

Widening Participation Strategy 2009-2016

1. Foreword

- 1.1 The University of Bristol has been a pioneer in the field of widening participation for over a decade. Recognising the potential of applicants has always been at the heart of our mission to recruit the most able students from the most diverse backgrounds.
- 1.2 The University has developed an innovative and creative outreach culture while adopting an evidence based approach to policy and procedure. We remain determined to achieve a more diverse student community, recognising the social, educational and cultural benefits this confers to the individual and institution. We acknowledge the barriers that persist for many and will continue to examine our admissions procedures, entry routes and curricula to ensure that all those with the potential to succeed at this University can do so. We will continue to do everything we can to make The University of Bristol as attractive to those from under-represented groups as it is to people from traditional backgrounds.
- 1.3 We believe that widening participation has a moral as well as a pragmatic foundation. It is right that anyone with the necessary abilities should feel encouraged to aspire to Bristol, regardless of their background.
- 1.4 This strategy (initially developed in 2009 but updated in 2013 to ensure continuing fitness for purpose following transition to a new financial regime and the introduction, by the Office of Fair Access of new and more rigorous regulatory requirements) builds on the success of our two previous documents, 'The Way Forward' (2001-04) and 'Quality through Diversity' (2004-09).
- 1.5 This strategy continues those policies and initiatives which have proved successful in recent years and re-affirms our commitment to the Widening Participation Research Cluster. At the same time, it responds to changing contexts by adopting a more target-driven approach and by placing new emphasis on monitoring and evaluation and on developing links with employers and the youth work sector. The focus of this strategy will be on widening participation to the University of Bristol, taking a pragmatic approach to increasing the proportion of students from currently under-represented groups to this institution in order to achieve the progress measures agreed annually with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA).
- 1.6 It should be noted that whilst the focus of this strategy is on widening participation at undergraduate level, there is a need to extend the work to focus on the postgraduate community. To this end, we will work to develop the evidence base on widening participation at postgraduate level, identifying any barriers there may be for students from underrepresented groups continuing their study and supporting them into employment.

- 1.7 The strategy provides a framework for widening participation at all levels and across all academic schools and support service divisions. Progress in delivering Widening Participation Strategy will be monitored by the University's Student Recruitment Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students), reporting to UPARC and Senate.
- 1.8 In addition, the Education Committee (through its Student Recruitment Committee – also chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education) will require each of the University's faculties and relevant divisions to submit, and report against, an annual action plan, containing actions supporting delivery of the UK Undergraduate Recruitment Strategy.
- 1.9 Operational responsibility for delivery and monitoring rests with the Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment team in partnership with appointed Faculty Widening Participation Officers and the Admissions Office.

2. Background

- 2.1 The principles on which this strategy is based are fundamental to the University and are as strongly held now as they ever were. The University's strategy for Widening Participation is underpinned by:
- A **commitment** to the highest standards in teaching, learning and research and to making the University as attractive and accessible as possible to students from all walks of life.
 - A belief in the educational and social benefits, to the University and to our students, of a **diverse** student population, drawn from all sections of society.
 - A belief in an admissions procedure that assesses a candidate's **potential** to succeed.
 - A recognition of the importance of adopting a **flexible** approach to programme design and delivery.
 - A commitment to ensuring that every student is given the academic and pastoral **support** he or she needs to succeed at the University.
 - An acknowledgement of the importance of adopting an **evidence based** approach to widening participation activity.
 - A recognition of the value of working in **partnership** with other education providers.
- 2.2 The University of Bristol was one of the first institutions to develop a widening participation focus – ahead of Government policy on the issue – and was a founding member of the Russell

Group Widening Participation Association. The University has produced three major strategies in relation to widening participation from 1999 to 2013.

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

2.4 Despite significant investment and wide ranging outreach activities, progress towards reaching our widening participation progress measures has proved challenging. The University continues to draw students primarily from the south of England, where average income levels are relatively high. A predominantly traditional subject portfolio also has some impact on attractiveness of programmes to widening participation students. This is compounded by relatively low levels of educational attainment, and relatively high levels of deprivation within the local area. Research undertaken by IntoUniversity in October 2011 noted that:

- Bristol has 39 LSQAs (Lower Super Output Areas) in the most deprived 10% nationally. Of these, 14 are in the most deprived 3% and 4 in the most deprived 1%.
- In the sub-domain of children and young people, 82 Bristol LSOAs fall within the most deprived 10% nationally in the domain of Education, Skills and Training deprivation. Of these, 17 are in the most deprived 100 areas in England and Illminster Avenue West in Filwood is the most deprived in England.
- Of England's core cities, Bristol has the second lowest proportion of low income children progressing to higher education.
- Black and minority ethnic pupils, those children with free school meal eligibility and pupils with English as an alternative language under-perform at all levels in Bristol.
- In 2008, it was established that around 21,900 (27%) children live in poverty in Bristol. In Lawrence Hill, this rises to almost 60% - the bottom percentile of all wards nationally.

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

2.6 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.

3. Strategic aims

3.1 The University has identified four key aims that will underpin the Widening Participation Strategy:

- To develop a strong market research base to underpin recruitment activity;
- To design and deliver innovative and accessible outreach activities;
- To attract and recruit a diverse body of gifted and motivated students from a wide variety of backgrounds, each with the potential to excel in, and contribute to our student community;
- To support our students during their initial transition to the University.

Strategic Aim 1: To develop and promote a powerful brand which positions the University as a world-leading, research intensive environment, in which students are welcomed and nurtured
Key Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A brand which is inclusive and consistently communicated as such
Priority Actions for 2014: <p>None</p>

Strategic Aim 2: To develop a strong market research base to underpin recruitment activity <p>The University has been a pioneer in research into widening participation issues. The University must continue to adopt an evidence-based approach to all widening participation and policy</p>
Key Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research commissioned in a robust, transparent and rigorous manner which will enhance widening participation policy, outreach and student financial support• The composition of the University's student body and our performance against our annual Access Agreement progress measures will be monitored on an annual basis• The impact and effectiveness of all University widening participation initiatives, including outreach activities, admissions policies and procedures and student support measures will be evaluated• The needs of widening participation students and any barriers they may face in relation to progressing to postgraduate study or accessing specific areas of employment will be investigated

Priority Actions for 2014/15:

- Allocate funding to the six widening participation research projects and monitor progress
- Disseminate the work and findings of the WP research fund through an Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS) seminar
- Develop an action plan based on the findings of the mature students' experience research
- Utilise the findings of the predicted grades study to inform content of Access to Bristol, summer school and RO sessions and continual professional development (CPD) activity with teachers and HE advisers
- Explore the possibility of undertaking research to assess patterns of attainment by students of different ethnic groups
- Use the outcomes of key WP interventions in the review of the current WP strategy
- Initiate research on the potential to apply the University's contextual data admissions methodology to the Medical Faculty
- Consider the implication of changes to the main national examinations systems at GCSE and A Level for the University's contextual data approach to fair admissions
- Undertake annual review of contextual offer policy

Those responsible for annual priority actions:

- **(lead role)** Head of UK Recruitment and Widening Participation **with:**
- Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment Team
- Director of the WP Research Cluster
- WP Research Management Group
- UG Admissions Office

Strategic Aim 3: To articulate and apply a clear rationale for the development of programmes**Key Outcomes:**

- A programme offer which is inclusive and which facilitates progression from non-traditional backgrounds
- Research conducted to assess the impact of foundation year and alternative progression routes (including part-time provision) in attracting and retaining students from under-represented groups
- Foundation year and/or part time progression routes piloted

Priority Actions for 2014/15:

- Plan for implementation of the Gateway programme

Those responsible for annual priority actions

- **(lead role)** Programme Director **with**
- Academic Colleagues in the faculties of Medicine & Dentistry and Medical & Veterinary Sciences
- UK Recruitment Office

Strategic Aim 4: To attract and recruit a diverse body of gifted and motivated students from a wide variety of backgrounds, each with the potential to excel in, and contribute to our student community

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

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

Key Outcomes:

- A more expansive outreach programme developed for learners of all ages, prioritising engagement with those with the academic potential to succeed at the University of Bristol
- Increased focus on developing engagement opportunities for other stakeholders including parents and carers, community groups, teachers and other higher education advisers
- Engagement opportunities developed for learners in youth work and youth group settings including The Princes Trust and other community groups.
- Research conducted into applicants' decision-making, reflecting the accepting and declining of offers made by the University

Priority Actions for 2014/15:

- Continue to target all outreach activity at WP category groups

- Review and evaluate the WP strategy to ensure the current document facilitates progress to be made against targets
- Meet (exceeding where possible) all intervention based progress measures
- Increase applications and intake from all WP categories
- Increase the number of Schools and Colleges Conferences from five to ten
- Investigate the viability of a second Insight Into Bristol programme in the Midlands
- Introduce more revision classes for project participants who have firmly accepted an offer to study at UoB
- Further develop a session for primary school students which can be run by Student Ambassadors
- Implement the progression framework with Merchants' Academy
- Pilot conferences for prospective applicants at the University of Bristol and with partner institutions
- Continue to run the Access to Bristol programme for 600 students and increase the number of subject streams available by two
- Increase applications from mature students. This will involve; continuing to develop information sessions and visit opportunities, regular visits to Access groups in FE colleges, close involvement in the personal adviser / telecentre campaign and providing a link between academic departments and prospective mature student applicants.
- Deliver the Students in Schools programme to help students in local secondary schools prepare for higher education
- Consider how to improve the attainment of those on key WP interventions
- Monitor and respond to GCSE and A Level reforms
- Work with the Director of Post 16 to increase applications to the University from Merchants' Academy students

Those responsible for annual priority actions:

- **(lead role)** Head of UK Recruitment and Widening Participation **with:**
- Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment Team
- Undergraduate Admissions Office
- Director of the WP Research Cluster
- Faculty Widening Participation Co-ordinators

Strategic Aim 5: To deliver a high quality, fair , and transparent service to prospective applicants from initial contact to offer acceptance

Key Outcomes:

- Admissions procedures developed and implemented that recognise an applicant's potential and that are informed by rigorous research on issues relating to widening participation (including guaranteed and contextual offers)
- Conversion rates from students from widening participation backgrounds improved

Priority Actions for 2014/15:

- Investigate the viability of extending the guaranteed offer to Pathways to Law participants from all partner institutions
- Investigate the weighting given to WP applications at admissions stage and assess whether the personal statement should be contextualised
- Reduce the number of applicants with unknown status further by extending the contextual offer to students who have applied directly via UCAS but have previously attended a school categorised as low performing
- Regularly monitor the implementation of the contextual offer policy
- Explore the development of the 'Bristol Scholars Scheme'

Those responsible for annual priority actions

- **(lead role)** Head of UK Recruitment and Widening Participation **with**
- Admissions Office
- WP Research Cluster
- SRAA Information and Systems Manager

Strategic Aim 6: To support our students during their initial transition to the University

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

Key Outcomes:

- A comprehensive programme of transition support for all students developed, including pre-application advice, guidance and skills development
- The impact of the University's financial support package evaluated. This will include the success of the package of attracting and converting applications from students from under-represented groups

- A programme of peer support across the University, including peer mentoring and peer-assisted study sessions, developed
- Student support provision enhanced to ensure it meets the needs of under-represented groups effectively to allow them to participate fully in University life
- Students from under-represented groups encouraged and supported into successful employment and postgraduate placements

Priority Actions for 2014/15:

- One to one Information Advice and Guidance, support and advocacy provided for applicants from a care background to ensure they make a successful transition to University
- Deliver the expanded Student Navigation Network peer mentoring scheme. Raise awareness of the scheme amongst senior tutors, personal tutors, academic and support staff.
- Expand the Student Navigation Network Peer Assisted Study Sessions to Biochemistry.
- Plan future structures for PASS which will make it possible to continue the expansion of the scheme.
- Work with the Graduate School of Education to expand the provision of CPD for NQT and Teach First trainees in WP target schools.
- Provide one to one support and advocacy for current mature and part-time students.
- Manage the Mature Student Advocates and ensure their work contributes to the successful transition and support of mature students. Design a training programme to support their development and improve delivery.
- Work with the Accommodation Office and Student Funding Office to ensure that Unite Scholarships are awarded to the students in the greatest need.
- Work with the Student Funding Office to ensure that the HSBC scholarships are awarded to the students in the greatest need.
- Work with the Careers Office and Research Enterprise and Development to ensure that free of charge places on chargeable courses area available to students meeting key WP criteria.
- Develop links with Teach First in order to access additional training for Students in Schools workers
- Expand the Welcome Helpdesk provision for Welcome Week

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider how best to address the challenges of widening participation at postgraduate level
<p>Those responsible for annual priority actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (lead role) Widening Participation Student Support Manager with • Transitions Group • Widening Participation and Undergraduate Recruitment Team • Academic colleagues in faculties and schools • Student Funding Office • Accommodation Office • Research Enterprise and Development Office • Careers and Employability Service

<p>Strategic Aim 7: To ensure excellent and effective communications with all prospective applicants and their influencers</p>
<p>Key Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications which are accessible to applicants from non-traditional backgrounds
<p>Priority Actions for 2014/15:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve communication to individual applicants of the rationale for making contextual offers • Improve transparency around the schools which the University defines as 'low performing'
<p>Those responsible for Annual Priority Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (lead role) Head of UK Recruitment and Widening Participation with • Admissions Office • Customer Relations and Student Marketing Office

<p>Strategic Aim 8: To work in partnership with key internal and external stakeholders to achieve the aims of the strategy</p>
<p>Key Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A co-ordinated approach taken to all outreach work within the University and with other education providers (including other higher education institutions, schools and colleges, children and young people's services, E-Class and Virtual Schools) • Continued commitment to a collaborative approach to outreach partners such as the Sutton Trust, College of Law, Open College Network and IntoUniversity, while developing new partners within the business community

Priority Actions for 2014/15:

- Actively contribute to the development of HEFCE's Single Point of Contact (SPoC) initiative
- Devolve £20K to each Faculty WP Representative to allocate to faculty specific WP projects
- Continue to manage the University's relationship with IntoUniversity and the implementation of the second IU centre. Ensure that the work meets the aims set out in the University's Access Agreement and WP Strategy and that participating students are appropriately targeted.
- Plan and deliver the Sutton Trust Summer School for 160 Y12 students from across the country, encourage more participants to apply for the University by continuing to implement the e-mentoring programme and Academic Apprenticeship.
- Continue to be an active partner in the Realising Opportunities partnership, maintaining our cohort size and strengthening relationships with partner institutions to produce a larger number of participants enrolling as undergraduate students for the University
- Continue to be an active partner in the Pathways to Law programme, recruiting and working with 35 students
- Deliver the Year 11 Summer School for 55 students in the local area. Work with the Universities of Bath and Exeter to promote cross promotion of summer schools

Those responsible for annual priority actions

- **(lead role)** Head of UK Recruitment and Widening Participation **with**
- UK Recruitment and Widening Participation office
- Faculty widening participation co-ordinators

4. Action Planning and Reporting

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

5. Risks

- 5.1 In developing this strategy, we have identified a number of key risks with the potential to jeopardise achievement of the University's objectives. Several of these relate to changes in

the external climate over which the University has little or no control, while others are specific to the University of Bristol and therefore offer more opportunity for local management.

5.2 External Risks

- A change of Governmental policy in relation to higher education could jeopardise the high priority that widening participation has benefited from over the last ten years. In addition, withdrawal of investment in this area could have serious repercussions with regard to the University's ability to meet its objectives.
- The strategy was launched in a period of recession and the consequences of such economic turmoil should not be underestimated now or in the future. The University must remain financially committed to the area whilst recognising that a pragmatic and prudent approach to the allocation of funds will be necessary.
- The University has experienced a high profile in the national media in relation to widening participation activity in the last decade. Success or failure in meeting the objectives set out in this strategy will ensure the continued interest of the media. Hostile coverage will, at the very least, undermine our widening participation strategy and, at worst, may impact on other areas of University life.
- A change in the allocation of funds from tuition fees could also have a major impact on the financial capacity of the University to achieve its widening participation objectives.
- The Widening Participation Strategy coincides with a period of significant demographic change with a sharp decline in the 18 year old population. This will necessitate a more targeted recruitment strategy for undergraduates at the University and an increased emphasis on mature students (defined as those aged 21 or over).

5.3 Internal Risks

- Significant success in widening participation could impact upon our traditional sources of recruitment, and our Undergraduate Recruitment team will be critical in delivering a continued high level of service for these markets.
- Substantial changes to the profile of our student population may create a different set of needs in relation to retention and student support provision. This will have a more significant impact if efforts to attract a more diverse pool of students were to succeed before changes in other areas, such as student support and curriculum development, had taken effect.

6. Measuring Success

- 6.1 The success of the Widening Participation Strategy will be judged by whether objectives have been met in the annual monitoring plans and by performance against application and intake progress measures. Progress measures are set for a variety of widening participation

categories and key widening participation interventions. Detailed information is provided in the annual Access Agreement submissions.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The University of Bristol has been a pioneer in the field of widening participation for over a decade. Recognising the potential of applicants has always been at the heart of our mission to recruit the most able students from the most diverse backgrounds.
- 7.2 This strategy articulates the ways in which the University will allocate resource, outlines key strategic objectives and highlights those responsible for delivering the strategy. The success of the strategy is contingent on the University working in partnership, at all levels, to achieve the objectives and recruit a more diverse student population,