

University of Bristol Access Agreement 2015-16

1. Background

- 1.1 The University of Bristol has been a pioneer in the field of widening participation for over a decade. Recognising the potential of our applicants has always been at the heart of our mission to recruit the most able students from the most diverse backgrounds.
- 1.2 The University has developed an innovative and creative outreach culture whilst adopting an evidence based approach to policy and practice. We remain determined to achieve a more diverse student community, recognising the social, educational and cultural benefits this confers to the individual and institution. We acknowledge the barriers that persist for many and will continue to examine our admissions procedures, entry routes and curricula to ensure that those with the potential to succeed at the University can do so. We will continue to do everything we can to make the University of Bristol as attractive to those from underrepresented groups as it is to those from 'traditionally represented' backgrounds.
- 1.3 The University developed its first Access Agreement in 2005. Subsequent revisions reflected a review of our student finance package, in light of the first year of operation, a comprehensive review of long term measurement of widening participation and changes to the government grant package. The new financial environment in 2012/13 necessitated a more fundamental review, the outcomes of which were reflected in our 2012 Access Agreement. Plans were further refined in response to significant environmental changes and our own plans for student number growth and outcomes were reflected in both our 2013 and 2014 Agreements.
- 1.4 In 2013 the University's Widening Participation Strategy, which provides the strategic framework within which our Access Agreement commitments sits, was reviewed and updated. The strategy has informed the development of the 2015/16 submission and care has been taken to ensure both documents complement one another and meet the stated strategic aims and objectives. The Agreement also aligns closely with the University's Vision and Strategy 2009-16 and Education Strategy both of which are committed to the highest standards of teaching and learning for all students.
- 1.5 The climate in which the 2015/16 Access Agreement is written in is one of rapid change. The ending of the National Scholarship Programme (NSP), uncertainty around Student Opportunity Funding and possible changes to the long term funding of higher education create challenges in long term planning.
- 1.6 However, the University has taken the opportunity, building on research undertaken from the first cohort of students paying higher fees, to assess the impact of the current student funding package and to explore the strategic re-balancing of funds from outreach.
- 1.7 The 2015/16 Access Agreement articulates 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. There are also changes within the funding package following a review of current provision. Notably, there has been extension of the University's bursary scheme such that from 2015/16 onwards it will reach all 'OFFA countable' groups following consultation with our Students' Union.

- 1.8 In parallel with the arrangements for 2015/16 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 actively contributed to the development of the 2015/16 Access Agreement. The Vice President (Education) was an integral member of the Student Finance Review Group, consulted widely on the proposed allocation of funding, and supports the final submission. The wider sabbatical team, and Union staff members, have worked closely with the Widening Participation and Recruitment team in the writing of this document and assessing the strategic direction of future outreach and student success activity.
- 1.10 This Access Agreement outlines our strategic priorities for 2015/16. It takes a whole-institution approach, covers the student lifecycle, reflects on those interventions with greatest impact, explores the strategic rebalancing of spend to support access, student success and progression and demonstrates our commitment to long term outreach. We include an assessment of our current performance against targets and articulate our planned response to the challenges faced. We demonstrate our collaborative work with partners within and outside the higher education sector and highlight the provision of support for mature and part time students.

2. Tuition fees

- 2.1 The University will charge an annual tuition fee of £9k (increasing annually in line with inflation where permitted) for all UK and EU students on full time undergraduate programmes and full time PGCE programmes.
- 2.2 Tuition fees for UK and EU students studying on a part time basis will be calculated on a pro rata basis, using the £9k fee as the full time equivalent rate. In practice, the maximum fee charged to any part time student as a result of this will be £4,500.
- 2.3 The following exceptions to this will apply:
- Students who are entitled to a fee waiver as part of our student finance package
 - Students undertaking a year of study abroad or an industrial work placement, during which a fee of £1350 per annum will be charged (15 per cent of the full time fee)¹.
- 2.4 It is anticipated that undergraduate tuition fees will generate an 'additional' income above the basic fee of approximately £42m in 2015/16. An increasing amount will be re-invested in student financial support and other measures underpinning our widening participation strategy.

3. Expenditure on additional access measures

- 3.1 In 2015/16 The University of Bristol will invest 31.3 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 and retention of students from underrepresented groups.

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

4. 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 We are proud of our excellent retention rates. According to HESA performance indicators, of the students aged under 21 who entered the University in 2010/11, only 1.4% withdrew from higher education without completing a programme, against a benchmark of 2.2%. The completion rates for mature students are not as positive however. The same data source indicates a non-continuation rate of 8.1% for this group against a benchmark of 7.5%. We recognise the need to improve rates for this group and outline planned activity in para 10.2.
- 4.3 Whilst retention rates are generally encouraging, the University of Bristol has had only limited success in realising its ambitions to widen participation at the application and intake stage and currently falls significantly short of the majority of its HESA benchmarks.
- 4.4 Using the University's own application and intake measures² to analyse performance over the five year period from 2009/10 to 2013/14, the proportion of undergraduate applications from under-represented groups has increased in five categories (mature, disabled, local, socio-economic groups 4-7 and minority ethnic students) with the proportion of applications from both other groups (students from low-performing schools and low-participation neighbourhoods) declining.
- 4.5 Over the same period, progress in diversifying intake has been less positive. There have been small improvements in only two areas, minority ethnic and disabled students. The proportion of mature students has remained at the same level (an achievement given the national decline in applications) and those from low-performing schools, low-participation neighbourhoods, local and socio-economic groups 4-7 has fallen.
- 4.6 However, a focus on conversion from application to intake has delivered significant success. During the same five year period, we have converted increasing proportions from low performing schools; socio economic groups 4-7; low performing neighbourhoods, local postcodes, mature, disabled and minority ethnic groups.
- 4.7 In most respects, the profile of our PGCE intake is either in line with or better than that of our key comparators³ and other local providers. In 2013/14 we recruited a cohort which was 39 per cent male, 61 per cent female (which compares with 32 per cent male: 68 percent female for the comparator group and 25 per cent male and 75 per cent female for the local group). 45 per cent were categorised as 'mature' (compared with 49 per cent of the comparator group and 45 per cent of the local group).
- 4.8 Our biggest challenge in relation to the PGCE programme relates to the recruitment of minority ethnic students. The 2012/13 year saw a significant improvement in this area but the profile of students in 2013/14 was less positive. The changing landscape of ITE training

² The University measures LPN applications and intake on the basis of the lower two POLAR quintiles, while HESA uses only the lowest quintile

³ The Institute of Education; University of London and the Universities of Bath; Birmingham; Cambridge; East Anglia; Exeter; Manchester; Nottingham; Oxford; Southampton and Warwick

is likely to bare a significant influence on this, which in turn also impacted our overall applications and student intake. It should be noted however that the retention of Black and minority ethnic students has improved since Access Agreement funding has been allocated to this area.

- 4.9 In order to make progress against our widening participation progress measures, the University will continue to take a holistic and contextualised approach to admissions. All students from low performing schools and colleges will be flagged within the University's admissions database and if an offer is made it will automatically be at the contextual (one grade lower) level. This will be irrespective of the predicted grades exceeding the entry requirements. In order to ensure positive conversion rates, and to explain the rationale behind the lower offer, a bespoke communication will be delivered through the University's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.
- 4.10 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 2013, we received an average of 8 home applications for every place (with some programmes receiving over 15 applications per place). The average UCAS tariff score of our 2013 entrants was 471.7 (the equivalent of 4 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 NCQ/QCF tariff score in Bristol Local Authority is 677.7 against a national average of 754.5. This presents significant challenges for an institution with high entry requirements⁴.
- 4.11 A feasibility study, undertaken by IntoUniversity in January 2014⁵ 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.
- 4.12 The impact of such high levels of deprivation on education within the city is clear. The City of Bristol has a disproportionately high number of underperforming schools. Of England's core cities, Bristol has the second lowest percentage of Free School Meal pupils progressing to higher education and Black and minority ethnic pupils and those with English as an alternative language underperform at all levels of education in Bristol⁶.
- 4.13 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.
- 4.14 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 The UCAS tariff and NQF/QCF tariffs are not calculated on the same basis so cannot be directly compared with each other

⁵ Brett, C (2014). 'Feasibility study for an IntoUniversity Centre in South Bristol'

⁶ Ibid.

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

5. Expenditure

5.1 In order to fund the activity described above and make progress against our targets, the University plans to invest a total of £13.2m in additional access measures in 2015/16, representing 31.3 per cent of total income from additional fees.

5.2 A high level summary of how this investment will be attributed in 2015/16 is provided in the table below. The amounts quoted would rise annually with inflation if fee levels were to rise to reflect inflation.

5.3

Outreach activities	£2.3m
Student Success and Progression activities	£0.6m
Student finance package	£10.3
Total reinvestment	£13.2

5.4 Work undertaken by the University to assess the impact of the current allocation of additional fee income has confirmed the need to strategically rebalance Access Agreement spend away from the student funding package towards outreach and student success activity. We will invest £2.9m in outreach and student success interventions in 2015/16, rising to £5.3m in 2018/19

6. Additional access measures

6.1 Additional access measures fall into three main categories:

- Outreach activity
- Progression and retention related activities
- Student financial support

7. Outreach expenditure

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

7.2 In order to achieve our aims, and informed by both the recent OFFA publication on the impact of bursaries on retention rates⁷ and research undertaken by our Widening Participation Research Cluster⁸, the University will invest £2.3m in outreach activities in 2015/16 rising to approximately £4m in 2018/19.

⁷ OFFA (2014) ‘An interim report: Do bursaries have an effect on retention rates?’

⁸ Davies,S, Hayes, D and Collard, S (2014) ‘Should expenditure be switched from bursaries to outreach? A comparative evaluation of the effects on Widening Participation of the Access to Bristol and Sutton Trust schemes’; Hartree,Y, Brown, G and Hoare, T (2014) ‘Student Financial Support Survey’

- 7.3 The focus of outreach activity in 2015/16 will be long-term. We will take a sustained approach to growing the applicant pool by working with primary school pupils to mature learners. We will further our commitment to IntoUniversity by opening a second centre in the south of the city in partnership with the universities of Bath and Exeter. We will continue to work closely with Merchants' Academy (an all-age academy based in South Bristol of which the University is a co-sponsor) and strengthen our links with providers of non-formal education (specifically the South Bristol Youth Project). We will also continue to invest in mentoring and tutoring programmes in the city to raise attainment at both GCSE and A Level. Based on the success of the Access to Bristol scheme we will expand the initiative outside of the local area. Further detail is provided below.
- 7.4 The University's commitment to long-term, sustained outreach coupled with analysis of the impact of the East Bristol IntoUniversity centre has 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 77 per cent of participants agreed that they were more likely to progress to higher education as a result of participation on the scheme and 81 per cent of those who took part in the intervention progressed to higher education compared to the local average of 13.9 per cent⁹. 12 IntoUniversity students, two from Bristol and 10 from London, secured a place at the University of Bristol in 2013 and with the support of IntoUniversity it was possible to trial a satellite version of the Access to Bristol programme in Hackney. In 2015/16 we will work in partnership with IntoUniversity to expand the satellite programmes within London.
- 7.5 The development of the IntoUniversity centre in South Bristol will complement the outreach activity the University is already involved in through its co- sponsorship of Merchants' Academy. The Academy, ranked as the 31st 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. The Academy is now an all age institution with children beginning their education in the nursery and progressing to the post sixteen centre. We are committed to providing strategic leadership to the Academy through the active engagement of the three University Governors and will continue to develop a series of bespoke outreach projects for students.
- 7.6 The University's commitment to raising attainment and aspirations through long-term outreach in South Bristol, one of the most economically deprived areas of the city and with the second lowest progression rates to higher education in the country¹⁰, 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.
- 7.7 As well as taking a long term approach to outreach, the University is committed to expanding those interventions with a proven track record of success. One such programme is the Access to Bristol programme (which incorporates our Pathways to Law scheme). It is clear that the intervention continues to have a demonstrable impact on applications and intake with the scheme exceeding the application and intake progress measures. 156 Access to Bristol students applied to the University for 2013 entry, against a progress measure of 108, and 37 such students started as undergraduates compared with a progress measure of

⁹ IntoUniversity Bristol East Annual Report 2012-13

¹⁰ HEFCE (2013), Trends in Young Participation in Higher Education: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201328/>

27. Feedback suggests that the commitment of a guaranteed offer combined with some element of financial support, acted as a significant incentive to apply to the University. We will retain the guaranteed offer and provide a transition year bursary for such students in 2015/16.
- 7.8 However, 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 cohort who received their A Level results in 2013. It led us to explore the accuracy of the predicted A level grades of all offer holders at the University of Bristol. The results indicated that 45.81% of predicted A level grades were incorrect and 38.35% of grades were over predicted. This increased to 43.64% with predictions from low performing schools.
- 7.9 To address the challenge of students not achieving their predicted grades, from 2014/15 onwards we are building revision sessions in Bristol and London for Access to Bristol and summer school participants. The sessions will involve school teachers running intensive day-long revision sessions in key subjects such as chemistry and maths. We will also continue to provide CPD sessions for teachers on writing personal statements. The evidence of an over-prediction of A level grades has been incorporated into these sessions.
- 7.10 In 2015/16, based on the success of the Access to Bristol scheme will we seek to expand the satellite programme schemes described in para 7.6 and work to establish a 'pathways to medicine' programme. This programme will build on the work currently being undertaken with students on the medical sciences stream of Access to Bristol and summer schools to strengthen performance at interview.
- 7.11 We will also continue our commitment to the University's long-standing summer school programme in 2015/16. We will maintain the level of participants on the 2015/16 Sutton Trust summer school to 160 but seek to improve application and conversion rates through a programme of e-mentoring and support for students at critical points in the admissions cycle. We will increase by five the number of students on the collaborative Year 11 summer school to 65.
- 7.12 The interests of groups protected under the Equalities Act 2010 and other groups such as care-leavers are important to the University and such students are well catered for within our outreach provision. As our 2013/14 intake data indicates that the University performs relatively well against our Black and minority ethnic progress measures for applications, in 2015/16 outreach will continue to target mature learners and students with disabilities.
- 7.13 Attracting applications from students with disabilities will remain an important part of the University's outreach activity in 2015/16. We will ensure that pre-application open days and campus tours are accessible to students with disabilities and will train tour guides such that they are able to support individual needs. We will continue to encourage students with disabilities to take part in the Access to Bristol scheme, making relevant adjustments where necessary. The University will maintain membership of the South West Disability Network through which it works collaboratively on disability issues.
- 7.14 The University holds the Buttle UK Quality Mark for its work with care-leavers. We are actively involved in the Universities South West programme for those working with children in care and care leavers and will continue our work in this area in 2015/16. 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 School and we will maintain involvement in this. We will continue to provide student role models, in the form of both mentors and ambassadors, for Looked After Children in 2015/16.

- 7.15 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 8.2 -8.6).
- 7.16 At postgraduate level we continue our work to increase the number of Black and minority ethnic students undertaking a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at the University. In 2015/16 we will build upon our existing programme of school based mentoring and tutoring by working with schools serving communities with high Black and minority ethnic populations, monitoring the proportion of mentors and tutors from such backgrounds and encouraging these students to become involved in this work.
- 7.17 We will raise the profile of career opportunities in teaching within the group by supplementing the training mentors and tutors receive with academic input from a variety of professional sources including Teach First, the Careers Service and the University's Graduate School of Education.
- 7.18 In 2015/16 the University will fund the delivery of career and professional development (CPD) opportunities relating to IAG and pupil progression for schools meeting widening participation criteria. To achieve this, we will draw on the HE advice and guidance expertise of the University's Undergraduate Recruitment and Widening Participation team as well as the academic staff in the Graduate School of Education.

8. Mature and part time students

- 8.1 We share OFFA's concern regarding the decline in part-time applications and enrolment. The University was represented on the steering group of the recent 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 In order to increase applications from mature learners the University will continue to invest in a range of outreach activities. In 2015/16 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 advice on applications, childcare, funding and accommodation. We will ensure that mature students continue to take part in the University's Access to Bristol scheme.
- 8.3 Data indicates that the part-time courses we do have, specifically those bespoke programmes developed for this market, are reaching mature students and those with little or no experience of higher education. In 2013/14 there were 71 students enrolled on our BA in English Literature and Community Engagement, all aged between 25 to 73, who study one night per week over six years. The first cohort will graduate in July 2014 and it is anticipated that 76 per cent will have a successful outcome.

- 8.4 Short courses have been developed with community organisations including: the IDEAL Project, which supports communities affected by drugs and offending; the Single Parent Action Network; and the Eden House Project, which supports women involved in the criminal justice system. These courses are designed to facilitate progression (19 of the current 71 students previously completed 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 studies¹¹.
- 8.5 The University remains committed to exploring opportunities to develop more flexible learning approaches. A business case has been approved to develop a 'gateway programme' focussing on progression routes specific to professional programmes (particularly Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science) and this will be specifically targeted at students in low performing schools and colleges in the local area.
- 8.6 It is hoped that the gateway programme will build on the success of the Arts and Humanities Foundation Year. Launched in September 2013 with a cohort of 27 students, the Foundation Year offers an access route to all undergraduate degree programmes in the Faculty of Arts for academically gifted and highly motivated students from a wide range of backgrounds who might not otherwise have an opportunity to access higher education.
- 8.7 Data from the first year highlights significant success in recruiting a diverse student population. Of the 27 students, 79 per cent were mature, 24 per cent came from low participation neighbourhoods, 17 per cent were from Black and minority ethnic groups, 72 per cent were local and 90 per cent had non A Level qualifications. Recruitment was supported through 'taster courses' run in collaboration with community organisations, including The Meriton, a pupil referral unit for young mothers. In 2013/14, 78 per cent of students had a household income of below £25k and were therefore eligible for a dedicated bursary. It is anticipated that 23 of the cohort will progress to undergraduate programmes at the University.
- 8.8 Feedback from the programme has been overwhelmingly positive and the Foundation Year has provided an excellent example of the way in which the University can adapt its programmes to reach currently under-represented groups. Funding for bursaries and the development costs associated with the programme will be committed from additional fee income in 2015/16.

9. Collaborative working

- 9.1 The University will engage in collaborative outreach both locally and nationally. We established a summer school with the Universities of Bath and Exeter in 2012 and will build upon this model (and expand by 5 places) in 2015/16. Data¹² suggests that such summer schools have been shown to improve progression to higher education from underrepresented groups.
- 9.2 We will continue to be active members of the Universities South West Widening Participation Group which brings together the 13 HEIs across the South West. This Group has worked together specifically to retain and further build collaborative relationships first

¹¹ Organisations with whom students are working include Bristol Libraries, the Bristol Drugs Project and the National Autistic Society

¹² HEFCE (2010) Aimhigher Summer Schools – Participants and Progression to Higher Education: <https://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2010/201032/name,63889,en.html>

established under the Aimhigher programme and to develop practitioner networks and deliver a programme of activities to support progression among hard to reach groups including students with disabilities, care leavers and Children in Care, mature and adult learners. There is also a strong commitment to the professional development of WP practitioners across the region with provision of an annual event to share effective practice.

- 9.3 In 2015/16, the University will also collaborate with eleven universities in the South West¹³ region to fund, maintain, develop and promote the careers support websites managed by the Western Vocational Progression Consortium ([WVPC](#)). These include the Lifepilot website ([www.life-pilot.co.uk](#)) which engages and supports mature and part-time students and the Careerpilot website ([www.careerpilot.org.uk](#)) which provides pathway and progression information for 13- 19 year olds.
- 9.4 Working collaboratively beyond the South West region and based on the success of the first three cohorts, the University will continue involvement in the national Realising Opportunities (RO) scheme in 2015/16.
- 9.5 The University is a member of Realising Opportunities (RO), a unique collaborative partnership of research intensive universities developing and delivering a national fair access scheme which promotes social and geographic mobility for students from under-represented groups. Successful completion of RO will result in additional consideration given to applications through UCAS from all Partner universities, and the potential for an alternative offer worth up to 40 UCAS points or equivalent from many (including the University of Bristol). Each of the participating institutions has committed future funds to the central operating budget to ensure the on-going delivery and development of RO to 2017.
- 9.6 In 2013 the Partnership set a joint target with regard to progression to research intensive universities¹⁴. This was exceeded and the University of Bristol is committed to achieving the 2016 target of 38 per cent of students starting RO in Year 12 in 2014 progressing to a research intensive university.
- 9.7 The University will continue to actively engage in the collaborative Widening Participation Research Group with the Universities of the West of England, Bath and Bath Spa. In addition, through the WPVC and the associated activities of the Western Access Progression Agreement, the same institutions will work to increase the progression to higher education of mature students in the local area. Building on a collaborative research project planned for 2014/15 we will explore the barriers to participation and identify practical strategies to encourage adults to return to study.
- 9.8 We await with interest news of the forthcoming £25 million funding available from HEFCE to develop the National Collaborative Outreach Network and look forward to taking part in future joint activity across the sector.
- 9.9 Whilst collaborative work outside of the institution continues, we are also committed to a co-ordinated approach to widening participation within the University. We will continue to work closely with the Students' Union sabbatical team including: the Equalities and Liberation Officer; Academic Experience 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

¹³ Arts University Bournemouth, Bath Spa University, Universities of Bath, Bournemouth, Exeter, Gloucestershire, Plymouth, St Mark and St John, West of England, Falmouth University and the Royal Agricultural College

¹⁴ Defined by membership of with the Russell Group or the 1994 Group

in the development of strategy in this area, including outreach work, student success activity and research.

- 9.10 Our Students' Union has an active volunteering programme for students in local schools at both primary and secondary level. Visits to the Union and an opportunity to find out about clubs and societies have been integrated into the Access to Bristol sessions and there are plans to extend this activity to participants on the 'Going Places' event highlighted in para 7.9. This work will continue in 2015/16.
- 9.11 Work is also underway to provide students from under-represented groups in the local area with the opportunity to take part in a 'day in the life project', shadowing a student to provide an insight into the realities of undergraduate education.
- 9.12 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 so¹⁵. We fully support such an approach and will continue to work closely with sabbatical offers and staff members to enhance the student experience for all.

10. Student success expenditure

- 10.1 Whilst the University's overall track record in student retention is strong, we will continue investment in interventions which provide support for the specific challenges which students from underrepresented groups often face in making the transition to university level study and progressing into employment and postgraduate study. We will commit to student success and progression activity £0.6m in 2015/16, rising to approximately £1.6m in 2018/19. Specifically we will:
- Expand our peer mentoring and Peer Assisted Study Sessions
 - 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.
- 10.2 We recognise that the University has slightly higher withdrawal rates for mature students and have commissioned research by the University's Widening Participation Research Cluster to investigate this. A project has been designed to explore the profile of student withdrawals over recent academic years, focussing on patterns of difference by intake cohort, year of study, widening participation characteristics, and student funding status, and the differences, if any, between withdrawals under the new £9k tuition fees regime and previous years. This research will supplement a forthcoming telephone interview survey of recent University of Bristol undergraduate withdrawals of widening participation and 'other' students to explore individual-level reasons for leaving the University. The outcomes of both projects will inform our student success interventions in 2015/16.
- 10.3 We have developed a tailored approach to peer support for students on the Foundation Year, based on feedback from students on the course in 2013/14. This combines both pastoral mentoring and Peer Assisted Study Sessions. Students who are currently studying for degrees in the Faculty of Arts will be trained to provide both peer mentoring and peer

¹⁵ For more information see <http://www.ubu.org.uk/activities/committeeresources/funding>

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 will also be able to provide both group sessions and one to one support around transition from the Foundation Year to degree level study. This was piloted in 2013/14 in response to a request from the course representatives and due to its success has now been built into future plans for the Foundation Year and provided a coherent programme of peer transition support into and out of the Foundation Year.

- 10.4 In order to ease the transition to higher education and ensure retention rates amongst mature learners remain high, 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 promote peer mentoring and Peer Assisted Study Sessions as being of particular benefit to this group and encourage them to take part. Mature Student Advocates will also be trained as peer mentors to provide mentoring for mature students.
- 10.5 The Students' Union recently undertook a survey with student parents and those with caring responsibilities. We will seek to implement the recommendations in the survey and continue to support the Student Parents' Network and Mature Student Advocates who represent the needs of adult learners, consult on policy changes and provide outreach and transition support.
- 10.6 In order to ensure that widening participation encompasses the whole student life cycle, we will prioritise employability within our student support activity. We will continue to offer the Lloyds Scholars scheme which offers internships, mentoring and other development opportunities to students from low income backgrounds. We will work with UpReach to pilot a programme of careers workshops, mentoring and internships for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and will continue to fund and promote paid internships.
- 10.7 In line with our commitments to Buttle UK, in 2015/16 all care leavers will have the support of a staff member who will act as a personal adviser. Such students will also be provided with mentoring and advocacy support from point of application to graduation and guaranteed a peer mentor on arrival and 365 day accommodation within the University.

11. Student financial support – undergraduate programmes

- 11.1 As part of the University's strategy to widen participation we have made a clear commitment to ensuring that as fees increase, students with genuine financial need are able to access excellent advice and appropriate financial assistance. It is our aim to ensure that no student has a legitimate reason to be deterred from applying to the University of Bristol because of their inability to meet the costs of living and studying here.
- 11.2 However, in light of the limited progress the University has made in achieving its targets to widen participation, and informed by research, including the recent OFFA report¹⁶, indicating that financial support alone has a limited impact in with the decision making or continuation rates of students from under-represented groups, an internal review of current arrangements was undertaken. 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.

¹⁶ OFFA (2014) 'An interim report: Do bursaries have an effect on retention rates?'

- 11.3 The Review Group was chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and comprised the Academic Director of Undergraduate Studies; the Director of the Widening Participation Research Cluster; the Finance Director; the Director of Student Recruitment, Access and Admissions; The Head of Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment; the Student Funding Manager and three representatives of the University of Bristol Students' Union.
- 11.4 The Group took an evidence-based approach to the review, drawing on the outputs from the Widening Participation Research Cluster and the Students' Union's analysis of the current funding regime. Of particular note was a survey conducted with Year 2 students which indicated that 80 per cent of students valued the University cash bursary and the opportunity to take all or part of their financial support entitlement in the form of a cash bursary or fee waiver.
- 11.5 In undertaking 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 has resulted in a strategic rebalancing of Access Agreement spend from 2015/16 onwards, away from student financial support towards outreach and student success measures.
- 11.8 The University's core financial support package for full time undergraduate students entering the University in 2015 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 - £42,620
- 11.9 In order to free up a greater proportion of Access Agreement spend for investment in outreach activity in 2015/16, the Access to Bristol fee waiver will only be available in the first year of study (as opposed to all three years) to provide transition support. Such students will still be eligible for the Access to Bristol annual maintenance bursary valued at £3,750.
- 11.10 All these amounts are valid for 2015/16 and would rise annually with inflation if fee levels were to rise to reflect inflation. Eligibility will be determined in accordance with the Student Loans Company (SLC) assessment of household income for state support purposes.
- 11.11 Our Student Funding Office's analysis of the costs of living and studying in Bristol suggests that, for those students in lower income groups, our core student finance package, combined with state support (tuition fee loans and maintenance grants/loans) and some

part-time working should ensure that eligible students have sufficient funding at their disposal to cover normal tuition and maintenance costs while at the University.

- 11.12 While we are confident that, for most students, this package should provide an appropriate level of support, we are, in addition to the core package, investing in hardship funds to provide an additional safety net for those UK undergraduate students who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in financial difficulty during their studies. In 2015/16, a total of £410k will be set aside for this purpose. It is anticipated that approximately £350k will be allocated from this fund to OFFA-countable groups
- 11.13 In parallel with arrangements for 2014/15 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 PGCE¹⁷ students from low income backgrounds are not deterred.
- 12.2 In 2015/16 we will therefore offer a more limited financial support package for PGCE students, delivering:
- A bursary of £9k for students with a first class undergraduate degree, whose residual household income is £42,620 or below and who is not already in receipt of bursary funding of £4k or above from another source.
 - A bursary of £4k for students with an upper second undergraduate degree; whose residual household income is £42,620 or below and who is not already in receipt of bursary funding of £4k or above from another source.
- 12.3 Means-testing for the PGCE awards will be undertaken in two phases:
- An initial assessment will be made on the basis of SLC data, as in the case of our undergraduate support package. Any student identified as having a residual household income of £42,620 or below will move on to the second phase of assessment.
 - In the second phase of assessment, we will factor in any bursary support which students are eligible for from other sources. Any student who meets the academic criteria detailed above and not eligible for a bursary of £4k or above from another source would be eligible for a University of Bristol bursary.
- 12.4 This will ensure that financial support is targeted at those most in need. As a good proportion of BME students currently apply for PGCE streams which do not readily attract bursary funding from other sources, we anticipate that there will also be indirect benefit for efforts to increase the number of students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds undertaking a PGCE.

¹⁷ 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

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

13. Targets and progress measures

- 13.1 In line with the University's 2014/15 Access Agreement we will continue to assess progress in widening participation against a combination of progress measures which, between them, are designed to assess:

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

- 13.2 We will continue to work on the five yearly targets set out in our 2014/15 Access Agreement. Specifically will aim 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 specifically enable us to monitor conversion from application to intake) are provided in the templates.

- 13.3 As far as possible, measures have been calculated taking account of the expected impact of a number of specific outreach initiatives (the Access to Bristol scheme, summer school programme and personal adviser scheme), each of which also has more detailed performance targets associated with it as highlighted in the template.
- 13.4 Measurement of intake profile will be focused on low school performance, reflecting the role this plays in our contextual approach to admissions.
- 13.5 Our decision to grow undergraduate numbers substantially meant that, from 2012/13 onwards, continuing to measure progress in diversifying intake by looking at under-represented groups as a percentage of total intake alone hid any progress in growing intake from non-traditional backgrounds. For each intake-related measure, we have therefore added the number of students the original percentages might have been expected to deliver. Monitoring against these numbers will give a more accurate idea of progress.
- 13.6 All progress measures have been informed by more detailed analysis of progress against our HESA benchmarks and will be re-calculated annually to reflect assessment of our progress to date. In addition, it should be noted that we intend to carry out further research in 2014-15 to better understand the impact of educational standards in the Bristol area on our ability to progress at the specified rates; we may need to adjust progress measures for future years to reflect the findings.

14. Monitoring and evaluation

- 14.1 Progress in delivering widening participation strategy is monitored by the University's Education Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) and including Students' Union representation.
- 14.2 In addition, the Education Committee (through its Student Recruitment Committee – also chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education, with a membership which includes admissions and widening participation expertise as well as Students' Union representation) will require each of the University's faculties and relevant Professional Services divisions to submit, and report against, an annual action plan, containing detailed actions supporting delivery of the Widening Participation Strategy.
- 14.3 Operational responsibility for delivery and monitoring rests with the Widening Participation and Undergraduate 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 outreach¹⁸.
- 14.6 We are also funding studies conducted by leading academic researchers into: efficacy of our widening participation progress measures; the impact of prior educational attainment and other relevant student background factors on the progress and retention of disadvantaged students at the University; the role which self-identification and aspiration play in the university application decision-making process; fostering a culture of belonging amongst widening participation students; overcoming mathematical barriers to participation in higher education and removing barriers to higher education. Outcomes of the research projects which will run until 2016 will continue to inform future strategy for outreach, student success and financial support provision.
- 14.7 The University is committed to enhancing progression opportunities for students from underrepresented groups. We have commissioned the Widening Participation Research Cluster to profile the 'after-graduation' transitions of 'widening participation' and 'non-widening participation' students into employment and postgraduate opportunities. This work will take place in collaboration with the Careers Service using the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DHLE) database. We will use the findings of the study to ensure we are targeting resources to those most in need.

¹⁸ Davies, S, Hayes, D and Collard, S (2014) 'Should expenditure be switched from bursaries to outreach? A comparative evaluation of the effects on Widening Participation of the Access to Bristol and Sutton Trust schemes'.

- 14.8 We recognise that robust monitoring and evaluation help to prioritise the delivery of programmes and activities that have the greatest impact. Evaluation is embedded in all of our plans and we analyse the efficacy of our outreach and student success interventions throughout the year.
- 14.9 Analysis of the impact of the University's outreach work indicates that those projects with the greatest success rates are long term interventions. This has influenced the overall focus of our outreach efforts. For example, the Access to Bristol, Pathways to Law and Realising Opportunities schemes are all sustained programmes, run over a series of weeks, months and years and bringing participants into contact with current students, academic staff and specialist mentors. In the 2013/14 admissions cycle, we received 156 applications from Access to Bristol participants (from a cohort of 300) and 20 from Pathways to Law (from a cohort of 35). This delivered an intake of 37 and 3 respectively.
- 14.10 Evaluation of the first and second Realising Opportunities cohorts indicates that those who continued on the scheme for its duration had higher UCAS acceptance rates than comparable non-participating cohorts.
- 14.11 As a result, the University has expanded the Access to Bristol initiative, extended the satellite programme with IntoUniversity, implemented a guaranteed offer for those on the scheme and committed to on-going development of Realising Opportunities when the HEFCE-funded pilot ends.
- 14.12 We constantly refine all outreach programmes in light of evaluation (as outlined in more depth in paras 7.10 – 7.13) and contract and expand interventions where appropriate.
- 14.13 Specific initiatives are evaluated using a range of quantitative and qualitative measures, a number of which are included in our Access Agreement. A 'Guide to Evaluation' has been developed to ensure that appropriate evaluation is built in to planning of all activities. An annual evaluation plan is produced to ensure evaluation activities are appropriate and effective. Outreach activities are assessed at a number of levels including: monitoring participant data to ensure activities reach target groups; participant feedback following events; pre- and post-event activity questionnaires measuring change in attitudes over time; and longitudinal work investigating outcomes such as participant behaviour. These approaches apply to both collaborative and university-specific work. Outcomes can result in fine tuning of initiatives to develop and enhance experience for participants, the termination of a project or its development.
- 14.14 We adopt a similar approach to evaluation of student success. At a policy level, while our overall track record in student retention is strong, we will commission research into retention rates of under-represented groups, with a particular focus on Black and minority ethnic students.
- 14.15 The University will continue to enhance evaluation in 2014. We have a formal evaluation plan which is being implemented in all outreach and student support activity. We have made it a requirement of faculties in receipt of WP outreach funding that they evaluate the activity undertaken using evaluation guidance provided by the WP and UG 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. In 2014, pupil attainment data will be collected from the Students in Schools Programme in collaboration with the University of the West of England as this has been recognised as an area in which we could improve the depth of evaluation data. We will also

work with the Sutton Trust to develop a single evaluation tool for all Sutton Trust programmes including summer school and the Pathways to Law programme.

- 14.16 As the national strategy for access and student success emerges, the University is keen to be actively involved in the development of sector wide measures for evaluation. We look forward to the forthcoming national roll out of the Higher Education Access Tracker and will continue to work with colleagues in the Russell Group to develop and share good practice and outcomes of evaluation.
- 14.17 As well as monitoring the impact of activity, we also evaluate University policy on widening participation. In 2014/15 we will be undertaking a wide-ranging review of our contextual data methodology and outcomes, including some new variables (birth month, parental higher education experience) and possible extensions to the University's medical courses and to applications from other parts of the UK outside England.
- 14.18 The Widening Participation Research Cluster will also assess the impact of the University's guaranteed offer to students who take part in relevant outreach programmes on their subsequent applications to the University. This research is in addition to an exploration of the impact of attendance at the University's Open Days and Access to Bristol courses on subsequent UCAS applications and progression to the University.

15. Provision of Information to Students

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

16. Equality and diversity

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

- 16.2 In accordance with this agreed approach, equality considerations have been embedded into the design of both the Widening Participation Strategy and of this Access Agreement, which sets out how we will sustain and improve access, retention and attainment among people from under-represented groups. Equality analysis has been a part of the policy development process and will inform implementation.
- 16.3 We undertake a detailed annual review of progress against all widening participation progress measures at university, faculty and programme level. Our analysis is used to help us identify groups that are particularly under-represented and to develop appropriate targeted actions to improve the diversity of our student body.
- 16.4 Monitoring pays particular attention to applications with protected characteristics and we have included progress measures for race, disability and age in our Access Agreement. We monitor gender and respond to trends in the data (working, for example, to increase participation of female students on some science and engineering programmes and encouraging male students to participate in summer schools) and have due regard to equality duty when selecting students. As we currently perform relatively well against progress measures for BME applications, outreach currently targets mature learners and students with disabilities.
- 16.5 The 2015/16 Access Agreement aligns closely with the University's Vision and Strategy 2009-16. Diversity and equity are key values as articulated in the document with a clear statement that we 'view the diversity of our staff, students and alumni as a great asset; we believe in the equitable treatment of all'¹⁹. Equality issues are included in all activities and have been mainstreamed into the decision making process at committee level. The University is committed to addressing the issues linked to retention rates for different groups of students as well as exploring inequalities in attainment and employability. Funds were allocated to an internship programme for students from under-represented groups in 2012/13, a research project will be undertaken to examine withdrawal rates for all students in 2014/15 and a framework of committees is being established to address gaps in attainment.

17. Conclusion

- 17.1 This Access Agreement outlines our strategic priorities for 2015-16. It takes a whole institution approach, covers the student lifecycle, reflects on those interventions with greatest impact, explores the strategic rebalancing of spend to support access, student success and progression and demonstrates our commitment to long term outreach. We have included an assessment of our current performance against targets and articulate our planned response to the challenges faced. We demonstrate our collaborative work with partners within and outside the higher education sector and highlight the provision of support for mature and part-time students.
- 17.2 It is hoped that this Agreement demonstrates the University's determination to recruit the most able students from the most diverse backgrounds and reinforces our long-term commitment to widening participation and student success.

¹⁹ <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/policies/vision/mission.html>