

## **University of Bristol Access Agreement 2017-18**

- 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 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 2015 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 2017-18 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 Education Strategy which outlines our commitment to the highest standards of teaching and learning for all students.
- 1.5 The climate in which the 2017-18 access agreement is written in is one of rapid change. The removal of student number control, demographic change and uncertainty regarding the outcomes of the Government's Higher Education Bill, create challenges in long term planning.
- 1.6 However, despite such external challenges, the University remains resolutely committed to increasing diversity amongst our student population. The writing of the 2017-18 access agreement coincides with the development of a new University Vision and Strategy. This ambitious document will capture the collective ambition of our staff, students, alumni, and partners and guide the University's development over the years ahead. Diversity within the student population has emerged as a key theme throughout the consultation process, with a clear appetite from staff and students to consider bold plans which will effect a step change in the diversity of our student population. Those priority actions, already identified and supported by the University community, are included this document.
- 1.7 The 2017-18 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 2017-18.

- 1.8 In parallel with the arrangements for 2017-18 described here, we will continue to honour financial commitments to students admitted on financial support packages described in previous access agreements.
- 1.9 Our Students' Union sabbatical team have contributed to the development of the 2017-18 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.
- 1.10 This access agreement outlines our strategic priorities for 2017-18. It takes a whole-institution approach across the student lifecycle. The document reflects on those interventions with greatest impact and 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, students with disabilities as well as those accessing professional courses. We make clear our commitment to ensuring an evidence based approach to widening participation, developing policy and practice in response to the work of our sector leading WP Research Cluster. We recognise the impact of multiple indicators of deprivation and are determined to develop a rigorous approach to assess and overcome the impact of such intersectional variables at every stage of the student life cycle.

## **2. Tuition fees, student numbers and fee income**

- 2.1 The total value of planned widening participation related expenditure for 2017-18 on wards is based on the assumption that the University will charge an annual tuition fee for new entrants of £9,250 (increasing annually in line with inflation where permitted) for all home fee status students on undergraduate programmes and full time PGCE programmes. Our policy intention in future years will be to review our fee level vs. the fee cap as it is inflated and set a new fee level up to and including that cap. This will apply to all such undergraduate and PGCE students entering from 2017-18 onwards. This will be kept under review subject to the final outcomes of the Government's Higher Education Bill.
- 2.2 Tuition fees for home fee status students studying on a part time basis will be calculated on a pro rata basis, using the £9,250 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 £4,625. 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 £6935.
- 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 £1385 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 £44.3m in 2017-18.

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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.

### **3. Access, student success and progression measures**

- 3.1 In 2017-18 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.
- 4.2 According to HESA performance indicators<sup>2</sup>, of the students aged under 21 who entered the University in 2013-14, 2.2 per cent withdrew from higher education, against a benchmark of 2.7 per cent. The same data source indicates a non-continuation rate of 10.6 per cent for mature students against a benchmark of 8.6 per cent. We recognise the need to improve rates for this group and outline planned activity in para 10.6.
- 4.3 Using the University's own application and intake measures<sup>3</sup> to analyse performance over the five year period from 2011-12 to 2015-16, the proportion of undergraduate applications from under-represented groups has increased in six categories: disabled; local; N-SEC groups 4-7; disabled; female 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 to 2013-14, the 2015-16 data highlights the continuation of an upward trend of applications from low performing school and college students which began in 2014-15. It should also be noted that in absolute numbers every category except mature students has seen an increase in applications from 2014-15. In many cases the 2015-16 figure is the highest for five years.
- 4.6 At the intake stage progress is also being made. HESA data indicates that state school intake rose slightly from 2013-14 to 2014-15. We have seen an increase of 1.7 per cent in the proportion of students from NS-SEC groups 4-7 from 2011-12 to 2013-14. Intake has increased from students living in low participation neighbourhoods we now exceed the HESA benchmark for the number of part time undergraduates entrants by age and low participation marker (13.6 per cent against a benchmark of 11.3 per cent). We recognise however that despite these positive rises, we continue to fall short of the majority of our HESA benchmarks. Information provided in sections 7 and 8 outline the interventions designed to make faster progress.
- 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 2014 intake data, there has been a rise in five categories including a 3.5 per cent rise in intake from students attending low performing schools and colleges, a 0.7 per cent rise in state school students and a 0.9 per cent rise in students from low participation neighbourhoods. This suggests that offers are being made to students from under-represented groups and that the contextual and

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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

guaranteed offers are proving effective. In the five year period from 2011-12 the University's intake of BME students more than doubled from 288 to 590.

- 4.8 Our focus on conversion from application to intake has also delivered significant success. During the same five year period, we have seen increases in converting proportions from all target groups. 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 14.12.
- 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 2015-16 we recruited a cohort which was 36 per cent male: 64 per cent female (which compares with 40 per cent male: 60 per cent female for the comparator group and 37 per cent male: 63 per cent female for the local group). 43 per cent were categorised as mature (compared with 44 per cent of the comparator group and 57 per cent of the local group). 9 per cent of Bristol's current cohort is from a BME background (compared with 12 per cent of the comparator group and 6 per cent of the local group).
- 4.10 Retention has remained high for this student group, with only 5 per cent of the total withdraws in 2013-14 being Black and Minority Ethnic students, notably none of the 2014-15 withdrawals were from this group and in 2015-16 there has been one withdrawal 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. It should be noted that we will reaffirm our commitment to contextualised admissions within the University's new strategy and are actively exploring how we can effect real change in the demography of our undergraduate student body.
- 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 2015, we received an average of 8 home applications for every place (with some programmes receiving almost 20 applications per place). The average UCAS tariff score of our 2015 entrants was 460 (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 716.5 against a national average of 778.3<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. Of England's core cities, Bristol has the second lowest percentage of Free School Meal pupils progressing to

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

<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'

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>7</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.
- 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. As outlined in the expenditure section below, in recognition of the need to improve application and intake rates for students from under-represented groups, our investment in access, student success and progression will increase from 2017-18 onwards.

## 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 £13.8m in additional access measures in 2017-18, 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 2017-18 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	£3m
Student Success and Progression activities	£1.7m
Student finance package	£9.1m
<b>Total reinvestment</b>	<b>£13.8m</b>

## 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, state schools, low participation neighbourhoods, N-SEC groups 4-7 and mature students to the University.

- 7.2 In order to achieve our aims, and informed by the recent OFFA Strategic Plan 2015-20<sup>8</sup>, Sir Martin Harris's paper 'What more can be done to widen access to highly selective universities?' and research undertaken by our Widening Participation Research Cluster<sup>9</sup>, the University will invest £3.m in outreach activities in 2017-18 rising to approximately £3.4m in 2020-21.
- 7.3 The focus of outreach activity in 2017-18 will be long-term and targeted. We have taken an evidence based approach to the targeting of activity and have specific intervention progress measures (detailed in paras 13.7-13.11) to reflect this. For those interventions designed and delivered by the University we require participants on our programmes to fulfil the following criteria: attend a low performing school or college<sup>10</sup>; live in a low participation neighbourhood; be in the first generation of their family to progress to higher education; and live in the local area<sup>11</sup>. The targeting criteria for the Pathways to Law and Sutton Trust summer school programme also include attendance at state schools, receipt of free school meals and looked after children. IntoUniversity also use these categories with priority also being given to those who live in social housing. As outlined in greater detail in section 13, from 2016-17 onwards we will introduce new, more granular targeting for participation of Black and Minority Ethnic students.
- 7.4 Using these criteria we will take a sustained approach to growing the applicant pool by working with primary school pupils to mature learners. 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, working with the Brilliant Club to place postgraduate students into target schools to deliver university style tutorials to small groups of highly achieving students. Based on the success of the Access to Bristol scheme we will also expand the initiative outside of the local area. Further detail is provided in paras 7.10 to 7.14.
- 7.5 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 68 per cent of participants agreed that they were more likely to progress to higher education as a result of participation on the scheme and 52 per cent of those who took part in the intervention progressed to higher education compared to the local average of 13.9 per cent<sup>12</sup>. Eight IntoUniversity students from London secured a place at the University of Bristol in 2015 and with the support of IntoUniversity it was possible to expand the satellite version of the Access to Bristol programme in east London. In 2017-18 we will work in partnership with IntoUniversity to expand the satellite programmes to other parts of London and the Midlands.
- 7.6 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 48 per cent in 2015. The Academy is now an all age

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/OFFA-Strategic-Plan-2015-2020-final-PDF.pdf>

<sup>9</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'

<sup>10</sup> A 'lower performing school or college is defined as being in the bottom 40 percent for one of: A Level average per student; A Level average per entry; progression rates to higher education

<sup>11</sup> The 'local' criteria is used for those interventions when long travelling time would prohibit involvement

<sup>12</sup> IntoUniversity Bristol East Annual Report 2014-15

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.

- 7.7 There is clear evidence as to the impact of the collective efforts of staff, Governors and parents in raising the aspirations and attainment of learners at all stages within the Academy. A recent inspection by The Venturers' Trust Education Adviser described the primary school has having undergone 'a transformation' in the last eighteen months. 95 per cent of teaching is now deemed to be good or outstanding and a significant number of children are taking part in programmes delivered by IntoUniversity Bristol South.
- 7.8 We will continue to work closely with learners to provide information, advice and guidance, academic mentoring and tutoring, priority access to Access to Bristol, Pathways to Law and our summer school programme and a guaranteed offer for those students who apply to the University with the predicted grades (including at contextual offer level). To further demonstrate our commitment to the Academy, for the first time, we have introduced a range of collaborative targets into this agreement. With the Senior Leadership Team at the Academy we have jointly developed progress measures for: GCSE performance; the number of students progressing into post 16 at the Academy; the attainment of the cohort; and the progression rates to higher education. We will continue to actively support the development of post sixteen provision in the school, specifically the possibility of establishing a new mathematics focussed free school sixth form.
- 7.9 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>13</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 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 which will inform possible expansion of the project. Evaluation is due to be complete in October 2017 and early findings indicate that the work of South Bristol Youth is having an impact on the aspirations of young people and their parents. There is also evidence of significant variation in behaviour within the different wards of south Bristol and this will play a part in the targeting of future outreach activity.
- 7.10 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 clear that the intervention continues to have a demonstrable impact on applications and intake with the scheme exceeding the application and intake progress measures.
- 7.11 Applications to the University from Access to Bristol participants increased by 56 per cent from 2013-14 to 2014-15. 405 Access to Bristol students applied to the University for 2015 entry, against a progress measure of 259 and 67 such students started as undergraduates compared with a progress measure of 66. 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 2017-18.

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<sup>13</sup> HEFCE (2013), Trends in Young Participation in Higher Education: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201328/>

- 7.12 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 2014 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.
- 7.13 To address the challenge of students not achieving their predicted grades, from 2014-15 we developed revision sessions in Bristol for Access to Bristol, Pathways to Law, Realising Opportunities and summer school participants. The sessions involved school teachers running intensive day-long revision sessions in key subjects such as chemistry and maths. We also continued to provide CPD sessions for teachers on writing personal statements. The evidence of an over-prediction of A level grades was incorporated into these sessions.
- 7.14 The impact of the revision sessions held in 2015 was evaluated by feedback from participants who overwhelmingly found the sessions useful and felt that they would help to raise their A level grades. However only seven out of the fourteen University of Bristol conditional firm offer holders who attended the revision sessions met the terms of their offer and in the next year we will extend the programme to include additional revision sessions, subscription to a revision website and ongoing support for students from teachers throughout the exam period via email to improve attainment.
- 7.15 In 2017-18, based on the success of the Access to Bristol scheme, we will expand the satellite programme schemes and the 'pathways to the professions' programmes which will be piloted in 2016-17 working with the faculties of Health Sciences (incorporating medicine, dentistry and veterinary science), Social Sciences and Law (economics) 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 professional mentors, work experience placements in their chosen discipline. It is anticipated that the guaranteed offer will be extended to this group.
- 7.16 Recognising the importance of widening participation activity being fully embedded within faculties, we will expand the development of 'Engagement Officer' posts which will be piloted in the faculties of Science, Social Science and Law and Biomedical Sciences in 2016-17. 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. In 2017-18 it is anticipated that the role will be extended to the Engineering faculty.
- 7.17 We will also continue our commitment to the University's long-standing summer school programme in 2017-18. We will maintain the level of participants on the 2017-18 Sutton Trust summer school to 160 but seek to improve application and conversion rates through a programme of support for students at critical points in the admissions cycle. The summer school timetable was redesigned in 2015, as previous feedback has suggested that our subject streams were too broad. By narrowing the timetables down to one subject, it was hoped that students would gain a deeper understanding of their chosen subject, be more likely to make informed choices at the application stage and have increased levels of attainment due to their engagement levels in further study being raised by their participation in the programme.



- 7.18 Early indications suggest that the changes are having impact. Applications to the University have increased from the 2014 summer school (from 118 to 129), and we will continue with the reforms in 2016 to ensure long term, deep relationships are built between summer school students and the University.
- 7.19 In addition to the full range of outreach interventions outlined above, the University plans to introduce an innovative offer for learners in 2017-18. Discussions are underway with all schools and colleges in the City Of Bristol in order to develop an unconditional offer scheme for five students in each school. Eligibility for the scheme will, for the first time, be based the Head Teachers' assessment of potential and progress, rather than examination results.
- 7.20 The scheme is intended to capture the missing talent we know exists in our locality, to demonstrate the University's commitment to Bristol's schools and colleges and provide alternative entry routes into our programmes to those who would otherwise be excluded due to our very high entry requirements.
- 7.21 It is anticipated that participants will gain familiarity with the institution over a period of twelve months. The programme will include (but not be limited to): intensive academic support in preparation for their year 12 exams; a summer school; on-going academic tutoring; events for parents and teachers; advice and support at critical moments of the application process; opportunities to gain work experience placements; bespoke personal development plans; and invitations to sporting and cultural events at the University.
- 7.22 Mindful of the support that may be required for such students to make a successful transition to University from their school or college, a tailored package of academic and pastoral provision will be developed, in partnership with each school, to guide their development through university. Key components are likely to include: pre sessional tutoring; professional mentoring; guaranteed internships; enhanced pastoral support; bespoke academic support throughout the first year or foundation year.
- 7.23 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. Our 2015-16 intake data indicates that the University performs well against our Black and Minority Ethnic progress measures for applications but that this is not evenly spread amongst all ethnic categories. The largest proportion of BME students at the University continue to be 'Asian/Indian' or 'White/Asian' by a significant margin. 'Chinese' and 'other mixed background' categories constitute the next largest groups, although the former has declined and the latter increased since 2014-15. We continue to have relatively low proportions of 'Asian/Bangladeshi', 'Asian/Pakistani and 'Black/Caribbean' students'.
- 7.24 In order to increase applications from these groups, from 2016-17 onwards we will include a target for the number of BME students taking part in our Insight Into Bristol programme. We will also work with third sector organisations to run an outreach programme for BME students (with a particular emphasis on the under-represented ethnic groups listed above). We will continue to offer the Students in Schools programme to schools serving communities with high BME populations, monitoring the proportion of mentors and tutors from such backgrounds and encouraging these students to become involved in this work. Targeting of the programme has been revised to increase the emphasis on BME students as a priority target group for this activity. This is intended to raise attainment and encourage such students to participate in Access to Bristol, Pathways to Law and other interventions with a proven track record in converting under-represented groups to the University

- 7.25 As well as an increased focus on learners from BME backgrounds, in 2017-18 outreach will continue to target those with additional protected characteristics including mature learners (outlined in greater detail in section eight) and students with disabilities. The University will continue to work towards being more inclusive by design, as well as make sufficient additional resources available to ensure disabled students are not disadvantaged by the changes to the Disabled Students Allowances. 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.
- 7.26 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.
- 7.27 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 2017-18.
- 7.28 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).
- 7.29 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. We will raise the profile of career opportunities in teaching within the group by supplementing the training mentors and tutors receive with continuing professional development input from a variety of sources including Teach First and the Careers and Employability Service.
- 7.30 In 2017-18 the University will fund the delivery of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities relating to pupil success and progression for schools meeting widening participation criteria. This work draws on the professional and academic expertise of staff in the Graduate School of Education, working with widening participation staff to identify target schools.
- 7.31 Finally, in order to ensure we take a whole student lifecycle approach to widening participation, the University has recently recruited a WP and Postgraduate Recruitment Officer. Responsibilities of this post holder 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 PG loans system) to relevant individuals.
- 7.32 In order to effectively target outreach work and monitor the demography of our postgraduate community, the University's postgraduate application form now includes a series of questions about an applicant's background. This includes questions such as whether they received a bursary as an undergraduate, school attended and their postcode before applying to university. To mitigate the financial barriers to postgraduate study, philanthropic giving has provided funding for ten bursaries of £10,000 each, to be awarded to students who attended the Access to Bristol scheme, took up an undergraduate place at Bristol, received the Access to Bristol bursary and will undertake a postgraduate taught programme at the University in 2016-17.

## 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 Applications from mature student have dropped (in line with a national decline) from 2012-13 onwards. In order to increase applications from mature learners the University will continue to invest in a range of outreach activities. In 2017-18 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. We are also exploring new outreach activities for mature students including working with local Access Course providers to design a one day conference for Access students and developing a Pathways to Law model for students studying Access courses in Law.
- 8.3 We are committed to exploring new approaches to increasing mature student applications, using expertise from across the University. In 2016-17 a member of academic staff with significant experience working on programmes designed for mature and part-time learners will be seconded to work with the central widening participation team on a part-time basis. The aim of this secondment will be to develop innovative approaches to attracting mature students to study at the University, including an investigation as to the development of short, introductory courses. We will also work with the Students' Union to implement the findings of a research project currently being undertaken to explore the experiences of part time students and the policy recommendations to ensure they are well supported.
- 8.4 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 2015-16 there were 58 students enrolled on our BA in English Literature and Community Engagement, all aged between 24 to 71, who study one night per week over six years. The first cohort graduated in July 2014, with 76 per cent achieving a successful outcome, which is well above the average on comparable part-time programmes. This programme continues to recruit an exceptionally diverse range of students. In 2015-16, of the 16 students admitted to the programme, 100 per cent were local; 100 per cent were mature (with 94 per cent over 25 and 81 per cent over 40); 12 per cent were Black or minority ethnic; and 50 per cent were the first generation in their family to go to university.
- 8.5 Short courses in literature and creative writing have been developed with community organisations including: IDEAL Community Action, 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; partners for this work include a wide range of schools, library services and charities in Bristol and across the surrounding region.
- 8.6 The University remains committed reviewing all curricula to ensure that they are inclusive in scope and delivery. We will also explore opportunities to develop more flexible learning approaches

particularly into our most competitive programmes. We read with interest 'A journey into medicine outreach guidance'<sup>14</sup> and are pleased to be undertaking much of the outreach suggested. Our 'Gateway Programme' into medicine, dentistry and veterinary science has been extremely successful in attracting applications from students from low performing schools and colleges, mature students and students from low participation neighbourhoods who are predicted lower grades than those required for the standard five year programme. The programmes will begin teaching the first cohort of students in September 2016. There will be 15 students enrolled onto the programmes in September 2016 and this will grow to 25 in 2017. For 2016 entry there were more than 100 applications for the programmes and 41 eligible candidates were interviewed. A significant number of offers have already been made and accepted, and it is anticipated that all 15 places will be filled.

- 8.7 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, we will be developing a similar foundation year in the Faculty of Social Science and Law in 2016-17 with a STEM based provision following in 2017-18.
- 8.8 It is hoped that the Gateway Programme will build on the success of the Arts and Humanities Foundation Year. Launched in September 2013, 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.
- 8.9 Data continues to demonstrate significant success in recruiting a diverse student population for the Foundation Year. In 2015-16, of the 30 students enrolled on the Foundation Year: 83 per cent were mature; 13 per cent were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups; 66 per cent were local; and 40 per cent were the first generation in their family to go to university. Recruitment was supported through short taster courses run in collaboration with community organisations, including The Meriton, a pupil referral unit for young mothers. In 2015-16, 73 per cent of students had a household income of below £25k and were therefore eligible for a dedicated bursary.
- 8.10 Progression rates to first-year undergraduate degree programmes from Foundation Year students are impressive. 86 per cent of the 2014-15 cohort completed the foundation year and all of these students continued to a degree. In total, 15 students progressed to a degree in the Faculty of Arts, one progressed to a degree in Law at Bristol and three were admitted to degree programmes at other institutions. This compares very favorably to similar foundation year programmes.
- 8.11 Many of the first cohort to complete the Foundation Year will graduate from degree programmes in 2016-17. We have been collating data on their progress and working collaboratively with students to map their experiences across the full life cycle of their studies. This data will be vital in ensuring that the support we offer to students who enter the University through alternative routes is appropriate and robust, and in mapping the diverse contributions these students have made to university life. Funding for outreach costs associated with the programme will be committed from additional fee income in 2017-18.
- 8.12 Aside from our foundation and preliminary year provision, in order to ensure that we enhance opportunities for part time students on more vocational pathways, the University is working with

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

the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to shape the national Degree Apprenticeships programme. As a representative of the Russell Group, the University is engaged in discussions over the formation of higher level apprenticeships (at levels six and seven) and is committed to providing high quality, flexible provision which meets the needs of students, employers and higher education institutions.

## 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 2017-18 we will continue to build on existing partnerships, including the IntoUniversity Bristol South centre 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<sup>15</sup> and Careerpilot<sup>16</sup> providing pathway and progression information for 13-19 year olds. 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 higher education.
- 9.3 As mentioned above, the University is a member of the Western Outreach Network (WON), part of the HEFCE funded NNCO. The evaluation taken place so far has shown that the WON adds significant value to the outreach work delivered by the partner institutions. Data indicates that: the engagement of schools with outreach activities has increased; aspirations to progress to higher education have been raised; and the resource benefits of collaboration have been realised. As a result of this, the universities involved in the WON have decided to sustain the network beyond the current HEFCE funding period through subscription. The Coordinator will be retained on part-time basis to maintain communications with schools and organise collaborative outreach activities for pre-16 students in the WON area. The WON will be managed through the Western Progression Vocational Consortium (WPVC) Board along with Careerpilot and the Western Access Progression Agreement (WAPA). The Universities of the West of England, Bath and Bath Spa are all represented on both groups and also work together to increase the progression to higher education of mature students in the local area.
- 9.4 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 widening participation staff, plans and delivers collaborative activity including the biennial Teachers' Conference and practitioner networks.
- 9.5 As part of the University's membership of the Russell Group WP Association, we are also a partner in Advancing Access, a national collaboration of 24 selective universities. We are working together with schools and colleges to develop and deliver continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and advisors that supports student progression to selective universities and courses. We are delivering the majority of CPD events and resources online to allow easy access for all schools, regardless of their location. This NCCO complements the important work already carried out at the University and other partner institutions by engaging those areas that have historically been hard to reach and may be in geographic 'cold spots'. It is a cost-effective approach to equipping

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<sup>15</sup> [www.life-pilot.co.uk](http://www.life-pilot.co.uk)

<sup>16</sup> [www.careerpilot.org.uk](http://www.careerpilot.org.uk)

teachers and advisors with the information they need to advise students with confidence. Initially funded through HEFCE's collaborative outreach network scheme, partner universities have agreed to continue Advancing Access through subscription from 2016 onwards.

- 9.6 In terms of collaborative student support activity, the University is actively engaged with the South West Peer Support Network and in shaping the emerging academic peer led learning network which replaces the National Peer Assisted Study Sessions Network. Both networks serve 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 2017-18.
- 9.7 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 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.
- 9.8 The University is committed to working with the Students' Union as it develops its widening participation activity. There are a number of part-time, elected student officers whose remit includes the representation of students from under-represented groups. These include: a Mature and Part Time Students' Officer; a BME Students' Officer; a Disabled Students' Officer and a WP Students' Officer. In addition to this, several of the full time elected officers have access and mental health within their remit. Supporting the University to further improve diversity is a key representative priority.
- 9.9 Beyond representation, the Students' Union is also involved in the development and delivery of a range of outreach programmes, including volunteering in local primary and secondary schools to provide classroom support and small group academic tutoring. 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 7.3, and this work will continue in 2017-18.
- 9.10 Collaboration extends to the joint delivery of activities to support mental health and well-being. This includes a specific society that connects students who want to talk about mental health, peer led support groups and networks. Each year the SU lead a dedicated mental health awareness campaign in partnership with central Student Services. This month long initiative pulls together a range of activity dedicated to exploring and enhancing mental health.
- 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 (essential, given a recent University commissioned study reported mature students, students with disabilities and female students reported personal finances as limiting their ability to participate fully in extra-curricular activities<sup>17</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

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<sup>17</sup> Hartfree, Y, Evans, J and Hayes, D (2016) 'Widening Participation Student Financial Support Survey 2015'

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 £1.7m in 2017-18.

Specifically we will:

- Expand peer support through peer mentoring and Peer Assisted Study Sessions
- Continue 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.
- Develop transition support for students with disabilities who may have additional difficulties to overcome when transitioning into University.
- Provide specialist study skills tuition for students with Specific Learning Difficulties
- Develop a whole-institution strategic approach to student wellbeing, with particular measures in place to enhance the wellbeing of students with enduring mental health difficulties
- Develop work to investigate the BME attainment gap at undergraduate level, explore the intersectionality of variables and create specific teaching and learning interventions to reduce inequalities in this area

- 10.2 The interventions outlined above have been informed by a number of research projects commissioned into retention and withdrawal rates at the University. A report on research by the University's Widening Participation Research Cluster into the relationship between widening participation characteristics, student funding arrangements and withdrawals has been produced, as has a qualitative investigation of students' reasons for withdrawal. While the latter did not have a specific focus on students with widening participation characteristics, it does provide a fuller picture of the range of wide-ranging and complex factors that can contribute to a students' decision to withdraw.
- 10.3 The results from the student financial support survey<sup>18</sup> proved interesting and indicated that a relatively high proportion of first year respondents (26 per cent) said that they had seriously considered withdrawing from the University at some point during the academic year, an increase on the figure of 21 per cent from the previous year's survey. This was particularly amplified amongst students with a disability: while 21 per cent of non-disabled students had considered withdrawing, as many as 42 per cent of disabled students had considered doing so. There was also considerable variation by ethnic group, with 36 per cent of non-White students considering withdrawing, compared to 23 per cent of students from a White background. It should be noted, however, that this result was not statistically significant.
- 10.4 When the results were analysed against the variable of financial support, the data indicated that a higher proportion of unfunded students had considered withdrawing (36 per cent) compared with those who had received funding (22 per cent), though this result was also not statistically significant.
- 10.5 Students who had considered withdrawing from the University were asked why they had considered doing so. Over two-thirds of these students reported that financial reasons were at

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<sup>18</sup> Hartfree, Y, Evans, J and Hayes, D (2016) 'Widening Participation Student Financial Support Survey 2015'

least partly the cause of their difficulties: 22 per cent said that they considered withdrawing for 'primarily financial' reasons and a further 48 per cent said that their reasons were 'partly financial'. The remaining 30 per cent gave other, non-financial reasons, such as illness, stress and anxiety, family difficulties and discontent with their chosen degree course. Reasons given for not withdrawing included a desire to get a degree for their future prospects. Other reasons included: having received personal advice and support, feeling that they had committed too much to their studies to drop out, receiving financial support, and that they enjoyed University (as a whole) too much to leave.

- 10.6 The findings of the research project cited above, as well as internal data indicating that students with disabilities are 30 per cent more likely to withdraw than those without, demonstrates the need for the University to invest in student success and progression interventions and take a whole institutional approach to the issue.
- 10.7 At a macro level, work will continue to improve student support and wellbeing. This will include: guidelines for personal tutors supporting first years through transition; a University wide working group on student well-being with a specific work strand on support for students with enduring mental health difficulties; a study skills project to support students' academic support and development; and increased support for mature students.
- 10.8 In order to respond to those groups most vulnerable to withdrawing, we will invest in specific interventions to improve such rates. Access agreement funding will be provided to develop a transition project for disabled students who may have additional difficulties to overcome when starting their studies, including those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Asperger's, and long term health difficulties, including mental health problems. This will be in addition to the University's reasonable adjustment and mainstream support. To mitigate the loss of Disabled Students' Allowance we will also provide funding for individual study skills tuition for students with specific learning difficulties.
- 10.9 Peer support is recognised as having a positive impact on students' sense of belonging and connection to their peers. We will further expand our peer support provision including appointing a graduate intern to support the growth of Peer Assisted Study Sessions and expanding peer mentoring to provide support for students experience mental health difficulties while they are waiting for a one to one counselling appointment.
- 10.11 We will continue 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 2017-18 onwards.
- 10.12 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. Training for Mature Student Advocates now specifically includes the needs of student parents and carers.



- 10.13 A calendar of social and support activities provided by the University and the Mature Students' Network will be provided at the mature students' induction event. This will raise awareness of the range of provision and serve to remind mature students that there are regular events for them throughout the year.
- 10.14 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.
- 10.15 Our commitment to supporting care leavers will continue. In 2017-18 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.
- 10.16 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 and will respond to them as the need arises. Recently we have identified a clear need to address issues of diversity within our residences, including the structural and cultural barriers that may have led to a bifurcation by school type in some of our accommodation. We are taking a whole institutional approach to this issue, including examining pricing structures and allocation processes for residences. As highlighted in para 11.13, we plan to introduce accommodation bursaries for the first time in 2017-18.

## **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 OFFA and Nursaw Associates reports<sup>19</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 UK Student 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.

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<sup>19</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>

- 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 2017-18 agreement.
- 11.8 The University's core financial support package for full time undergraduate students entering the University in 2017 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
  - A bursary of £500 for all students whose residual household income is £40,001 - £42,875
- 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 2017-18, the Access to Bristol fee waiver (of £9,250k) will continue only to 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 2017-18. 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 2017-18, a total of £350k will be set aside for this purpose. It is anticipated that approximately 60 per cent will be allocated from this fund to OFFA countable groups.
- 11.13 Following concern from our students as to rent rises in recent years and the possible impact of this on the demographic balance of our residences, we will be introducing accommodation bursaries for the first time in 2017-18. We will work with our Student Union representatives to establish the most appropriate level and number of bursaries to allocate in order to have greatest impact. The scheme will be evaluated at the end of the first year. We will seek to assess whether the bursary

has influenced the likelihood of students applying to the University from under-represented groups and the choice of residence (with the aim being to diversify some of our more expensive residences). Only those students deemed to be OFFA countable will be eligible for the bursary.

- 11.14 In parallel with arrangements for 2017-18 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>20</sup> students from low income backgrounds are not deterred.

- 12.2 In 2017-18 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 £42,875 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 £42,875 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:

- 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 £42,875 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. This will ensure that financial support is targeted at those most in need.

- 12.4 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 milestones**

- 13.1 In developing the 2017-18 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 We have worked hard to ensure that our targets are linked to our widening participation aims across the student lifecycle, and using 2013-14 application and intake as our baseline year we will assess:

- Year on year progress in diversifying our applicant and student population
- Year on year progress in improving conversion of under-represented applicants

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<sup>20</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

- 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 and summer school programme for example), each of which also has more detailed performance targets associated with it as highlighted in the resource plan.

13.6 In setting long term progress measures for such groups we were mindful of the base from which we start, the finite number of students within each group and the importance of committing to targets we could realistically achieve.

13.7 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 2020-21.

13.8 We have introduced a collaborative target for the IntoUniversity South Bristol Centre, a partnership intervention with the universities of Bath and Exeter. The target is long term and seeks to increase the number of participants taking part in their programmes. The centre was deliberately situated in Withywood, an area of South Bristol with the second lowest progression rates to higher education in the country, in recognition of the need to increase the aspirations and attainment White working class students.

13.9 The target for IntoUniversity Bristol South is necessarily broad in the 2017-18 agreement as the centre only officially opened in March 2016. We will be working with colleagues from IntoUniversity to refine the target for future submissions following an analysis of those areas in which greatest progress is needed (White working class boys for example).

13.10 Our long standing commitment to the Pathways to Law programme has led to the introduction of a target for applications to the University from students who take part in the Pathways programmes at partner institutions. Students who are part of the Bristol cohort of Pathways to Law are included in our Access to Bristol targets, however in the last year we have increased the number of outreach events which we organise for students from partner institutions. Evaluation of these events has shown that they are successful in generating applications to the University with a total of 91

applications being received by the University for 2016 entry. We will increase the number of activities which we provide for students from partner institutions in order to showcase the Law School and the benefits of studying a Law degree at Bristol.

- 13.11 We are committed to examining multiple indicators of deprivation and to doing all we can to reduce their impact. We have added in several new intervention targets to reflect the need for intersectionality between progress measures and the partnership work we are undertaking. Recognising the need to increase the number of students from specific BME groups (Asian/Pakistani, Asian/Bangladeshi and Black/Caribbean in particular), we have introduced a target for the number of such students on our Insight Into Bristol programme. As a result of this new targeting criteria we will ensure that students taking part in the programme are prioritised if they are: from BME backgrounds; come from low performing schools, are in the first generation of their family to apply to university and live in neighbourhoods where few people progress to higher education.
- 13.12 Ethnicity continues to have impact beyond the application and intake stage. We have identified that ethnicity is an important factor in the success of learners at the University, with data suggesting that there is a gap in attainment between BME and white undergraduate students at the top and lower end of degree classifications. In 2014-15 of the white students graduating, 31 per cent achieved a first class honours, compared to 20.7 per cent of BME students. Likewise, proportionately more BME students (17 per cent) who graduated are awarded a 2:2 classification than white students (6.8 per cent).
- 13.3 In 2017-18 we will invest access agreement funds to explore the effect of the attainment gap on specific BME groups, as well as the possible overlaps with other key protected and widening participation characteristics such as: age; disability; gender; socio economic status. As a result of this work being undertaken we will seek to create new, more granular targets, for the retention of students from key under-represented groups for the 2018-19 agreement
- 13.14 Recognising the importance of the whole student lifecycle and of the need to make continuing 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. These figures are benchmarked against withdrawal rates for N-SEC 1-3 and white students with the aim of reaching an equitable position by 2019-20.
- 13.15 We have also increased the number of intervention targets to ensure that they accurately reflect the partnership work undertaken by the University. We are proud to be a sponsor of Merchants' Academy and the active participation by University staff and students has played a part in the upward trajectory of GCSE attainment in the Academy. We have introduced an intervention target regarding the percentage of Merchants' Academy students that achieve 5 or more A\*-C grades including maths and English. The raising of attainment levels at GCSE is especially important as the University guarantees an offer to any Merchants' student who applies to the University who meet the academic entry criteria. By increasing attainment levels at GCSE it is anticipated that a larger number of students will stay on at the Academy's sixth form, apply to the University and consequently take advantage of the guaranteed offer.
- 13.16 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.
- 13.17 Finally, we have retained a number of student success intervention progress measures including peer mentoring coverage and peer assisted study sessions.

## 14. Monitoring and evaluation

- 14.1 Progress in delivering our 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 with a membership which includes admissions and widening participation expertise as well as Students' Union representation) requires 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. Evaluation of student success and progression activity are reported to the University's Transition Group, with student representatives on the committee playing an active role in the assessment of such interventions.
- 14.3 Operational responsibility for delivery and monitoring rests with the 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>21</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 August 2016, will continue to inform future strategy for outreach, student success and financial support provision. A seminar, which we hope will attract a national audience of policy makers and practitioners, will take place in October 2016.
- 14.7 The University is committed to enhancing progression opportunities for students from underrepresented groups. In 2015 we commissioned the Widening Participation Research Cluster to explore the inter-relationships between the individual characteristics of University of Bristol undergraduates and their post-graduation destinations after six months, as revealed by the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, in order to inform policy in this area.

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<sup>21</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 The study<sup>22</sup> compared the outcomes of ‘widening participation’ and ‘non widening participation’ students. The results proved interesting, with clear relationships emerging between the two datasets. The study confirmed that ‘widening participation’ students are disproportionately associated with certain post-graduation outcomes. They are less likely to undertake further full-time study or work in ‘graduate’ jobs, more likely to work in the public sector, to earn lower salaries, less dependent on their social networks in finding work and in financing further study, and more likely to work and study in locations familiar to them.
- 14.9 Recommendations from the report included: the need to expand internship opportunities for students from under-represented groups; enhance information, advice and guidance for such students from the Careers and Employability Service; increase the proportion of the ‘disadvantaged’ cohort progressing to postgraduate degree level; and strengthen the role of academic departments in supporting their students’ career progression. The costs of such activity have been included within the student progression expenditure.
- 14.10 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.
- 14.11 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 and Pathways to Law 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.
- 14.12 In the 2014-15 admissions cycle, applications from Access to Bristol participants increased by 56 per cent on the previous year. We received 405 applications from Access to Bristol and Pathways to Law participants (against a progress measure of 259) and 82 per cent of such students were made an offer. This delivered an intake of 67 students in 2015 (against a progress measure of 66). 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 (19 per cent against 13 per cent respectively).
- 14.13 The analysis of impact of such interventions demonstrates our commitment to refine all outreach programmes in light of evaluation. As a result of the success of Access to Bristol we have expanded the initiative, extended the satellite programme with IntoUniversity, and implemented a guaranteed offer for those on the scheme. Conversely, the Realising Opportunities scheme and Year 11 Summer School did not show similar levels of success and both have been discontinued and the resource refocused into activities providing stronger outcomes.
- 14.14 We also adapt interventions in response to direct feedback from participants. Evaluation of the Insight Into Bristol programme found that those attending the programme reported that the structure (which ran over a weekend in London) proved problematic with work commitments. In 2016-17 we will introduce a shorter, sharper, one day intervention in London, followed by three days in Bristol. It is hoped that this will lead to higher levels of engagement from the participants.
- 14.15 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

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<sup>22</sup> Hoare, A (2016) ‘What happens after graduation? : A first analysis of the short-term post-graduation experiences of one cohort of the University’s widening participation students’.

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.

- 14.16 Recent evaluation of the Students in Schools programme highlighted challenges in reaching the right target groups of pupils. In addition while qualitative feedback was extremely positive, the nature of the programme was such that it was difficult to acquire clear evidence of impact in terms of attainment or progression. Substantive changes to the scheme, tighter targeting and the use of the HEAT database to track participants have been introduced as a result of the evaluation. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be carried out to ensure that these changes have the intended outcomes. An emerging picture of the impact of these changes should be seen in 2017-18.
- 14.17 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 recognise the attainment gap that currently exists amongst students from BME groups. As outlined in greater detail in para 13.2, from 2016-17 onwards we will invest access agreement funds to explore the possible reasons for this difference as well as the possible overlaps with other key protected and widening participation characteristics.
- 14.18 As outlined in para 14.2, evaluation of student success and progression activity essential in order to ensure it remains effective. 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.
- 14.19 The University will continue to enhance evaluation in 2017-18. 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 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 contributed to the Sutton Trust's work to implement a single evaluation tool for all Sutton Trust programmes including summer school and the Pathways to Law programme, this was rolled out fully from 2015 onwards.
- 14.20 We have recently become a member of the collaborative Higher Education Access Tracker Service (HEAT) which assists in the targeting, monitoring and evaluation of both our individual and their collaborative outreach activities. HEAT allows us to demonstrate outreach participation in relation to success at key transition point, collectively explore best practice in combining qualitative and quantitative research on outreach and in the future, facilitate the development of collaborative targets. Membership of the HEAT service will assist the University in fully understanding patterns of participation in outreach and the effectiveness of different types and combinations of outreach, something which is made possible by the collaborative nature of the service. We can use the HEAT database to record outreach activity and see where individuals have engaged in activities with more than one HEAT university. Collectively this allows the central HEAT service to analyse the timing and combinations of activities that show most impact on enrolment in higher education.
- 14.21 It can take some time for data about young participants in outreach to mature to the point of understanding their patterns of enrolment in higher education as well as their retention and success rates. In the meantime the HEAT service has developed a model of matching a number of different administrative datasets to the HEAT database which will afford us with a better



understanding of the relationship between outreach and key educational outcomes at both pre and post 16, before any enrolment takes place. The collective size and diversity of the database will mean this relationship can be explored against multiple participant characteristics, contributing to both the University's and the sector's understanding of outcomes for different under-represented groups and recognising that widening participation students are not a homogenous group.

- 14.22 When the HEAT data has matured, it will allow the University to understand the relationship between outreach participation and HE enrolment, retention and success. We will be able to see if and when its outreach participants enrol in higher education. Crucially this data will show enrolment not only to the University of Bristol but to all other HEIs. This will allow us to demonstrate our contribution to the sector as a whole. We will also be able to build a picture of the retention and degree classification of its outreach participants, as well as seeing destination and postgraduate enrolment data.

## **15. Equality and diversity**

- 15.1 The University of Bristol has made a strong commitment to advancing equality and representation of disadvantaged groups. Our draft equality objectives align with the objectives and outcomes set out in our access agreement.
- 15.2 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.
- 15.3 The University produces an Annual Report which provides high level equality data about both the student and staff population to provide an evidence based approach to equality monitoring and to demonstrate our compliance with the Equality Act by publishing this information. The University's Annual Programme Review (APR) process also provides reporting at programme level covering the following characteristics: gender/sex; age; disability; and ethnicity. At the start of the 2014-15 academic year, the University began collecting additional information from students as part of online registration. Caring responsibilities, gender identity, sexual orientation and religion or belief are the areas now included.
- 15.4 We are also developing an extensive and sophisticated approach to monitoring our students' attainment and progression to ensure that we better understand their experience with us. It also allows us to consider interventions based solidly on evidence and monitor the impact of initiatives. The University's Education Committee has, for the last number of years, received an extensive equalities data report which is complemented by an annual report from Research Degrees Examination Board. This activity is being further extended by a project this year led by the Student Data and Information Team within Academic Registry to develop a fuller dataset which will be capable of interrogation by the widest range of student characteristics and at institutional, faculty, school and programme level.
- 15.5 Equality considerations have been embedded into the design of both the Widening Participation Strategy and of this access agreement. Equality analysis has been a part of the policy development process and will inform implementation. 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.

- 15.6 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.
- 15.7 Students with protected characteristics will continue to be included in all outreach work funded by the University's 2017-18 access agreement. 28 mature students and 183 students from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds completed the Access to Bristol programme in 2014-15 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.
- 15.8 We are determined to make further progress in this area and, as a subscriber, deploy the resources received from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) focused on addressing under-representation, progression and success of students to assist meeting targets outlined in the agreement. Many of the areas for consideration set out in ECU's Race Equality Charter are already being undertaken, including examining the data and causes of differing participation and attainment of students from different ethnic backgrounds. Utilising benchmarking data provided by ECU, we align the work undertaken at the University with national challenges and priorities.
- 15.9 The approaches and interventions outlined in this access agreement positively impact upon equality and diversity within the University in a number of ways. We are committed to taking a whole institution approach to the issue as we know that our widening participation and equality and diversity efforts are likely to focus on the same groups of students who share a protected characteristic that is underrepresented. Understanding where this crossover exists and coordinating work that seeks to reach and support these groups will increase the impact of resources used. Critically, it will also ensure a smoother path for students so that they are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes and have a positive experience whilst at the University.
- 15.10 The University is committed to providing a positive experience for all students, where individuals are treated with courtesy and consideration and where difference is valued and diversity respected. We expect the highest standards from our students and are resolutely committed to complying with the Equality Act 2010 and eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation. We publish Student Disciplinary Regulations and Conduct Procedures for members of staff. We have a zero tolerance to sexual harassment policy and have signed Bristol City Council's pledge to end gender based violence.
- 15.11 In order to ensure that students with particular protected characteristics are supported, we implement (and publish) a range of policies including fitness to study<sup>23</sup> as well as guidance for members of staff working with students from under-represented groups (such as transgender students<sup>24</sup>, for example).

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

- 16.1 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.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/act/protected/disability/fitnesstostudy/fitnesstostudypolicy.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/act/protected/genderreassign/supportingtransstudents.pdf>

- 16.2 Details of tuition fee levels and of the financial support available to students will be routinely published in our prospectus and on our website.
- 16.3 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.
- 16.4 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.
- 16.5 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.
- 16.6 The University is cognisant of having entered a period of unprecedented qualification reform within the United Kingdom, which will continue into 2020. The reform covers GCSEs and a range of post-16 options, including vocational qualifications, apprenticeships, AS and A levels as well as regional differences across the UK, with qualifications in Wales and Northern Ireland diverging further from those in England. We know that these changes will take place at different times depending on the region within the UK, the type of qualification and also the subject area. These complexities have the potential to introduce confusion for applicants, their influencers as well as for University Admissions staff. The number of changes also pose a threat to the perception of fair and transparent recruitment, selection and admissions to the sector.
- 16.7 The University of Bristol will ensure throughout this time of qualification reform, noting in particular of the increasing take up of vocational qualifications and lesser take up of A levels, that admissions policies remain fair, transparent with clear provision of information to potential applicants and their influences in print, web and at open days.

## **17. Consulting with students**

- 17.1 The role of our Students' Union, key representative sabbatical officers and full time members of staff, has been critical to the development of this access agreement. Monthly meetings have taken place with the Students' Union's Equality, Liberation and Access Officer, Post Graduate Education Officer and the Head of Representation and Development to plan and develop the submission, ensuring they contributed to the strategic direction of the agreement.
- 17.2 All sabbatical officers were invited to submit suggestions for allocation of access, student success and progression funding to Student Recruitment Committee and, as a member of the group, the Equality, Liberation and Access Officer played a key role in making the final decisions as to areas of spend. A meeting was held with all sabbatical officers to discuss the content of the access agreement, to ensure their views have been accurately reflected and all feedback included.
- 17.3 Many of the strategic themes included in this document (specifically in relation to: the BME attainment gap; the impact of enduring mental health issues; the importance of a diverse and representative curricula; and the importance of diversity in our residences) have been championed by our student body through the University's new strategy development process and thus included in the agreement. We will continue to work with our students to implement the commitments outlined in the document.

## **18. Conclusion**

- 18.1 This access agreement outlines our strategic priorities for 2017-18. 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. We reaffirm our commitment to working with our students to develop and deliver our work to diversify the undergraduate student body and are mindful of the very close links with institutional equality and diversity efforts.
- 18.2 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.