

Flagship Programme: Pathways to a Degree

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Context and background

Cardiff University's Division of Lifelong Learning (LEARN) exists to provide, support and facilitate high-quality, accessible, affordable and flexible higher education (HE) for a diverse range of adult learners and communities.

LEARN's flagship programme, Pathways to a Degree, offers supportive part-time routes to degree study at Cardiff University. The aim of the Programme is to widen access to HE for adults who might not normally consider applying to university: learners from socially and economically deprived backgrounds, those who missed the chance to study at university when they were younger and those disadvantaged by physical disabilities and/or mental health conditions. LEARN typically recruits students from disadvantaged areas¹ and those from the University's priority groups for widening access: care leavers, carers, veterans, estranged young people, refugees and asylum seekers.

Pathways

- ➔ Business Management, Marketing, and Accounting
- ➔ Computer Science and Applied Software Engineering
- ➔ Earth and Environmental Sciences
- ➔ English Language, English Literature, Creative Writing, and Philosophy
- ➔ History, Archaeology and Religion
- ➔ Media, Journalism and Culture
- ➔ International Relations and Politics
- ➔ Law ➔ Healthcare
- ➔ Medical Pharmacology
- ➔ Dental Hygiene or Dental Therapy & Hygiene
- ➔ Optometry ➔ Psychology
- ➔ Social Science ➔ MA in Social Work

Each Pathways consist of 60 credits of Level 4 modules and have been developed and introduced in partnership with individual academic schools. Currently there are 13 Pathways on offer.

Cardiff University's commitment to Lifelong Learning is steeped in its history and the longevity and success of the Pathways to a Degree programme is testament to this commitment.

Sara Jones
Lifelong Learning

¹ This is based on postcode according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD); most learners are from quintiles 1 and 2, representing the 40% most disadvantaged areas within Wales

The LEARN Community and Outreach Team works with various community organisations who signpost Pathway courses to their clients.

Promotion and recruitment from these groups has been successful as shown in Table 1 for the 2024-25 year.

Table 1: Characteristics of Pathways learners 2024-25 (each category is independent of others so some learners may be included more than one row)

Student characteristic	Proportion
WIMD quintile 1 or 2	63%
BAME	49%
Cardiff University's priority groups: care experienced, carers veterans, estranged young people and asylum seekers	22%
Refugee or asylum seeker ²	14%
Disclosed a disability	21%
LGBTQ+	16%

Support for pathways students

LEARN provides bespoke academic and pastoral support for Pathways students, which includes:

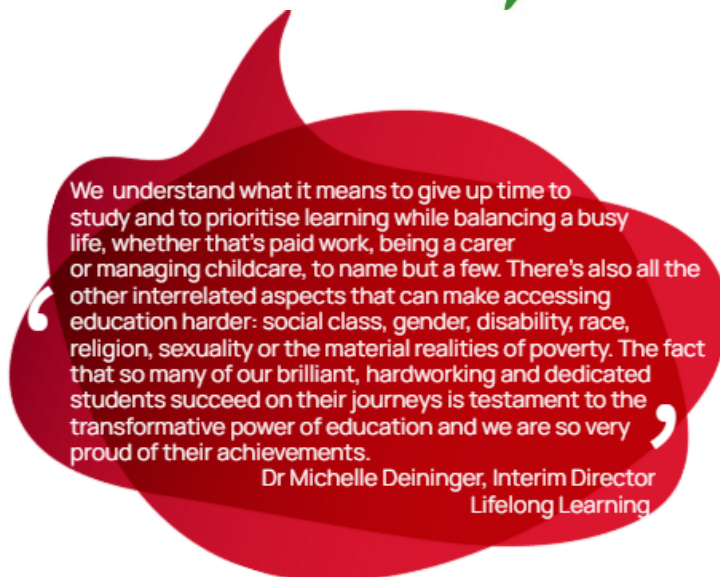
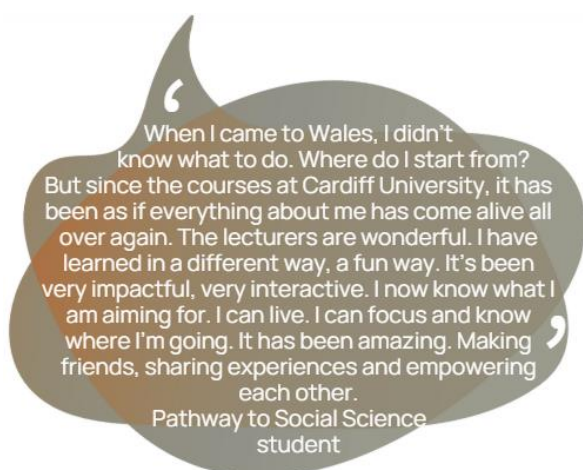
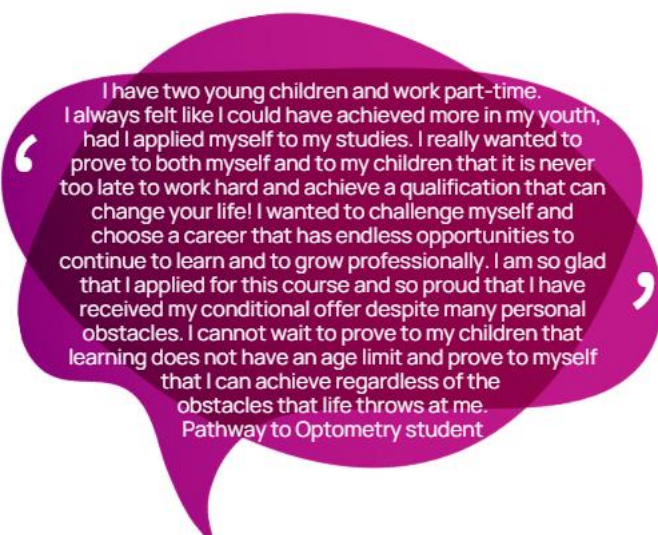
- ➔ Pre-enrolment academic guidance
- ➔ Advice on module selection
- ➔ A dedicated Pathways Induction event
- ➔ Guidance on students' applications for funding from Student Finance Wales
- ➔ Ongoing support for applications to university via UCAS, including personal statement support and references
- ➔ Pastoral support from experienced adult education tutors, the Pathways Coordinator, and relevant Co-ordinating Lecturers
- ➔ Mature Students' Induction event post-Pathway (led by LEARN and the WP team and open to all mature students at the University)

² Asylum seekers are recorded twice as they are a priority group for Cardiff University and are eligible for University scholarships (refugees are not)

Student success

Student numbers on our Pathways have remained healthy despite the cost of living crisis and the impact of the pandemic. In 2023-24 61 students completed Pathways to a Degree and 381 Pathways students have progressed to undergraduate courses at Cardiff University since 2012. For students who have completed their degrees, retention and completion rates are notably strong: 94% completion rate for ex-Pathways students for degrees in the School of Healthcare, 89% in the School of History, Archaeology and Religion, and 86% in the School of Social Sciences.. Within Healthcare, around 73% of students achieve either a first-class or upper second-class degree.

The Pathways to a Degree programme creates successful learning communities for under-represented learners and provides individuals with the opportunity to access part-time routes into HE.





Former Pathways students graduating in BSc Occupational Therapy

This case study has been produced and shared as part of the Medr-funded QAA Cymru project: Enabling learner progression into and within higher education.

Find out more about the project on the QAA Cymru [website](#).

