

Access and Participation Statement 2026

Provider's name: Francis James Limited

Provider's UKPRN: 10095926

1. Introduction

This Access and Participation Statement sets out our commitment to supporting access and participation in higher education by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups. It is published in line with our values, and also to align with the requirements of the Office for Students' (OfS) Regulatory Framework.

Francis James Limited (FJ) is a specialist institution offering programmes in construction and the built environment. We were established to provide flexible, part-time, distance learning opportunities for people seeking to develop and progress their careers in the construction sector, recognising that the traditional university approach to learning does not suit everyone.

2. Context

January 2026 saw the first cohort of learners start their undergraduate studies with Francis James. The degree programme has been designed specifically to enable access to study online, on a part-time basis. Francis James has taken this approach because we believe in expanding opportunities for learners from all backgrounds to access higher education, empowering people who may not have considered study at this level, or who may have faced too many barriers to access.

“We are committed to inclusivity and accessibility, ensuring that education is open to all, fostering an environment where diversity is respected, and individuals are supported to achieve their potential.”¹

The Construction Leadership Council's Industry Skills Plan² highlights the need, and the opportunity, for the sector to “create an environment in which everyone can work - a culture that is welcoming, fair and flexible” (p9). Our approach fully embraces this intention, recognising the role education can play in establishing expectations, and delivering on them, to help improve the construction sector workforce.

As part of establishing our institution's offer, we have embedded support in a number of ways that can help widen access to higher education through Francis James. This includes through the design of programme delivery, learner support services, admissions policies and approaches to financial support. This plan sets out further details on these below.

¹ Francis James Strategic Plan 2024-2029

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<https://www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/CLC-Skills-Plan-2023-24-FINAL.pdf>

Francis James received validation from Richmond American University London (RAUL) in August 2025. We have responsibility for creating, delivering and assessing our degree programme and setting the standards for our higher education provision, while RAUL maintains an oversight of these standards. Learners who successfully complete their studies with us receive a UK award from RAUL.

3. Access and Participation Commitments

The areas of access and participation that we currently focus on, and which inform decisions we take about our policies and operational processes, are:

- To ensure personalised support for learners who may have particular needs or encounter certain barriers to development through study. These needs and barriers may include:
 - Recognised (or previously undiagnosed) learning needs or disabilities
 - Being out of education for a long period of time
 - Lack of confidence to study at a higher level
 - Financial constraints
- To maintain flexibility in delivery
- To provide contextual considerations through the admissions process, including taking account of prior work experience
- To ensure the learner voice is heard as we grow and develop what we offer

These areas cut across our activities in a number of ways.

Admissions

For entry into our undergraduate programmes we have set a standard entry criteria which is the equivalent value of 96 UCAS tariff points (this could be three A levels all at grade C, a T level pass, or MMM grade for a NTEC National Extended Diploma, for example). However, in commitment to widening participation, we may, where relevant and possible, offer contextual admissions. These are made on a case by case basis at our discretion. Applicants may receive one or more of the following:

- A slightly lower entry offer
- Extra assignments or skills work to complete before enrolment to the programme to demonstrate ability
- Extra support during the first year of study
- Attendance at outreach activities.

Those who may be eligible for contextual admission include: learners from areas where there is a low rate of school leavers who attend higher education; people who have been in care; unpaid carers; armed forces veterans; people with disabilities.

Programme Delivery

Our undergraduate programme is delivered fully online through distance learning. Research shows that the overall costs of higher education tuition, travel, food and accommodation often deter people from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds³. By having no physical campus, we remove many of these barriers, allowing learners who cannot travel to access education more easily, saving both time and money.

³ University Business (2025) *Breaking financial barriers: Support for underrepresented students in higher education*. Available at: <https://universitybusiness.co.uk/barriers-to-higher-education/> [Accessed: 15 Jan 2026]

We expect most of our learners to be in employment and support them in applying their learning within their workplace. Where this is not possible, we provide alternative resources such as software, 3D models, curated datasets, photosets, BIM federations and realistic tools that offer equivalent learning opportunities regardless of background.

Our curriculum is intentionally designed for part-time, online study, making it accessible to those who cannot step away from work, especially for the three years typically required by full-time on-campus programmes. Teaching is scheduled for evenings and weekends, reflecting our priority to support part-time learners rather than fitting them around a full-time model.

Learners study one module at a time, reducing workload and helping manage competing commitments. This structure also supports those who may need additional help; for example, National Federation of Builders' research⁴ suggests one in four construction workers identify as neurodiverse, compared with the NHS estimate of one in seven in the UK population.

The consecutive structure of the programme also lets learners pause and rejoin their studies smoothly. With three entry points a year, a short break is often enough before joining another cohort, rather than deferring for a full year. While beneficial to all learners, this flexibility may help reduce drop-out rates, which government research shows are higher among minority ethnic groups⁵.

Learner Support

All learners enrolled with Francis James are given a Programme Support Officer, who provides a range of support to the learner throughout their time studying with us. While this is of benefit to all, it is anticipated that some learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups will be those who benefit the most from the additional support as it is personalised, and looks at learner wellbeing and progress, as well as academic outcomes.

Research by HEPI published in 2024⁶ showed that those learners more likely to drop out of a higher education course include mature learners, Black learners, disabled learners and those learners who were entitled at school to Free School Meals. Learners do not drop out directly because of their characteristics but because they may not have the support structures in place to help with their learning - this can include support and experience from friends and relatives, or from employers, as well as finance and other resources. Being able to tailor learner support through our Programme Support Officers is an effective way of helping learners stay committed to their studies.

We have a range of potential interventions available to learners to help them with their academic skills. These include workshops on areas including research skills, communication and maths. Improving skills in these areas can boost confidence and encourage better engagement with all other aspects of study.

⁴ Construction News (2023) *One in four construction workers identify as neurodiverse*. Available at: <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/health-and-safety/mind-matters/one-in-four-construction-workers-identify-as-neurodiverse-08-08-2023/> [Accessed: 18 Nov 2025].

⁵ House of Commons Library (2023) *Tuition fees and student funding in England*. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9195/> [Accessed: 15 January 2026].

⁶ HEPI (2024) *'Dropouts or stopouts or comebacks or potential completers?': Non-continuation of students in the UK (HEPI Policy Note 53)*. Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2024/04/25/why-a-fresh-approach-is-needed-for-university-drop-out-rates/> [Accessed: 18 Nov 2025]

It is important to us that we understand the impact of any actions we take to support our learners. We have established a Learner Experience and Welfare Committee, which will be attended by senior colleagues and teaching staff from Francis James, as well as a number of learners who will act as representatives for their cohorts. We will use the Committee to reflect on the effectiveness of our actions and consider any particular impacts on learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups. The Committee will also identify areas of improvement, and will contribute to the review of this Access and Participation Statement each year.

4. Future plans

We have a range of plans we intend to implement in coming years to expand our reach, and our support to learners, as we grow. In the shorter term, our plans to enhance access and participation will see us develop outreach activities and ensure appropriate training is in place to promote staff development, so they have the right skills to support learners. Longer term, we intend to further develop the financial support we are able to offer.

Outreach

We already engage with a number of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies within the construction and engineering sectors. We intend to seek opportunities to support and join their outreach activities, such as social media campaigns, college careers fairs and jobs fairs. We will also further develop our own media campaigns, identifying key target audiences who we know may benefit most from our approach to educational delivery.

Staff training

We intend to introduce a dedicated programme of training and resources that will enable academic staff and support staff to confidently deliver an inclusive approach to learning. All staff will be provided with equity, diversity and inclusion training, and be able to access resources to support their work. We will also look to introduce training in other areas specific to job roles, including on unconscious bias and pastoral support.

Financial Packages and Bursaries

We recognise that one of the biggest barriers to entry to higher education is finance. Our current learners either self-finance, or their employers pay some or all of their fees. We are committed to applying to the Office for Students for registration. Registration will provide many learners then with the option to access support funding (for example student loan services). A student loan can help widen participation as it can remove the immediate upfront barrier of tuition fees. We also intend to further develop our options for financial support to learners, which will include bursaries and financial payment plans specifically to support widening access for learners from low-income households. As we mature as a provider in the higher education market, we will also be able to develop the resources we can provide to learners to support them in seeking financial support from their employers. This will include case studies and endorsements from existing learners.

5. Access and Participation Data

As part of our enrolment and admissions process, we collect relevant data to enable monitoring of the characteristics of our learners⁷. Currently our data is limited due to the small

⁷ Our Privacy Notice sets out what we collect, including: SEND, racial/ethnic origin, age, gender.

number of learners we have, and this means we cannot yet do any meaningful analysis with regards participation.

Over time we will build and monitor our enrolment data, and in future years will report (where possible and reasonable) on the characteristics of our learners and any impact we feel our actions may have had on their engagement with our degree programmes, including aspects relating to outcomes and progression. Ultimately our intention is to develop a segmented analysis, reflecting different protected characteristics, that not only allows for comparison over time, but which can inform future targeted activities relating to enhancing access and participation.

Our *Cohort and Internal Data Monitoring Process* sets out how we approach data gathering and monitoring. Our Academic Quality and Standards Committee will receive periodic updates on our access and participation data, and also holds responsibility for reviewing this statement on an annual basis.

6. Data Protection and Confidentiality

Francis James Ltd is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office as a Data Controller. As Data Controller, we have in place measures to ensure that personal data provided to us is processed and held in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulations and the Data Protection Act 2018.