

## University of Bristol Access Agreement 2016-17

### 1. Background

- 1.1 The University of Bristol has been a pioneer in the field of widening participation for over a decade. Recognising the potential of our applicants has always been at the heart of our mission to recruit the most able students from the most diverse backgrounds.
- 1.2 The University has developed an innovative and creative outreach culture whilst adopting an evidence based approach to policy and practice. We remain determined to achieve a more diverse student community, recognising the social, educational and cultural benefits this confers to the individual and institution. We acknowledge the barriers that persist for many and will continue to examine our admissions procedures, entry routes and curricula to ensure that those with the potential to succeed at the University can do so. We will continue to do everything we can to make the University of Bristol as attractive to those from underrepresented groups as it is to those from 'traditionally represented' backgrounds.
- 1.3 The University developed its first access agreement in 2005. Subsequent revisions reflected a review of our student finance package, in light of the first year of operation, a comprehensive review of long term measurement of widening participation and changes to the government grant package. The new financial environment in 2012-13 necessitated a more fundamental review, the outcomes of which were reflected in our 2012 access agreement. Plans were further refined in response to significant environmental changes and our own plans for student number growth and outcomes were reflected in both our 2013 and 2014 agreements.
- 1.4 In 2013 the University's Widening Participation Strategy, which provides the strategic framework within which our Access agreement commitments sits, was reviewed and updated. The strategy has informed the development of the 2016-17 submission and care has been taken to ensure both documents complement one another and meet the stated strategic aims and objectives. The agreement also aligns closely with the University's Vision and Strategy 2009-16 and Education Strategy both of which are committed to the highest standards of teaching and learning for all students.
- 1.5 The climate in which the 2016-17 access agreement is written in is one of rapid change. The removal of student number control, demographic change, outcome of the general election and associated uncertainty regarding the funding of higher education, create challenges in long term planning.
- 1.6 The 2016-17 access agreement continues the University's commitment to invest a greater proportion of additional fee income into outreach than in previous agreements and reduce the amount allocated to our funding package. Following consultation with the Students' Union there was an extension of the University's bursary from 2015-16 onwards such that it will reach all 'OFFA countable' groups. This will continue in 2016-17.
- 1.7 In parallel with the arrangements for 2016-17 described here, we will continue to honour financial commitments to students admitted on financial support packages described in previous access agreements.
- 1.8 Our Students' Union sabbatical team have contributed to the development of the 2016-17 access agreement. The Equality, Liberation and Access Officer is an integral member of the Student Recruitment Committee and has provided insight into the specific role the Students'

Union will play in the delivery of outreach, student success and progression interventions as well as the impact of all elements of the agreement for the student body.

- 1.9 This access agreement outlines our strategic priorities for 2016-17. It takes a whole-institution approach, covers the student lifecycle, reflects on those interventions with greatest impact, explores the strategic rebalancing of spend to support access, student success and progression and demonstrates our commitment to long term outreach. We include an assessment of our current performance against targets and articulate our planned response to the challenges faced. We demonstrate our collaborative work with partners within and outside the higher education sector and highlight the provision of support for mature and part time students, care leavers, young carers as well as those accessing professional courses.

## **2. Tuition fees**

- 2.1 The University will charge an annual tuition fee of £9k (increasing annually in line with inflation where permitted) for all UK and EU students on full time undergraduate programmes and full time PGCE programmes.
- 2.2 Tuition fees for UK and EU students studying on a part time basis will be calculated on a pro rata basis, using the £9k fee as the full time equivalent rate. In practice, the maximum fee charged to any part time student as a result of this will be £4,500. If a student studies at a higher intensity than 50 per cent (the standard pattern), but below 75 per cent (and therefore not deemed to be part time) the maximum fee would not exceed £6750.
- 2.3 The following exceptions to this will apply:
- Students who are entitled to a fee waiver as part of our pre 2015 and Access to Bristol student finance packages
  - Students undertaking a year of study abroad or an industrial work placement, during which a fee of £1350 per annum will be charged (15 per cent of the full time fee)<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.4 It is anticipated that undergraduate tuition fees will generate an 'additional' income above the basic fee of approximately £43m in 2016-17.

## **3. Expenditure on additional access measures**

- 3.1 In 2016-17 The University of Bristol will invest 31.2 per cent of its additional fee income in additional access measures to include: financial support for students from low income backgrounds and a comprehensive programme of activities to support outreach, retention and progression of students from underrepresented groups.

## **4. Assessment of access and retention record**

- 4.1 The University of Bristol is determined to invest additional fee income strategically in order to achieve maximum impact. We have taken an evidence-based approach, analysed current performance and prioritised interventions with a proven track record. As an institution with relatively low proportions of students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups we have focussed activity and investment on those areas in which we need to make progress against targets.

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<sup>1</sup> Where a year abroad is a fully integrated part of a programme of study, we wish to be able to charge the full fee of £9k per annum.

- 4.2 According to HESA performance indicators<sup>2</sup>, of the students aged under 21 who entered the University in 2012-13, 1.8 per cent withdrew from higher education without completing a programme, against a benchmark of 2.3 per cent. The same data source indicates a non-continuation rate of 10.5 per cent for mature students against a benchmark of 9 per cent. We recognise the need to improve rates for this group and outline planned activity in para 10.2.
- 4.3 Using the University's own application and intake measures<sup>3</sup> to analyse performance over the five year period from 2009-10 to 2014-15, the proportion of undergraduate applications from under-represented groups has increased in five categories: mature; disabled; local; N-SEC groups 4-7; and Black and minority ethnic students). Applications from low participation neighbourhoods and the state sector have remained stable.
- 4.5 We are encouraged that following a period of decline from 2009-10, the 2014-15 data highlights an upward trend of applications from low performing school and college students. It should also be noted that in absolute numbers every category except mature students has seen an increase in applications. In many cases the 2014-15 figure is the highest for five years.
- 4.6 Whilst application rates are generally encouraging, we have had limited success in realising our ambitions to widen participation at the intake stage and we currently fall short of the majority of our HESA benchmarks.
- 4.7 In spite of limited progress against HESA benchmarks, the picture for many of the University's own widening participation categories at the intake stage is more positive. Compared to the 2013 intake data, there has been a rise in all categories including a 1.8 per cent rise in intake from students attending low performing schools and colleges, a 0.4 per cent rise in local students and a 1.4 per cent rise in students from N-SEC groups 4-7. This suggests that offers are being made to students from under-represented groups and that the contextual and guaranteed offers are proving effective.
- 4.8 Our focus on conversion from application to intake has also delivered significant success. During the same five year period, we have seen year on year increases in converting proportions from: low performing schools; socio economic groups 4-7; low participation neighbourhoods: local postcodes; mature; disabled; and minority ethnic groups. We have exceeded all access agreement progress measures in this area (conversion targets were included for low performing schools and colleges, relation to LPS, socio economic groups 4-7 and local students). We are also very encouraged by the conversion rates for those students participating in our Access to Bristol and summer school programmes. More information on this area of activity is provided in para 14.10.
- 4.9 In most respects, the profile of our PGCE intake is either in line with or better than that of our key comparators<sup>4</sup> and other local providers. In 2014-15 we recruited a cohort which was 34 per cent male: 66 per cent female (which compares with 32 per cent male: 68 per cent female for the comparator group and 25 per cent male: 75 per cent female for the local group). 41 per cent were categorised as 'mature' (compared with 50 per cent of the comparator group and 46 per cent of the local group).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/noncon>

<sup>3</sup> The University measures LPN applications and intake on the basis of the lower two POLAR quintiles, while HESA uses only the lowest quintile

<sup>4</sup> The Institute of Education; University of London and the Universities of Bath; Birmingham; Cambridge; East Anglia; Exeter; Manchester; Nottingham; Oxford; Southampton and Warwick

- 4.10 Our biggest challenge in this area relates to the recruitment of Black and minority ethnic students. In 2013-14 there was a significant drop in this area (to 3 per cent of the cohort) but this has significantly improved for the 2014-15 academic year (to 7 per cent of the cohort). Despite our figures being slightly lower than our comparator group (15 per cent), we are higher than our local group (5 per cent). Retention has remained high for this student group, with only 5 per cent of the total withdraws in 2013-14 being minority ethnic students, notably none of the 2014-15 withdrawals are from this group.
- 4.11 In order to make progress against our widening participation progress measures, the University will continue to take a holistic and contextualised approach to admissions. All students from low performing schools and colleges will be flagged within the University's admissions database and if an offer is made it will automatically be at the contextual (one grade lower) level. This will be irrespective of the predicted grades exceeding the entry requirements. In order to ensure positive conversion rates, and to explain the rationale behind the lower offer, a bespoke communication will be delivered through the University's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.
- 4.12 Context is also important in understanding the University's current performance against a range of widening participation indicators. We are a highly selective, research-intensive University. For entry in October 2014, we received an average of 7.6 home applications for every place (with some programmes receiving over 16 applications per place). The average UCAS tariff score of our 2014 entrants was 465 (the equivalent of just over 3 A\* grade A Level passes). By contrast, average secondary attainment in the Bristol area is among the poorest in England. At A Level, the average A Level student tariff score in the Bristol Local Authority is 703.7 against a national average of 787.1<sup>5</sup>. This presents significant challenges for an institution with high entry requirements<sup>6</sup>.
- 4.13 A feasibility study, undertaken by IntoUniversity in January 2014<sup>7</sup> noted that Bristol has 32 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the most deprived 10 per cent nationally. There is an estimated child poverty rate of 25 per cent (rising to 44 per cent in the south of the city). In the sub-domain of children and young people, 82 Bristol LSOAs fall within the most deprived 10 per cent nationally in the domain of Education, Skills and Training deprivation.
- 4.14 The impact of such high levels of deprivation on education within the city is clear. The City of Bristol has a disproportionately high number of underperforming schools. Of England's core cities, Bristol has the second lowest percentage of Free School Meal pupils progressing to higher education and Black and minority ethnic pupils and those with English as an alternative language underperform at all levels of education in Bristol<sup>8</sup>.
- 4.15 Beyond the Bristol area, the University draws students primarily from the south of England, where average income levels are relatively high. A predominantly traditional subject portfolio also has some impact on attractiveness of programmes to widening participation students.
- 4.16 Such characteristics create some very specific challenges when it comes to diversifying our own undergraduate intake (as opposed to playing our part in raising student aspirations and widening participation in Higher Education more generally). These involve culture and perceptions as well as attainment and economics. The former are slower to change and less easy to control than the latter.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/cgi-bin/schools/performance/group.pl?qttype=LA&no=801&superview=p16>

<sup>6</sup> The UCAS tariff and NQF/QCF tariffs are not calculated on the same basis so cannot be directly compared with each other

<sup>7</sup> Brett, C (2014). 'Feasibility study for an IntoUniversity Centre in South Bristol'

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

4.17 Given this context, the University of Bristol’s strategy for Widening Participation has been deliberately built around a combination of aspiration and attainment-raising activity in local schools (often undertaken in collaboration with other local HE providers and designed primarily to widen participation in the Higher Education sector generally); more targeted activities, designed to attract the most able students to Bristol and a contextualised approach to admissions, which ensures that poor school performance is taken into account when selection decisions are made.

## 5. Expenditure

5.1 In order to fund the activity described above and make progress against our targets, the University plans to invest a total of £13.7m in additional access measures in 2016-17, representing 31.2 per cent of total income from additional fees.

5.2 A high level summary of how this investment will be attributed in 2016-17 is provided in the table below. The amounts quoted would rise annually with inflation if fee levels were to rise to reflect inflation.

5.3

Outreach activities	£2.5m
Student Success and Progression activities	£1.0m
Student finance package	£10.3m
<b>Total reinvestment</b>	<b>£13.8m</b>

5.4 Work undertaken by the University in 2014 to assess the impact of the current allocation of additional fee income confirmed the need to strategically rebalance access agreement spend away from the student funding package towards outreach and student success activity. We will invest £3.5m in outreach and student success interventions in 2016-17, rising to £4.6m in 2019-20.

## 6. Additional access measures

6.1 Additional access measures fall into three main categories:

- Outreach activity
- Student success and progression activities
- Student financial support

## 7. Outreach expenditure

7.1 It is clear that progress is required in order to meet the targets set. There is a particular need to attract students from low performing schools and colleges, low participation neighbourhoods and N-SEC groups 4-7 to apply to the University.

7.2 In order to achieve our aims, and informed by both the recent OFFA Strategic Plan 2015-20<sup>9</sup> and research undertaken by our Widening Participation Research Cluster<sup>10</sup>, the University will invest £2.5m in outreach activities in 2016-17 rising to approximately £3.2m in 2019-20.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/OFFA-Strategic-Plan-2015-2020-final-PDF.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Davies, S, Hayes, D and Collard, S (2014) ‘Should expenditure be switched from bursaries to outreach? A comparative evaluation of the effects on Widening Participation of the Access to Bristol and Sutton Trust schemes’; Hartree, Y, Brown, G and Hoare, T (2014) ‘Student Financial Support Survey’

- 7.3 The focus of outreach activity in 2016-17 will be long-term. We will take a sustained approach to growing the applicant pool by working with primary school pupils to mature learners. We will further our commitment to IntoUniversity by opening a second centre in the south of the city in partnership with the universities of Bath and Exeter. We will continue to work closely with Merchants' Academy (an all-age academy based in South Bristol of which the University is a co-sponsor) and strengthen our links with providers of non-formal education (specifically the South Bristol Youth Project). We will also continue to invest in mentoring and tutoring programmes in the city to raise attainment at both GCSE and A Level. Based on the success of the Access to Bristol scheme we will expand the initiative outside of the local area. Further detail is provided in paras 7.4 and 7.11.
- 7.4 The University's commitment to long-term, sustained outreach coupled with analysis of the impact of the East Bristol IntoUniversity centre led to the decision to commit further access agreement funds to the opening of a second centre in South Bristol in September 2015. The East Bristol centre has achieved outstanding results since opening in 2013. Data indicates that 86 per cent of participants agreed that they were more likely to progress to higher education as a result of participation on the scheme and 51 per cent of those who took part in the intervention progressed to higher education compared to the local average of 13.7 per cent<sup>11</sup>. Four IntoUniversity students from London secured a place at the University of Bristol in 2013 and with the support of IntoUniversity it was possible to trial a satellite version of the Access to Bristol programme in Hackney. In 2016-17 we will work in partnership with IntoUniversity to expand the satellite programmes to other parts of London, the Midlands and the South West.
- 7.5 The development of the IntoUniversity centre in South Bristol will complement the outreach activity the University is already involved in through its co- sponsorship of Merchants' Academy. The Academy, ranked as the 31<sup>st</sup> most improved school in the country by the Department for Education, is making impressive progress in raising the attainment and aspirations of its pupils. In 2009 only 17 per cent of students achieved five A\*-C grades at GCSE, including Maths and English. This rose to 51 per cent in 2013 and was 46 per cent in 2014. The Academy is now an all age institution with children beginning their education in the nursery and progressing to the post sixteen centre. We are committed to providing strategic leadership to the Academy through the active engagement of the three University Governors and will continue to develop a series of bespoke outreach projects for students. We will support the Academy in the development of post sixteen provision in the school, specifically the possibility of establishing a STEM sixth form.
- 7.6 The University's commitment to raising attainment and aspirations through long-term outreach in South Bristol, one of the most economically deprived areas of the city and with the second lowest progression rates to higher education in the country<sup>12</sup>, extends beyond our work with Merchants' Academy. We will continue to support South Bristol Youth, an innovative partnership which brings together schools and youth organisations in the area. We have recently commissioned a longitudinal piece of research into the impact of the project which will examine the behavioural and attitudinal outcomes of the programme and participants, their families and peer group. The outcomes of the research will inform possible expansion of the project.
- 7.7 As well as taking a long term approach to outreach, the University is committed to expanding those interventions with a proven track record of success. One such programme is the Access to Bristol programme (which incorporates our Pathways to Law scheme). It is

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<sup>11</sup> IntoUniversity Bristol East Annual Report 2013-14

<sup>12</sup> HEFCE (2013), Trends in Young Participation in Higher Education: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201328/>

clear that the intervention continues to have a demonstrable impact on applications and intake with the scheme exceeding the application and intake progress measures.

- 7.8 Applications to the University from Access to Bristol participants increased by 58 per cent from 2012-13 to 2013-14. 253 Access to Bristol students applied to the University for 2014 entry, against a progress measure of 200 and 72 such students started as undergraduates compared with a progress measure of 60. Such figures suggest that the guaranteed offer, academic content of the programme, support through the application process and financial support package is proving effective. As such we will retain the guaranteed offer and provide a transition year fee waiver and bursary for such students in 2016-17.
- 7.9 However, annual evaluation of the scheme (along with the summer schools) has shown a higher than average number of offer holders whom have also taken part in these programmes do not achieve the terms of their offer. This was a particular issue for Access to Bristol and summer school cohorts who received their A Level results in 2013 and recent research suggest the problem persists. Analysis of the accuracy of the predicted A level grades of all offer holders at the University of Bristol in 2014 indicated that 45.6 per cent of predicted A level grades were incorrect and 38.5 per cent of grades were over predicted. This increased to 44.2 per cent with predictions from low performing schools.
- 7.10 To address the challenge of students not achieving their predicted grades, from 2014-15 we developed revision sessions in Bristol and London for Access to Bristol and summer school participants. The sessions involve school teachers running intensive day-long revision sessions in key subjects such as chemistry and maths. We will also continue to provide CPD sessions for teachers on writing personal statements. The evidence of an over-prediction of A level grades has been incorporated into these sessions. The impact of the pilot revision sessions held in 2014 was clear and data confirmed that those students who attended the sessions were significantly more likely to achieve the results required to meet the terms of their offer than those students which did not.
- 7.11 In 2016-17, based on the success of the Access to Bristol scheme, will we seek to expand the satellite programme schemes described in para 7.4 and work to establish a 'pathways to the professions' programme working with the faculties of Health Sciences (incorporating medicine, dentistry and veterinary science) and Engineering. The programme will provide targeted outreach to academically able students at post 16 level from under-represented groups. Tailored support will be provide in preparing for interviews and exams, participating students will have access to work experience placements in their chosen discipline and it is hoped that the guaranteed offer will be extended to this group.
- 7.12 Recognising the importance of widening participation activity being fully embedded within faculties, we will explore the development of 'engagement officer' posts, piloting the role in the faculties of Science, Social Science and Law and Arts in the first instance. This role will provide a single point of contact for academically focussed outreach activity within the faculty, allow for enhanced communication with schools and colleges and create capacity to develop programmes of work which complement the national curriculum and can contribute to raising attainment within participating schools. If successful the model could then be extended to the remaining faculties.
- 7.13 We will also continue our commitment to the University's long-standing summer school programme in 2016-17. We will maintain the level of participants on the 2016-17 Sutton Trust summer school to 160 but seek to improve application and conversion rates through a programme of e-mentoring and support for students at critical points in the admissions cycle. The summer school timetable has been redesigned for 2015, as previous feedback has

suggested that our subject streams were too broad. By narrowing the timetables down to one subject students will gain a deep understanding of their chosen subject it is expected that this will increase the number of summer school students which apply to the University. We will increase the number of students on the collaborative Year 11 summer school to 65.

- 7.14 The interests of groups protected under the Equalities Act 2010 and other groups including care-leavers are important to the University and such students are well catered for within our outreach provision. As our 2014-15 intake data indicates that the University performs well against our Black and minority ethnic progress measures for applications, in 2016-17 outreach will continue to target mature learners and students with disabilities.
- 7.15 In anticipation of the significant changes to funding for disabled students, the University recognises that a number of audits, changes in practice and additional resource will be required. The University will ensure that it meets its duty under the Equality Act 2010 and aims to be one of the UK higher education institutions providing good practice to disabled students.
- 7.16 At the outreach stage, attracting applications from students with disabilities will remain an important part of our in 2016-17. We will ensure that pre-application open days and campus tours are accessible to students with disabilities and will train tour guides such that they are able to support individual needs. We will continue to encourage students with disabilities to take part in the Access to Bristol scheme, making relevant adjustments where necessary. The University will maintain membership of the South West Disability Network through which it works collaboratively on disability issues.
- 7.17 The University continues to be actively involved in the South West network activity for those working with children in care and care leavers. A specific outreach programme of aspiration and attainment activities for such students has been developed with the University of the West of England, Bath Spa University and the Virtual Schools and we will maintain involvement in this. We will continue to provide student role models for children in care through both Student Ambassadors and the Students in Schools programme in 2016-17.
- 7.18 In addition to supporting students with protected characteristics to consider higher education, the University of Bristol is committed to reviewing the modes of delivery of degree programmes to ensure they are as accessible as possible (see paras 8.3 -8.7).
- 7.19 At postgraduate level we continue our work to increase the number of Black and minority ethnic students undertaking a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at the University. In 2016-17 we will continue to offer the Students in Schools programme to schools serving communities with high Black and minority ethnic populations, monitoring the proportion of mentors and tutors from such backgrounds and encouraging these students to become involved in this work.
- 7.20 We will raise the profile of career opportunities in teaching within the group by supplementing the training mentors and tutors receive with academic input from a variety of professional sources including Teach First, the Careers and Employability Service and the University's Graduate School of Education.
- 7.21 In 2016-17 the University will fund the delivery of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities relating to Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) and pupil progression for schools meeting widening participation criteria. To achieve this, we will draw on the higher education advice and guidance expertise of the University's Widening Participation and UK Student Recruitment team as well as the academic staff in the Graduate School of Education.

- 7.22 Finally, the University will recruit a Widening Participation and Postgraduate Recruitment Officer in 2015 to increase participation at postgraduate level amongst students from currently under-represented groups. Responsibilities of this post holder will include identifying target groups, developing interventions with current undergraduates from such groups to raise awareness of our postgraduate programmes and continuing to explore and promote new sources of funding (such as the HEFCE postgraduate support scheme) to relevant groups.

## 8. Mature and part time students

- 8.1 We share OFFA's ongoing concern regarding the decline in part-time applications and enrolment. The University was represented on the steering group of the UUK review of this area and whilst our current part-time provision is relatively small-scale we are committed to promoting those courses we do offer and to providing ongoing support to such students throughout the student lifecycle. Our Mature and Part Time Students' Adviser works with colleagues in schools and faculties to identify such students, provides information on transition support and promotes the peer mentoring scheme.
- 8.2 We note that applications from mature student have dropped slightly to the University from 2012-13 onwards (in line with the national decline) and in order to increase applications from mature learners the University will continue to invest in a range of outreach activities. In 2016-17 this will include; information sessions to Access students in local and regional Further Education Colleges, contributing to the regional Access Conference and running specific 'drop in' sessions on the University campus for prospective applicants, providing information, advice and guidance on applications, childcare, funding and accommodation. We will ensure that mature students continue to take part in the University's Access to Bristol scheme.
- 8.3 Data indicates that the part-time courses we do have, specifically those bespoke programmes developed for this market, are reaching mature students and those with little or no experience of higher education. In 2014-15 there were 77 students enrolled on our BA in English Literature and Community Engagement, all aged between 25 to 73, who study one night per week over six years. The first cohort graduated in July 2014, with 76 per cent achieving a successful outcome.
- 8.4 Short courses have been developed with community organisations including: the IDEAL Project, which supports communities affected by drugs and offending; the Single Parent Action Network; and the Eden House Project, which supports women involved in the criminal justice system. These courses are designed to facilitate progression, with many current students previously completing a short course. Outreach is also an integral part of the degree programme and each student runs a community project, such as a reading group as part of their studies<sup>13</sup>.
- 8.5 The University remains committed to exploring opportunities to develop more flexible learning approaches particularly into our most competitive programmes. We read with interest the recently published 'A journey into medicine outreach guidance'<sup>14</sup> and are pleased to be undertaking much of the outreach suggested. Indeed, an innovative 'gateway programme' into our medicine, dentistry and veterinary science courses has recently been approved and will begin teaching the first cohort of students in September 2016. Priority will be given to students in the local area, studying in lower performing schools and colleges

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<sup>13</sup> Organisations with whom students are working include Bristol Libraries, the Bristol Drugs Project and the National Autistic Society

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.medschools.ac.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/MS-A-Journey-to-Medicine-Outreach-Guidance.pdf>

and with lower than standard predicted grades for such programmes. Mature students will be a key target group for this programme.

- 8.6 The format of the gateway programme is not only designed to provide enhanced science training to students, but also to equip them with the necessary academic literacy skills for success in their future studies. Personal and professional development will be a key strand of the programme and will aim to give students the appropriate skills to succeed in the three clinical professions. Based on the anticipated positive recruitment to the programme, there is interest in developing a similar foundation year in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law.
- 8.7 It is hoped that the gateway programme will build on the success of the Arts and Humanities Foundation Year. Launched in September 2013 with a cohort of 27 students, the Foundation Year offers an access route to all undergraduate degree programmes in the Faculty of Arts for academically gifted and highly motivated students from a wide range of backgrounds who might not otherwise have an opportunity to access higher education.
- 8.8 Data continues to demonstrate significant success in recruiting a diverse student population for the foundation year. In 2014-15, of the 27 students enrolled on the foundation year: 72 per cent were mature; 38 per cent came from low participation neighbourhoods; 20 per cent were from Black and minority ethnic groups; 34 per cent were local; and 90 per cent had non A Level qualifications. Recruitment was supported through 'taster courses' run in collaboration with community organisations, including The Meriton, a pupil referral unit for young mothers. In 2014-15, 70 per cent of students had a household income of below £25k and were therefore eligible for a dedicated bursary.
- 8.9 Progression rates to first year undergraduate degree programmes from foundation year students are impressive. 89 per cent of the 2013-14 cohort completed the foundation year and all students achieved the required levels to progress onto a degree in the Faculty of Arts. In total, 19 students progressed to a degree in the Faculty, one progressed to Childhood Studies and one was admitted to study at Leeds University. This indicates that 78 per cent of the cohort continued to a degree, with three students choosing to leave with an exit award at the end of the year. This compares very favorably to study of comparable foundation year programmes. Funding for bursaries and the outreach costs associated with the programme will be committed from additional fee income in 2016-17.

## **9. Collaborative working**

- 9.1 The University recognises the strength of collaborative arrangements, including the benefits of scale, increased engagement with students and potential applicants, enhanced co-ordination and reduced duplication. In 2016-17 we will continue to build on existing partnerships, including the summer school programme developed with the Universities of Bath and Exeter.
- 9.2 We will collaborate with eleven universities in the South West region to fund, maintain, develop and promote the careers support websites managed by the Western Vocational Progression Consortium (WVPC): Lifepilot engaging and supporting mature and part-time students ([www.life-pilot.co.uk](http://www.life-pilot.co.uk)) and Careerpilot providing pathway and progression information for 13-19 year olds ([www.careerpilot.org.uk](http://www.careerpilot.org.uk)). We will continue to support the development of the websites, develop further strategies to embed the websites into outreach and IAG activities, maintain the 'Parent's Zone' developed as part of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) initiative, set and monitor milestones for inclusion in the OFFA monitoring report and explore funding opportunities for the

development of additional resources to support schools in providing IAG about progression to HE.

- 9.3 As mentioned above, the University is a member of the Western Outreach Network (WON), part of the HEFCE funded NNCO. In terms of sustainability beyond the funding period the WON will evaluate the effectiveness of its activities considering schools', colleges' and universities' level of engagement with outreach activities; impact on aspiration to progress to higher education; effect on relationships between schools, colleges, universities and the local community; and resource benefits of collaboration. This local evaluation will inform decisions regarding the continued operation of the Network after 2015-16.
- 9.4 Collaborative activity will extend beyond the South West. The University is a member of Realising Opportunities (RO), a unique collaborative partnership of research intensive universities developing and delivering a national fair access scheme which promotes social and geographic mobility for students from under-represented groups. Successful completion of RO will result in additional consideration given to applications through UCAS from all Partner universities, and the potential for an alternative offer worth up to 40 UCAS points or equivalent from many (including the University of Bristol). Each of the participating institutions has committed future funds to the central operating budget to ensure the on-going delivery and development of RO to 2017.
- 9.5 In 2013 the Partnership set a joint target with regard to progression to research intensive universities<sup>15</sup>. This was exceeded and the University of Bristol is committed to achieving the 2016 target of 34 per cent of students starting RO in Year 12 in 2014 progressing to a research intensive university.
- 9.6 The University will continue to actively engage in the collaborative Widening Participation Research Group with the Universities of the West of England, Bath and Bath Spa. In addition, through the Western Progression Vocational Consortium (WPVC) and the associated activities of the Western Access Progression Agreement, the same institutions will work to increase the progression to higher education of mature students in the local area.
- 9.7 At a national level, the University will continue to contribute to the Russell Group WP Association in 2016-17. This group has provided a forum for collaborative work across these highly selective institutions for many years. The association provides peer support for senior WP staff, plans and delivers collaborative activity including the biennial Teachers' Conference and practitioner networks. A 'Proof of Concept' project has recently been approved by HEFCE to develop and deliver CPD materials for teachers to support progression to selective universities funded by the NNCO and if successful, this may be extended to include selective courses more generally.
- 9.8 In terms of collaborative student support activity, the University is actively engaged with the National Peer Assisted Study Sessions Network and the South West Peer Support Network to develop and share best practice for staff and student workers engaged in peer support for current students. These networks provide valuable opportunities for staff development and training, ensuring high quality delivery on these programmes. We will continue to play a part in such networks in 2016-17.
- 9.9 Whilst collaborative work outside of the institution continues, we are also committed to a co-ordinated approach to widening participation within the University. We will continue to work closely with the Students' Union sabbatical team including: the Equality, Access and

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<sup>15</sup> Defined by membership of with the Russell Group or the 1994 Group

Liberation Officer; UG Education Officer and Student Living Officer as well as the part time Widening Participation Officer and the Engagement Manager (a permanent staff member) to ensure that all outreach work is as co-ordinated as possible. All will be engaged in the development of strategy in this area, including outreach work, student success activity and research.

- 9.10 The University is committed to working with the Students' Union as it develops its volunteering programme for learners in local schools at both primary and secondary level. They offer classroom support and academic tutoring for small groups of students. The Union is in the process of establishing strong links with Merchants' Academy, the school of which the University is a co-sponsor, and students have taken part in reading support, talking in assemblies and assisting with extra-curricular activities. Visits to the Union and an opportunity to find out about clubs and societies have been integrated into the Access to Bristol and 'Going Places' event highlighted in para 7.6. This work will continue in 2016-17.
- 9.11 In order to ensure that all students are able to benefit from the wealth of extracurricular activities at the University, the Students' Union currently provides a 'fair access fund for those who would like to take part in societies or sports clubs and who don't have enough money to do so<sup>16</sup>. We are fully supportive of such an approach and will continue to work closely with sabbatical offers and staff members to enhance the student experience for all.

## **10. Student success expenditure**

- 10.1 Whilst the University's overall track record in student retention is strong, we will continue investment in interventions which provide support for the specific challenges which students from underrepresented groups often face in making the transition to university level study and progressing into employment and postgraduate study. We will commit to student success and progression activity £1m in 2016-17, rising to approximately £1.4m in 2019-20. Specifically we will:
- Expand our peer mentoring and Peer Assisted Study Sessions
  - Extend the University's funded internship programme, providing ring fenced places for students from under-represented groups
  - Review University-level induction and transition support more widely to ensure that students from non-traditional backgrounds continue to be as well supported as possible
  - Enhance student support provision to ensure it meets the needs of under-represented groups. This will include investing in early intervention services for students facing challenging personal circumstances.
- 10.2 We recognise that the University has slightly higher withdrawal rates for mature students and have commissioned research by the University's Widening Participation Research Cluster to investigate this. A project has been designed to explore the profile of student withdrawals over recent academic years, focussing on patterns of difference by intake cohort, year of study, widening participation characteristics, and student funding status, and the differences, if any, between withdrawals under the new £9k tuition fees regime and previous years. This research will supplement a recently completed telephone interview survey of University of Bristol undergraduate withdrawals of widening participation and 'other' students which explored individual-level reasons for leaving the University. Early results suggest that both academic and non-academic issues contribute to their decisions to leave the University. Interestingly, very few stated that they withdrew as a result of funding

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<sup>16</sup> For more information see <http://www.ubu.org.uk/activities/committeeresources/funding>

issues. Indeed, many confirmed that they had been in receipt of financial support, recognised the economic benefits that a degree from a highly selective institution conferred but still felt unable to continue their studies due to other personal reasons. We will build upon the outcomes of the telephone survey and will use the outcomes of the longer research project to inform our outreach and student support activity in 2016-17.

- 10.3 We have continued to offer a tailored approach to peer support for students on the Arts and Humanities Foundation Year. This combines both pastoral mentoring and Peer Assisted Study Sessions. Students who are currently studying for degrees in the Faculty of Arts are trained to provide both peer mentoring and peer led study so that they can respond effectively to the needs for the foundation year students as they develop over the course of the year. The peer mentors provide both group sessions and one to one support around transition from the foundation year to degree level study. Students who have progressed from the foundation year to undergraduate degree programmes will be encouraged to return to work as peer supporters for this group from 2016-17 onwards.
- 10.4 In order to ease the transition to higher education and ensure retention rates amongst mature learners increase, we will continue the student support activities we have developed in recent years. Bespoke study skills sessions and information on student funding, employability and managing the demands of study and childcare will be provided in welcome week. The Mature and Part Time Students' Adviser will continue to promote peer mentoring and Peer Assisted Study Sessions as being of particular benefit to this group and will encourage them to take part. Mature Student Advocates, who represent the needs of adult learners, will also be trained as peer mentors to provide mentoring for mature students.
- 10.5 Training for Mature Student Advocates now also specifically includes the needs of student parents and carers. We will continue to support the Student Parents' Network and are exploring the specific needs of young carers in order to provide support for these students, since they fall outside of the provision for mature students.
- 10.6 In order to ensure that widening participation encompasses the whole student life cycle, we will prioritise employability within our student support activity. We will continue to offer the Lloyds Scholars scheme which offers internships, mentoring and other development opportunities to students from low income backgrounds. We will also extend the University's own funded internship programme, providing ring fenced places for students from under-represented groups.
- 10.7 Our commitment to supporting care leavers will continue. In 2016-17 all such students will have the support of a staff member who will act as a personal adviser. Care leavers will be provided with mentoring and advocacy support from point of application to graduation, guaranteed a peer mentor on arrival and 365 day accommodation within the University.
- 10.8 We are committed to ensuring an outstanding experience throughout the student life cycle for all learners at the University. We will continue to work with our students and their representatives to ensure all needs are being met. We will take an evidence-based approach to the development of new student success interventions; in 2016-17 this may include investigating whether the creation of accommodation bursaries for students from under-represented groups would create greater diversity within our residences.

## **11. Student financial support – undergraduate programmes**

- 11.1 As part of the University's strategy to widen participation we have made a clear commitment to ensuring that as fees increase, students with genuine financial need are able

to access excellent advice and appropriate financial assistance. It is our aim to ensure that no student has a legitimate reason to be deterred from applying to the University of Bristol because of their inability to meet the costs of living and studying here.

- 11.2 However, in light of the limited progress the University has made in achieving its targets to widen participation, and informed by research, including the recent OFFA and Nursaw Associates reports<sup>17</sup>, indicating that financial support alone has a limited impact on decision making or continuation rates of students from under-represented groups, an internal review of current arrangements was undertaken in 2014. The focus of the review was to assess the balance of additional fee income invested in the undergraduate student finance package, outreach and student success measures.
- 11.3 The Review Group was chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and comprised the Academic Director of Undergraduate Studies; the Director of the Widening Participation Research Cluster; the Finance Director; the Director of Student Recruitment, Access and Admissions; The Head of Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment; the Student Funding Manager and three representatives of the University of Bristol Students' Union.
- 11.4 The Group took an evidence-based approach to the review, drawing on the outputs from the Widening Participation Research Cluster and the Students' Union's analysis of the current funding regime. Of particular note was a survey conducted with Year 2 students which indicated that 80 per cent of students valued the University cash bursary and the opportunity to take all or part of their financial support entitlement in the form of a cash bursary or fee waiver.
- 11.5 During the course of the review, the Students' Union expressed a concern related to the 'cliff edge' built into the current funding package which provides generous support to students in the lowest household income groups (£25k and below) but no support at all to other OFFA countable groups in receipt of a statutory maintenance grant (£25k-£42.6k income bracket). The Student's Union's desire to extend financial support was reinforced by the Year 2 survey findings which indicated that 61 per cent of respondents not currently in receipt of funding being in favour of this change.
- 11.6 The impact of the University bursary on decision-making was also explored in research undertaken with participants on the Access to Bristol and Sutton Trust summer schools as well as focus groups in local schools. The initial findings indicated that bursary provision alone did not influence applicant decision making and that course, grade requirement, location of the institution and outreach work were all important factors.
- 11.7 The findings of the research undertaken resulted in a strategic rebalancing of access agreement spend from 2015-16 onwards, away from student financial support towards outreach and student success measures and this is reaffirmed in our 2016-17 agreement.
- 11.8 The University's core financial support package for full time undergraduate students entering the University in 2016 will provide:
- A bursary of £2,000 for all students whose residual household income is £25k or below
  - A bursary of £1,500 for all students whose residual household income is £25,001 - £30k
  - A bursary of £1,250 for all students whose residual household income is £30,001 - £35k
  - A bursary of £750 for all students whose residual household income is £35,001 - £40k

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<sup>17</sup> OFFA (2014) 'An interim report: Do bursaries have an effect on retention rates?'; <http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Literature-review-PDF.pdf>

- A bursary of £500 for all students whose residual household income is £40,001 - £42,620

The amounts stated above will be available to students in every year of study providing they continue to meet the eligibility criteria.

- 11.9 In order to free up a greater proportion of access agreement spend for investment in outreach activity in 2016-17, the Access to Bristol fee waiver (of £9k) will only be available in the first year of study (as opposed to all three years) to provide transition support. Such students will still be eligible for the Access to Bristol annual maintenance bursary valued at £3,750.
- 11.10 All these amounts are valid for 2016-17 and would rise annually with inflation if fee levels were to rise to reflect inflation. Eligibility will be determined in accordance with the Student Loans Company (SLC) assessment of household income for state support purposes.
- 11.11 Our Student Funding Office's analysis of the costs of living and studying in Bristol suggests that, for those students in lower income groups, our core student finance package, combined with state support (tuition fee loans and maintenance grants/loans) and some part-time working should ensure that eligible students have sufficient funding at their disposal to cover normal tuition and maintenance costs while at the University.
- 11.12 While we are confident that, for most students, this package should provide an appropriate level of support, we are, in addition to the core package, investing in hardship funds to provide an additional safety net for those UK undergraduate students who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in financial difficulty during their studies. In 2016-17, a total of £410k will be set aside for this purpose. It is anticipated that approximately £350k will be allocated from this fund to OFFA-countable groups
- 11.13 In parallel with arrangements for 2016-17 described here, we will continue to honour financial commitments to students admitted to the University on support packages described in previous access agreements.

## **12. Student financial support – PGCE programmes**

- 12.1 Most PGCE students are able to access financial support from other sources. We do not therefore believe that a support package mirroring the undergraduate one is appropriate. However, we feel that there is still a case for a small scale package to ensure PGCE<sup>18</sup> students from low income backgrounds are not deterred.
- 12.2 In 2016-17 we will therefore offer a more limited financial support package for PGCE students, delivering:
- A bursary of £9k for students with a first class undergraduate degree, whose residual household income is £42,620 or below and who is not already in receipt of bursary funding of £4k or above from another source.
  - A bursary of £4k for students with an upper second undergraduate degree; whose residual household income is £42,620 or below and who is not already in receipt of bursary funding of £4k or above from another source.
- 12.3 Means-testing for the PGCE awards will be undertaken in two phases:

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<sup>18</sup> Note that eligibility thresholds and award amounts have been aligned with current Teaching Agency bursary criteria and eligibility thresholds and will change to reflect any alterations to these

- An initial assessment will be made on the basis of SLC data, as in the case of our undergraduate support package. Any student identified as having a residual household income of £42,620 or below will move on to the second phase of assessment.
- In the second phase of assessment, we will factor in any bursary support which students are eligible for from other sources. Any student who meets the academic criteria detailed above and not eligible for a bursary of £4k or above from another source would be eligible for a University of Bristol bursary.

12.4 This will ensure that financial support is targeted at those most in need. As a good proportion of Black and ethnic minority students currently apply for PGCE streams which do not readily attract bursary funding from other sources, we anticipate that there will also be indirect benefit for efforts to increase the number of students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds undertaking a PGCE.

12.5 The PGCE support package will be reviewed on an annual basis, within the context of any potential changes in wider bursary availability from the National College for Teaching and Leadership.

### **13. Targets and progress measures**

13.1 In developing the 2016-17 access agreement the University has taken the opportunity to review and update our progress measures in relation to widening participation, ensuring all milestones are both stretching and achievable.

13.2 Using 2013-14 application and intake as our new baseline year we will continue to assess:

- Year on year progress in diversifying our applicant and student population;
- Year on year progress in improving conversion of under-represented applicants;
- Year on year progress in retaining students from under-represented backgrounds;
- The specific impact of a number of key outreach initiatives.

13.3 In line with the strategic priorities outlined in this agreement we aim specifically to increase applications in the following areas:

- Students from low performing schools and colleges;
- Mature students;
- Students from NS-SEC groups 4-7;
- Black and Minority Ethnic Students;
- Disabled Student;
- Local Students.

Progress measures for each of these categories (which include measures designed to enable us to monitor conversion from application to intake) are provided in the resource plan.

13.4 At the intake stage, we will continue to focus on low school and college performance and mature students, reflecting the role both play in our contextual approach to admissions

13.5 As far as possible, measures have been calculated taking account of the expected impact of a number of specific outreach initiatives (the Access to Bristol scheme, summer school programme, Realising Opportunities for example), each of which also has more detailed performance targets associated with it as highlighted in the resource plan.

- 13.6 In updating the baseline data to provide a more accurate sense of current performance and to bring uniformity to the year of comparison, it became evident that the University was already exceeding the 2015-16 progress measure on a number of indicators. This was the case for applications from: N-SEC groups 4-7; Black and Minority Ethnic students and disabled students. As such we have revised upwards the progress measures from 2015-16 onwards and committed ourselves to year on year increases.
- 13.7 In setting long term progress measures for such groups we were mindful of relatively strong base from which we start, the finite number of students within each group and the importance of committing to targets we could realistically achieve. We are particularly conscious of the disabled student milestone and the widespread national concern regarding the possible impact of the changes in funding for this group.
- 13.8 As some progress measures have been revised upwards, following discussion with colleagues at OFFA, we have taken the opportunity to revise others downwards to more realistic levels. The 2015-16 access agreement committed the University to achieving an intake from students from low performing schools and colleges of 27 per cent by 2016-17. Despite significant investment in this area at both the outreach and admissions stage, the 2013-14 baseline data indicates that current performance is 15.7 per cent. Whilst we fully expect this figure to rise as a result of additional outreach activity it was felt to be more realistic to commit to annual increases of 1 per cent with the aim of reaching a target of 20.7 per cent by 2019-20.
- 13.9 In order to assess the impact of our outreach interventions we have a number of progress measures for conversion. These are focussed on those areas we are able to take into consideration as part of our contextual approach to admissions (low performing schools and colleges), those for which we need to make progress against our HESA benchmarks (students from N-SEC groups 4-7) as well as those forming the basis of most outreach interventions (student from BS and BA postcodes). As is made clear in the resource plan we have committed ourselves to incremental increases, aiming to have increased conversion rates for all indicators by 1.5 per cent in 2019-20.
- 13.10 Recognising the importance of the whole student lifecycle and of continuing to make progress with retention rates, we have committed ourselves to stretching five year targets for withdrawal rates for students from N-SEC groups 4-7 and non-white students. If achieved withdrawal rates for the groups listed above will have reduced by almost fifty per cent by 2019-20.
- 13.11 We have also rationalised the number of intervention targets to ensure that only those directly linked to existing outreach or student success interventions are included. As such we have removed geographical progress measures for the personal adviser scheme as we now reach offer holders from under-represented groups from across the UK through this initiative (not just the South West and Midlands as was previously the case). We have retained and incrementally increased application and intake progress measures for Access to Bristol and increased intake progress measures for the Sutton Trust summer school. It should be noted that the decision to reduce the size of the Sutton Trust summer school from 178 participants to 160 was a deliberate one based on rigorous evaluation of the scheme. It is anticipated that a slightly smaller, more intensive residential experience will lead to a higher number of applications and intake for the University.
- 13.12 We have retained a number of student success intervention progress measures including peer mentoring coverage and peer assisted study sessions and have stretching collaborative targets for the Realising Opportunities scheme.

## 14. Monitoring and evaluation

- 14.1 Progress in delivering widening participation strategy is monitored by the University's Education Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) and including Students' Union representation.
- 14.2 In addition, the Education Committee (through its Student Recruitment Committee – also chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education, with a membership which includes admissions and widening participation expertise as well as Students' Union representation) will require each of the University's faculties and relevant Professional Services divisions to submit, and report against, an annual action plan, containing detailed actions supporting delivery of the Widening Participation Strategy.
- 14.3 Operational responsibility for delivery and monitoring rests with the Widening Participation and UK Student Recruitment team, reporting to the Director of Student Recruitment, Access and Admissions. This team conducts a detailed annual review of progress against access agreement commitments, reporting key conclusions, achievements or concerns to the Student Recruitment Committee, which is accountable to Education Committee for overseeing compliance and monitoring progress against OFFA-related targets.
- 14.4 Strategy development is routinely informed by research commissioned from the University's Widening Participation Research Cluster. For example, our contextualised approach to selection, which has led to a lower offer to any applicant from a low performing school, was developed as a result of research conducted by the Research Cluster. This indicated a correlation between A-Level attainment, low school performance and student success on undergraduate programmes at the University.
- 14.5 Recent Research Cluster projects include an analysis of the impact of the University's student finance package on our ability to attract and retain a diverse student community. This research informed the University's decision to strategically rebalance funds away from bursaries and towards outreach<sup>19</sup>.
- 14.6 We are also funding studies conducted by leading academic researchers into: efficacy of our widening participation progress measures; the impact of prior educational attainment and other relevant student background factors on the progress and retention of disadvantaged students at the University; the role which self-identification and aspiration play in the university application decision-making process; fostering a culture of belonging amongst widening participation students; overcoming mathematical barriers to participation in higher education and removing barriers to higher education. Outcomes of the research projects which will run until 2016 will continue to inform future strategy for outreach, student success and financial support provision.
- 14.7 The University is committed to enhancing progression opportunities for students from underrepresented groups. We have commissioned the Widening Participation Research Cluster to profile the 'after-graduation' transitions of 'widening participation' and 'non-widening participation' students into employment and postgraduate opportunities. This work will take place in collaboration with the Careers Service using the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DHLE) database. We will use the findings of the study to ensure we are targeting resources to those most in need.

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<sup>19</sup> Davies, S, Hayes, D and Collard, S (2014) 'Should expenditure be switched from bursaries to outreach? A comparative evaluation of the effects on Widening Participation of the Access to Bristol and Sutton Trust schemes'.

- 14.8 We recognise that robust monitoring and evaluation help to prioritise the delivery of programmes and activities that have the greatest impact. Evaluation is embedded in all of our plans and we analyse the efficacy of our outreach and student success interventions throughout the year.
- 14.9 Analysis of the impact of the University's outreach work indicates that those projects with the greatest success rates are long term interventions. This has influenced the overall focus of our outreach efforts. For example, the Access to Bristol, Pathways to Law and Realising Opportunities schemes are all sustained programmes, run over a series of weeks, months and years and bringing participants into contact with current students, academic staff and specialist mentors.
- 14.10 In the 2013-14 admissions cycle, applications from Access to Bristol participants increased by 58 per cent on the previous year. We received 253 applications from Access to Bristol and Pathways to Law participants (against a progress measure of 200) and 75 per cent of such students were made an offer. This delivered an intake of 72 students in 2014 (against a progress measure of 60). It should also be noted that the conversion rate for Access to Bristol and Pathways to Law students was significantly higher than the University average (48 per cent against 33 per cent respectively).
- 14.11 As a result, the University has expanded the Access to Bristol initiative, extended the satellite programme with IntoUniversity, implemented a guaranteed offer for those on the scheme and committed to on-going development of Realising Opportunities until 2017.
- 14.12 We constantly refine all outreach programmes in light of evaluation (as outlined in more depth in paras 7.9– 7.13) and contract and expand interventions where appropriate.
- 14.13 Specific initiatives are evaluated using a range of quantitative and qualitative measures, a number of which are included in our access agreement. A 'Guide to Evaluation' has been developed to ensure that appropriate evaluation is built in to planning of all activities. An annual evaluation plan is produced to ensure evaluation activities are appropriate and effective. Outreach activities are assessed at a number of levels including: monitoring participant data to ensure activities reach target groups; participant feedback following events; pre- and post-event activity questionnaires measuring change in attitudes over time; and longitudinal work investigating outcomes such as participant behaviour. These approaches apply to both collaborative and university-specific work. Outcomes can result in fine tuning of initiatives to develop and enhance experience for participants, the termination of a project or its development.
- 14.14 We adopt a similar approach to evaluation of student success. At a policy level, while our overall track record in student retention is strong, we will commission research into retention rates of under-represented groups, with a particular focus on Black and minority ethnic students.
- 14.15 Evaluation of our peer support programmes has demonstrated the value of this type of activity in building student community, supporting transition and building students' confidence during the early stages of their course. Working as a peer supporter also has significant benefits for students themselves, many of whom report that working in such roles improved their own student experience and helped them to develop employability skills including communication skills and problem solving.
- 14.16 The University will continue to enhance evaluation in 2016-17. We have a formal evaluation plan which is being implemented in all outreach and student support activity. We have made it a requirement of faculties in receipt of WP outreach funding that they evaluate the

activity undertaken using evaluation guidance provided by the WP and UK Student Recruitment Team to ensure their initiatives are having maximum impact. We continue to measure the impact of our activities by analysing applications, offers, conversion and intake on an annual basis. We will also work with the Sutton Trust to implement a single evaluation tool for all Sutton Trust programmes including summer school and the Pathways to Law programme, this was piloted at the 2014 summer school and will be rolled out fully throughout 2015 onwards.

- 14.17 We have agreed a contract with the Higher Education Access Tracker to support the monitoring and evaluation of our work and will continue to work with colleagues in the Russell Group to develop and share good practice and outcomes of evaluation.
- 14.18 As well as monitoring the impact of activity, we also evaluate University policy on widening participation. In 2014-15 we undertook a wide-ranging review of our contextual data methodology and outcomes, to ensure that our low performing school measure continues to be an effective and robust measure, supported by a firm evidence base. Our findings suggested that it is and we will continue to adopt such an approach for as long as the data is available from the Department for Education and UCAS.

## **15. Provision of Information to Students**

- 15.1 The University understands the importance of providing clear, accurate and up to date information to all prospective applicants. Such detail is particularly important to those students from under-represented groups who may be more debt averse than those from 'traditional' backgrounds.
- 15.2 Details of tuition fee levels and of the financial support available to students will be routinely published in our prospectus and on our website.
- 15.3 Our Student Funding website includes information to enable students to work out the likely costs of studying at Bristol and to identify the various sources of funding (including both government and University of Bristol support) which they might be able to draw on to support themselves during their studies.
- 15.4 Information on tuition fees and financial support available to students will also be made available, in a timely way, to UCAS and to the SLC, as they reasonably require, populating their applicant-facing web services.
- 15.5 The University will also communicate information relating to student finance in the following ways; through the provision of Key Information Sets (KIS), student funding presentations in targeted low performing schools and colleges, pre application open days, recruitment events, widening participation interventions, pre and post offer visit days and as part of the University's annual Higher Education Advisers day.

## **16. Equality and diversity**

- 16.1 The University fulfils its commitments under the Equality Act 2010 by integrating equality and diversity considerations into all decision-making processes and into the development of strategy and policy across the institution. Equality analysis must be undertaken on all policies and activities and committee cover sheets require reference as to how equality related issues and relevant equality data have been taken into account.

- 16.2 In accordance with this agreed approach, equality considerations have been embedded into the design of both the Widening Participation Strategy and of this access agreement, which sets out how we will sustain and improve access, retention and attainment among people from under-represented groups. Equality analysis has been a part of the policy development process and will inform implementation.
- 16.3 We undertake a detailed annual review of progress against all widening participation progress measures at university, faculty and programme level. Our analysis is used to help us identify groups that are particularly under-represented and to develop appropriate targeted actions to improve the diversity of our student body.
- 16.4 Monitoring pays particular attention to applications with protected characteristics and we have included progress measures for race, disability and age in our access agreement. We monitor gender and respond to trends in the data (working, for example, to increase participation of female students on some science and engineering programmes and encouraging male students to participate in summer schools) and have due regard to equality duty when selecting students.
- 16.5 Students with protected characteristics will continue to be included in all outreach work funded by the University's 2016-17 access agreement. 44 mature students and 133 students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds completed the Access to Bristol programme in 2013-14 and we will work hard to ensure we continue to reach these important target groups. In order to meet the needs of prospective students with disabilities, we will ensure that all outreach activities are inclusive and accessible, making relevant adaptations as appropriate.
- 16.6 Finally, it should be noted that the 2016-17 access agreement aligns closely with the University's Vision and Strategy 2009-16. Diversity and equity are key values as articulated in the document with a clear statement that we 'view the diversity of our staff, students and alumni as a great asset; we believe in the equitable treatment of all'<sup>20</sup>. Equality issues are included in all activities and have been mainstreamed into the decision making process at committee level. The University is committed to addressing the issues linked to retention rates for different groups of students as well as exploring inequalities in attainment and employability.

## 17. Conclusion

- 17.1 This access agreement outlines our strategic priorities for 2016-17. It takes a whole institution approach, covers the student lifecycle, reflects on those interventions with greatest impact, explores the strategic rebalancing of spend to support access, student success and progression and demonstrates our commitment to long term outreach. We have included an assessment of our current performance against targets and articulate our planned response to the challenges faced. We demonstrate our collaborative work with partners within and outside the higher education sector and highlight the provision of support for mature and part-time students.
- 17.2 It is hoped that this Agreement demonstrates the University's determination to recruit the most able students from the most diverse backgrounds and reinforces our long-term commitment to widening participation and student success.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/policies/vision/mission.html>