



Directorate of Student Life – Annual Report 2024-2025

Dr Clare Dickens MBE – Director of Student Life and Principal Safeguarding Lead

Foreword

I am proud to present the first Annual Report of the Student Life Directorate – a milestone that reflects the remarkable journey we have been on together.

What began in December 2022 with the leadership of the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Team, alongside Disability and Inclusion being allocated to me, quickly grew into something much larger. After months of consultation, we successfully launched the University's first Support to Study Policy and new Cause for Concern pathway in January 2023 – a critical step in ensuring students are supported with compassion and consistency.

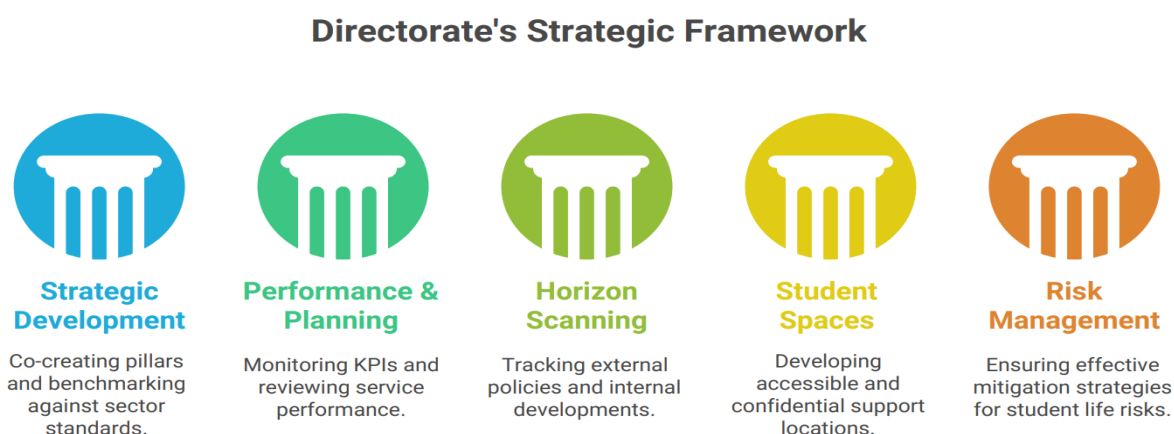
By October 2023, the addition of Student Hardship and Safeguarding expanded our reach and responsibility, and with it came the exciting challenge of shaping a new **Specialist Student Support Directorate** under the leadership of our new Vice Chancellor Professor Ebrahim Adia.

None of this progress would have been possible without the hard work, patience, and trust of our staff teams. Their willingness to adapt, to lean into change, and to bring their expertise and dedication to every step of this journey has been the foundation on which we have built. I am deeply grateful for their commitment to our students and for the professional pride they bring to this work.

This report does more than share achievements – it tells the story of how we have built momentum, embraced change, and laid the foundations for a Directorate that champions inclusion, wellbeing, and resilience for every student who requires our support.

Dr Clare Dickens MBE - Director of Student Life and University Principal Safeguarding Lead.

Figure 1: Offers a visual representation of the key pillars that emerged as strategic priorities for the newly formed directorate.



Humility, Innovation, and Resilience.

The beginning of our journey - Services Review Summary

Working with team managers and heads, we undertook a comprehensive review of each Specialist Student Support function, examining current methods, processes, and programmes. This process, in collaboration with wider university colleagues, highlighted both the needs of the institution and the challenges within existing provision.

The review revealed:

- **Limited change over the past decade**, leading to a sense of inertia.
- A reliance on a **deficit-focused model of support**, characterised by a repetitive cycle of consultation, rebranding, and relaunch, without substantive innovation or operational changes – which stifled capacity and capability, but also invited bottle necks.
- The need for a **step change in culture and approach**, requiring humility, collaboration, and professional pride across teams.
- A call for services that are **resilient to peaks in demand**, strategically visible, and underpinned by clear governance and accountability.
- A renewed emphasis on **innovation, alignment, and confidence**, ensuring that support is proactive, empowering, and fit for the future.

The agreed next steps at that point

- Embed a **new cultural approach** that prioritises collaboration, humility, and professional pride.
- Shift from a **deficit-focused model** alone to a proactive, empowering, and inclusive support offer.
- Build **resilient services** capable of withstanding peaks in demand without compromising quality, setting ambitious Key Performance Indicators.
- Strengthen **strategic visibility, governance, and accountability** across all teams.
- Foster **innovation and alignment** with institutional priorities to ensure long-term impact.

A summary of each team enhancement plan from 2023- 2024 can be found within the section of this report which shares team **highlights from academic year 2024-2025**.

Executive Summary of Academic Year24-25

Transforming Specialist Student Support – A Year of Impact

2024–25 marked a defining year for the Directorate of Student Life which has seen us support over 5000 **new** student registrations across the five distinct specialist student support strands. Across every strand of our work, we have reimagined what specialist student support can and should look like — moving beyond reactive provision to deliver **timely, visible, and joined-up services** that make a tangible difference to our students' lives.

From reducing wait times for specialist mental health support from weeks to hours, to ensuring disabled students can access fully funded dyslexia assessments, to safeguarding hundreds of students at risk, our teams have worked with determination and compassion to remove barriers, protect wellbeing, and enable success.

Crucially, these achievements have been made possible through **collaboration with a host of colleagues across the wider University** — from academic departments and professional services to leadership and

frontline staff. Together, we have embedded Student Life at the heart of the University of Wolverhampton experience, ensuring that support is not just a service but a shared responsibility and a source of pride.

This has been a year not only of numbers, but of lives changed. Every intervention represents a student who was able to come forward and seek the help they need and deserve. In most cases, they have been able to continue their studies, feel safer, or gain confidence in their future. Collectively, these successes show the power of a whole-university approach where Student Life, partners, and inspires confidence.

Our investment in specialist staff is not just about numbers — it is about people. By redesigning the way we have worked since 2023, we have created the space and skills to support students at the hardest moments of their journey. **The result is clear: collectively over 93% of students** who came to us in crisis and acute need were able to stay, progress, and succeed. This is the return that matters most — lives changed, barriers removed, and futures protected

Headline data

Specialist Mental Health and Wellbeing Impact (2024–25)

In 2024–25, access to the **Specialist Mental Health and Wellbeing Team** was transformed, with wait times reduced from **up to 14 weeks to just 48 hours, at the same time as seeing continued increase in demand for their support.**

Of the students who registered with the service, **95% were retained and progressed in their studies**, demonstrating the powerful impact of timely, specialist support on student success.

In addition, the team developed a **suite of psychoeducational sessions and resources** designed for delivery to wider student groups. These included **targeted course-level interventions**, shaped by registration trends, ensuring proactive support reached students where it was needed most.

Support to Study Impact (2024–25)

In 2024–25, the **Support to Study Pathway** proved highly effective in safeguarding student success. Of the students identified as acute causes for concern — due to poor engagement, challenging conduct, or welfare issues — **93% were retained and progressed in their studies.**

Over **800 cases** were reviewed in partnership with faculty colleagues, complaints and student casework and with each student supported through a **co-designed, multi-disciplinary plan** tailored to their needs.

This outcome demonstrates the pathway's impact in turning potential withdrawals into successful continuations.

In 2024–25, **6,000 EC claims were approved** (4,700 first sits, 1,300 re-sits) — each now reviewed through a **Support to Study lens**, recognising every claim as a potential **communication of need.**

In 2024–25, over **3,500 hours of in-class support were delivered** — from notetaking and BSL interpretation to exam support — alongside **466 hours of specialist one-to-one interventions**, ensuring students with some of the most complex needs had the tailored adjustments and mentoring needed to succeed.

Disability and Inclusion Impact (2024–25)

In 2024–25, the **Disability and Inclusion Team** supported a total of **6,047 disabled students** across the University.

Within this, **2,217 new registrations for disability-related support and adjustments** were received and responded to within **five working days**, reflecting the team's commitment to timely and effective support.

This academic year also marked the **first time the University fully funded and arranged diagnostic assessments for Dyslexia**. In previous years, only partial financial support was offered, and students had to organise assessments themselves; both factors were hypothesised as barriers to access such vital clarification of need. In 2024–25, **352 students were supported to access fully funded assessments** — an increase of more than **250 students** compared with previous years. Notably, around **71% of these students were from global majority backgrounds**, demonstrating how this initiative has potentially removed barriers to access for underrepresented groups.

By proactively funding and arranging assessments, the University not only enhanced inclusivity but also strengthened compliance with its **legal duties under the Equality Act 2010** — ensuring that disabled students are not placed at a disadvantage, and that reasonable adjustments are made in a timely, equitable, and anticipatory way.

Student Money and Hardship Impact (2024–25)

In 2024–25, the **Student Money and Hardship Team** played a critical role in ensuring financial barriers did not prevent students from continuing their studies.

- A total of **£790,900 in hardship funds** was distributed to **1,341 students** who applied for financial support on the grounds that they were at risk of withdrawing. 98% of these students were **retained and progressed as intended**, evidencing the impact of this intervention on continuation.
- A new **Bus Cancellation Financial Support Pathway** was launched, providing over **£50,000 in assistance** to **69 students** who were directly affected by sudden transport disruption.

These interventions not only removed immediate financial barriers but also directly supported the University's **Access and Participation Plan commitments**, ensuring vulnerable students, and often those navigating caring responsibilities were able to continue and succeed in their studies.

Safeguarding Impact (2024–25)

The University's **Safeguarding function** has seen a dramatic and sustained rise in demand, reflecting both the increasing complexity of student lives and the growing visibility of support routes.

- In **2020–21**, the function managed **104 cases**.
- By **2022–23**, this had risen to **154 cases**.
- In **2024–25**, there were **307 safeguarding registrations**, a **195% increase** since 2020–21.
- **93% of the students** who have been safeguarded via this pathway in 2024–2025 remain and have progressed within their studies.

Alongside this, safeguarding interventions arising from the **Cause for Concern (CFC) pathway** have also accelerated:

- In **2023–24**, **115 students** were picked up by safeguarding through CFC referrals.
- In **2024–25**, this figure has risen to **215 students**.

This means that in 2024–25, the safeguarding function has managed **over 520 safeguarding cases in total** (registrations plus CFC referrals) — the highest volume ever recorded. In addition, the team has overseen **more than 40 external positions of trust and safeguarding referrals**, ensuring effective joined up working with statutory services and external partners.

Key Safeguarding Themes

Cases reflected a wide range of acute and serious risks, including:

- Domestic abuse
- Homelessness
- Emotional abuse
- Violence from others outside of the family
- Acute and imminent risk, including suicidal crisis
- Exploitation

106 students were supported through the **Care Experienced and Estranged Student Pathway**, including **£112,500 in direct awards** to cover essential living costs and expenses.

97% of this student case load have been retained and have progressed within their studies.

The scale of this growth demonstrates the increasing trust between students and staff in the safeguarding function, and the central role it now plays within the wider **Student Life Directorate** — ensuring students at risk are identified early, supported holistically, and kept safe within the University community.

Student Life Desk Impact (2024–25)

Since its launch in October 2024, the **Student Life Desk** has become a vital first point of contact for students in need, with just over **1,000 students** approaching the service during 2024–25. Prior to this, students could only access the teams via a webpage link.

The most common reasons for seeking support included:

- *“I need help now; I am in crisis”*
- *“I need help to register with the mental health and wellbeing team”*
- *“I am experiencing abuse”*
- *“I need support to apply for specialist support funding”*
- *“I need advocacy with Student Finance England”*
- *“I need emergency financial assistance”*
- *“I am concerned about a student peer”*

The opening of the **Harrison Library Student Centre in October 2024** provided a central, accessible, and visible space for this service, embedding Student Life within the heart of city campus. The dedicated desk not only offered immediate support to students in crisis but also strengthened pathways to wider specialist teams, reinforcing the University’s commitment to making help **visible, accessible, and responsive**.

Quiet Orientation – A Supportive Start to University Life

Steered and shaped by our support coordinators, in July and August 2025, Student Life proudly hosted its **first orientation days** for incoming students beginning their studies in 2025/26 who had expressed a need for a **quieter, more individualised welcome** to the University.

Joined by parents and guardians, students were offered **guided tours of our campuses** and given the time and space to connect with **specialist support services**, ask questions, and build confidence ahead of starting their academic journey.

The events welcomed around **50 new students** and were met with overwhelmingly positive feedback, achieving an **average 4.5-star rating**. More importantly, they provided reassurance, clarity, and a sense of belonging at a crucial transition point.

These orientation days reflect Student Life's commitment to **inclusive, personalised approaches** that ensure every student, regardless of their needs, can start university life feeling **safe, supported, and ready to succeed**.

Benchmarking ourselves against the sector.

Mental Health

National evidence shows that **15–20% of students access wellbeing or mental health services each year**, with some studies suggesting as many as one in three will seek support during their studies. This highlights the scale of demand facing specialist support services.

Research indicates that timely and accessible support can **stabilise withdrawal rates** for students with mental health challenges. Our own data echoes this, with high retention among those who engage with the Specialist Mental Health and Wellbeing Team.

Like the wider sector, we face challenges in linking **service directly to course completion** due to limited longitudinal data. However, new dashboards and retention metrics are beginning to strengthen this evidence base.

Overall, most University of Wolverhampton students who access this team's support are likely to **remain and progress**, though a minority will continue to face risks without more tailored interventions. This underlines the need for **flexible, preventative, and cross-sectional approaches** that meet the diverse needs of the student community.

Accessibility and Disability

In 2024/25, the team supported over 6,000 disabled students — including a record 352 fully funded dyslexia assessments — positioning the University as an emerging sector leader in equitable, anticipatory support.

Around **20% of UK undergraduates declare a disability**, yet disabled students are still less likely to progress than their peers. Evidence shows that **early assessments, funded diagnostics, assistive technology, and inclusive curriculum design** can close these gaps, though long-term sector data remains limited.

At the University of Wolverhampton, support reached **6,047 disabled students in 2024/25**, including **352**

funded dyslexia assessments — with 71% uptake from global majority students, addressing key equity barriers. With **Tableau dashboards now tracking disclosure and progression in real time**, the University is well positioned to become sector leading. The priority for 2025/26 is to embed **inclusion by design** across curricula, moving from reactive adjustments to anticipatory support that strengthens disabled students' continuation and success.

Safeguarding Need

Safeguarding cases at the University of Wolverhampton have nearly tripled in four years — a 195% increase — underlining both the rising complexity of student lives and the growing trust in our safeguarding function.

Safeguarding cases in higher education are rising sharply, with risks such as **domestic abuse, homelessness, emotional abuse, violence, suicidal crisis, and exploitation** putting students at higher risk of withdrawal without timely support. National evidence highlights the importance of **early identification, multi-agency working, and specialist staff capacity**, though sector data rarely tracks long-term outcomes.

At the University of Wolverhampton, safeguarding cases have grown from **104 in 2020/21 to over 520 in 2024/25** (including Cause for Concern referrals) — a **195% increase**. The team has also overseen **40+ external safeguarding referrals**, evidencing strong statutory partnerships. This growth reflects **greater trust and visibility** in our safeguarding function. The priority for 2025/26 is to maintain **rapid triage and response**, embed safeguarding across all teams, and strengthen external collaboration so that at-risk students are protected and supported to continue their studies.

Support to Study

In 2024/25, **93% of students flagged as acute causes for concern** through our Support to Study pathway were retained and progressed — outcomes that compare favorably with the limited evidence available across the sector, positioning the University's approach as emerging best practice.

Across the sector, *Support to Study* policies provide a structured, supportive alternative to disciplinary action, helping universities manage concerns around engagement, conduct, and welfare. Evidence suggests these frameworks improve retention by enabling early, coordinated interventions, though sector-wide benchmarking and long-term data remain limited.

At the University of Wolverhampton, the pathway supported over **800 students in 2024/25**, with **93% of those flagged as acute causes for concern retained and progressed**. These outcomes compare favorably with sector practice and highlight our **collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach** as a model of good practice. The next step is to ensure consistent faculty-wide adoption, strengthen longitudinal tracking.

Student Hardship Support

Financial stress is one of the strongest predictors of withdrawal in UK higher education, and hardship funds play a decisive role in helping students stay in study. Sector evidence shows that while direct financial aid varies widely, students value both the **practical support and the sense of institutional care**, which together strengthen retention and belonging. However, few universities publish robust data on long-term outcomes for hardship recipients.

At the University of Wolverhampton in 2024/25, more than **1,300 students received £790,900 in hardship funds**, with most going on to remain and progress in their studies (98%). Additional targeted support included **£112,500 for 106 care-experienced and estranged students**, and a new **Bus Cancellation Pathway** providing

over **£50,000 to 69 students** affected by transport disruption. These interventions show our commitment to both crisis response and innovation in financial support. The priority for 2025/26 is to **sustain funding at scale while embedding preventative financial education** and strengthening evidence on long-term impact.

Key achievements

Health access

Top-tier in the UK for accessibility of health services for students (Oct 2024): The recognition reflects how clearly and visibly the University helps students access healthcare—e.g., straightforward GP registration guidance, prominent signposting to urgent help and NHS services, and easy-to-find on-campus support routes. This strengthens our whole-university approach to wellbeing and underpins fast pathways into specialist Mental Health & Wellbeing when needed.

Investor in Students

The University of Wolverhampton achieved its **highest-ever IIS (Investor in Students) Accreditation Score of 863 in Spring 2025**, up from 829 in 202. This positions us at the top of the sector for student accommodation experience. Students awarded the University multiple **gold ratings**, a significant step forward from last year's silver benchmarks.

Standout improvements include:

- **Meeting My Expectations:** Jumped from Silver to Gold, now at 8.30/10.
- **Personalising My Experience:** Maintained as the strongest pillar, with key services moving from Silver to Gold.
- **Delighting Me:** Gold ratings doubled (social facilities and staff support stood out).
- **Protecting Me:** Gold across the board — accommodation now ranks in the **top 5 nationally for supporting student mental health**.

The University is also the **only IIS member to achieve Gold for “It’s easy to make friends and integrate with the community.”**

Care Scoring (Gold Achievements for Students)

From the student perspective, the University scored **Gold** in:

- Ease of making friends and community integration.
- Accommodation supporting **mental health**.
- Accommodation **feels like home**.
- **Staff fairness, care, and wellbeing support**.
- **Responsiveness and helpfulness** of staff.
- **Personalised support** when needs aren’t being met

Why does any of this matter?

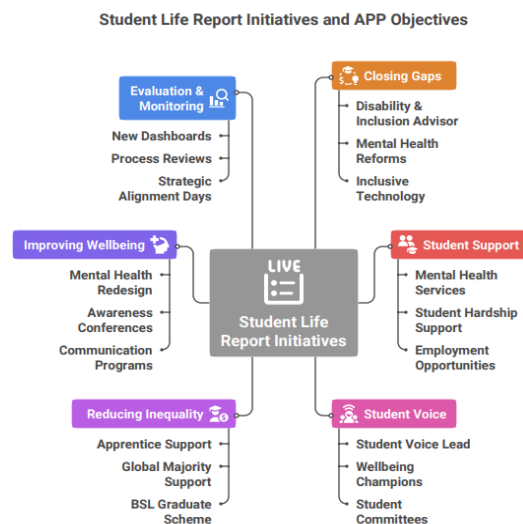
Access and Participation

Our Student Life Directorate's work is deeply aligned with the University of Wolverhampton's Access & Participation Plan. From redesigning student support systems (disability, mental health, hardship) to strengthen continuation and success, to expanding student voice and partnership (student wellbeing champions, committees), and to embedding evaluation and inclusive technologies — our initiatives map closely to the APP's goals of improving equality of opportunity for underrepresented students. We also acknowledge areas for further work, especially in establishing quantified outcome targets for specific groups and emphasising pre-entry outreach, and we commit to embedding these into our 2025-26 priorities.

Overview: Wolverhampton's Access & Participation Plan – Key Themes

From our APP (2024-25 to 2027-28):

- Improving **equality of opportunity** for under-represented groups, in *access, success (continuation & attainment), and progression*.
- Specific focus on *student support* as a strategic area, including financial, academic, wellbeing, and inclusion support services.
- Enhancing **student voice**, partnership with students, student wellbeing champions, opportunities for under-represented students to shape services.



Areas Where More Explicit Alignment Could Strengthen

While Student Life activity shows strong alignment, there are a few areas where we could make the connection more explicit to fully mirror the APP:

1. Set measurable targets linked to APP metrics

For example, the APP has defined %-gaps for continuation/attainment/progression for specific groups. Student Life should set similar KPIs (or show progress against them).

2. **Ensure full lifecycle coverage**
Access (pre-entry), continuation, attainment, progression. Student Life has good work in continuation and support, but more visible pre-entry / outreach work could be added.
3. **Further transparency in evaluation**
Publicising evaluations or impact reports of specific interventions going forward will help to demonstrate that efforts are having measurable effect in line with APP goals.
4. **Widen monitoring of equity groups**
Beyond disability and mental health: care leavers, estranged students, IMD/low socioeconomic status, non-traditional entrants. Ensuring those groups are included in key findings, KPIs.

Alignment with University Statutory Requirements

Office for Students (OfS) – Conditions of Registration

The work of the Student Life Directorate is not only strategically aligned with the University's mission and Access & Participation Plan but also with statutory requirements across higher education. Through integrated wellbeing, safeguarding, disability and inclusion, financial support, and student voice initiatives, the Directorate strengthens the University's ability to meet Office for Students conditions of registration (E2–E6), the Equality Act 2010, and wider duties under HERA 2017. Our reforms ensure we remain compliant while embedding a culture of inclusion, protection, and partnership that goes beyond compliance to deliver real impact for students.

- **Condition E2 – Access and Participation:**
 - Student Life's work directly contributes to reducing equality gaps (e.g. support for disabled students, apprentices, international and global majority students).
 - Initiatives such as Disability & Inclusion Advisor realignment, Health Speak app, and hardship/financial support ensure underrepresented groups are not disadvantaged.
- **Condition E3 – Student Protection / Support:**
 - Safeguarding, Support to Study, and Mental Health services provide the infrastructure to meet obligations for student wellbeing and protection.
- **Condition E5 – Student Outcomes:**
 - Work on retention, progression, and wellbeing aligns with OfS monitoring of continuation and completion rates, especially for students from disadvantaged groups.
- **Condition E6 – Freedom of Speech (new 2025 requirement):**
 - In year policy development steer included focus on preparing the university and for E6 compliance, embedding a culture that balances inclusion with lawful freedom of expression, and protection from harassment.

Equality Act 2010

- **Anticipatory and Reasonable adjustment Duty:**
 - Disability & Inclusion reforms, accessible technology review, and curriculum input ensure reasonable adjustments are built in *by design* rather than only on request.
 - Retaining a team of dedicated specialist advisors have been realigned based on course and pathway specificity bolsters our ability to treat requests for reasonable adjustments favorably.
- **Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED):**
 - Student Life activities (Wellbeing Champions, BSL Graduate Scheme, tailored apprenticeship support) demonstrate due regard to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality, and fostering good relations.

Higher Education & Research Act (HERA) 2017

- By embedding student voice, representation, and wellbeing into strategic decision-making (e.g. committees, peer-to-peer training, wellbeing champions), Student Life supports HERA's principles of:
 - Protecting the interests of students.
 - Promoting equality of opportunity in access, participation, and success.

Charter and Sector Standards

- **Student Minds Mental Health Charter:**
 - Many of Student Life's reforms (MH triage model, therapeutic interventions, student voice structures, staff training) align with Charter themes: *early intervention, whole-university approach, and embedding student partnership.*
- **UK Quality Code for HE (QAA):**
 - By contributing to curriculum review, inclusion by design, and student support mechanisms, Student Life addresses QAA expectations around student engagement, wellbeing, and learning support.
- **Disabled Student Commitment**
 - This report highlights how we are already delivering on the principles of the Disabled Student Commitment. By introducing the beginning of a *Tell Us Once* system to reduce the burden of disclosure, funding and arranging diagnostic assessments to remove barriers, and significantly expanding our Disability and Inclusion Advisor capacity, we are embedding accessibility into both systems and cultures.
 - Our work ensures students are met with timely adjustments, inclusive curriculum design, and clear routes to support. These actions not only align us with the Commitment's focus on fairness, transparency, and opportunity, but also place the University in a strong position to evidence sector-leading practice in disabled student inclusion and success.

Safeguarding Duties

- In line with the **Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance** and broader safeguarding responsibilities for adults at risk, the inclusion of safeguarding under Student Life ensures statutory obligations are met and, in many cases, exceeded.

Purpose and remit of the Directorate of Student Life.

The Directorate of Student Life exists to ensure students both **thrive** and feel fully supported through their university journey, as well as ensuring the university meets its legal duties. It brings together a range of distinct specialist support functions under one cohesive framework, recognising that student success depends on more than academic strengths alone.

Key elements of our remit include:

- **Holistic student support** – covering timely wellbeing, inclusion, disability, safeguarding, financial hardship, and study support, to address both proactive and reactive needs.
- **Creating accessible and safe environments** – ensuring physical, cultural, emotional safety and belonging for students; embedding safeguarding, cultural competence, compassion and safety into routine operations.
- **Inclusive and anticipatory provision** – not only responding when students experience difficulties, but anticipating potential issues and intervening early, moving beyond deficit models only.

- **Student involvement and co-production** – involving students as collaborators, partners, “co-producers” of support, shaping the services they use.
- **Continuous improvement and evidence-led practice** – building monitoring, evaluation, and feedback loops; developing theories of change, collecting impact data, and refining services over time.
- **Visibility and accessibility of services** – bringing support “front and centre,” ensuring students know how to access services, expanding physical presence (e.g. via Student Life Spaces), and delivering services where students are.
- **A resource for University Staff** -No member of our university staff should go home and worry about the support needs of our students. As a collection of specialist support teams for students we also seek to support the needs of our staff, working in partnership with them to enhance student success.

A detailed breakdown of the purpose and remit of Student Life and each strand can be found within **Appendix 1** of this report

Strategic Context and Alignment

The Directorate of Student Life operates within a national policy environment shaped by OfS priorities — quality, equality of opportunity, student safety, and resilience — alongside legal duties under the Equality Act and growing concern over student hardship and wellbeing. In this context, the Directorate’s work directly supports both regulatory compliance and the University’s Strategy 2035.

Through safeguarding, mental health and wellbeing, disability and inclusion, student money and hardship, and support to study, the Directorate reduces barriers, promotes equity, and strengthens continuation and success. Its work fosters inclusive student success, advances the University’s civic mission, improves retention and productivity, and enhances reputation through excellence in support.

Internally, the Directorate demonstrates operational efficiency and culture change by embedding evidence-based, preventative, and timely interventions. Externally, it strengthens partnerships with the NHS, communities, and regulatory bodies — positioning Wolverhampton as a university committed not only to widening access but ensuring every student has the tools and opportunities to succeed.



A detailed overview of the National Policy and Regulatory Environment in which Student Life operates, to include how Student Life activity aligns with Strategy 2030 can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Humility, Innovation, and Resilience.

Directorate Highlights from Academic Year 2024- 2025

Beyond Day-to-Day Support

Alongside providing day-to-day guidance and tailored specialist support to thousands of students each year, the Directorate of Student Life has also taken a bold and proactive role in shaping the wider student experience across the University.

- **Cross-Directorate Projects:** We have steered and contributed to high-impact campaigns, student experience initiatives, and collaborative projects with academic departments — breaking down silos and ensuring that support is seamlessly integrated across the student journey.
- **Championing Student Voice:** By embedding student perspectives into our work, we have ensured that the services and policies we design reflect student needs. This has strengthened trust, built confidence, and delivered changes that students can see and feel.
- **Civic Engagement:** Our teams have played a key role in extending the University's civic mission, working with local and regional partners to support students as active contributors to their communities and to the life of the city of Wolverhampton.
- **Student Employment Opportunities:** We have carved out and created meaningful student employment pathways, giving students the chance to gain paid experience, develop skills, and shape services from the inside out.

Taken together, these achievements reflect how Student Life has grown into much more than a specialist support function — it is now a driver of cultural change, innovation, opportunity, and community impact across the University and beyond.

Student Engagement and Opportunity

Within the emerging Student Life Directorate, a colleague was identified to lead on **Student Voice and Opportunity** across all five strands of work. This role steered the development of **student committees and forums**, supporting our commitment to working with students as partners and aligning with our ambition to achieve **Student Minds Mental Health Charter Status** and set out our **Disabled Student Commitment**.

We trained an in-house **team of “train the trainers”**, enabling peer-to-peer support training to be delivered to student groups. Our **Student Wellbeing Champions Scheme** was strengthened, with the creation of a **paid Senior Wellbeing Champion role**. They went on to recruit over **50 well-being student volunteers** from across all three faculties, a scheme which goes from strength to strength, and continues to foster employability opportunities for students. Their work has also been cited in the City of Wolverhampton's annual report 2024 highlighting the power of partnerships.

A **British Sign Language (BSL) Graduate Scheme** was successfully launched. We sponsored a BA graduate to undertake her master's studies while employed in a paid role with mentorship from our two substantive BSL interpreters, we recruited an additional graduate in September 2024. Both remain members of our team and have taken a dynamic duo of two BSL interpreters with a combined service of over 50 years, to the fab four who will cement our place within this remit of specialist support which is both an art and a science.

To support the **branding of Student Life**, we collaborated with three Visual Illustration students from the School of Art and Design on three creative commissions:

- The Student Life logo and sub-brands for each team.
- A range of **Student Life greetings cards** to be sent to students.
- A series of **infographics** including myth-busting content and team access maps.

Humility, Innovation, and Resilience.

We also recruited **two Student Digital Ambassadors**, both of whom were international students, who enhanced our **web presence, video production, and social media content**. In addition, we supported a **year-long student placement** from the University of Nottingham in partnership with the **Black Country Partnership NHS Trust Recovery College**.

Within our **Student Mental Health and Wellbeing team** we have successfully placed **two PGR counselling doctorate students** who work with us for up to 10 hours per week as part of their programme, one of whom has now begun to work with us on a paid basis in addition to her placement hours.

Harrison Library – A New Era for Student Life

In October 2024, we proudly opened the doors to the newly refreshed **Harrison Library** at City Campus — marking a major milestone in our commitment to student success, wellbeing, and belonging.

What Changed

- The **ground floor** was completely transformed into the vibrant new **Student Life Centre** — a welcoming front door for ASK@WLV, with visible, accessible drop-in support for Mental Health & Wellbeing, Disability & Inclusion, Financial Support, Safeguarding, and Support to Study.
- The **third floor** was refreshed with a modern IT suite, flexible study zones with comfortable seating and power access, enhanced silent study areas, and upgraded furniture to create a more student-friendly space.

Why It Matters

- For the first time, specialist student support services moved from being hidden away to being **visible, central, and easy to access**.
- Student feedback directly shaped the redesign, ensuring the spaces feel welcoming, practical, and supportive of both study and wellbeing.
- Collections and resources were reorganised with clearer signage and layout, making studying simpler and more intuitive.
- Most proudly, we became the **first university library in the UK and the World outside of Ireland to introduce a Cubbie** — an immersive sensory booth designed to reduce anxiety, improve focus, and enhance wellbeing for students. This groundbreaking addition has set a global benchmark for inclusive, student-centered support.

A Celebration of Partnership

This £1.6 million transformation was more than just a refurbishment — it was a statement of intent. By bringing together learning, wellbeing, accessibility, and support, we created a space that reflects the true spirit of the University of Wolverhampton: inclusive, ambitious, and student focused.

The reopening was celebrated by our university community, partners, and students, who joined us in marking the beginning of a bold new chapter for Harrison Library and Student Life.

Assistive Technology Review – University of Wolverhampton

Purpose of the Review

The review, delivered by Diversity & Ability and commissioned by Student Life, was undertaken to modernise

and strengthen the University's **Assistive Technology (AT) provision** so that it:

- Met the diverse needs of students and staff.
- Aligned with national best practice and sector benchmarks.
- Improved inclusivity, accessibility, and competitive standing.

Key Findings

- The **AT provision was patchy** – with some tools outdated (e.g., ClaroRead, Sonocent Audio Notetaker) or underused.
- **Gaps were identified** in support for academic reading, referencing, organisation, time management, and exam preparation.
- **Students reported** their main struggles were academic reading & referencing, time management, and anxiety about plagiarism.
- **Staff highlighted** proofreading, grammar, exam stress, and complex reading demands as key challenges.
- **Awareness and training were low** – many staff and students did not know what AT was available or how to use it.
- **Benchmarking revealed** Wolverhampton lagged some regional competitors.

Core Recommendations

The review recommended a **strategic refresh** of AT provision, with a focus on accessibility, integration, and awareness.

Must-have software (paid):

- Read Write, Dragon Professional, Ava, Glean, Grammarly Premium, Scholarcy, EquatIO, Speechify, Mind View/Ayoo/Boost, PresentPal.

Desired / wellbeing tools:

- Headspace/Calm, Trello, Luna.

Free / built-in tools to maximise:

- Zotero, Microsoft 365 tools, Google Live Transcribe, and built-in accessibility features across Windows, Mac, Android, iOS, and Linux.

Survey Insights

- **Students:**
 - Top challenges were reading/referencing (49%), organisation (27%), and group work.
 - 81% reported high levels of exam anxiety.
 - Only 24% had access to AT via DSA.
- **Staff:**
 - Recognised reading, grammar, and exam stress as barriers.
 - Many noted **they too would benefit from AT** but lacked awareness/training.

Recommendations for Action

- Provide **training and awareness sessions** for staff and students.
- Consolidate licenses and phase out outdated tools.
- Ensure **students could access AT whether they received Disabled Students Allowance or not**.
- Emphasise integration of AT with teaching and curriculum design.
- Commit to **regularly reviewing and updating AT provision** to keep pace with sector innovations.

Strategic Outcome

The review demonstrated that, if adopted, these recommendations would:

- **Close the gap with competitors** in AT provision.
- Ensure **faster, more inclusive access** to learning resources.
- Reduce stress, improve retention, and boost student outcomes.
- Build a **future-proof AT strategy** aligned with the University's 2035 vision for inclusion and innovation.

Health Speak – Supporting Nursing and Allied Health Students Through Language and Wellbeing

Student Life has partnered with academic colleagues within the Nursing academic team to develop Health Speak. Health Speak is a unique mobile application developed to support the academic success and wellbeing of nursing students, with a particular focus on those studying in English as a foreign language.

Why it was developed

- To help students **overcome language barriers** in healthcare settings.
- To improve **confidence in communication** and performance in **practical assessments**.
- To support the development of **future NHS staff** from diverse, global backgrounds.

How it works

The app uses an **innovative pedagogical teaching approach** to address challenges faced by global majority students, especially in understanding and using key academic and clinical terminology.

Key Features

- **Phrase Bank:** A searchable library of academic and clinical words and phrases to support study and practice.
- **Audio Player:** Allows students to listen to correct pronunciations, reinforcing learning through repetition and clarity.
- **Student Support:** Provides access to wellbeing and mental health resources, recognising that confidence in language and communication is tied to overall student wellbeing.

Overall Intended Impact

Humility, Innovation, and Resilience.

By combining **language support, practical tools, and wellbeing resources**, Health Speak aims to empower nursing and allied health students — particularly those for whom English is not their first language — to thrive academically, communicate effectively on placement, and enter the NHS workforce with greater confidence. We have now finalised development and will be ready to launch a feasibility pilot in October 2025.

Wolverhampton MH in HE Conference – Surviving & Thriving (March 12, 2025)

What Happened

- The university hosted a conference bringing together academic leaders, professional service teams, students, and external stakeholders (including City of Wolverhampton Council and MP Warinder Juss) to focus on mental health in higher education.
- It was part of the University’s participation in the *Student Minds Mental Health Charter* programme, led by Student Life and in collaboration with Associate Deans for Students and Education within each Faculty.

Themes & Messages

- Mental health was framed as *everyone’s responsibility and right*, and the importance of collaboration across the institution — faculties, support services, Deans, Associate Deans — was emphasised.
- Legal challenges, the best sector practice, and how universities can move beyond traditional communication about mental health were examined.
- Strong emphasis placed on **student voice**:
 - Students engaged in mental health initiatives were recognised.
 - A third-year Primary Education student shared how placements included in her course design helped her feel supported.
 - Wellbeing Champions were acknowledged for their contributions.

Notable Speakers & Moments

- Dr Robert Abrahart, a retired lecturer and campaigner, gave a moving keynote titled “*Take One for the Team*”, reflecting on his experience following the suicide of his daughter, Natasha Abrahart, to highlight systemic issues and the need for change.
- Dr Clare Dickens MBE (Director of Student Life) stressed the importance of shared accountability among all university roles.

Impact and Takeaways

- The conference reinforced the University’s commitment to creating more supportive, inclusive campus culture around mental health.
- It elevated the role that students have in shaping mental health initiatives — listening to their experience was central.
- Key areas for ongoing work included improving communication, embedding student-centric supports, and ensuring mental health is treated not just as welfare but as integral to quality education.

Staying Safe – Compliance Snapshot (Condition E6)

The University of Wolverhampton has taken significant steps to prepare for the new **OfS Condition E6** on harassment and sexual misconduct, which came into effect from August 2025, rallying cross collaboration with HR and augmenting Worker Protection Act compliance principles. This work has been steered and shaped from within Student Life. The *Staying Safe* framework demonstrates robust compliance through the following:

Humility, Innovation, and Resilience.

- **Clear Policy Framework**
 - Comprehensive policies in place, including Safeguarding, Dignity at Work and Study, Personal Relationships, and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion.
 - Dedicated Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Framework publicly available.
- **Freedom of Speech Alignment**
 - A Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech ensures lawful expression is protected while balancing against protection from harassment and misconduct.
- **Definitions and Transparency**
 - Clear definitions of sexual misconduct, harassment, and related behaviours ensure consistency in response and understanding across the University community.
- **Accessible Reporting & Support Routes**
 - Immediate danger protocols (Safe Zone app, campus security, police/emergency services).
 - Clear signposting for students, staff, and apprentice learners to report incidents and access timely support.
- **Prevention, Response, Intervention, and Support**
 - Commitment to a proactive and whole-university approach.
 - Emphasis on early intervention and accessible pathways for disclosure.
- **Values-Led Approach**
 - Underpinned by University values — Ambitious, Resilient, Inclusive, Accountable — ensuring dignity, respect, and transparency in safeguarding culture.

Wolverhampton Suicide Prevention Stakeholder Forum & City Strategy

Key Purpose & Role

The **Wolverhampton Suicide Prevention Stakeholder Forum (SPSF)** is a multi-agency partnership of local organisations, public health, University of Wolverhampton, voluntary sector, community groups and others. It is chaired by Dr Clare Dickens, Director of Student Life. The Forum provides leadership for the city's suicide prevention agenda, helping to shape strategy, action planning, prevention, intervention, and postvention efforts. It ensures that multiple voices and organisations are engaged and coordinated.

Development of City Strategy

A **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment** was carried out by Wolverhampton Council's Public Health team that informed a refreshed city-wide approach. It identified risk factors such as financial pressures, domestic abuse, and poor mental health as key contributors to suicidal risk. In September 2023, the University hosted a city-wide strategy development event with many stakeholders, aligned with World Suicide Prevention Day, to set priorities for an Action Plan up to around 2027.

Strategy Content / Key Commitments

- The strategy commits to building **compassionate, aware, and equipped communities and workforces** so people in distress can access support more easily.
- It recognises the need for work at several levels:
 1. **Prevention** (awareness, stigma reduction, addressing underlying risk factors),
 2. **Intervention** (those at increased risk), and
 3. **Postvention** (support after a suicide or in the "ripple effect").
- It includes governance elements: Annual action plans, co-production with communities, improvements to data collection (including real-time surveillance of suspected suicides), safety plans for individuals in distress, support for bereavement, and broad workforce training.

Benefits for Students and the University

The Suicide Prevention Forum and City Strategy, chaired by Clare Dickens, directly enhance the student experience and strengthens the University.

For **students**, the strategy means:

- **Earlier access to help** through faster referrals and multi-agency working.
- A **safer campus and city**, with risks such as abuse, exploitation, and crisis addressed across Wolverhampton.
- **Reduced stigma**, thanks to awareness campaigns and training that normalise seeking support.
- **Tailored postvention support** to minimise the ripple effects of trauma on peers and communities.

For the **University**, the benefits include:

- **Stronger retention and progression**, with crises managed before they escalate.
- **National recognition** as a leader in suicide prevention and mental health.
- **Robust partnerships** with the NHS, council, and community organisations.
- **Policy assurance**, meeting OfS Condition E6 and aligning with UUK's Suicide-Safer Universities framework.
- **Greater staff confidence and capacity**, supported by training and development opportunities

Contributions to Sector Guidance and Case Studies

Impact briefly:

- First UK university to launch a *whole-staff suicide prevention training strategy*.
- Winner of the **2016 Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Student Support**.
- Contributions to **multiple national frameworks**: UUK's *Suicide-Safer Universities*, OfS Topic Briefings, NHS England projects, and HEPI research.
- **Local to global reach**: leadership of the City of Wolverhampton strategy, with influence extending to Ireland, Australia, and beyond.
- Sustained **academic contributions** through peer-reviewed publications and sector leadership.

Our Student Wellbeing Champions are now nationally recognised as a model for sector practice, case studies and chapter contributions have emerged from Student Life focusing on Student Suicide Prevention. Student Life is therefore more than aligning with sector best sector practice, it is being cited as example, which boosts reputation and gives confidence to students that support exists and is meaningful.

Service Reports

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Reconfiguration in 2023

The Mental Health and Wellbeing service has been reconfigured from a traditional “counselling-only” model into a **multi-disciplinary, two-part system**.

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Service Identity & Staff Roles

- **Before:** Confusion about whether the service was “just counselling” or broader wellbeing support. Staff from different professional backgrounds (nurses, counsellors, social workers) felt they were all expected to deliver the same function.
- **After:** Clear separation into two distinct patches — **Access & Assessment Team** (front door triage and rapid intervention) and **Therapeutic Intervention Team** (longer-term and specialist work). Staff now work to their strengths, improving morale and efficiency.

Waiting Times

- **Before:** Students faced waits of up to **14 weeks** before being seen.
- **After:** All registrations are triaged within **48 hours (often within 12)**, ensuring timely contact and early intervention.

High Did Not Attend (DNA) Rates

- **Before:** Appointments were offered around staff availability, not student schedules, leading to high DNA rates.
- **After:** Students now **self-select their own comprehensive assessment slot (time, date, and mode)**, improving attendance and engagement.

Inefficient Default Pathway

- **Before:** Assessors routinely took students onto their caseload for at least 4 sessions, regardless of need (equivalent to admitting every A&E patient).
- **After:** Students receive a tailored support plan at triage; only those who require it are referred into the **Therapeutic Intervention Team** or external services.

Limited Flexibility at First Contact

- **Before:** Early contact often meant waiting for assessment or referral, with little resolution at first point.
- **After:** The **Access & Assessment Team** delivers holistic triage (covering health, study, emotional and social wellbeing, finances, and risk). Many needs are resolved **at first contact**.

Weak External Partnerships

- **Before:** Limited NHS and third-sector collaboration.
- **After:** Access Team members (nurses with crisis intervention expertise) are now invited to **NHS stakeholder forums**, with over 60 organisations wanting to partner for student benefit.

Gap in 24/7 Professional Support

- **Before:** Together all had low uptake and raised specialist concerns, leaving a gap in out-of-hours support.
- **After:** Launch of **WLV Student Life Connect** (Sept 2024), providing access to a qualified mental health professional 24/7 via phone or online — moving beyond crisis-only provision to proactive accessibility.

This transformation shifted the service from a **slow, one-size-fits-all model** to a **responsive, flexible, and partnership-driven system** that matches the diversity and urgency of student needs.

A snapshot of engagement and demand trends within Academic Year 2024 – 2025

In 2024–25, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Team received **904 student-led registrations (170 FABSS, 445 FEHW, 147 FSE, 137 WLV Online)**, with **290 students** going on to receive medium-term one-to-one therapeutic intervention. Registrations peaked in **October** and **February**, reflecting pressure points in the academic cycle. Students most cited reasons such as **course-related stress, external pressures, relationship issues, fitness-to-practice concerns, abuse from others, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and substance use** — underlining both the complexity of need and the importance of timely, specialist support.

This mirrors trends seen across UK higher education. What distinguishes our provision is the **high rate of follow-through into sustained therapeutic support**, ensuring students not only access help but remain engaged with it, strengthening retention and wellbeing outcomes compared with sector norms.

Drawing on insights from student registrations in previous years—where it became clear that stress, anxiety, low mood, and relationships are among the most common drivers of distress among students—Wolverhampton introduced a suite of **weekly psycho-educational workshops** in 2024-25. These sessions, led by practitioners from the Mental Health & Wellbeing Team, blend theory with practical coping techniques, and offer support at regular points (for instance first Tuesdays and fourth Thursdays of each month).

These workshops reflect a shift from solely reactive crisis support to a more **preventative, accessible model**, enabling students to gain early tools to manage anxiety, troublesome thoughts, or low mood, before their situations escalate. The fact that they are open, recurring, and responsive to student input (students are invited to suggest new workshop topics or times) shows a commitment to tailoring support where it is needed most.

In sum: these workshops are a powerful example of the Directorate putting evidence and **student voice into action** — helping build resilience, reducing barriers to mental health, and preventing withdrawal by giving students tools before a crisis hits.

Next Steps for 2025/26

Looking ahead to 2025-26, the programme of psycho educational workshops will be further enhanced with a **suite of additional resources** — including workshops, podcasts, and videos — focused on building the skill of **disagreeing well**. This development reflects Wolverhampton's proactive response to the new **Freedom of Speech legislation for universities**, and is designed to serve a dual purpose:

- As a **wellbeing intervention**, helping students reduce the stress and conflict that can arise from challenging conversations.
- As a **civic learning opportunity**, equipping students with the confidence and resilience to engage in dialogue, debate, and difference in a way that strengthens community, democratic values, and mutual respect.

Together, these steps strengthen our culture of resilience, inclusivity, and respectful engagement, ensuring Wolverhampton students are prepared to thrive personally, academically, and as active members of society.

Expanding Access & Assessment: Physical Health Checks and the Health Hub Vision

Building on the transformative success of the Access & Assessment Team in cutting mental health waiting times and delivering fast, compassionate triage, we are proud to announce that from 2025–26 this patch of the team will also begin offering **physical health assessments** for both students and staff.

These assessments — including blood pressure, BMI, lifestyle indicators, and health risk screenings — will help individuals identify concerns early, access timely advice, and take positive steps toward better wellbeing. By integrating physical health into the work of a team already trusted for its responsiveness and expertise, we are creating a **seamless, whole-person approach** to care.

This development also forms part of Wolverhampton's wider **Health Hub vision**: an ambitious step toward becoming a sector leader in student and staff health. Working in partnership with the NHS, public health services, and local community organisations, the Health Hub will offer a central, accessible service point for prevention, wellbeing, and health promotion.

For students, this means **removing barriers to participation and strengthening retention and progression** by linking physical health directly to academic success. For staff, it reinforces Wolverhampton's identity as an **employer of choice**, offering tangible wellbeing support alongside professional growth.

By embedding physical health checks into the Access & Assessment function, we are demonstrating commitment to treating **the whole person, not just the role they occupy**. This integrated model of care sets Wolverhampton apart as **bold, imaginative, and distinctive** — a university where wellbeing is not an add-on, but a foundation for flourishing.

Disability and Inclusion

Reconfiguration in 2023

This transformation represents **the most significant shift in Disability & Inclusion support Wolverhampton has ever undertaken**. It has:

- Moved from **slow, admin-heavy, deficit-focused systems** to **fast, proactive, and inclusive pathways**.
- Built new **capacity, visibility, and partnerships**.
- Positioned us to become **sector-leading in anticipatory and inclusive design**.

Service Identity & Student Experience

- **Before:** The term “disabled” could feel both empowering and stigmatising. Registration often required **medical evidence by default**, creating barriers to access.
- **After:** The service now emphasises **cultural competence and inclusivity**, moving away from medical evidence thresholds as standard. This shift underpins the development of a new **UoW Student Commitment**, ensuring students feel supported without unnecessary barriers.

Faculty Enabling Tutor (FET) Role

- **Before:** The FET role existed for 15 years but had become **stagnant and unclear** — students often didn't know who their FET was or what the role was for.
- **After:** A **comprehensive review** with Associate Deans has begun the revitalisation of the role, creating the beginnings of a **community of practice**, which will produce refreshed descriptors, and professional development pathways.

Disability & Inclusion Advisor (DIA) Capacity

- **Before:** Wolverhampton sat in the **worst 22% of UK HEIs** for disabled student numbers per DIA resource. Capacity gaps led to slow responses.

- **After:** DIA numbers increased from **3.2 to 7 FTE**, plus a new full-time Disability Support Advisor. Advisors are now **aligned by course type and need** (e.g. PGR, online, apprenticeships, placements, partnerships), giving each DIA ownership and focus, and enabling a balance of **reactionary and anticipatory work**.

Response Times & Systems

- **Before:** Responses to disability disclosures could take **up to 16 weeks** in peak periods. Processes were slow, admin-heavy, and reliant on inaccurate reporting.
- **After:** Bespoke **Tableau dashboards** now allow real-time visibility of disclosures, enabling a **48-hour standard response**. Admin burden has been reduced to **zero**, and tutor awareness sheets are automatically available for staff.

Apprenticeship Provision

- **Before:** The service focused narrowly on DSA, leaving apprentice learners underserved. The approach emphasised what apprentices *could not* access, costing the University an **£180,000 income loss** and leaving students without compliant support.
- **After:** Pathways were redesigned to meet **ESFA compliance**, reducing faculty financial burden to zero. A **mock ESFA audit** confirmed readiness, a “for real” ESFA audit cemented the grasp we have on this differential funding model, and most importantly apprentices now receive appropriate, funded support.

Assistive Technology (AT) Provision

- **Before:** AT spending was **outdated, underused, and inconsistent**, leaving Wolverhampton behind competitors. Awareness among staff and students was low.
- **After:** An external review has been commissioned, including **student/staff surveys, costed recommendations, a redesigned webpage with videos, and a train-the-trainer model**. This will modernise AT, increase usage, and ensure value for money.

Inclusive Curriculum Partnerships

- **Before:** Some courses — such as Nursing — struggled with low success rates, particularly for global majority cohorts (as low as <50%).
- **After:** By partnering with academics, adopting a **scaffolded curriculum design**, and piloting a **verbal phrase bank**, success rates rose to **86%**. Work is underway to turn this into a **mobile app** to support both global majority and dyslexic learners, with potential commercial benefits.

Dyslexia Assessments

- **Before:** Students were asked to part-fund their assessments, (we would fund £400) and costs varied wildly (£400–£800), creating financial barriers.
- **After:** The University now **fully funds assessments** and has adopted a **preferred provider model**, reducing costs to a consistent **£375 per assessment** while widening access.

“Tell Us Once” Approach

- **Before:** Students often had to repeat their disclosure multiple times across services (e.g. disability, occupational health, accommodation).
- **After:** Cross-service collaboration has introduced the beginnings of a **“Tell us once” model**, ensuring smoother pathways and reducing the emotional and administrative burden on students.

- Support provided (reasonable adjustments, assistive tech, study support).

A snapshot of engagement and demand trends within Academic Year 2024 – 2025

In academic year **2024/25**, the Accessibility, Disability & Inclusion team at Wolverhampton:

- **Supported Access and Funding:**

- Triaged and responded to **2,000+ new disability registrations**, with peak activity in September and March
- Assisted **hundreds of students** with funding applications for specialist non-medical help (e.g. specialist tuition, mentoring).
- For those not eligible, developed cost-cases, securing **£200,000 in specialist support**, with a portion successfully reclaimed through the ESFA pathway, to the sum of **£121,000**.

- **Student Outcomes and Performance:**

- The **overall module pass rate** was **88.8% (79.1% adjusted)**. Disabled students achieved broadly similar outcomes, but gaps emerged for some groups:
 - **Lower outcomes:** long-standing illness, mobility impairments, multiple disabilities.
 - **Higher or equal outcomes:** dyslexia, other learning difficulties.
 - **Mental health:** large gap between standard and adjusted pass rates, indicating higher non-submission and mitigation.
- Completion data for a small number of acute and multiple complex needs student cases shows that out of **61 tracked disabled students, 52 (85%) completed their course successfully**.

- **Graduate Outcomes (Progression):**

Disabled students lag non-disabled peers in professional employment across all faculties:

- **FABSS:** -3.2 pp in professional employment; unemployment gap +2.6 pp.
 - **FEHW:** -2.4 pp in professional employment; unemployment gap +1.9 pp.
 - **FSE:** -7.1 pp in professional employment (largest gap); unemployment gap +4.1 pp.
- Disabled students were more likely to pursue **further study**, especially in **FSE** (+6.5 pp).

- **Accessibility Enhancements:**

- New **booking pathways** and personalised support for disabled parking and physical mobility needs.
- Orientation resources and tracking of progress for these students.
- Planning cemented which will see the launch of targeted campaigns and good news stories in AY 25/26

- **Sensory Space (“The Cubbie”) Impact**

In 2024–25, **627 students** accessed the University’s Sensory Space, designed to provide a calm environment for students experiencing sensory overload or heightened anxiety. **40% of users reported a significant reduction in anxiety**, evidencing the value of this proactive, inclusive intervention. The

Cubbe has become a visible symbol of our commitment to accessibility, enabling students to self-regulate, reduce barriers to participation, and remain engaged in their studies.

Disability and Inclusion – Systems Improvement and Data Innovation

Since 2023, the Disability and Inclusion Team has tackled a wide-ranging programme of **systems improvement projects**, made possible by dedicating specific resource and expertise to operational development. These projects have transformed the way the team captures, manages, and learns from data, shifting processes that were once slow, fragmented, or overly manual into streamlined systems that enhance both **efficiency** and **student experience**.

Key improvements include:

- **Smarter communication and tracking** – automated chases, email data capture, and initial contact lookups now ensure faster response times and reduce administrative burden.
- **Enhanced reporting and insight** – new dashboards and reports (e.g. module pass rates linked to declarations, opt-out tracking, parking usage, Self Declarations received, apprentice costing, external referrals, and mentoring approvals) provide real-time data to support decision-making.
- **Improved service access** – systems such as Microsoft Bookings for BSL interpreters and mentoring, HR-linked parking support, and Blue Badge parking management have simplified booking and approval processes for both students and staff.
- **Better student journey tracking** – tools like the Student Life counter form, open day/event trackers, updated webpages, and enhanced Tutor Awareness Sheet fields mean that students are supported more consistently, and their engagement can be mapped across their time at the university.
- **Resilience and continuity** – the team has responded flexibly to IT system challenges (e.g. temporary case management fixes) while developing sustainable long-term solutions.
- **In summary:** Accessibility, Disability and Inclusion has delivered strong compliance with Equality Act duties and OfS expectations by supporting thousands of disabled students, securing substantial specialist funding, and maintaining high overall pass and completion rates. However, **progression gaps remain** in professional employment and unemployment—especially in STEM (FSE)—making employability support a key strategic priority for 2025/26.

Together, these changes represent the **most significant operational overhaul** the service has seen in years. They not only allow the team to work more efficiently, but also provide the **opportunity to report, analyse, and learn from data** in ways that were previously not possible. This strengthens accountability, supports strategic decision-making, and ensures the team can identify trends, risks, and opportunities for inclusion more quickly.

Next Steps for 2025/26

Looking ahead to 2025–26, our focus will be on **deepening impact in line with the principles of the Disabled Student Commitment** — fairness, equity, transparency, and employability. While overall pass and continuation rates remain strong, sector evidence and our own data highlight that disabled students continue to face **progression gaps into professional employment and disproportionate unemployment**, particularly in STEM disciplines.

To address this, next steps will include:

- **Embedding employability support into disability provision**, with tailored pathways, mentoring, and stronger collaboration with the University’s Careers and Enterprise teams.
- **Partnering with academic colleagues** to ensure inclusive curriculum design and assessment practice, aligned with “inclusion by design” principles.

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- **Expanding pre-entry and outreach work**, helping prospective disabled students and apprentices' transition smoothly into study with adjustments in place from day one.
- **Strengthening student voice and co-production**, ensuring disabled students help shape future services and contribute to continuous improvement.
- **Monitoring and publishing outcomes transparently**, using dashboards and longitudinal data to track progression into graduate employment and inform targeted interventions.

Through these steps, the Disability and Inclusion Team will not only sustain its compliance role but also **move decisively into shaping equitable graduate outcomes** — ensuring that disabled students at Wolverhampton are not just supported to succeed in study but also empowered to thrive in their careers and futures.

Student Money and Hardship

Reconfiguration in 2023

Collectively, these developments demonstrate that the Student Money team is moving from a **reactive hardship focus** to a **proactive, student-centered financial welfare function**, embedded in safeguarding, strengthened by partnerships, and powered by data.

- Financial advice and literacy initiatives.
- Hardship funding statistics: applications, awards, impact.
- Trends in cost-of-living challenges.
- Partnerships with Students' Union, local community support.
- Policy advocacy and feedback to university finance strategy.

Team Capacity & Resourcing

- **Before:** The Student Money team was small, limiting capacity to deliver both day-to-day hardship fund oversight and proactive financial welfare initiatives.
- **After:** A **new claims assessor post** has been created enabling the team to strengthen fund management and expand into a more **robust, anticipatory financial welfare offer**.

Data-Driven Insight & Prevention

- **Before:** Financial hardship was often addressed reactively, with little systematic analysis of trends across courses or cohorts.
- **After:** The team has begun a **thematic analysis of Semester data** to identify peak courses experiencing hardship. This will inform **collaborations with programme leads** to address root causes and mitigate financial stress at source.

Safeguarding Integration

- **Before:** Hardship fund applications were assessed primarily for financial eligibility, missing the wider safeguarding concerns that often underpin financial crises (e.g. domestic abuse).
- **After:** **Safeguarding staff are now embedded** in weekly hardship review panels, ensuring students' broader welfare needs are recognised and supported alongside financial relief.

Student Access & Engagement

- **Before:** Students often had limited informal access to financial advice outside of hardship applications, creating barriers to early support.
- **After:** A programme of **routine drop-ins** has been advertised, giving students accessible opportunities to seek advice, raise concerns, and access guidance outside of crisis points.

Checks, Balances & Advice

- **Before:** Hardship assessments focused narrowly on eligibility decisions, missing opportunities to connect students with wider financial welfare support.
- **After:** The team now uses **enhanced checks and balances** to identify opportunities for **welfare advice and signposting** at the same time as hardship claim reviews, embedding a more holistic approach.

Partnership Working

- **Before:** Fund review processes were handled internally, limiting opportunities for collaborative oversight and advocacy.
- **After:**
 - Weekly panels are now run **in partnership with the Students' Union and Safeguarding**, strengthening student representation and trust.
 - **Links with central Finance colleagues** have been enhanced, ensuring smoother processes and better alignment with institutional financial governance.
 - The team consistently **advocates directly with Student Finance England** on behalf of students (with consent), resolving complex issues and unlocking essential support.

Data-Driven System & Impact

- **Before:** Processes lacked transparency and efficiency, with limited data to guide improvement or evidence impact.
- **After:** Since 2023, the team has developed a **data-driven system and purpose**, using insight to track trends, inform strategy, and evidence outcomes in terms of both financial relief and student retention.

A snapshot of engagement and demand trends within Academic Year 2024 – 2025

During the 2024/25 academic year, the University of Wolverhampton distributed **1,341 awards totalling £790,900** to students. This represents a significant increase compared with **1,070 awards totalling £405,705 in 2023/24**, and demonstrates a clear, targeted response to cost-of-living challenges. Levels of investment remain consistent with previous years (e.g. £834,804 in 2022/23), reflecting sustained institutional commitment.

The breadth of awards covered both **short-term hardship payments** and **longer-term structured bursaries**, ensuring flexibility to meet a range of student needs. This targeted investment supports continuation, retention, and attainment by mitigating financial pressures that might otherwise impact student success.

These outcomes are directly aligned to the University's **Access and Participation Plan (APP)** and the **OfS expectations** for providers to:

- Remove or reduce financial barriers to access.
- Support equality of opportunity in continuation and attainment.
- Ensure progression outcomes are not determined by background or financial disadvantage.

In summary - by committing **record levels of financial support in 2024/25**, the University has demonstrated proactive measures to address sector priorities. This approach underlines Wolverhampton's progress against

APP targets and evidence compliance with OfS requirements to deliver sustainable improvements in access, success, and progression for under-represented and disadvantaged groups.

Next Steps for 2025/26

Looking ahead, the team has identified key areas of focus for 2025/26 to further strengthen impact:

- **Enhancing budgeting support and financial advice** so that a greater number of students can proactively manage their finances, reducing reliance on emergency hardship funding.
- Expanding communication and awareness campaigns to ensure all eligible students are aware of available awards and support pathways.
- Continuing to monitor award distribution and student outcomes at a granular level, ensuring resources are targeted effectively to those with the greatest need.
- Linking financial support more explicitly to **progression planning**, ensuring that financial security supports both academic success and graduate employability.

Support to Study

Collectively, the introduction of the Support to Study Policy and Cause for Concern Pathway in January 2023, mark a **major step forward** in how Wolverhampton identifies, supports, and responds to student need:

- Moving from **reactive, siloed systems** to **proactive, joined-up pathways**.
- Addressing **gaps in provision** (e.g. expectant mothers, period dignity).
- Strengthening **student voice, equity, and belonging**.
- Embedding **holistic, compassionate approaches** that improve both retention and student experience.

Policy Development & Foundations

- **Before:** Wolverhampton lacked a comprehensive, unified framework to manage complex student engagement, conduct, and welfare concerns in a structured and supportive way.
- **After:** In **January 2023**, the University launched its **first Support to Study Policy and Trusted Person Notification Procedure**, co-produced with staff and students, and informed by external expertise from **UCL** and the **LEARN Network** of bereaved families. This created a compassionate, transparent foundation for student support and risk management.

Cause for Concern Pathway

- **Before:** Concerns about students were often managed in silos, with limited opportunities for cross-university collaboration.
- **After:** A **weekly Cause for Concern Panel** was established, bringing together **academic coaches, engagement officers, associate deans, security, and accommodation teams**. This has embedded multi-disciplinary decision-making, improved early intervention, and strengthened faculty-service collaboration.

Extenuating Circumstances (EC) Review

- **Before:** EC claims were reviewed primarily as administrative tasks, missing opportunities to identify deeper needs or safeguarding risks.

- **After:** The **EC Review Panel** now examines claims through a **holistic lens**, considering every possible disclosure of need. This ensures that students receive the right support rather than a purely transactional decision.

Emerging Themes & New Support Areas

- **Before:** Gaps existed in identifying and supporting **expectant student mothers**, with no systematic process in place.
- **After:** The Head of Support to Study proactively began engaging these students, providing **adjustments, risk assessments, and monthly parent support groups**. Over **80 students** have already been supported, with insights now shaping a **dedicated university policy and webpage**.

Tackling Barriers & Equity Gaps

- **Before:** Basic wellbeing needs, such as **period dignity**, were unaddressed, leaving students at risk of disadvantage.
- **After:** In collaboration with Associate Professor Dr Debra Cureton, Student Life now sponsors and distributes **80 Period Dignity Packs per month**, ensuring students can access essentials at the point of need.

Financial Pathways

- **Before:** The **WLV Wallet – Access Bursary** required clearer governance and oversight, with risks of duplication and inefficiency.
- **After:** Student Life has taken ownership of the scheme, ensured continuity of awards while undertaken a full review to maximise impact and equity.

Student & Staff Engagement

- **Before:** Routes into Support to Study were unclear, limiting staff confidence in referrals and sometimes second guessing if their concerns met a threshold for escalation.
- **After:** A programme of **routine drop-ins** has been launched, giving both students and staff accessible spaces to raise concerns, seek advice, and build trust in the system.

A snapshot of engagement and demand trends within Academic Year 2024 – 2025

In 2024–25, the University's **Cause for Concern (CFC) and Support to Study Pathways** managed a significant volume of referrals, demonstrating their central role in safeguarding student success and ensuring compliance with statutory and regulatory duties.

- **Referral scale:** Over 800 CFCs were raised, with the Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing (FEHW) accounting for more than half (423 cases), followed by FABBS (198) and FSE (150). Online students (27) were also represented, showing reach across modes of study.
- **Referral themes:** The most common categories were safeguarding (212), Academic Coaches (125), Disability, Accessibility & Inclusion (146), and study barriers emerging from and because of financial hardship via the Dennis Turner Hardship Fund (93). Mental health (55), conduct, fitness to study and questions around suitability (73), and personal tutoring (43) also featured prominently.
- **Student groups:** International students (90) and apprentices (3) were represented, highlighting the diverse needs of different cohorts.
- **93% of those engaged via this pathway have been retained and progressed with their studies within AY 24/25.**

- **Extenuating Circumstances – A New Approach Backed by Scale**
In 2024–25, over **6,000 EC claims were approved** (4,700 first sits and 1,300 re-sits). Unlike in previous years, each claim was not only processed administratively but also **reviewed through the Support to Study lens**, commencing from the baseline that **every claim may represent a communication of need**. This marks a major shift in practice — transforming EC from a records-based function into a **proactive student support safeguard**.
- In 2024–25, our Specialist Support Coordinators delivered a step-change in accessibility, providing **over 3,500 hours of in-class support** — including notetaking, BSL interpretation, practical support, and exam adjustments — alongside **466 hours of specialist mentoring and study skills support**.

Linking to Office for Students (OfS), Equality Act & Access and Participation Plan (APP)

- **OfS Condition E6 (Mental Health and Wellbeing):** These pathways ensure early identification of students at risk due to poor engagement, welfare concerns, or safeguarding issues. By intervening before crises escalate, the University is meeting its regulatory duty to provide an environment that supports mental health and wellbeing.
- **Equality Act 2010:** A considerable proportion of referrals related to disability, inclusion, and safeguarding, demonstrating the University’s proactive approach to its anticipatory duty under the Act. Adjustments were not only made reactively but embedded in planning and co-designed support plans.
- **Access & Participation Plan (APP):** The high number of CFCs and Support to Study cases reflects the University’s commitment to tackling continuation gaps. By coordinating multi-disciplinary responses, we ensure underrepresented groups — including disabled students, international learners, and those experiencing hardship — are supported to remain and succeed in study.

In summary, this data tells a clear story: we have cemented a pathway which is **not punitive, but protective**. It operates as a structured framework that turns risk into resilience. In doing so, we safeguard students’ rights, uphold the University’s legal and regulatory responsibilities, and directly support APP targets by ensuring that those most at risk of non-continuation are retained, supported, and empowered to progress.

Through the **Support to Study** and **Cause for Concern** pathways, students receive timely, tailored interventions that address the full spectrum of academic, wellbeing, and safeguarding concerns. Interventions range from co-created support plans and adjustments to referrals into specialist teams (mental health, disability and inclusion, safeguarding, hardship) or external services such as the NHS or social care. For students in acute difficulty, the pathways provide a joined-up response — bringing together academic, wellbeing, and professional service colleagues to ensure no one is left to navigate challenges alone.

Equally important, these pathways provide **vital reassurance and practical support for staff**. Colleagues are no longer expected to carry cases of concern in isolation; instead, concerns are escalated into a multi-disciplinary forum where responsibility is shared, decisions are documented, and clear next steps are agreed. This collective approach not only safeguards students but also protects staff wellbeing, fostering a culture where early intervention and shared accountability are the norm.

Next Steps 2025/26

In 2025–26, we will build on these strong foundations through a programme of development and refinement designed to further embed best practice and meet the evolving needs of our students:

- **Support to Study Policy Review and Update:** The policy will undergo a full review, informed by data, sector benchmarking, and student/staff feedback. This will ensure it continues to operate as a protective, supportive framework while keeping pace with regulatory requirements and emerging good practice.

- **Pregnant Student Policy and Support Framework:** Building on the informal work undertaken in 2024–25, we will formalise a dedicated policy and framework to ensure expectant and new parents are supported consistently and compassionately across all faculties. This will include adjustments, risk assessments, and access to specialist services.
- **Enhanced Staff Support:** We will continue to strengthen pathways that protect staff from carrying complex cases in isolation, embedding routine communication and decision-making processes that share accountability and provide reassurance.
- **Data and Insight Development:** With the rollout of enhanced dashboards, we will track themes and outcomes more systematically — enabling us to identify gaps, refine interventions, and evidence long-term impact on retention and progression.
- **Student Voice and Co-Production:** We will expand opportunities for students who have engaged with the pathway to shape its future development, ensuring the framework reflects lived experiences and fosters trust.

Together, these next steps will ensure that the Support to Study framework remains not only a cornerstone of student success at Wolverhampton but also a sector-leading example of how universities can combine protection, compassion, and accountability to transform outcomes.

Safeguarding

Reconfiguration in 2023

Collectively, the developments have transformed safeguarding from a **compliance-heavy, reactive function** into a **strategic, student-centered, and sector-leading strand**. Wolverhampton now combines robust operational delivery (referrals, SCR, apprentice safeguarding) with **innovative practice** (No Lone Wolves, Domestic Abuse Framework, sector literature), safeguarding both a protective function and a driver of inclusion and leadership.

Leadership & Capacity

- **Before:** Safeguarding responsibilities were spread thinly, creating pressure on existing staff and limiting strategic development.
- **After:** In **October 2023**, a **full-time Head of Operational Safeguarding** was recruited, taking direct oversight of most referrals and providing dedicated leadership for safeguarding operations.

Care Experienced & Estranged Students

- **Before:** There was little in the way of a structured approach to tracking the progress or wellbeing of care experienced and estranged students, leaving risks of isolation or disengagement.
- **After:** The team undertook an **MOT of every student in this group**, contacting each one individually to review their study health and progress.
 - Feedback revealed a need for **community connection**, leading to the **soft launch of “No Lone Wolves” in March 2024**, a programme of social events designed to build peer networks.
 - This work supports ambitions to achieve **university accreditation for care experienced support provision**.

Sexual Harassment & Consent

- **Before:** Sexual harassment and consent education was underdeveloped and did not fully meet the emerging OfS compliance requirements.

- **After:** Content has now been **scoped and commissioned**, with launch a successful launch for **Summer 2024**, embedding consent education as a core feature of Wolverhampton's student experience and regulatory compliance.

Single Central Record (SCR)

- **Before:** Oversight of the SCR lacked systematic review, risking inaccuracies and compliance gaps.
- **After:** An **extensive review** was completed, and the SCR is now **maintained actively**, alongside the development of a **separate SCR for Education** in partnership with HR.

Apprenticeship Safeguarding

- **Before:** Safeguarding content for apprentices was limited to induction, with little reinforcement across the student lifecycle.
- **After:** Face-to-face safeguarding awareness continues to be delivered at induction, and **new work began to embed safeguarding themes across apprenticeship programmes**, responding directly to Ofsted feedback.

Domestic Violence & Sector Leadership

- **Before:** Domestic violence was addressed reactively, with no overarching institutional policy or sector contribution.
- **After:** Work began supporting an emerging leaders' group on a **Domestic Abuse Framework**, which was approved at UEB in 2024. In addition, the team is preparing an **abstract proposal to edit a book on Safeguarding in HE**, addressing a notable gap in the literature and strengthening Wolverhampton's sector influence.

Referrer Communication & Staff Morale

- **Before:** Staff who raised safeguarding referrals often received no follow-up or debrief, fueling anxiety, uncertainty, and low morale.
- **After:** A new process ensures that **all referrers now receive follow-up and debriefs**, closing the feedback loop, improving confidence, and reducing anxiety for staff engaging in safeguarding.

A snapshot of engagement and demand trends within Academic Year 2024 – 2025

The University's **Safeguarding function** has seen a dramatic and sustained rise in demand, reflecting both the increasing complexity of student lives and the growing visibility of support routes.

- In **2020–21**, the function managed **104 cases**.
- By **2022–23**, this had risen to **154 cases**.
- In **2024–25**, there were **307 safeguarding registrations**, a **195% increase** since 2020–21.
- **93% of students** who have been safeguarded via this pathway in 2024-2025 remain and have progressed within their studies.

Alongside this, safeguarding interventions arising from the **Cause for Concern (CFC) pathway** have also accelerated:

- In **2023–24**, **115 students** were picked up by safeguarding through CFC referrals.
- In **2024–25 to date**, this figure has already risen to **215 students**.

This means that in 2024–25, the team has managed **over 520 safeguarding cases in total** (registrations plus CFC referrals) — the highest volume ever recorded. In addition, the team has overseen **more than 40 external positions of trust and safeguarding referrals**, ensuring effective joined up working with statutory services and external partners.

Key Safeguarding Themes

Cases reflected a wide range of acute and serious risks, including:

- Domestic abuse
- Homelessness
- Emotional abuse
- Violence from others outside of the family
- Acute and imminent risk, including suicidal crisis
- Exploitation

106 students were supported through the **Care Experienced and Estranged Student Pathway**, including **£112,500 in direct awards** to cover essential living costs and expenses.

97% of this student case load have been retained and have progressed within their studies.

The scale of this growth demonstrates the increasing trust between students and staff place in the safeguarding function, and the central role it now plays within the wider **Student Life Directorate** — ensuring students at risk are identified early, supported holistically, and kept safe within the University community.

Next Steps 2025–26

Building on the significant progress made in recent years, the Directorate is now entering a new phase of safeguarding development. Our ambition is to move from a predominantly reactive response model to one that is proactive, preventative, and embedded across the whole University community.

- **New role creation:** In Semester One of AY 2025–26, we will recruit a dedicated *Safeguarding and Student Welfare Officer*. This role will strengthen capacity, provide specialist expertise, and enable us to deliver earlier interventions — ensuring that safeguarding concerns are addressed before they escalate.
- **Awareness and culture change:** The new officer will support us in raising awareness of safeguarding across all student and staff groups. By embedding safeguarding themes into inductions, training, and campaigns, we aim to normalise conversations about safety and wellbeing, reducing stigma and increasing confidence in using support pathways.
- **Preventative model:** We will expand from case-by-case responses to proactive engagement, including targeted outreach to higher-risk groups, workshops to build student resilience, and resources designed to help staff recognise and respond confidently to concerns.
- **Partnership building:** The strengthened team will also deepen collaboration with external agencies and community partners, ensuring that University of Wolverhampton students benefit from the same protections, wraparound support, and opportunities as those available across the city and region.
- **Regulatory alignment:** These next steps directly support the University's **Access and Participation Plan** by improving retention and continuation among students facing safeguarding risks — groups who are often underrepresented and most vulnerable to withdrawal. They also strengthen compliance with the **Office for Students' Conditions of Registration (E2 and E6)**, which emphasise the importance of student support, wellbeing, and safety, as well as aligning with statutory safeguarding duties under the **Equality Act** where intersecting risks exist.

- A core aim is to achieve **NNECL accreditation**, embedding best practice for care-experienced and estranged students. Together these steps will strengthen early intervention, expand awareness and training, and ensure safeguarding is recognised as everyone's responsibility across the University.

This shift represents a major step forward: from simply responding when students are at risk, to creating a safeguarding culture that prevents harm, empowers students, and reassures staff that no one is left to carry cases of concern alone.

Student and Learner Feedback Summary

Prior to academic year 2024-2025, none of the teams within Student Life had any mechanism to invite regular student feedback. We rectified this developing a "tell us how we did" feedback option after every interaction. This is reviewed weekly, any feedback of concern is addressed immediately, and all 5 Star Feedback is shared via our Directorate Teams Channel every Friday with the aim of ending our working week on a high and offering gratitude to staff.

Over the past academic year, students and learners at the University have shared an outpouring of feedback based on their interaction with Student Life teams, that reflects the extraordinary dedication, compassion, and professionalism of our specialist support services. From Disability and Inclusion to Mental Health, Safeguarding, and Student Services, students consistently described their experiences as empowering, respectful, and life changing.

- **Compassionate and Personalised Support** Students frequently expressed how deeply they felt listened to, understood, and supported—often during some of the most difficult moments in their academic journeys. Staff were praised for their empathy, patience, and ability to create safe, non-judgmental spaces where learners could speak openly and receive tailored guidance.
- **Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing** Many learners' navigating anxiety, depression, PTSD, and other mental health challenges shared how the university's support helped them feel less alone and more equipped to cope. The mental health and wellbeing teams were recognised for their swift responses, thoughtful interventions, and consistent follow-up.
- **Academic Adjustments and Accessibility** the Disability and Inclusion team received widespread appreciation for their clarity, responsiveness, and commitment to ensuring reasonable adjustments were in place. From note-taking services to DSA support and accessibility guidance, students felt empowered to succeed academically despite complex needs.
- **Trust, Advocacy, and Empowerment** Learners described the support staff as advocates who stood by them, helped them navigate university systems, and empowered them to take control of their education. Whether it was assistance with forms, funding, or simply reassurance, the team's efforts were seen as vital to student success.
- **Areas for Growth** While most feedback was overwhelmingly positive, a few students noted delays, inconsistent communication, or gaps in service delivery. These reflections are valuable reminders of the importance of continued improvement, transparency, and proactive engagement.
- **Impact and Gratitude** Many students shared that they would not have made it through university without the support they received. Their words reflect not just satisfaction, but deep emotional connection and appreciation for the individuals and teams who helped them feel seen, heard, and valued.

Case studies and some examples of student testimonials.

[Inclusion Awareness: Dan's Story](#)

"I have nothing but high appreciation with the support and how quickly it has been arranged".

"Staff were lovely and welcoming, supportive, knowledgeable and non-judgmental".

"I feel that everyone professional has given me the time, empathy and support with not a single ounce of judgement or disregard to my feelings and emotions".

"The support I received from the disability inclusion team was very helpful and encouraging. The memory will live with for a very long time. The support started when I was still in Nigeria processing my admission and it continued immediately, I arrived University of Wolverhampton. I can't take the opportunity and the help for granted by any means. I am really grateful".

"Thank you so very much for your support and encouragement, I really appreciate it. I wouldn't be here if you had not pushed for adjustments and putting sessions in place for me, thank you so very much".

"Very compassionate, empathetic & understanding. Addressed all my concerns in a very fast time frame, Exceeding the normal expected support".

"Found service amazing and helped me through my degree ".

Next Steps?

We plan to build on the success of gaining student feedback and insights going into academic year 2025-2026 by building on the success of our growing resource and campaign aims. The campaign page we have developed is designed to **share experiences** from disabled students, with a view to dismantling stigma and helping others understand disability and inclusion better. We actively invite students to get involved in awareness campaigns and do so informed by ethics where we pay them for their time and gain valid, written consent.

Key awareness topics so far include:

- **Speech Dysfluency / Cluttering** (with video testimony from learners)
- **Deaf Awareness**, including basics of British Sign Language (BSL), insights from former students, guidance for inclusive teaching, and information about interpreters.
- **Neurodiversity**: Information is provided on conditions such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, ADHD, Autism Spectrum Conditions, Visual Stress, and Tourette Syndrome.
- We offer several **video-resources**, e.g. alumni speaking about their experiences, plus materials aimed both at students and staff to raise awareness and promote inclusion.
- Staff, students and others are encouraged to contact the team to help develop or run campaigns, share personal stories, or help produce awareness content.

Disability Awareness Campaign Impacts University



Retention Impact

The evidence across Mental Health and Wellbeing, Support to Study, Disability and Inclusion, Student Money and Hardship, and Safeguarding is unequivocal: **students at highest risk of withdrawing or facing barriers to success are not only staying — they are thriving.** In 2024–25, retention rates among these groups ranged from **93% to 98%**, with thousands of students supported to overcome challenges that might otherwise have ended their university journey. These are not abstract numbers — they represent students navigating acute mental health crises, financial hardship, experiences of abuse, homelessness, who nevertheless continued in their studies because timely, joined-up, and compassionate support was available. Their progress is a testament both to the University’s commitment and to the extraordinary bravery and determination of the students themselves, who stepped forward, accepted help, and chose to persist. In doing so, they have reshaped what success looks like at our university: not just entering higher education, but being supported to remain, to belong, and to succeed against the odds.

A Note of Caution: Correlation vs. Causation

While the data in this report demonstrates strong links between Student Life interventions and improved retention, progression, and student outcomes, it is important to recognise the limits of attributing direct causation. Many factors influence a student’s ability to continue and succeed — including personal circumstances, academic experience, and external pressures such as cost of living or health. Our data shows compelling correlations: for example, high continuation rates among students accessing hardship funds or specialist wellbeing support. However, we cannot claim that Student Life support alone was the sole determinant of these outcomes. Instead, our services play a critical role within a wider ecosystem of academic, personal, and community support. This acknowledgement is essential to ensure that our conclusions remain evidence-based, proportionate, and transparent, while still demonstrating the powerful contribution Student Life makes to student success.

At the same time, we are determined to continue strengthening the evidence base for our work. We believe in **measuring what we treasure** — not only tracking demand, access, and outcomes, but also refining our data to better evidence the long-term impact of our services. By building new tools such as dashboards, case management systems, and student voice feedback, we will continue to develop transparent and rigorous measures. Just as importantly, we will contribute these insights to the wider sector and literature, sharing our

journey so that Wolverhampton plays an active role in shaping best practice in student success, wellbeing, and inclusion.

Value for Money

In 2024–25, the Directorate of Student Life operated with a specialist staff budget of approx. **£1.45 million** which spans **30 specialist support staff, five distinct heads of area and a director post**. When benchmarked against sector trends, this level of investment is proportionate and well-targeted: across the UK, universities often allocate several million annually to specialist student support, wellbeing and inclusion, yet the challenge remains if they can evidence such strong correlation between their student engagement and direct retention outcomes. Our model now has the cornerstones of being considered distinctive in that it demonstrates measurable returns, with retention rates consistently above 93% for students engaged through our Mental Health and Wellbeing, Support to Study, Hardship, Disability, and Safeguarding pathways.

This means that for every £1 invested in specialist staff capacity, the University is actively safeguarding tuition income that would otherwise be lost through withdrawal, while enabling students at highest risk to remain and progress. With over 5,000 students directly engaged through these services in 2024–25, the cost equates to around £280 per student supported — a fraction of the financial value of a retained student.

A further area of progress has been the **Apprenticeship Support Pathway**, which has unlocked new financial resilience for the University. By aligning specialist support for apprentice learners with Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) compliance requirements, we have successfully reclaimed funds that had previously been lost — estimated at £180,000 across a case load of 104 learners in an 18-month period. Importantly, in 2024–25 alone we have already reclaimed **£121,000**, directly reinvesting this back into the sustainability of staff capacity and student support. This work not only ensures apprentices receive equitable, specialist support (including mental health mentoring and disability adjustments), but also demonstrates how regulatory alignment can create income streams that strengthen the University's resilience.

Our journey to this point has been deliberate. Since 2023, we have moved away from inherited operational models that were inefficient and resource-heavy, choosing instead to reconfigure structures, streamline pathways, and build specialist capacity before asking university leadership for more staff resource. This approach has ensured that our investment is not only sustainable but also transformative — turning finite resources into the makings of being sector-leading, data-driven, and student-centred outcomes.

Student Life has therefore delivered a return on investment, both financial and social: contributing to the protection of our institutional resilience while delivering life-changing, and in many cases lifesaving, impact for our students.

Risks and Challenges

Challenges and Opportunities Ahead (2025–26)

As we look ahead to 2025–26, the Directorate of Student Life recognises the scale of demand and complexity that continues to grow across the university and the Higher Education Sector as a whole. These challenges are significant, but they also represent opportunities to further strengthen our services, deepen collaboration, and reaffirm our role at the heart of the student experience.

Meeting Rising Demand with Resilience

- Safeguarding referrals, mental health registrations, financial support requests, and disability support requests are all increasing year on year — clear evidence that students see us as a trusted place to turn.
- Our challenge will be to **sustain rapid response times** (48-hour MH triage, 5-day disability adjustments) while expanding our reach. With an emphasis on strong systems, creative and sustainable workforce planning, and cross-university partnership, we are confident we can continue to deliver.

Navigating Policy and Regulation with Confidence

- The introduction of **OfS Condition E6** and potential reforms to **DSA** represent an opportunity to showcase our leadership in inclusive practice.
- By anticipating change, embedding compliance into everyday practice, and working with colleagues across governance and quality, we will not only meet requirements but **set a high standard for the sector**.

Responding to Emerging Student Needs

- Pressures from the **cost of living, digital inclusion, and complex welfare issues** will continue to shape our work.
- We are ready to adapt by developing new financial pathways, harnessing technology, and offering more **cross-sectional, targeted support**
- Each new challenge is also an opportunity to innovate and co-create solutions with our students and staff.

Our Commitment

The year ahead will further test our capacity and adaptability, but it also offers us the chance to **prove our resilience, creativity, and determination** even more than we have done so far. By working together — within our teams, across the University, and with our external partners — we are ready to meet these challenges head on, ensuring that every student has the opportunity not just to stay on and study with us, but to thrive.

Priorities for the Next Year

Away Day Insights – September 2025

Our **second Student Life Away Day** was another defining moment, giving us space to reflect, recharge, and realign. Three key insights emerged as our springboard into 2025–26:

- **Shared Values** – reaffirming humility, collaboration, and innovation as the foundations of our work.
- **Strategic Alignment** – connecting our directorate and individual team purposes to the University’s wider mission and statutory responsibilities.
- **Collective Confidence** – recognising our ability to sustain quality under pressure, while embracing change as an opportunity to lead.

A more detailed overview of our Student Life Away Days can be found in **Appendix 3**

Student Life Directorate Action Plan 2025–26

Headline KPIs (Core Commitments to Students & Staff)

Priority Area	KPI	Benchmark 2025–26	Why It Matters	Lead/Owner
Mental Health Access	% of students triaged within 48 hours	≥95%	Ensures timely crisis response and reduces escalation risk	Head of MHWB
Retention via Support to Study	% retained and progressed	≥93%	Protects continuation of students at acute risk	Head of Support to Study
Safeguarding	% of referrals acted on within 48 hours	≥90%	Early intervention in high-risk cases	Head of Operational Safeguarding
Disability & Inclusion	% of disclosures responded to within 5 working days	≥95%	Builds confidence and compliance with Equality Act	Head of Accessibility Disability and Inclusion
Hardship Fund Impact	% of recipients retained and progressed	≥95%	Directly reduces financial withdrawal risk	Student Money Lead
Student Life Desk Reach	Number supported annually & % resolved at first contact	≥1,200; ≥85%	Ensures accessibility and swift resolution	All Student Life Heads
Campaign Engagement	Engagement in awareness campaigns	≥1,000 engaged; ≥80% positive impact	Normalises inclusion and wellbeing	Campaigns Lead
Aspire Wallet	% of funds redeemed	≥90%	Ensures equitable access to financial support	Student Money Lead and Head of Support to Study

Strategic Projects in Pipeline

Each project links to **University Strategy 2035 outcomes** and includes what success will look like.

- Glean Site-Wide Rollout**
 - Outcome link:** Creating opportunity & transforming lives.
 - Success:** ≥40% active users in year one; higher retention in user groups.
- Inclusive Learning & UDL**
 - Outcome link:** Fostering satisfaction & equitable outcomes.
 - Success:** MH and Wellbeing, and Disability Inclusion embedded in curricula; improved NSS/feedback for inclusivity.
- Technology-Enhanced Learning (Assistive Technology)**
 - Outcome link:** Being bold, imaginative, and distinctive.
 - Success:** Higher engagement and retention in participating modules.
- Data-Driven Student Success**
 - Outcome link:** Efficient, proactive intervention.
 - Success:** Increased early flagged interventions; improved continuation.
- Health Hub & Physical Health Assessments**
 - Outcome link:** Holistic wellbeing and retention.
 - Success:** Increased staff/student uptake; measurable wellbeing gains.
- Financial Welfare Workshops & Drop-Ins**
 - Outcome link:** Financial resilience and fairness.
 - Success:** Fewer hardship claims; greater confidence in financial management.
- Driving Change in HE – Carers**
 - Outcome link:** Equity & opportunity.
 - Success:** Improved continuation and satisfaction for student carers.
- Student Communication Review**
 - Outcome link:** Student satisfaction & engagement.
 - Success:** Higher engagement rates reduced missed opportunities.
- Perceptions of Care (University-Wide)**

- **Outcome link:** Embedding care in culture.
- **Success:** Positive year-on-year shift in care perceptions.

10. Safeguarding Next Steps

- **Outcome link:** Inclusive Student Success & Civic Role.
- **Success:** Recruitment of a Safeguarding and Student Welfare Officer, achievement of NNECL accreditation, and stronger early intervention pathways — embedding sector-leading, preventative safeguarding practice that ensures equity, safety, and belonging for all students.

11. Student Life Directorate SOPs

- **Outcome link:** Efficiency & transparency.
- **Success:** All core processes documented, fair, and consistent.

Monitoring & Reporting

- **Dashboards:** Monthly monitoring of KPIs via Tableau & (future) Tribal.
- **Governance:** Bi-monthly review at Student Life SMT; quarterly upward and downward reporting
- **Annual Review:** Findings published in the **Student Life Annual Report** (Sept 2026).

This action plan frames our ambitions as measurable, accountable, and tied to sector benchmarks — making a strong case for **impact, compliance, and continuous improvement**.

Strengthening Governance and Data Insight

A PwC audit of Student Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Summer of 2025 was a tremendous success. It highlighted many aspects of innovative and best practice, as well as some areas for enhancement. Importantly, it highlighted the urgent need to move from ad hoc reporting to a consistent, data-driven governance model for the team and the directorate in which it sits. This is a challenge we embrace. In 2025/26, we will embed a clear structure for upward and downward reporting, ensuring accountability at every level. The launch of this very **Student Life Report** marks the beginning of an annual cycle, providing transparency and insight.

With the introduction of the Tribal system and new dashboards, we will be able to track demand, waiting times, and outcomes by faculty, school, and demographic — identifying gaps, targeting interventions, and evidencing impact. This will allow us not only to strengthen equity of access but also to measure success more robustly, ensuring every student counts.

Student Life Staff Development

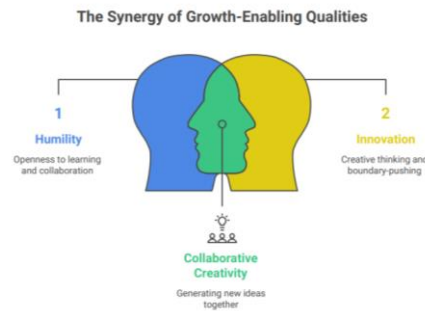
Looking ahead, we are committed to further investment in our staff. This year, every colleague has engaged in a meaningful conversation within their Development and Performance Dialogue (DPD) about their aspirations, training needs, and professional hopes, ensuring that personal growth is at the heart of our planning. Alongside this, we have identified a set of essential “musts” for all staff, including enhanced legal compliance training with a particular focus on the Equality Act within our HE context.

Our two Student Life Away Days in 2024 and 2025 have been central in bringing colleagues together — building shared understanding, strengthening cross-team relationships, and creating space to align our vision with the University’s broader priorities. Together, these developments ensure that our teams are not only confident and skilled but also united in purpose.

Looking ahead, we will also continue to carve out opportunities for colleagues to engage in restorative and formative supervision, in both structured and informal formats. This reflects the complexity of student cases they work with and acknowledges the importance of sustaining staff wellbeing, resilience, and reflective

practice. Far from being a remedial step, this is a proactive investment in our people — ensuring they feel supported, connected, and equipped to thrive in their roles.

For students, these collective commitments translate into more consistent compliance, stronger advocacy, and a competent, responsive service that supports their success.



Conclusion

2024–25 has been a year of transformation, collaboration, and impact for the Directorate of Student Life. Together we have reduced barriers, safeguarded students at risk, expanded access to specialist support, and provided vital financial assistance. From cutting waiting times for mental health support, to supporting thousands of disabled students, to distributing nearly £800,000 in hardship funds, to creating a bedrock for university colleagues to get their heads together with us and agree on a way to help students succeed, our work has changed outcomes — and lives.

This year has also marked an exciting structural change: the Directorate of Student Life has found a new home within the wider remit of **Student Journey**, joining forces with Registry and Student Success under the leadership of a new Dean of Students role. This alignment not only strengthens integration, coherence, and impact across the whole student experience, but also places us in an even stronger position to deliver on the University’s **Access and Participation Plan** commitments and statutory obligations, ensuring equity and accountability are at the heart of everything we do.

The achievements set out within this report, are not ours alone. They were made possible by the trust, patience, and commitment of staff, and by the partnerships we have built with colleagues across the University and beyond.

As we move into 2025–26, our focus turns to strengthening partnerships further:

- **With academic colleagues**, embedding wellbeing and inclusion into the curriculum and learning environment, bolstered with our new and exciting curriculum framework.
- **With our NHS and health partners**, ensuring seamless care for students whose needs cross boundaries between campus and community.
- **With the Students’ Union**, expanding opportunities for student voice, leadership, and employment.
- **With our local communities**, tackling shared challenges such as cost of living, safety, and housing.
- **With our professional services colleagues** — in HR, Finance, IT, Registry and Estates — whose collaboration and expertise are vital to our success, ensuring the systems, infrastructure, and resources underpinning our work are strong, sustainable, and innovative.

We enter the new academic year with confidence — a confidence that, in 2023, we could not yet have imagined possible. The challenges are real — rising demand, shifting policy, and evolving student needs, but we are ready to meet them head on. By deepening collaboration and sustaining our culture of **humility, innovation, and resilience**, we will ensure that Student Life continues to be a cornerstone of the University of Wolverhampton experience.

To our students — thank you. This report is as much about your courage as it is about our progress. By coming forward, sharing your stories, and trusting us with your needs, you have shown extraordinary bravery and commitment to your own health, wellbeing, and success. You are the reason we exist, and you continue to inspire us every day. In 2025–26 and beyond, we will keep working to ensure that you not only remain within study, but thrive — academically, personally, and within your communities. Together, we will continue to build a university experience where specialist support is visible, accessible, and transformative.

Dr Clare Dickens MBE

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University of Wolverhampton

September 2025

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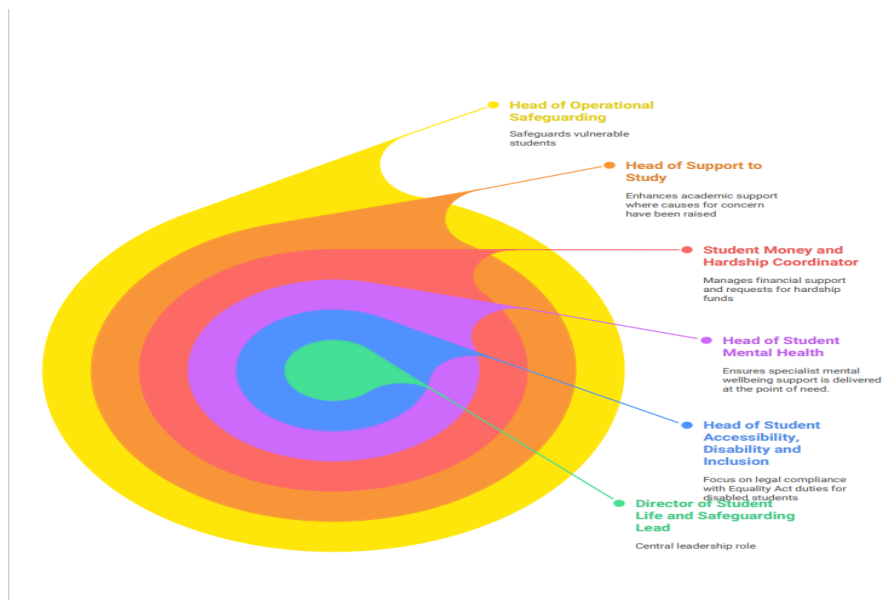
Purpose and remit of the Directorate of Student Life.

The Directorate of Student Life exists to ensure students both **thrive** and feel fully supported through their university journey, as well as ensuring the university meets its legal duties. It brings together a range of distinct specialist support functions under one cohesive framework, recognising that student success depends on more than academic strengths alone.

Key elements of our remit include:

- **Holistic student support** – covering timely wellbeing, inclusion, disability, safeguarding, financial hardship, and study support, to address both proactive and reactive needs.
- **Creating accessible and safe environments** – ensuring physical, cultural, emotional safety and belonging for students; embedding safeguarding, cultural competence, compassion and safety into routine operations.
- **Inclusive and anticipatory provision** – not only responding when students experience difficulties, but anticipating potential issues and intervening early, moving beyond deficit models only.
- **Student involvement and co-production** – involving students as collaborators, partners, “co-producers” of support, shaping the services they use
- **Continuous improvement and evidence-led practice** – building monitoring, evaluation, and feedback loops; developing theories of change, collecting impact data, and refining services over time.
- **Visibility and accessibility of services** – bringing support “front and centre,” ensuring students know how to access services, expanding physical presence (e.g. via Student Life Spaces), and delivering services where students are.
- **A resource for University Staff** -No member of our university staff should go home and worry about the support needs of our students. As a collection of specialist support teams for students we also seek to support the needs of our staff, working in partnership with them to enhance student success.

Organisational structure and team overview.



Accessibility, Disability & Inclusion Team

The Accessibility, Disability & Inclusion Team plays a central role in ensuring that all students can thrive at the University, regardless of disability, neurodivergence, or long-term health condition. The team provides specialist advice, arranges tailored support, and works proactively with academic colleagues to embed inclusive practice across teaching, learning, and assessment.

Purpose and Approach

- To remove barriers to learning and participation, enabling equal access to education.
- To adopt a personalised and anticipatory approach, tailoring support to individual student needs.
- To work collaboratively with staff and students to promote inclusion as part of the wider university culture.

Key Services

- **Reasonable Adjustments:** Development and implementation of individual learning plans to ensure students can fully engage with their course.
- **Specialist Adviser Support:** Faculty-aligned advisers who understand course demands and collaborate with academic staff to ensure adjustments are effective.
- **Funding Guidance:** Support for applications to Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) and other statutory schemes.
- **Information and Advice:** Guidance for applicants, current students, and staff on inclusive practice and accessibility.
- **Early Engagement:** Pre-enrolment referrals and discussions with prospective students to prepare for transition to university study.

Impact and Outcomes

- Hundreds of students supported annually through the creation of tailored adjustment plans.
- Positive student feedback highlights the impact of personalised support on confidence, engagement, and achievement.
- Contribution to the University's compliance with the Equality Act 2010
- Strengthening inclusive culture through staff development and awareness-raising activity.

Looking Ahead

The team will continue to build capacity for early intervention, expand training for staff on inclusive teaching practices, and refine service delivery in line with sector best practice and student feedback.

Safeguarding Team

The Safeguarding Team ensures the University remains a safe and supportive environment for all students, with clear processes for responding to safeguarding concerns. The team fulfils statutory obligations, including Prevent Duty, while adopting a student-centered approach that prioritises wellbeing and early intervention.

Purpose and Approach

- To protect students from harm, abuse, or exploitation.
- To promote a culture of safety, vigilance, and share responsibility across the University community.
- To maintain strong partnerships with external agencies, including local authorities, police, and health services.

Key Services

- **Case Management:** Coordinating responses to safeguarding referrals and supporting students at risk.
- **Training and Awareness:** Delivering staff and student training to increase understanding of safeguarding responsibilities.
- **Partnership Working:** Collaborating with external agencies to ensure holistic support for students.

Impact and Outcomes

- Effective management of safeguarding cases with timely intervention.
- Enhanced staff confidence in identifying and escalating concerns.
- Contribution to a safe and inclusive campus environment.

Looking Ahead

The function will strengthen data collection to monitor emerging risks, expand preventative training, and refine safeguarding policies to meet sector best practice.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Team

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Team provides specialist support to help students manage mental health challenges and build resilience. The team offers both reactive interventions and proactive wellbeing initiatives, supporting student success and retention.

Purpose and Approach

- To promote positive mental health and equip students with tools for wellbeing.
- To provide timely, compassionate support for students experiencing mental health difficulties, to include those of an acute and chronic nature.
- To integrate wellbeing into the wider student experience, reducing stigma and encouraging early help-seeking.

Key Services

- **Specialist Support:** Mental health clinicians, wellbeing practitioners, and counsellors providing one-to-one and group interventions.
- **Workshops and Campaigns:** Promoting resilience, stress management, and wellbeing awareness.
- **Crisis Response:** Coordinated interventions for students in urgent need.
- **Digital and Peer Support:** Online resources and peer-led initiatives to extend reach and accessibility.

Impact and Outcomes

- Significant uptake of services, with year-on-year increases in student engagement.
- Improved retention and continuation for students supported by the team.
- Growing awareness of mental health across the University community.

Humility, Innovation, and Resilience.

Looking Ahead

Future priorities include expanding preventative wellbeing programmes to include physical health checks, and embedding mental health awareness in all aspects of student life.

Student Money and Hardship Team

The Student Money and Hardship Team provides vital financial guidance and support, helping students manage their finances and access hardship funding during times of need. The team plays a key role in mitigating the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

Purpose and Approach

- To equip students with the knowledge and skills to manage their finances effectively.
- To provide compassionate and timely financial support to those facing hardship.
- To influence institutional and sector policy on student finance challenges.

Key Services

- **Financial Advice:** Guidance on budgeting, student funding, and financial planning.
- **Hardship Funds:** Administration of hardship applications and distribution of awards.
- **Cost-of-Living Support:** Signposting to internal and external support networks.
- **Money Skills Education:** Workshops, campaigns, and resources to improve financial literacy.

Impact and Outcomes

- Direct financial support enabling students to continue their studies.
- Increased student awareness of financial management strategies.
- Enhanced institutional response to the cost-of-living pressures facing students.

Looking Ahead

The team will continue to monitor financial pressures on students, expand financial education initiatives, and advocate for sustainable funding solutions

Support to Study

The Support to Study function manages the University's framework for supporting students whose health, wellbeing, or behaviour impacts their ability to engage with study. The team ensures that students are supported compassionately, while maintaining academic standards and community wellbeing.

Purpose and Approach

- To provide structured support to students whose circumstances impact study.
- To balance the needs of individual students with the wider student and staff community.
- To ensure fair, transparent, and consistent application of policy.

Key Services

- **Case Management:** Coordinating reviews and action plans for students referred to the Support to Study process.
- **Return-to-Study Plans:** Supporting students to re-engage with study following interruption.
- **Policy Development:** Maintaining and updating the Support to Study policy framework.
- **Advisory Role:** Guiding staff on when and how to refer students into the process.

Impact and Outcomes

- Clearer pathways for students experiencing significant difficulties.
- Positive outcomes for students, including continuation, improved wellbeing, or supported transition out of study.
- Improved staff confidence in managing complex student cases.

Looking Ahead

The team will refine case tracking and evaluation, enhance communication with staff and students, and strengthen preventative interventions to reduce the need for formal processes.

Wolverhampton Wallet / Aspire Scheme Update (2024–25)

The **Wolverhampton Wallet**, delivered through the Aspire platform, and led by Student Life continued to provide a flexible and transparent way of allocating bursaries, hardship funds, and other financial awards to students during the 2024–25 academic year.

Benefits for Funders

- **Control & visibility** over all awards (single or multiple beneficiaries).
- Flexibility to allocate **any value** and schedule when funds become available.
- Access to **reporting, reconciliations, and insights**.
- Ability to **retrieve unclaimed funding** or reallocate to other students, creating efficiency and savings (a new efficiency introduced within Student Life in AY 24-25).

Benefits for Students (Beneficiaries)

- **Choice and flexibility** in how funds are used.
- Single self-serve portal with notifications when funds are allocated.
- Options to withdraw via **Paylt, ATM, Aspire Cash, Aspire Vouchers, or Aspire Credit**.
- Ability to withdraw at any time, in full or part.

Key Outcomes 2024–25

- Funds allocated across a wide range of bursaries and hardship schemes, with both cash and credit awards.
- **Emergency Food Vouchers (DTHF):**
 - 94 students awarded vouchers worth **£17,765**.
 - 80 students redeemed vouchers (85% uptake), equating to **£15,460 redeemed (87%)**.
- Wallet schemes supported thousands of students with bursaries, hardship funds, scholarships, and digital inclusion awards.

Strategic Impact

Humility, Innovation, and Resilience.

The Aspire system enabled the University to:

- Provide **timely and flexible financial support** directly to students.
- Ensure **efficient use of funds**, with unclaimed allocations reabsorbed as savings.
- Improve student **experience**, offering reassurance that funds could be accessed quickly and easily in response to need.

Role Descriptions

Below are brief descriptions of each managerial role within the Student Life organisational chart: overall the directorate comprises of 30 specialist support staff across all five strands.

1. Director of Student Life and University Principal Safeguarding Lead

- **Responsibilities:**
 - Provides strategic leadership and direction for all aspects of student life, ensuring a positive and supportive environment for all students.
 - Acts as the University's Principal Safeguarding Lead, responsible for developing and implementing safeguarding policies and procedures to protect students from harm.
 - Oversees all specialist student support services, including accessibility, disability inclusion, mental health, wellbeing, financial support, and safeguarding.
 - Ensure compliance with relevant legislation and regulations related to student welfare and safeguarding.
 - Collaborate with other departments and external agencies to promote student wellbeing and safety.
 - Manages the budget and resources for student life and safeguarding services.
 - Reports to senior management on student life and safeguarding matters.

2. Head of Student Accessibility, Disability and Inclusion

- **Responsibilities:**
 - Leads the development and implementation of policies and procedures to ensure accessibility and inclusion for students with disabilities.
 - Provides advice and support to students with disabilities, including reasonable adjustments to learning and assessment.
 - Works with academic departments to promote inclusive teaching and learning practices.
 - Raises awareness of disability issues and promotes a culture of inclusion across the University.
 - Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of accessibility and inclusion initiatives.
 - Ensure compliance with relevant legislation, such as the Equality Act
 - Manages and oversees a team comprising:
- 7 Disability and Inclusion Advisors
- 1 Disability Support Advisor (with an additional advisor to be recruited in Semester 1 of Academic Year 2025/26)
- 2 British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreters
- 2 Graduate BSL Interpreters

3. Head of Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

- **Responsibilities:**
 - Leads the development and implementation of a comprehensive student mental health and wellbeing strategy.
 - Oversee the provision of mental health support services, including counselling, therapy, and crisis intervention.
 - Manages a team of mental health professionals including 6 nurses, 1 social worker, 3 counsellors, x2 PGR placement students.
 - Develops and delivers mental health awareness training for students and staff.
 - Works with academic departments to promote student wellbeing and resilience.
 - Collaborates with external mental health services and organisations.
 - Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of mental health and wellbeing initiatives.

4. Student Money and Hardship Coordinator

- **Responsibilities:**
 - Provides advice and guidance to students on financial matters, including budgeting, debt management, and student loans.
 - Administers the University's hardship fund, providing financial assistance to students in need.
 - Assesses applications for financial support and makes recommendations for awards.
 - Liaises with external funding bodies and charities.
 - Develops and delivers financial literacy workshops for students.
 - Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of financial support services.
 - Managed a team of one senior claims assessor and 2 claims assessors

5. Head of Support to Study

- **Responsibilities:**
 - Leads the development and implementation of policies and procedures to support students who are struggling with their studies.
 - Provides advice and guidance to students on academic skills, time management, and study strategies.
 - Coordinates teams of academic and support staff in response to individual causes for concern or support to study pathways.
 - Works with academic departments to identify and support students at risk of academic failure.
 - Develops and delivers workshops and resources to enhance student learning.
 - Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of support to study initiatives.
 - Managed two specialist support coordinators in class, and one student life administrator.

6. Head of Operational Safeguarding and Institutional Lead for Care Experienced and Estranged Students

- **Responsibilities:**
 - Leads the operational implementation of the University's safeguarding policies and procedures.
 - Manages and responds to safeguarding concerns and disclosures.
 - Provides training and support for staff on safeguarding matters.
 - Acts as the Institutional Lead for Care Experienced and Estranged Students, providing tailored support and guidance to this group of students.
 - Liaises with external agencies, such as social services and the police.
 - Maintains accurate records of safeguarding incidents.
 - Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

- Is due to manage a newly developed role scheduled to commence at the beginning of semester two of academic year 25/26 – safeguarding and student welfare officer.

Appendix 2

Strategic Context for the Directorate of Student Life

National Policy / Regulatory Environment

- **Office for Students (OfS)** OfS's draft strategy for 2025-2030 emphasises three strategic priorities: *quality, wider student interests*, and *sector resilience*. These include ensuring high quality student experiences, promoting equality of opportunity, and addressing financial sustainability and effective governance. Specifically, OfS has highlighted mental health and wellbeing as a priority for higher education providers, urging them to ensure students have access to timely and effective support.
- **Equality and Opportunity** A consistent national theme is closing gaps in access, success, and outcomes for underrepresented groups (disadvantaged backgrounds, disabled students, those with mental health needs, etc.). OfS expects institutions to do more than just provide equal access — services must enable **equal success**.
- **Mental Health & Wellbeing**, the Department for Education, OfS, and other bodies have increased emphasis on student mental health. There is expectation that higher education providers should not only respond to acute or crisis situations but also provide preventive, inclusive and accessible wellbeing services. OfS has funded innovation in mental health provision, particularly for groups less likely to access support.
- **Inclusion, Disability, and Regulatory Compliance** Legal obligations under the Equality Act require universities to make reasonable adjustments, prevent discrimination, and ensure accessibility (physical, pedagogical, technological). Also, regulatory requirements increasingly expect universities to have clear policies and evidence of inclusive practice.
- **Student Financial Support & Hardship** Given increasing concern over cost of living, tuition fees, housing costs etc., national policy and sector discourse are focused on student hardship, financial literacy, and ensuring students are not forced out of study for financial reasons. OfS mentions the rising costs of accommodation and living as risk factors to equality of opportunity.

OfS Priorities (Current / Emerging)

- **Equality of Opportunity:** Ensuring that students from all backgrounds can access, succeed in, and progress from higher education. This includes attention to those most exposed to risk (disability, mental health issues, low income, estrangement, etc.).
- **Student Mental Health & Wellbeing:** Funding and regulation directed at ensuring providers offer sufficient, accessible support, with innovative, intersectional approaches.
- **Student Protection & Support:** Safeguarding, preventing harm, dealing with sexual misconduct, ensuring student safety are important regulatory concerns.
- **Quality & Student Experience:** Universities are expected to deliver not just academic programmes but holistic experiences (wellbeing, inclusion, student support) that align with what students expect, including transparency, fairness, good teaching, assessment, support.

Alignment: How the Directorate of Student Life Supports Strategy 2035

The Directorate of Student Life's services directly contribute to the University's Strategy 2035. This section of the report highlights the alignment across key strategic pillars, including Inclusive Student Success, Civic Role & Community Engagement, Sustainability, Productivity & Excellence, and Operational Excellence & Culture. This section of the report demonstrates how the Directorate's work in safeguarding, mental health and wellbeing, disability and inclusion, student money and hardship, and support to study directly supports the University's overarching strategic goals.

Inclusive Student Success

The Directorate of Student Life's services are intrinsically linked to the Student Success strategy. The services provided by the Directorate, namely:

- **Safeguarding:** Ensuring a safe and secure environment for all students, protecting them from harm and exploitation.
- **Mental Health & Wellbeing:** Providing support and resources to promote positive mental health and wellbeing, addressing issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as complex mental health needs and crisis.
- **Disability & Inclusion:** Ensuring that students with disabilities have equal access to education and support, promoting an inclusive and accessible learning environment.
- **Student Money & Hardship:** Providing financial advice and support to students facing financial difficulties, helping them to manage their finances and access hardship funds.
- **Support to Study:** Offering academic support and guidance to students, helping them to develop their study skills and achieve their academic goals.

These services directly address barriers to student success. By providing comprehensive support, the Directorate helps students overcome challenges, build resilience, and thrive in their academic pursuits. The Directorate fosters environments where all students, regardless of their background or circumstances, can achieve their full potential. This proactive approach ensures that students are equipped with the necessary tools and resources to navigate their academic journey successfully. The focus on early intervention and preventative measures further enhances student wellbeing and academic performance, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Civic Role & Community Engagement

The Directorate of Student Life plays a crucial role in supporting the University's civic mission of opportunity and social mobility. By providing targeted support to students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds, including those with additional needs or facing financial hardship, the Directorate actively promotes inclusivity and equity.

The Directorate's commitment to supporting these students ensures that they have equal access to educational opportunities and resources. This support enables them to overcome barriers and achieve their academic and personal goals. By empowering students from diverse backgrounds, the Directorate contributes to a more inclusive and representative student body, reflecting the diversity of the wider community.

Furthermore, the Directorate's engagement with the community extends beyond the University campus. Through partnerships with local organisations and initiatives, the Directorate provides students with opportunities to engage in community service and contribute to the betterment of society. This engagement fosters a sense of civic responsibility and encourages students to become active and engaged citizens.

Sustainability, Productivity & Excellence

The Directorate of Student Life's strong student support services have undoubtedly impact on student retention, continuation, and overall outcomes. By providing comprehensive support and resources, the Directorate helps students overcome challenges and stay on track with their studies. This, in turn, leads to improved institutional productivity, as evidenced by lower dropout rates and better progression rates.

The Directorate's focus on student wellbeing and academic success contributes to a positive learning environment, where students feel supported and motivated to achieve their full potential. This positive environment fosters a sense of belonging and encourages students to engage actively in their studies.

Moreover, the Directorate's commitment to quality and excellence enhances the University's reputation. By providing high-quality student support services, the Directorate helps to uphold Wolverhampton's reputation for quality education and student care. This reputation attracts prospective students and enhances the University's standing in the higher education sector, directly supporting Strategy 2035's broader goals of achieving excellence in all areas.

Operational Excellence & Culture

The Directorate of Student Life is committed to delivering student support services in a timely, efficient, and evidence-based manner. This commitment aligns with the University's priority for operational excellence. By streamlining processes and utilising data-driven insights, the Directorate ensures that students receive the support they need when they need it.

The Directorate's focus on efficiency and effectiveness extends to all aspects of its operations, from initial contact to ongoing support. By utilising technology and innovative approaches, the Directorate strives to provide seamless and accessible services to all students, which owes due regard to delivering efficiency and cost savings to the university.

Furthermore, the Directorate fosters inclusive behaviours and promotes a culture of respect and understanding. This aligns with the People & Culture component of Strategy 2035. By creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, the Directorate ensures that all students feel valued and supported. This inclusive culture promotes a sense of belonging and encourages students to engage fully in their academic and personal development. The Directorate actively promotes diversity and inclusion through training, awareness campaigns, and collaborative initiatives. This commitment to inclusivity enhances student experience and contributes to a more positive and equitable learning environment for all.

Appendix 3

Student Life Away Day – March 2024

In March 2024, we held our first **Student Life Directorate Away Day** at the Black Country Museum. This event marked an important milestone in bringing together colleagues — some with decades of service and others brand new — to begin shaping our future as the new department of **Student Life**.

Highlights of the Day

- **Team Dynamics:** Colleagues engaged in reflective activities celebrating similarities and differences, strengthening relationships, and building trust across teams.

- **Inspiration from the Doctoral College:** A session highlighted how professional service teams can measure and evaluate impact, contribute to literature, share knowledge, and innovate across the higher education sector.
- **Creativity & Symbolism:** The day concluded with a **terrarium masterclass**, chosen as a metaphor for our collective journey.

The Terrarium Metaphor

- **Base layers** represented the solid foundations we have built over the past 19 months, and more intensively in recent months.
- **Individual plants** symbolised teams and individuals: each unique, nurtured, and placed to thrive within the wider environment of the University.
- **Water levels** illustrated the pace of change: too much risks overwhelm, too little risks stagnation.
- **The terrarium housing** reflected the University itself — a structure within which we must remain visible, sustainable, and aligned.

Impact

The Away Day was not only an opportunity for colleagues to connect, but also a pivotal moment in establishing shared purpose, confidence, and optimism. Together, we reflected on how, with the right conditions — **financial, cultural, operational, and strategic** — Student Life will continue to grow into a sustainable, innovative, and sector-leading department.

Student Life Away Day – September 2025

In September 2025, colleagues gathered at the Hayward Suite, Molineux Stadium, for our second **Student Life Directorate Away Day**. This event built on the foundations of our first gathering, offering space to reflect on our journey so far, prepare for the 2025/26 academic year, and strengthen our shared purpose as a directorate.

Highlights of the Day

- **Welcome and Scene Setting:** Dr Clare Dickens opened the day with reflections on Student Life’s progress and the year ahead, including new national requirements such as the *Office for Students Condition of Registration (E6)* and the *Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act (2025)*.
- **Keynote on Generative AI:** Nationally recognised expert Danny Mirza delivered an energising session on the potential of AI in Higher Education, demystifying its functionality and demonstrating how it could enhance efficiency, wellbeing, and student experience.
- **Interactive Planning:** Colleagues reflected on how AI could be applied within Student Life, sharing ideas and posing questions for future adoption.

Creativity, Reflection & Teamwork

- **Messy Strategic Thinking:** A team activity inspired colleagues to embrace creativity and resilience. Through a **clay workshop**, we explored the symbolism of imperfection, humility, and continuous learning — reminding us that both individuals and teams thrive not by being perfect, but by being adaptable and authentic.
- **Genio Demonstration:** Joshua Hartrick showcased the University’s new partnership with **Genio**, following an assistive technology review. This session highlighted how tools such as CORA (Capture, Organise, Refine, Apply) would transform notetaking, accessibility, and learning for all students.
- **Team-Based Reflection:** To close the day, colleagues identified the “*one thing*” each team would focus on for 2025/26, creating a springboard for collective planning and accountability.

Impact

The Away Day was a powerful opportunity to strengthen connections, prepare for sector-wide changes, and reflect on the innovation and creativity that drive our directorate forward. It reinforced our shared commitment to building a **Student Life culture where colleagues feel proud to belong and confident in shaping meaningful change for students and the University.**