

NUSU PARTICIPATION BURSARY SCHEME EVALUATION REPORT 2022-23

Chiara Blows

Accessibility and Inclusion Coordinator

INCLUSIVE NEWCASTLE KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

2022-2023 Participation Bursary Scheme Evaluation Report

Chiara Blows (NUSU Accessibility and Inclusion Coordinator)

Supported by Charlotte Boulton (Inclusive Newcastle Research, Evaluation & Policy Officer)

Executive Summary

- One of the main ways NUSU contributes to meeting the shared goals of the Widening Participation Agenda and to the Access and Participation Plan is through our **Participation Bursary scheme** which aims to remove some of the barriers under-represented students experience by covering some of the costs associated with extracurricular activities.
- In 2022/23, eligible students applied to one of three PB tiers including Tier 1 (£120), Tier 2 (£180) and Tier 3 (anything up to £280).
- The in-depth evaluation used the **Theory of Change** model to evaluate the Participation Bursary using both **quantitative and qualitative data** from a variety of sources including the Participation Bursary applications, the Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey sent to bursary recipients and staff's experiences administrating the bursary.
- There were **791 applications** to the bursary with **697 successful applicants**. **£138 484** was spent on the Participation Bursaries made up of both APP and Student Disbursement funds
- Demographically **46.2%** of bursary recipients identified as being Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) and applied on this basis, **85%** of successful applications were undergraduate and **83.3%** were home students.
- **96%** of respondents agreed that their Participation Bursary was necessary to engage with NUSU opportunities while **83%** of respondents agreed that the amount was sufficient.
- **93%** of respondents agreed that the Participation Bursary helps them to feel included
- **87%** of respondents agreed that the Participation Bursary helps them gain skills and knowledge
- **96%** of respondents agreed that the Participation Bursary helps them afford to participate
- **95%** of respondents agreed that the Participation Bursary helps improve their health or wellbeing with **52.3%** of respondents using the bursary for sports-related activities
- Students who were **Postgraduate** and/or **International** appear to be *more likely to report* that the PB had a **positive impact** on their **feelings of inclusion** at Newcastle University.
- This report explores 11 recommendations. Some of the key recommendations include: *Hiring a student intern* (Recommendation 3), updating both the *eligibility criteria* and *evidence requirements* for these criteria (Recommendation 7 and 8) and to keep the Participation Bursary *open to all students* (Recommendation 10).

Some Helpful Abbreviations:

There are multiple abbreviations used throughout this report – the below is a helpful summary of some of them

- UG – Undergraduate
- PGT – Postgraduate Taught
- PGR – Postgraduate Research
- PG – Postgraduate including PGR and PGTs
- APP – Access and Participation Plan
- NUSU – Newcastle University Students Union
- SU – Students Union
- PB – Participation Bursary
- IPC – Initial Point of Contact
- TOC – Theory of Change

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Introduction

Background

For the last **ten years**, Newcastle University Students Union (**NUSU**) has collaborated with the University on their **Widening Participation** agenda and the implementation of the Access and Participation Plan (**APP**). NUSU contributes to the APP through delivering **interventions to support students** in line with the plan's priorities, **working in partnership with University colleagues** to develop knowledge and evaluate interventions, and through **sabbatical officer representation** in the APP Working Group.

Another main way NUSU contributes to meeting these shared goals is through our **Participation Bursaries scheme**. This bursary aims to help **remove some of the barriers** to extracurricular participation for **under-represented students** by covering some of the costs of getting involved in NUSU and University extracurricular activities.

In **2022/23**, eligible students were able to apply to one of the following three Participation Bursary tiers:

- Tier 1 (£120). For students who only aim to engage with *NUSU Societies, Go Volunteer* and some *Give It a Go activities*
- Tier 2 (£180). For students who wish to join the *University Sports Centre and/or a NUSU Club* and engage in some of the activities covered by Tier 1.
- Tier 3. For students who require either less or more than Tiers 1 and 2 (up to a *maximum of £280*).

Participation Bursaries 2022/23

In **previous years**, the Participation Bursaries were available for students to apply for throughout the year and **remained open** during the full academic year. **Contrastingly**, this year applications for the PB

could only be **accepted for just over one month** and closed on the *31st of October* due to both the **limited funding** and the **influx of applications** when the bursary first opened¹.

The applications were **reviewed in order of application date**, focusing on those who had applied on the application form, before groups of 100 students from the waiting list were invited to apply by a specified deadline. Applications were analysed by NUSU's **Accessibility and Inclusion Co-ordinator** (AIC) and **funding was granted based on the evidence** provided for the activities up to the tiered amount requested.

Applications

For the 22-23 academic year, NUSU received a **total of 791 applications** – this includes both the original application form and the waiting list form and has not removed any duplications. This figure is **down 21%** compared to last year's application figures (997); however, it took merely one month to generate 79% of the previous years' application figures which typically spans approximately 8 months.

This **rapid increase** may be attributed to the **bursary availability to all students** of all stages and fee status studying at the University (including stage 3 and international students) as well as the increased promotion of the scheme through word of mouth or through clubs/societies as **39%** of survey respondents reported that this is how they had heard about the bursaries.

Unsuccessful applications

Of the 791 applications, only 83 were unsuccessful compared to the 366 unsuccessful from the previous year. This means that the **unsuccessful applications decreased by 84%** compared to last year. This wasn't an intended or planned output as the application window was much shorter. However, this 84% decrease possibly could be the result of widening the pool of eligible recipients to include stage 3 and international students who may have applied in previous year and been ineligible due to their stage and/or fee status.

Of these unsuccessful applications, **43%** were unsuccessful as applicants did not meet the criteria while **30%** were unsuccessful as applicants either provided none or the incorrect evidence of their eligibility, based on the current eligibility guidance document (**Appendix 2**). A further **16%** unsuccessful applications lacked evidence of any NUSU specific extracurriculars, **9%** were unsuccessful as they were

¹ Applications to the Participation Bursaries fund *closed on the 14th of October 2023* and a **waiting list** was made available in its place. The waiting list also proved to be oversubscribed and *closed on the 31st of October 2023* based on instruction from the *Student Disbursement Fund Committee*.

not on the waiting list during the second round and **2%** were unsuccessful as these applicants are not current students.

Successful Applications

Once duplicate applications were removed (~11); a **total of 697 students were successful** in their application, a **10.5% increase** in successful applications compared to previous year. This exceeded our target of a 10% increase in successful applications.

The 697 successful applicants fulfilled various eligibility criteria shown below² in table 1. Of these successful applications:

- **46.2%** of recipients identified as being Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (**BAME**) and applied on this basis.
- **27.6%** were in receipt of an **Opportunity Scholarship** for the current academic year.
- **13.2%** met the **Low Participation Neighbourhood (LPN)** Criteria (POLAR Q1 and Q2 criteria or IMD Decile 1 or 2 criteria.)

Table 1: Breakdown of the eligibility criteria of 697 successful applications for the Participation Bursary for 2022-2023

Criteria	%
In receipt of the Opportunity Scholarship	27.6
Care-experienced student	0.1
Disabled or have a long-term illness	2.4
Young carer or parent	0.8
Estranged Student	0.5
Mature Student	2.4
BAME Ethnic Student	46.2
Gypsy Roma or Traveller	0.0
Refugee	0.5
Military Families	1.1
Home Post Code	13.2

² Please note students could apply under multiple criteria and **multiple students were successful for multiple criteria** so table 1 indicates the percentage of the total responses rather than total applicants.

Commuter/Live at Home Student	5.2
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A brief summary of the **successful applications** can be broken down by the stage of study and fee status in Table 2 below. The **majority** of successful applications were undergraduate students (**85%**) and home students (**83.3%**).

Table 2: Breakdown of the Stage of Study and Fee Status of the 697 successful applications for the Participation Bursary for 2022-2023

		<i>Stage of Study (%)</i>				
		UG	PGR	PGT	Intercalating	
<i>Fee Status (%)</i>	Home	78.5	0.7	3.5	0.6	83.3
	EU	1.6	0	0.1	0	1.7
	International	4.9	4.0	6.1	0	15
		85	4.7	9.7	0.6	

Funding Spent

There were **two students who did not claim** their awarded bursary amount despite multiple follow ups. There was also a £25 Co-op Voucher to incentivise students to fill in the Participation Bursary Evaluation. Therefore, the total amount spent on the Participation Bursaries for the 2022-2023 academic year was **£138 484**. This amount was made up of APP funds (£50 000) and Student Disbursement Funds (£63 484). Therefore, there was an average of **£199 of funding** available per student.

Evaluation Methodology

Theory of Change for 2022/23

The **Theory of Change** is a comprehensive method of evaluation that illustrates the **reasons** behind a desired change that is expected to happen and the pathways of **how** this desired change would happen in certain contexts.³ This is the **first iteration** of using this method of evaluation for this scheme and is a **more in-depth evaluation** compared to previous years. This was due to the growth of the PB scheme compared to previous years and previous analysis not linking to the wider framework of the scheme.

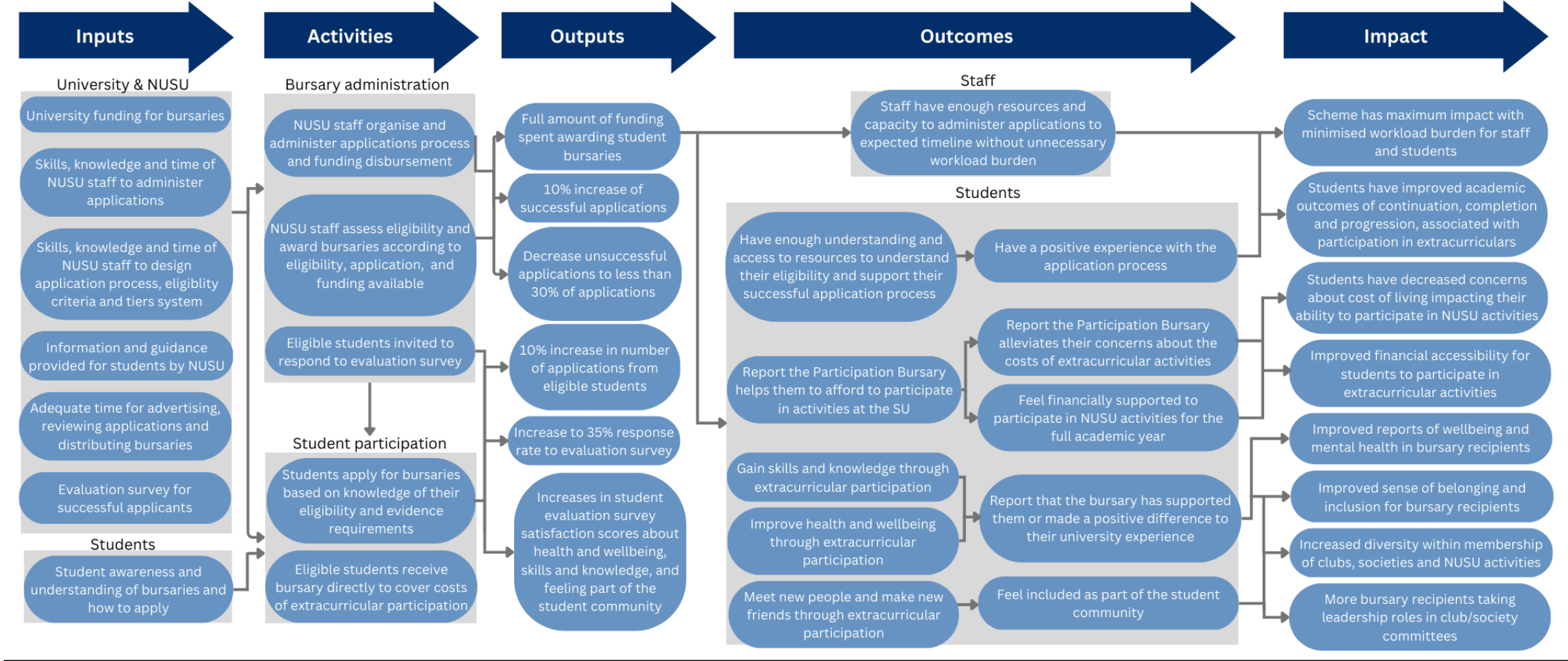
The **Office for Students** is requiring **future APPs** to focus more on providing robust evaluations for interventions, so the Theory of Change approach is being used to increase the robustness of the evaluation, prepare the scheme for future evaluation requirements, and to enhance learning from the process.

This **methodology** was hoped to **identify gaps** and **areas of improvements** for the PB scheme to implement a revised scheme to **better benefit staff and students** involved.

The **Theory of Change logic model for the 2022-2023 academic year** was co-developed by the NUSU Accessibility and Inclusion Co-ordinator and Inclusive Newcastle Knowledge Centre evaluators and can be found below. This will be referred to as the **ToC Model 1** in the below areas.

³ <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

CONTEXT	The Office for Students has identified inequalities in access to extracurricular activities (e.g. societies and clubs) as a risk to equality of opportunity for particular student groups, suggesting that differential access to participation in enrichment activities may lead to differential outcomes in terms of progression into further study and employment, supported by existing research (OfS 2023; Stuart, 2011). Previous Participation Bursary evaluation reports have shown that that financial barriers to participation are a key reason for these inequalities , and that the current cost of living crisis is increasing financial pressure on students from various backgrounds and lived experiences. To improve equality of opportunity as part of Newcastle University's Access and Participation Plan, the Participation Bursaries scheme aims to remove some of the barriers to extracurricular participation for students from underrepresented backgrounds by covering some of the costs of getting involved in NUSU and University activities.
OBJECTIVES	To improve accessibility and inclusion of student engagement in various <u>extracurricular activities</u> at Newcastle University Students' Union through <u>distribution of direct funding to students</u> to mitigate financial barriers to participation , aiming to improve sense of belonging, inclusion and wellbeing for all under-represented students at Newcastle University.



Assumptions of the programme design	Risks to delivery
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students are aware of the Participation Bursaries 2. Students are able to apply for the participation bursary and are eligible 3. There is sufficient funding to support the eligible students 4. The students want to use the participation bursary to get involved with extracurricular activities 5. Getting involved in extracurricular activities helps students feel included, feel a sense of belonging and improves students' wellbeing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of accessibility to and understanding of the bursary will prevent some students from applying despite being eligible as well as students who are unsuccessful as they are ineligible 2. Misunderstanding/confusion about the application process, application form, or purpose of the bursary leads to lower quality applications which require more follow up and additional workload for staff 3. The students struggle to justify the amount they require without using a reimbursement process

Methods of Evaluation

To **thoroughly evaluate the Participation Bursary** process for the 2022-2023 academic year input from both staff involved and the students who were successful in their application for the Participation Bursary was collated, including both **quantitative** and **qualitative** data, and progress was measured against outcomes identified in the TOC Model 1. This **informed the development** of the Theory of Change logic model for the 2023-2024 academic year, incorporating learnings and recommendations from the evaluation (Appendix 3). This is referred to as the **TOC Model 2** in the below areas.

Student Data - Survey

To begin, the **Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey** was conducted at the end of January 2023 after the exam period and was open for just less than a month. The form received **269 submissions** which represent close to **40%** of this year's Participation Bursary recipients. These responses were made up of UG (**81%**), PGT (**11%**) and PGR (**8%**) students. A full breakdown of respondent demographics can be found in the Appendix (**Appendix 1**)

The **survey** collated both quantitative and qualitative data from respondents. **Quantitative** data includes questions requiring respondents to **rank the extent of their agreement** or disagreement with specific statements while **qualitative** data included the **comments to more open-ended questions**. The answers received from the survey were helpful in providing insight into the students' understanding of the PB and their experience applying for the bursary. This information highlighted the **strengths** and **areas of improvement** in the current Participation Bursary process.

Other Data – Staff experiences, discussions with colleagues, previous evaluations

In addition to the data given directly by the students through the survey, further information has been collated more **indirectly by staff**. These include **staff interactions** with students through emails or impromptu drop-ins, new staff experiences handling the administration of the Participation Bursary, discussions with more experienced colleagues and the **previous evaluations** of the scheme.

Measuring progress against Theory of Change outcomes

The information received through the above areas will be compared against the **TOC Model 1** and consequently assist in the **development of the TOC Model 2** which is planned to be implemented for the next cycle of this scheme (2023-2024).

1. Evaluating the Overall Process and Timing

Application Process

Recommendation 1: Update the Participation Bursary Application Form

Students' **ability to understand and complete the application** form easily directly impacts on their probability of a **successful** application and indirectly on their **experience**. This links to the TOC Model 1 **expected outcome** that "*Students have enough understanding and access to resources to understand their eligibility and support their successful application process.*"

An area that appears to be **hindering students' ability** to complete their application successfully and to meet this outcome, were **problems with the application form**. For example, in multiple applications, the ethnicity field had been recorded as a city, presumably due to the autofill feature of online forms. This required **follow ups** to confirm the applicants' **correct ethnicity** which was particularly important if a student had applied under the BAME criteria.

In addition, further challenges included students' ability to **submit the form without providing the correct evidence**. This could have been a result of the **complex nature of the form** and if a student selected **multiple eligibility criteria**. Therefore, the form increased difficulties for staff to administer the bursary. Furthermore, **some students experienced difficulties filling in the form** which is further supported by a few responses received in the survey:

- "Improving digital application process."
- "The form to fill in for the bursary was long and some of the questions were very similar."
- "the digital form is quite long it should come with a warning."

Therefore, one recommendation is to improve the digital application form for the next academic year.

Staff members also discovered the **overlap between the funding available** from the Students Union Activities team through the *Inclusive Newcastle Funding* and the *Qualification Fund*. *Inclusive Newcastle* is a NUSU led tool which aims to **assist students with disabilities or long-term medical conditions** to fully participate in NUSU activities which is also an eligibility criterion the PB covers. The *Qualification Fund* is also a NUSU led scheme which aims to **help provide students with the opportunities to gain coaching of officiating qualifications** to put back into their club while the student gains personal development skills. Therefore, a specific recommendation is the creation of a

new digital form which would be redirecting students to these **alternative funding streams** if it appears these alternatives will be more appropriate for them. Furthermore, the above comments indicate that the form is **long**, therefore ensuring that the form is **as short as possible** will contribute to making the application process easier.

It is expected that these changes would **improve the number of successful applications**, decrease the need for follow up with students, decrease the extra workload created and have a **positive impact** on the students experience of applying to the Participation Bursary and other funding streams.

Workload

Recommendation 2: Timeline Implemented and Communicated to Students

One of the expected outcomes identified in the TOC Model 1 was that students would report that they **feel financially supported to participate** in NUSU activities for the full academic year as a result of receiving the Participation Bursary. This would be **measured through the responses** received from the Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey.

However, some of the responses received from the student survey indicated that the **timing of when the bursary was granted** affected the impact of the bursary:

- “The participation bursary could be open to more students at the start of the year. I was unable to apply until a *second round* by which time *I had missed a significant amount of time* within the society and therefore the value of the bursary was diminished.”
- “Due to the bursaries being oversubscribed and I applied on the second wave, *I ended up missing a substantial portion of the year* that I then ended up paying for when paying the sports centre annual membership.”
- “The only thing I would say is that it is *received later on in the year*, so this means *you miss the first weeks of the club*. So, I missed a lot of the initial moves in dancing. If I could start from week 1 that would have been amazing.”
- “It would be great if they *could arrive quicker* if possible.”

These insights indicate the **importance** for the students to **receive the funding very early** on in the academic year, ideally in the beginning of October. However, the **timeline** of releasing the funds is complex due to varying considerations.

The **first consideration** is giving students **enough time to collect the documents** showcasing their eligibility criteria. This is particularly important for *Opportunity Scholarship recipients* who may only have the access to their documents by mid-November. The **second consideration** is on **staff workload** (further detail below). These **considerations need to be balanced** with ensuring students received the money at an ideal time to have the maximum impact on students.

This becomes a **very small timeline** from opening the application form, receiving and reviewing the applications alongside allocating the funds. Additionally, for this particular year (2022-2023), a **large** number of applications were received in a **short** amount of time which was **unmanageable** for the staff responsible for the bursary allocation and **delayed** students received the bursary at the **optimal time** to have the best impact of the bursary.

Therefore, it is recommended to **alter the timeline** through a variety of ways:

1. Open a **Registering Interest Form** early (August).
2. Adequately **advertise** the scheme including the criteria and evidence required both online and at the Freshers Fair.
3. **Visualize and advertise** the **timeline** of the bursary process both online and at the Freshers Fair.
4. After Freshers Fair it is hoped to invite **groups of students** on the **Registering Interest Form** to apply with the required evidence.

Additionally, this process should be readily available for students to view, and it is further recommended that the **expected deadlines** and **timeframes** of outcomes and claiming to be received should be **communicated** across online.

It is hoped that both the alteration and communication of the PB application timeline would **help manage student expectations** and **ensure students are fully informed** about the process while simultaneously providing the opportunity to administer the bursary to ensure that the maximum impact of the PB is delivered. Therefore, this recommendation is hoped to result in *students reporting that they feel financially supported to participate in NUSU activities* for the full academic year; to put us on track to meet this outcome. This would again be measured through the responses of the participation bursary survey.

Another aspect that this recommendation is hoped to achieve is to **decrease the number of queries staff receive** to ensure more time is spent allocating the PB. As the AIC was the **main point of contact**

for the PB, their contact details were available on the webpage for students to ask any questions. Throughout the first term, there were at **least 50 students** reaching out via emails to ask more about the Participation Bursary, to query about the application process, their individual application and application deadlines alongside students' responses to the AIC who may have required further information about their application. This further adds to the **staff's workload** and indicates that the outcome for students to have *enough understanding and access to resources to understand their eligibility and support their successful application process* has also not been met. This creates difficulty in managing students' expectations and impacting their experience applying for the Participation Bursary.

Therefore, the **clear communication** of the timeline is also hoped to **minimise any confusion** or queries students have through emails or drop-ins and this will **decrease any additional workload**. This will ensure staff involved in administering the Participation Bursary will have a **manageable workload** to focus on meeting the desired outcome that *staff have enough capacity to administer applications to the new timeline without unnecessary workload burden*.

Recommendation 3: Hire a Student Intern

For this current year, the **rapid influx of applications in a short timeframe** further added to a workload that was difficult to manage and the desired outcome that *staff have enough capacity to administer applications to the new timeline without unnecessary workload burden* outcome was not adequately met. This was seen through the AIC working out of hours to review the applications and allocate funds.

Therefore, implementing and communicating a timeline for the bursary is one way to manage the workload (Recommendation 2). Nevertheless, the complexities and considerations mentioned previously to ensure the PB has the maximum impact on students indicate that the **small period to review and allocate the funds** remains.

Therefore, the impact of **adjusting the timeline** on the desired outcome of *staff having enough resources and capacity to administrator applications without unnecessary workload burden* is predicted to be **impactful but minimal** without further changes to facilitate workload. In an effort to assist the AIC who is responsible for the reviewing and allocating of the Participation Bursary funds; one recommendation is to **hire a student intern**. The main aim of hiring this intern would be to assist with the **administrative burden** in the beginning of the academic year (September) when the timeframe for distribution of the fund is small. It is expected that this additional staff member would be able to

ensure that the tight deadline can be more realistically managed and **create a manageable workload for the staff involved.**

The intern would have a significant impact by assisting for at **least 4 hours** each week from September. While the exact job description will need to be created, this student intern will support the administration of the Participation Bursary through a variety of ways including **processing of applications** while under supervision, help **advertise** the scheme by potentially creating or filming content as well as write up a **brief report** of the breakdown and demographics of applicants and recipients of the Participation Bursary and potentially assist with the **evaluation of the scheme** if the funding allows. It is hoped that the intern will be able to **expand their knowledge** of the Participation Bursary scheme and be involved in shaping a very student focused scheme whilst learning **transferable skills** and **gaining work experience** to add to their CV.

It is then hoped that having a student intern would **maximise the impact of the bursary** for the students wanting to get involved with extracurriculars while **minimising the workload** burden for staff members. This impact would be measured via the student responses of their experience through the evaluation survey, which is hoped to **reflect an increased benefit** and **impact** of the Participation Bursary on the students.

Website

Recommendation 4: Increased Information about the Participation Bursary on the NUSU Website and Guidance Documents

One of the expected outcomes identified in the TOC Model 1 was that *students would have enough understanding and sufficient access to resources to understand their eligibility and the application process to support their successful application process.* This outcome was measured through comparing the number of **successful** and **unsuccessful applications** alongside the number of student queries. The latter has been discussed above ([Recommendation 3](#)). It was anticipated that the number of **unsuccessful applications** would **decrease to less than 30% of applications** while **successful applications** would **increase by 10%**.

Our application data shows that our **unsuccessful** applications were **10.5% of our total applications**, down from 37% of unsuccessful applications in the previous year while our successful applications

grew from 631 applications to 708 applications, an approximate **12% increase**. This indicates our *targeted outputs exceeded our expectations* as outlined in the TOC Model 1.

However, as mentioned above; throughout the first term, various students reached out via emails querying various aspects of the Participation Bursary. This indicates a **lack of understanding** about the process of the bursary potentially due to a lack of communication and information available about the scheme.

Furthermore, it was revealed through the Evaluation Survey that some **students were not aware of the purpose of the PB**. For example, one respondent wrote, *"I feel like the bursary should be open to everyone. I was lucky to receive it based on my BAME background, but did not fully understand why this was a criterion,"* while another respondent indicated, *"I could only apply on the basis of ethnic background even though my finances haven't changed, so maybe be able to apply in the basis of student finance as evidence eg if get max loan."* Therefore, raising awareness through information on the website of the **rationale** for both **the implementation of PB scheme** and the set criteria would provide valuable information to **increase students' understanding** of the PB while also decreasing the number of ineligible students applying.

Another reason to revamp any of the information currently available on the website is that there is evidence to suggest that **students are not able to engage or read it properly**. For example, one student commented on improving the PB Evaluation Survey to ; *"Allow it to be used for Give It A Go activities - can be estimated by stating exactly which activities you'd like to do,"* however, the website had indicated that the PB was available to be used for *Give It A Go Activities*. Therefore, students are not able to engage in the information currently available.

Therefore, it is recommended that **more in-depth information on the website is available** including the availability of guidance documents. This information will include the background of the PB scheme, the reasoning behind the eligibility criteria and a revamped eligibility criteria document as well as an overview of the application timeline and process (Recommendation 2). There will also be links to a Frequently Asked Questions section, an example application and other guidance documents. It is also important to prioritise having **multiple formats** highlighting the same information from an **accessibility viewpoint**.

Recommendation 5: Increased Transparency + Evaluation Reports Available

To further build on the previous recommendation there should also be an **increased amount of transparency about the bursary** alongside the increased amount of information about the PB scheme available on the webpage. This information would include a background on the **funding sources** and the **amount of available funds** as well as a copy of the **previous year's evaluation report**. This would build on students' awareness and understanding of the PB which would impact on their ability to present a successful application.

Instalments

Having this increased transparency could also explain why previous suggestions from students are not currently possible. For example, some students commented in the PB Evaluation survey that they would prefer **instalments of the PB scheme** as shown below:

- *“They could give it in instalments, so it's better managed throughout the year. Maybe half given in the first semester and the other half given in the next semester.”*
- *“Instead of a 1 time payment you could do it each term as safety equipment wears down very quickly in a combat sport.”*
- *“Maybe try to offer it in semester 2, as for example my netball requires a second payment in January. But I had a chunk of rent coming out then.”*

However, the administrative burden that would result from administering each application in multiple instalments would be unfeasible. Moreover, the PB scheme is one of the only SU schemes that is advertised as a one-off payment you can apply for once a year instead of as a reimbursement. This decision was made to ensure students would research the amount of money they would need for the full academic year and ensure that the **preparation for their application spreads the amount awarded over the year** which also teaches them valuable budgeting skills. This would be supported by the increased information on the website, so students have a better idea of what to consider when making their application.

Multiple Applications

In a similar vein, some students commented on being able to **apply for the bursary more than once**: *“More frequent application periods so I can apply for financial support for something I may not have known about at the time of the original application,”* and *“Increase the number of times an individual can apply for it”*. However, the **funds are limited**, and the **SU prioritises helping as many students as possible** so it would not be possible for the same students applying multiple times during the year.

Additionally, the **PB is not meant to cover all the costs associated with extracurriculars** but is instead hoped to help those with financial burdens as a result of their background to get involved through covering some costs related to getting involved. This was positively reflected by one respondent's comment indicating the PB helped with the majority of the costs; *"Covered about 70% of the cost of the necessary gym membership + club joining fee. Would have been too expensive otherwise"* while another respondent who was on the 1st team for water polo *"required having a full gym membership as the sports centre which was quite expensive, and I questioned whether it was worth the money I would be spending. When I found out about the bursary it was a big help and **also allowed me to put some of the money that I saved towards buying the kit which I otherwise wouldn't of bought.**"*

Increased Funding

Furthermore, some student comments from the PB evaluation survey indicate a want to have an **increase of funding:**

- *"Increased funding from the university to make the bursary accessible to more students would be fantastic. I'm so grateful to have received mine and think it will benefit students so much. I hope in the future all students who need it will be able to utilize it."*
- *"Fund availability because I think more people could benefit from it."*
- *"I feel the funding availability needs to be increased."*

This indicates there is a **clear demand for more funding** and students are commenting on the value of the Participation Bursary:

- *"I am incredibly appreciative of the bursary and without it wouldn't have been able to commit myself to the sport due to financial barriers."*
- *"I am very thankful for giving me a chance to have a bit of joy playing basketball."*

However, this also indicates that **students are unaware of how much funding there currently is** or how it is allocated. Therefore, **improving transparency about decision-making** and making the best use of limited funds would increase students' awareness and knowledge of funding realities.

What the Participation Bursary Can be Used For

In addition, some students are wanting to use the funds for non-NUSU extracurriculars. For example, one student wrote in the PB Evaluation Survey to *"Extend it to other university sports clubs that aren't NUSU affiliated (and yet take part in IM and use the sport's centre)."* However, the purpose of the PB is

to encourage students who are facing financial barriers due to their background to **get involved in extracurriculars at the SU and University.**

Additionally, there were comments in the PB Evaluation Survey that indicated that students wanted the **PB to be extended to local gyms.** This is unable to be covered by the bursary as local gyms are less likely to encourage participation in Newcastle University and SU extracurriculars and less likely to contribute to a sense of belonging compared to the **Newcastle University Sports Centre which is more likely to contribute to students' feeling they are a part of the community.** However, if a student required a different gym for reasons such as pool access for their club or requiring a different gym for accessibility needs, this would be decided on a case-by-case basis. This would likely then direct students to the *Inclusive Newcastle* scheme at the SU which is a scheme that strives to provide more than financial support to best support students with a disability and long-term medical condition to get involved.

Similarly, as **club and society balls** and socials encourage integration and a sense of community and belonging amongst students, the PB is consequently able to cover these whereas the **Grad and AU Ball** do not encourage integration in the same way; and are therefore **not** able to be covered by the PB scheme.

Another decision made for 2022-2023 was to advertise the PB scheme **alongside** the *Give It A Go (GIAG)* activities as these activities are generally cheaper (including £1 or free events) in comparison to societies or clubs. Therefore, **GIAG could be offered as an alternative** to clubs and societies rather than being something covered by the PB scheme. Therefore, this new decision needs to be **visible** and **communicated** to students.

Lastly, conversations with **Newcastle University Sports Centre** and SU Activities Team are still to be held to discuss the costs associated with **Campus Leagues** and **Intramural Sport** and whether these would be covered by the scheme. The decision and reasonings for this would then be available to students to manage expectations and ensure applications are received that could be supported.

Summary: Recommendation about Transparency

Therefore, as shown above, students have commented about wanting to improve the scheme including widening what it can cover, the amount of funding received, having instalments or being able to apply more than once. To ensure students feel listening to and to manage their expectations, there needs to be more **transparency on the reasons** for the limited funds and why certain activities or processes are

implemented to explain the SU's choices throughout while decreasing any student queries or confusion they may experience through the application. Additionally, ensuring **students are able to read these evaluation reports** will allow them to see the wider picture of how the funds have been spent, how many students were supported and how their feedback is used to further develop the scheme.

The transparency of this information would **indirectly impact the quality of the applications** received, **increase the percentage of successful** applications, ensure a **positive student experience** applying for the PB scheme and **maximise the impact of the PB** scheme on students while **minimising workload** burden for staff and students.

2. Evaluating Tiers vs Evidence Based Applications

Tiers

Recommendation 6: Increased Number of Tiers

One of expected outcomes in the TOC model 1 was that students would have enough understanding of the PB scheme to support their successful applications. One aspect of this was understanding the three tiers as specified above in the Introduction. However, students' comments from the PB Evaluation Survey indicated **the tiers are an aspect that students did not understand**. For example, some students indicated on the PB Evaluation survey asking for:

- *“Clarity on funding tiers may be helpful but other than that I think it was ran well.”*
- *“I hope that the funding tiers and amount of the bursary can be explained in more detail. I did not find any introduction on these aspects in the previous email.”*

Therefore, whilst increased transparency and information about the tiers would help some understanding of the tier system, the information that was available did not clear up the confusion experienced by the students and **indicate that the current tiers system is confusing**. For example, Tier 1 and 2 were fixed amounts of £120 and £180 respectively but Tier 3 was any amount up to £280 – including any amounts between Tier 1 and 2. Nevertheless, some students were still confused as one student indicated in their response to the evaluation of the PB; *“Perhaps add an extra funding tier between tier 2 and 3, for those who don't want to claim the maximum amount, but are limited by the*

other tiers” while another recipient commented asking for “*more options between the bursary amounts. e.g., more amounts you can choose from rather than the gaps between £100-280 etc.*” This indicates **students did not understand that Tier 3 was for any amount from £1 up until £280** therefore the combination of tiers including both ones that are fixed amounts and evidence based up to an amount was not clear to students.

Therefore, there were discussions with **NUSU Staff** about either alternating the current 3 Tier System to **solely an evidence-based process** similar to Tier 3 which would include applications for any amount up to £280 or to instead **increase the number of fixed tiers** which would be dependent on the types of activities each student would like to get involved with.

When beginning to research the reasons behind putting the current tier system in place, the **proposal about restructuring the PB based on 2019-2020 data was found**. This restructure was developed in order to open the PB scheme to students of all stages of study in an effort to target the recorded approximate **1600 students** that year that fit the **focus of the current APP**⁴. This restructuring was based on research the **EDI Coordinator** of the time had undertaken and written up in the proposal. This paper highlighted that the PB scheme was adapted to the current tier system based on what the costs of the societies, clubs and gym membership were.

However, seeing the paper indicated that **this data was out of date** and from 2019 to 2022 multiple changes included increased prices of NUSU extracurriculars, the university gym membership structure changing, a new NUSU website provider and various cost-of-living increases **meant that the current tier system was no longer relevant or the best practice to use**. For example, one respondent commented: “*Allowed me to get the memberships but was not enough to attend any of the events. Which is practically useless getting the membership.*” Therefore, the tiers system that are based off the old membership prices can help students to get the membership but is not sufficient enough to help students engage in events or activities that the societies or clubs put on.

Following this, various discussions were had with the NUSU staff in the various teams (Activities, Your Voice, Go Volunteer etc) about the **costs students may incur engaging in the various activities**. Moreover, discussions were had with senior management focusing on the pros and cons of using either a new tier system or a completely evidence-based approach. Following this discussion, it was then decided and recommended that a **different tier system, composing of more specific tiers, would be**

⁴ NUSU Participation Bursary Restructure written by EDI Coordinator Rohit Sharma

implemented. These tiers would more closely relate to the activities, membership and equipment on offer with *more subtle changes in value*. This would ensure students have more **guidance on what tiers to apply for** and would be able to buy memberships and go along to events to maximise their involvement in the SU while *also recognising the PB does not cover all costs*. An **initial draft of the tiers** can be found below; however, as the **handover period** between new and old society and club committees are still underway, this will be further developed after more data is received from the Activities Team.

It is also hoped that **each society or club will use a standard template to indicate a breakdown of costs** identified to get involved in their society/club including memberships, kit, social costs, competition costs and so on. It is envisioned that this breakdown would be used as **evidence for the bursary** and potentially would be available from the executive committee of each society and club. The responsibility of distributing this form would lie with the executive committee which will **help them in an effort to be more inclusive and accessible** as they choose the best way to share this with their members alongside **ensuring students reach out** to the societies or clubs they are interested in and do **the adequate research, planning and budgeting before applying for the PB Scheme**.

Student responses from the Participation Bursary Survey have informed this development, for example one student stated, *"The evidence asked for is sometimes difficult to gather. Membership fees are pretty straight forward. But if you are required/expected to buy for example a team top but they aren't available to buy yet it is difficult to know what evidence you could submit."* Therefore, the comments about the difficulty of providing evidence for some of activities such as socials and balls have been taken into consideration in the tier system; **this change highlights the importance of students feeding back in the evaluation process to influence recommendations**.

This additional document will also make it **easier for the NUSU Staff to check the PB applications** which will streamline the workload, application process and the timeline for the student to receive the funding which **indirectly improves the impact of the PB** on the students.

Lastly, as the 2023-2024 academic year will be the first time using the below tiers; this aspect is **recommended to be re-evaluated at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year** to ensure it is the most efficient for both staff and students.

Table 3: New Tier System Proposed to be implemented for the 2023-2024 Participation Bursary

Scheme

Tier	Amount	Activity Details
1	100	For example; Go Volunteer Activities – Can be used towards gear or other costs associated with Go Volunteer activities. Please note transport to external events is reimbursed by the Volunteering Team – please email them to find out more. 1 Society (can be used to towards membership fees and paid activities including balls)
2	120	GV/2 societies
3	150	Club
4	180	Club + Kit
5	200	1 Club + 2 Societies
6	230	Club + fitness membership
7	250	Club + Sports and fitness membership
8	280	Club + sports and fitness membership + kit etc

Eligibility Criteria

Recommendation 7: Update the Eligibility Criteria

Originally, the PB Scheme was only available to **Home** Students who were in **Stage 0/1**. Throughout the years it has widened the students who could access it in terms of stage and fee status and in the **2022-2023 academic year it was available to students of all stages and fee status**. This was appreciated by respondents who *indicated the importance of the PB for international students* as shown in some comments received from the PB Evaluation Report:

- *“Also, international students have it harder to find friends and settle in to uni life so maybe a special fund for them might help a lot. Also, activities to integrate them into uni life can also help.”*
- *“Was very helpful with paying towards sports membership in particular, as my tuition is already very high as an international student. Definitely also encouraged me to join more societies than I would have because of cost related reasons .Give it a go was nice as well to join, with the funding.”*

- *“As an international student unfamiliar with the English planning system, I have to do a lot of reading and research as an urban planning student. As a result, I have very little time to go out and enjoy myself. Football is something that makes me feel more lively and refreshes my mood, so I am a member of the civil engineering and geospatial society, as well as a member of the civil engineering team, which makes me feel great.”*

In addition, **PG students** also indicated their appreciation of the bursary and found it helpful with some respondents commenting:

- *“Continue to support postgraduate students and widen access to those who need it.”*
- *“I joined Dance club, lifestyle medicine society and PGR society. I have more opportunities to join in the activities and make more friends. I started to keep my modern dance class which is a definitely fantastic thing, not only for exercise, but also for mentally health including keeping confidence and energetic during my intensive PhD study.”*

However, while students appreciated opening the PB to all students; **the eligibility criteria** (Appendix 2) **remained the same which presented some issues with the applications**. For example, the *UG Opportunity Scholarship* follows a completely separate process to the *PG Opportunity Scholarship*; the post code information only applies to UK Home Students; PG Students were applying under the *Mature Students* criteria which only applies to UG students and some students living in Jesmond and Heaton qualified as *Commuter Students* which was not the group of students intended for the PB to be supporting. **The distinctions in the specific eligibility criteria for different students had not been altered or communicated**. There were also a few applicants who had selected multiple eligibility criteria when they may be ineligible for a few i.e., an international student selecting *BAME* ethnicity as well as *Home Post Code* cannot be eligible for the *Home Post Code* criteria but may have still been successful in their application and may assume they were successful for all the criteria they chose.

Additionally, the eligibility document (Appendix 2) **did not have live links to further information** to receive the evidence of their criteria such as the Opportunity Scholarship Team or for where they could go to for support i.e., Student Health and Wellbeing. Therefore, the **eligibility criteria document needs to be updated** to indicate which students are limited to certain criteria and the reasons for this as well as to ensure the document outlines helpful links.

Furthermore, it was discovered that while the PB aims to widen participation amongst under-represented student groups, the data on which students are under-represented at Newcastle University is not available. Therefore, alongside altering issues mentioned above, a bigger project is

hoped to commence over the summer months of 2023 to look into the **student body demographics** which will **contribute to the review of the eligibility criteria** for the 2023-2024 Participation Bursary Scheme to ensure the **criteria reflect the students of all stage and fee status that are under-represented at Newcastle University**. Depending on when the data will be available in the longer planning process will depend on when it can be added into the eligibility criteria, therefore, the criteria is **recommended to be re-evaluated at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year** to ensure it continues to reflect under-represented students at Newcastle University.

Evidence Requirements

Recommendation 8: Update the Evidence Requirements

Following on from Recommendation 7 which indicated the problems that arose from the PB scheme widening to include all students without editing the eligibility criteria itself; **the evidence required to prove their eligibility for some students was difficult or inaccessible**.

For example, one student had emailed the AIC about **her struggles with providing evidence to prove her status of estrangement** and stated in the email that “[she] *was just getting in touch regarding the criteria which is laid out on proving your estrangement for the participation bursary as I find it somewhat inaccessible*” and went on further to explain that “*The lack of social work/local authority involvement is an issue which many estranged students are facing. My GP are unaware of the issue because it is not something which happened recently, and I do not feel that it is something which I need to discuss with them. As the university is not yet affiliated with Stand Alone or any similar organisations – currently getting evidence from those sources is not yet straightforward.*” This particular student had offered a **solution** stating that using **proof of estrangement on Student Finance England** or other governing bodies could be something to consider.

In a similar fashion, while staff were administrating the PB, it was revealed that the *Military Background* Criteria grouped the evidence required for **students who had served in any military services** with the evidence required for if **the students’ parents had served in military services** by requiring a letter from their school. This prompted discussions around why this criterion was included in the PB scheme, and what evidence could be accepted due to students submitting other forms of evidence compared to the eligibility document (Appendix 2) and it was discovered that this particular criterion mirrors the **PARTNERS programme criteria**. It was decided that this criterion would be edited

to only be applicable to parents/carers of the students as this experience may have had an impact on their schooling experience sense of belonging and it is hoped the PB helps to rectify this.

An extra obstacle was the lack of knowledge the staff administrating the PB had about the Newcastle University staff who are able to help with the evidence and process of the PB Scheme. For example, the initial lack of knowledge of the Initial Points of Contact (IPCs) for **care-experienced students** and **estranged students**, and the data sharing policies, staff contacts for both the UG and PG Opportunity Scholarship and the discovered **limitations of the Medical Evidence Form**. Therefore, various meetings and discussions were had with various university staff members in an effort to have more partnership with the university and to ensure the students applying for the PB are **not required to duplicate proof of their eligibility repeatedly**.

Therefore, in conjunction with looking at the overview of the eligibility criteria as shown in Recommendation 7, it is also recommended to **review and update the evidence requirements for each eligibility criterion** during the summer planning for the PB. Furthermore, it is recommended for the evidence requirements to be **re-evaluated at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year** to ensure these requirements remain the most inclusive and accessible for the students applying to the PB Scheme.

3. Evaluating Funding

Amount of Money

Recommendation 9: Re-evaluation of Maximum Amount Granted Per Student

As mentioned in the Introduction; the total amount spent on the Participation Bursaries for the 2022-2023 academic year was **£138 484** and was allocated to 697 students, although 2 did not claim the funding. There was an **average of £199 of funding available per student**.

1) The participation bursary was necessary for me to engage with activities at the Students' Union.

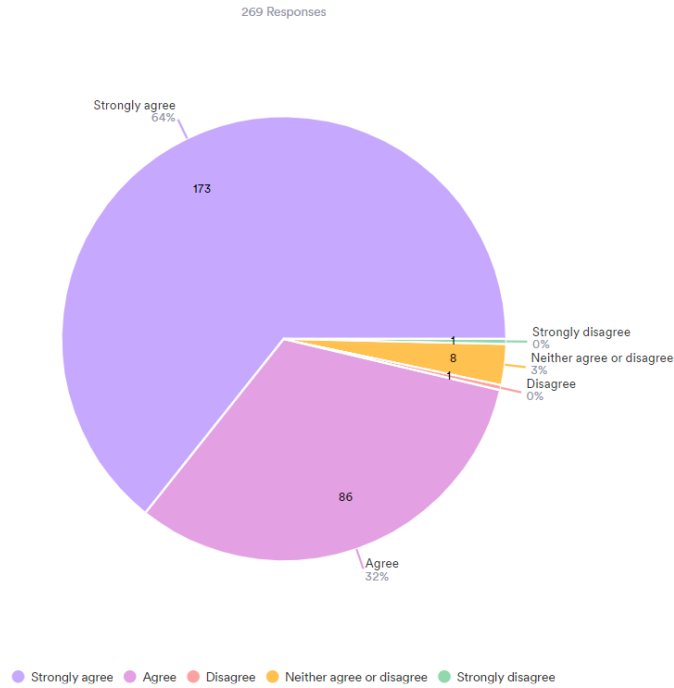


Figure 1 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating the extent respondents agreed with the statement that “The Participation Bursary was necessary for me to engage with activities at the Students’ Union.”

2) The amount of money was sufficient to engage with activities at the Students' Union.

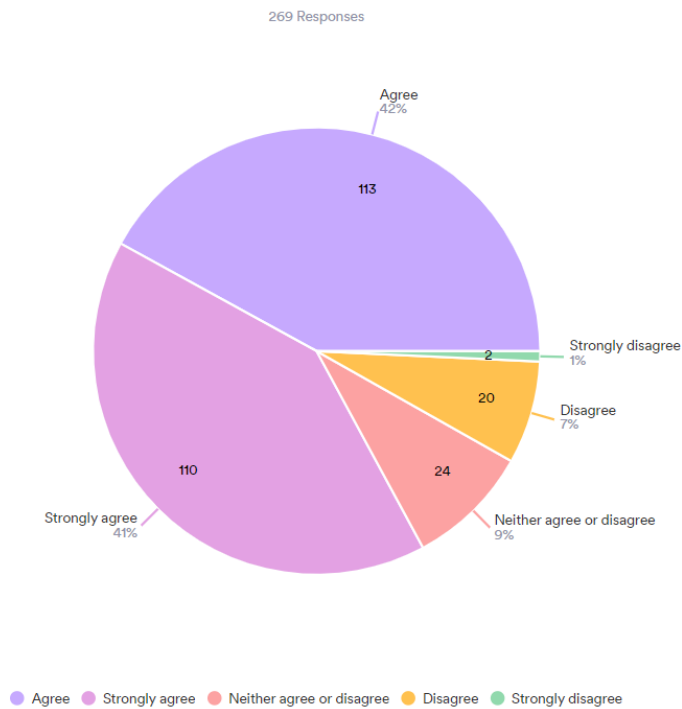


Figure 2 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating the extent respondents agreed with the statement that “The Amount of money was sufficient to engage with activities at the Students Union.”

In the PB Evaluation Survey, **96%** of respondents **agreed with the statement that their Participation Bursary was 'necessary to engage with NUSU opportunities'** (Figure. 1) which is down from 97% agreement of the previous year. In addition, **83%** of respondents agreed with the statement that **the amount they received through the PB was sufficient** to engage with their chosen extracurricular activities (Figure 2) which was up from 82% of the previous year.

Of the **8%** of respondents for whom the Participation Bursary amount was insufficient, a number elaborated on their responses in the survey as shown below:

- *"The bursary could be a higher amount **especially as some sports are so expensive**, they could also make the gym membership discounted or even free"*
- *"Perhaps a greater funding/access for more students - especially in regards to **the current financial crisis**"*
- *"If possible, maybe increase the amount given as I have been unable to buy the gym membership, as well as a netball kit as **i couldn't afford it and it went over the bursary amount**"*
- *"I felt more relieved when there's financial support and am less reluctant to join club activities. However, the bursary was not enough to cover all the expenses especially since I join climbing club and all climbing activities are done outside of school, this requires extra money to pay for entry fee. Thus, **I only managed to join a few yet felt left out from the club since I can't always be there**"*
- *"Without the bursary, I would have been unable to join the swim team, buy the necessary equipment or the sports membership, which has really helped my mental health and fitness levels, **however, as much as I am grateful, it did not allow me to go to any competitions or join the gym**"*
- *"It helped me cover part of membership fee. Though it didn't cover all the costs as I am in first team which is in national premiere league, it still relieved me a lot"*
- *"Maybe provide a larger sum of money than the exact one that was estimated in the application as **I wasn't able to do all the things I wanted because there was a lack of money**. For example, I wanted to go to a society ball but ended up not going as I spent the participation bursary on other society-related things."*

Two of the expected outcomes in the TOC Model 1 are for students to report that the **PB helps them to afford to participate** in activities at the SU which then leads to an **alleviated cause of concern about the costs of extracurricular activities** and **for students to feel financially supported to participate** in NUSU activities for the full academic year.

Therefore, this outcome is only partially met with the **96%** of respondents agreeing for the *necessity of the PB to get involved* in the SU however the drop from this 96% agreement to **83%** of respondents agreeing the *PB amount is sufficient* indicates the money **may not have the same worth** as when the tier system was first introduced in 2019.

Have you accessed the Student Financial Support Fund and/or the Financial Assistance Fund this year?

269 Responses

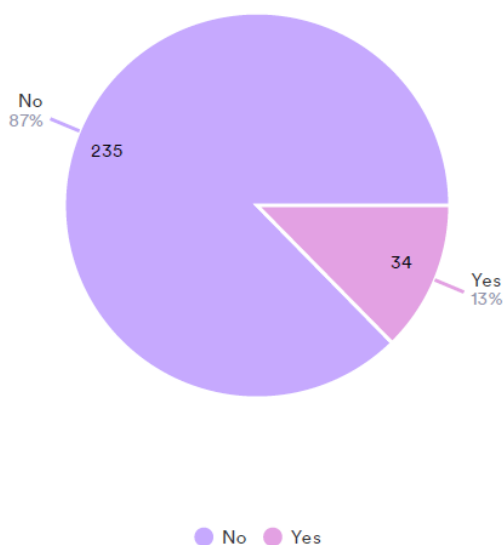


Figure 3 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating whether respondents had “accessed the Student Financial Support Fund and/or the Financial Assistance Fund this year?”

Inflation from 2019 to 2023 alongside the **cost of living** crisis can be presumed to play a big role in this and **13%** of respondents to the PB Evaluation Survey had accessed the *Student Financial Support Fund and/or Financial Assistance Fund* this year (**Figure 3**). However, the necessary **strictness on amount granted** this year due to the restrictions of the limited funds could also be a factor although to determine a causal link at this stage is difficult.

Therefore, it is hoped that with **increasing the number of tiers** and replacing the current mixed tier system to consist of **only fixed tiers** will create a fairer process for students (Recommendation 6). In conjunction with the **increased communication and information** from Recommendation 4 and 5, this will hopefully help communicate the monetary **limitations** of the PB scheme and increase the survey responses for the 2023-2024 academic year. However, if this does not happen and there are still a

large number of students indicating that the **bursary amount is insufficient**, it is recommended that **this should be researched in depth** i.e., to *draw comparisons* between the tiers applied and granted as well as analyse these relationships and the data on the specific activities’ students are using the PB funding for. This would be through more targeted questions in **the 2023-2024 PB Evaluation Survey**.

4. Evaluating Students’ Experience

Contributing to sense of belonging

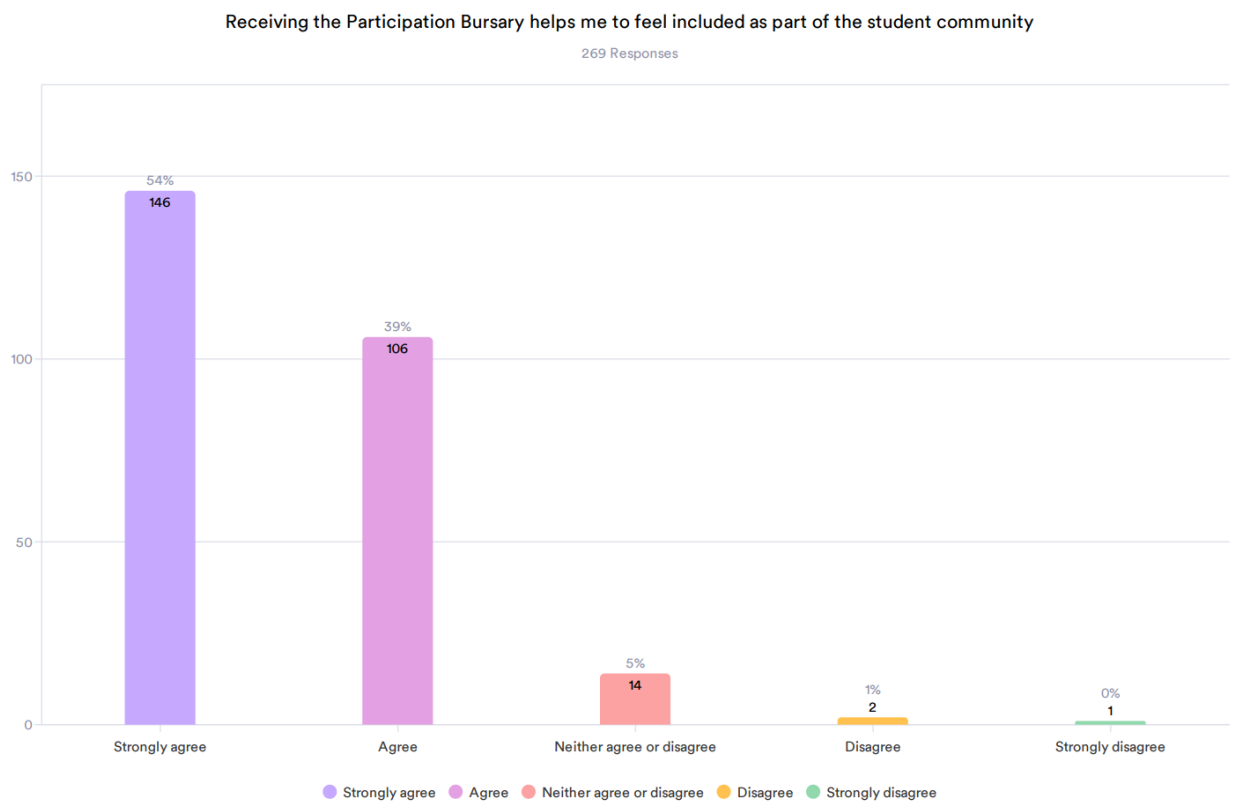


Figure 4 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating to what extent respondents agreed with the statement that “Receiving the Participation Bursary helps me to feel included as part of the student community.”

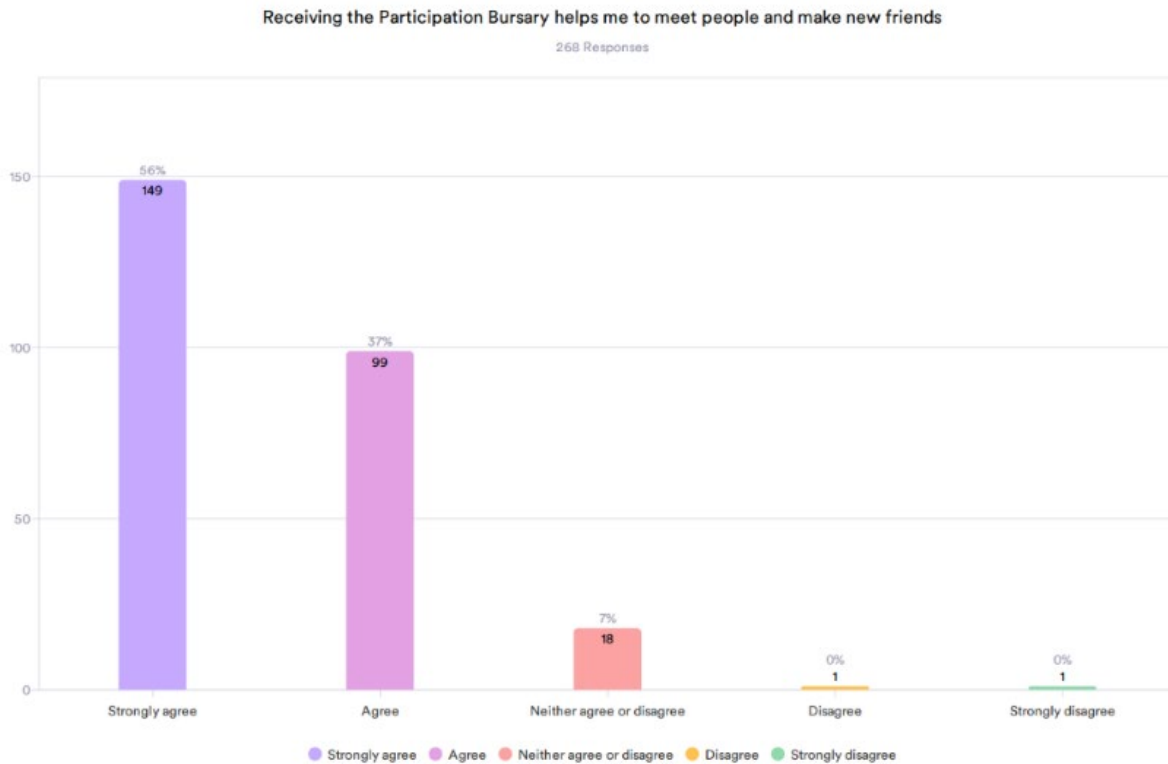


Figure 5 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating to what extent respondents agreed with the statement that “Receiving the Participation Bursary helps me to meet people and make new friends.”

One of the big, expected outcomes identified in the TOC Model 1 was that students would be able to **meet new people** and **make new friends** through extracurricular participation which would directly lead to **students feeling included as part of the student community**. This would have an impact of improving **students’ sense of belonging and inclusion** for bursary recipients, which is one of the main overarching aims of the PB scheme.

From the 2022-2023 Evaluation Survey Data, **93%** of respondents agreed with the statement that *‘Receiving the Participation Bursary helps [them] to feel included as part of the student community’* (**Figure 4**), and **93%** agreed with the statement that *‘Receiving the Participation Bursary helps [them] to meet people and make new friends’* (**Figure 5**). Therefore, this expected impact and aim of the TOC Model 1 was largely met and was a **2%** and **3% increase** respectively compared to the 2021-2022 data. Therefore, these two outputs were largely met for the 2022-2023 year.

Furthermore, a number of respondents elaborated the ways in which **receiving the Participation Bursary has contributed to their sense of belonging**:

- “Additionally, I have participated in social activities such as basketball games, which I find quite entertaining. **I believe that all these experiences enrich my knowledge and sense of belonging to the university.** Thank you very much for the bursary.”
- “I want to thank you for your support. I was not expected to receive the bursary, but when I received it, **it changed my plan of joining more social activities during the dark winter and Christmas break.**”
- “The participation bursary has allowed me to cover travel costs and sign-up costs for the American football team. **the social aspect of this team has allowed me to make friends and expand my social circle**”
- “Allowed me to pay for all the associated costs with the rugby league performance squad this year. **It has been a key aspect of my social life at University this year.**”
- “With this membership I’ve been able to regularly attend the gym and **make and meet new friends as well, thus overall, it has been a really big help!**”

However, in Figure 4 and Figure 5, **5%** and **7%** of respondents respectively *neither agreed or disagreed* with both of the above statements. Therefore, there is still room for improvement, and it is hoped that implementation of the above recommendations including **streamlining the application process** by using a student intern for the next academic year ([Recommendation 3](#)) could ensure students who are granted the bursary can join activities earlier which would lead to **more students reporting an increased impact on their sense of belonging.** This would be measure through responses on the PB Evaluation Survey for the 2023-2024 academic year.

Recommendation 10: Participation Bursary to Remain Open to All Students

Interestingly, of the respondents that *neither agreed or disagreed* with the statement that the Participation Bursary helps them *feel part of the student community or helps them meet new people*; the **majority** were **Home and/or UG Students (71%)**. Therefore, students who were **PG and/or International** appear to be more likely to report that the PB had a **positive impact** on their feelings of inclusion at Newcastle University which then helped them to make friends and **contribute to their sense of belonging** on Newcastle University campus.

This highlights *the importance of the PB including PG and International students* and the impact it has on their sense of belonging at Newcastle University. This is further supported by **one PhD student** stating in the PB Evaluation Survey that joining Dance club, Lifestyle Medicine Society and the PGR society **helped them feel included** as they “*have more opportunities to join in the activities and **make more friends.** I started to keep my modern dance class which is a definitely fantastic thing, not only for*

*exercise, but also for mentally health including **keeping confidence** and energetic during my intensive PhD study.”* In a similar fashion, one **international student** commented on the PB Evaluation Survey that being unfamiliar with the English planning system means they **spend more time reading and researching** for their course and *“as a result, I have very little time to go out and enjoy myself. Football is something that makes me feel more lively and refreshes my mood.”* Therefore, this student has been a member of the civil engineering and geospatial society as well as a member of the civil engineering team which helps **them feel included** at their university.

Therefore, it is **recommended that the PB scheme remains open to students of all stage of study and fee status** in an effort for all students studying at Newcastle University to feel included in university and SU extracurriculars whilst studying here at Newcastle University.

Contributing to student success and progression

Another big, expected outcome identified in the TOC Model 1 was that students would be able to **gain skills and knowledge through their participation with extracurricular activities**. One way this was envisioned would be bursary recipients taking up **leadership roles** in their chosen club/society committees as a result of having received the PB allowing them to get involved in that specific club/society. Although other ways of skills attainment through this extracurricular participation would include more **transferable skills** such as improved communication skills, teamwork and time management. These skills could help the bursary recipients in the future when working on their **careers** as well as potentially contribute to their **academic outcomes** of continuation, completion and progression. While the data on the latter academic outcomes is difficult to obtain and make causal links; the PB Evaluation Survey did include some questions related to the **attainment of skills** and some students provided comments in the PB Evaluation Survey about **the skills they obtained** when asked about what impact the PB had on them.

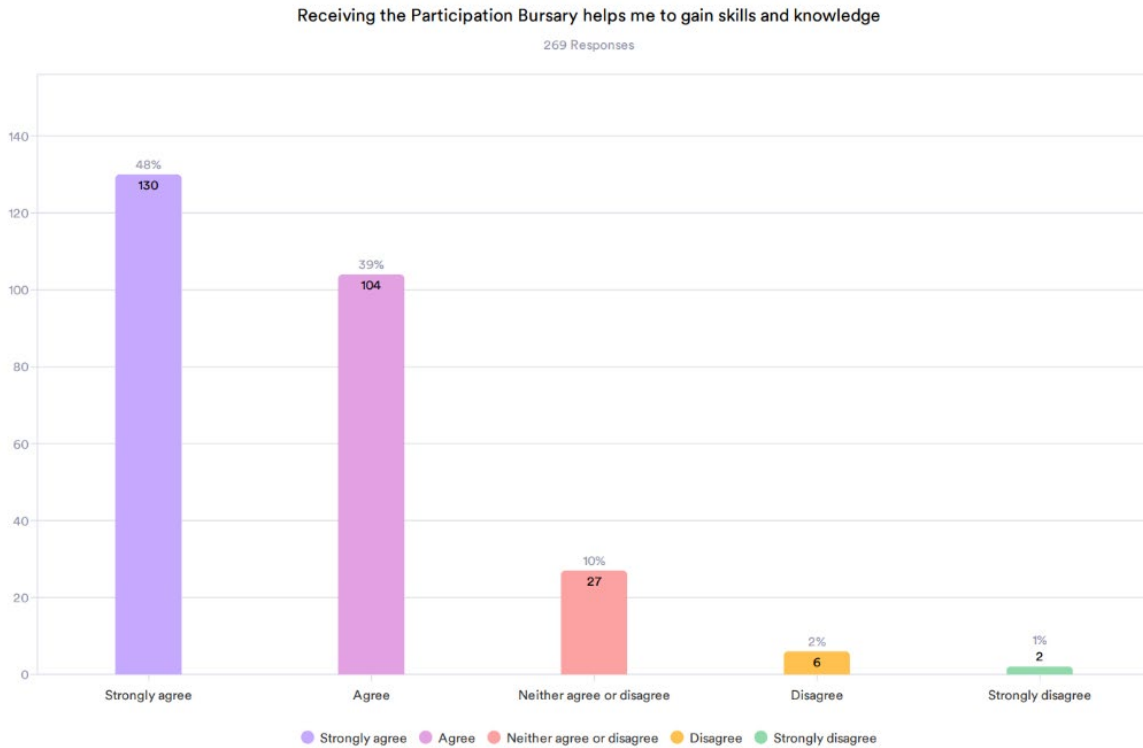


Figure 6 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating to what extent respondents agreed with the statement that “Receiving the Participation Bursary helps me to gain skills and knowledge.”

Leadership Skills

From the PB Evaluation Survey Data, **87%** of respondents **agreed** with the statement that ‘Receiving the Participation Bursary helps [them] to gain skills and knowledge’ (Figure 6). This is a **6% increase** compared to 2021-2022 data. Therefore, this output was largely met for the 2022-2023 year.

In particular, a number of respondents elaborated in the PB Evaluation Survey the ways in which receiving the **Participation Bursary has contributed to the attainment of leadership skills and knowledge** as shown below:

- *“Helped me take a **leadership** position in my club”*
- *“It allowed me to join the american football team, for another year, as a **captain of the team** and this was very important to me”*
- *“This club has been my main interaction with other students outside of my degree as well as helping me massively with my confidence and mental health. After losing one of my university years to Covid, I am so glad to be able to participate in clubs such as Jiu Jitsu this year and I am also the **Social Secretary.**”*
- *“I was able to take part in and **lead a dance team at a national competition**, none of which I would have been able to do without the support of the bursary.”*

Are you likely to take up a leadership position next year?

269 Responses

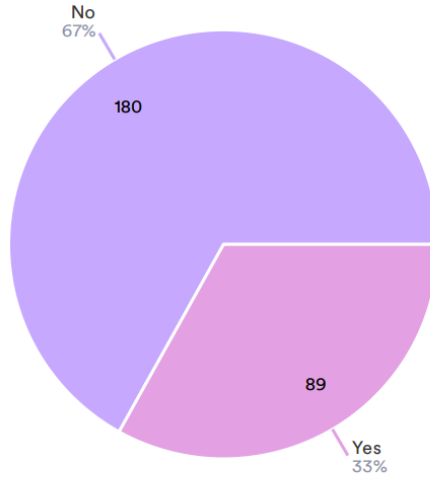


Figure 7 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating respondents answers to the question “Are you likely to take up a leadership position next year?”

Are you employed alongside your studies?

269 Responses

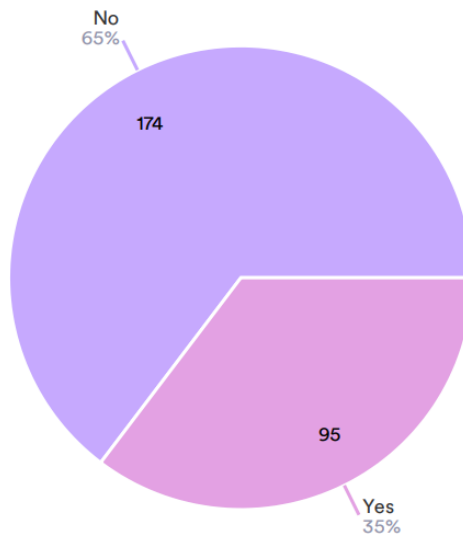


Figure 8 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating respondents answers to the question “Are you employed alongside your studies?”

Another question in the PB Evaluation Survey asked PB recipients if they are likely to “take up a leadership position next year?” (Figure 7) where the majority of respondents (67%) answered “No.” There are a few possibilities to explain this outcome.

Transferable Skills

Firstly, 35% of respondents are **employed** alongside their studies (Figure 8), which is the same figure as the 2021-2022 data. Consequently, working alongside their studies could mean **students cannot afford to give time volunteering as committee members or holding voluntary leadership positions.**

However, another possibility is that PB recipients are learning a **variety of other skills** which they may not necessarily be putting back into the society or club the PB contributes to them being a part of.

For example, bursary recipients also expanded on the impact of the PB on developing *other transferable skills*. For example, some comments from bursary recipients in the PB Evaluation Survey mention the development of other skills:

- “It has allowed me to **develop my language and sports skills** during my sessions at the sports centre”
- “I was able to join a sports club this year because I could afford the sports membership and the joining fee for the club, which has **boosted my confidence** and allowed me to work on my **interpersonal skills**”
- “The participation bursary allowed me to **attend the National Jiu Jitsu competition** as a part of my participation in Jiu Jitsu Club. It helped me pay for the Gi (the uniform) and the accommodation for the trip. I was so happy to be able to go because I actually reached the **finals of the competition**; something I am very proud of as well as giving me the skills needed to apply for a Grading within the club (which the bursary also helped me pay for). **I passed the grading** and have achieved my orange belt: the 3rd belt in the Jiu Jitsu ranking”
- “It allowed me to take part in events that I previously wouldn't have been able to take part in because of cost concerns and worries about financially distressing myself and my parents (though they wouldn't complain). It was such an important gesture towards us who have trouble with finances especially towards doing **extracurricular activities that aren't required by our course** and aren't critically essential to the field we are studying in, though it will help us be **more employable in the future.**”

Another important although not surprising aspect was uncovered involving **students joining societies linked to their courses**. These societies have the benefits mentioned above about *improving students' sense of belonging and inclusion* alongside **the peer support** and ability to increase **course knowledge**

through **extra resources** available through these societies which aim to support students with their degree or career planning. For example, some students commented through the PB Evaluation Survey on the **extra support provided by joining a society linked to their course** below:

- “By joining the **pharmacy society** I have also had **access to resources and revision sessions/support classes** provided by the society which have massively supported my work.”
- “There were many societies that I had hoped to apply to and have been able to do so thanks to the participation bursary. As a **medical student**, the **learning I've had from these societies** has been incredibly helpful and has allowed me to improve many skills in a social setting, as well as to meet new people.”
- “The most prominent thing the bursary helped me with is buying the ticket to the **law ball!** Without it I would have been unable to go to it and **socialize with my peers and feel a part of my course**. I'm grateful and excited to attend the ball in March.”

Recommendation 11: Follow Up Questions in Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey 2023-2024

Therefore, the above comments about *developing leadership* and *transferable skills* in addition to the attainment of *additional degree course knowledge* indicates a **positive direction** towards the TOC Model 1 Outcome of students reporting that the PB helps them to *gain skills and knowledge through extracurricular participation*. The reasons behind students reporting that they are **less likely to take up a leadership position** could be due to other commitments including part-time work or focusing on developing other skills.

However, this is an interpretation based on the data available; therefore, it is recommended for there to be **follow up questions** in the survey for the 2023-2024 academic year. This recommendation will allow for **more data collation about the skills and knowledge students are developing** in their extracurriculars and is reflected in the TOC Model 2. Furthermore, these follow up questions will contribute to a **re-evaluation** of the expected outcomes of the PB, particularly providing *more clarity on how extracurricular participation impacts on the attainment of skills and knowledge*.

Contributing to easing the cost of living

The next big, expected outcome identified in the TOC Model 1 was that students would report that the PB **alleviates their concerns about the cost of extracurricular activities** and that they feel **financially supported** to participate in NUSU extracurricular activities.

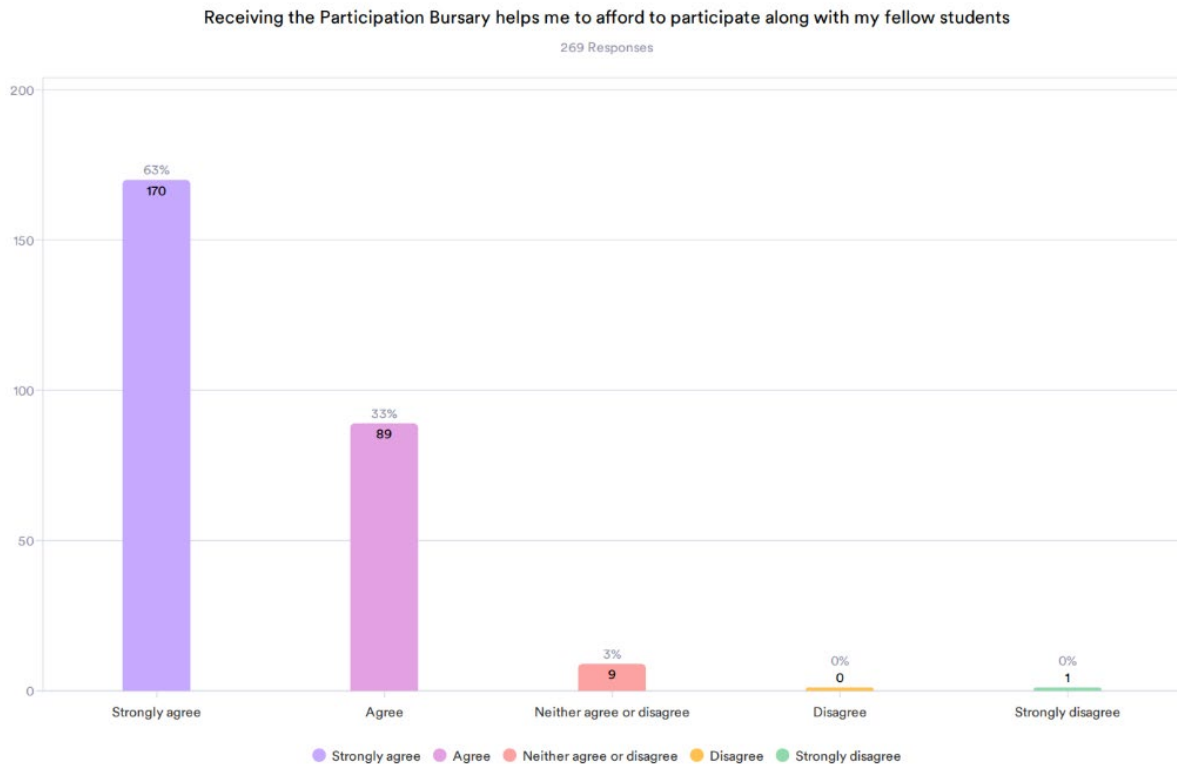


Figure 9 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating to what extent respondents agreed with the statement that “Receiving the Participation Bursary helps me to afford to participate along with my fellow students.”

As previously mentioned above, **96%** of respondents **agree** with the statement that their Participation Bursary was ‘*necessary to engage with NUSU opportunities*’ (**Figure. 1**). In addition, **96%** of respondents agreed with the statement that ‘*Receiving the Participation Bursary helps me to afford to participate with my fellow students*’ (**Figure 9**) which was a **5% increase** compared to the 2021-2022 data (91%). Therefore, this output was largely met for the 2022-2023 year.

When asked to elaborate on their responses in the PB Evaluation Survey, a number of students pointed to the **help the PB had on alleviating the stress over the finances and being able to afford to participate in extracurriculars** or to get to campus to participate in extracurriculars:

- “It has made the experience much better because I don't need to worry as much about the costs of activities within societies, and I can participate in them and enjoy that time more without the added stress of cost.”
- “The participation bursary supported me by allowing me to take part in extra curricular activities that I would have struggled to attend without the bursary. It allowed me to feel like I wasn't missing out on non-academic aspects of university lifestyle and made me worry less about how I would afford to do such things.”

- *“Really helped with travel costs as I was based away from Newcastle this year”*

Further comments in the PB Survey highlighted that a number of students pointed towards concerns around the **rising cost of living** and how the **PB helped them to get involved** without adding a further financial burden:

- *“The bursary was a timely solution to my **anxiety about the rising cost of living**. It has given me the opportunity to take part in activities such as fitness, hikes to the beach and so on. Although the money does not cover my needs, I am still very grateful to the Students' Union and the University for reaching out to those of us in need.”*
- *“Since the cost of living has increased, keeping the balance between essential and non-essential expenses has become increasingly difficult. With this bursary, **I was able to ease this burden mentally, which allowed me to socialise more frequently.**”*
- *“I was **really stressed out regarding the cost of living crisis and joining any club or society adds upon the financial burden**. The participation bursary really helped me to join the society, clubs and fitness center. It was a great help and I'm extremely thankful to the NUSU.”*

Nonetheless, while the above comments indicate the positive impact the PB has financially, some students also indicated that the **cost-of-living crisis** has **decreased the impact of the monetary value of the PB** as shown below:

- *“The participation bursary allowed me to offset some of the costs of joining a society and attending events as well as purchasing equipment. Unfortunately, with **the increased cost of living the bursary did not go as far as it may have previously** and perhaps need to be increased to reflect the change in the value of the bursary.”*
- *“They may **consider to increase bursary** amount a bit because **increasing cost of living** also affected sports club membership, or equipment, or travel activities”*

Therefore, these comments from PB recipients indicate that the **maximum amount granted of the PB may need to be increased**. However, these comments could be attributed to the **expectation that this PB will cover all the costs** of getting involved in NUSU and Newcastle University extracurriculars.

Therefore, the clear communication to students that the PB will only **help to cover some of the costs** of getting involved and not all (Recommendation 5) may help **manage student expectations** and these comments may be less prevalent for the next cohort of PB recipients (2023-2024). Nonetheless, these comments will still be used to support the **re-evaluation of the sufficiency of the maximum PB amount** after the 2023-2023 Academic Year (Recommendation 9) and ensure **students continue to**

report that the PB supports them financially and alleviates their concerns around extracurricular costs.

Contributing to health and wellbeing

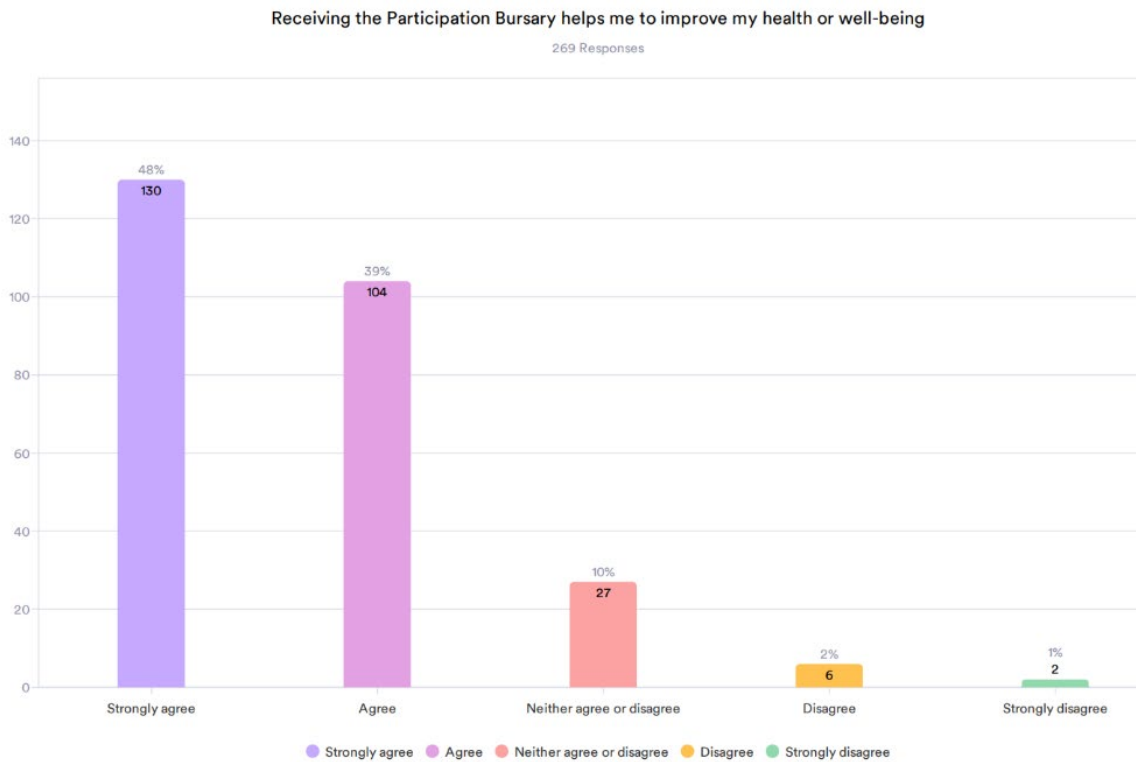


Figure 10 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating to what extent respondents agreed with the statement that “Receiving the Participation Bursary helps me to improve my health or well-being.”

One of the final big, expected outcomes identified in the TOC Model 1 was that students would report that the PB both **improved their health and wellbeing through extracurricular participation** and made a difference to their university experience through this positive impact on their **wellbeing and mental health**.

From the PB Evaluation Survey, **95%** of respondents agreed with the statement '*Receiving the Participation Bursary helps me to improve my health or wellbeing*' (**Figure 10**) which is an **increase of 4%** compared to 2021-2022 data (91%). Therefore, this output was largely met for the 2022-2023 year.

When asked to elaborate on their responses in the PB Evaluation Survey, a **number of survey respondents pointed towards the positive contribution that the Participation Bursary made to their mental and physical wellbeing:**

- “Without the bursary I likely wouldn't have been able to join the societies/clubs I did and as such am very grateful for the funding. Participating in these societies allowed me really enjoy my time at uni by making new friends, exploring my hobbies and helping with my mental health”
- “It allowed me to join clubs and societies, meaning meeting more people, improving both my physical and mental health.”
- “I think being in a sports club has had a positive effect on my mental health”
- “The participation bursary allowed me to take part in different events despite financial circumstances and helped to to feel part of the university when starting. It's was very helpful for both my physical and mental health”
- “When I felt overburdened or worked out from my university degree - medicine takes a huge toll, I was able to participate in sport activities paid by the bursary money which relieved my stress and financial stress.”

Please tell us what you have used the participation bursary towards (tick all that apply)

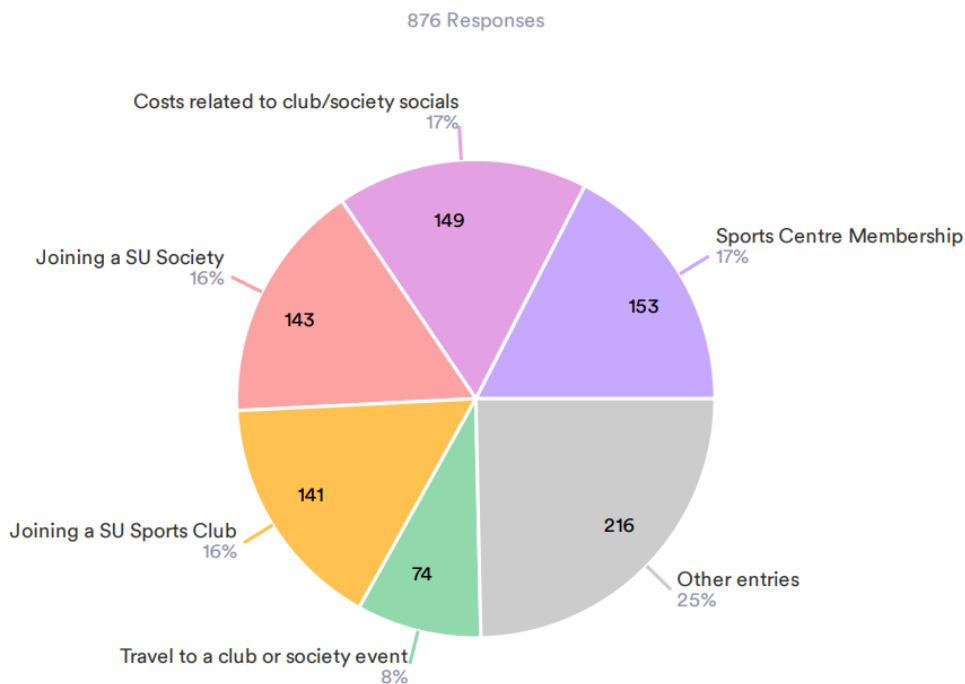


Figure 11 – Survey results from the 2022-2023 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey indicating what Participation Bursary Recipients have used their bursary for

Aligning with the positive impact the PB has on students physical and mental wellbeing, just over half of responses (52.3%) to the question “Please tell us what you have used the participation bursary towards,” indicated **sports-related activities (Figure 11)**. For example, 16% of respondents indicated using the PB to join a **SU sports club**, 17% used the PB on a **University Sports Centre membership** and

a further 20% used the PB for **sporting-related expenses** including sports equipment, swimming pool access and competition-related expenses (**Figure 11**).

However, the 2021-2022 data indicated **22%** of PB survey respondents used the PB to **join sports club** while **23%** of PB survey respondents use the PB for the **University Sports Centre membership**. This indicates a **decrease of 6%** of PB survey respondents using the PB for both sports clubs and Sports Centre Memberships. While the data available is limited; this decrease could be the result of PB recipients using the bursary towards **other sporting related expenses** including travel (8%) and **more social activities** within their club or society (17%) or for students to get involved in **societies** (16%). Alternatively, students who did use their PB for club and sports centre memberships may not have filled in the PB Evaluation Survey. Therefore, this interpretation also supports implementing **follow up questions** in the 2023-2024 Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey to get more depth of students' answers (Recommendation 11). Lastly, as there is still room for improvement, it is **recommended to annually re-evaluate the impact the PB has on bursary recipients mental health and wellbeing** and strive for continued improvement.

Conclusion

To summarise the above; the 2022-2023 year was the **first year a TOC approach** was used to evaluate the PB to ensure that for **students** applying to the PB scheme, the maximum impact was achieved. This impact can be monitored through the **various targeted outcomes** including a **positive experience applying** for the bursary, reporting that the **PB alleviates students' concerns about the costs of extracurricular activities** and reporting an **increased sense of belonging, improved physical and mental wellbeing** amongst others as highlighted in the TOC Model 1.

As outlined above, the **majority of outcomes were met or exceeded**. However, through distribution of the PB and students' feedback through the PB Evaluation Survey; **areas of improvement** for the PB scheme were presented. Therefore, in order to fully meet the outcomes desired, various recommendations were devised to ensure the maximum impact of the scheme for students can be achieved.

Summary of Recommendations

While **each section above went into detail** about the reasons for the proposal of the recommendations for the next year of the PB scheme; there were **crossovers with recommendations** in certain sections; particularly concerning students' experience. Therefore, all the recommendations from above can be summarised below:

Recommendation 1: Update the Participation Bursary Application Form

This recommendation explored **improving the digital application form for 2023-2024 academic year** which is expected to improve the number of successful applications, decrease the need for follow up with students, decrease the extra workload created and have a **positive impact on the students experience** of the application to the PB and other SU specific funding projects.

Recommendation 2: Timeline Implemented and Communicated to Students

This recommendation hoped that both **implementing** and clearly **communicating** the Participation Bursary **application timeline** will help manage student expectations and provide the opportunity to distribute the PB to the expected timeline which has been designed to make the **maximum impact on students** applying for the Participation Bursary.

Recommendation 3: Hire a Student Intern

This recommendation explored how a student intern would help ensure both the **maximum effectiveness of the scheme** and **maximum positive impact on the students** is achieved alongside creating a **manageable workload** for the staff involved in distributing the Participation Bursary.

Recommendation 4: Increased Information about the Participation Bursary on the Website and Guidance Documents

Recommendation 4 highlighted that **more in-depth information** on the website should be available in **multiple formats** to assist with accessibility. This information will include:

- The Participation Bursary scheme **background**
- Explanation for the **Eligibility Criteria**
- Revamped eligibility criteria document
- Overview of the application timeline and process.

Additionally, **guidance documents** would be published which would include a section on Frequently Asked Questions and example application.

Recommendation 5: Increased Transparency + Evaluation Reports Available

This recommendation builds on Recommendation 4 and focuses on closing the feedback loop and helping manage students' expectations through increased **transparency** on the limited funds, the scheme and the **implementation of certain processes** which will also decrease the number of student queries or confusion throughout the application. Alongside this, **previous evaluation reports will be available** on the pages for students to see how the overall funding has been allocated and ensure they are aware of the importance of their feedback.

Recommendation 6: Increased Number of Tiers

The tier system implemented for the 2022-2023 academic year was unclear for students in addition to being outdated. Therefore, it is recommended that a **different tier system, consisting of more specific tiers, would be implemented**. These tiers would more closely relate to the activities, membership and equipment on offer for students with more subtle changes in value between the tiers to help students apply for the correct bursary amount. As this is a new tier system being implemented; a re-evaluation of the scheme will be had for the 2023-2024 academic year.

Recommendation 7: Update the Eligibility Criteria

The current eligibility criteria were also revealed to be outdated; therefore, the **eligibility criteria will be updated** to indicate which students are limited to certain criteria and the reasons for this as well as to ensure the document outlines helpful links.

Recommendation 8: Update the Evidence Requirements

This recommendation leads on from recommendation 7; and explored how the evidence required for certain eligibility criteria were either outdated or inaccessible to students. Therefore, together with updating the eligibility criteria, this recommendation supports the **review and update of the evidence requirements for each eligibility criterion**.

Recommendation 9: Re-evaluation of Maximum Amount Granted Per Student

From the PB Evaluation Survey, students commented how **the cost-of-living crisis** impacted on the current value of the bursary. While it is hoped that moving to a solely tier based system with an increased the number of tiers (Recommendation 6) and increased communication and information about the limitations of the PB Scheme (both Recommendation 4 and 5) will decrease the prevalence of these comments as students' expectations of the scheme have been relayed. However, it is still possible for **a large number of students to indicate that the bursary amount is insufficient** for the 2023-2024 academic year despite the former recommendations. Consequently, it would be

recommended that **in depth research about the sufficiency of the amount should be undertaken** i.e., to draw comparisons between the tiers and the specific activities students are using the PB Scheme for.

Recommendation 10: Participation Bursary to Remain Open to All Students

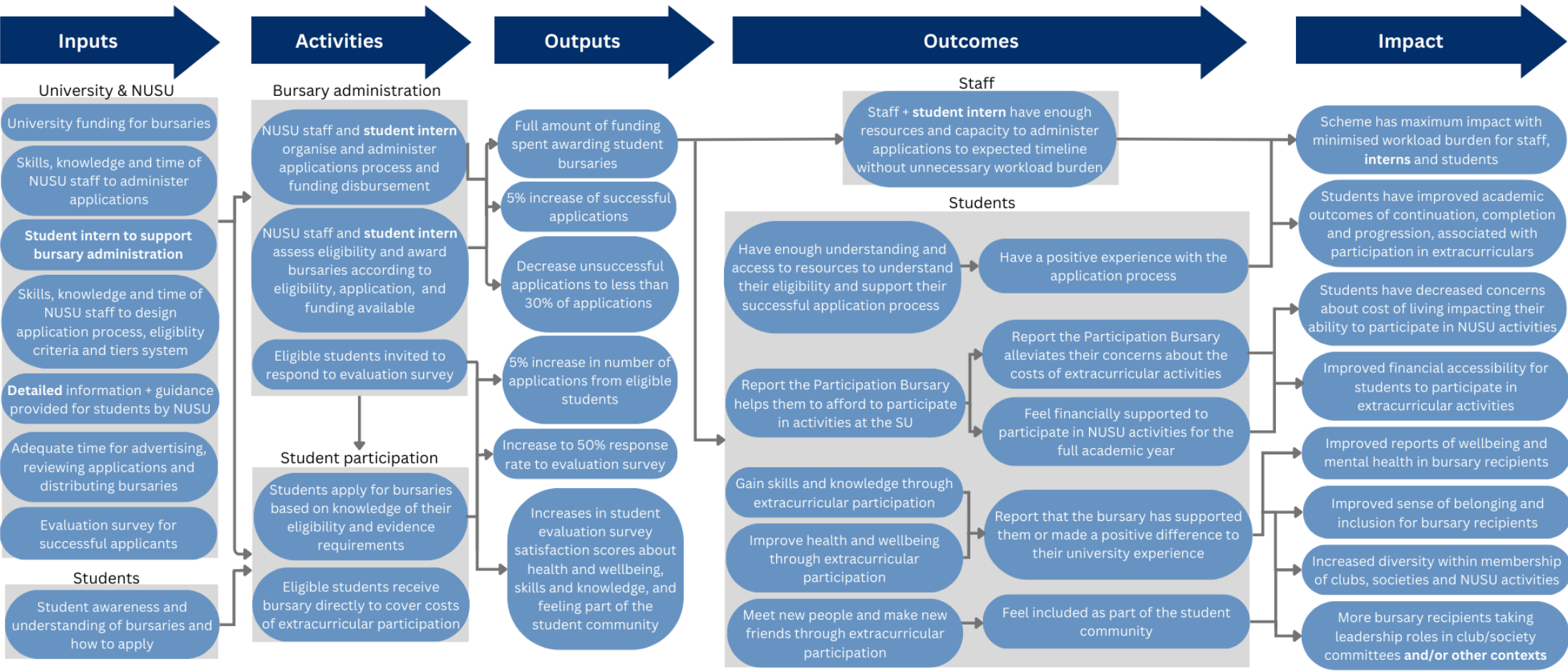
The 2023-2024 academic year was the first year that **students of all stages and fee status were able to apply for the Participation Bursary**. This had been hugely appreciated by the student body therefore, it is recommended that the **Participation Bursary scheme** remains open to students of all stage of study and fee status as this would ensure that all students studying at Newcastle University are **able to feel included** and **able to participate in extracurriculars**.

Recommendation 11: Follow Up Questions in Participation Bursary Evaluation Survey 2023-2024

The Participation Bursary recipients' responses in the PB Evaluation Survey indicated that they developed both **leadership** and **transferable** skills alongside extending their degree knowledge. Although, the reasoning of **why students are less likely to take up a leadership position** remained unclear. As there was limited interpretation to be made from the data available, this recommendation highlighted the inclusion of **follow up questions** in the survey for the 2023-2024 year to collate more data about the skills and knowledge students are developing in their extracurriculars.

Theory of Change for 2023/24

Finally, the recommendations developed from evaluating the PB Scheme for the 2022-2023 year have been added to create the **TOC Model 2** which is the **Theory of Change Model for the 2023-2024 year**. This **visually** shows how the **above 11 recommendations are expected to affect outcomes**. Some of the consequent outputs have decreased to goals that are hoped to be realistic and achievable for the next academic year.



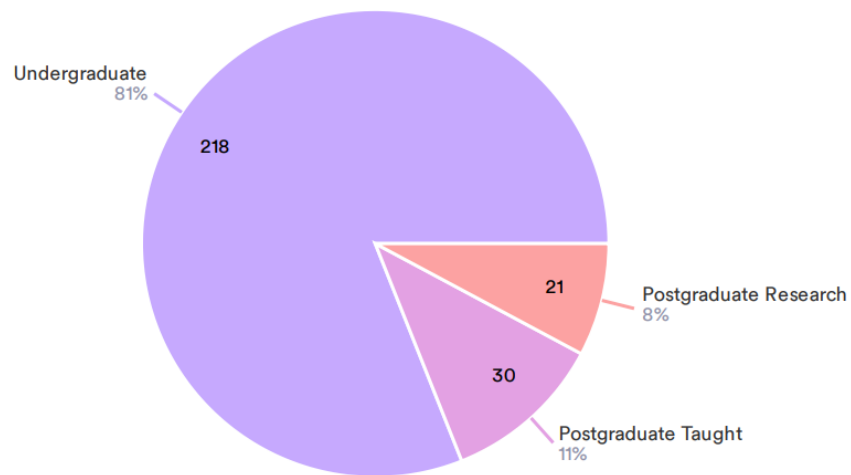
Assumptions of the programme design	Risks to delivery
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students are aware of the Participation Bursaries 2. Students are able to apply for the participation bursary and are eligible 3. There is sufficient funding to support the eligible students 4. The students want to use the participation bursary to get involved with extracurricular activities 5. Getting involved in extracurricular activities helps students feel included, feel a sense of belonging and improves students' wellbeing 6. Direct funding to eligible students is better than a reimbursement process 7. There is a relationship between NUSU staff facilitating the participation bursary and the relevant university contacts 8. Hiring a student intern to support bursary administration will reduce workload burden and positively affect the application process for staff, interns and students 9. There is a manageable workload and staff available to deliver the allocation and distribution of the participation bursary 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of accessibility to and understanding of the bursary will prevent some students from applying despite being eligible as well as students who are unsuccessful as they are ineligible 2. Misunderstanding/confusion about the application process, application form, or purpose of the bursary leads to lower quality applications which require more follow up and additional workload for staff 3. A student intern may not be the most effective input to spread bursary administration workload 4. The students struggle to justify the amount they require without using a reimbursement process 5. There are not sufficient funds to distribute to all eligible students who apply 6. The bursaries are not distributed to students in a timely way, meaning students have to use their own funds which could be detrimental to their financial situation

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Survey Respondent Demographics

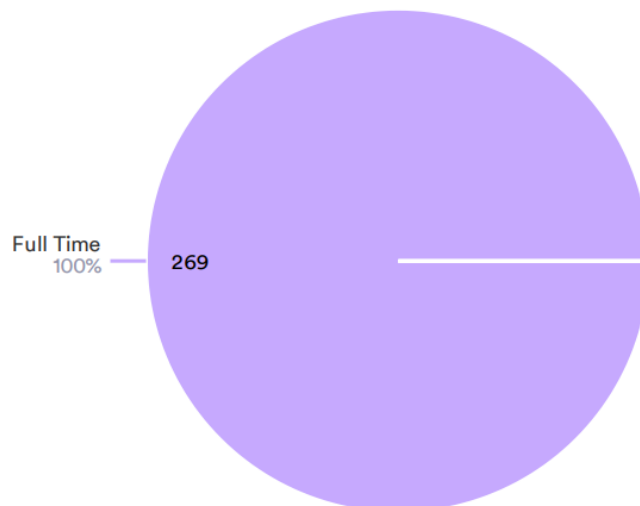
Level of Study

269 Responses



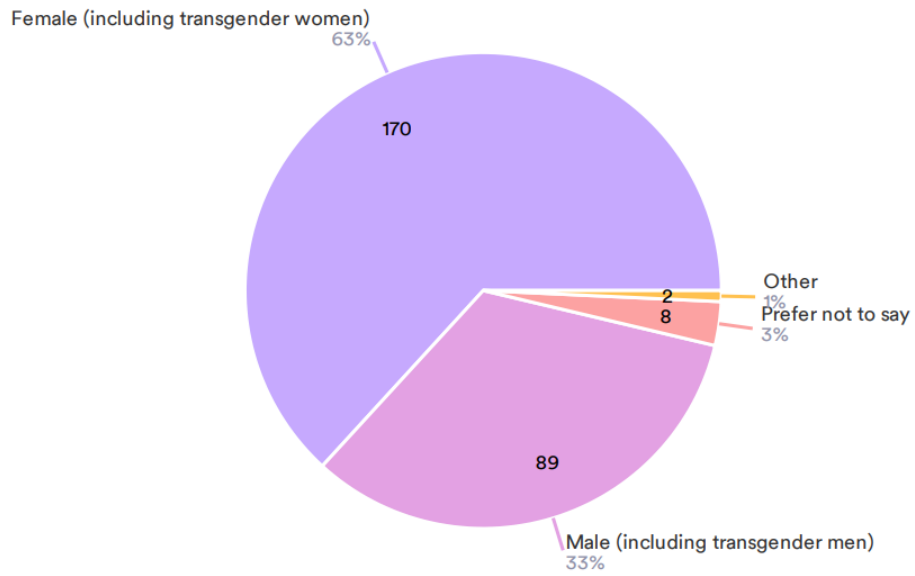
Mode of Study

269 Responses



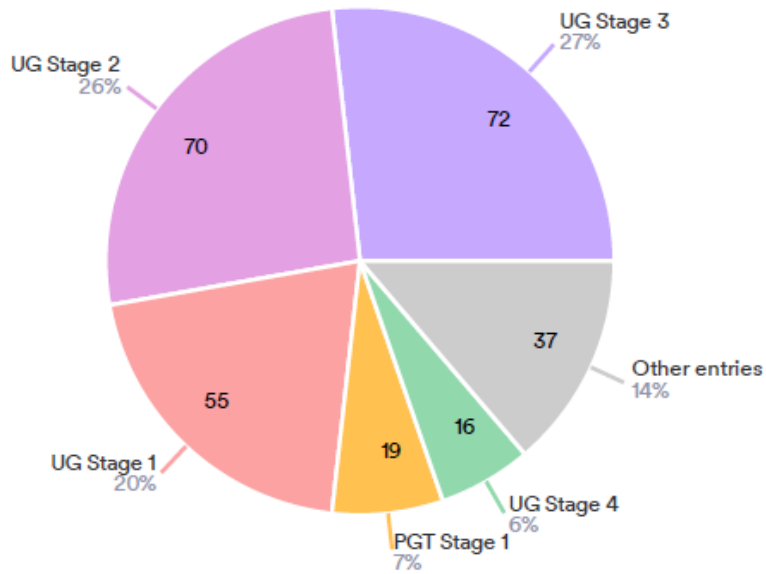
How would you describe your gender?

269 Responses



Stage of Study

269 Responses



NUSU Participation Bursaries

Guidance notes for eligibility

Contents:

You receive an opportunity scholarship from Newcastle university
You are a care experienced student
You are disabled or have a long-term illness
You are a young carer or a parent?
You are an estranged student
You are a mature student
You are a black, Asian or minority (BAME) ethnic student
Gypsy, Roma or traveller
Refugees
Military families
Home postcode
You are commuter/live at home student

You receive an Opportunity Scholarship from Newcastle University

This can be either the partial or full scholarship.

You must provide a scanned copy of your 'Bursary and Scholarship Entitlement for the Academic Year' letter from Newcastle University as part of your application.

You are a care experienced student

You must have spent at least 3 months in local authority care.

None required as part of your application. Your status as a care leaver must have been declared as part of your UCAS application; this will be confirmed with the universities designated care leaver contact.

You are disabled or have a long-term illness

You must be in receipt of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) OR Medical Evidence Form. You must provide a copy of your PIP decision letter OR your annual updating letter if your decision letter is more than twelve months old.

OR

We also accept Medical Evidence Forms (which are supplied by Student Health and Wellbeing Service and completed by a GP. If a student has a disability or long-term illness and wants to access support, then they can contact Student Health and Wellbeing Service here.

You are a young carer or a parent?

You must be looking after a relative or friend who has a long-term illness or disability or misuses substances.

You must provide a document (on headed paper) confirming your status as a carer which can be one of the following:

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Carer's Allowance statement/letter
- Carer's support group
- Social Services/Local Authority
- Your relative's NHS or Private Support Worker
- A letter from your GP

You are an estranged student

You would be eligible if you are a young person who is living independently of your parents/guardians and has no communicative relationship with either of your biological parents/legal guardians and you do not expect this situation to be reconciled.

You must provide a document (on headed paper) confirming your status as an estranged student which can be one of the following:

- Estranged student support group/network, such as StandAlone or the Unite Foundation
- Social Services/Local Authority
- A letter from your GP
- A statement from your school/college

You are a mature student

You would be eligible if you are a mature student who is starting their first undergraduate degree. This will mean students who are over 21 years of age at the beginning of their undergraduate studies.

You must provide ID, confirming your date of birth, through one of the following:

- Passport
- Driving license
- Birth Certificate

You would also need to provide evidence of your registration at the university. A letter from your department stating when you started your course will suffice, provided you were over 21 years of age when starting your degree.

You are a Black, Asian or Minority (BAME) Ethnic student

You are eligible for the Participation Bursary if you are from a BAME background. This criterion is fulfilled if you belong to one of the following ethnic groups

- Black or Black British – Caribbean

- Black or Black British – African
- Other Black background
- Asian or Asian British – Indian
- Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Other Asian background
- Mixed White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed White and Black African
- Mixed White and Asian
- Other Mixed background
- Arab
- Other Ethnic background
- State your ethnicity. We ask everyone applying to state this.

Gypsy, Roma or Traveller

You are eligible for the Participation Bursary if you are from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community.

You must provide a document (on headed paper) confirming your status as a member of the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community by your school or college that you have attended.

Refugees

You are eligible for the Participation Bursary if you have refugee status.

You have been given permission to stay in the UK, and granted official 'refugee status'. You should have a letter from UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) to confirm this. Please provide this as evidence.

Military Families

You are eligible for the Participation Bursary if either/both of your parents/carers are serving or have served in the armed forces at key educational times. You are also eligible if you have served in the armed forces.

The British Armed Forces consist of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, British Army, Royal Air Force, Regular Reserves, Volunteer Reserves, and Sponsored Reserve.

You must provide a document (on headed paper) from your school or college confirming which armed forces your parent(s) or you have served in.

Home Postcode

To be eligible you must live in a neighbourhood that has a low progression rate to higher

education and has a high level of financial, social or economic deprivation.

You will need to provide a proof of address:

- Student loan letter of offer from Student Loan Company
- Phone bill
- Bank statement

We will check your home postcode to determine eligibility using POLAR and IMDdata. We ask everyone applying to state their home postcode.

You are Commuter/Live at Home Student

You are eligible for the Participation Bursary if you live alone or cohabit with non- students (eg – parents, family, legal guardians etc) and/or the time taken to travel to campus greater than a 30-minute walk.

- You will need to provide a proof of address:
- Student loan letter of offer from Student Loan Company
- Phone bill
- Bank statement
- Confirmation of home address of your parent/guardian
- Letter of confirmation of your term address from the university