Foreword

The University of Bristol has been a pioneer in the field of widening participation for over a decade. Recognising the potential of applicants has always been at the heart of our mission to recruit the most able students from the most diverse backgrounds.

The University has developed an innovative and creative outreach culture while adopting an evidence based approach to policy and procedure. 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 all those with the potential to succeed at this University can do so. We will continue to do everything we can to make The University of Bristol as attractive to those from under-represented groups as it is to people from traditional backgrounds.

We believe that widening participation has a moral as well as a pragmatic foundation. It is right that anyone with the necessary abilities should feel encouraged to aspire to Bristol, regardless of their background.

This strategy (initially developed in 2009 but updated in 2013 to ensure continuing fitness for purpose following transition to a new financial regime and the introduction, by the Office of Fair Access of new and more rigorous regulatory requirements) builds on the success of our two previous documents, ‘The Way Forward’ (2001-04) and ‘Quality through Diversity’ (2004-09).

This strategy continues those policies and initiatives which have proved successful in recent years and re-affirms our commitment to the Widening Participation Research Cluster. At the same time, it responds to changing contexts by adopting a more target-driven approach and by placing new emphasis on monitoring and evaluation and on developing links with employers and the youth work sector. The focus of this strategy will be on widening participation to the University of Bristol, taking a pragmatic approach to increasing the proportion of students from currently under-represented groups to this institution in order to achieve the progress measures agreed annually with the Office for Fair Access. It should be noted that whilst the focus of this strategy is on widening participation at undergraduate level, there is a need to extend the work to focus on the postgraduate community. To this end, we will work to develop the evidence base on widening participation at postgraduate level, identifying any barriers there may be for students from underrepresented groups continuing their study and supporting them into employment.

The strategy provides a framework for widening participation at all levels and across all academic schools and support service divisions. Responsibility for delivering the strategy lies with all staff but will be driven by the Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment team in partnership with appointed Faculty Widening Participation Officers and the Admissions Office.
The principles on which this strategy is based are fundamental to the University and are as strongly held now as they ever were. The University’s strategy for Widening Participation is underpinned by:

1. **A commitment** to the highest standards in teaching, learning and research and to making the University as attractive and accessible as possible to students from all walks of life.

2. A belief in the educational and social benefits, to the University and to our students, of a diverse student population, drawn from all sections of society.

3. A belief in an admissions procedure that assesses a candidate’s potential to succeed.

4. A recognition of the importance of adopting a flexible approach to programme design and delivery.

5. A commitment to ensuring that every student is given the academic and pastoral support he or she needs to succeed at the University.

6. An acknowledgement of the importance of adopting an evidence based approach to widening participation activity.

7. A recognition of the value of working in partnership with other education providers.

**Background**

The University of Bristol was one of the first institutions to develop a widening participation focus – ahead of Government policy on the issue – and was a founding member of the Russell Group Widening Participation Association. The University has produced three major strategies in relation to widening participation from 1999 to 2013.

Since 2005, the University has also entered into an annual Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) specifying undergraduate tuition fee levels, making a commitment to re-invest a proportion of additional fee income in outreach, progression and retention related activities and financial support packages. It also sets out the targets and milestones against which progress in widening participation will be measured. This strategy provides the framework which will guide development of future access agreement submissions.

Despite significant investment and wide ranging outreach activities, progress towards reaching our widening participation progress measures has proved challenging. The University continues to draw 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. This is compounded by relatively low levels of educational attainment, and relatively high levels of deprivation within the local area. Research undertaken by IntoUniversity in October 2011 noted that:
Bristol has 39 LSQAs (Lower Super Output Areas) in the most deprived 10% nationally. Of these, 14 are in the most deprived 3% and 4 in the most deprived 1%.

In the sub-domain of children and young people, 82 Bristol LSOAs fall within the most deprived 10% nationally in the domain of Education, Skills and Training deprivation. Of these, 17 are in the most deprived 100 areas in England and Illminster Avenue West in Filwood is the most deprived in England.

Of England’s core cities, Bristol has the second lowest proportion of low income children progressing to higher education.

Black and minority ethnic pupils, those children with free school meal eligibility and pupils with English as an alternative language under-perform at all levels in Bristol.

In 2008, it was established that around 21,900 (27%) children live in poverty in Bristol. In Lawrence Hill, this rises to almost 60% - the bottom percentile of all wards nationally.

These characteristics create some very specific challenges when it comes to diversifying the University’s undergraduate intake as opposed to playing our part in raising student aspirations and widening participation in Higher Education more generally.

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.

**Strategic Aims**

The University has identified four main aims that will underpin the Widening Participation Strategy.

1. **Monitoring and Research**

   The University has been a pioneer in research into widening participation issues. The University must continue to adopt an evidence based approach to all widening participation policy and practice.

2. **Outstanding Outreach**

   The University must continue to lead in the design and delivery of innovative and accessible outreach activities, which raise awareness of and aspirations to Higher Education. This must include enhancing our relationships with key influencers such as parents, teachers and employers. Our outreach activity must also diversify
applications to the University in line with the application related progress measures agreed annually with the Office for Fair Access.

3. Diversify Intake

The University must be accessible to students from all backgrounds with the potential to succeed at the University of Bristol. In particular, it is imperative that we diversify intake in line with the intake related progress measures agreed annually with the Office for Fair Access.

4. Student Support and Progression

The University must ensure that students from non traditional backgrounds are appropriately supported; financially and in making the transition to higher education.

Objectives

Each of the four aims has five clear objectives:

1: Monitoring & Research

Objectives:

1.1 Commission research in a robust, transparent and rigorous manner which will enhance widening participation policy, outreach and student financial support.

1.2 Monitor the composition of the University’s student body and performance against our annual Access Agreement progress measures on an on-going basis.

1.3 Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of all University widening participation initiatives including outreach activities, admissions policies and procedures and student support measures.

1.4 Identify the needs of widening participation students and any barriers they may face including in relation to progressing to postgraduate study or accessing specific areas of employment.

1.5 Continue a collaborative approach to widening participation research, disseminating information and examples of good practice to regional and national partners.
2: Outstanding Outreach

Objectives:

2.1 Develop a more expansive outreach programme for learners of all ages, prioritising engagement with those with the academic potential to succeed at the University of Bristol.

2.2 Ensure a co-ordinated approach to all outreach work within the University and with other education partners (including; other higher education institutions, schools and colleges, Children and Young People’s Services, E-Class and Virtual Schools).

2.3 Increase the focus on developing engagement opportunities for other stakeholders including; parents and carers, community groups, teachers and higher education advisers.

2.4 Continue the University’s commitment to a collaborative approach to outreach with partners such as The Sutton Trust, College of Law, Open College Network and IntoUniversity, while developing new partners within the business community.

2.5 Develop engagement opportunities for learners in youth work and youth group settings including The Prince’s Trust and other community groups.

3: Diversify Intake

Objectives:

3.1 Develop and implement admissions procedures that recognise an applicant’s potential and that are informed by rigorous research on issues relating to widening participation (including guaranteed and contextual offers).

3.2 Improve conversion of applicants from widening participation backgrounds by a variety of methods including the Customer Relationship Management system, visit days, targeted correspondence and telephone campaigns.

3.3 Research the impact of foundation year and alternative progression routes (including part time provision) in attracting and retaining students from under represented groups.

3.4 Identify, on the basis of such research (including provision in comparator institutions) a small number of degree programmes to pilot foundation year and/or part time progression routes.
3.5 Develop a research and evidence base for applicant’s decision making reflecting the accepting and declining of offers made by the University in order to inform future policy.

**Aim 4: Student Support and Progression**

**Objectives:**

4.1 Develop a comprehensive programme of transition support for all students including pre-application advice, guidance and skills development.

4.2 Evaluate the impact of, and endeavour to maintain an appropriate degree of student choice within, the University’s student financial package, considering its role in attracting and converting applications from widening participation backgrounds and in supporting widening participation students during their studies. Adjust the package, as appropriate, in the list of findings.

4.3 Develop a programme of peer support across the University including peer mentoring schemes and peer assisted study sessions.

4.4 Enhance the University’s student support provision to ensure it meets the needs of underrepresented groups effectively, to allow them to participate fully in University life.

4.5 Encourage and support the progression of widening participation students into successful employment and postgraduate placements.

The objectives for each of the strategic aims are deliberately broad to allow detailed plans to be revised in the light of on-going evaluation. The specific focus of the widening participation work undertaken will be set out in annual action plans and this will ensure a more targeted approach to widening participation across the University.

A diagram showing the way in which the strategy is structured can be found in Annex A.

**Action Planning and Reporting**

The Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment team, as well as each of the six faculties will produce an annual action plan for each of the four aims. The actions for the forthcoming year will be linked to the five objectives within that aim. At the end of the academic year these actions will be evaluated and reported on, in preparation for the setting of new actions for the start of the next academic year.
Risk Factors

In developing this strategy, we have identified a number of key risks with the potential to jeopardise achievement of the University’s objectives. Several of these relate to changes in the external climate over which the University has little or no control, while others are specific to the University of Bristol and therefore offer more opportunity for local management.

External Risks

1. A change of Governmental policy in relation to higher education could jeopardise the high priority that widening participation has benefited from over the last ten years. In addition, withdrawal of investment in this area could have serious repercussions with regard to the University’s ability to meet its objectives.

2. The strategy is launched in a period of recession and the consequences of such economic turmoil should not be underestimated now or in the future. The University must remain financially committed to the area whilst recognising that a pragmatic and prudent approach to the allocation of funds will be necessary.

3. The University has experienced a high profile in the national media in relation to widening participation activity in the last decade. Success or failure in meeting the objectives set out in this strategy will ensure the continued interest of the media. Hostile coverage will, at the very least, undermine our widening participation strategy and, at worst, may impact on other areas of University life.

4. A change in the allocation of funds from tuition fees could also have a major impact on the financial capacity of the University to achieve its widening participation objectives.

5. The Widening Participation Strategy coincides with a period of significant demographic change with a sharp decline in the 18 year old population. This will necessitate a more targeted recruitment strategy for undergraduates at the University and an increased emphasis on mature students (defined as those aged 21 or over).

Internal Risks

1. Significant success in widening participation could impact upon our traditional sources of recruitment, and our Undergraduate Recruitment team will be critical in delivering a continued high level of service for these markets.

2. Substantial changes to the profile of our student population may create a different set of needs in relation to retention and student support provision. This will have a more significant impact if efforts to attract a more diverse pool of students were to succeed before changes in other areas, such as student support and curriculum development, had taken effect.
Annex A: Widening Participation Strategy

1: Monitoring & Research
- Adopt an evidence-based approach to widening participation by:

Objectives:
Commissioning research in a robust, transparent and rigorous manner which will enhance widening participation policy, outreach and student financial support.

Monitoring the success of all University widening participation initiatives including outreach activities, admissions policies and procedures and student support measures.

Identifying the needs of widening participation students and any barriers they may face including in relation to progressing to postgraduate study or accessing specific areas of employment.

Continuing a collaborative approach to widening participation research, disseminating information and examples of good practice to regional and national partners.

2: Outstanding Outreach
- Raise awareness of and aspirations to HE
- Diversify applications to UoB in line with the application-related progress measures agreed annually with OFFA by:

Objectives:
Developing a more expansive outreach programme for learners of all ages, prioritising engagement with those with the academic potential to succeed at the University of Bristol.

Ensuring a co-ordinated approach to all outreach work within the University and with other education partners (including; other higher education institutions, schools and colleges, Children and Young People’s Services, E-Class and Virtual Schools).

Increasing the focus on developing engagement opportunities for other stakeholders including; parents and carers, community groups, teachers and higher education advisers.

Continuing the University’s commitment to a collaborative approach to outreach with partners such as The Sutton Trust, College of Law, Open College Network and IntoUniversity, while developing new partners within the business community.

Developing engagement opportunities for learners in youth work and youth group settings including The Princes Trust and other community groups.

3: Diversify Intake
- Diversify intake in line with the intake-related progress measures agreed annually with OFFA by:

Objectives:
Developing and implement admissions procedures that recognise an applicant’s potential and that are informed by rigorous research on issues relating to widening participation (including guaranteed and contextual offers).

Improving conversion of applicants from widening participation backgrounds by a variety of methods including; the CRM system, visit days, targeted correspondence and telephone campaigns.

Research the impact of foundation year and alternative progression routes (including part time provision) in attracting and retaining students from underrepresented groups.

Identifying, on the basis of feedback from potential applicants from widening participation backgrounds, a small number of programmes to work with in order to develop an offer which would help to meet demand.

Identify, on the basis of such research (including provision in comparator institutions) a small number of degree programmes to pilot foundation year and/or part time progression routes.

4: Student Support and Progression
- Ensure that students from non-traditional backgrounds are appropriately supported by:

Objectives:
Developing a comprehensive programme of transition support for all students including pre-application advice, guidance and skills development.

Evaluating the impact of, and endeavour to maintain an appropriate degree of student choice within, the University’s student financial package, considering its role in attracting and converting applications from widening participation backgrounds and in supporting widening participation students during their studies. Adjust the package, as appropriate, in the list of findings.

Developing a programme of peer support across the University including peer mentoring schemes and peer assisted study sessions.

Enhancing the University’s student support provision to ensure it meets the needs of under-represented groups effectively to allow them to participate fully in University life.

Encouraging and supporting the progression of widening participation students into successful employment and postgraduate placements.