

University of Birmingham

Access Agreement 2018-19

Introduction

The University of Birmingham offers an inspirational student experience at a selective leading global University. We are proud of our strong outreach and retention record, which has been developed over a long period of time and places us amongst the top Russell Group institutions.

We continue to build on this record by committing the equivalent of c. 30% of our additional fee income to an enhanced range of outreach and access activities. Over the last 5 years, the HESA performance indicators show that we have consistently recruited in the region of 76-80% of our intake from state schools and out-performed many of our peer institutions in terms of the proportion of students from low participation neighbourhoods. On retention, the exceptional quality of our students and the high quality of their teaching and learning environment ensures that we are able to consistently outperform our HESA benchmark.

To enhance this successful record in promoting fair access further, we continue to demonstrate innovation and leadership. In September 2015, following £2.6m of capital investment from the University, the University of Birmingham Training School (UTS) opened to over 330 students, recruited from specially identified nodes of under-provision and low socio-economic scores across the city. The School exists to advance the educational attainment and aspiration of Birmingham's young people, and from day one students have unrivalled access to University facilities and academic capital.

We are committed to investing over £5.2m per annum, by 2018/19, in activities supporting outreach, retention and student success. We are continuing to develop our flagship Access to Birmingham (A2B) scheme and we are committed to continuing our leadership role in successful, collaborative Aimhigher activities. Following the success of our locally funded initiative, after the removal of national funding, we are now leading a consortium as part of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme; this is in addition to our existing commitments through our Access Agreement. We are continuing to develop our 'Forward Thinking' progressive programmes which work with Gifted and Talented widening participation (WP) students over the course of their secondary education. To support the Access to the Professions agenda we have invested in our employability strategy, which includes increasing the number of funded internships for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are also investing in an enhanced academic tutoring system to support the increased retention of our students. In both of these latter cases we expect there to be a demonstrable impact on our ability to recruit students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Fees, Student numbers and Fee income

To ensure that we can continue to deliver the inspirational experience that our students deserve, and extend our high quality and progressive outreach, retention and financial support activities as indicated in this Agreement, we would expect to charge the maximum permitted fee for full-time Home/EU undergraduate students in 2018/19 (at the time of writing this agreement the fee cap for 2018/19 has not been confirmed by Government). The University will review and agree its fee levels annually. Fees are likely to increase annually by the maximum rate approved by the Government. We estimate that our intake of full-time undergraduate students in 2018/19 will be in the region of 5200.

For courses which include a placement year, studying or working, we will charge 15 % of our home/EU UG fee for Erasmus programmes and 20% of the standard fee for non-Erasmus programmes for the year of the placement, based on the fee the student is paying.

The University does not intend to charge fees in excess of 50% of its standard full-time UG fee in a single academic year for any regulated part-time programmes. The University does not offer part-time study for Bachelor level qualifications, with Undergraduate part-time provision classified at sub-degree level.

Access and Student Success measures

(a) Assessment of our Access and Retention Record

The following self-assessment demonstrates our strategic, institution-wide approach to widening participation. It is underpinned by a firm belief that our performance should be placed against that of institutions most similar to us in the Russell Group. Comparison against the sector as a whole underplays both the success we have achieved and, crucially, the clear commitment we have to fair access and widening participation. Assessing our access and retention record only against the HESA Performance Indicators (PIs) distorts our commitment and success with, in particular, outreach. This self-assessment, therefore, is based on a broader assessment of our outreach activities, much of which has been highly successful in raising students' aspirations and encouraging applications to other HEIs. We use both external PIs and internal impact assessments to monitor, review and refine our approach to widening participation to ensure the University's activity is impactful and relevant to the context in which the University is operating.

HESA Performance Indicators

Our performance in the three main HESA performance indicators ranks us amongst the top performing English Russell Group universities. We have made significant progress over the past 6 years in improving the proportion of young people from under-represented groups admitted to UG study. Latest (15/16 HESA PI) data show 80.8% of our students are from state schools (up 0.5% from the previous year), and 6.8% are from low participation neighbourhoods (up 0.6% from the previous year). We have the 4th largest UG BME population in the Russell Group (14/15 HESA data).

Once students have started their study, the University is committed to ensuring that students continue and complete their journey. 97.1% of our full-time first degree entrants in 14/15 (latest HESA PI data available at time of writing) remained in higher education the following year. This exceeds our location-adjusted benchmark, and our continuous efforts to improve retention have seen us match or exceed our benchmark each year since 2007. This demonstrates that, whilst not being complacent, we can be confident that our current retention activities are highly effective in supporting our students. Continuation rates for cohorts of WP-students (e.g. low participation neighbourhoods) are comparable to this overall figure, and in some cases (e.g. Access to Birmingham students) students show a higher continuation rate than their non-A2B peers.

(b) Expenditure on Access and Retention Measures

This Access Agreement proposes expenditure of c. £14.4m by 2018/19, which will include additional investment on outreach and retention activities of around £5.2m per annum and a progressive package of financial support totalling over £9.1m by 2018/19 for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We estimate that by 18/19 this package will offer generous, flexible support to around 5200 students, or c. 30% of our undergraduate population.

In particular, we are continuing our investment in the following activities, which are outlined in more detail in the following section.

- Ongoing development of our flagship Access to Birmingham (A2B) programme, with the addition of new pilot activities to support academic attainment and final entry to the University.
- Funding the continuation of the most effective Aimhigher activities and network supporting regional activities.
- Continuing to be a major partner in the Realising Opportunities Programme.

- Drawing on robust evaluation, continue to develop our 'Forward Thinking' progressive programme with Gifted and Talented WP students.
- Investing in our Internship programme and growing our programme of 'Routes to the Professions' activities, building on particular success with our Access to Medicine activity.
- Continuing to build on our monitoring and evaluation capability through the work of our Officer with responsibility for evaluation as well as work with our Aimhigher team.
- Expanding our capacity to implement contextual admissions.

Proposed Contribution Band

We are proud of our strong access and retention record, which has been highly commended by both HEFCE and the QAA for being progressive and sector-leading. On the basis of this assessment, we feel that the combination of our performance compared to our peers and the scale and impact of our outreach activities places us in a position to propose a contribution level of c.30% of our Additional Fee Income, or £925 per student per annum. This will be invested into our access and retention measures.

Financial Support

Our financial aid package is highly targeted. We will use over £9.1m of our own resource to deliver a set of awards which will not only improve the recruitment of disadvantaged students onto our programmes but will also, crucially, support their retention.

Our distinctive, high quality student experience has a significant residential component which enables our students to be fully embedded within an international community of scholars. We are committed to alleviating the financial barriers which prevent our most disadvantaged students from participating to the same extent as their more advantaged peers. Therefore, the University will either offer fully subsidised University accommodation (to the value of £5,915) for all eligible Care Leavers or an enhanced cash award of £3,000.

Chamberlain Awards

In 2018/19 the University of Birmingham will be continuing with our successful Chamberlain awards programme and will continue to extend our support to those students who would have qualified for a National Scholarship in previous years. All of our eligible Home students, first and subsequent years, who have residual household incomes of between £0 and £36,000, will be eligible for a Chamberlain Award of between £2,000 and £1,000.

We would seek to continue to provide the same level of financial support to eligible students covered by this Access Agreement during any study year abroad, which is a component of the programme for which they have registered. Where students on a year abroad would have otherwise qualified for a Chamberlain Award, the maximum award will be to the value of £2,000.

Overall Financial Support

The University will attempt to provide the financial support outlined above to all eligible students, but will apply an upper limit to the level of total expenditure in any single financial year. This limit will be based on the commitment to fulfilling the proportionate spend of additional fee income outlined in this agreement. Priority for awarding bursaries will be given to Care Leavers and for students from households with the lowest incomes. All students wishing to be means-tested for their statutory support are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, and by no later than 31st May 2019.

(c) Outreach Activities

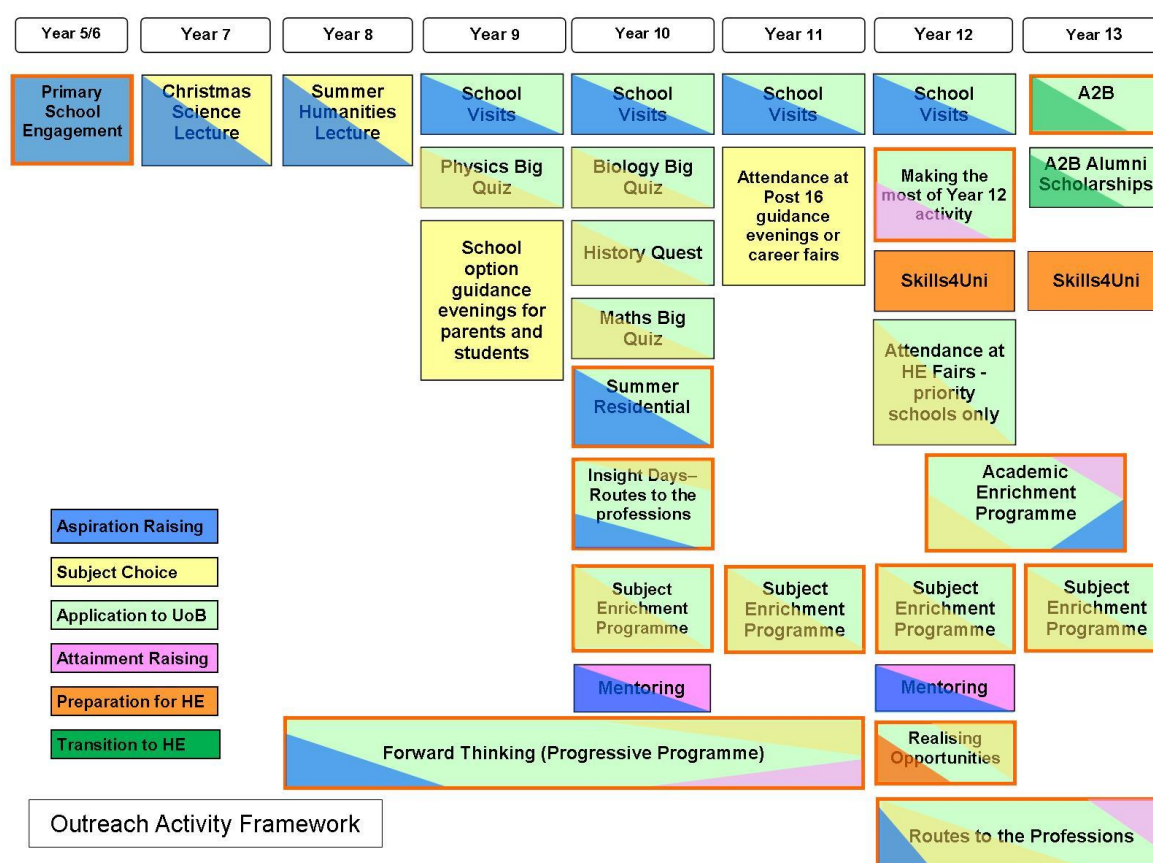
Growth in Outreach

We believe that the following section demonstrates the University's robust, strategic approach to improving access, including activity undertaken with younger age groups.

The University is proud of its comprehensive suite of outreach activities which support sector-wide progression as well as progression to research-intensive universities and where appropriate the University of Birmingham. We will continue to focus our additional investment on our proven progressive and intensive outreach programmes to strengthen our position amongst English Russell Group universities. We are reviewing our activities to see where we can increase engagement by some of the most under-represented groups, e.g. white disadvantaged males, in order to contribute to the ambitions that the government has nationally for the sector.

Our activity includes work with pre-16s, post-16s, specific access to the University of Birmingham and collaborative activity both locally and nationally. We believe that this range of activities ensures a spread of interventions throughout the educational career of a young person from year 6 to year 13. It also offers a 'ladder of engagement', starting with low engagement visits to campus, and extending into intensive courses that lead to University admissions and takes full account of our continued aim to compensate for the removal of funding from the national Aimhigher initiative, and the funding constraints placed on schools.

In our activity diagram below those areas highlighted in orange are those activities which we have been expanding or continuing to offer post-Aimhigher since the introduction of the new fee regime.



Pre-16 Activity: Primary Activity

Our higher education aspiration activity begins with our Primary Engagement activity, which targets year 6 students in primary schools which feed our key secondary schools, and introduces the concept of higher education. Following feedback from schools this has moved from being delivered in schools to being on campus. We worked collaboratively with Aimhigher partners to develop on-line activities through the NNCO initiative, to complement face-to-face engagement and these are now embedded into our delivery.

Pre-16 Activity: Forward Thinking Programme

Research has shown that the impact of widening participation activity is greatest when students participate in a programme of sustained interventions, rather than one-off activities. The Forward Thinking Programme is a progressive programme of activity with students in Years 8 to 11. It has a particular focus on supporting progression to selective institutions. Each year the schools select five Year 8 students to take part in the programme who are deemed to be both 'Gifted and Talented' within their school cohort but also meet socio-economic indicators of disadvantage. Students are encouraged to think about their future education and career path in order to make informed decisions about progression to university, and to help motivate them to succeed at school and achieve their potential. Students take part in a mixture of on-campus activity, mentoring by undergraduates, and advice and guidance to support decision making. They are then encouraged to continue to engage in wider outreach activities available to students in Year 12 and 13.

Our evaluation demonstrates the positive contribution the intervention is making. We believe it is supporting the academic attainment of participants with students out performing similar peers. In 2015/16 711 students from 37 schools were engaged in the programme. In 2016, 146 students in cohort 6 from 25 schools completed the final year of the programme. 97% came from families with no parental HE experience, 67% lived in low youth participation neighbourhoods and 68% experienced multiple disadvantage. When looking at 5 GCSEs, including English and Maths attainment, Forward Thinking students have outperformed the KS4 attainment of peers in all Birmingham Local Authority schools by 37.7 percentage points, all peers in the Forward Thinking schools by 43.2 percentage points, and the high attainers in those schools by 5 percentage points (comparison to 2015 DfE Data). Post-16 destinations were obtained for 91 students (62% of cohort) and 97% of students progressed onto Level 3 study (91% studying A levels and 9% BTEC). Whilst tracking of participants remains challenging, tracked students from cohort 4 (61 students) showed a 64% application rate to HE (29% above the average application rates for the West Midlands).

Pre-16 Activity: Summer Schools

Residential activity is a proven intensive, but high impact, intervention designed to improve aspiration, knowledge and understanding of HE study. We provide 200 places across four summer schools for year 10 students. 150 of these are funded entirely by the University and 50 are delivered as part of our Aimhigher partnership.

Our 50 place Aimhigher Summer School is a general introduction to higher education, whilst our institutionally funded places include 100 dedicated to the Health Professions and 50 focussing on how arts and social science subjects can lead to professional careers. Student activity is complemented by parents' events to brief parents and carers, with more than 300 attending. We use this opportunity to promote the benefits of HE and distribute materials on financial support. Both our partnership and institutional residential activity is subject to rigorous targeting, monitoring and evaluation, but we now face challenges in accessing data through UCAS to enable ongoing tracking of students to the point of UCAS application and acceptance.

Pre-16 Activity: Mentoring

We have a suite of mentoring interventions where our undergraduate students support school pupils in local schools and colleges. This is done through our Aimhigher partnership, as a component of the Forward Thinking, Routes to the Professions and Academic Enrichment programmes. Much of the activity is face-to-face individual mentoring, complemented by the use of the e-mentoring system provided by Brightside. We use a common programme of training and a range of support materials to maximise this resource. For our undergraduates there is a comprehensive training and support programme and the activity can be accredited through the Personal Skills Award.

Pre-16 Activity: Campus Visits

The University's Outreach team also organise a number of large scale events for pupils in years 7-11, known as the RAISE Programme (Raising Aspirations in Secondary Education). They provide a first contact with University life and include Year 7 Christmas Science lectures; Year 9 Physics Big Quiz; Year 10 Biology Big Quiz; Year 10 Maths Quiz; and Year 10 History Quest Day. In addition, we run a

programme of school visits to campus tailored to suit school needs. For our school visits we carry out additional participant monitoring to ensure schools are targeting appropriate students and that students from BME backgrounds and those with disabilities are appropriately represented in line with our duties under the Equality Act.

Post-16 Activity: Academic Enrichment Programme

Each year the Academic Enrichment Programme supports 100 able WP students, boosting their academic performance and enabling them to apply to high quality degree programmes, often associated with the professions. Initially funded by philanthropic donations, the success of this programme means that it is now an integral part of the University's fair access activity. This is a long term intervention supporting students during year 12 and 13 beginning with a 5-day summer residential and followed by e-mentoring; support with university applications; and study skills support.

The Academic Enrichment Programme is now a well-established, proven programme in its 11th year. Over the last 11 years 382 students have progressed to study at the University of Birmingham, with a further 265 going on to study at other Russell Group institutions. Our evaluation demonstrates that, whilst students are targeted using WP criteria and their potential for accessing a research intensive university, 40% of AEP students achieve A Level grades AAB or better, compared to 16.9% of students achieving these grades in schools and colleges in the West Midlands - outperforming peers by 23.1%. We therefore believe that this programme is supporting the academic attainment of participants and demonstrably supporting progression to selective universities.

Post-16 Activity: Year 12 Higher Education Insight

In 2013 we introduced a summer school for WP students from outside of the West Midlands. Evaluation from our current WP activity with such students, including the Realising Opportunities Programme, indicates that although students are encouraged to apply to us, their final choice is often to attend their local research-intensive university. In 2015 54 students joined the programme from 39 different schools and colleges. 52% of participants went onto apply to the University of Birmingham with 9 students enrolling in 2016. This cohort of students is one which is highly sought after by our peer group, particularly as WP students are typically less mobile. We will continue to develop this offer with an increased focus on recruiting students from particularly underrepresented groups, e.g. white disadvantaged ~~males~~, males, Polar 3Q1 and the Government's new Opportunity Areas.

Post-16 Activity: Routes to the Professions

Our Routes to the Professions programme (R2P, launched 2012/13) underpins our commitment to supporting students from less advantaged backgrounds to access professional careers. The programme is designed to enable new pathways to be added in a flexible way to enable us to respond dynamically to student needs. An important focus of this new programme is the development of professional links to the associated employment area. Following the demonstrable success of our Medicine and Law pathways, in 2017 we launched two new pathways: R2P Financial Services and R2P Dentistry. A range of new graduate opportunities in Financial Services are opening up in Birmingham, for example the new Head Office for HSBC UK will open in the city, and the Financial Services programme will support local students keen to access them.

Each strand of R2P includes an initial Year 10 Insight Day. Then in year 12 and 13 we have a programme involving practical workshops, support for applications and interviews, student shadowing, mentoring from students and support with accessing placements. Placements are supported with preparation and post-event reflective workshops. Students on the Law stream are able to participate in a one week internship with a local law firm during the summer, and Financial Services will provide similar opportunities. Students are supported with placement preparation, as well as follow-up reflection activity to support future UCAS and job applications.

This programme is supporting the academic attainment of participants as our evaluation data shows that 47% R2P (Medicine) and 44% of R2P (Law) students achieved A Level grades ABB or higher. We are delighted that in 2016 34 students entered medicine via the A2B Scheme, a 21 % increase on the previous year, and around 10% of the overall intake. In Law 48 students entered via A2B, an increase of 45% on the previous year.

Participants are eligible to apply to us through our Access to Birmingham Scheme. Students who join us following participation in R2P and A2B will continue to receive support from our Careers Network through a new initiative Access to Careers (A2C).

(d) University Training School

The University of Birmingham Training School (UTS) opened in September 2015, following University capital investment of £2.6m, with the aim of advancing the educational attainment and aspiration of Birmingham's young people. Now in its second year of intake, the School recruits secondary and sixth form students from across the city. Secondary-level pupils are drawn from four specially identified nodes of under-provision and low socio-economic scores across the city, whilst sixth-form students are recruited from 66 different secondary schools. Almost three-quarters of the intake population are from the most disadvantaged IMD neighbourhoods, with over a third from neighbourhoods with low proportions of 18/19-year-olds entering HE (Polar 3 quintile 1 and 2). 5% of the Year 7 intake are looked-after or previously looked-after children, or have a statement of special educational needs, and the school community reflects over 30 ethnic groups.

From day one, the links with the University of Birmingham are cemented. On-campus induction activities introduce the University and raise aspirations from the start. The School's governance structure reflects the strong integration of University and School. The Advisory Committee is chaired by the PVC (Social Sciences) and has a membership drawn from across the University. Senior University staff also sit on the School's Board of Governors.

Students have access to the intellectual and physical resources of the University. University staff contribute to five hours of weekly 'enrichment activities' (such as subject clubs, master classes and assemblies on cutting edge research projects) timetabled into the standard teaching day and which are designed to develop the extra-academic skills needed for successful transition to work or further study. Sixth form students receive 1-2-1 support from the University careers service, offering advice and guidance on access to HE, apprenticeships and alternative options after sixth form. Students are given advice on choosing the right university, preparing personal statements, as well as understanding the costs of university. The School building itself includes space for University researchers and trainee teachers to work and interact with students, further facilitating integration between the School and University activities.

The School aims to be a centre of excellence for teacher training and CPD. In collaboration with University staff, the School is leading on establishing a new integrated model of University-led and School-based teacher training. Teachers are encouraged to be research active, developing research-informed and research-informing teaching practice. Subject leaders have University academic 'partners' to deepen their knowledge of their subject to enhance the learning experience, and in turn inform the development of the University's UG programme to ensure our offering continues to reflect the needs of current sixth form students and supports successful transition to HE.

The School also undertakes outreach activity with local primary schools. Specialist subject leaders provide GCSE master classes to supplement subject knowledge and offer early intervention to raise aspirations.

(e) Access

Access to Birmingham (A2B)

The current A2B scheme is recognised as an excellent achievement with a demonstrable track record of success. It has been commended by the QAA and HEFCE and is widely used by other institutions

as the model of best practice on which they have based similar schemes. It helped create the Realising Opportunities collaborative programme, for example, and in 2013 was shortlisted for the Times Higher Education WP Initiative of the Year. It is aimed at applicants from less advantaged backgrounds who are identified by their school and teachers as having the intellectual potential to succeed at Birmingham. A2B applicants undergo an intensive programme and receive an entry grade offer which is usually two grades below the standard offer. The scheme includes an A2B scholarship that is awarded to A2B students who achieve the standard offer grades for their course. This has been increased from £1200 to £1500 in 2016. Our data shows that the year we introduced the scholarship to the scheme, retention and completion of the scheme by students showed a steep change which has been maintained ever since. Students greatly value this highly targeted financial support, and schools also value the additional incentive it provides to encourage students to achieve their maximum academic potential.

In 2016, 340 students entered the University via this route representing 6.2% of the overall intake. We are mindful that over the next few years this cohort may be adversely affected by the A level curriculum reforms and the general turbulence experienced by our local schools which are already seeing a downward trend in GCSE attainment. We are, therefore, committed to continuing to maintain our intake at 6% of overall first year full-time entrants. Every year a significant number of students who participate in the A2B Scheme, despite their predictions and the alternative two grade offer, do not achieve the grades that allow them to join us. In 2017, to support A2B student attainment, we are working with an online tutoring company to pilot 10 hours of one to one, online subject tutoring for 100 A2B students. We will evaluate this pilot to see if this cohort is more likely to meet the terms of their offer than those who have not participated. Our data shows that when we introduced the A2B Scholarship we saw a significant increase in both applications and retention on the A2B programme. In 2017, supported by Alumni donations, we are piloting a £1000 A2B award for students who meet the terms of their A2B offer. We hope this will provide further incentive to A2B applicants to achieve the grades for entry. We are also focussing some of our A2B engagement to increase our proportion of white males from disadvantaged backgrounds, and students who reside in a Polar 3 quintile 1 area.

Broader Use of Contextual Data

We are conscious that our current contextual offer is limited to students in the West Midlands region through our A2B Scheme. From 2017/18 entry we have introduced a nationwide WP contextual offer one grade below the standard prospectus offer. In order to qualify students must be from areas of low participation in higher education (i.e. HEFCE Polar 3 Quintile 1) and be attending, or have attended, a school/college where performance is below the national average.

In 2016 we entered into a Mutual Recognition Scheme with Nottingham so that applicants to Birmingham and Nottingham who had completed identified intensive programmes with either institution would be afforded additional recognition at the point of application. At Birmingham all eligible applicants received an offer one grade below the standard offer for the course. Students who have participated in interventions at Birmingham, e.g. our Higher Education Insight Residential for students beyond the West Midlands, who are not eligible for our A2B Scheme, have also been given this recognition.

During confirmation and clearing priority is given to students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods when borderline cases are being reviewed. For 2016/17 entry, 22% of all borderline cases taken were from Polar 3 quintiles 1 or 2 (with 7% from quintile 1).

To further support our commitment to widening access, the University utilizes the UCAS equalities dataset to help identify and understand any underrepresentation in our admissions population. The University commissioned internal analysis of the 2016 dataset and outcomes arising from the work are considered by the University Access and Progress Committee.

Supporting Access and Success of Vocational Learners on BTEC Level 3 Pathways

Recent UCAS and institutional data show that the number of students applying to university with BTEC qualifications is increasing, however there is also evidence that BTEC students have poorer outcomes than BTEC plus A-level or A-level only cohorts. Our internal non-continuation data has highlighted that the non-continuation rates for our BTEC population are consistently higher than those of A-level students. The University has taken action to address this gap through the development of support mechanisms both prior to entry and during study at the University: we have reviewed and improved our pre-entry information for applicants, produced tailored resources to support transition to Higher Education for BTEC learners, and piloted some specific mentoring in partner colleges for BTEC learners. For some programmes with higher numbers of students who have progressed via BTEC study specialist personal tutoring has been provided. As a result of these interventions the University has already seen a 13 percentage point reduction in BTEC non-continuation rates between 13/14 and 15/16 (to 13.7%).

To further complement and build on this work the University is a key partner in a £500k HEFCE Catalyst-funded project (*Transforming Transitions*) that seeks to evaluate existing support interventions at four universities and to use this data to design, implement and evaluate better interventions. The aim of the project is to further improve outcomes for BTEC students and to develop best practice guidance for schools, colleges and universities for the support of BTEC students. As a University, we understand the social and institutional importance of this project, and are keen to learn from it to inform our own responses to transition and retention experiences for all students, but particularly those from diverse backgrounds.

Postgraduate WP Activity

There is a perception that the poorest students may be deterred by increased undergraduate fees and debt. The University will seek to strengthen diversity by expanding participation of under-represented groups in all postgraduate programmes through the development of targeted recruitment and retention strategies. We will expand success in recruiting and retaining under-represented students at UG by extending this to PG WP development. We will provide focussed outreach and communications activity targeting A2B students and those who entered the University at UG via WP backgrounds, prioritising them for the financial support that is available.

Partnership Activity: Realising Opportunities Programme

The University of Birmingham 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 able students from under-represented groups.

The award-winning RO programme, developed through shared best practice, provides support for students through interventions designed to raise aspirations, develop skills and enable them to demonstrate their potential to succeed at a research intensive university. These interventions are offered locally and nationally and include a National Student Conference, ongoing support and encouragement from a trained student mentor and an assessed academic element. Successful completion of RO will result in additional consideration being given to applications through UCAS from all Partner universities, and the potential for an alternative offer where successful completion of RO is worth two A Level grades of equivalent.

Each participating institution has committed future funds to ensure the on-going delivery of RO to 31 July 2019. For 2018/2019 this will be a maximum of £38,000 per Partner.

RO has a robust evaluation framework which incorporates contextual data, student aspirations and the longitudinal tracking of students through the HEAT database and UCAS. Evaluation work has indicated the impact of RO on a number of levels. UCAS analysis has shown RO is robust in its dual targeting of high attaining students from disadvantaged backgrounds – 100% of students meet this criteria. White males are well represented and there is a higher proportion of Black and Asian students taking part in RO when compared to the population as a whole.

UCAS analysis continues to show evidence of elevated application and offer rates for RO students. HEAT analysis for students entering HE between 2011 – 2014, and UCAS analysis for those entering in 2015, shows that higher numbers of RO students are entering both HE generally and research intensive universities (RIUs) than comparator groups. RO increases the number of students it works with annually and since 2014 has seen the number of students progressing to RIUs increasing both as a percentage of the cohorts and as a real number of students (74 more students progressed to RIUs in 2015 than 2014 and 65 more in 2016 than 2015. In 2016 162 more students entered RIUs than the 2011 baseline group).

The RO Programme aims to prepare students for successful transition to higher education. HEAT provision of HESA data has highlighted RO students' success in higher education and beyond graduation. 83% of students received a 1st or 2:1 compared to 66% of all students nationally, including those from the most advantaged backgrounds. 93% of RO students who graduated in 2013/2014 were in work or study six months after graduation, compared to 89% for all leavers from all UK HEIs.

Aimhigher

The University of Birmingham will continue the collaborative Aimhigher West Midlands partnership with Aston University, Birmingham City University, University College Birmingham and the University of Worcester. The partnership met its yearly milestones in 2015/16 and is on course to do so again in 2016/17. We therefore confirm our intention to engage 1,000 disadvantaged young people in Aimhigher's intensive activity in each year from 2018/19. As part of this collaborative programme we will seek opportunities to extend and enhance our work with young people facing multiple dimensions of disadvantage. This will include support for children in care via our relationship with the Birmingham Virtual School.

We will align the management and delivery of this collaborative activity with that of our National Collaborative Outreach Programme consortia, monitoring the engagement of regional schools and colleges and the ages of the students we engage to ensure those outside the scope of the NCOP are not marginalised. We will also increase our efforts to engage schools and colleges in the region's only Opportunity Area (Stoke-on-Trent).

The University of Birmingham will jointly fund Aimhigher with a contribution of £35,000 in 2018/19; we will be intimately involved in its governance and management and will continue to host the management team. The outreach activities delivered through the partnership will complement Birmingham's own extensive programme of widening access and fair access measures outlined elsewhere in this Agreement.

Advancing Access

The University of Birmingham is a partner in Advancing Access, a national collaboration of 24 selective universities. We are working together with schools and colleges to develop and deliver CPD for teachers and advisors that supports student progression to selective universities and courses. Advancing Access has a particular focus on schools with low levels of progression to such universities. We are delivering the majority of CPD events and resources online to allow easy access for all schools, regardless of their location.

Advancing Access complements the excellent work already carried out at University of Birmingham and other partner institutions by engaging those areas that have historically been hard to reach and may be in geographic 'cold spots'. It is a cost-effective approach to equipping teachers and advisors with the information they need to advise students with confidence. Initially funded through HEFCE's collaborative outreach network scheme, further funding options are currently being explored.

Widening Access to STEM Degrees

In 2016/17 the Outreach team worked with the University of Birmingham School and other local partners to identify an area of the A level STEM curriculum where schools would benefit from additional support. This led to the creation of materials to support the A level practical examinations in Physics, Biology and Chemistry. The materials help to develop important practical skills needed for further STEM study, and link to research areas at the University. They will support the academic attainment of A level students. <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/preparing-for-university/stem/STEM-resources.aspx>

(f) Student Success

The University has an excellent record on retention. As noted above, latest available HESA PI data show that 97.1% of our full-time first degree entrants are in higher education in the following academic year. The main reason for this is the high quality of our learning and teaching coupled with excellent academic support and personal tutoring in our Schools. Our academic support is complemented by specialist student services (e.g. counselling, disability services, support for care leavers and parents), our Student Mentor system, the Funding, Graduation and Awards Office who provide a range of budget management tools, and the advice services provided by the Guild of Students.

Following a joint initiative with the Guild of Students to understand the impact of additional course costs, the University has responded to concerns regarding printing, textbook and field trip costs through investment in increased central library provision of core textbooks, and student subsidies for field trips, alongside options of low or no cost field trips.

Academic Skills Development and Support

The University offers a broad range of targeted study skills training as part of its Library Services. The Academic Skills Centre (ASC, opened in 2012/13), within Library Services, offers drop-in advice, one-to-one appointments, generic workshops and embedded training developed in direct partnership with Schools. The ASC supports UG students from all disciplines with their academic transition to the University, progression to higher years, and academic attainment by developing their writing and study skills. Examination resit support is also offered as part of its programme. The Centre incorporates a successful Maths Skills Centre (MSC) that assists students in developing their numerical and statistical abilities as well as offering examination resit support as part of its programme. The ASC maintains a focus on embedding skills training at programme and School level. A total of 9,807 interactions were recorded for the ASC/MS in 2015/16.

The ASC coordinates a programme of Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), available across all Colleges. The DLHE report highlighted that in 2014/15 our PASS Leaders (126) achieved 91.6% graduate employability compared to 85.3% across the whole leaver cohort.

A wide range of online study skills, mathematics and statistics resources are also available through the ASC/MS, some of which have been developed with the direct involvement of students. The Academic Skills Gateway was launched in 2015/16, providing an online, open-access portal to the University's training resources, with additional content developed as part of this initiative to cover the full range of skills support offered. The Gateway received 27,066 views between 01/09/2015 – 09/03/2017.

The Centre has enabled us to offer targeted support for at-risk cohorts and has contributed positively to the University's suite of retention activities. For example, part-time students can access general academic and writing skills support outside of core hours, and induction sessions are offered for mature students. Disabled students are also able to access an enhanced level of support from ASC to assist students to embed appropriate strategies as a result of their feedback and specialist input. This also mainstreams significant elements of the provision in line with our aspirations to develop a more inclusive learning environment. Analysis of usage data to-date indicates the Centre's services are utilised comparatively more by mature, BME, disabled, low SEC and A2B students, demonstrating its contribution to the University's widening participation responsibilities in student success.

In order to expand its reach and accessibility, the Centre offers support outside of 'normal' working hours and has invested in developing new online modes of support to enhance student retention and outcomes.

The Academic Writing Advisory Service (AWAS), pioneered by the College of Arts and Law provides a host of online, self-access materials for students wishing to improve their writing and achieve the highest possible degree outcomes. There is a combination of support in the form of small-group workshops led by postgraduate students in their own discipline, and feedback through email and tutorials. The service also offers a range of online material available to all students, with contributions from students and academic staff, designed to help with all aspects of writing for academic work.

Enhanced Academic Support Tutoring

We continue to invest in an enhanced academic tutoring system, primarily aimed at year 1 students, based on existing best practice within the University. Students have regular meetings in small groups (usually fewer than 15) with an academic tutor to work on specific problems, texts and issues arising from their curriculum. In addition all students have regular (at least one each term) 1:1 meetings with their personal tutor to discuss academic progress across their programme of study. This is contextualised to specific disciplines, but all tutorials provide the opportunity for students to receive feedback, enhance their learning capabilities, and develop transferable skills and the confidence to employ them. The tutorial system can provide an early indication if a student is experiencing difficulties and appropriate information, advice and guidance from the range of University support services (e.g. the Academic Skills Centre, School Welfare Services and the Student Hub) can be given. We have targeted Schools with particularly challenging student-to-staff ratios and cohorts with lower retention rates. Tutorials also identify academic potential and talent, and signpost students to further opportunities to develop their skills, interests, and engagement in the life of the University and the wider community. Personal tutors also work closely with the University's Careers Network to provide tutees with opportunities to engage in early career planning and CV writing.

The continual enhancement of our academic support system is overseen by the Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor for Student Experience. Subsuming and enhancing the former role of University Senior Tutor, the DPVC (Student Experience) – under the guidance of the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education – provides strategic leadership and support on issues related to personal tutoring across the campus and is working to advance an integrated approach to personal tutoring and pastoral care throughout the University. This DPVC works with colleagues in Student Services, CLAD and Library Services on a range of progression and retention- focussed initiatives.

Improving Students' Transition to HE

The University tutorial system is underpinned by a commitment to supporting students through their transition to higher education. The University has supported the development of an integrated pastoral care network, which brings together the ongoing review of students' transition to HE within a broader network of tutorial support meetings. It is based on an approach that sees a move towards the professionalisation of welfare provision throughout the University, alongside the close integration of the provision of Professional Services (from the Guild of Students, Careers Network, Library Services, and Student Services) with the tutorial system, enabling tutors to signpost students to a variety of opportunities and support structures.

We are also committed to continually developing our Welcome programme, our student orientation guides, the Welcome website (which covers a wide range of activities that provide an introduction to life at Birmingham), our Staying Local event for new students, and a range of wellbeing and support campaigns. Additionally, we run an effective Student Mentors scheme and a Guide to Effective Learning website (now incorporated within the Academic Skills Gateway) that provides a range of support on the learning experience for new students. Focus groups conducted with mature students

and student parents have identified opportunities for new induction and transition activities that have been incorporated from 12/13 onwards. These include coffee mornings and workshops (with free child care also provided). The Guild of Students and the University have worked closely to further develop and enhance the provision of networking events and activities within the first term at the University. Three dedicated welcome events (targeted at mature students, student parents and students living at home in the local area) have been held by the Guild since 2014, not only to ensure students are fully aware of the services available to them, but also to foster peer-to-peer connections early in the study life-cycle.

Students are informed clearly of their rights and responsibilities as active participants in academic tutorials, and the system is part of our robust quality assurance procedures. It is also intended to have an impact on our ability to attract students from disadvantaged backgrounds as we will be able to demonstrate that we focus our transition and academic support on students as individuals rather than on students in groups defined by their background.

The University ensures there is a system of welfare support in Colleges and every School has a Welfare Tutor available as a referral point for any student experiencing difficulties. Welfare tutors advise students on a range of issues, primarily pastoral rather than academic, and will signpost to other professional services. The University is reviewing this provision to develop it further and enhance the proactive elements of the system, so that emerging issues can be addressed early on. Welfare tutors are supported in their role by staff from Student Support and have access to a daily telephone consultation service as well as regular drop-in advice and debrief sessions. In September 2014 the College of Arts and Law launched its Professional Services Staff-Student Mentoring Scheme. The scheme pairs interested student mentees with a Professional Services mentor. This scheme aims to aid students' transition to university by providing students with the support of a neutral and supportive adult who is knowledgeable about the University and who is not a peer, nor directly connected with students' programmes. The scheme also provides Professional Services staff with an opportunity to support the student experience and/or to meet students in a different capacity. The scheme is in its pilot period and informal feedback from both mentors and mentees indicates that the scheme has helped students gain confidence in taking their first steps into university life.

The University continues to work to enhance its training and development provision for Welfare Tutors and Reasonable Adjustment Contacts (School and College-based staff overseeing implementation of reasonable adjustments) to support their roles and share good practice. Additional targeted training sessions are also offered, for example Asperger's Awareness.

Inclusive Curriculum

The Inclusive Curriculum Working Group (ICWG) was established in Spring 2014 to explore how 'inclusivity', in its widest possible sense, might be more effectively embedded within the curriculum and staff might be better supported to this end. The work of the group covers disability, diversity, international and part-time students, socio-economic status, gender, religion, and LGBT. The remit of the Group is to explore how inclusivity may be better, and more naturally, embedded within core areas of University activity including the provision of accessible learning materials and resources, teaching delivery, assessment and feedback, personal tutoring and student access. Recent work undertaken has produced greater clarity to the data in order to enable the analysis of inclusivity, producing focused training for new teaching staff and highlighting areas to build in anticipatory adjustments for disabled students.

Additional Support for Mature Students and Those with Caring Responsibilities

The University offers a number of targeted support initiatives for mature students and those with children or other caring responsibilities. There is a dedicated webpage for mature students considering applying to the University and a mature student ambassador attends Open Days to give first-hand advice. Through A2B, mature students are invited to a separate guidance event before

working on their assignments and are also invited to a morning induction in September to help them navigate Welcome Week. Tailored advice about studying as a mature student is also provided. Additionally, there is an intranet webpage with video and useful links which students can use once they are at the University. This also raises the profile of the needs of mature students for staff.

The Guild of Students runs a Student Parent and Carers Association as well as a PG and Mature Student Association. Focus groups for undergraduate mature students identified specific support needs and consequently a bespoke academic skills session has been developed by the Academic Skills Centre and a dedicated web presence is being scoped. Access to PG study spaces has also been arranged.

Young Adult Carers

The University of Birmingham recognises that the responsibilities of a student carer can have a significant impact on their University experience and their ability to engage with their studies. We have been delivering outreach activity for Young Adult Carers (i.e. young people aged 14-25 who provide unpaid care for a friend or family member who could not cope without their support) since 2015. We are working with community support groups to provide bespoke outreach activity to raise aspirations of young carers in the region. A film has also been made to highlight the support available for young carers once studying at the university.

In 2016, the University launched the Sarah Hawkins *Financial Award for Young Adult Carers*, in conjunction with an external donor. These awards fund seven young carers studying at the University, to the value of £2000 per year of study. This award is currently funded until 2022.

We have implemented enhancements to our data collection processes to enable us to identify existing University of Birmingham students who are also young carers so that we can better understand and support their needs to ensure successful outcomes. Alongside this we have developed guidance for Welfare Tutors engaging with student carers, to enable them to receive more consistent support across the university. Our Student Support team also run drop-in and focus group sessions to allow student carers to engage with Student Services and a Wellbeing Officer.

A student carer has the option to disclose their carer status when completing their on-line registration form. Early disclosure is encouraged so that support can be co-ordinated. Following disclosure student carers have the opportunity to discuss what support might be appropriate with a designated contact. Such a tailored approach offers flexibility in relation to academic and pastoral support as well as an increased opportunity to participate in University life. We also work in partnership with local carer support services and organisations, to ensure that students get the most appropriate and effective support possible.

(e) Employability

The University continues to invest heavily in its employability strategy, recognising the importance of maximising graduate employability outcomes for all students especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. From an initial £3.5m investment, the University has invested a further £1m to fund its Employability Strategy for 2016/17-2019/20. This has been used to support a number of new posts that are actively seeking to enhance, create and quantify the impact of initiatives designed to directly support students from widening participation backgrounds, including the Widening Participation Internship Officer post. As well as launching new initiatives, the University of Birmingham has worked to improve the inclusivity of its established services and activities as well as to respond to student demand and the changing labour market.

Access to the Professions

The University has piloted a number of specific interventions designed to improve access to the professions for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The *Access to your Career* (A2C) programme seeks to offer specific guidance, career development opportunities and work-related activity to first year undergraduates who came to the University of Birmingham through the Access

to Birmingham (A2B) and Routes to the Professions (R2P) programmes. Over 120 students have participated in the programme, which includes personalised strengths' guidance, visits to local businesses and practical opportunities with employers. Increased engagement with A2B students through the A2C programme has led to 60 students signing up for the *Birmingham Project*, giving these students the opportunity to tackle a real world challenge, conduct research and create an innovative online resource.

Mentoring and Internships

The University is also committed to improving participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in all of its existing programmes including the University's mentoring scheme. During 2017, overall applications to the Careers Network (CN) mentoring scheme increased by 44% (from 237 to 342) with 236 mentoring relationships successfully formed (17% increase). For the first time, Careers Network actively provided support to students with disabilities and 19 disabled students were successfully paired with a mentor. An additional 25 LGBT mentoring relationships were created through the LGBT Mentoring Scheme. CN continues to offer award winning support to students through the Personal Skills Award, careers advice and careers' skills sessions. Plans are in place to develop a strategy for better understanding and quantifying the participation of and impact on target groups of students, and to increase the accessibility of existing CN services through an increase in our online presence.

The University continues to enhance the breadth and depth of bursary support made available for students to undertake internships or work experience. This year, the University has piloted a *Virtual Internships Programme*, where students have the opportunity to work on a project for a social enterprise and get international experience without leaving the country. This enables students with other commitments, such as caring responsibilities, to also participate. As well as Virtual Internships, the University continues to offer fully funded *Global Internships*, which give students the chance to intern in top organisations across the world, *Enterprising Internships* based within a local social enterprise and funding to support students pursuing work experience in research and professional settings.

Our sector leading Gateway Work Experience Bursaries, targeted at priority WP student groups (defined as A2B students, registered disabled, leaving care, first generation of the family into higher education, in receipt of a grant or scholarship, lone parent and ethnic minorities), offer up to £2000 to fund extra-curricular placements throughout the year. We fund a wide variety of work experience across a range of sectors and professions both in the UK and overseas including the arts, health care, technology community development, scientific and biological research, marketing and international development. The scheme has seen, and continues to see, great successes, with students securing places, on their own merit; these have ranged from a Coding internship in China to the provision of comprehensive health services to rural communities in Tanzania. In the 2015/16 academic year 118 gateway bursary awards were granted, totalling over £90k. During 2017, CN will implement a new scoring system and process of self-reflection to better support applicants' learning and development.

In addition to the bursary programmes, we also source bespoke internships for our students as well as actively promoting opportunities to the student population. The University of Birmingham has an institutional internship framework which sets out definitions for paid internships, short voluntary placements and work shadowing. In line with this policy, a new post has been created in Careers Network with a focus on sourcing and creating internship opportunities for students from widening participation backgrounds. To date, 106 opportunities have been sourced and a further 23 bespoke opportunities have been created.

Targeted support

Careers Network at the University of Birmingham is increasingly focussed on evidence-based, targeted development of services and support. The University's 'hub and spoke model', in which Careers Network services are increasingly being delivered in University Colleges and Departments,

has allowed us to respond more effectively to employability gaps. One example of this is the Accounting and Finance Employability module, which has seen graduate employability increase from 68.3% in 2011/12 to 88.4% in 2014/15 (rising steadily in between). Through employer campus visits and careers talks, the module has encouraged students to think early about getting an internship and has increased the number of students from the department seeking Careers Network help.

In response to OFFA guidelines, the University has also sought to proactively engage with target groups of students and to monitor the number and progression of students where direct interventions do not yet exist. Examples of activities include:

- BME Careers Showcase: over 50 BME students attended a careers event discussing the relationship between ethnicity and employability and strategies to excel in the workplace;
- BME Ambassadors: training sessions were offered to the 200+ BME Ambassadors on goal setting and employability; and,
- a series of Careers Network workshops for students with disabilities contributed to an increase in applications to the Change 100 internship programme (an external programme organised by Leonard Cheshire Disability); 21 students applied compared to 5 the year before.

Much of the investment we are committed to in relation to employability, and in particular our expanded internship programme, is specifically aimed at improving access to the professions for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It therefore not only supports our efforts to improve student retention and success, but also acts as a significant part of our outreach and recruitment activity by making us more attractive to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Over the period to 2018/19 the Careers Network is working to implement a number of initiatives to further develop our targeted employability offering. This is expected to include: the guarantee of an offer of work-related activity for A2B and R2P students within their first two years at the university, development of additional ring-fenced annual internship places for students from widening participation backgrounds.

Targets and Milestones

On the basis of our strong track record in outreach, that places us in the upper quartile of the English universities of the Russell Group, we believe that it is important that we are judged by our relative performance in the HESA Performance Indicators. We will therefore aim to maintain our position in the top quartile of the English universities of the Russell Group for the life of this Access Agreement. In addition, we are proposing a number of internal targets which will not only satisfy OFFA guidelines but will also contribute to our monitoring of effective outreach activities.

- Increase the proportion of young people from our pre-16 progressive activity target group progressing to level 3 programmes.
- The proportion of young people from our pre-16 progressive activity target group applying to a FT place in HE is greater than local averages for young people from socially disadvantaged groups.
- Increase the percentage of students engaged in our post-16 outreach programmes applying to the University of Birmingham.
- Growth in the percentage of entrants via our Access to Birmingham Programme.
- Ensure that the continuation rates of students who entered via Access to Birmingham is equal to that for the overall cohort.
- Increase the percentage of students who entered via Access to Birmingham gaining a 2.i or 1st (with due regard given to the context of the qualification with which the student entered the University).
- Improve the proportion of students who entered via Access to Birmingham gaining a graduate level job within 6 months of graduating.

Through these targets we will demonstrate the impact of our outreach and retention activity at each of the key stages between 'first contact' with the target group for our pre-16 progressive activity

through to their first job after graduation. By monitoring progress at each of these key points, we will be able to identify where appropriate interventions need to be made to improve our approach to our outreach and retention activities.

Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements

The widening participation agenda, retention rates and success across the student lifecycle are overseen by the University's Student Access and Progress Committee. The Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and with representation from the Guild of Students, receives and considers regular reports and analysis of institutional performance in a range of areas (such as continuation rates, student equality benchmarks, HESA Performance Indicators, student experience surveys, outreach activity evaluation, etc.). In addition, the University Education Committee, also chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and with representation from the Guild, receives an annual progress report, approves OFFA reporting and considers the annual report from the Academic Skills Centre.

Within the University's Outreach team there is a dedicated Officer with specific responsibility for evaluation; this post works closely with Outreach Officers and with Aimhigher on the evaluation of activities.

The Outreach Evaluation Strategy for 2015-2018 supports our commitment to evidence-based practice in widening participation and outreach as well as to facilitating a culture of learning and continuous improvement. We are committed to generating evidence-based information from timely and robust evaluations to inform and support our outreach work. The overall aim of the Evaluation Strategy is to provide a framework for producing high quality evidence-based monitoring and evaluation information to support learning, improvement, innovation, accountability and strategic decision-making. The key objectives of the strategy are as detailed below.

- Support the generation of evaluation evidence to improve fair access to higher education by:
 - understanding what we do;
 - identifying what approaches work in promoting fair access and social mobility;
 - identifying where we can improve to increase the effectiveness of our widening participation policies and interventions; and,
 - supporting strategic decision making and allocation of resources.
- Provide direction on our approach to evaluation to ensure information generated is robust, relevant and useful.
- Provide a framework for future evaluations and link them to strategic decision-making by setting out the key focus areas for evaluations and the main evaluation questions they will seek to address.
- Provide a plan for outreach evaluations over the next 3 years, which will be reviewed and updated annually.

We have a comprehensive evaluation programme for our Access to Birmingham programme, including monitoring of applications through from acceptance and tracking students to graduation and employment.

Aimhigher West Midlands undertakes comprehensive evaluation of the impact of its interventions, with reference to control and experimental groups. Tracking suggests that engagement in Aimhigher during Key Stage 3 and 4 generates increased aspiration towards higher education, improved KS4 attainment and increased progress to higher education (HE).

The proportion of Aimhigher-engaged Pupil Premium learners attaining 5 GCSEs at A* - C, including English and Maths, exceeded that of regional Pupil Premium learners over the four years 2011/12 to 2014/15.

The progression of Aimhigher beneficiaries into HE is tracked via HESA data. Aimhigher learners formerly receiving Free School Meals (FSM) are more likely to enter HE than non-Aimhigher FSM

students (31.6% in 2014 and 36.7% in 2015). By comparison, regionally 22% of former FSM students entered HE in 2014. Aimhigher learners from POLAR3 Quintile 1 postcodes also enter HE in greater proportions than their peers (40.0% in 2014, compared to 12.4% regionally, and 32.40% in 2015, compared to 13.4% regionally). There is evidence of increased volatility in national GCSE attainment and progression to HE trends. National research¹ suggest Key Stage 4 curriculum reform will disproportionately impact on the attainment for disadvantaged learners, and January 2017 UCAS data showing a marked (2/3rd) reduction in the year-on-year growth in application rates of 18 year olds witnessed since 2012. As a result we intend to maintain our current ambitious milestones for both the GCSE attainment and HE progression of Aimhigher beneficiaries.

The Realising Opportunities Pilot project has undergone extensive evaluation looking at the outcomes for learners and the wider impact of the partnership. This continues to inform the future of the scheme.

We continue to develop our Evaluation Strategy with respect to the range of financial support we provide. This is focused on two main areas: work to understand patterns of spend and how the money is used, along with work to understand the impact of the money provided on retention and success. The work will draw on the OFFA toolkit.

Equality and Diversity

Our students and staff are key to achieving excellence and to delivering the objectives outlined in our Strategic Framework 2015-2020. Our linked Equality Scheme recognises the need to encourage each and every student to flourish whilst removing barriers to success. Equality is central to our mission to be a global force in teaching and research, and our Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor for Equalities leads our institutional development in this, reflecting that commitment.

The University's Equality Scheme 2016-2020 has been developed around themes of inclusiveness, attainment, flexibility and embedding. As part of the development of the objectives we consulted with students to identify actions they felt the University should take to improve equality, and we have sought to address this feedback in our objectives. Progress against objectives is reviewed annually as part of the Equality and Diversity Assurance Report to Council.

The University has been taking action to address the attainment gap between BME students and white students achieving a first or upper second class honours degree. We have delivered innovative mentoring and employability schemes for BME students, providing them with practical skills and role models for success in the workplace. The BME ambassador scheme, an initiative part-funded by the HEA, involves students engaging with staff in Schools and Departments to consider actions that can be taken to improve BME student inclusion, representation, engagement and to promote race equality. This project has been widely cited across the UK HE sector as an example of good practice in engaging and listening to BME students. We will continue to focus on developing this area of work and will be partners with Manchester University and Manchester Metropolitan University in a HEFCE Catalyst funded project as part of this.

A website dedicated to supporting the success of BME students was launched in 2014/15, and a supporting online platform for staff launched in 2016 that captures the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of ambassador activity. The BME student ambassadors continue to work with School Equality co-ordinators to identify issues that impact on their experiences, and have developed action plans for activities that make a positive difference. There are over 200 BME students who are ambassadors and 10 College student leads. Following the launch of the online portal, the project will be evaluated in July 2017.

The ethnicity attainment gap is a sector-wide issue and forms much of the focus of work with students on equality issues in universities today. This is an area of activity that we will continue to

pursue in relation to our work towards the ECU's Race Equality Mark. We are expanding this work to identify and address differences in completion rates and attainment amongst other groups, such as LGBT and trans students, mature students, disabled students and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, and identify equivalent interventions.

Around 6% of all University of Birmingham students have dependents. The University is one of only a handful that collects this information at registration and we are therefore now able to monitor the progression and retention of student parents. Since 2010, the University has helped support student parents establish a Guild Association, produce a pregnancy, maternity and paternity policy, and work towards a more inclusive curriculum that recognizes the needs of students with caring responsibilities. From 2015/16 we have further enhanced the support offered to student carers identified above at (d), and developed a new University Policy for Student Parents, Guardians and Carers (effective from 2017/18).

LGBT students have been supported by a mentoring scheme that was launched in 2012 called 'Come Out, Stay Out'. In 2016 there were around 60 professional mentors, most being University staff, supporting over 28 student mentees. Around 3% of students identified as LGBT in 2016, whilst over 30% did not select the option to tell us their sexual identity at registration. Students are encouraged to disclose, and information is available at registration to explain the benefits of informing the University. We have developed trans-inclusive practices, including the provision of gender neutral facilities, the recording of personal information and through the publication of transgender guidance, and we are developing activities to improve understanding amongst our wider community of trans issues.

To support the development and promotion of religious literacy and integration on campus the University has worked with a number of community organisations including local mosques and religious schools. The University's Good Campus Relations Group comprises of members from community groups and works towards the promotion of understanding and representation of different faith groups. The University has an excellent data collection and analysis system and, as part of its annual review of academic programmes, ensures that Schools consider the recruitment and performance data of students in the protected characteristics and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Schools report issues emanating from the data to the University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, chaired by the PVC (Education); the Committee then monitors how the Schools work towards making improvements. This process is supported through targeted Student Equality Reports, which are disseminated to Schools outlining any identified issues.

We are fully committed to ensuring that anyone with the aspiration and ability can gain access to the University, as well as progress and achieve success regardless of any disability. As a result of the proposals around the reduction in funding and support by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in the form of the Disabled Students' Allowances from 2016/17 onwards, a panel of specialist and senior staff, chaired by the Director of Student Services, was convened. Following this work the University continues to develop its approach to deliver a more inclusive education environment and also identified an additional £500k to support disabled students where that support now falls outside Disabled Students Allowance.

The challenges of creating a physically accessible campus have been highlighted by students and staff in the Equality Scheme consultation as a key priority for the University, and we have undertaken significant work to improve accessibility across campus. During 2016 we developed a forum for students and staff to raise accessibility issues and to comment on campus developments to ensure the diverse needs of our community are reflected.

We have worked closely with the Guild's liberation associations and Guild officers via the Equality Executive Group to ensure we have student input on equality issues. We have worked to embed the principles of Athena SWAN, and we outperform the sector for female representation in Maths and Engineering (37.2% and 20.6% respectively against sector figures of 34.1% and 16.4%). In 2015, we

took the next step in developing our equality principles and practices by embarking upon the work required to achieve the ECU's Race Equality Charter.

Provision of Information to Prospective Students

The priorities for communications to prospective students are that we provide clear and timely advice and information which is enhanced by our extended programme of face-to-face communications with students in school and their advisors, including parents and teachers. Market research continues to be conducted with students, prospective students and their parents in the development and focus of our messages, our choice of information channels and to determine which information is of most importance to prospective students.

Recruitment activities for the 2018/19 cohort of students are already underway. The Guild contributes to the Undergraduate Prospectus for all potential students. Details of fees and funding arrangements are available on the University website; details are regularly updated as part of the Key Information Set initiative. Subscribers to our online customer relationship management system (CRM) are provided with personalised messages about fees and funding packages as well as the opportunity for online chat sessions with Funding Advisors. The University provides information to UCAS and the SLC in order to populate their information channels.

Face-to-face contact is recognised as one of the most influential channels of information, providing opportunities for prospective students and their parents to understand the fees and funding regime. We ensure that University recruitment staff are experts in the current arrangements at Government and University level.

Advisors on each of the outreach programmes are kept up-to-date on all aspects of student fees and support so that they can provide detailed and expert advice to students (and, wherever possible, their parents) participating in the A2B programme, as well as the other progressive programmes outlined in this document. We have provided authoritative information about the fees regime which has ensured that younger students have not been deterred from considering a university career in the future for fear of debt.

Finally, at the point at which the OFFA Agreement is confirmed, the University will produce a 'Money Matters' booklet. The booklet provides information about the fee, the University's financial package, including sport and music scholarships and a link to our searchable funding database, alongside an explanation of the statutory support package offered by the Student Loans Company. It forms a key part of the communications to our WP students, and is distributed at all talks, visits and events, and made available online. The booklet is well received and is an essential part of our recruitment activity.

Consultation with Students

Representatives from the Guild of Students have been engaged in the drafting of this Agreement. This Access Agreement is considered at a number of senior University committees which include formal representation from the Guild of Students, including the Vice-President (Education). The initiatives and activities detailed in this document are formulated following extensive evaluation of student feedback.