

EDA College Ltd

Access and participation plan 2027-28 to 2030-31

Approved by the Board of Governors on 11 September 2026. Submitted with the College's representation to the Office for Students against the provisional decision of 11 August 2026.

EDA College Ltd: access and participation plan 2027-28 to 2030-31

1. Introduction and strategic aim

EDA College is an independent higher education provider in Solihull. Since January 2024 it has taught the BSc (Hons) Business Management with Foundation Year on behalf of Birmingham Newman University, under a subcontractual arrangement, and at the time of writing it teaches 855 students on that programme. Those students are registered with the University and are covered by the University's own access and participation plan. This plan concerns a different group. From 2027/28 the College intends to register students directly with itself on the NCC Education Level 4 and Level 5 Diplomas in Business (HTQ), for which NCC Education accredited the College as a partner centre on 10 September 2026, and this plan sets out what it will do to promote equality of opportunity for those students.

The College exists to serve people who have not been well served by higher education. Of the students it teaches today, 91.8 per cent are mature and 95.2 per cent come from the two most deprived quintiles of the index of multiple deprivation, against 33.9 per cent of full time undergraduates across the sector. Those figures describe the students the College was established to teach, and they are the basis on which this plan has been written.

The College's strategic aim for this plan is to admit students who would not otherwise enter higher education, to support them to complete, and to see them into work or further study at rates that bear comparison with the sector as a whole. The College is registering its first directly enrolled cohort and has limited itself to four objectives, since a plan which concentrates its effort is likely to achieve more for fifty students a year than one which spreads it across a longer list.

2. Risks to equality of opportunity

The College has assessed its performance in the manner described at annex A. Because it has taught only under a subcontractual arrangement, it holds no entrant, continuation, completion or progression data of its own, and the students this plan covers do not yet exist. It has therefore used the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register to identify the risks its students are most likely to experience, as Regulatory advice 6 provides for where a provider cannot undertake a credible assessment of its own performance, and it has tested those risks against the profile of the students it teaches today and against published sector and local data.

Four risks are addressed by this plan, one at each stage of the student lifecycle.

Risk	Why it applies to the College's students	Stage
Risk 1: knowledge and skills	The register names mature students, students from low income households and first in family students among those most likely to experience this risk. The College's intake is drawn overwhelmingly from the first two groups. Across subcontracted provision nationally, 55.3 per cent of students enter with no, unknown or	Access

Risk	Why it applies to the College's students	Stage
	other entry qualifications, and the College's own students enter predominantly through a foundation year. From 2027/28 the College will admit directly at Level 4, which makes the question of how students acquire the knowledge and skills to succeed at that level more pressing rather than less	
Risk 6: insufficient academic support	The register names mature students, first in family students, commuter students and students from routine and semi-routine occupational backgrounds, and directs providers to consider the intersections between them. Continuation across delivery partner provision nationally was 75.2 per cent against 87.3 per cent across all providers. The College treats this as the risk most material to its students' outcomes	Continuation
Risk 10: cost pressures	The register names students from low income households, mature students, commuter students and those with caring responsibilities. With more than nine in ten of its students drawn from the two most deprived quintiles, and a cohort likely to be balancing study with employment and family responsibility, the College expects financial and practical pressure to bear on continuation and completion more heavily than for a conventional intake	Continuation and completion
Risk 12: progression	The register names mature students, vocational learners, students from low income households and those with parental responsibility. Progression from business and management is the weakest of the ten subjects the Office for Students has examined, at a weighted median of 64.7 per cent for full time undergraduates, and progression from delivery partner provision was 62.8 per cent against 72.0 per cent sector wide	Progression

The College has considered all twelve risks in the register. Risks 2, 5, 7, 8 and 11 are recognised as present for students of this profile and are addressed within the four intervention strategies below rather than as separate risks, because separating them at this scale would produce five further strategies competing for the same resource and the same small cohort. Risks 3, 4 and 9 are not addressed, and annex A explains why.

3. Objectives

	Objective	Risk	Target
1	To sustain the College's reach into the most deprived neighbourhoods of its catchment as its student body grows fourfold, so that growth does not come at the cost of the students the College exists to serve	1	PTA_1
2	To raise continuation among its directly registered students well above the level associated with provision of this kind, through academic support designed for students entering without recent formal study	6	PTS_1

	Objective	Risk	Target
3	To ensure that financial and practical pressure is not the reason a student leaves before completing	10	PTS_2
4	To improve progression into managerial and professional employment and further study, against a subject and a mode of delivery in which progression is weakest across the sector	12	PTP_1

4. Intervention strategies

Intervention strategy 1: getting in without a foundation year

Addresses risk 1. Objective 1.

The College's current students enter higher education through a foundation year. The provision this plan covers begins at Level 4, and the College cannot assume that the same students will arrive ready for it. The strategy has four components.

The first is recognition of prior learning and experience. Most of the College's applicants are mature and many bring substantial workplace experience that maps onto the learning outcomes of a Level 4 business qualification without appearing on any certificate. The College will operate a recognition process with trained assessors and a published policy, and will report annually on how many applicants are admitted through it.

The second is a pre-entry preparation programme. All offer holders will be invited to a programme before enrolment covering academic writing, numeracy for business, digital skills including the spreadsheet and presentation software used throughout the course, study organisation and what will be expected of them in assessment. It is designed for people who have been away from formal education, in many cases for a decade or more, and it is free. The College had proposed a short programme. Its current students, consulted on this plan, told it plainly that they would not have coped at Level 4 without a foundation year and that preparation before enrolment was what they most needed, and the programme has been extended in length and scope in response. It will run for two weeks before enrolment, with two sessions a week delivered in person at the College, timed in the evening, the daytime or at the weekend according to the needs of the group, and materials available online between sessions.

The third is contextual admissions. The College will admit on the basis of what an applicant can be supported to achieve rather than on prior attainment alone, and will publish the contextual factors it takes into account.

The fourth is the most important. Where an applicant is not ready for direct entry at Level 4, the College will not admit them to it, and will instead direct them to the foundation year route available through the programme it delivers with Birmingham Newman University, which exists for that purpose. The College does not consider that admitting a student to a level they are unlikely to pass serves the interests of access.

Expected outcome: the College maintains its reach into the most deprived neighbourhoods of its catchment whilst growing fourfold, and admits students who are equipped to succeed at the level to which they are admitted.

Intervention strategy 2: academic support built for the students who are here

Addresses risk 6. Objective 2.

The register identifies insufficient personalised academic support as the risk most likely to affect mature students, first in family students and commuters. The College's response rests on six commitments, two of which were added after consulting its students. Every student has a named personal tutor who arranges contact at set points during the year, since the students who most need support are, on the College's experience, the least likely to seek it out. Teaching is timetabled to suit students who are working or have caring responsibilities; the College will consult students before changing the pattern, will give at least four weeks' notice of any change to the days or times of teaching, and will not change the days on which a cohort is taught within a year of study except by agreement with the students affected, because its current students told it that such a change, made at short notice, had put their employment at risk. Engagement is monitored from the first week, with contact triggered by absence or non-submission rather than by the student asking, and the College will keep that contact proportionate, since students also told it that repeated reminders to those already attending are counterproductive. Academic skills support is embedded within modules, since support offered separately tends to be used least by those who need it most, and it includes English language support and instruction in spreadsheet and presentation software, both of which students asked for. And the College will fund a programme of activity that builds belonging, meaning social events, visits, guest speakers and sporting and cultural activity, because when its students were asked where a fixed sum would best be spent to help them stay and finish, this was their answer in every group and the College had not planned for it.

Expected outcome: continuation rises towards the target at PTS_1, and the gap between the College's continuation and the sector rate for all providers narrows across the plan period.

Intervention strategy 3: removing cost as a reason to leave

Addresses risk 10. Objective 3.

The College will operate a hardship fund with a published application process and a decision within five working days, since a fund which takes longer to pay out is of limited use to a student in immediate difficulty. It will provide texts, materials and digital access at no charge to students. It will record the reasons students give for withdrawing in a form that allows financial and practical causes to be distinguished from academic ones, which it does not at present do. And it will provide money guidance at enrolment and at the start of each subsequent year, delivered by staff trained to give it.

The hardship fund is provided at £15,000 in 2027/28, rising to £30,000 by 2030/31 as the cohort grows. Texts, materials and digital access are provided at about £150 for each student, £7,000 in the first year rising to £30,000. Money guidance is delivered within existing staffing and carries no separate cost.

Expected outcome: completion meets the target at PTS_2, and withdrawals recorded as attributable to financial or practical pressure fall across the plan period.

Intervention strategy 4: progression into work that uses the qualification

Addresses risk 12. Objective 4.

Progression is the measure on which the College's subject and mode of delivery perform least well nationally, and the College will address it from the start of the course. Employability activity will be embedded in modules at both levels. The College will build relationships with employers in the Solihull and

Birmingham area, drawing on the leadership and management skills need identified as one of three priorities in the West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan. Every student will be offered a work placement, project or employer-set assessment. The College will provide enterprise support, covering starting and running a business, financial literacy and the essentials of taxation and business regulation, with business mentoring where it can be arranged, because when its students were asked what they wanted to be doing in three years a large proportion said running a business of their own, and they asked for exactly this. And the College will establish progression routes to Level 6 study, with named partners, so that students completing a Level 5 diploma have a clear onward path.

Expected outcome: progression meets the target at PTP_1, against a subject median of 64.7 per cent and a threshold of 45 per cent.

5. Targets

The College's targets are expressed as rates rather than as gaps between groups of its own students. More than nine in ten of its students are drawn from the two most deprived quintiles and more than nine in ten are mature. There is no comparator group within its own cohort against which a gap could meaningfully be measured, and any figure derived from a group of that size would carry statistical uncertainty so wide as to be uninformative, as well as risking the identification of individuals. The College has therefore set targets against published national comparators and against the numerical thresholds the Office for Students applies under condition B3 to full time other undergraduate courses, which are the thresholds applicable to this provision.

Ref	Target	Threshold	Sector context	2030-31
PTA_1	Proportion of entrants from index of multiple deprivation quintiles 1 and 2	None	33.9% of full time undergraduates sector wide; 60.6% across subcontracted provision	90%
PTS_1	Continuation	75%	87.3% full time first degree, all providers; 75.2% at delivery partners	82%
PTS_2	Completion	65%	88.5% full time first degree, all providers; 75.7% at delivery partners	75%
PTP_1	Progression to managerial or professional employment or further study	45%	72.0% full time first degree, all providers; 64.7% weighted median in business and management	60%

Two points should be made about how these have been set. The thresholds shown are those for full time other undergraduate provision, which are lower than those for first degrees. The College has not set its targets at those thresholds, since a threshold is the level below which provision is judged inadequate and is not in itself a standard to aim at. Each target sits well above the threshold and is consistent with the commitments the College has already made in its published access and participation statement, which are continuation above 80 per cent, completion above 75 per cent and progression above 60 per cent.

Three of these four targets cannot be fully measured within the period this plan covers. Its first directly registered students enter in September 2027 on a two year route, so continuation is first measurable in 2028/29 and completion in 2029/30. Progression cannot be measured within the plan period at all, since the Graduate Outcomes survey is conducted around fifteen months after qualification. The College has

therefore set milestones where a measure will exist and has identified leading indicators it can collect from the first term of teaching. Where no cohort can be measured in a year, the fees, investment and targets document carries the condition B3 threshold for that year as a placeholder, because the template requires a figure in every year; those placeholders are not targets and are shown in brackets below.

Target	First measurable	Milestones	Leading indicators reported from the first term
PTA_1	2027-28	90% in each year of the plan	Applications and offers by deprivation quintile; admissions through recognition of prior learning; pre-entry programme take-up
PTS_1	2028-29	(2027-28 75%), 2028-29 78%, 2029-30 80%, 2030-31 82%	Week four and week twelve engagement; module pass rates at first attempt; take-up of academic support
PTS_2	2029-30	(2027-28 65%, 2028-29 65%), 2029-30 72%, 2030-31 75%	Level 4 to Level 5 progression; withdrawal reasons recorded at exit
PTP_1	After the plan period	(45% in each year of the plan); 60% for the first qualifying cohort, reported in the succeeding plan	Placement and employer project participation; confirmed Level 6 progression routes; destinations of students taught under the subcontractual arrangement, as a proxy

6. Whole provider approach

The College is small, and a whole provider approach describes how it already works. The Principal holds executive responsibility for this plan and the governing body approves it and receives an annual report on progress against every target. The plan was approved by the governing body on 11 September 2026.

Responsibility for delivery sits with named post holders, and progress against the leading indicators is reviewed each term. Where a target is not being met, the College will say so in its annual report and set out what it is changing.

The College's equality, diversity and inclusion policy, its student support policy and its personal tutoring policy have been reviewed against this plan and are consistent with it. Staff development for 2027/28 will include working with mature students returning to study, which the College recognises as a distinct skill.

7. Student consultation

The College consulted its current students in shaping this plan. Those students are registered with Birmingham Newman University and taught by the College, and they are the closest available proxy for the students the plan covers, sharing the same catchment, the same age profile and the same socio-economic background.

The consultation ran from 1 to 4 September 2026 and was conducted by the College's Student Success Lead and its Communication Officer, neither of whom teaches or assesses the students concerned. It had two parts. A one page questionnaire, setting out the four intervention strategies in this plan in plain terms and asking students to say which measures would have helped them most, to rank the four strategies and to say whether they could have coped with direct entry at Level 4 without a foundation year, was handed out and collected in timetabled sessions. It was offered to the 385 students timetabled during the consultation

period, of whom 144 attended and 74 completed it, a completion rate of 51 per cent among those attending. Five focus groups of between eight and twelve students, drawn from Levels 3, 4 and 5, then discussed a structured set of eight questions, with between fifty and sixty students taking part in all.

Students broadly supported the four strategies. On three matters they disagreed with the College or told it something it had not planned for, and the plan has been changed in each case.

First, and most clearly, students did not accept that direct entry at Level 4 was right for people like them. Many said the foundation year had given them the confidence, the business knowledge and the understanding of what would be expected of them without which they would not have been ready for degree level study, and the focus groups returned repeatedly to the need for preparation before enrolment, in the form of short certificated courses, academic preparation programmes and induction to the College's systems. The College had proposed a short pre-entry programme. In response it has lengthened and strengthened that programme, as intervention strategy 1 now describes, and it has made explicit that the foundation year route through the programme it delivers with Birmingham Newman University remains available and will be recommended to applicants who are not ready to begin at Level 4.

Second, when asked where the College should spend a fixed sum to help students stay and finish, students did not choose the hardship fund or free materials the College had proposed. In every group they chose activity that builds belonging: social events, trips, sporting activity, cultural celebrations, volunteering and guest speakers. The College had not planned for this. Intervention strategy 2 now includes it, on the evidence of the students themselves that isolation is among the things that lead them to consider leaving.

Third, students were critical of how the College communicates with them. They described timetable changes, including a move from weekend to weekday teaching, made with too little notice to fit around their employment; too many reminder emails and telephone calls about attendance; and online sessions that were poorly signposted. The College had committed in this plan to timetabling that suits working students. Students told it that the commitment depends on changes being consulted on and notified in good time, and intervention strategy 2 now provides for that.

Two further things students said have shaped the plan without amounting to disagreement. Their ambitions for three years' time were strikingly entrepreneurial, and they asked for support in starting and running businesses, in financial literacy and in understanding taxation and regulation, alongside the placements and employer links the College had proposed; intervention strategy 4 now includes enterprise support. And a number of students, particularly those for whom English is an additional language, asked for language support and for training in the ordinary tools of business, such as spreadsheets and presentation software, which intervention strategy 2 now provides.

What students said they nearly did not apply because of, and what gets in the way of their studying, matched the assessment of performance at annex A closely: employment, childcare and adult caring, travel distance and cost, money, health, long gaps since previous study and low confidence. The College takes that as confirmation that the risks it has chosen to address are the right ones.

The College will report in its annual monitoring what students said and what it did in response. From 2027/28 it will establish a student representative arrangement for its own students and will involve them in monitoring this plan, in evaluating the intervention strategies and in preparing the plan that follows it.

8. Evaluation

The College's own directly registered cohort will be small in the early years of this plan, and the College has been realistic about what it can evaluate on those numbers. It will not claim causal impact where the numbers cannot support such a claim.

Each intervention strategy has a theory of change setting out what the College is doing, what it expects to change and why, and the evidence on which that expectation rests. Those are at annex B. Evaluation will be at the level the numbers permit: narrative and descriptive in the first two years, moving to empirical comparison as cohorts accumulate and the College can aggregate across years. The College will rely substantially on qualitative methods, since with fifty students a year the reasons students give for staying or leaving are likely to be more informative than the proportions.

The College will publish an annual report on this plan covering progress against each target, the leading indicators, what the evaluation showed and what it is changing. Where data is suppressed because of small numbers, the report will say so.

The College also commits to collecting, from its first direct cohort, the data it presently lacks: age on entry, deprivation quintile, eligibility for free school meals where a student is able to report it, ethnicity disaggregated into individual groups, disability including receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance, first in family status, caring responsibilities and commuting distance. It will report on all of these annually.

9. Investment

The College will invest in the activity described in this plan as set out below. Investment rises across the plan as the number of students registered with the College rises from fifty to two hundred.

	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	Plan total
Access activity	£20,000	£25,000	£30,000	£35,000	£110,000
Financial support for students	£22,000	£35,000	£48,000	£60,000	£165,000
Research and evaluation	£8,000	£10,000	£12,000	£15,000	£45,000
Total	£50,000	£70,000	£90,000	£110,000	£320,000
Higher fee income	£36,500	£73,000	£109,500	£146,000	£365,000
Investment as a proportion of higher fee income	137%	96%	82%	75%	88%

Higher fee income is the amount by which the College's fee of £7,250 exceeds the basic amount, which for 2027/28 is £6,520, multiplied by the number of students. Because the College's fee sits only a little above the basic amount, higher fee income is modest, and the College's investment exceeds it in the first year and is close to it thereafter. The investment is funded from the College's general income and not only from the higher fee element. Access activity comprises the pre-entry preparation programme, recognition of prior learning and community outreach under intervention strategy 1. Financial support comprises the hardship fund and the provision of texts, materials and digital access under intervention strategy 3. Research and evaluation covers the evaluation of all four strategies. Academic support under intervention strategy 2 and progression activity under intervention strategy 4, which the fees, investment and targets document records by strategy rather than by category, add a further £180,000 across the plan, so that the College's total investment in the activity described in this plan is £480,000 over four years.

The College charges £7,250 a year for the provision covered by this plan. That is above the basic amount and below the higher amount applicable to a provider with an approved plan, which is why this plan is required.

10. Provision of information to students

The College publishes its fees, the financial support available and the terms on which it is awarded on its website, before applications open for each cycle. It will publish this plan and a summary of it in plain language.

The College also recognises a particular obligation arising from its position. It teaches two populations under different arrangements, and from 2027/28 it will do so at the same time. Students taught under the subcontractual arrangement with Birmingham Newman University are the University's students: the University holds their contract, receives their fee and is responsible for any refund. Students registered directly with the College from 2027/28 will contract with the College, pay their fee to the College and look to the College for any refund. The College will make that distinction plain in every document a student sees, and will not use the same terms and conditions, complaints process or refund policy for both.

Annex A: assessment of performance

This annex sets out the College's approach to assessing its performance, the evidence on which the assessment rests, the indications of risk identified and the reasoning by which the risks addressed by this plan were selected. It also records the risks considered and not addressed, and the data the College undertakes to collect during the plan period.

A1. Approach

The College's evidential position should be stated at the outset. All the higher education the College has delivered has been delivered under a subcontractual arrangement with Birmingham Newman University. Those students are the University's students and their outcomes are reported through the University's returns. The College has therefore never appeared in its own right on the Office for Students access and participation data dashboard and holds no entrant, continuation, completion or progression data of its own. The population this plan covers is in any case prospective, since the College will not enrol students in its own name until 2027/28.

Regulatory advice 6 provides at paragraph 30 that where a provider does not have sufficient data to undertake a credible assessment of its performance it may use the national groups identified in the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register to identify potential risks its students may be facing. Regulatory notice 1 recognises at paragraph 60 that statistical uncertainty is a common challenge for smaller providers and encourages early discussion with the Office for Students. The College has taken that route. It has used the risk register to identify risk, the students it teaches today as an evidential proxy for those it expects to recruit, published sector data as comparators and local data for the context in which it recruits.

A2. The profile of the students the College teaches

The College's published access and participation statement records that 91.8 per cent of its students are mature and 95.2 per cent come from the two most deprived quintiles of the index of multiple deprivation. Retention across the three cohorts taught to date has ranged between 77 and 83 per cent.

Characteristic, full-time undergraduates	The College	Subcontracted provision, 2022-23	All students, 2022-23
Mature on entry	91.8%	82.0%	24.9%
Deprivation quintiles 1 and 2	95.2%	60.6%	33.9%
Living locally before entry	Not collected	48.8%	24.2%
No, unknown or other entry qualifications	Not collected	55.3%	9.0%
Reporting a disability	Not collected	7.3%	18.9%
Minority ethnic background	23.0%	31.8%	28.0%

On the three characteristics for which the College holds data, its students are drawn considerably more heavily from mature and deprived populations than students taught under subcontractual arrangements generally, who are in turn drawn more heavily from those populations than the sector as a whole. The

College's intake is, in substance, a widening participation intake in its entirety, and this plan is written on that basis.

A3. Local context

The borough average does not describe the College's catchment. Solihull is the twenty-eighth least deprived upper tier local authority in England. Eighteen of its 134 lower layer super output areas nonetheless fall within the most deprived ten per cent nationally, and six within the most deprived five per cent. On the education, skills and training domain, seventeen Solihull neighbourhoods are among the most deprived ten per cent nationally and ten among the most deprived five per cent, and all seventeen lie within the North Solihull regeneration area. In Chelmsley Wood, at the ninth percentile of deprivation nationally, 21 per cent of working age residents hold no qualification and 19 per cent hold one at Level 4 or above.

Across Birmingham, 11.8 per cent of residents aged 16 to 64 hold no qualifications and 44.4 per cent hold a Level 4 qualification or above, against 6.9 and 47.1 per cent for England. Nationally, 28.9 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals had entered higher education by the age of 19 in 2023/24, against 49.0 per cent of those not eligible.

The employer context supports the provision. The West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan, which covers Solihull, identifies leadership and management skills as one of three priorities.

The College does not use area based participation measures such as POLAR4 or TUNDRA as a primary basis for analysis. Both measure young participation, and a cohort in which more than nine in ten students are mature is not meaningfully described by them. The College uses the index of multiple deprivation in combination with individual circumstances, consistent with the expectation that area based measures are not used in isolation where the risk relates to individual circumstances.

A4. Indications of risk

The College has identified four. At access, a high proportion of its students enter without standard qualifications and after a substantial gap since formal study, and at present the great majority enter through a foundation year rather than directly at Level 4. At continuation, retention across the College's three cohorts sits below the rate for all providers and below the weighted median for business and management. At continuation and completion, a cohort drawn overwhelmingly from the most deprived quintiles and likely to be balancing study with work and caring responsibility is exposed to cost and capacity pressure to a degree a conventional intake is not. At progression, business and management performs least well of the ten subjects examined, and delivery partner provision least well again.

A fifth indication may emerge when Birmingham Newman University supplies outcomes data for the students the College teaches. Attainment is the most likely candidate and no assertion is made about it here.

A5. Risks considered and not addressed

Risks 2, 5, 7, 8 and 11 are recognised as present and are addressed within the four intervention strategies rather than separately, and section 4 identifies where. Risks 3 and 4, perception of higher education and application success rates, are not addressed: the College recruits locally, largely by word of mouth and community referral, and does not operate a selective admissions process in which success rates could vary by characteristic. It will keep this under review as it begins to recruit in its own name. Risk 9, the ongoing

impacts of coronavirus, is not addressed, as the College does not consider it a distinguishing risk for a cohort entering in 2027/28.

A6. Confidence and statistical uncertainty

The confidence that can be placed in this assessment is limited by the size of the College's numbers. Single year figures for any subgroup would be unreliable and, in most cases, disclosive, and the College has therefore not disaggregated its retention figures by characteristic. Where it has cited its own data it has done so across all cohorts taught to date rather than year by year. Data suppressed or omitted because of small numbers is identified as such wherever it appears. The College expects statistical uncertainty to remain material throughout the first two years of the plan and has set targets as ambitious estimates against national comparators accordingly, which the guidance recognises as the appropriate approach where a provider's own data cannot support a full assessment.