

# University of Birmingham

## Access and participation plan 2020-21 to 2024-25

The University of Birmingham has embraced widening participation and fair access since its foundation. In recent years the University has provided not only outstanding initiatives to widen participation at Birmingham and beyond, but also sector leadership amongst the selective high-tariff universities across the UK. We were one of the first universities to use contextual offers, with up to two grade reductions for those who had demonstrated the potential to succeed but not reached the standard entry tariff. Our pioneering Access to Birmingham (A2B) programme has been widely copied across the country, and we note that it is referenced by the OfS as best practice. The A2B programme is built on extensive engagement with schools across the region, with our students, staff and alumni working directly to raise aspiration and support attainment. The success of the programme is based on careful selection of, and sustained engagement, with the target group. The majority of our UK-domiciled undergraduate first-degree population study full-time (99%); three quarters are from state schools, and a third are first generation students (2018/19 data), and a fifth are from disadvantaged backgrounds (Polar Quintiles 1 and 2).

Our commitment to widening participation goes beyond simply access to the University of Birmingham. We are the only university to have opened our own secondary training school dedicated to raising aspiration and achievement. The School is a comprehensive non-selective institution with a highly diverse student population. This has been a significant financial and resource investment; this level of commitment is sector-leading, and we see this as a core element of our contribution to improving access to higher education. We offer a number of annual scholarships to students from the University School to support their progression to higher education study at Birmingham.

This document sets out an ambitious, outcomes-based Access and Participation Plan. We welcome the opportunity to plan and set targets over a longer period than previously. Our performance assessment highlights a number of areas of success on which we can build, as well as highlighting some areas where our analysis highlights that more needs to be done. Expertise from the University's own research centres, including the Centre for Research in Race and Education, the Department of Disability, Inclusion and Special Needs, and the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has informed the development of our Access and Participation strategy, and will continue to do so.

Whilst we recognise the shift in OfS focus to closing the gap in access between students from low (quintile 1) and high (quintile 5) participation neighbourhoods, evidence suggests that Polar data, in isolation, is a very limited measure of disadvantage. It is a single-dimension methodology (based on allocation of postcodes only) which does not reflect the complex and often intersectional nature of disadvantage; indeed research<sup>1</sup> has shown that only 13% of students eligible for Free School Meals live within P4Q1 areas of the country. This is supported by evidence from our own institutional data which shows that nearly 10% of students from low participation neighbourhoods come from high-income households. The challenge of focusing purely on reducing the POLAR gap is further compounded by the limited number of Polar4 Quintile 1 (P4Q1) students who leave school with the qualifications for admission to higher-tariff institutions, compared to the numbers from other groups. For example in 2017/18 UCAS data showed there were only 2700 P4Q1 students nationally who achieved AAB or better. This suggests that access is a complex issue which cannot be addressed by universities in isolation, and there is a risk that universities will be competing for a small pool of priority applicants.

Our experience shows that a multi-dimensional measure of disadvantage – one which recognises the multiple and complex backgrounds from which our students come - is preferable to a singular focus on P4Q1 cohorts. For over 10 years our access strategy has focused on supporting students that are disadvantaged as evidenced by a **basket of measures**, such as the performance of their school, household income, where they live, whether they are disabled, and whether they are the first in their family to attend university. This is a realistic and balanced, yet stretching and ambitious, approach, and one that we have championed through our A2B Scheme. This approach has been further developed through the recent introduction of a wider and more flexible range of access programmes under our Pathways to Birmingham (P2B) banner.

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<sup>1</sup> *Using contextualised admissions to widen access to higher education: a guide to the evidence base*, Vikki Boliver, Stephen Gorard and Nadia Siddiqui. Durham University Evidence Centre for Education,

We are committed to continuing our focus on measures of multiple disadvantage and, through this Plan, we are setting ourselves an ambitious target to grow the number of students we admit through our flagship Pathways to Birmingham access programmes. Recognising the OfS national key performance measure, however, and the role we have to play in this, we have also set ourselves a supplementary and realistic target specifically relating to closing the gap in access between students from low (P4Q1) and high participation neighbourhoods.

Our strategy is underpinned by our new *Birmingham Scholar* framework. This is a full lifecycle framework that provides targeted, personalised interventions to support specific groups (including those targeted within this Plan) of applicants, students and recent-graduates who are likely to face additional challenges throughout their student journey. As part of this framework, current students will continue to have a central role in co-creating initiatives and supporting their peers.

We are pleased that the OfS has recently awarded Challenge funding to two University-led initiatives in local graduate employability and student mental health, both of which will contribute to the objectives set out in this plan.

## 1. Assessment of performance

We believe that our performance data highlight the impact of the University's commitment to equality of access and opportunity, as well as the absolute value of a Birmingham education. Birmingham students from each of the four<sup>2</sup> OfS target groups outperform the sector in absolute terms across continuation, attainment and graduate and highly-skilled employability. In many cases, the absolute performance of our students across the four OfS priority under-represented groups is better than the sector average for students from more advantaged backgrounds. As such, Birmingham students from under-represented groups are as likely (if not more likely) to continue on their course, achieve good honours and gain highly-skilled employability than the average English student from over-represented groups.

We have reduced the performance gap across each of these measures for all four target groups over the period from 2012/13. In all but two cases (mature continuation and P4Q1 progression) our gaps are below the sector, and, in the case of the P4Q1 progression gap the difference is not statistically significant. Our longstanding commitment to improving access means that our intake of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (as measured by our A2B population and Polar 3 Q1&2) has grown in absolute terms, and our intake are majority state school educated (c. 75%). OfS data highlight statistically significant access gaps across a number of the OfS target groups, but it is important to note that our access strategy to date has focussed on providing support and fair access to students from our local region, based on a basket of indicators of disadvantage, not just those specified by individual OfS KPMs.

We expand on this summary in the following sub-sections. In each section we provide an assessment of the extent to which our performance indicates a need for targeted interventions to support improved performance, either through formal targets or through the continued development of existing measures.

We have utilised the OfS dataset as the starting point for our analysis, supplemented by a range of detailed internal and external data (TEF metrics, UCAS equalities data, HESA and DLHE data and internal KPIs) as appropriate. Our analysis has focussed on full-time, first degree students only, as that reflects our institutional context as a majority full-time, residential, campus-based university (99.5% of our undergraduates study full-time first degrees, equating to over 22,000 students). Our part-time undergraduate provision is restricted to a small number of specialist programmes, with a total population of 128 (2018/19).

### 1.1 Higher education participation (POLAR4 Quintiles).

Figure 1 shows the percentage performance gaps for P4Q1 students (as compared to P4Q5 students) across the four main elements of the student lifecycle, over a five year period. The University of Birmingham performance (orange line) is compared against the sector (blue line); significant gaps are represented by a solid circle, and non-significant gaps are represented by a hollow circle. The lighter

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<sup>2</sup> Care Leaver data is not available at sector level for comparative purposes

orange/blue ranges indicate the 95% confidence intervals for Birmingham and the sector respectively and this illustrates the relative sensitivity of a particular gap to small populations (the smaller the population, the larger the interval range is likely to be). The figure shows statistically significant gaps for access and attainment for P4Q1 students, and that gaps for continuation and progression are not statistically significant. We unpick this analysis further in the following sub-sections.

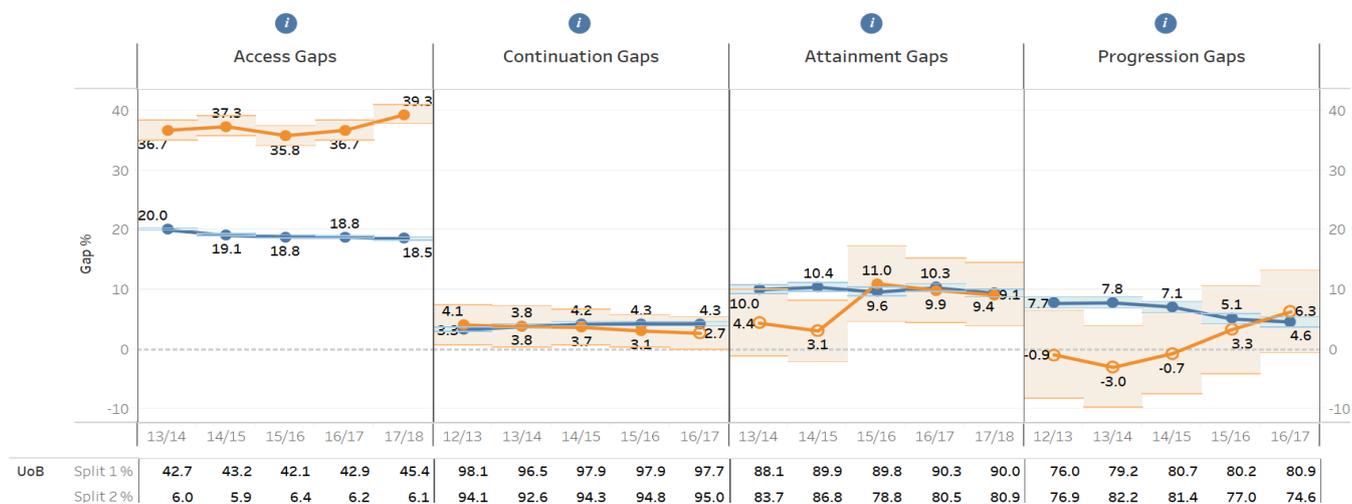


Figure 1: POLAR Quintiles 1 and 5 percentage performance gaps across the student lifecycle, UoB (orange) vs sector (blue) (OfS data release March 2019, POLARQ1 is 'split 2')

## Access

Our access strategy to date, and our previous OFFA targets, have focussed on increasing access for regional students with multiple characteristics of disadvantage through our A2B scheme. We have consistently met our A2B target and, in 2018/19, 6.8% of our intake were A2B students from backgrounds reflecting multiple measures of disadvantage. We have long recognised that students from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience educational disadvantage and we already offer targeted contextual offers. Students who progress from our access programmes (including A2B students) receive a two grade reduction on our standard offer, while students from Polar Q1 backgrounds outside of the region receive a one grade reduction. Though our existing access strategy we have increased the proportion of A2B applications from P3Q1<sup>3</sup> areas from 15% to 28%, and in 2018 we saw a 70% increase in A2B entrants from P3Q1 (102 students), against a previous four-year average of 60 students.

Our absolute performance in recruiting students from Polar 4 Quintile 1 (P4Q1) backgrounds shows that we are making steady progress. P4Q1 students account for 6.1% of our full-time, first degree intake (2017/18); a growth of 20% since 2013/14. Notwithstanding improvements in absolute terms, our 2017/18 gap in access between P4Q1 and P4Q5 students is 39.3%. This gap has increased slightly over the period from 2013/14, against a declining sector gap, and remains statistically significant. Our ratio is 7.4:1 and this compares to a Russell Group ratio of 6:1 and a 'high tariff institutions'<sup>4</sup> ratio of 5:1.

Our performance reflects positive outcomes on those measures that we have previously targeted. Closing the Q1/Q5 gap is a new target. We are committed to reducing that gap whilst retaining our commitments to supporting fair access across multiple measures of disadvantage as we believe this to be an appropriate and accurate reflection of disadvantage. We have therefore further developed our access offering to include a wider and more flexible range of access programmes under the banner of *Pathways to Birmingham* (see later Strategic Measures section). We will demonstrate the value and impact of this through a challenging target to increase intake via these programmes. We also recognise the OfS national key performance measure, and the role we will play in this in light of current performance. We will seek to address this through a supplementary access target specifically focussed on closing the gap in P4Q1 access, but our approach must be realistic given the evidence of a small national pool of suitably qualified applicants (even with grade drops). Section 2.2 provides further detail

<sup>3</sup> As Polar 4 data has previously not been available our evaluation work to date has included analysis of Polar 3 performance.

<sup>4</sup> As defined by OfS for KPM 2.

on our access targets, and Section 3 provides detail on the measures we have in place to support their achievement.

### **Success (Non-continuation)**

The continuation rate for P4Q1 students is 95% (2016/17) and this is 5 percentage points higher than the sector rate for P4Q1. This reflects four years of continuous improvement and is above the sector average continuation rate for P4Q5 students. The gap in performance compared to P4Q5 students is small (2.7%) and well below the sector rate of 4.3%. Over the period from 2012/13 the gap has reduced from 4.1% to 2.7%, and is no longer statistically significant.

The University has a sustained and very positive retention record across all student groups (see figures 1-4). This reflects our continued investment in and development of integrated pastoral care and student support structures (see Section 3 'Strategic Measures'). We understand, however, that maintaining our strong performance will become increasingly challenging as we work to increase our intake of P4Q1 where we may be recruiting students with additional financial support needs, family commitments and work commitments. It is important that we continue to offer the additional support necessary to help students to balance these challenges with those of studying at Birmingham (see Section 3 - Strategic Measures - for details of the support we provide). We will continue to prioritise this support and seek to maintain our strong performance in this area.

### **Success (Attainment)**

80.9% of our P4Q1 students achieved good honours in 2017/18. This is 7.1 percentage points higher than the sector rate, and reflects a third consecutive year improvement in absolute attainment. The gap to P4Q5 good honours attainment is 9.1% (2017/18); this is below the sector gap (9.4%) and again marks a continued positive trajectory in reducing the performance gap.

The gap is, however, statistically significant and we will commit to reducing this gap as part of the aims and objectives outlined in this Plan. This will be an ambitious target given the planned growth of intake in this cohort. Whilst our target is focussed on P4Q1, per OfS guidance, we also note that our data show a significant attainment gap for IMD5 students. Our analysis suggests that there is significant overlap between POLAR and IMD, and we say more in Section 3 about the additional measures we will put in place to support reducing the POLAR attainment gap and how these measures will, concurrently, support the reduction of the IMD gap.

### **Progression to highly-skilled employment or further study**

We have consistently out-performed the sector in absolute terms over the full reporting period. Highly-skilled employability for our 2016/17 P4Q1 graduates is 74.6%. This is over 6 percentage points higher than the sector rate. We have seen a decline in recent years with P4Q1 highly-skilled employability falling from 82.2% to 74.6%, and this has contributed to the performance gap to P4Q5 students increasing from -0.9% in 2012/13, to 6.3% in 2016/17. This is larger than the sector gap, but we note it is not statistically significant (a difference of 12 students would eradicate the gap).

Internal analysis of our performance has highlighted that locally-domiciled A2B and Black students (who make up 15% and 11% of our P4Q1 cohort respectively) are contributing disproportionately to our declining absolute performance (and associated increased gap). Graduate employability for A2B students has fallen from 82.6% to 77.4%, and for local Black students it has fallen from 88.2% to 71.4% (compared to relatively stable local BAME graduate employability).

Supporting our students into graduate and highly-skilled employability is a key strategic priority and we are committed to reversing the declining graduate employability rates for our P4Q1 students. We have already begun to address these challenges through our Access to Careers (A2C) programme (see Section 3, 'Strategic Measures'), and in continued support of our strategic objective we will specifically target locally-domiciled A2B and Black students as part of the targets set out in this Plan.

## **1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students**

Figure 2 shows the percentage performance gaps for BAME students (as compared to White students) across the four main elements of the student lifecycle over a five year period. Birmingham performance

(orange line) is compared against the sector (blue line); significant gaps are represented by a solid circle, and non-significant gaps are represented by a hollow circle. The lighter orange/blue ranges indicate the 95% confidence intervals for Birmingham and the sector respectively; this is provided to show the relative sensitivity of a particular gap to small populations (the smaller the population, the larger the interval range is likely to be). The figure shows statistically significant gaps for access and attainment for BAME students while gaps for continuation and progression are not statistically significant. We unpick this analysis further in the following sub-sections.

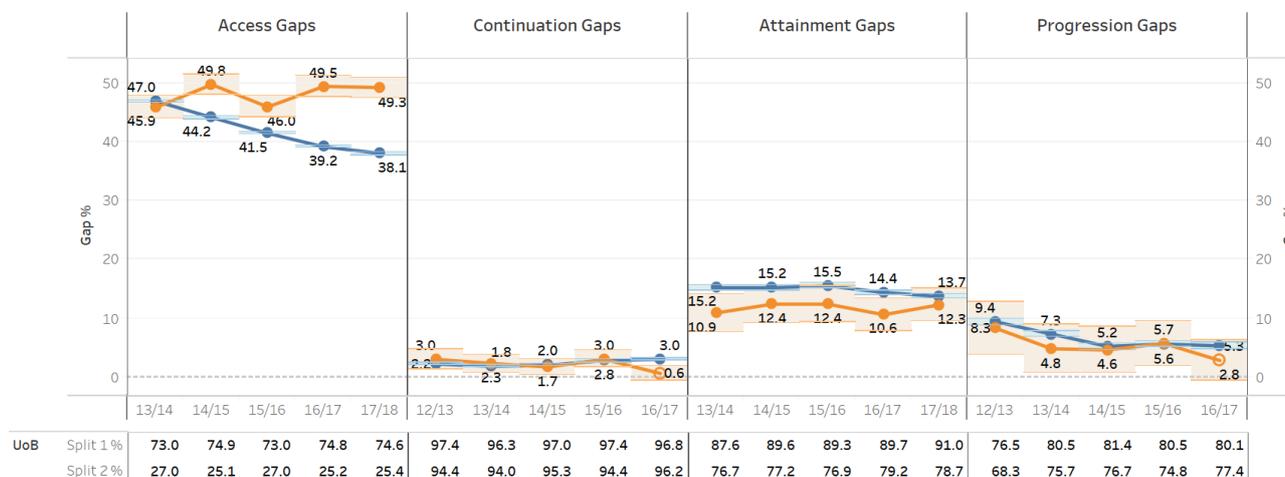


Figure 2: BAME vs White performance gaps across the student lifecycle, UoB (orange) vs sector (blue) (OfS data release March 2019, BAME is 'split 2')

## Access

In 2017/18, 25.4% of our full-time undergraduate intake were students from BAME backgrounds, compared to 31% nationally. Our BAME intake has increased by 8% since 2013/14<sup>5</sup>. The BAME access gap has, however, increased from 45.9% in 2013/14 to 49.3% in 2017/18, against a lower and falling sector gap (38.1% in 2017/18).

The access gaps are most significant for Black students and students of other ethnicity, being 69.9% and 73.6% respectively (although the latter group represents very small absolute numbers – 45 students). Whilst Transparency Condition data show relatively low offer rates for Black and Asian students, our 2018 UCAS data also show that Black applicants are less likely to apply with the predicted grades that meet our offer criteria (55% of Black applicants meet our standard criteria vs 67% of White applicants). For some programmes, the mix of A level subjects studied is a further important barrier.

We target schools for our Outreach activity that have high proportions of BAME students and this means that BAME students are proportionally well-represented in our A2B and low participation intake population: 11% of our P4Q1 intake are of Black ethnicity and 76% of our (2018) A2B intake were from BAME backgrounds.

This is a complex challenge, and one that has roots deep in the secondary school system (and earlier). We have, however, undertaken detailed analysis to understand how we can better support suitably qualified Black and Asian applicants to enrol at Birmingham. Our evaluation has shown that offer rates are broadly equal across the different ethnicity groups for qualified candidates in non-interviewing subjects. However for some subjects that employ interviews, such as Medicine and dentistry, BAME students are less likely to receive an offer. We have taken steps to address and monitor this though the collation of data relating to interview attendance, performance at interview, academic thresholds and reasons for decision to ensure that unexpected variations are not present. Data are now reviewed systematically at key points during the interview processes, and we are confident that our processes are consistent, transparent and equitable. We are extending the robust training we provide to interview panels to further minimise the risk of unconscious bias and enhancing the availability of targeted interview support, building on best practice in medicine. We have also taken steps to better support our

<sup>5</sup> 2% growth in intake for Asian students, 5% for Black students, 24% for mixed race students and 50% for students of other ethnicity

BAME applicants to be prepared for, and informed about, the application process to increase their chances of success. Our Routes to the Professions scheme, for example, is an 18 month programme of support for students who are looking for careers in medicine, dentistry, law, accounting and finance, and engineering.

### **Success (Non-continuation)**

96.2% of our BAME students continued their studies in 2016/17; this is 7 percentage points higher than the sector rate (89%) and marks a broadly increasing trajectory over the reporting period. This performance is replicated at the detailed level, with Asian, Black and students of mixed and other ethnicity all having absolute continuation rates above the sector<sup>6</sup>.

The gap in BAME performance compared to White students has fallen from 3% in 2012/13 to 0.6% in 2016/17; this is well below the sector gap of 3%, and is not statistically significant. Similarly, at the detailed ethnicity level, performance gaps are small and not statistically significant (Asian -0.7%, Black 2.8%, mixed 0.8%, other 5.8%).

The data do not highlight any significant differences in continuation for our BAME students, either at the broad or detailed ethnicity level. We note, however, that the wider societal and structural issues underpinning differential BAME performance and we remain committed to the interventions we have developed over the recent past (see Section 3, Strategic Measures) that have had a positive impact on our current performance. Such measures include our BAME Ambassadors scheme, supported by the OfS and recognised by UUK and NUS as best practice. We will continue to prioritise this support and ensure that any gap in BAME continuation does not increase to a statistically significant level through the objectives and targets set out within this Plan.

### **Success (attainment)**

78.7% of our BAME graduates achieve good honours; this is 11 percentage points higher than the sector rate for BAME good honours. At a detailed ethnicity level, students with 'other' ethnicity have the highest absolute performance (82.9% compared to the sector rate of 67.3%), whilst Black students have the lowest (75.3%, compared to the sector rate of 58.1%); in all cases our students' absolute performance outstrips the sector.

The BAME gap to White performance is 12.3%; this is smaller than the sector gap (13.7%). Whilst our BAME attainment gap has generally been on an improving trajectory, we saw a slight increase from 2016/17 to 2017/18, and the gap remains significant.

At a detailed level, the gap to White attainment ranges from 8.2% (for students of other ethnicity) to 15.7% (for Black students); in both cases the gaps are smaller than the sector (14% and 23.2% respectively). Our rate of improvement in reducing the Black attainment gap has outstripped the sector, falling from 20.3% in 2013/14 to 11.8% in 2016/17. However the gap remains statistically significant. Asian students have the second largest attainment gap (12.5%), and as our largest proportion of BAME students (accounting for 60% of the 2017/18 graduating BAME population) are contributing more significantly to our overall BAME attainment gap. This (Asian v White) gap has broadly tracked in line with the sector, although latest data (2017/18) show our gap to be higher than the sector.

The data highlight a statistically significant gap in the performance of BAME students as compared to White students in attainment of good honours, and we will commit to reducing this gap as part of the aims and objectives outlined in this Plan. Our analysis has shown that Black and Asian students have the most significant (in terms of population size and absolute performance) gaps; we will therefore target these cohorts of students through targeted interventions (see Section 3 - Strategic Measures). In doing so we will also contribute to the OfS KPM 4 to reduce the Black attainment gap.

### **Progression to highly-skilled employment or further study**

Graduate outcomes for our BAME students are strong. 77.4% of our BAME graduates secured highly-skilled employability in 2016/17; this is 9.5 percentage points higher than the sector rate (67.9%) and

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<sup>6</sup> Asian students 97.4% continuation (vs 90.9% sector), Black students continuation 94% (vs 86.2% sector), students of mixed ethnicity continuation 95.9% (vs 89.6% sector), and students of other ethnicity continuation 90.9% (vs 89.2% sector).

marks a sustained improving trajectory. This picture is replicated at the detailed level, where highly-skilled employability outstrips the sector across the board (by 11.9 percentage points for our Asian students, 4.3 points for our Black students, 5.8 percentage points for our students of mixed ethnicity and 17.1 percentage points for our students of other ethnicity).

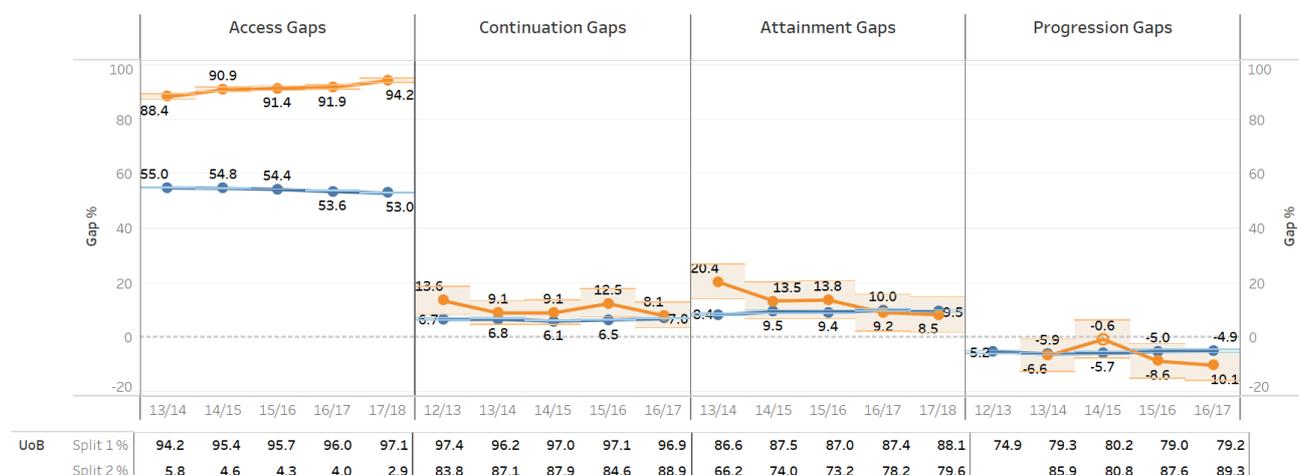
The gap in BAME highly-skilled employability has fallen from 8.3% (2012/13) to 2.8% in 2016/17, and is now statistically not significant. This picture is replicated for our Asian students (where the gap reduced from 9% to 0.8%) and students of other ethnicity (where the gap has reduced from -0.5% to -4.5%). Whilst the gap has increased for students of mixed ethnicity (from -2.5% to 4.9%) the gap remains statistically not significant.

For our Black students, the performance gap to White students has increased from -2.4% (2014/15) to 7.9% (2016/17). This gap is above the sector and statistically significant; it has largely been caused by falling absolute employability rates for our Black students against a stable performance from White students<sup>7</sup>. Internal analysis has further identified a specific challenge with our low-participation Black students (as defined as those entering through our A2B programme). Black A2B students have a graduate employability rate of 50% (2016/17 data) compared to 77.4% for the overall A2B cohort. Therefore we will target Black students, particularly those who are A2B entrants, for additional employability support and to enhance engagement.

Supporting our students into graduate and highly-skilled employability is a key strategic priority, and we have already taken steps to support increased engagement with our careers support based on learning from our evaluation activities (see Section 3, Strategic Measures). We will commit within this Plan to seek to reduce the Black graduate employability gap.

### 1.3 Mature students

The University of Birmingham’s strategic missions is to deliver full-time, campus-based undergraduate provision, and therefore 95% of our population is full-time, with mature students only making up a small proportion of our population. Figure 3 shows the percentage performance gaps for mature students (as compared to young students) across the four main elements of the student lifecycle, over a five year period. Birmingham performance (orange line) is compared against the sector (blue line); significant gaps are represented by a solid circle, and non-significant gaps are represented by a hollow circle. The lighter orange/blue ranges indicate the 95% confidence intervals for Birmingham and the sector respectively; this is provided to show the relative sensitivity of a particular gap to small populations (the smaller the population, the larger the interval range is likely to be). The figure shows statistically significant gaps for access, continuation, attainment and employability, however in the latter case this is a ‘negative’ gap whereby our mature students outperform their young peers. We unpick this analysis further in the following sub-sections.



<sup>7</sup> Black student graduate employability was 83.8% in 2014/15, and has fallen to 72.2% in 2016/17. Graduate employability for White students was 80.5% in 2013/14 and 80.1% in 2016/17.

### **Access**

Given our context as majority full-time and campus-based for our undergraduate study, we anticipate and accept a high full-time access gap between young and mature learners. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the OfS data show a high access gap for mature full-time learners. In 2017/18, 97.1% of our (2017/18) full-time intake were under 21, and this represents a 94.2% access gap.

Our core mission is full-time, campus-based UG education, and to focus on a mature access gap would be contrary to this. We are confident that the OfS recognises the importance of institutional autonomy in setting subject mix and majority mode of delivery. We are not, therefore, seeking to address this gap in our Plan. We note, however, that our (very small and specialist) part-time UG population comprises predominantly mature students (78.4% of our PT other UG intake in 2017/18 were over 21) and we have a dedicated mature-student ambassador to support these mature learners.

### **Success (non-continuation)**

Our absolute continuation rate for mature students is 88.9%, this is 3.4 percentage points above the sector, and reflects a broadly positive trajectory over the reporting period. The performance gap to young students has fallen from 13.6% (2012/13) to 8.1% in 2016/17.

We have undertaken further analysis to seek to understand the reasons underlying why our mature student do not continue in their studies. Over a three year aggregated period (2015/16 to 2017/18), two thirds (66%) of mature students left for personal reasons beyond the University's control (for example, moving into employment, health reasons, transferred to another institution or balancing full-time study with existing personal commitments became unsustainable). We will continue to work with our mature students to better understand their individual circumstances and offer support towards the most appropriate outcome for them. We note that in some cases, non-continuation is the appropriate outcome for an individual.

### **Success (Attainment)**

The good honours rate for our mature students is 79.6%; this is 9.8 percentage points higher than the sector and marks a sustained increase over the period (improving from a good honours rate of 66.2% in 2013/14). The gap in performance has fallen from 20.4% (2013/14) to 8.5%, and is now below the sector gap (9.5%).

Mature students at the University of Birmingham have a higher rate of achieving good honours, and are therefore more likely to succeed, than the average English student under 21 (79.6% of Birmingham mature students achieve good honours, compared with 79.3% of sector under 21s). Our full-time mature population is small; an additional 12 students, annually, gaining good honours would eradicate the gap; this is less than 0.3% of our annual graduating cohort. As such we do not believe that is it appropriate to set a formal target for such small numbers, however we will continue to support our mature students to achieve their academic potential through access to targeted interventions provided under the Birmingham Scholar framework (see Section 3 'Strategic Measures', for further details).

### **Progression to highly-skilled employment or further study**

In 2016/17 89.3% of our mature students secured highly-skilled employability, this is 13.5 percentage points higher than the sector rate. The gap to our young graduates is 'negative' across the full reporting period, with mature students consistently showing a higher highly-skilled employability rate than their young peers. The 2016/17 gap is -10.1%.

The data show a consistently strongly positive performance for our mature students in gaining highly-skilled employability; as such we do not intend to set a target in this area. We note that the OfS dashboard flags this gap as statistically significant, however it would be perverse to artificially constrain the performance of our mature students to address this perceived issue.

## 1.4 Disabled students

Figure 4 shows the percentage performance gaps for disabled students (as compared to other students) across the four main elements of the student lifecycle, over a five year period. Birmingham performance (orange line) is compared against the sector (blue line); significant gaps are represented by a solid circle, and non-significant gaps are represented by a hollow circle. The lighter orange/blue ranges indicate the 95% confidence intervals for Birmingham and the sector respectively; this is provided to show the relative sensitivity of a particular gap to small populations (the smaller the population, the larger the interval range is likely to be). The figure shows statistically significant gaps for access. Small performance gaps for continuation, attainment and employability are not statistically significant, and in the latter case the gap is 'negative' where our disabled students outperform their peers. We unpick this analysis further in the following sub-sections.

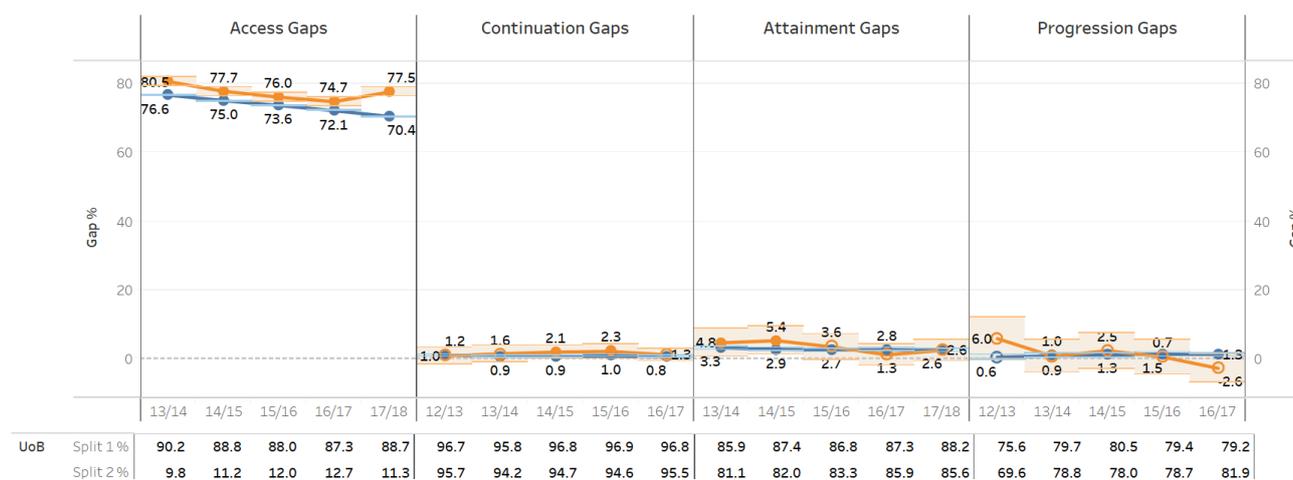


Figure 4: Disabled vs non-disabled performance gaps across the student lifecycle (OfS data release March 2019, Disabled is 'split 2')

### Access

11.3% of our student intake in 2017/18 consisted of students with a reported disability. Over the period since 2013/14, our disabled population has increased by 34% (to 525). We have reduced the disabled access gap from 80.5% in 2013/14 to 74.7% in 2016/17, broadly mirroring the sector trend. At a disaggregated level, the access gaps are broadly comparable (cognitive and learning disability 85.1%, mental health disability 85.3%, multiple impairments 86.1%, sensory medical and physical disability 87.5%, and social and communication disability 88.5%). Our offer rate is slightly higher for UCAS applicants declaring a disability than otherwise.

We have not outlined a specific target in relation to disabled access as we do not believe that this is appropriate, because it is not clear what an appropriate target would be in relation to the disabled access gap, nor would a target help to support the large number of applicants who do not declare a disability during the recruitment process. We remain strongly committed however to the belief that disability should not present a barrier to access to the University of Birmingham, and we will continue to work to ensure this is the case. Students with disabilities are a priority group for engagement in our outreach activities (disability is a targeted criteria for our A2B and expanded Pathways to Birmingham programmes), and we have a dedicated Student Disability Service which provides information and support from pre-application to graduation with expertise across a range of disciplines – including mental health.

### Success (Non-continuation)

95.5% of our disabled students continue in their studies, compared to 90.3% across the sector (2016/17 data). The continuation gap to students with no known disability is small (1.3%), not statistically significant and relates to very small numbers (<10 students).

At a more detailed level, the continuation rate for students with mental health disabilities is out of line with our institutional average (and other categories of disabilities), with a 3.2% continuation gap;

although this gap is slightly above the sector, it is not significant. Absolute continuation rates for our students with declared mental health issues is 5.8 percentage points better than the sector. Indeed, students with declared mental health issues are more likely to continue at Birmingham than the average English student with no known disabilities.

We recognise that this is an area with often complex and differing needs for individual students and we note that the majority of our disabled students leave for personal reasons. Our central Disability Support Team have reviewed the reasons why students do not continue their studies in order to inform the development of further targeted support. This revealed that a particularly common reason for non-continuation amongst disabled students is related to a deterioration in their existing condition, as opposed to any particular reason within the control of the University.

The population of students with disabilities who do not continue is very small; indeed, to eradicate the gap in continuation for students with mental health disabilities would require a change of less than 5 students annually. We do not believe that it would be appropriate to outline a formal target for such a small population, however we will continue to develop our advice and support to meet the needs of our students. Examples include the development of flexible study patterns (though our new Academic Teaching Year structure) that makes it easier for students to pause and resume their studies, alongside reasonable adjustments for on-course support (see Section 3 'Alignment with other strategies' for detail).

### **Success (Attainment)**

Birmingham students with a reported disability are more likely than the average English student to achieve good honours. 85.6% of our students with a reported disability achieved good honours in 2017/18; this is 10.4 percentage points higher than the sector. The gap in attainment compared to other students has fallen from 5.4% in 2014/15 to 2.6% in 2017/18. We note that the gaps from 2015/16 onwards are not statistically significant.

At a detailed level, the attainment of students with declared mental health and social communication disabilities are out of line with our institutional average, with an attainment gap (to other students) of 5% and 6.9% respectively, although we note that the latter gap is below the sector and not statistically significant, and in both cases student populations are relatively small (250 and 15 respectively).

OfS' KPM 5 seeks to reduce the attainment gap between disabled and other students. We will, therefore, commit to maintaining our positive performance across the life of this Plan. In recognition of the relatively small population and the performance swings that small changes in absolute performance can have on percentage gaps, our target will seek to ensure that any gap will not increase to a statistically significant level.

### **Progression to highly-skilled employment or further study**

81.9% of our students with a reported disability achieved a highly-skilled job in 2016/17; this is 11 percentage points higher than the sector. Over the period from 2012/13 we have seen a continuous positive trajectory, with the highly-skilled employment gap between disabled and non-disabled students falling from 6% to -2.6% in 2017/18, where our disabled student population has a higher highly-skilled employability rate than their non-disabled peers. This picture is replicated across the detailed level, with gaps ranging from -0.3% for students with mental health disabilities, to a -7.4% gap for students with sensory disabilities. In all cases our students with reported disabilities outperform their non-disabled peers.

The data show a consistent and strongly positive performance for our students with reported disabilities in gaining highly-skilled employability; as such we do not intend to set a target in this area but will continue to provide support and services to these groups under the Birmingham Scholar framework (see, particularly, our Access to Careers programme, outlined in Section 3 (Strategic Measures).

## **1.5 Care leavers**

Data on care leavers is based on self-identification. We respect the wishes of those students who decline to be identified as care-leavers.

Given the very small Care Leaver population at the University (our care leaver population in 2018/19 was less than 45, or less than 0.3% of the population), we do not propose formal targets as part of this Plan (such small populations can result in significant swings in performance on the basis of the performance of one or two students). Instead we will continue to develop our suite of specific support services for Care Leavers, examples of which we provide as part of the self-assessment below. Our commitment to providing support to care leavers across the student lifecycle is demonstrated by the fact that we are a signatory to the 'The Care Leaver Covenant' which is part of the government's Keep on Caring strategy to support people leaving care to become independent. Our commitment is underpinned by a working group (with membership including the Guild of Students) who consider the University-wide support available to care leavers and its overall effectiveness.

### **Access**

To date our access initiatives have supported care-leavers to access higher education as part of our broad programme of support through Pathways to Birmingham as well as pre-16 activity. In 2018, the University received UCAS applications from 256 self-identified care leavers, 89 of which received an offer. Our intake of Care Leavers has increased from 9 in 2014/15 to 17 in 2018/19.

We work with Birmingham Virtual Schools, local authorities and local HEIs to provide a robust programme of activity for care experienced young people. We are active participants of National Network of Education for Care Leavers and the West Midlands Care Leavers Network, and we have a presence on the Propel website. We give care experienced applicants priority access to our outreach programmes, and provide a single point of contact for young people in care, care leavers and their advisers. We work very closely with the Birmingham Children's Trust, ensuring their personal advisers have a named contact to discuss any prospective or current applications to the University. In addition, our University of Birmingham School admissions policy affords priority to Looked After or Previously Looked After children.

### **Success (Non-continuation and attainment)**

The aggregated continuation rate (2014/15 to 2018/19) for our care leavers is 91.8%; this is compared to 94.2% for all other UK-domiciled UG entrants. Good Honours attainment (aggregated 2015/16 - 2017/18) was 80.0% compared with 88.3% among all other UK-domiciled UG leavers.

Care leavers are invited to attend an enhanced welcome event and social networking event at the start of their studies at Birmingham, with the aim of supporting transition and, ultimately, retention. Care leavers are eligible to receive an accommodation deposit waiver, receive priority for their first choice University-owned halls of residence and flexible contracts for University-owned student accommodation (covering the full calendar year). We are further enhancing our support, following student feedback, with the provision of a welcome package including, for example, bedding, kitchen utensils and a food voucher.

### **Progression to employment or further study**

Graduate employability (aggregated over two years 2015/16 and 2016/17) for our Care Leavers was 91%. This shows that our Care Leaver students are more likely to secure a highly-skilled level job than the average (young) English student<sup>8</sup>.

Care leavers are prioritised for the Gateway Bursary which provides financial support to students undertaking internships or work experience relevant to their future career (see Strategic Measures section), and for the Impact Challenge. Further work is underway to enhance the support we provide to care leavers who apply for a place on our internships, graduate training programmes and apprenticeships.

## **1.6 Intersections of disadvantage**

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<sup>8</sup> Average graduate employability rate for young, full-time, first degree students is 71%

Intersectional analysis has been incorporated into our analysis above, in order to better understand our performance and the potential reasons underlying it. We have shown, for example, that locally-domiciled A2B and Black students are contributing disproportionately to our P4Q1 highly-skilled employability gap. We have seen that BAME students are well-represented in our A2B and low participation intake population, with 76% of our (2018/19) A2B intake from BAME backgrounds, and 11% of our P4Q1 intake being of Black ethnicity. A number of our targets reflect the outcomes of this inter-sectional analysis, particularly a focus on locally-domiciled Black students for increased employability support.

### **1.7 Other groups who experience barriers in higher education**

The University of Birmingham School was established with a clear purpose to create a highly diverse and inclusive study body, and the aim of advancing the educational progression, attainment and aspiration of Birmingham's young people. Our admissions policy has resulted in a highly diverse community, with a range of educational ability. In 2018/19, 66% of our school population were from BAME backgrounds, 4.8% of our secondary population comprised children with Education Health Care Plans (compared to 1.6% for all state-funded mainstream secondary schools in England) and 14.6% were eligible for free school meals. 36% of our intake qualified for Premium Funding (compared with national figures of 27.9%), and 17.3% had English as an additional language. From this diverse cohort we have seen real success in supporting students to progress to higher education. 80% (112 students) of the 2017/18 A-level cohort gained places at universities, with 43% of these students progressing to Russell Group institutions (41% of which enrolled at the University of Birmingham).

## **2. Strategic aims and objectives**

**Our ambition** is that students with the potential to succeed at the University of Birmingham have the opportunity to gain access, achieve their academic potential and progress successfully to their chosen careers or further study. We have held this ambition since our creation in 1900, and throughout our history have sought to provide leadership, innovation, and a realistic, evidence-based approach to student access and participation.

We are the only UK University to open and own a fully comprehensive, non-selective secondary training school dedicated to raising the aspiration and the potential of its pupils, and this is testament to our belief in the importance of widening participation. As one of the largest teacher training centres in the UK we also have a direct impact on improving the quality of teaching, as well as increasing opportunities for young people to be well-informed, encouraged and engaged as a means to support them to secure higher levels of prior academic attainment.

We recognise that addressing many of the challenges in securing equality of opportunity will require a coordinated approach across the entire educational and employment sector. Our strategy is therefore a dual approach recognising where we are able to effect change internally and where we can work in partnership with the sector to support change.

We are working with our regional and national partners to support students to access the course and institution that is right for them. Examples include our NCOP, AimHigher, Realising Opportunities collaborative programmes and our strategic partnership with University College Birmingham as well as our recent OfS-funded programme with Newman University and University College Birmingham to support locally-domiciled graduates into employment. We outline more detail on our strategic approach to delivering change in partnership with others in section 3.1.

### **2.1 Target groups**

We are aware that, as in the wider society, there is work to do to achieve the ambition of equality of opportunity and outcome. The assessment of performance outlined above has highlighted that there are differential outcomes across the student lifecycle between some student groups. We are also aware that in order to achieve the most significant impact we need to adopt a targeted and focussed approach to our interventions and support; an approach that remains true to, and reflective of, our civic values, our institutional context and identity, as well as the values and priorities of our whole student body.

We have taken a data-led and realistic yet challenging approach to identifying the target groups and priorities outlined within this Plan, informed by (i) the Office for Students' Key Performance Measures, (ii) assessment of our current performance and (iii) our broader institutional strategic priorities. We have identified the following target groups for each stage of the student lifecycle:

Area	Target groups
<b>Access:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• POLAR4 Quintile 1 applicants;</li> <li>• Pathway to Birmingham candidates (based on a basket of measures of disadvantage which includes students who live in areas of low progression to higher education, who first generation entrants to higher education, who have a household income that is below the national average, who have a disability and are in receipt of a personal independence payment, and/or who are estranged from parents or guardians).<sup>9</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Attainment:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students of Black and Asian ethnicity;</li> <li>• Students with a reported disability;</li> <li>• Students from Polar 4 Quintile 1.</li> </ul>
<b>Highly-skilled employability:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black students;</li> <li>• Locally-domiciled students who joined the University via our Pathway to Birmingham programmes.</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Aims and objectives

### **Aim 1: To continue to expand, develop and broaden the reach of our proven outreach initiatives to widen access to higher education.**

Our objectives build on our experience which shows that a multi-dimensional measure of disadvantage - which recognises the multiple and complex backgrounds from which our students come - is preferable to a singular focus on P4Q1 cohorts. As outlined earlier, evidence shows that a singular emphasis on the Polar methodology, with its known limitations (such as being one-dimensional, lacking links to economic disadvantage etc.), risks interventions being targeted away from those students with the most complex disadvantage and greatest need (as evidenced by the research<sup>10</sup> showing that only 13% of students on free school meals live in P4Q1 postcode areas). We are also keen to ensure that students' from P4Q2 are not further disadvantaged by the emphasis on P4Q1 students. We will therefore continue to target students with multiple measures of disadvantage through our *Pathways to Birmingham* programme of access support.

We do, however, recognise the shift in national focus to increasing P4Q1 access but we are concerned that the OfS target to reduce the gap in P4Q1 intake at high tariff institutions from 5:1 to 3:1 is unachievable without admitting students who would not be equipped to succeed at Birmingham, (especially in STEM subject where attainment in maths is a key requirement) and/or an uncomfortable engineering of intake which would be prejudicial to suitably qualified students from quintiles 2 to 5. In 2017/18 UCAS data showed that there were only c.2700 students, nationally, from P4Q1 postcodes who achieved grades of AAB or better, compared to c. 22,000 for P4Q5. Indeed, P4Q1 students account for only 6.6% (5755) of the total national BBB+ applicant population, so even the impact of our contextual offer scheme (discounting up to two grades against our standard offer) is limited in the context of such a small national pool.

Our objectives therefore seek to balance our commitment to building on our previous and proven successes in supporting access across multiple measures of disadvantage alongside a realistic realignment with national ambition. We believe that our combination of objectives to 2025 are ambitious yet realistic and provide a strong foundation for our longer-term ambitions. Our specific Access-related objectives, which are underpinned by formal APP targets, are:

- 1a) to increase the proportion of our intake of students with multiple measures of disadvantage to 10% by 2025, as measured by the percentage of our entrants that are admitted through our Pathways to Birmingham scheme. This represents a challenging 77%**

<sup>9</sup> Our Pathways to Birmingham (P2B) programme uses a basket of indicators to identify disadvantage. All applicants attend a partner school for their Key Stage 5 study and have attended a non-selective state-funded school at Key Stage 4. Applicants who have experience of public care are not required to meet any further criteria. All other applicants are required to meet three criteria of disadvantage

<sup>10</sup> *Using contextualised admissions to widen access to higher education: a guide to the evidence base*, Vikki Boliver, Stephen Gorard and Nadia Siddiqui. Durham University Evidence Centre for Education.

growth on the target we have previously set ourselves (6.2% of our entrants) and will necessitate a more flexible approach involving widening access to our pathway programmes.

- 1b) to reduce the gap between the number of students we admit from the most (P4Q5) and least (P4Q1) represented groups to a ratio of 5:1 (from 7.4:1) by 2025.** In the longer-term, as collaborative initiatives to address challenges in prior attainment begin to take root, we will seek to grow and maintain our share of P4Q1 students in line with the national growth in the pool of appropriately qualified students. Our current P4Q1 ratio is 7.4:1. Our modelling of intake suggests that to achieve a ratio of 5:1 will require us to reduce our intake tariff to at least to BCC, and potentially to CCC for some students (unless, of course, Government actions in schools result in better outcomes for more disadvantaged students over the period). In order to maintain our current tariff (and accounting for contextual offers) we would only achieve a 5:1 ratio through substitution of qualified P4Q5 applicants for P4Q1. We currently do not receive enough applications from P4Q1 students (of any grade combination) to achieve a ratio of 3:1. We have developed our yearly milestones for this target recognising that it will take time to embed our new initiatives. As such, our year 1 milestone reflects modest improvement on our baseline year to allow us to fully embed our activities whilst milestones for years 2-5 reflect challenging ambition to improve our performance.

**We also have an additional objective to contribute to sector targets by increasing the number of students participating in our post 16 outreach activities who then progress to other universities.** Whilst this is not included as a formal APP target, we will nonetheless commit to support 500 Pathway to Birmingham students each year to enrol at other UK HEIs. This reflects and recognises the important role that our outreach activities play in widening participation in higher education more broadly amongst under-represented groups.

**Aim 2: To continue to demonstrate leadership and innovation in regional and national collaborations and partnership activity.**

Working in partnership with key regional and national stakeholders is central to achieving our ambition. Individual institutions cannot, in isolation, deliver the rate of change set out by the OfS and we believe that regional and partnership approaches to widening access and improving prior attainment are necessary components of securing sustainable rates of change, particularly to address the currently very small national pool of suitably qualified P4Q1 applicants. Our role in working with local schools (including our own University Training School) and FE colleges to raise aspirations and support a long-term goal of improving access to and participation in HE remains a clear element and focus of our strategy. We remain committed to demonstrating leadership and innovation in our partnerships and activities. We will continue to support and invest in our **University of Birmingham Training School** to deliver its objectives of an inclusive student community and increased aspiration and attainment. We will also continue to **develop our strategic partnership with University College Birmingham**, using our collective expertise to raise aspirations and attainment, contribute to the regional skills agenda, support economic growth, and enhance the global position of the West Midlands. In section 3 (Strategic Measures), we outline the wide range of collaborative and partnership activities we undertake in support of promoting equality of access and success.

Our collaborative objectives are:

- 2a) to increase the proportion of Realising Opportunities (RO) students<sup>11</sup> accessing a research intensive university, within two years of becoming 'HE ready' and completing their Post-16 studies, by 12 percentage points (to 54%) by 2025.** This objective has been agreed between all RO partners, and will contribute to a national improvement in closing the gap in entry rates at higher tariff providers between the most and least underrepresented group. We have set a formal APP target to underpin this work. The target to increase articulation to research intensive institutions is challenging, yet realistic and evidence-led.

- 2b) to increase the percentage of Polar 4 Q1 learners engaged on Aimhigher West Midlands programmes** This objective has been agreed between all Aimhigher partners, and supports the OfS ambition to reduce the gap in HE participation between P4Q1-Q5 areas at sector level. For the

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<sup>11</sup> RO uses a robust targeting criteria and all RO students are from groups underrepresented in higher education

period of this plan, the activity of the partnership will have an enhanced focus on Q1 students, alongside our 'basket' approach. As the activity underpinning this objective is focussed on engagement, there is no formal APP target related to this work.

**Aim 3: To support student success through an inclusive and supportive environment which enables all students to reach their potential.**

In supporting student success, we provide an inclusive and supportive environment which enables all students to reach their potential. We will continue to develop and deliver targeted interventions throughout the student lifecycle to reduce any continuation and attainment gaps amongst our students. Where our self-assessment has shown that our students are succeeding at rates equivalent to, or better than, sector averages, we will seek to maintain this strong performance. Alongside this, our specific objectives are to:

- 3a) Reduce the gap in degree outcomes (1st or 2:1) for our Black and Asian students** (as compared to their White peers) to 5% by 2025, and to eliminate or reduce to a non-significant level in the longer-term.
- 3b) Reduce the gap in degree outcomes (1st or 2:1) for our P4Q1** (as compared to their P4Q5 peers) to a non-significant level by 2025.
- 3c) Ensure that any gap in degree outcomes (1st or 2:1) between disabled students and other students remains non-significant.**

**Aim 4: To support our students to progress to employment by supporting them to develop the personal and social capital they need to make an informed choice about their futures.**

In supporting progression to employment we support all our students to develop the personal and social capital they need to make an informed choice about their futures. By this, we mean that we will equip our students with the skills, experience, knowledge and, importantly, the confidence, to pursue their post-study ambitions.

Whilst we recognise that highly-skilled and graduate level employment may not be the desired or appropriate outcome for all our students, this is an ambition for the majority of our students. We have therefore outlined two objectives specifically focussed on addressing the cohorts of students we believe to be in most need of additional support to gain highly-skilled employability. In setting our objectives we have reflected on the level of challenge to increase the absolute employability rate for our priority student groups. We are committed to supporting our students to the right graduate destination for them, and our evaluation and experience to date has shown that intensive and sustained support is necessary. The ambition set out in our objectives is challenging yet realistic given the level of support required and the context of the regional job market, where (our evaluation shows) the majority of our priority groups will seek employment. Our objectives are:

- 4a) Reduce the highly-skilled employability gap for our locally-domiciled P2B students** to 3% by (from 9.5%) 2025.
- 4b) Reduce the highly-skilled employability gap for our Black students** to 2% (from 7.9%) by 2025.

## **3 Strategic measures**

### **3.1 Whole provider strategic approach**

The University of Birmingham has a clear, overarching and institution-wide strategy that has been developed to align with and support the aims and objectives outlined above. Our strategic approach has been developed with engagement across the University (e.g. Professional Services, University Executive Board, our academic Schools and representatives from our student body (including members of our Guild of Students)). Our strategy is reflective of the University of Birmingham mission, and seeks to balance our global profile and priorities with a clear and prioritised focus on areas where we are able to

make the most impactful changes. Our approach has been endorsed by University Council, and this Plan has been approved by the Chair of Council on behalf of the Governing Body.

### Birmingham Scholar Framework

Our strategy is underpinned by our new *Birmingham Scholar* Framework. This framework sits across the full applicant and student lifecycle and provides an umbrella structure for targeted, personalised interventions to support those applicants and students, primarily from disadvantaged/under-represented backgrounds, who may be in need of further help (in addition to the suite of support available for all students) to progress and complete their course successfully. The Birmingham Scholar framework includes a commitment to scale up existing and proven successful activities (for example our Academic Skills Centre and our Access to Careers programme) as well as developing new initiatives in support of our targets and ambitions (see Strategic Measures for more detail).

Figure 5 outlines the Theory of Change (ToC) underpinning the Birmingham Scholar Framework. The overarching changes we are seeking to embed as part of our ambition are (i) fair and equitable access to the University resulting in a diverse and well qualified student population, and (ii) equality of opportunity for all our students to achieve their full academic potential and to successfully realise their post-University ambitions. The Birmingham Scholar framework has three main components aligned to the stages of the student lifecycle and the aims and objectives outlined in this Plan: Pathways to Birmingham (Aims 1 and 2), Pathways through Study (Aim 3) and Post-graduation Pathway (Aim 4). We provide examples (*Strategic Measures* section) below of the specific support and interventions which are offered under the Birmingham Scholar framework in support of our strategic aims.

Applicants to the University via Pathways to Birmingham will automatically become *Birmingham Scholars* when they join the university. Other students displaying key characteristics of disadvantage (aligning with, but not limited to, our target groups outlined above) will be identified, flagged in our Personal Academic Tutoring system, and invited to join the programme. Importantly, students can become a *Birmingham Scholar* at any point in their journey, as and when our evidence indicates an issue or need. The flexibility of our framework to target those in most need of support, underpinned but our multiple indicators of disadvantage, will enable us to most effectively address the gaps outlined in our self-assessment.

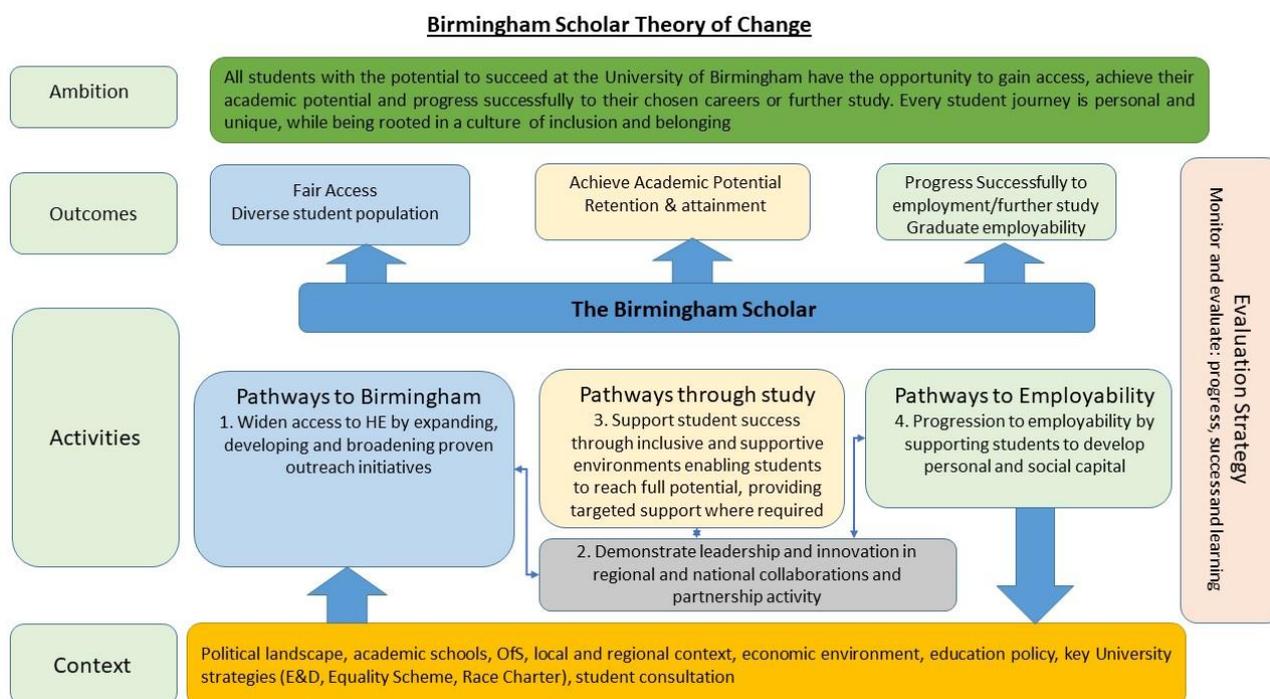


Figure 5: Birmingham Scholar Theory of Change

Working within the institutional *Birmingham Scholar* framework, our academic Schools are a central element. Each academic School will be provided with high quality data on their own performance in the University priority target areas. Schools will produce local action plans which focus on issues

manifested at academic School level and can be nuanced against the institutional picture. In this way our Schools are empowered to address performance in ways that make most impact in their context while being informed and guided by our institutional principles and objectives. We provide examples of local interventions in the later section on Strategic Measures to illustrate this. *Local area, collaboration and partnership activity*

As we outlined under Strategic Aim 2, working in partnership with key regional and national stakeholders is central to our strategy. The majority of our collaborative and partnership activity seeks to support increased access to higher education and/or increase the national pool of suitably qualified students from disadvantaged backgrounds (not just P4Q1) through access and attainment raising activities

The **University of Birmingham Training School (UBS)** is an exemplar of our innovation and commitment to supporting the OfS ambition to widening access to higher education. The School opened in September 2015 with the aim of advancing the educational progression, attainment and aspiration of Birmingham's young people. Our School operates a 'nodal' admissions policy designed to recruit pupils from across the city to ensure that its population reflects the rich diversity of our city. Pupils with a Statement of Special Needs or an Educational Health and Care Plan, as well as those who are Looked After or Previously Looked After, are given priority, regardless of where they live. This admissions policy results in a highly diverse school community: in 2018/19, 66% of our school population were from BAME backgrounds, 4.8% of our secondary population comprised children with Education Health Care Plans (compared to 1.6% for all state-funded mainstream secondary schools in England) and 14.6% were eligible for free school meals. 36% of our intake qualified for Premium Funding (compared with national figures of 27.9%) and 17.3% had English as an additional language.

Our **strategic partnership with University College Birmingham** is focused on using our collective expertise to raise aspirations and attainment, contribute to the regional skills agenda, support economic growth, and enhance the global position of the West Midlands. This established partnership creates a model for collaboration and aims to improve outcomes for young people and support the city's long-term economic success through a range of joint activities. The partnership has taken a particular focus on enhancing student opportunities through developing FE to HE pathways. Following a successful bid for catalyst funding, the UoB/UCB partnership is working with South and City College Birmingham (SCCB) to develop an innovative engineering progression pathway from FE to HE in order to support the development of higher level skills in engineering (see Aim 2 Strategic Measures for further detail). The partnership has also recently been successful in securing OfS Challenge funding for a 3-year project (2019-2022) with Newman University to address the challenges faced by locally-domiciled students and graduates from underrepresented groups in progressing into highly-skilled and graduate level employment while also seeking to meet the demands of the local labour market (see Aim 4 Strategic Measures for further details).

We are also a partner institution in the recently awarded **Greater Birmingham and Solihull Institute of Technology Consortium (GBS IoT)**. Due to open in September 2019, the IoT is a regional consortium of 12 technology education providers<sup>12</sup>, with an emphasis on advanced manufacturing and close links to industry. It aims to provide a single point of contact for industry in the GBS LEP area to influence curricula and source and participate in skills training to meet their needs. It will also work closely with local schools to improve the pipeline of skilled personnel serving local advanced manufacturing industry. The IoT will also undertake research to better understand and support students from non-traditional backgrounds to undertake higher education study in technology subjects relevant to advanced manufacturing. Included in this will be research on the development of core maths skills and study skills (in particular, technical report writing). As an IoT partner, we will provide in-kind investment to support the aims of the Institute.

We are part of **Realising Opportunities (RO)**, a collaboration of research intensive universities working with shared objectives to support the OfS in eliminating the national gap in entry rates at higher-tariff providers between the most and least under-represented groups. RO also contributes to our own strategic aim to improve access to Birmingham from under-represented groups. We are the lead institution for the **Aimhigher West Midlands** partnership (which includes Aston University,

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<sup>12</sup> The 12 partners are: Aston University, Birmingham City University (BCU), University College Birmingham (UCB), Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet), Solihull College University Centre (SCUC), South and City College Birmingham (SCCB), The University of Birmingham (UoB).

Birmingham City University, University College Birmingham and the University of Worcester), working with young people facing multiple dimensions of disadvantage. The work of the partnership supports the OfS ambition to reduce the gap in HE participation between P4Q1-Q5 areas at sector level. We are also the lead institution for **Aimhigher Plus**, one of the largest of the 29 consortia delivering the NCOP, and are a partner in **Advancing Access**, a national collaboration of 24 selective universities working together with schools and colleges to develop and deliver CPD for teachers and advisors.

### ***Alignment with other strategies***

We are committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive learning and working environment, and this is demonstrated by embedding equality and diversity into our decision-making and service delivery at all levels. Our work on equality, diversity and inclusion is underpinned by a number of broad institutional strategies, each being complementary to our Access and Participation aims and objectives.

Our **Equality Scheme (2016-2020)** seeks to ensure that students from all backgrounds have an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. The Scheme reflects our broad duty to students and staff around issues of equality, but the challenges of differential student attainment and experience will continue to feature prominently in our work. Under the scheme to date we have transformed our data collection, analysis and understanding of students' protected characteristics. A significant campaign amongst the student body to promote data declaration at entry has resulted (in 2018) in our highest levels of available intelligence, reducing the response rate of "information not known" to less than 1% for ethnicity, faith, religious beliefs, sexual identity etc. We have introduced specific training for staff, including unconscious bias training and our library team has invested in the collection to promote BAME and LGBTQ authors.

The University is preparing to submit an application for the Advance HE **Race Equality Charter** Award (submission expected July 2019). In support of our application we have undertaken a significant research exercise - including over 2600 student survey respondents and 30 student focus groups - to better understand the experience of BAME students across the whole lifecycle. We are continuing to collate our evidence and will soon begin work to outline an ambitious three-year action plan against aspects of BAME access, attainment, progression to employment and overall satisfaction/experience – all of which will contribute and reinforce the targets set out in this Plan. Given the timing of the development of this Plan and the REC action plan, the actions and interventions will be aligned and cross-refer. Interventions which we outline in the 'Strategic Measures' section below will be included in our REC action plan.

Since our first **Employability Strategy** in 2011/12, highly-skilled and graduate employability has been an area of tremendous success for the University, producing innovative structures and models that have been recognised as sector-leading. Our current overall graduate employment rate is 86%, with rates across each of the OfS under-represented groups outperforming sector averages for students from more advantaged backgrounds. The future priorities for our Employability Strategy have been closely informed by the priorities set out in this Plan, and data from our 'Career Readiness' student survey and learning from the evaluation of our targeted interventions have directly informed the priority student cohorts targeted in this Plan.

We will be implementing a **New Academic Teaching Year** structure from 2020-21. The aim of the change to the new academic teaching year is to improve the learning experience for all students, and one of the key drivers behind the project was a concern about the impact of our current structure on disadvantaged students. In the new structure we will be able to offer more flexible programmes which will widen access, we can offer shorter, accredited mobility options to reduce cost, assessment is closer to teaching to facilitate earlier feedback on progress to ensure that problems can be identified at the earliest opportunity, and a new model for personal academic tutoring will ensure that the system is less daunting for first generation students. We are also introducing three new assessment support weeks and an enrichment week as an additional opportunity to build a wide range of personal and employability skills. These initiatives are being co-designed with our students.

### ***Strategic measures***

In this section we provide some examples of the measures we are taking to achieve our stated aims. The examples form part of our Birmingham Scholar framework; they are not exhaustive but are

indicative of the type and range of measures we provide to support our students (and prospective applicants).

**Aim 1: To continue to expand, develop and broaden the reach of our proven outreach initiatives to widen access to higher education (supporting achievement of objectives 1(a-b))**

Our post-16 outreach and access activity falls under the Pathways to Birmingham strand of the Birmingham Scholar framework. Our post-16 P2B scheme includes our Access to Birmingham (A2B), Routes to the Professions, Realising Opportunities, and Academic Enrichment Programmes, as well as our National Summer School. Participation in each of these programmes is based on a basket of measures of disadvantage to ensure we are appropriately targeting students in most need. Evaluation of our programmes has shown positive outcomes and informed our future investment. In 2018, 64% of our Academic Enrichment Programme participants progressed to a selective university and 32% of our Routes to the Professions (R2P) (Medicine) students progressed to study medicine.

As P2B applicants, students are supported through a range of pre-application activities designed to increase engagement, build the key study skills needed for higher education and address attainment shortfalls in key subject areas. We will introduce some specific measures designed in particular support of our targets to increase recruitment of P4Q1 students. These include:

- Extending our contextual offer scheme beyond the region to offer all P4Q1 applicants a one grade reduction on our standard offer;
- Supplementing our contextual offer scheme with a range of strategies to prioritise P4Q1 students who have narrowly missed the terms of their offer during Confirmation and Clearing;
- Piloting a pre-sessional Maths course for P4Q1 applicants to Engineering and Physical Sciences programmes who have narrowly missed the terms of their offer to support progression to the UG or Foundation programme, depending on the assessment of their needs;
- Piloting a fully funded Foundation Year for up to 12 P4Q1 students whose predicted A-level grades would not have secured a conditional offer, and may have even discouraged an initial application to Birmingham.
- A range of initiatives to support academic attainment in schools which include the use of undergraduate tutors for A2B applicants, online tutoring in partnership with MyTutor, and after school year 13 A-level maths classes. Our evaluation has shown positive impact on attainment (of almost half a grade - +0.4) of students participating in MyTutor online tuition and the year 13 maths sessions compared against students non-tutored subjects.

Our pre-16 activity recognises the importance of supporting schools and their students at key points in their secondary education. This can help to raise aspirations and awareness of higher education opportunities, and support teachers and students to select and achieve the appropriate subjects/qualifications for ongoing progression. Our intensive programmes include mentoring, residentials and our sustained Forward Thinking Programme, and we regularly engage 600 students in years 8-11. Evaluation of Forward Thinking previously reported to the OfS has consistently shown that students' GCSE performance and HE entry rates outperforms the West Midlands average.

**Aim 2: To continue to demonstrate leadership and innovation in regional and national collaborations and partnership activity (supporting achievement of objectives 2(a-b))**

In previous sections we have outlined some of the partnerships and collaborations of which we are part. Examples of the specific interventions we undertake as part of each include:

- **University College Birmingham partnership:** Under the UoB/UCB partnership banner we have undertaken (with the support of Catalyst funding) a unique and innovative collaboration with South and City College and partners in industry to address the regional skills agenda and widen access to higher level engineering qualifications. A three-year programme has been jointly developed as an alternative route to an engineering bachelor's degree. The programme includes a choice of pathways including Electronic and Electrical Engineering, and Mechatronic and Robotic Engineering and is targeted specifically at students who would not traditionally progress from STEM A-Levels to an engineering degree at a Russell Group university. It will seek to plug the gap in provision between FE Colleges (which tend to take more vocationally-focused students) and research-intensive universities (which traditionally admit more academically focused students) and so provide a route to overcome this binary divide. A key feature of the new programme is the 'enhanced curriculum' which provides students with the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge,

and competencies (across a range of key employability skills) that would not be developed within a 'traditional' foundation degree programme. The curriculum has inbuilt flexibility with various access and exit points to allow students to progress at a pace that suits them. As of May 2019 we have received 21 applications and expect the first cohort (September 2019) to be around 30 students.

- **Aimhigher:** As part of our collaborative work with Aimhigher, we will be working with other regional institutions to increase the number of students from POLAR 4 Quintile 1 accessing services to support destinations into post 16 education. We are committed to the longstanding partnership activity in the West Midlands region. Our evidence from both our APP funded work and our NCOP activity shows that increased engagement leads to increased HE participation and thus will contribute to the sector wide ambition to reduce the gap between POLAR 4 Quintile 5 and Quintile 1. We will continue to work collaboratively with cohorts of 11-16 year olds on a sustained programme of activity. This activity will be tailored to the needs of learners but typically involves mentoring from undergraduates and other role models, residential opportunities and a range of activities to address aspirations, awareness, attainment, access and application. This provides a progressive and integrated programme of support and advice, to widen participation in HE at sector level. Post-16, whilst the intensive face to face work of the partnership will cease, we will continue a programme of communication and signposting to enable students to engage with the programmes and activities offered by our partner HEIs and neighbouring consortia as part of their recruitment activity. In delivering the programme we will engage with parents and guardians, schools and other influencers. Our activity will seek to complement any activity funded by the OfS such as the NCOP, but also sustain proven activity subject to resource available.
- **Realising Opportunities** Students participate in a sustained programme of on campus activity, including taster days, subject-specific master classes and residential summer schools alongside mentoring and an academic assignment leading to an alternative offer recognised by all partner universities. The programme is underpinned by robust evaluation, undertaken by independent evaluators, which is a theory of change model using narrative, empirical research and causality evaluation types to evidence impact.
- **Advancing Access:** The aim of the programme is to support student progression to selective universities by equipping teachers/ advisors with the information and tools they need to advise students effectively. There is a particular focus on working with schools with historically low levels of progression to universities. The range of tools and activities that are offered through the programme include a suite of free online resources for Schools, teachers and advisors, CPD sessions delivered in Schools, and conferences for teachers and advisers hosted on-campus.
- **University of Birmingham Training School (UBS):** We have outlined above the inclusive and diverse admissions policy of our School. Our secondary school admits students from a vast range of educational attainment backgrounds. This is a clear principle of our School: we welcome pupils of all abilities to develop their character and achieve academic success in a way which is meaningful to their individual circumstances. The School aims to equip pupils and students for their onward journeys, creating great citizens who will help to create great communities. UBS pupils benefit from a distinctive Birmingham experience which has a strong focus on raising aspirations, increasing awareness of higher education and increasing social mobility. Pupils 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. These enrichment activities are part of the School's commitment to 'Character Education' which is a curriculum framework for the development of moral, civic, behavioural – as well as intellectual – virtues. It is spearheaded by the University's Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, and was recognised in the School's recent Ofsted report for its national and international acclaim. Staff from the University's Careers Network and Outreach teams are actively involved in the pastoral programme for sixth formers, providing advice on higher education or alternative options after sixth form. 80% (112 students) of the 2017/18 A-level cohort gained places at universities, with 43% of these students progressing to Russell Group institutions (41% of which enrolled at Birmingham).
- **Teacher training and educational research:** The UBS works closely with the University's School of Education collaborating in areas such as initial teacher education, educational research, evidence informed practice and CPD, all of which directly and positively impacts our regional schools. Our teacher training programmes provide a key pipeline of high quality teachers to schools in Birmingham and the wider region. In collaboration with University staff, the UBS 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 knowledge of their subject to enhance the student learning experience.

### **Aim 3: To support student success through an inclusive and supportive environment which enables all students to reach their potential (supporting achievement of objectives 3(a-c))**

Under the banner of *Pathways through Study* (within the Birmingham Scholar Framework) we will provide targeted interventions to support the specific cohorts identified in our aims and objectives to progress through study and achieve degree outcomes at a rate equitable with their peers. Our enhanced academic tutoring system (EATS) is a central component of our Pathways through study framework. Personal tutors provide front-line support and are able to signpost students to support tailored to their specific needs.

Our actions and initiatives to support student success are developed from our own research and evaluation, as well as contributions to sector evidence about the most impactful interventions<sup>13</sup>. Interventions are available across the student lifecycle recognising that gaps in non-continuation and student academic success can develop from the first transition into higher education. Our interventions start with support for transition, developing belongingness, wellbeing support on course and the opportunity to develop academic skills that underpin successful study. We have committed to implementing the UUK framework for addressing the BAME attainment gap, and a number of initiatives supported by the framework are already in train. In addition, the University has a well-established research expertise within our Centre for Research in Race and Education which, in tandem with individual project evaluation, will continue to develop a broad framework of knowledge and evidence to inform and evaluate our activity.

Examples of initiatives within the *Pathways through Study* component include:

- **Equality & Diversity Student Ambassador Scheme** (*specifically targeted to support continuation and attainment for priority student groups – BAME, low participation, disabled*): The Ambassador Scheme is a student-led OfS funded project working in collaboration with The University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University. This initiative, cited by the NUS and UUK as an example of best practice in the sector, supports students to be successful, empowered and to develop a sense of belonging through peer-to-peer networks. The Ambassadors are primarily recruited with protected characteristics (BAME, Students with Disabilities, LGBTQ students and first generation students) and are trained as visible peer mentors and ambassadors: they provide a point of contact for advice and signposting to available support. They are visible role models and champions of the academic and social experience on campus for under-represented groups. The University has recruited 6 lead student ambassadors and 80 volunteer student ambassadors as part of the equality and diversity scheme. The ambassadors operate locally in each of the University's colleges and have co-created and delivered training and awareness activity for their peers. Examples of their work include: structured peer to peer mentoring with students sharing the same protected characteristics; establishment of student groups and networks (for example a new students society for BAME scientists); formal and informal research activities to represent the student experience at College-level Equality & Diversity Committees and across the University.
- **Exam practices and study group diversity** (*specifically targeted at the BAME/Black/Asian attainment gap, with P4Q1 (and IMD5 where appropriate) intersectionality*): We have undertaken detailed statistical analysis of student performance on module assessment against diversity characteristics, piloting this approach in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences. This work identified that those modules with written unseen exams had the most significant BAME attainment gaps, particularly for Black students. Research<sup>14</sup> has also identified that study groups which lack diversity result in BAME under-performance, and this has been reinforced through qualitative evidence from student focus groups. Learning from this has informed specific targeted interventions which are now being implemented in the College, such as establishing School-level BAME student groups, increasing the diversity of study/revision groups (through targeted allocation) and establishing workshops for staff to increase awareness and understanding of the BAME attainment challenges.

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<sup>13</sup> "What Works?": Student retention and success, (2017), Closing the Gap (UUK/NUS report), (May 2019)

<sup>14</sup> Per Miller, M (2016), *Ethnicity Attainment Gap Literature Review*, Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Unit, University of Sheffield.

- **Staff Training and Toolkits** (*specifically targeted at the BAME/Black/Asian attainment gap, with P4Q1 (and IMD5 where appropriate) intersectionality*): In line with the UUK BAME attainment framework, we are establishing mechanisms for good practice to be shared across the institution and for staff training to take place in priority areas. The Access and Participation Working Group is in the process of developing a BAME intervention toolkit, informed by learning from our Centre for Research in Race and Education. We are launching the new toolkit for the start of the 2019/20 academic year.
- **The Academic Skills Centre (ASC)** (*targeted to support continuation and attainment for priority student groups – particularly BAME, low participation, disabled, P2B students<sup>15</sup>*): The ASC supports students with their academic transition, progression and attainment through targeted support to develop the academic, digital and study skills needed for successful higher education study. The ASC works closely with our academic Schools to embed the development of skills within the local curriculum and, provides targeted, personalised support to students identified in our target groups and/or by personal tutors and other professional support services. This approach is based on research<sup>16</sup> and established practice in the sector and enables us to deliver important academic support at times - and in contexts - that are most relevant in students' learning journeys. Services provided by the ASC include an online Academic Skills Gateway (ASG), personalised 121 sessions, Peer-Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), online guides and Skype appointments, and embedded training developed in direct partnership with Schools. The resources offered by the ASC mirror the good practice outlined in the OfS *Good Practice Regulatory Advice*<sup>17</sup> for building engagement and belonging, and reducing non-continuation.
- **Inclusive Teaching and Learning practices** (*supporting continuation and attainment for disabled students*): We have introduced digital reading lists and digitised content (ResourceLists@bham and FindIt@bham) which have been extremely successful in improving access to our extensive print and online collections through a single search interface integrated with Canvas (our digital learning platform). In particular, these services have increased the accessibility of course materials for our disabled students. Our lecture capture facility (Panopto) supports individualised student learning needs, for example by enabling students to listen again to lectures which can be particularly beneficial for those students who struggle to take notes in a lecture and by supporting those students who wish to take additional time to consider the learning points made. We also make lecture slides available in advance via Canvas. Our approach to inclusive education is supported and informed by research undertaken in our Department of Inclusion, Disability and Special Needs.
- **Improving understanding of the local (School-level) issues underpinning the BAME attainment gap** (*specifically targeted at the BAME/Black/Asian attainment gap, with P4Q1 intersectionality, and IMD5 where appropriate*): The University's Educational Enhancement Partnership Fund, run in collaboration with the University of Nottingham, focussed on establishing projects specifically dedicated to understanding and addressing the BAME attainment gap at local academic School level. Three UoB-led projects are currently funded: (i) a School of Political Science and International Studies-led project to improve curriculum diversity and representation, (ii) a School of Sport and Exercise-led project to design and implement a framework for reverse mentoring programme to enhance equality, diversity and inclusion in academic settings, with the aim of increasing BAME student engagement and satisfaction with their academic experience, and (iii) a College of Engineering and Physical Sciences-led project to identify and pilot best practice from the wider sector to address BAME attainment gaps in STEM subjects. Outcomes, learning and good practice from these projects will feed into the development of further interventions to support BAME attainment. Learning will be disseminated in a number of ways, including our signature MicroCPD initiative that ensures new evidence reaches all staff.
- **Early interventions for mental health**: The University has been successful in its bid for £650,000 of OfS Challenge Funding to further develop our mental health support around early intervention – an area of excellence in our research. We will be working in parallel with our significant existing student support to deliver NHS specialist services on campus through partnership with Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, Forward Thinking Birmingham and the Children's Society. Skilled professionals, ranging from qualified therapists to youth workers, will utilise early-intervention approaches to enhance student mental health and wellbeing on campus, increase personal

<sup>15</sup> As P2B is aimed at students with multiple indicators of disadvantage, this will also support P4Q1 and IMD5 performance

<sup>16</sup> Thomas et al (2017), Stevenson, J., O'Mahony, J., Khan, O., Ghaffar, F., and Stiell, B. (2019) *Understanding and overcoming the challenges of targeting students from under-represented and disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds*: [Report to the Office for Students]. Thomas, L., et al. (2017) *Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change*. HEA.

<sup>17</sup> Office for Students (2018) *Regulatory Advice 6: Good Practice Advice on the Preparation of Access and Participation Plans for 2019-20*.

resilience, and enhance referrals for a right service, right time outcome. The project recognises the University's leadership in this field: adopting a Whole University approach recommended by the UoB Mental Health Policy Commission Report 2018 and evaluation of the project impact and outcomes will be supported by academic expertise from our Institute of Mental Health.

**Aim 4: To support our students to progress to employment by supporting them to develop the personal and social capital they need to make an informed choice about their futures (supporting achievement of objectives 4(a-b))**

Many of the interventions we provide in relation to employability are specifically aimed at improving employability for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our performance trajectory to date underlines the value and impact of this investment (see self-assessment section), and we will continue to develop our support to build on past successes.

Within this Plan we have identified that Black and locally-domiciled students who have joined the University through our *Pathways to Birmingham* schemes require additional support to achieve their potential. Our evaluation activity has shown that these cohorts in particular face challenges both in developing employability skills and competencies while studying, and in entering the job market on graduation. Our experience shows that some of these students are not engaging with the on-campus employability activities or support, and they are also less likely than other student groups to move to different geographic areas to seek appropriate jobs. This analysis is supported by research<sup>18</sup> which suggests that disadvantaged students are not always aware of the importance of extracurricular activities in securing employment, and consequently tend to de-prioritise social and enhancement activities. For some students, there will also be additional pressures on their time that make engagement more challenging, and for Black students in particular, a lack of role models and examples of relatable graduate success stories exacerbates a lack of engagement and 'belongingness'. The Birmingham Scholar *Post-graduation Pathway* provides access to a range of interventions developed with this learning in mind and informed, also, by the lived experience of our students (though focus groups and other evaluation/engagement activity). Examples include:

- **Access to Careers (A2C):** Our unique employability programme is a targeted skills and employability programme which offers specific guidance, career development opportunities and work-related activity for our priority Birmingham Scholars. The A2C programme includes personalised strengths guidance, visits to local businesses and practical opportunities/experience with employers. Early evaluation of this activity has identified a reported benefit to our students from greater confidence, leadership ability, and clearer career ideas for the future.
- **Guaranteed work-related placements for target student groups:** The value of work experience on highly-skilled and graduate employability has been well documented. The 2019 *High Fliers* report highlighted that more than a third of recruiters stated that graduates with no previous work experience were unlikely to be successful during the selection processes. Our target (P2B and Black) students will receive a guaranteed offer of work-related activity within their first two years at Birmingham. This might include business treks (where students are taken on multiple employer visits on a short time scale), virtual internships, business and consultancy challenges, and/or mentoring.
- **Employability Coaches:** Experience has already shown us that our priority cohorts require additional support to engage in the careers services we provide, and we have already seen an increase in engagement through specifically targeted activities, with 31% of A2B students (who currently benefit from our targeted interventions such as A2C) participating in employability-related activity outside of the core curriculum, compared to 26% of all first year students. To improve levels of engagement, and to ensure target groups benefit more fully from the range of support available to them, we will provide a dedicated Employability Coach for our P2B and Black students. The Coach will work closely with our target students whilst they are at university, as well as into the post-graduation period, to provide personalised support and career coaching. The post-graduation period is especially critical for this type of support given the challenges (such as building new professional networks outside of their own local circles) that our locally domiciled students face when seeking to enter the regional labour market. This approach is based on research<sup>19</sup> which

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<sup>18</sup> Bathmaker et al (2008)

<sup>19</sup> Shury, J, Vivian, D, Turner, C, Downing, C 'Planning for success: Graduates' career planning and its effect on graduate outcomes' Research report March 2017, IFF Research, and Robertson, P. J 'The well-being outcomes of career guidance' 2013 British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, Volume 41, 2013 - Issue 3: Re-framing careers work, Pages 254-266

show that career planning, work experience and targeted job applications produce better graduate employment outcomes.

- **Gateway Bursaries:** Our sector-leading scheme is targeted at priority student groups (defined as A2B students, registered disabled, leaving care, first generation of the family into HE, in receipt of a Chamberlain Award, lone parent and ethnic minorities) and offers 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; previous opportunities secured by our students have ranged from a coding internship in China, to the provision of comprehensive health services to rural communities in Tanzania. Impact assessment provides clear evidence of impact on the graduate employability of participants in the Scheme as compared to the overall cohort: P4Q1 participants, for example, saw a 15% uplift in graduate employability compared with the overall cohort. As such we will extend and enhance the scheme to support our priority (P2B and Black) cohorts.
- **Local (Commuter) Students:** In partnership with our Guild of students we will be delivering targeted employability and employer events and training to support commuter students who are often less able to engage with standard extra-curricular events owing to personal circumstances and family commitments for example. Coupled with support by careers specialists our interventions will focus on addressing the employability gap between locally domiciled and other students.
- **Digital tools:** we have introduced PebblePad as the communication platform for students and personal academic tutors, and to provide students with a digital space in which to collect, reflect on and develop material for their CVs. In addition, from 2019-20, we will be offering all students, staff and alumni (up to 2 years from graduation) 'Linked In Learning' accounts both to provide easy access to a vast range of bite-sized employment skills modules and to encourage students to build an external Linked In profile throughout their studies.

### Financial support

The provision of financial assistance underpins each of our strategic aims, from supporting our targeted recruitment activity, to supporting student performance by reducing financial anxiety, to unlocking access to opportunities and experiences which might otherwise be unattainable. Our ambition is to ensure that the full 'Birmingham experience' is available to all of our students and we offer a range of targeted financial support packages to facilitate this.

In the last year we have undertaken a thorough evaluation of the impact and benefit of these awards. We commissioned independent consultants to undertake detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of the impact of financial support. As part of the evaluation we consulted with more than 2000 award recipients. Our evaluation recognised the positive impact financial support has on students during their studies but also highlighted that financial support alone does not fully address the challenges faced by our students. The conclusions from our evaluation have informed a remodelling of our bursary package with a more specific focus on the target groups identified as part of this Plan, and have underpinned the development of our Pathways to Birmingham framework.

The independent review of our financial support noted that '*the Award appears to level the playing field for All Degrees, and appears to have a slight positive influence on Continuation and Graduate Employment...as well as helping students to financially continue with their studies, the Chamberlain Award benefits students' abilities to more fully enjoy a more comfortable living and enjoy their time at university in a number of ways including travel, societies and other social activity, as well as supporting mental health and wellbeing*'. The qualitative data from student recipients of the awards reinforces this conclusion:

*'I wouldn't have had the experiences I had. I would have probably had to get a part time job while I was here, which would have affected my grades. I could revise and work without having to worry.'*

*'I wouldn't have been able to do my hobbies, look after myself and do well in my studies if I had to dedicate a lot of time to a job as well. I wouldn't have got the grades that I did if it wasn't for that money.'*

The table below summarises the quantitative evidence for the value of our financial support:

	Award holders	Comparator group
Non-continuation	3.3%	4.4%
Grad Employability	80.0%	78.7%
All degrees	99.1%	99.4%

Whilst the headline figures are positive, our evaluation identified that there are multiple barriers to be addressed in supporting our disadvantaged students, of which the financial element is only one. Indeed, our data showed that our most disadvantaged students, in receipt of the highest tier of financial support (£2k pa) performed less well across the key metrics than those with slightly higher household incomes (in receipt of the £1k pa award). This tells us that financial support alone is insufficient to redress the balance; this evidence has directly informed the development of our Birmingham Scholar framework, (building on our existing A2B programme) as a means to address these additional areas of need. The combined impact of financial support alongside a programme of targeted academic, pastoral and employability support was evidenced by our evaluation, which showed that our current A2B students outperformed their counterparts who received only financial support:

	A2B + award	Award only
Non-continuation	2.1%	3.3%
All degrees	100%	99.1%
1 <sup>st</sup> class degrees	38.8%	26.1%

The award criteria for the new Chamberlain scheme will specifically target those students in greatest need – recognising both the national focus on P4Q1 students and our continued and proven institutional focus on students from backgrounds of multiple measures of disadvantage (i.e. those targeted through our Pathways to Birmingham – previously A2B – programmes). Eligible students will be awarded a £2k bursary, per year, for the normal duration of their studies. Students with the following characteristics will be eligible for an award:

- Students with a household income of less than £25k;
- Pathways to Birmingham students with a household income of less than £60k
- P4Q1 students with a household income of less than £60k

We will offer an additional award of £1k (in the first year only) for P4Q1 students who decide to live in University halls of residence. Our Care Leavers are eligible for an enhanced Chamberlain award of either fully subsidised University accommodation (to the value of £5,915) or a cash award of £3,000.

In addition to the flagship Chamberlain Award, we offer a range of additional, targeted financial support packages:

- **P2B Scholarship** (of £1500 annually) for entrants who successfully participate in a Pathways to Birmingham programme, perform well in the A2B module and achieve the standard offer grades (or equivalent) for their course.
- The Sarah Hawkins **Financial Award for Young Adult Carers** funds seven young carers studying at the University, to the value of £2000 per year of study. This award is currently funded until 2022.

- Our **Mike Roden Scholarships** provide financial assistance to ten students per year from our University School who gain places at the University of Birmingham. Four of these scholarships are valued at £5,000 per year, and reserved for students who are studying STEMM subjects. The remaining six will be valued at £1,500 per year for students following other programmes of study.

### Investment

The ambitions and activities outlined in this Plan are underpinned by an investment of over £16.5m per year; this maintains previous levels of investment outlined under OFFA. As part of the evaluation activity underpinning the development of this Plan we have reviewed the allocation of funding across the student lifecycle to ensure that investment is appropriately aligned to deliver the outcomes expected from this Plan. We have re-aligned our targeted financial support to more directly support the students targeted in this Plan, and have increased investment across outreach and 'in-reach' (i.e. success and employability) activities. Our annual investment includes in the region of £3.1m for our outreach and access activity and £8.6m in financial support.

In addition, we have invested over £5m of institutional funds in establishing our University of Birmingham School. This includes a £3.1m capital investment, donation of University land valued at £1.93m, as well as continued in-kind investment of academic staff time and access to facilities.

This Plan has been produced at a time of financial uncertainty in the sector, notably arising from a lack of clarity regarding the outcomes of the Augar review. The outcomes set out in the Plan assume a level of investment that is based on the current tuition fee levels of £9,250. Should the Augar review result in a reduced tuition fee, we would have to review our investment and associated outcomes in the light of a more constrained financial resource, recognising that we have a responsibility to maintain the quality of education and student experience for all our students from all backgrounds. We also note that the fee has been capped at this level for some time, while costs across all university activities are rising.

### **3.2 Student consultation**

This Plan has been developed in partnership with our Students and we will continue to work with them to inform the further and future development of our institutional strategy, aims and interventions. We have held specific APP meetings with our Guild of Students in addition to our ongoing engagement with the students who benefit from our access and participation initiatives and our formal committee structure with its extensive student representation. Whilst the short timeframe between publication of the OfS APP guidance and submission has precluded extensive student engagement, we have worked with our Guild to identify ongoing opportunities for student engagement with the APP. Our Guild of Students state:

*The Guild have been working in partnership with the University on the Access Plan, its targets and initiatives and we are glad that the University has incorporated our views and suggestions as the plan has developed. Our members play a central part in supporting the delivery of targets and initiatives in roles such as E&D ambassadors, Student Reps and Officers. We are pleased that the University has committed to work in partnership with us to provide these students – and the wider student body – with training, so they are able to contribute to the review of the plan at the 2019/20 forum.*

Our Guild have been active participants in a working group led by the PVC Education to consider how our targets should evolve. Through this group they have been able to help us identify stretching targets and explore effective methods to deliver against those targets. Leading the Guild input has been the Vice President (Education) supported by the President and Guild staff.

Our ongoing dialogue current A2B students has informed our plans, particularly our ongoing user feedback of services targeting retention, success and employability. This has been further supplemented by the independent review of our financial support packages to help understand how students use the funds and what they have highlighted has the most value to them.

Our Student Representation System (SRS) is an important means by which students engage in their studies and become authentic partners, and we are supporting our Guild of Students in an extensive review of the SRS and specifically in support of the next-stage development of our APP strategy and

interventions. This includes: the development of a clear consultation timeline for engagement with Student Reps; incorporating a specific section on access and participation issues in our annual *Student Voice* report which is led by the Guild of Students to capture student feedback; and the provision of training and support for Student Reps (particularly those on our APP Working Group and Committees with responsibility for monitoring progress against this Plan) in accessing and understanding the key datasets underpinning our performance and evaluation. This aligns with OfS good practice. This training will be central to helping us further develop our initiatives.

To further support our engagement with students we will hold an annual forum with student representatives, supported and co-hosted by the Guild. The forum will review success of the Plan and associated initiatives and milestones, as well as provide advice and guidance for future policy and practice. The forum will provide a platform for students to better understand the APP agenda and its implications for them as individuals and/or target groups, and to ensure the University can continue to understand the wide range of student perspectives, and their shifting dynamics. We will use this same forum to bring our academic practice and research in access and participation to the attention of the students, and through that, further develop our approach.

Students are important contributors to the delivery of our access and participation activity. Students are important role models as ambassadors and mentors in our outreach activity, as well as in our on-programme peer-assisted study support and mentoring programmes. In many cases students are co-creators of the interventions we provide. The Equality and Diversity Ambassadors scheme delivers targeted events and support created *by* students, *for* students. Via our Careers Network, we survey all Access to Careers participants to seek their views on how we might further develop and shape the support we offer to address their needs. This has resulted, for example, in the inclusion of a workshop on confidence building and public speaking this year. We involve students in planning our careers internship programmes and, over the summer, we run focus groups for current students to look at ways to engage students in the implementation and evaluation of support for WP students. Evaluation of our intensive outreach programmes includes feedback from student participants and is used to inform the future development of the programmes. As part of the future development of measures to support the achievement of the objectives set out in this Plan, we will hold dedicated consultation/focus groups with the priority student groups identified in our targets.

### 3.3 Evaluation strategy

We are developing our Evaluation Strategy to support an evidence-based approach to the delivery of the aims and objectives outlined in this Plan, and to embed a comprehensive evaluation framework across the full student lifecycle.

Our Evaluation Strategy is informed by our learning from the self-assessment toolkit and existing expertise from across the University. The key objectives of our strategy are to:

- Provide a framework for producing high quality evidence-based monitoring and evaluation information to support learning, improvement, innovation, accountability and strategic decision making.
- Ensure engagement with our academic community whose specialist research in these areas is invaluable in exploring and developing cutting-edge approaches and sharing practice across the sector.
- Continue to generate robust evaluation evidence to improve fair access to higher education by understanding what we do, identifying how and why specific approaches work and identifying where improvements can be made to increase the effectiveness of our policies and interventions.
- Provide robust evidence to support strategic decision-making and allocation of resources.
- Provide a plan for evaluation over the next 5 years, which will be reviewed and updated annually.

The development of our strategy will be supported by an Evaluation Working Group, with membership including evaluation leads for access, student success and progression, as well as academic representation from our specialist research centres. Our Evaluation Strategy is comprehensive and covers each element of the student lifecycle, including financial support and collaborative partnerships:

**Access:** Each of our sustained progressive outreach programmes has a bespoke evaluation framework that sets out the rationale for the intervention, aims and objectives, and expected short-term and intermediate outcomes, and longer term impact. The evaluation framework sets out key evaluation questions to assess progress against the impact and identifies indicators and data collection methods.

Bespoke data collection tools have been developed for each programme to ensure robust data are collected to evidence the impact of the interventions. This on-going programme of monitoring and evaluation feeds into a cycle of in-depth impact evaluations. Current evaluation of our outreach work includes a six-year longitudinal impact evaluation of our flagship residential programme (the Academic Enrichment Programme). We are currently in the process of publishing a journal paper on the application of the Theory of Change as a framework to plan and evaluate widening participation interventions. We are also undertaking a comparative evaluation of the impact of our key attainment raising interventions (e.g. MyTutor, and after school year 13 A-level maths classes) and plan to share learning from the evaluation with the sector and contribute to the knowledge base.

**Success:** As part of the developing Evaluation Strategy we will build on some of the specific evaluation activities we have undertaken thus far, such as our 2018 campus-wide survey (with c. 3,000 participants) looking at potential institutional barriers to student success in relation to race and ethnicity. This was followed by around 30 thematic student focus group studies conducted in February 2019. This large scale evaluation formed part of the University's application for the Race Equality Charter Bronze Award. The research team trained a cohort of 12 student researchers who led on the data collection and evaluation process, we also used this opportunity to upskill our students and maximise their participation in the evaluation of student voices.

**Progression:** The Careers Network evaluates the impact and effectiveness of its services on the confidence, competence and knowledge of students, monitors attendance and engagement with its services mapping graduate outcomes against engagement and uses data to influence strategic decision making. We will build on this in the development of the new Evaluation Strategy underpinning this Plan.

**Financial Support:** Evaluation of our financial support includes a combination of supplementary qualitative surveys (drawing upon sector best practice) into how our awards reduce the need for part-time work, address any perceived disadvantage, and reduce levels of stress and anxiety experienced by some individuals, and quantitative analysis, drawing on the (previously OFFA) toolkit methodology. Our quantitative analysis focuses on the following key areas of impact: (i) retention into a second year of study, (ii) completion of study within 5 years, (iii) achieving a 'good' degree and (iv) graduate employment. We have undertaken a large scale, comprehensive review of the financial support available at the point of entry, utilising an external consultancy and mirroring elements of the toolkit methodology. The outcomes of this review have demonstrated the continuing value of our awards and highlighted areas for us to consider as potential enhancements. The outcomes from our most recent evaluation of financial support has led to a remodelling of our bursary package with a more specific focus on the target groups identified as part of this Plan (see earlier section).

**Collaborative evaluation partnerships/work:** Realising Opportunities has a robust evaluation framework, undertaken by independent evaluators, which is a theory of change model using narrative, empirical research and causality evaluation types to evidence. Through Aimhigher West Midlands we jointly fund one of three data services approved by the OfS to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of the NCOP. This also supports our ongoing work to track the attainment and entry to H.E. of participants in institutionally-funded Aimhigher programmes. Within our evaluation plan, we will be employing a quasi-experiment approach where outcomes of learners engaged within the Aimhigher programme will be compared against learners from similar backgrounds who have not engaged (comparison group). The formation of a comparison group will require access to anonymised NPD and HESA student records and will be subject to the agreement of the release of this data. Our evaluation approach is aligned to type 3 (causality) of the OfS standards of evidence and evaluation.

### 3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

The development of the Plan has been a cross-institutional endeavour with voices drawn from students, academic and professional services staff, and wider sector colleagues. It has been developed, and will continue to be overseen, by a Steering Group of senior staff chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education) leads on Access and Participation and is a member of this group, supported by the Academic Registrar who co-ordinates delivery of the strategy. Executive Board, Senate and Council have all contributed to the development of the Plan, and the Chair of Council has signed off this final version of the Plan on behalf of Council.

Students have been central to this work, with our Guild contributing to the identification of targets and helping us develop the subsequent actions, as well as being part of our team writing the Plan. In addition students are represented throughout the committee structure that has been part of a cross-institution discussion. We regularly review student feedback – through surveys and through direct conversation – and students have been clear about the value of our initiatives – “Without the encouragement of the A2B programme, I would never have applied to Birmingham...Skills4Uni is an online study platform which introduced me to new ways of learning. The course prepared me for areas of university life that I hadn’t previously considered, and put me in a much better position to start university” (Maths BSc) or “Were it not for the A2B Scholarship and Bursary, I could not have afforded to accept my place at university due to travel costs etc.” (American and Canadian Studies BA). We use some of that feedback in materials for other students so they can understand what support and help is available. We will continue to engage with students in a variety of ways to assess and inform our plans.

Council receives regular reports on progress against the targets and actions in the plan. The PVC Education has responsibility for delivery of the plan, with executive oversight provided by the VC’s Steering Group. Each School has an annual action plan that is reviewed by College and central university committee structures taking a data-led focus at all levels. The outcomes of those plans are considered annually by Student Staff Consultative Committees and up through the Senate committee structure. University Executive Board, Council and Senate all receive regular updates on our initiatives and themes in support of outreach and participation, devoting entire meetings to reviewing particular aspects. Recently, for example, we reviewed our virtual learning environment and how learner analytics could help us target differential attainment. Our staff sit on the governing body of our University School so we have direct feedback as to the challenges and success of our distinctive outreach initiatives.

We have extensive data reporting on outreach and increasingly on participation activities. This enables us to identify areas that would benefit from special focus, such as developing new reporting for academics using our VLE noted above or how evaluation of our Routes to the Professions programme led to us expanding it from Medicine and Law to include Engineering and Accounting & Finance. In addition we will continue to make use of external expertise to enhance our provision through testing our assumptions, as we did most recently with a review of the recipients’ views on our scholarship provision, which has led directly to our new scholarship offer.

As noted earlier, we anticipate that the OfS APP guidance will be available earlier in future to make it more feasible for more students to engage with the APP process. Next year, for example, we will be holding an annual student forum, in partnership with our Guild of Students, to bring together student views, our APP ambitions, and academic expertise in the areas covered by the Plan. This will ensure that students are informed about the implications of the APP for them as individuals. It will also help to raise students’ understanding of national challenges as the context for the University’s specific plans.

## 4 Provision of information to students

We take a student-centred approach to all communication to ensure they have easily accessible information, in multiple formats, which enable them to be fully informed and able to make the right decisions for them.

Details of fees and funding arrangements (including information on our financial packages, sport and music scholarships, and statutory support available from the SLC) are available on the University website ([www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/fees](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/fees)) which is regularly updated with the latest information. A printed ‘Money Matters’ booklet is also available.

Course information can be found in our print Prospectus (applicants can request a copy online, or collect from UCAS fairs and school events) and on our website. The course finder section of the University’s website allows students to search courses on offer ([www.birmingham.ac.uk/study](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/study)), and our offer calculator helps applicants predict whether they are likely to receive an offer from Birmingham. Open Days in June, September and October give applicants the opportunity to visit campus and engage with our staff and current students. We provide all offer-holders with online programme factsheets which are produced annually and contain information on course-specific fees and associated costs, assessment methods and core modules.

# Addendum: Variation to Access and Participation plan 2023/24

This variation to the University's plan sets out the work the University is undertaking in response to the priorities set out by the OfS, which builds on the actions already included in the previously approved substantive plan. Some of the activity (such as the UoB School) is existing work which has always been important to the University's access strategy, but which was not encouraged by previous APP guidance, whilst other aspects are a refocusing of activity in light of the new OfS priorities. The variation demonstrates the trajectory of our activity, in particular an enhanced focus on supporting raising attainment for years 7 to 11, and our investment in technical pathways through our acquisition of the National College for Advanced Transportation and Infrastructure. The variations set out below for 2023/24 can in general be scaled upwards for inclusion in the next Plan for 2024/25 onwards.

**Develop, enhance and expand their partnerships with schools and other local and national organisations, to help raise the pre-16 attainment of young people from underrepresented groups across England.**

- **University of Birmingham School** – The University of Birmingham School was established in 2015 to create a learning environment dedicated to advancing attainment and aspiration of Birmingham's young people. The school is a comprehensive non-selective institution which continues to benefit from wide-ranging support from its partnership with the University – for example, the University makes work experience opportunities available for the entire Year 10 cohort. In September 2021 the school reached full capacity for the first time and its distinctive 'nodal admissions' policy (designed to reflect the diversity of the city of Birmingham) has led to the school being one of the most academically, socially and ethnically diverse in Birmingham. The 2021 year 7 intake came from 58 different primary schools in Birmingham and represent 50 different ethnic groups. 39% of pupils qualified for Pupil Premium funding in September 2021 (above national and West Midlands averages) and the school now accommodates the highest number of pupils with an EHCP of all citywide mainstream secondary schools.
  - In the context of this diversity, the school has been particularly successful in adding value to its pupils during their time at the school. The Progress8 estimate for the current Year 11 cohort is +0.9. For 2021, the school had 81% EBacc entry (compared to the DfE target of 75% by 2022), with an average grade point score of 5.50 (national average 4.07). 66% of pupils gained 5+ in English and Maths (national average 43%), whilst 46% of disadvantaged pupils gained 5+ in English and Maths (national average 25%).
  - While for post-16 progression, 78% of the school's A level group went onto university, with 43% of these progressing to a Russell Group University. 21% went onto other further education, technical training, or apprenticeships.
  - The school is also the first secondary University Training School in the country and its comprehensive nature, focus on inclusion and distinctive character education echo some of the key educational research specialisms of the University. In addition, the School of Education, has been chosen as one of fourteen specialist partners for the newly formed National Institute of Teaching (NIoT).
- **Forward Thinking programme** – Forward Thinking (FT) is a progressive programme of higher education awareness activity which aims to encourage and support future applications to higher education. It has been designed to inform students about higher education pathways as well as to help raise the attainment of those students taking part. Each year we work in partnership with 40 schools in the West Midlands to deliver this activity, supporting a cohort of 600 students from Year 8 to Year 11. Previous research shows that students on FT not only outperform students in the West Midlands and their school, but also outperform high achieving students at their school who are not on the programme. A more detailed evaluation is currently underway and is being run partnership with TASO (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in HE) to assess this multi-intervention programme. A mixed-method, multi-cohort evaluation design has been adopted and the final report and outcomes of this research is due to be disseminated in autumn 2022.
- **Pilot programme of pre-16 tutoring with 5 Forward Thinking schools** – Given the success and reputation of Forward Thinking in the region, we will now pilot a new stream of work focussing on raising attainment in FT schools. Initially, we will pilot this in 5 FT schools with the

aim of expanding this initiative for the 24/25 cycle (following evaluation of the pilot). Our initial plans are focussed around providing tutoring (delivered by undergraduates) in Maths and English but we are running focus groups with participating schools to determine what would work best for them and how best to deploy this, working in partnership with the schools to co-create this activity. It should be noted that the University has been running attainment raising interventions for a number of years. This activity was targeted at Year 13 students on our flagship Access to Birmingham (A2B) programme and included a combination of one-on-one tutoring in schools, online tutoring via MyTutor, as well as after school A level Maths classes. However, whilst A2B students meet several widening participation measures, their previous attainment and engagement on the A2B programme means that they typically have high rates of progression to HE and achieve comparatively well in their level 3 qualifications. Noting this, and given the emphasis on driving attainment in pre-16 students, we will now re-purpose this resource to enable us to deliver this new activity for younger year groups who may benefit more from an earlier attainment raising intervention.

- **Year 10 Summer School** – We will enhance our successful Year 10 Summer School by offering attendees 10 one-hour tutoring sessions (via MyTutor) as a follow up activity to taking part in the residential. These are an engaged cohort where we also have good communication and engagement with their parents and we anticipate that this will be a welcome addition to the programme and one that would be relatively straightforward to implement and evaluate. MyTutor report that they have consistently found that pupils made, on average, one whole grade of progress in their tutored subject after one term of tuition (based on comparison between their mock exam and final GCSE grades) and we hope to now offer this benefit to our Summer School students. As above, we previously offered this support to Year 13 students but will now re-purpose this offer for this pre-16 cohort.
- **Levelling up: STEM** – The University is now a key member of the national ‘Levelling Up: STEM’ project which offers A-Level students from less advantaged backgrounds online tutoring and mentoring in Maths, Chemistry, Physics and Materials Science. We are also the national hub for Physics. Made possible through philanthropic donation and match funding from the University, Levelling Up aims to support academic attainment through the development of high-quality tutoring and materials which have been designed by a team of the UK’s foremost experts in this area of activity. This project is currently being evaluated by a research lead in the School of Education at Durham University.
- **Aimhigher West Midlands partnership** – We are the lead institution for the Aimhigher West Midlands partnership, who provide an integrated programme of support and advice for young people facing multiple dimensions of disadvantage. During 2022-2023, the partnership will come together to scope new requirements set by the OfS to support attainment raising and closer collaborative working with schools, with a view to develop a longer-term regional offer. This offer will be research-led and support schools and the sector in its changing priorities. As part of a partnership of regional HEIs, we are committed to working in collaboration to support schools and learners to raise attainment across the West Midlands.
- **Realising Opportunities (RO)** – We are a founding member of RO which is a collaboration of 14 institutions working together to promote fair access to research intensive universities to ensure successful education and career outcomes. During the period of July 2022 through to April 2023, the partnership will come together to scope how the RO programme for Key Stage 5 students, and the information it generates through independent evaluation and impact monitoring, could contribute to the OfS’s priority of raising attainment, via school/college partnerships. Through collaboration with regional Uni Connect Leads and other key stakeholders, RO Partners intend to explore how the programme might add value to raising attainment initiatives, either already in progress or in design. RO will also explore how the current programme for Key Stage 5 students could be further enhanced to support attainment raising that would complement local provision at Key Stage 3 & 4. Information will be shared across the Partnership following a school/college mapping exercise to identify potential pilot gaps, avoid duplication and support clear signposting of activity.
- **National literacy trust** – The University has partnered with the National Literacy Trust, an independent charity working with schools and communities to give disadvantaged children the literacy skills to succeed in life. Together we have launched the first university-led literacy campaign in the country – Birmingham Stories. [Birmingham Stories](#) brings together the expertise of the National Literacy Trust and the University of Birmingham to deliver a new kind of Literacy Hub. Building on the power of storytelling and the potential of digital technology, the

Hub seeks to widen the definition of reading well. Launched in October, together we have delivered reading, writing, and storytelling programmes with schools in the city.

### **Seek to develop more diverse pathways into and through higher education through expansion of flexible Level 4 and 5 courses and degree apprenticeships**

In addition to our traditional undergraduate degree programmes, we also run number of alternative pathways to support students into and through higher education. These include:

- **EPS Futures Foundation Year** – EPS Futures is a fully funded foundation year that leads directly on to our highly regarded Engineering and Physical Sciences degrees. This course is designed for students from areas where a low percentage of young people go to university and comes with significant financial and educational support. This includes specialised support in academic, professional and study skills to equip students for their future learning and career. The programme welcomed its first cohort in 2021 and aims to support 60 students over the first 5 years.
- **National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure (NCATI)** - The University has recently launched the new National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure in a special collaboration between higher and further education. As part of the University group, the new NCATI will produce a new generation of highly skilled professionals to lead Britain's future rail, transport and infrastructure workforce. NCATI will draw on the University's internationally recognised rail expertise and, with strong industry and wide range of partners, will help address the sector's skills gaps in the Midlands and North. As part of this collaboration, we are also working with NCATI to establish two new foundation degrees that will enable students articulate to final year degrees in our College of Engineering and Physical Sciences.
- **Foundation Degree in Electrical and Electronic Engineering** – A University of Birmingham validated foundation programme in agreement with South and City College. This course encompasses a choice of pathways including Electrical & Electronic Engineering and Mechatronic & Robotic Engineering and enables students to progress onto a degree in our School of Engineering.
- **Computer Science with Digital Technology Partnership (PWC)** - This degree apprenticeship is a unique collaboration with PwC and offers students the opportunity to gain valuable work experience alongside learning the fundamentals of computer science, preparing them for a successful career within a digital technology team.
- **University of Birmingham Boot camps** – Our recently launched boot camps are online programmes designed to equip participants for careers in web development or data analytics. These courses are open to all over the age of 18 and are designed to provide learners with the latest skills in web development and data analytics as well as providing a number of support services and in-depth career advice.

### **Set out how we ensure that students from underrepresented groups are supported to successfully participate on their courses and achieve good quality outcomes:**

- **Birmingham Scholar**- we have expanded our Birmingham Scholar programme in its second year of delivery in terms of both cohort and activities offered. Beginning in 2021/22 we increased the Scholar cohort to automatically include all undergraduates from P4Q1 backgrounds, which has almost doubled our number of Birmingham Scholars to 3.3k. We have also developed new initiatives such as fully funded places for Scholars on short-term global mobility programmes via Turing, more collaboration with DARO including Alumni mentoring, our new 'Goldman Sachs Scholars' scheme which provides mentoring and employability support for 50 of our STEM, Law and Business Birmingham Scholars, and the establishment of a short- and long-term laptop loan scheme exclusively for Scholars to reduce the impact of digital poverty.
- **Increased transition support**- our Academic Skills Centre delivers transition and belonging interventions exclusively for Scholars during Kick Off Week, as well as the Birmingham Scholar PASS throughout Semester One. The Scholar PASS has also been expanded in 2021/22 to include all years of undergraduate study. Welcome activities have become more joined up across the University in response to the return to campus post-pandemic.

- **Improved support for Care-Experienced and Estranged students (CEES)** - all CEES are automatically added as Scholars; our application for the NNECL quality mark is in progress with a strong focus on Birmingham Scholar support for CEES.
- **Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) referrals**- referrals for 1<sup>st</sup> Years will be made after Semester Two assessments results are known in time for onboarding at start of Year 2.
- **Cross-institution evaluation**- our Pathways Through Study Theory of Change (ToC) has been developed to include individual College ToCs nested into a Student Success ToC together with that of the Academic Skills Centre to embed academic engagement across all Birmingham Scholar activities. All ToCs are reviewed and updated annually. Evaluation of Scholar activities and other work supporting our APP is ongoing and embedded into each activity using feedback surveys and focus groups, and is reported on annually as part of the University's APP Evaluation Strategy.
- **Targeting of non-engaged Scholars**- real-time monitoring of Scholar engagement rates by year group will be implemented enabling targeted communication to drive up engagement rates.

It is worth noting that some of these activities represent significant investment into APP activity by the University, which is additional to that already set out in our APP. This includes: £3m capital funding by the University in creating the University of Birmingham School, alongside a significant investment in management time and capability to open the school, and funding to support its development during its early years. The University's investment continues through academic and Professional Services support from many parts of the University to enrich the work of the school. We have made over £6m available over the next 4 years through the acquisition of NCATI, and similarly to the UoB School we have invested considerable management resource, development funding, and additional University-based posts to support the College's development.

The University remains committed to evidence-based practice in access and participation and our current APP Evaluation Strategy sets out our approach to measuring progress and evaluating the impact of interventions to meet our existing APP targets. Given this new trajectory of activity, and some of the above new interim measures being put in place, we will now re-visit and revise our strategy to ensure that we are evaluating progress against any new strategic objectives whilst continuing to build on existing evaluative work and enhance evaluation practice.

**Summary of 2020-21 entrant course fees**

\*course type not listed

**Inflationary statement:**

The University reviews and agrees its fee levels annually. Fees are likely to increase annually, in line with the maximum fee cap approved by Government.

**Table 4a - Full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants**

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£9,250
Foundation degree		£9,250
Foundation year/Year 0		£9,250
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT		£9,250
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year		£1,850
Erasmus and overseas study years		£1,385
Other	*	*

**Table 4b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants**

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

**Table 4c - Part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants**

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	Food Safety (Chemical Engineering)	£4,625
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

**Table 4d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants**

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

# Targets and investment plan

## 2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: The University of Birmingham

Provider UKPRN: 10006840

### Investment summary

The OfS requires providers to report on their planned investment in access, financial support and research and evaluation in their access and participation plan. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in student success and progression in the access and participation plans and therefore investment in these areas is not recorded here.

#### Note about the data:

The investment forecasts below in access, financial support and research and evaluation does not represent not the total amount spent by providers in these areas. It is the additional amount that providers have committed following the introduction of variable fees in 2006-07. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>Total access activity investment (£)</b>	£2,823,772.46	£3,163,800.93	£3,210,128.60	£3,263,252.73	£3,318,236.21
Access (pre-16)	£406,813.19	£414,219.87	£421,885.79	£429,820.01	£438,031.94
Access (post-16)	£2,301,215.68	£2,633,384.50	£2,671,577.44	£2,716,282.13	£2,762,551.49
Access (adults and the community)	£36,683.46	£36,819.31	£36,959.92	£37,105.45	£37,256.07
Access (other)	£79,060.14	£79,377.24	£79,705.45	£80,045.14	£80,396.72
<b>Financial support (£)</b>	£8,682,625.00	£8,682,625.00	£8,682,625.00	£8,682,625.00	£8,682,625.00
<b>Research and evaluation (£)</b>	£295,205.40	£305,537.59	£316,231.41	£327,299.51	£338,754.99

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>Higher fee income (£HFI)</b>	£55,135,713.00	£55,468,198.00	£55,567,973.00	£55,611,303.00	£55,611,303.00
<b>Access investment</b>	3.3%	3.3%	3.4%	3.5%	3.5%
<b>Financial support</b>	15.3%	15.2%	15.2%	15.2%	15.2%
<b>Research and evaluation</b>	0.5%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
<b>Total investment (as %HFI)</b>	19.1%	19.1%	19.1%	19.2%	19.3%



