**University of East Anglia**

**Access Agreement 2016-17**

The University of East Anglia is committed to widening participation of high-quality Higher Education (HE). The pursuance of social inclusion in the profile of the students we admit is one of the University’s guiding precepts. A corporate priority is to continue to enable motivated and able students from non-traditional backgrounds and low participation areas, particularly from the region, to gain the advantages of university education via our existing widening participation (WP) activity. This Access Agreement outlines how we will address access, success and progression, recognising the importance of supporting students throughout the whole student lifecycle.

The University of East Anglia (UEA) has two franchised partners; City College Norwich and Easton and Otley College. The majority of this agreement solely covers the University of East Anglia except for section 1 where these partners are referenced explicitly. The University is also a partner with the University of Essex in University Campus Suffolk (UCS). UCS’s Access Agreement is appended.

The HE sector is experiencing uncertainty within the funding environment, particularly in relation to the future of Student Opportunity funding and Disabled Students’ Allowance. In this uncertain environment the University remains committed to spending approximately 25% of additional fee income at steady state on access, success and progression, and to the financial support outlined in this agreement. Within this commitment our plans have been designed to allow flexibility. In the event that the Government cap on the tuition fee amount available to the University for Undergraduate Study is amended from £9,000/year, we will review resource commitments we devote to access and outreach activity, student support, retention and student success measures, along with the levels of student financial support we provide through our Bursary provision.

# Fees, student numbers and fee income

This section relates to the UEA and our franchised partners. The UEA, City College Norwich and Easton and Otley College intend to maintain fees at 2015/16 levels. Table 1 below outlines maximum fee levels for new fee-regulated full-time entrants in 2016/17.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Full-time | |
| Maximum Fee level | # total new system |
| University of East Anglia undergraduate | £9000 | 7597 |
| University of East Anglia PGCE | £9000 | 274 |
| City College Norwich | £6999 | 100 |
| Easton and Otley College | £8500 | 330 |

Table 1: fee levels and total number of new system fee-regulated full-time students for 2016/17.

For 2016/17, the following figures apply to the University and our partners:

* Total higher fee income: £23,159,045
* Maximum full-time fee: £9000
* Average course fee: £8,643
* Average course fee adjusted for fee waivers: £8,643
* Average fee adjusted for all financial support: £8,154

Students spending a study or Erasmus year abroad, or undertaking a year in industry will pay fees of £1350.

Part-time students will not be charged more than £6000 in an academic year.

A more detailed breakdown of individual fees by course and provider, for both new entrants and continuing students, is available in the 2016-17 resource plan, Table 1.

It should be noted that income and expenditure calculations are based on our current student cohort characteristics, planned student numbers and estimated Student Opportunity allocation going forward. They may therefore be liable to change.

We intend to apply annual increases in line with the amount set by the Government each year.

# Access, student success and progression

## Our strategic approach

The University is currently reviewing strategic approaches to produce the UEA Plan (2016-2020.) Continued development of our Widening Participation Strategy is being guided by key principles set within the context of this plan and the wider University Strategic Vision to support widening participation initiatives across the whole student lifecycle.

Included within these principles is recognition that an evidence-based approach is essential to planning and resourcing widening participation activities. This approach is underpinned by an emphasis on monitoring and evaluation to prioritise activities and interventions with the greatest impact. This is achieved by utilising data to establish baselines and identify gaps in performance between different groups, and building an evidence base of effective activities, good practice and areas for improvement.

To achieve our aims we will work collaboratively with external stakeholders and internally by adopting a whole-institution approach. Across the region we engage in partnership with schools and colleges, HE providers, local authorities, NHS trusts and other educational stakeholders. Internally, we work to embed widening participation across key areas of strategy such as learning and teaching, employability, equality and diversity and student support services, as well as consulting with our students and other internal stakeholders. The following framework provides the basis of our strategy.

**Access: preparing for and entering HE**

* Continue to deliver our innovative outreach programme reflecting the socio-economic and geographical context of our region. Broaden aspirations, raise attainment and increase participation rates of under-represented groups, closing any gap between the least and most advantaged.
* Improve the social inclusion profile of the students we admit and deliver a fair and transparent admissions process.

**Student Success: staying on and achieving**

* Maintain our exceptional student experience through an inclusive approach for all students irrespective of background.
* Improve retention rates for all students, with a focus on enhancing the sense of belonging for less advantaged students and narrowing the gap between most advantaged and disadvantaged.
* Improve educational outcomes for all students with a focus on good honours while addressing differentials in attainment between underrepresented groups, and closing any gap between the least and most advantaged.

**Progression: further study and employment**

* Improve graduate employment outcomes for all students, reducing inequalities in outcomes between underrepresented groups, and closing any gap between the least and most advantaged. Recognise the significance of Fair Access to the Professions for underrepresented groups.
* Increase progression to post-graduate study for all students, identifying under-represented groups and an emphasis on narrowing any gap between the least and most advantaged.

## Assessment of performance

Within this section and to review our statistical milestones and targets we have shifted from using POLAR2 to POLAR3 as a key indicator.

### Access

Among leading universities[[1]](#footnote-2), UEA is one of very few delivering such a highly ranked student experience to such an inclusive social body. Our outreach activity has a proven record of success and contributes to our inclusive student cohort through delivery of a range of high quality and innovative activities across the region. We are one of a handful of such leading mainstream English universities ranked in the Top 20 for the National Student Survey (NSS) who also achieve consistently strong scores across key WP measures. We have consistently scored in the NSS top 10 among mainstream English universities.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Performance Indicator** | **UEA** | **Benchmark** | **England** |
| State School | 90.1% | 84.4% | 89.7% |
| Low participation neighbourhood (LPN) | 8.4% | 8.0% | 10.9% |
| Mature students with no previous HE & from LPN | 11.3% | 11.5% | 11.9% |
| In receipt of DSA | 8.6% | 6.2% | 7.1% |

Table 2: 2013/14 access performance indicators (POLAR3). \*Location adjusted benchmark. Source: HESA

The University’s access performance using HESA key performance indicators (KPI) is outlined in Table. The University meets or exceeds all access related benchmarks within the margin for error, a key aim in terms of our milestones. Given we perform well in the sector and historically we have generally exceeded our benchmarks, we will be maintaining the proportion of additional fee income expenditure on outreach.

Evaluation of outreach activities indicates that they are impactful from a short term perspective in terms of the key objectives outlined in section 2.4 and that our targeting is effective. For example, a current sixth form project is engaging 54 students, 52 of which are from POLAR3 quintile 1 or 2 (LPN) areas. Across all our events to date in 2014/15 66% of students said they were “more likely to go into Higher Education” because of their experiences at UEA. In 2013/14 our Sports for Boys scheme engaged with 251 year 7 boys from 9 different schools. Of these, 81% came from POLAR3 quintile 1 and 2 areas. Before the events, only 24% of students said they were “seriously thinking about doing Higher Education at college or university”, compared to 69% who said they either “definitely” or “probably” would afterwards.

The University continues to focus on the student experience and we have maintained our application position despite uncertainty in the sector. We are conscious of the need to ensure changes in our student profile are also underpinned by agile and well-informed practice to ensure that all groups are enabled to achieve their full academic potential. Part of our focus has been to greatly strengthen the academic experience students receive at the University and, as a result, our expectation of their performance. A consequence has been a sharp rise in tariff. Our average tariff rose from 366 in 2008/09 to 426 in 2012/13. Though this dropped to 408 in 2013/14, internal data indicates recovery to 422 in 2015/6 and we continue to operate consistently with a tariff in excess of 400. This tariff increase represents an additional challenge for us to keep up our performance relating to access; in this context we consider maintaining our current position to be an achievement. However, in order to balance the rising tariff requirements we have continued to promote access opportunities through our partnerships and invest in our foundation courses. These foundation courses are designed to enable students from a variety of backgrounds to access HE. Students on the Science and Arts and Humanities Foundation years from low income backgrounds, for example, will benefit from £1800 financial support.

We anticipate that our performance against location adjusted benchmarks will fluctuate given the lag inherent in the system. In addition, we expect additional turbulence in our benchmarks as they reflect the impact of changes in our partner college numbers. However, we want to exceed our benchmarks and are confident that, in the long run, our drive to raise entry standards is in the best interest of our students.

### Student Success and Progression

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| **Non continuation rate** | **UEA** | **Benchmark** | **England** |
| All entrants | 4.8% | 4.8% | 7% |
| Low participation neighbourhood (LPN) | 4.6% | 5.3% | 7.7% |
| Other neighbourhood | 3.3% | 3.5% | 5.4% |
| Mature previous HE | 6.8% | 9% | 10.4% |
| Mature no previous HE | 16.7% | 11.3% | 12.8% |

Table 3: non-continuation performance indicators for 2012/3 entrants POLAR3. Source: HESA

Performance measures relating to student success are outlined in Table 3. Overall for all entrants the University performs well against our benchmark, and this is also seen for students from both low participation and other neighbourhoods and mature students with previous HE experience. However, for one group of more disadvantaged students, mature students with no previous HE experience, the University does not achieve our benchmarks. Of particular concern is the difference in performance between LPN and other neighbourhoods, and between mature students with and without previous HE experience. Understanding and addressing these differences in performance remains a key focus with the creation of additional resource within our Business Intelligence Unit dedicated to exploring the available data to help us understand this and other themes relevant to widening participation. These performance gaps informed the decision in our 2015/16 Access Agreement to rebalance spend proportionally from financial support to student success. This balance will continue to be informed by evidence as it becomes available.

## Expenditure on access, success and progression

Following close assessment of our performance (section 2.1), the University commits to spending approximately 25% of our additional fee income from undergraduate students at steady state (2019/20) on access, success and progression. This equates to expenditure of £756 per student, including those on half fees. In addition, we commit 10% of our additional fee income from new PGCE students to widening participation measures.

### Estimated expenditure from additional fee income

Table 4 outlines the University’s total OFFA countable expenditure both in absolute and proportional terms for undergraduate students. Figures show the ‘steady state’ estimated expenditure for 2019/20 and, for comparison, 2013-14 actual expenditure taken from our most recent monitoring return.

In 2016/17, the University will maintain the level of expenditure on outreach as outlined in our 2015/16 Access Agreement, committing to spend 7% of additional fee income on outreach. The university recognises both the effectiveness of outreach activities and the need to maintain performance against benchmarks and in light of uncertainty going forward, we will focus on maintaining the proportion of spend rather than absolute figures.

The University will continue to spend a high proportion of its fee income on financial support for students from low income households. While we acknowledge that national research has not yet found robust evidence to support bursaries as an access or retention measure, we recognise concerns raised by the Union of UEA Students about the potential impact of any cuts to financial support packages. In agreement with the position in the latest report to OFFA[[2]](#footnote-3) that the impact to individuals and groups is a complex issue requiring further research, we maintain our bursary options at 2015/16 levels while we continue to review our own data and further develop our understanding of the impact of our financial support packages.

In our 2015-16 Access Agreement we rebalanced some spend from financial support to student success and progression as outlined in 2.2.2.

We will continue to monitor the balance of spend between access, success and progression. This will be reviewed annually and we will maintain flexibility as evidence arises to ensure it best meets the aims set out in this agreement and the needs of our students. The overall distribution of funds is liable to change in the event of future amendments to Student Opportunity Allocation, Disabled Students’ Allowance and other policy changes.

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|  | **‘Steady state’ (2019/20) estimated expenditure** | **2013-14 actual expenditure** |
| Outreach | £1,703,530 (7%) | £1,162,505 (5.9%) |
| Financial support | £3,905,828 (16%) | £ 3,739,600 (18.8%) |
| Success and progression | £474,679 (2%) | £171,548 (0.9%) |
| **TOTAL** | **£6,084,037 (25%)** | **£5,073,653 (25.7%)** |

Table 4: Expenditure on access and retention as an absolute and percentage of additional new system undergraduate student fee income above £6000 for UEA only. Note that figures are provided in relation to steady state onwards and assume that the number of students and the WP composition of the cohort remain constant.

## Outreach

The University’s outreach activity aims to widen aspirations, support attainment and encourage progression to higher education, working with individuals (and their influencers) from under-represented groups who have the potential to progress to university. To fulfil this aim we have the following overarching objectives:

* Enable positive attitudinal change to encourage progression
* Broaden awareness, understanding and knowledge to ensure informed choice
* Contribute to improved attainment to enable progression
* Increase applications from under-represented groups to the University and higher education in general

The University’s Outreach Team manages a range of pioneering projects to fulfil these aims. We were involved in the first HEFCE funded Summer Schools in 2000 and continue to run a range of residential summer schools. We believe our University Challenge badge for Guiding and Scouting is unique and all our activities are supported by one of the largest Student Ambassador schemes. Continued development of our faculty outreach provision allows us to focus on building a portfolio of subject-specific activity with initiatives such as the Language Teachers’ Network and Language Ambassador Scheme to support attainment and retention within Modern Foreign Languages. Our provision is flexible, responding to the needs of the learners with whom we engage and we design activities and experiences to be accessible and inclusive.

Activity is targeted at both area- and learner-level to ensure resources are targeted at those who will benefit the most. Under-represented target groups include:

* Students from low participation neighbourhoods or low income households
* Mature students
* Disabled students
* Looked-after children and care leavers
* Young carers
* Specific black and minority ethnic groups
* Less advantaged young white males

For 2016/17 we will maintain the proportion of additional fee income spent on outreach with smarter evidence-based spend. Our focus will be on activity that is proven to be effective, as well as maintaining our innovative approach in developing new activities that enable us to meet our aims. We review our activities on an annual basis to ensure we continue to be effective and ensure the Outreach Team continually enhance and update their knowledge of the wide range of groups with which they engage.

We continue to be guided by monitoring and evaluation, now embedded in all our outreach activity. This considers both early evidence relating to changes in aspirations, as well as longer-term changes in attainment and progression. Working closely with our target schools we are developing reporting processes to allow us to better understand the impact of our activity.

Our outreach programme includes global through to learner level targeted activity. We recognise both the value of intensive, highly targeted long term activities such as mentoring as well as whole cohort activities. Whole class or year group activities are particularly relevant to the region we work in, contributing to raising aspirations and attainment and to counter peer pressure.

The University understands the benefit of long-term outreach and already offers a broad range of activities for younger age groups, with a significant number specifically designed for key stage 2 to support long term outreach. We work closely with Norfolk Children’s University, hosting the graduation and supporting experiences, and our Challenge badge incorporates badges for both Rainbows and Beavers. We will continue to develop our activities in this context underpinned by our progression framework incorporating key stages 2 to 5 as well as mature students. We have developed a specific guidance materials for mature students and introduced faculty networks to support those returning to learning. Development of further activities to support mature students both in terms of outreach and across the student lifecycle will continue to be a core focus.

The University will continue partnership working to enhance our outreach activity. In addition to playing an active role in the National Collaborative Networks led by our partner institution, University Campus Suffolk (UCS); we will continue to engage with membership of the Eastern Region WP group and the Cambridge Access Validation Agency, as well as other groupings and networks. Working in collaboration with key stakeholders including HE providers across the region, local authorities, NHS trusts and third sector organisations, the University will continue to host and participate in collaborative events to support our learners. Through our role as co-sponsor of City Academy Norwich we deliver aspiration- and attainment-raising activities across the school In particular, we intend to continue working with University Campus Suffolk jointly offering activities for looked-after children, key stage 3 and mature students, as well as secondary level teachers. In terms of targeting, monitoring and evaluation, we will share data on secondary school liaison to ensure geographic coverage and no gaps in provision within our catchment areas as well as exploring opportunities for data sharing to enable effective tracking of participants.

The University remains committed to ensuring that looked-after children and care leavers who engage with, visit, apply to and study at the University are encouraged and supported throughout their time with us. Working closely with schools and local authority contacts we proactively encourage participation in our activities. In addition we have a dedicated post to support inclusion, and this initiative, along with bespoke support for students with disabilities and young carers, will be a key focus of the role.

Supporting Access to the Professions continues to be a key outreach activity theme. Our Faculty Outreach Academics ensure a diverse range of activities exist to support this strand, consulting guidance from professional bodies and other key stakeholders. Existing projects such as Medical Aspirations, Street Law and Next Steps to Teaching (with an additional focus on encouraging males to explore primary teaching) already contribute to this agenda. Additional projects are currently under development including supporting students to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to encourage and support aspiration to join the health and care professions, including medicine.

## Further Access considerations

We are continuing to explore the use of contextual data further, including ways of acknowledging applicants’ engagement in outreach activities. Our contextual data working group will consider the use of this data and differential offers ensuring fair, transparent and evidence based implementation where appropriate.

As outlined in section 2.1 we are working to embed Widening Participation in all areas of strategy. To this end outreach colleagues are included in the membership of Faculty Admissions groups to ensure that the impact on under-represented groups is considered when deciding and implementing strategy.

In terms of courses and modes of study we offer Foundation Years in Science and Arts and Humanities as well as Medicine.

## Student success and progression

The University recognises the importance of widening participation across the whole student lifecycle and our commitment to student success is outlined in our WPSA, interim statements and through our approach in section 2.1. Current key priorities include employability, retention and an evidenced based approach. Our HEFCE Student Opportunity allocation will support these priorities as well as supporting our collaborative and equality and diversity objectives.

To ensure that all groups are able to realise their full academic potential, the University invests in a support infrastructure for students and regularly reviews processes to ensure effectiveness. We have recently begun an institutional review of our induction and transition support. Throughout this, widening participation considerations will be a key focus with Faculty Outreach Academics included in the working group membership. In conjunction with the Higher Education Academy, we are also working to promote a sense of belonging using the student voice and separately to consolidate our knowledge of retention initiatives across the University. This work will be supported by a new post within the Business Intelligence Unit and will help to inform our understanding of the disparity in retention as outlined in section 2.2.2 and identify any gaps in attainment.

As noted in our 2013-14 Access Agreement, additional staffing within our Dean of Students’ Office continues to ensure that applicants with disabilities, including in particular those on the autism spectrum, are appropriately supported throughout the admissions process and their student career. Additional provision of academic skills support (including maths and statistics) to enable students to achieve their full potential experiences significant demand from WP groups, for example Foundation Year and mature students. The University will continue to monitor the spend attributed to the Dean of Students office, recognising that additional investment may need to be made following the proposed changes to Disabled Students’ Allowance.

Progression to employment and postgraduate study is a key area of focus. We have actively engaged with the new Postgraduate Support Scheme for 2015/16 academic year and are continuing to develop and pilot activities designed to support the employability of under-represented groups, recognising the potential for disparity in graduate destinations. New reporting systems allow us to monitor the engagement with the central careers service of key widening participation target groups (as identified in section 2.4) to identify gaps and plan activity accordingly. In addition to working to ensure that all progression activity is inclusive and accessible, specific programmes are in place to target students who have had very little work experience, lack confidence and do not have a network of support from whom they can draw when trying to gain experience and employment. Activities include; access to a pool of mentors from a wide spectrum of sectors and professions, paid on-campus training internships, paid summer vacation internships and access to a wide range of events and on-line tools and resources. Initial data is positive in terms of target group involvement. Although there will be on-going monitoring to ensure, for example, that students are acquiring high level experience, we will not be able to report on destination impact until 6 months after graduation.

## Financial support

The University’s financial support in the form of bursaries will be targeted at care leavers and students from low income backgrounds.

Students are able to choose the format of the support they receive on an annual basis from the following options which can be combined.

* Fee waiver
* University accommodation waiver
* Cash payment

There is a clear bursary task process in place for students to indicate their preferred option at the start of every year. Fee waivers are the default option only for those students (less than 1%) who, despite reminders, fail to complete the task.

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| **Household income per annum** | **Bursary amount** | **Duration** |
| Less than £16,000 | £1800 | per annum for the first four years of undergraduate study. |
| £16,001 to £20,000 | £1000 | per annum for the first four years of undergraduate study. |
| Care leavers | £3000 | per annum for the first four years of undergraduate study. |

Table 5: Financial support available to 2016/17 new entrants from specified income brackets. \*Support is available for four years. This includes any support that may be given for a Foundation Year.

For 2015/6 entry and beyond we have extended the availability of the care leavers’ bursary by broadening the definition to ensure that anyone who has been in the care of the Local Authority in the five years preceding their course is able to benefit from the provision.

Entrants to our Foundation Year programmes in the Faculties of Science and Arts and Humanities with a household income of less that £16,000 will be eligible for a £1,800 bursary in Year 0.

The University will also offer Entry Scholarships in recognition of academic achievements. In 2016/17 an Entry Scholarship will be worth £1000 and will be awarded to students achieving AAA or equivalent. We estimate 34% of these will be OFFA countable.

High achieving students from low income backgrounds will receive both a bursary and a scholarship.

For 2016/17 total planned spend on bursaries and scholarships is:

* for new system students: £4,040,184
* for old system students: £4,358

With reporting systems now in place the University will continue with our institution evaluation of our financial support packages. Working together with the Union of UEA Students, Business Intelligence Unit and Dean of Students we will collect and review data relating to the impact of financial support under the new system, in particular looking at student outcomes. Anticipating the outcomes of OFFA commissioned research, we will continue to consider national research and resources alongside this internal process.

Further details relating to our investment in financial support for new entrants and continuing students is outlined in the 2016/17 resource plan, Table 5.

# Targets and milestones

The University’s statistical milestones relating to our student cohort will be taken from the following HESA performance indicators:

* State School (location adjusted)
* LPN (location adjusted)
* Mature students with no previous HE & from LPN
* **Non-continuation of young and mature students following year of entry from LPN**

In addition we also monitor the proportion of students:

* in receipt of full state support
* with a self-declared disability
* who are male on the primary level PGCE

We are also seeking to add a target relating to students progressing to employment and further study. In order to set a baseline and appropriately stretching targets we will be reviewing the available data using our new systems to establish the most robust measure for consistent reporting.

The University considers that benchmarks are the most helpful milestone against which to assess our performance, rather than absolute measures which do not reflect context. But, equally, we recognise the value of aspirational targets and have therefore expressed milestones in absolute terms. These milestones have been set using the most recent HESA data as a baseline, which may not give an accurate representation of our current position given the year to year variability. In order to calculate statistical milestones we have plotted past performance to determine an overall trend and, in consultation with OFFA, have set stretching targets which often exceed the values indicated within these trends. In some cases this takes our milestones considerably above our current performance and the national average and will therefore require annual review to ensure they remain realistic. This is particularly relevant as sufficient data to assess the impacts of fees and changes in student number control and changing partnerships becomes available. These milestones are detailed in the 2016/17 resource plan, Table 7a.

Our other milestones and targets in the 2015/16 resource plan, Table 7b relate to outreach/WP activity and student support services. The University has a strong and established outreach programme, with milestones relating to both the level of engagement and the proportion of participants from under-represented groups. As outlined in section 4, our access to data has improved allowing us to more effectively monitor our progress. Using the new reporting tool we will be developing targets in relation to student support once we have a complete cycle of data to analyse.

# Monitoring and evaluation arrangements

The University undertakes to monitor compliance with this agreement and our progress towards milestones. Our Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) is responsible for our Access Agreement and WPSA/SS and chairs our Widening Participation Working Group (WPWG). The WPWG is responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of all our WP activities, including the access and success and progression measures outlined in this agreement. The group includes representation from across the university including the Union of UEA Students, Learning and Teaching Service, the Careers Service and the Equality and Diversity Office.

Under the direction of the WPWG, our WP strategy as outlined in section 2.1 is being developed and will be underpinned by an evaluation strategy. All activities, milestones and targets that form part of this Access Agreement as well as wider WP activity will be included in this evaluation strategy. Implementation of this strategy will be supported by colleagues across the institution as outlined below.

The monitoring and evaluation of outreach and retention activities focuses on outcomes and measures both short- and long-term impacts. This is supported by the University’s Outreach Evaluation Coordinator to ensure evaluation is well designed to provide robust data. In addition the University will carefully monitor the clarity of information on, and the effectiveness of, financial support available to students through surveys and focus groups to ensure our provision meets the needs of the least advantaged students. The University’s Business Intelligence Unit (BIU) supports monitoring of milestones and reviews market research in a WP context. Our data warehouse and new reporting tool enables easy access to data across the institution for the student lifecycle, improving the efficiency of monitoring and evaluation activity.

Supported by the WPWG, and as outlined in s.2.2.2, a specific widening participation post has been created within BIU to utilise University data to support smarter evidence based spend to achieve our ambitions of reducing the gap in successful participation and progression. This post will also work alongside our Outreach Evaluation Coordinator and Careers Systems Officer to enable consistent evaluation across the whole student lifecycle.

An annual monitoring report is made to the University’s Senate and Council.

# Equality and Diversity

The University has taken equality issues into account when designing access plans for 2016/17 and executed our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. As noted in section ‎2.4, target groups for outreach activity include those with protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010~~.~~ We are currently reviewing outreach data collection to ensure monitoring data relating to these groups is collected where possible to support assessment of any differences in impact for different groups. The University is also considering the most effective ways to standardise data collection of the student cohort in relation to the protected characteristics.

An equality and diversity focus informs our AA. We are continuing to develop our understanding of students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in relation to access, success and progression. This will determine if milestones for this group are required. In addition for outreach activity, we are working to understand of the characteristics of the local population with whom we engage. All outreach activities and information materials are designed to be inclusive, but where positive action is appropriate, some are specifically delivered for target groups. For example our specific events and activities targeted at mature students or our Sports for Boys project. Information relating to characteristics such as disability and religion and belief is also collected prior to events to ensure that participants’ individual needs are observed.

There is very close liaison between the operations of the Outreach and Equality and Diversity Teams. The Assistant Head of Outreach is a member of the Equality and Diversity Committee and the University’s Equality and Diversity Manager is involved in the development of this AA and is a member of the WP working group responsible for its monitoring and evaluation. In addition the Outreach and Equality and Diversity strategies are closely linked, as will be the WP strategy currently under development. The University is continuing to develop systems to enable disaggregation of data in relation to equality and diversity monitoring and to put robust monitoring systems in place. This is enabling the current review of data to establish any barriers to access, success and progression.

# Provision of information to prospective students

The University recognises the importance of clear, accessible and timely information for applicants and students in relation to fees and financial support. We will therefore ensure the materials and information we produce have been user tested, and reflects published good practice.

Once this Agreement has been submitted we will make such information available noting it is subject to approval by OFFA. Information will be widely available, including through the following routes:

* An animated finance infographic
* Finance guide for applicants and our University prospectus
* Dedicated web pages and social media
* Specific finance and budgeting talks and workshops to secondary, sixth-form and college students
* Enhanced IAG for teachers and advisers of prospective students
* Attendance at parents evenings

Previous feedback indicates that mature students and those from low participation neighbourhoods are significantly more interested in information about the cost of living and availability and value of bursaries. In recognition of this we are reviewing the information available online to ensure that it is clear and easily accessible, supporting students undertaking research into what is available to them.

Our outreach activities, particularly those relating to access to medicine and other professions, and our employability project also ensure that under-represented students are provided with information and advice at all stages of the student lifecycle.

The initial research indications outlined in 2.4 suggest students from low participation neighbourhoods may be less aware of activities such as Open Days and are less likely to use prospectus and course brochures. We are reviewing the breadth and depth of our communication materials to ensure less advantaged students are able to access information.

We will provide timely information to UCAS and SLC as they reasonably require allowing them to populate their applicant-facing web services.

# Consulting with students

Widening participation falls within the remit of the Welfare, Community and Diversity Officer of the Union of UEA students (UUEAS). They are a permanent member of the University’s Widening Participation Working Group, along with a senior member of Union staff, and are also a member of the University’s Equality and Diversity Committee. Through this involvement and additional discussions the Students’ Union has provided significant input into the development of this agreement and our WP strategic framework.

Current areas of UUEAS concern include financial support and student living and studying costs. We are currently working together in the development and delivery of a long-term student consultation plan in relation to the impact of financial support on retention and student outcomes. UUEAS also feed into discussions relating to our understanding of students financial issues.

Additional student consultation is currently being undertaken as part of the UEA 2030 project which is producing a 15-year strategic vision for the University. Input from this work throughout 2015 will be used to inform the further development of our Widening Participation strategy and related activity.

We are mindful of the number of surveys asked of students and have a clear schedule to prevent survey fatigue. To this end we continue to explore other methods to further increase consultation with our student population. Examples of these other methods include in depth telephone interviews which were carried out during the creation of this Access Agreement with current students who have progressed from our priority target schools. Given their experiences they are ideally placed to give informed feedback to shape our strategy. They have highlighted lack of confidence and perception of poor attainment as significant barriers to widening participation; the need for clear, early course specific information to support options and the need to be mindful of issues relating to transition and developing a sense of belonging.

Current and potential students (and influencers) are regularly consulted with to inform our communication strategies, to ensure that we deliver clear messages and effective IAG. For example, focus groups with local school students to establish preferred communication channels. We gather feedback from our student ambassador cohort, who given both their experience of university and understanding of widening participation, are ideally placed to comment on activities. In addition, the University’s Outreach team work closely with UUEAS to support their volunteering activity with schools and colleges through the provision of training and school engagement.

**University Campus Suffolk**

**Access Agreement 2016-17**

This agreement sets out how University Campus Suffolk (UCS) will safeguard and promote fair access to all of its HEFCE-funded full-time and part-time undergraduate programmes, recognising the need to support students throughout their whole student lifecycle. This agreement is submitted on behalf of the whole UCS network.

**Introduction**

UCS is a partnership between the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex, Great Yarmouth College, Lowestoft College, Suffolk New College and West Suffolk College. UCS provides Suffolk with a thriving university campus with a hub in the county town of Ipswich, together with linked Centres in Bury St Edmunds, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft. The development of UCS is a county-wide initiative serving the whole of Suffolk, Great Yarmouth and beyond.

UCS offers a unique collaboration of higher education (HE). The universities, building on their established reputations in teaching and research, collaborate with UCS to offer a professionally and vocationally relevant curriculum. All UCS degrees are jointly validated by both the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex. The two validating universities work closely with UCS to assure the quality and standards of all the degree courses on offer.

UCS is a private company limited by guarantee.

The UCS Board has agreed that UCS should seek to move towards a new governance structure. If successful this would mean that UCS would gain its own degree awarding powers and university title. The UCS Executive is committed to achieving this objective, and the earliest time that the process is likely to conclude is spring 2016. Following UCS’ application for TDAP last year, the institution is currently undergoing a period of scrutiny by the QAA, the outcomes of which are expected to be reported to ACDAP in the autumn of 2015.

UCS aims to be a beacon of excellence attracting students from Suffolk and beyond, helping to reverse the net export of graduates and the low post-16 participation rate which has adversely affected Suffolk for many years. The collaboration work between HEIs in Suffolk and Norfolk as part of the National Network for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) initiative will continue into 2016-17. This work aims to address the problem of isolation in rural and coastal communities in Suffolk and Norfolk, ensuring that all schools receive outreach activity to help ensure that HE is accessible to as many people as possible.

Widening participation continues to be central to the mission of UCS, and the profile of its student population reflects this. UCS has a high proportion of under-represented students, and there is a broad mix of students across the undergraduate student body. UCS is pleased with the progress being made against the ambitious targets set for student access, success and progression.

The UCS student body is diverse and inclusive with 28.4% studying part-time and 62.6% classed as mature (over 21) in 2014-15. 12.7% of UCS students in 2014-15 come from ethnic minorities against a background figure for Suffolk of 4.8% (Suffolk Demographic Profile 2013, based on 2011 Census data).

In 2013-14, 13.9% of UCS students disclosed a disability and 6.1% were in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance. Almost all young (18-21 year olds) full-time undergraduate UCS students came from a state school in 2012-13 (99.6%) and 47.6% are from NS-SEC classes (4, 5, 6, 7). The majority of students are from the eastern region with 56.6% from the IP postcode in 2014-15.

Despite the image of Suffolk being one of affluence, 33 of Suffolk’s Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are ranked in the most deprived 20% areas in England, and 14 LSOA’s are ranked in the worst 10% deprived areas in England. In Great Yarmouth, 22% of the borough’s population are living in the 10% most deprived areas in England (English Indices of Deprivation 2010). There are nearly 20,000 children living in income deprived households in Suffolk, and a further 4,500 in Great Yarmouth (26.5% of children). 23% of children in Ipswich are being brought up in poverty (IMD 2010, Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)).

Suffolk continues to address poor attainment in maintained schools through the Raising the Bar initiative led by Suffolk County Council (SCC) to improve the outcomes for young people in Suffolk. UCS has a key priority to widen access and raise aspirations across the region which helps to support Raising the Bar. The participation of 18 years old from Suffolk in HE has increased from 16% in 2010, to 22.7% in 2014 (SCC data). UCS has played a significant role in achieving this increase, but there is still considerable work to do. In 2014, 30.4% of English 18 year olds were accepted into higher education, and 30.7% of 18 year olds from the East of England were accepted into higher education (UCAS End of Cycle Report 2014). Based on a cohort size of 7735 in Suffolk, the low participation rate means that Suffolk sent 619 fewer students to HE than would have been expected if the participation rate was at the East of England average.

UCS will continue to focus on curriculum areas that are closely aligned with the regional economic and New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) priorities particularly STEM and those other areas that will support the local economy. UCS is working with SCC leading the Suffolk STEM Accelerator which will work with young people and schools to raise participation in STEM subjects at both school and in post-compulsory education and stimulate interest in STEM employment opportunities. UCS is also working with NALEP to establish a STEM Innovation Centre at UCS which will support new businesses and bring together students and employers.

In previous years UCS has reported high in-year retention and achievement rates. In 2013-14, the overall in-year retention rate was 95.4% and the achievement rate was 92.3%. A key strength is the quality of student support and this aspect contributes significantly to the retention and success rates of students. We also wish to report on continuation data which is currently at 86.8% for all full-time undergraduate students and 86% for all full-time mature undergraduate students (first degree and other, 2012-13 entrants, HESA). It is acknowledged that these figures are gradually increasing but need improvement, and this has guided the decisions over UCS’ access expenditure proposals which are discussed further in section 2.5.1.

In November 2014 the QAA undertook a Higher Education Review of UCS Ipswich. ​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​​The overall aim of Higher Education Review is to inform students and the wider public whether a provider meets the expectations of the higher education sector for:

* the setting and/or maintenance of academic standards
* the provision of learning opportunities
* the provision of information
* the enhancement of the quality o​f students' learning opportunities.

UCS was delighted to be awarded ‘Meets UK Expectations’ in each of the above four categories, and that the Review identified good practice at UCS relating to employer engagement and employability skills. The full report can be found on the QAA website.

**1. Fees, student numbers and fee income**

For 2016-17 UCS proposes to maintain fee levels in line with those set in its 2015-16 access agreement which are as follows:

* £9,000 for full-time Bachelor’s degrees and DipHEs (estimated number: 1313 FTE)
* £8,000 for full-time Foundation degrees (estimated number: 510 FTE)
* £8,490 (pro-rata) for part-time Bachelor’s degrees and DipHEs (estimated number: 20 FTE)
* £7,980 (pro-rata) for part-time Foundation degrees (estimated number: 75 FTE)
* £6,000 (pro-rata) for HND/HNC (estimated number: 70 FTE)
* £6,000 (pro-rata) for ITT courses (estimated number: 70 FTE)

It is felt that this fee structure represents an attractive offering to a wide range of potential students, and especially those from under-represented groups in HE. It reflects the diverse nature of UCS’ recruitment, and especially acknowledges the unique nature of UCS’ county-wide Learning Network.

All of the above fee levels will apply for the duration of the students’ studies.

**2. Access and student success measures**

***2.1 Assessment of access and retention record***

UCS has a high proportion of under-represented students. In 2016-17 UCS plans to spend 30% of higher fee income on additional access and retention measures.

This assessment is based on the following measures and indicators P3[[3]](#footnote-4):

* 47.6% of young full-time undergraduate UCS entrants are from low socio-economic groups (NS-SEC classes 4, 5, 6, 7) (HESA data 2012-13) (benchmark 39.7%)
* 29.1% of young full-time undergraduate UCS entrants are from low participation neighbourhoods (HESA data 2012-13, P3)
* 18.2% of mature full-time undergraduate UCS entrants have no previous HE and are from low participation neighbourhoods (HESA data 2012-13, P3) (benchmark 11.3%)
* 28.4% of UCS students are part-time (2014-15)
* 17.9% of part-time young undergraduate UCS entrants have no previous HE and are from low participation neighbourhoods (HESA data 2012-13, P3) (benchmark 18.1%)
* 12.7% of UCS students come from ethnic minorities (2014-15)
* 99.6% of young full-time UCS students come from state schools (2012-13)
* In Suffolk the number of young people in Local Authority Care (LAC) progressing to university each year rarely goes above single figures, though this is increasing and in 2013-14 17 care leavers were studying at UCS
* Deprivation levels in much of Suffolk and Great Yarmouth remain high. 50 of Suffolk and Great Yarmouth’s Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are ranked in the most deprived 20% of the country, and 26 LSOAs are ranked in the worst 10% of deprived areas in the country (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010)
* A high number of students in Suffolk and Great Yarmouth in low participation groups, are first generation HE students

***2.2 Strategic approach to access and student success – the balance between widening participation, fair access and retention***

In order to enhance access to UCS courses of under-represented groups in Suffolk and to increase the retention and success rates of students, UCS will concentrate most of its efforts on measures that will have a direct bearing on its own fair access, retention, performance and progression of students. UCS is, however, keen to continue with outreach work that promotes access to HE more generally and to maintain successful collaborative work and, as such, a proportion of UCS’ outreach work will continue to maintain and develop these partnerships.

UCS has seen a steady increase in students from widening participation backgrounds over recent years. This has been underpinned by successful outreach activity, improved pre-applicant information, advice and guidance (IAG), and excellent student support processes. UCS hopes to continue to improve these figures in 2016-17.

Though UCS’ overall in-year retention figures are good, recent HESA data highlights the need to improve continuation and achievement figures for full-time first degree students, including addressing and monitoring whether these figures are directly linked to the growing number of students from under-represented groups.

***2.3 Expenditure on access and student success measures***

In 2016-17 the total institutional expenditure on access, student success and progression measures will be approximately £2million, and this is broken down in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Anticipated expenditure on new access and retention measures:   * Student outreach and access * Student success * Progression: Disability * Progression: Careers and employability * Non-NSP financial support (bursaries) | £342,000  £237,000  £177,000  £128,000  £1,161,000 |
| **Total Institutional Expenditure in 2016-17** | **£2,045,000** |

***2.3.1 The balance between non-financial measures and financial support***

In 2016-17 UCS plans to rebalance its resources and expenditure. In the first years of the new regime, priority was given to student financial measures as UCS wished to retain its high level of applicants from lower socio-economic groups and it was considered that fee waivers would be the best mechanism for ensuring this. As a result, expenditure as a proportion of higher fee income was significantly higher than as required in OFFA guidance which placed UCS as one of the highest spending universities in the sector. UCS has had considerable success in widening participation (as above, 47.6% of young full-time undergraduate UCS entrants are from low socio-economic groups) but has found that uptake of its financial support measures has been difficult to promote. In particular, applications by students for the Suffolk Access Champion Scheme has been disappointing as has engagement of local schools and so this scheme will be withdrawn in 2016-17.

This experience at UCS is supported by a recent report carried out for OFFA about the impact of financial support on access and student success, which concludes that overall nationally, financial support does not have a significant effect on students’ choice of HEI or on non-continuation rates. Some institutional findings however suggest that financial support did impact the decision-making process of students, and meant it less likely for them to withdraw. The conclusions demonstrate the complexity of the situation and reflect the need for institutions to tailor the financial support they offer.

Following this, UCS intends to reduce its expenditure as a proportion of higher fee income to 30%. Levels of activity expenditure will be increased but financial support expenditure will reduce. UCS experience is that bursaries are important to our widening participation students and do have an impact on both access and retention and so it is proposed that the bursary offer to students is streamlined with expenditure on the main scheme maintained in absolute terms but that other unsuccessful schemes that have had little measurable impact are not continued. This will continue to enable UCS to respond to market demands and improve the attractiveness of UCS to widening participation students, supporting them through their whole student lifecycle and beyond. We will put in place better means of promoting the more simplified bursary scheme to potential students to improve take-up. Details of the proposed changes to bursaries are given under paragraph 2.6.

Below is a broad indication of the proportion of UCS’ institutional access spend between non-financial measures and financial support:

* Financial support (fee waivers and bursaries) - 57% (from 67% in 2015-16)
* Non-financial measures (access, student success and progression) - 43% (from 33% in 2015-16)

***2.4 Outreach and access***

UCS is committed to providing aspiration and attainment raising activities for under-represented groups across Suffolk and Great Yarmouth and encouraging them to apply for HE. This will include continuing to work in a structured way with schools and colleges with low progression rates, as well as with communities with low participation rates, including mature and part-time students. It is proposed that a proportion of the additional fee income will be allocated to specific measures designed to increase access.

UCS will invest approximately £342,000 in outreach and access in 2016-17.

Outreach activity will include:

* Continuation and growth of long term sustained outreach activity with young people from primary age upwards in carefully targeted schools and colleges in Suffolk, Great Yarmouth and beyond
* Maintaining intensive outreach activity such as summer schools, taster days, campus visits and family awareness days, that have proven to be most successful in evaluation of activity
* Subject specific events such as the Health Conference and Creative Arts Conference, and STEM events
* Development of progression agreements and a continued focus on outreach work with students that apply through a progression agreement
* Outreach activity with other targeted community groups e.g. mature students, military families, ethnic minority groups, care leavers, young carers, those wishing to study part-time and in particular parents
* Resources, including maintaining outreach staff and the UCS student ambassador scheme
* A subject specific ambassador programme, where current students contribute to outreach activity to inspire and enthuse young people to consider degree level study by running taster sessions in their subject area
* Collaborative activity with other regional HEIs to continue the work developed as part of the National Network for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO)
* Investing resources in contextual data gathering using CACI Acorn Data/HEAT, a strong and robust approach to evaluation of activity, and tracking students through their pre-applicant and student life cycle enabling UCS to focus resource and support on those most likely to need it
* Working with local schools to support development of new governance structures
* IAG materials to include explaining student finance and the UCAS application process to target groups and parents, and a targeted campaign to encourage mature and part-time applicants to UCS and HE in general
* Play a key role in the UCS Equality and Diversity Committee, which aims to review and monitor data about UCS staff and students and reflect relevant population benchmark data

UCS outreach will target the following groups:

* Students (and their supporters) from low income families, with particular emphasis on students from households with an income of less than £25,000. Some activities and UCS bursaries are offered to those with a household income of less than £42,620 (in receipt of maintenance grant)
* Students from primary school age upwards in carefully targeted Suffolk and Great Yarmouth Schools
* Students with a physical or specific learning disability
* Students who live in, or have recently left, local authority care
* Students from military families and ex-military
* Gifted and talented students
* Mature and part-time students
* Ethnic minority groups
* Young carers
* Parents/carers of these groups

UCS will ask schools to use the above criteria when selecting students to take part in outreach activity. UCS will continue to use contextual data resources, and indices such as POLAR 3 data, free school meals and no parental experience of HE to target the correct students.

UCS plans to enhance the transition for students from outreach work and access, through to application, enrolment and the student life cycle. The role of the UCS Infozone is to assist in providing IAG relating to wider educational opportunities in the local area, helping potential students to see pathways into HE and aspire to achieve higher level qualifications.

UCS will continue to deliver and where appropriate review the format of pre-entry study skills for prospective students. Currently this is usually offered to non-typical applicants and where it is felt they could benefit. With additional development and offer of online teaching and distance learning this will be available to more prospective students.

Induction events for mature students and others have proven successful in helping the transition to student life, and UCS plans to further develop targeted activities for identified ‘at risk’ groups, to be delivered throughout pre-arrival and over an extended induction period.

***2.4.1 Collaboration***

All outreach activities will be targeted and sustainable and will be run in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders.

UCS is the realisation of a Suffolk-wide outreach framework and, as such, will continue to work collaboratively with its partner FE colleges and other stakeholders, such as schools and the Raising the Bar project led by SCC, and NALEP, to raise attainment and widen participation. In particular UCS will strive to increase progression from its partner FE colleges on to HE programmes at UCS, where currently uptake is variable.

UCS works with all schools in Suffolk, but has a number of strong links with specific organisations that have low progression rates to HE or high numbers of widening participation students. UCS has a number of staff which sit on different school governing bodies, and are involved with the development of new governance structures.

UCS is the lead institution in the Suffolk and Norfolk NNCO, through this network and the Eastern Region Widening Participation Working Group (comprising of Anglia Ruskin University, UEA, UCS, Norwich University of the Arts, and the universities of Bedfordshire, Cambridge, Essex and Hertfordshire) UCS will continue to share best practice and facilitate collaborative working in the region, increasing the engagement of schools in the east. In particular UCS will work closely with UEA to offer activities for both key stage 3, mature students, and secondary level teachers. These activities, supported by the NNCO until December 2016, will be multi-institution and multi-location to ensure the greatest possible reach and attendance. In order to effectively target, monitor and evaluate activity, we will share data on secondary school liaison with the Suffolk and Norfolk NNCO network to enable a full geographic coverage in provision within our catchment areas. We also plan to explore opportunities for data sharing to aid effective tracking of participants. UCS has met the collaborative targets for 2013-14 and has set new targets to ensure collaborative outreach is continued after NNCO funding has ceased.

UCS will also continue to be involved in the Eastern Region Care Leavers Group, running a joint conference for practitioners, or collaborative outreach events for young people.

UCS is a proactive member of the Higher Education Liaison Officers Association (HELOA). HELOA is the professional body of HE staff who provide information, advice and outreach activities to prospective students, their families and guidance advisers. Good practice around access and outreach is shared amongst members regionally and nationally.

The newly opened Fujitsu Intel Innovation Hub at the Ipswich Campus is the result of a new partnership between UCS, Fujitsu and Intel. It is equipped with a range of the latest computer equipment, and will be used to promote the use of technology in higher, further and secondary education. The new centre houses an array of Fujitsu technology including tablets, hybrid devices, laptops and desktop PCs, all running off the latest Intel® Atom™ and Intel® Core™ processors. As part of the initiative, UCS and Fujitsu will work with local schools in line with the new national computing curriculum and promoting STEM skills. The hub is already being used for outreach work with schools and we plan to incorporate use of this new technology into more school activities.

***2.4.2 Contextual information***

UCS will continue to invest a proportion of its outreach investment on further improving its information systems to support contextual data gathering, tracking and evaluation. This has involved the purchase of contextual data (CACI Acorn data) which UCS will continue to use to cross reference with our student records to support outreach work and inform retention activity, alongside the use of the HEAT facility as part of the NNCO.  We will continue to develop a system/resource that will ensure all of UCS’ information systems (including the enquiry service desk, paperless admissions, student records and contextual data) are linked and can be used cohesively to enhance outreach activity and targeted recruitment, and support focussed on-going student retention and success.

***2.4.3 Courses and modes of study***

UCS understands that some of its courses and modes of study attract a higher number of non-traditional students. Research into retention has highlighted the varying levels of success and student retention for particular groups and UCS is developing objectives to target these specific groups to improve retention levels. Events, such as taster days, Year 12 conferences and Summer Schools with the aim of helping prospective students to understand what is involved before enrolling on such courses will continue. A new programme to prepare students for HE will be introduced for 2016-17, aimed primarily at those applying through clearing. Further development needs to be made around taster sessions for potential mature and part-time students.

***2.5 Student success and progression***

In total, UCS plans to spend £542,000 on student progression and success measures in 2016-17.

***2.5.1 Student success***

UCS is committed to increasing student retention and success rates and, where identified, in reducing and removing gaps in success between different student groups. In year retention rates are 95.4% (HESA 2013-14) for full-time undergraduate students compared to 95.1% in 2012-13. Whilst retention rates are gradually improving, they still require further improvement in order to benefit individual students as well as the overall institutional position. The Retention Working Group addresses and leads on the issues of retention. This includes comprehensive analysis of withdrawals of students with protected characteristics and/or other factors that may impact upon retention. This data and the work of the Retention Working Group report into the Equality and Diversity Committee for oversight and further scrutiny. Annually key processes are reviewed (e.g. induction), student feedback is gained and impact measured. Findings and recommendations are implemented to improve the student experience and to aid retention and student success.

UCS will invest £237,000 in retention and success measures including:

* Building on initial statistical findings UCS will seek student feedback on specific topics and aspects of student experience
* Continuing to deliver and where appropriate review the format of pre-entry study skills and bridging modules for prospective students
* Induction events for mature students. Further development of targeted activities for identified ‘at risk’ groups to be delivered throughout pre-arrival and over an extended induction period
* Collaboratively across UCS continue to develop services that actively engage students and provide robust means for personal, professional and academic development and success
* Effectively promote opportunities e.g. counselling, wellbeing and academic support, and proactively engage students where they are more likely to be at risk of withdrawing, or where there are differences in attainment
* Design, implement and oversee effective peer-to-peer support systems in collaboration with the UCS Students’ Union
* Development of inclusive teaching and learning practices
* Increased access to learning resources and e-resources to facilitate flexible and inclusive approaches to learning materials
* Further development of the Enquiry Service Desk (ESD) and Student Guides to improve access to information, advice and support services

Student withdrawal is greatest in the first year of study (16.06% at Level 4 in 2013-14), the most common reasons cited for withdrawal include academic failure and other personal reasons. Pre-entry courses will continue to be delivered to develop study skills and confidence in those that are mature or from a non-traditional entry route. Bridging modules will be investigated and implemented where they will effectively support students’ transition into HE.

To further the overall student experience and to engage students across the student lifecycle, Professional Services teams will continue to expand extra-curricular, co-curricular and inter-curricular learning opportunities for students supporting their academic, personal and professional development. Staff will achieve and/or maintain specialist qualifications and the suite of learning opportunities delivered will be underpinned by current pedagogical practices. Learning opportunities will include the development of; underpinning academic and literary skills required, critical thinking, self-confidence, emotional intelligence, reflexivity and employability, for example. UCS will continue to invest in the development of these activities and develop mechanisms whereby such activities can be recognised as achieved on the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR). High quality teaching is a key factor in the student experience and while teaching rates highly in student satisfaction scores, continual improvement and development is required.

UCS acknowledges that proposed reforms to Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs) will impact students financially. UCS continues to monitor the proposed reforms via the DSA Working Group. This group will identify actions and make recommendations regarding areas for development where UCS can anticipate and support individual need, for example through investment in additional equipment, new technologies or expansion of e-resources. In addition, an extensive programme of staff development will be maintained that focuses on developing strategies for supporting students and their individual needs, for example, understanding the needs of mature, part-time and disabled students. This will also ensure that UCS can meet the needs of students with mild difficulties who may (under new DSA regulations) no longer be eligible for DSAs.

UCS plans to further develop plain English and user-friendly Student Guides to enhance student access to information about academic matters. The ESD service continues to be managed through the UCS Infozone. ESD enables students to access information and advice quickly and online. Students are able to self-book and self-manage advisory appointments, giving greater autonomy. UCS will continue to invest in ESD to ensure it continues to deliver a timely and quality service. System enhancements to reporting functionality will also be explored, which will allow greater analysis of service data and further roll out of ESD across UCS will be explored to improve contact between students, academic and professional services, and for pastoral support to be facilitated more effectively.

Following a review of mentoring programmes at the end of 2014-15, UCS will continue to develop the Peer Assisted Student Success Scheme (PASS) to provide an essential peer support network. Counselling and well-being services are well utilised by mature students and students who are experiencing short-term periods of anxiety or low mood. However, male and younger students (under 25 years of age) are typically under-represented in service data in these areas. UCS will further develop well-being resources for students, for example online, in the form of talking therapies or peer-to-peer networks.

Mature students (25 years upwards) are significantly over-represented in service data relating to accessing finance advice (2013-14 service data 59.1% compared to UCS population 42%). This is an area which will be kept under review for potential development to offer advice and workshops developing financial proficiency in students.

***2.5.2 Progression: Disability***

UCS will invest £177,000 in disability and equality and diversity activities. These will include:

* Specialist mental health adviser/s
* Outreach disability clinics and investigation into the use of a SPLD screening tool to enhance the effectiveness of referral to diagnostic assessment
* Ring fence money to enable students to access diagnostic learning assessments
* Provision of one-to-one support for students
* External disability training and professional updating
* Specialist equipment and adaptations
* Promotion of services

UCS is committed to improving the experience of students with disabilities and continues to maintain the staffing resource in Student Support in recognition of the continuing need from students presenting with disabilities as the institution has grown. Students presenting with physical, learning and mental health disabilities can all access specialist advice and support and there is a well-established process for agreeing and supporting reasonable adjustments that is embraced and understood across the institution. Findings from retention data and student focus groups, shows that students with reasonable adjustments are less likely to withdraw and that students felt there should be greater promotion of services. Work will continue to develop ways to promote disability support and reasonable adjustments to prospective and current students.

As described in section 2.5.1, the Disability and Wellbeing Team plan to expand learning opportunities, which will build on the existing workshops in self-esteem, communication and managing exam stress. There is a continued requirement to provide specialist support for

students and training for staff as student need dictates.   
  
UCS is mindful of its duties and responsibilities under the Equality Act and allocates a proportion of additional fee income to specific measures designed to fulfil them. It has been recognised that monitoring and evaluating the impact of such measures on student recruitment, retention and success requires more resource.

Following the announcement regarding reforms to DSAs the Disability and Wellbeing Team and DSA Working Group continue to review provision and resources to ensure the most vulnerable students that are affected by these changes are protected and to ensure that access to HE and the student experience for students with disabilities is commensurate to non-disabled students.

***2.5.3 Progression: Careers and Employability***

UCS will invest £128,000 in careers and employability activities targeted at students from under-represented groups using contextualised data sources. These will include:

* Specialist careers and employability post/s
* Employer Liaison Adviser
* Promotion of internships, placements and student exchange
* Progression of under-represented groups into graduate level employment and/or postgraduate study
* Internship programmes
* Promotional campaign
* External employability training and professional updating
* Careers Fairs and other related activities

A significant aspect of the UCS approach to improving the success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is the attention to careers and employability advice including close engagement with employers to ensure the curriculum is fit for purpose. Broadly speaking, the overall offering at UCS is vocational, with courses overtly preparing students for the world of work, with graduate key skills embedded in programmes. In recent years, there has been targeted investment in using additional fee income to extend and enhance the internship and work placement scheme to support one of our main targets.

The Career Edge model, a holistic framework for graduate development was adopted in 2014-15 and a pilot Graduate Development Programme embedding this model into curriculum areas and across centralised services was trialled in 2015-16, bringing together Learning, Student Services and the Suffolk Business School. As described in section 2.5.1 the Careers and Employability Team will continue to expand the annual cycle of learning opportunities, guest speakers and fairs to support the progression of students and target groups that are under-represented to participate in these activities.

The Employer Liaison Adviser will continue to generate and increase opportunities and internships for students, with a particular focus on creating opportunities that are accessible. Further work is anticipated to expand employer engagement by working collaboratively with Research and Enterprise to engage SMEs with the UCS internship programme and following this identify progression opportunities for graduates.

The International Officer continues to support academic links with EU Universities to grow opportunities for international student exchange, supporting students’ development of cultural capital and international awareness. Additional resource allocated to the promotion and administration of Erasmus+ raises students’ awareness and aspirations to such opportunities.

The terms of reference for all Faculty Boards and Committees were reviewed to ensure that they reflect Chapter B4 of the QAA Quality Code: ‘enabling student development and achievement’. Ensuring that supporting all students’ personal, academic and professional development is a core area of discussion and focus. The B4 mapping document recording key processes and developments is kept under regular review and scrutiny of the Learning Teaching and Assessment Group (LTAG).

UCS promotes postgraduate provision through specific postgraduate open events, advertising to alumni and final year students. Development of peer networks gives undergraduate students access to postgraduate case-studies.

***2.6 Financial support for students***

***2.6.1 NSP Financial Support***

This is expected to be nil in 2016-17 as all planned expenditure is completed in 2015-16. However, there may be some deferred expenditure relating to awards not taken up for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 cohorts but this expenditure does not form part of this access agreement.

***2.6.2 Non-NSP Financial Support***

In-line with our own findings, and the supporting research carried out for OFFA, UCS is proposing to streamline its bursary offer to students and consolidate the areas that are proving successful.

***UCS Bursary***

For 2016-17 UCS will continue to run a bursary scheme for new students studying full-time on an undergraduate programme. Students who meet the following criteria will receive up to a £1,000 bursary in their first year of study and up to a £500 bursary in both their second and third years of study, to support student success.

The eligibility criteria for the bursary scheme will be as follows. Students must be:

* Studying a full-time undergraduate degree programme
* In receipt of part or all of the maintenance grant (students with a household income of up to £42,620) or a special support grant
* Living in the UK

If applications for the UCS bursary exceed the number of allocations, awards will be subject to additional academic criteria.

***Looked After Children Bursary***

This will be offered to students who live or have lived in local authority care. The bursary will be £500 each year of undergraduate study.

This will relate well to UCS outreach work activity, as Looked After Children are highly under-represented in HE and are a key target group for UCS.

**3. Target and milestones**

***Targets and milestones relating to applicants, entrants or student body***

The following targets are until 2019-20, with measurable milestones at the end of each year. These targets include full and part-time students.

* UCS will aim to maintain the current broad mix of its undergraduate student body of over 45% of students from lower socio-economic groups
* UCS will aim to maintain an in-year retention rate of 95%
* UCS will aim to increase its in-year achievement rates by 0.5% each year
* UCS will aim to increase student continuation by 1% each year
* UCS will aim to increase the number of students who disclose a disability by 0.5% each year
* UCS will aim to increase the number of students from BME backgrounds by 0.25% each year
* UCS will increase the number of Care Leavers from Suffolk and Norfolk applying to HE by two students each year
* In the UCS 2015-2020 strategic vision one of our institutional KPIs is to monitor student dropout rates. We would like to include this as a new target, to support monitoring our retention work in real-time, alongside the HESA targets. The undergraduate full-time dropout rate for all non-health students is 12% (2013-14), the target is to decrease this figure by 1% each year until we reach 9% and then maintain this rate

***Other targets and milestones***

The following targets are until 2019-20, with measurable milestones at the end of each year.

* UCS will contribute towards raising the aspirations and attainment of young people in Suffolk, and ultimately progression of Suffolk students onto HE in general. UCS will contribute to increasing the number of young people in Suffolk progressing to HE by 1% each year
* UCS will maintain the number of residential and non-residential summer schools it runs for schools
* UCS will run one joint summer school or campus visit per year with other regional HEIs
* UCS will increase the number of outreach activities it runs for schools and colleges by 5% each year from 2016-17
* UCS will run two regional conferences per year for 11-16 schools in collaboration with other regional HEIs
* UCS aims to enhance the number of paid internships for students
* UCS aims to increase its graduate employability rate by 2% each year
* UCS will develop a shared programme of HE training for teachers with other HEIs and hold one event per year

**4. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements**

***Institutional monitoring arrangements***

UCS will monitor compliance with the commitments made under this agreement and its progress against UCS’ targets and milestones. The following indicators will be monitored annually:

* The retention, achievement and continuation rates of full-time and part-time undergraduate students
* The socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, age, disability status and entry qualifications of its new entrants
* The graduate employability rates and progression of full-time and part-time undergraduates
* Quantity and impact of outreach activities taking place in each year

The monitoring will be undertaken via annual reports to the UCS Academic Board and the Senates of the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex via the UCS Joint Academic Committee. Reports will be submitted by the Deputy Provost (Resources).

***Evaluation***

UCS will evaluate all measures in the agreement to ensure long term value for money. Evaluation and monitoring data will be collected for all initiatives and activities by the following methods:

* Pre and post evaluation questionnaires to assess impact of all activity including collaborative work. Evidence relating to changes in attitudes and aspirations as well as long term changes in progression will be focussed on
* Tracking of a selected cohort of students from year 9 through to their destination at 18 and comparing their progress with a selected control group of the same age
* Evaluation of attainment and destination data provided by SCC
* The UCS Management Information Team which provides statistics on socio-economic data relating to retention and other matters
* The Equality and Diversity Committee which reviews UCS data on ethnic minority, age and disability and other protected characteristics – with specific working groups looking at retention and progression
* Student Experience Committee where there is representation from UCS students. This group is used to evaluate the entire student lifecycle, from pre-admission to graduation, for example by looking at NSS data and identifying both academic and non-academic areas that can be improved upon
* The Retention Working Group which reviews and monitors data on retention, and works to provide students with a positive induction experience

**5. Equality and diversity**

All UCS policies are subject to equality impact assessment and draw upon consideration of the access, success and progression of students, broken down by protected characteristics. This also includes consideration of academic appeals, complaints, academic misconduct, and professional misconduct and these are reported to Academic Board and the Joint Academic Committee of our validating Universities.

At the end of 2014-15 UCS undertook a project to understand perceptions of race and ethnic (in) equality and differences in experience, UCS continues to implement actions from the findings of this project.

UCS monitors how its duties under the Equality Act 2010 are implemented and evaluated through the Equality and Diversity Committee which enjoys a diverse membership from community partners. In addition the work of the DSA Working Group advised on actions UCS should take to mitigate the impact of the proposed reforms.

Work of other departments such as the Outreach and Student Services teams continue to report into the Equality and Diversity Committee providing a holistic view of Equality and Diversity issues across the institution. Much work has been done to capture and analyse a broader range of protected characteristics of students in order to inform marketing and recruitment activities, curriculum development, and the tailoring of support to suit a range of needs. Continuing to develop an inclusive culture in HE remains an institutional priority. Mechanisms in place that monitor student attendance and identify students at risk continue to be reviewed for their effectiveness and there are plans to build on this work to analyse data across the student lifecycle. Marketing and recruitment activities target and engage closely with specific community events where diverse groups are represented with the aim of raising aspirations and encouraging them into HE.

All staff involved with the recruitment of students receive training which emphasises the need to ensure discrimination, either direct or indirect, is not exercised during any recruitment processes.

Much work has been done to support applicants and students with disabilities and UCS regularly reviews its compliance with the expectations of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Equality Act 2010. All marketing literature and digital media, including the website, is fully compliant with accessibility guidelines. For example, web-based tools were reviewed and a suitable piece of software sited for use on the UCS website that enable partially sighted and dyslexic students to access information. All students are able to access the physical environment in which they study, learn, live and take part in the social life of the institution. UCS continues to invest in information and advice for applicants to ensure that they are aware of the reasonable adjustment process, Disabled Students Allowances and are encouraged to disclose as early as possible. UCS is committed to developing the Applicant Portal which allows applicants to communicate on-line with UCS and with other applicants, building early links and familiarity with course materials and tutors.

UCS supports a multi-faith Chaplaincy representing a wide range of faiths. There is provision for private prayer and community worship and a programme of activities and clubs for different groups and effective links with local faith groups. The latter is particularly important for students from BME origin and different faiths outside Suffolk who find comfort from linking to established networks nearby. The Chaplains are very visible in the UCS community, enhancing the wellbeing service provided by Student Services, and welcoming students of all faiths or no faith who are troubled in any way. In particular, strong links with the local mosque have proved very useful in furthering understanding of the needs of our Muslim students.

The International Student Officer will continue to offer staff training and support aspects of the PGCAP with sessions relating to cultural capital and cultural awareness. Work continues to internationalise the experience at UCS by increasing opportunities for student and staff international exchange.

**6. Provision of information to prospective students**

UCS is committed to clearly informing prospective applicants and existing students of the tuition fees that UCS charge and the financial support UCS offer students in each year of their degree, including information on financial support packages.

Information will be made available through a wide range of channels which include specific information leaflets for applicants, the UCS website, its printed prospectuses, associated documentation, social networks and other online tools. UCS also commits to providing UCAS and SLC with information as required to populate their applicant-facing web services and databases.

Applicants will also be advised of the estimated associated costs of studying on particular courses during the application process and on the website, along with advice on the support available both at UCS and more broadly.

The UCS Infozone gives a single, coherent point of contact and it provides both current students and applicants with a well-established Student Support service including specific student financial and welfare advice. The Infozone-online service also provides an enhanced service and FAQs. Pro-active Recruitment and Admissions teams also support and advise applicants through the admissions process. The UCS Infozone and Student Recruitment and Outreach team provide an IAG service to students and applicants, as well as to members of the public, both online and in person. The Careers and Employability team provide IAG support to students’ right through their student life cycle and progression beyond HE. All services are promoted actively on both the UCS website and through MyUCS (staff and student intranet). The UCS Network of Centres also provides an IAG service to potential applicants about UCS and HE in general and progression onto postgraduate study.

**7. Consulting with students**

UCS has consulted with the Students’ Union when designing this agreement and the Union is in support of the proposals. UCS staff attended a meeting with the Students’ Union President and Vice-President to discuss potential changes to the Access Agreement. Feedback focussed mainly on UCS financial support packages and highlighted the students’ desire for continued bursaries to support them whilst at UCS.

UCS also consulted with current students (both full and part-time) via the Student Experience Committee.

UCS students will continue to be involved in the implementation of the Access Agreement in a number of ways, including through the subject specific ambassador programme where students will participate in outreach activities in local schools. In particular the Students’ Union will support UCS in promoting the financial support packages to potential students, and continue to be involved in the monitoring of the Access Agreement through sessions with the Student Union Council.

The President of UCS Union has stated his support for the 2016-17 agreement ‘UCS Union is supportive of the Access Agreement and is pleased that UCS have considered our feedback to be beneficial in the process. We are keen to continue taking part in outreach activities with potential students’.

1. Defined for this purpose as being within the Top 20 in The Times League Table [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. What do we know about the impact of financial support on access and student success? Report to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) by Nursaw Associates (March 2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Based on POLAR 3 data. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)