, creating an inclusive work environment and empowering our diverse workforce to thrive.



We will:

- Enhance our customer focus, investing in improving school relationship management, and building a scalable sales, onboarding and commercial engine.
- Redesign our systems and processes to increase our effectiveness and more support for young people, ensuring we can continue our dedicated focus on impact as we scale.
- Meet the needs of communities across the country, building meaningful partnerships with regional organisations, developing regional programme management and embedding flexibility into our programmes.

The Access Project supports students from under-resourced backgrounds to access top universities, through a unique programme of in-school mentoring, skills coaching and tuition. We work with them to make good applications, get the grades and transition to university.

We are grateful to our partners and volunteers for enabling us to deliver our mission and need your support more than ever as we enter our next phase. To find out more about supporting The Access Project, visit our website or email us and we'd be happy to book an introductory call.

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