

University of Essex

**Access Agreement
2017-18**

1. Introduction

This access agreement applies to students enrolling on undergraduate programmes which commence in 2017-18.

1.1. Vision and aims

Our founding vision in 1965 was to be “freer, more daring, more experimental”, a principle to which we still hold true. Our bold agenda, set out in our strategic plan¹, focuses on a very clear mission: to contribute to society through excellence in education and excellence in research.

The aim of our education strategy is to offer our students a transformational educational experience, encompassing both the academic and the extra-curricular, which provides them with the opportunity to fulfil their potential as individuals by developing themselves within our living and learning community as independent learners equipped to take responsibility for their personal and professional development throughout their lives².

1.2. Values

The pursuit of our mission is underpinned by our core values, shared across our community and evidenced in our activities and behaviours. These values are excellence, academic freedom, integrity, partnership, accountability, community, innovation, global outlook and inclusivity. Sustaining an inclusive and diverse community that is open to all who have the potential to benefit from membership of it, which ensures equality of opportunity for all our members with equal respect and dignity at all times, is essential for the success of our university³.

1.3. Principles

This access agreement sets out how we will invest our higher fee income to provide transformational opportunity to our students across the student lifecycle. We have invested significant time and resource in developing our access agreement to ensure our investment is focused on delivering impact and providing students with the ability to achieve successful outcomes.

We have reviewed the principles behind our previous access agreements and have concluded that they continue to be appropriate for this access agreement.

Accordingly, this access agreement is based on the following principles:

- recruiting students nationally with the merit and potential to benefit fully from the educational opportunities offered by the University, irrespective of socio-economic background or ability to pay;
- increasing retention and progression for students from under-represented groups by recognising and supporting their specific needs;
- increasing levels of student achievement and ensuring the mechanisms to educate our students increase their prospects of securing a good degree;
- achieving successful outcomes and increasing the proportion of students achieving positive employability through providing specific support and mechanisms to help graduates from under-represented groups be on a level playing field with other UK graduates achieving graduate-level employment; and
- demonstrating the value of the type of education we offer as a research-intensive, research-led University by facilitating opportunities and access for researchers in schools, and engagement with young people and with families and education professionals.

1.4. Oversight, implementation and monitoring

Projects, activities and services to support student progression and success are delivered throughout the student lifecycle by a combination of departments and teams across the University. This includes academic departments, our Students' Union, other student groups and professional services such as

¹ University of Essex strategic plan 2013-19, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/about/strategy>

² University of Essex education strategy 2013-19, http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/strategy/documents/education_strategy.pdf

³ University of Essex equality and diversity framework and sub-strategy 2015-18, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/equality/strategy.aspx>

the outreach team, student support, employability and careers centre, talent development centre and student engagement team.

Our education strategy and our access agreement plans are aligned, and delivery of our access agreement activity is directed and supported by the annual education action plan. Progress against our access agreement commitments is monitored and reviewed by the education committee – a sub-committee of Senate – and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education).

1.5. Consultation with students

We have worked in partnership our Students' Union to produce this agreement. Our Students' Union has also been involved in the steering groups and other committees which oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of our action plans.

1.6. Partnerships

The University has several strategic partnerships which seek to increase access to our education provision.

This access agreement includes details of the Edge Hotel School access agreement commitment. Details are provided in appendix A.

No access agreement is required for University of Essex Online, delivered by Kaplan Open Learning, due to the level of tuition fee charged.

Our partnerships with Colchester Institute and South Essex College of Further and Higher Education will have no new entrants in 2017-18. Therefore, these partnerships are not included within this access agreement, although the relevant access agreements are attached as appendices B and C respectively. Continuing students will continue to be covered by the access agreement appropriate to their year of entry.

2. Tuition fees

Our tuition fees for new and continuing students are subject to any real-term permitted increases in subsequent years.

2.1. Full-time students

For Home and EU undergraduate students admitted in 2017-18, and continuing students that were admitted in 2012-13 to 2016-17 inclusive, we propose to charge a fee of £9,250.

The estimated number of students who will be paying the fee of £9,250 is expected to be 8,409 in 2017-18, subject to a number of varying factors.

2.2. Part-time students

The majority of our part-time provision is delivered by our franchise partners included under the partnership sections of this agreement, which is detailed elsewhere in this document.

Where other part-time provision is provided, tuition fees are not expected to exceed the basic part-time fee level of £4,625 within an academic year, due to part-time study being undertaken on a modular basis. Although we do not expect any student to incur a part-time tuition fee above the basic fee level, should this need occur, we will spend an appropriate proportion of any income above this part-time basic fee level on access measures.

2.3. Placement years

To support our commitment to give students access to the additional opportunities provided by a period of study abroad or an industrial placement, students admitted between 2012 and 2017 and subject to the new fee will not be charged a fee for a study abroad year or for an industrial placement year as part of a four-year course. This is predicted to benefit approximately 600 students in 2017-18 (who entered in 2015-16) and participation will continue to increase in future years.

2.4. Continuing students

Students admitted prior to 2012 will be subject to the maximum fee levels for entrants prior to 2012.

3. Expenditure

In 2017-18, we will spend 19% of higher fee income, as defined by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). We expect our commitment to continue at this level in 2018-19.

Our steady-state expenditure, excluding partners, of higher fee income in 2017-18 will be:

- Access: 1.7%
- Student Success: 3.8%
- Progression: 2.8%
- Financial Support: 10.7%

Our proposed expenditure is in line with OFFA guidance⁴. Our expenditure reflects our proportion of students from under-represented groups in a research-led university and our targeted evidence-based approach.

Total expenditure including partnerships within the scope of this agreement will be 19% in 2017-18.

4. Outreach and access

In order to support access for students with the potential to benefit from a University of Essex education, we will invest a proportion of higher fee income in delivering outreach activity.

4.1. Targeting

We use POLAR3 data, school attainment and free school meals data to target schools and colleges. We invest resources in ensuring that our target schools access our wider outreach activity, ensuring an appropriate representation of students from under-represented groups and providing the ability for students and schools to benefit from peer support.

4.2. Activity

We use our past experience of delivering outreach activity and national best practice to inform the development of our work. Our programme is reviewed annually to ensure we can maximise the impact of our resources invested in this area. Developments in recent years include:

- VI6 initiative;
- expansion of our subject-focused activity through conferences and junior lectures;
- enhancing access to our study support materials for schools, teachers and students at the enquiry and application stage, including our online learning platform Essex101 which develops students' study skills prior to entering university;
- implementation of a progression project that works with cohorts of students across their school/college years;
- increasing our work with teachers;
- pre-arrival mentoring;
- Schools Membership programme.

We will also continue to deliver a summer school, campus visits, school talks, study skills and primary school activity.

Our outreach activity is delivered by a dedicated outreach team with input and assistance from other departments and teams where required.

4.3. VI6

Since September 2015, we have been working in partnership with six local sixth forms, enabling students to study an A-Level on our Colchester campus. The A-Levels being taught as part of the scheme are those which the sixth forms would not be able to offer by themselves due to small class sizes. By working together, the sixth forms have been able to offer several additional A-Levels and to have good cohort sizes.

⁴ Office for Fair Access, Strategic guidance: developing your 2017-18 access agreement, <https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/strategic-access-agreement-guidance.pdf>

In addition to offering the space and facilities on campus at no charge, we work with the six forms to offer additional academic and cultural opportunities such as taster sessions, use of learning facilities and interaction with our students and academic staff.

Plans are being put in place to increase the number of A-Levels being taught in this manner from September 2016.

4.4. Long-term outreach

Our outreach activity builds long-term relationships with participants and schools and, in some cases, begins with students at primary school age.

4.4.1. University Challenge

We will continue to deliver our University Challenge programme, initiated in 2007 and delivered in partnership with a local education trust. The project works with Year 6 primary students as part of their transition into the schools we work with at secondary-school level.

Data is collected to track participants' future engagement with, and their access and progression to, the University.

4.4.2. Progress with Essex

We have developed a progression project that works with cohorts of students across their school/college years, starting with students in Year 8 and working with them through to Year 13 and university entry. The selection of students for the scheme is based on POLAR3 data and academic ability, working with the schools involved to ensure effective targeting in order to maximise the impact of the project. The interventions students receive and participate in during the project are relative to their age and stage, and in some cases are opened up to a wider group of participants within the school/college.

The progression project is evaluated, including participant and teacher questionnaires, school data on participants' progression and attainment, and tracking of participants' access and progression to the University.

4.4.3. Children's University

We have links with Essex Children's University which is part of the national Children's University Trust and offers innovative learning opportunities to seven- to fourteen-year-olds outside of school hours. We have a number of accredited activities across the age groups and host a number of graduation ceremonies for local participants.

4.4.4. Long-term school/college links

Our continued work with our target schools is an important element for delivering long-term outreach. In many instances, this involves positively impacting on the culture and perceptions within our target schools. Many of these schools are already, or will become, involved in our new Schools Membership scheme.

4.5. Working in partnership

We have existing relationships with a number of schools and colleges, local education providers, education trusts and networks. We have always maintained very strong relationships with other higher education institutions in the region. In particular, we seek to ensure school, college and university resources are targeted appropriately and are not duplicated. We also collaborate with other universities on programmes as part of our aim to encourage geographical mobility of students from under-represented groups; the Pathways to Law programme is an example of such work.

Our collaborative work extends beyond our access agreement activity, and we often work with education organisations and charitable trusts on projects designed to support students' skills development, pre- or post-arrival.

We also work with local authorities to deliver collaborative outreach projects, including Essex County Council, Southend Borough Council, Colchester Borough Council and Tendring District Council.

We work with our Students' Union across a number of areas of our outreach activity, and in particular with their volunteering schemes and engagement with local schools. This relationship works particularly well with students volunteering regularly on our arts activity. This partnership provides opportunities for both local school staff and pupils, and for our University students that participate in these activities.

4.5.1. Schools Membership

In spring 2015, we launched our Schools Membership programme. Several of our target outreach schools were selected for the enhanced Schools Membership Plus programme. This programme has strengthened existing relationships with schools and colleges as well as ensuring that we have effective communication channels. The scheme gives schools and colleges access to outreach activity, continuing professional development events, an online newsletter and other useful information and activities. Schools and colleges in the programme also help inform future activity through feedback and evaluation.

4.5.2. National Network for Collaborative Outreach

Alongside Anglia Ruskin University, we are the joint leads for the Essex Collaborative Outreach Network. This network has been based within our outreach team.

The network has worked on a variety of activity including careers fairs, summer schools and conferences to support targeted groups across Essex. We have worked to increase awareness of outreach work amongst schools and individuals as well as raising aspirations of target groups in general.

The network is currently in the delivery stages of its plan, working with partner institutions to produce a variety of activities to support targeted groups. Funding provided by the Government for the network is due to end in December 2016. The work of the network will soon be evaluated, and we will work with our partners to embed activity which has been successful into our wider outreach work.

5. Access and admissions

We are committed to fair access and we encourage applications from applicants demonstrating the greatest potential to benefit from the type of education that we provide. Our admissions policies and procedures are designed to ensure that all applications are considered fairly and consistently, and in accordance with professional standards.

Applying a holistic approach, individual applicants are considered on the basis of their merits, abilities and potential regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, socio-economic background, family circumstances, religious or political beliefs, affiliations or other irrelevant distinction.

We do not currently use contextual data in making selection decisions at the point of application. We use contextual data at the point of confirmation in order to allow additional consideration of factors which may have affected borderline students who have not met the conditions of their offer; this has been in place since October 2012 entry. Our education committee continues to review the use of contextual data.

6. Progression and success

Our student community includes a substantial proportion of students from under-represented groups and with a wide range of academic backgrounds. We recognise the importance of supporting our students from their pre-arrival engagement with the University through to achieving graduate-level employability outcomes. We seek to ensure we can maintain and continually enhance the support we offer to these and other students and our plans to support progression and student success are set out and targeted to ensure we support our students in the most effective way. We monitor and analyse students' progress and academic outcomes at all levels and we consider recommendations and take action where appropriate.

The creation of a new student life directorate in 2016 brings together many of the services and teams which provide support to our students during their time at the University. It currently incorporates

student support, the employability and careers centre, and the student engagement team. The directorate will ensure that support services and activities are delivered in a strategic and coherent manner with a focus on engaging with students throughout the student lifecycle from enrolment through to graduation. The directorate also has a responsibility to increase awareness and accessibility of support services by all students.

As part of our commitment to making services more accessible and easy-to-use for students, we opened the new Silberrad Student Centre on our Colchester campus in August 2015. This has brought together many support services in a single location to offer integrated information, advice, guidance and other support.

We have outlined below how we intend to support students throughout their time in the University and also to continue to support those students as graduates in the period after graduation, where they require such support.

Where support is available to all students, we include a proportion of the expenditure representative of the proportion of students from under-represented groups within our student community. We target students from under-represented groups and monitor engagement with this activity to ensure those students benefit from our wider support.

6.1. Student engagement

During 2015-16, we changed our approach to student engagement (progression and success) with the repurposing and renaming of our student engagement team. This team is already allowing us to be more strategic and flexible in the actions taken to support student success.

The student engagement team is already trialling new projects and using a broad evidence base to inform decision-making. As a result of these findings, we have increased investment to support the following activity:

- a further increase in central staff and operational resource to support the engagement, progression and success of students;
- activity to support the transition and attainment of students from under-represented groups, e.g. mature learners, commuting students, BAME students;
- targeted activity to improve continuation and success delivered at key points in the academic year with emphasis on activities where students are beneficiaries and benefactors, e.g. peer engagement ambassador and intern schemes;
- additional activity targeted in departments/schools where data analysis highlights particular challenges around continuation, progression and success;
- enhancements to mentoring schemes across the student lifecycle from pre-arrival through to employment, e.g. undergraduate peer mentoring in all academic departments;
- enhancements to personal tutoring arrangements and other student support at department/school level, equipping staff to provide timely support.
- active engagement with curriculum review enhancing student learning opportunities.

6.2. Student support

We are committing to provide funding for a range of student support services which help students to overcome any difficulties they may face in succeeding with their studies and to make the most of their time at the University. Our student support teams on all three campuses will continue to provide support for students from under-represented groups, particularly students with a disability, to assist with their progression and success.

Since 2011, we have increased our investment in our residence life provision to support the transition of students into higher education, to foster an inclusive community within residences, and to assist in skills development essential for independent living and learning. By helping students to settle at the University, residence life supports a sense of belonging, induction and retention of students. This programme will continue to engage students from a wide range of ethnic and social backgrounds. In addition, the experience of being a residence assistant with substantial training, supervision and opportunities to develop and practice skills, provides further opportunities for students to enhance their employability.

We will continue to make available financial support for students in significant financial hardship. Our commitments include expenditure to support disabled students who would previously have received support through the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), including the provision of non-medical helpers such as note-takers, library assistants and practical support assistants.

6.3. Learning and development

We will continue to offer learning and development support to all students and, in particular, those from under-represented groups. Examples include the following continuing or new activity:

- access to study support and study skills materials for enquirers, applicants and teachers;
- an online study skills programme for applicants, which supports applicants in their preparation and transition to the University;
- access to a suite of self-assessments for students to understand their starting point and to target academic skills support more effectively;
- the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP), which provides students with the opportunity to work in placements alongside established academics and to learn first-hand what being a researcher really means;
- the Challenge Essex project, which provides students with an opportunity to reflect on and develop their research skills and mind set in partnership with academic staff;
- online taster modules to introduce prospective students to their topic of study before arrival;
- academic skills development classes embedded within the curriculum;
- extended academic integrity and scholarly writing support to ensure maximum awareness of the conventions surrounding scholarly practice;
- coaching and mentoring for undergraduate students;
- targeted academic skills activity through our Talent Development Centre, which includes independent study, face-to-face advice and guidance, peer-assisted learning, and bespoke projects and events;
- increasing access to online submission, feedback and assessment of coursework through the FASER online submission service, which will be developed to enable students to monitor their progress and respond to feedback over time;
- professional development opportunities and recognition support for academic staff;
- access to an institutional curriculum design and delivery toolkit to ensure teaching is aligned with our education strategy.

6.4. Graduate-level employability outcomes

Since 2012, we have continued to increase our investment in targeted employability activity. This has included evaluation of our students' engagement with our employability services and ongoing research to ensure we can maximise the impact of our investment.

We are committing to continue to invest in the following initiatives and programmes:

- Big Essex Award for employability;
- introducing more internships, including graduate internships;
- creative internships for graduates from under-represented backgrounds;
- Frontrunners internship scheme;
- student ambassador scheme;
- targeted employability support for students from under-represented groups, including launching a pilot programme for high-potential under-represented students aspiring to 'blue chip' companies;
- mentoring of students by employers and alumni;
- targeted workshops to support identified needs;
- ongoing employability support to recent graduates;
- employability and careers staff embedded within academic faculties, e.g. employability officers, placement managers;
- provision of the Languages for All scheme, which provides free language tuition for one year alongside degree programmes;
- support for students wishing to study abroad;
- gender-equality initiatives, e.g. Sprint personal and professional training for female students/graduates.

7. Financial support for students

We will provide financial support packages which have been developed based on research and consultation with our current students and our Students' Union. Such financial support will be targeted at ensuring students can access and benefit from their education at the University, and that they are not prevented from doing so due to financial concern or hardship.

7.1. Bursary scheme

Our findings have shown that being in receipt of a bursary is a positive predictor of student retention; students not in receipt of a bursary are more likely to fail or withdraw from their course than those that received a bursary. The scale of this difference has varied in recent years as the bursary arrangements have altered, but the difference has been present in each case. Our findings have also shown that this effect persists even when age, gender, disability, ethnicity, postcode (POLAR3), stage number, course campus, and the type of bursary scheme according to which awards were granted are taken into consideration. Although the criteria for bursary schemes have changed over the years, household income has remained one of the criteria for an award. Therefore, the University will continue to provide a bursary scheme for students from low-income households.

We will provide a bursary of £1,000 per year for the first two years of study and £500 for the final year, to full-time entrants with a household income of up to £25,000 and who meet all eligibility criteria.

Students undertaking a year abroad or placement year as part of a four-year course will not be eligible for this bursary due to these students not incurring tuition fees for this year.

From 2017-18, new entrants to nursing, midwifery and allied health professions will no longer receive NHS bursaries. For the first time, these students will have access to our bursary scheme; this was not previously permissible. Continuing students who are funded by the NHS will not be eligible to access our bursary scheme.

7.2. Other targeted bursary schemes

7.2.1. Care Leavers' Bursaries/Refugee Bursaries

We will offer a number of targeted bursaries of up to £1,000 per year to students who were in local authority care prior to starting their university course and/or who have refugee status, or who are dependants of refugees. These students may have overcome significant barriers to gain a place at university and could have less practical and financial family support upon which they can rely.

7.2.2. Diagnostic Assessment Bursaries

We will provide bursaries to contribute to the cost of a diagnostic assessment for dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties will be provided to students, allowing assessments to take place at or soon after enrolment or throughout students' courses. This bursary will benefit students who have not been in a position to fund an assessment prior to starting their course and will help to ensure the relevant support is in place. Each bursary will contribute to the cost of a diagnostic assessment and will be paid directly to a University-approved assessor.

7.2.3. International Experience Bursaries

We recognise that cost can be a significant barrier for students seeking to access international internships, placements, volunteering or other educational experiences, e.g. conferences or summer schools. We will support students from low income households to access these experiences by providing a bursary of up to £1,500 to fund an international internship, placement or voluntary activity. The voluntary activity must be of four- to twelve-week duration over the summer vacation.

7.2.4. Helena Kennedy Foundation

We will offer one bursary through the Helena Kennedy Foundation. This will support a disadvantaged student who has overcome significant barriers in order to continue their education and progress to the University.

7.3. Finance information for students

We provide information on student financial support on our website and in all pre-application material, including the prospectus. We also distribute information at pre-applicant events including higher

education fairs, open days, careers evenings and school/college presentations. Outreach staff deliver higher education finance presentations in a large number of schools and colleges throughout the year and we provide a central email address for pre- and post-registration enquiries.

We will continue to invest in staff support to manage our targeted support schemes and to ensure that information, advice and guidance is provided in appropriate formats, particularly to students in greatest need. This includes providing printed publicity material to support information, advice and guidance in schools and for use at careers and education events. We will also continue to publish vodcasts about student financial support.

We will continue to work with the regional Student Loans Company (SLC) student finance consultant to promote higher education student finance awareness.

Student finance information is provided as a matter of course to a number of national information providers and, in particular, we will continue to provide information to UCAS and the SLC.

8. Evaluation

We have continued to increase our investment in ensuring the ability to evaluate and measure the impact of our investment through our access agreements. We also use the academic expertise within our institution to evaluate of our investment.

Our evaluation measures include:

- an outreach evaluation strategy;
- Higher Education Access Tracker;
- analysis of the impact of financial support;
- analysis of retention, progression and outcomes of our students.

We continue to develop and improve our reporting and evaluation tools, and to identify other relevant data sets which help us to enhance our plans and activities.

8.1. Outreach evaluation strategy

In order to measure the impact and outcome of the resources invested in our outreach activity, we have developed an overarching outreach evaluation strategy which will continue in future years. Our methods of evaluation include pre- and post-activity questionnaires, teacher evaluation through questionnaires and feedback, and developing our ability to track participants' progression to the University through data collection and permissions, working with unique pupil and learner numbers, and use of our management information systems for data collection and reporting. Analysis of our findings is used to assess the impact of our outreach activity and to inform future development.

8.2. Higher Education Access Tracker

Since summer 2015, we have been recording participation of students on intensive outreach activities through the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT). This project tracks progression to university and enables us to measure the impact of outreach activity to inform future projects. We anticipate seeing the first set of results in spring 2017. Data from HEAT will be incorporated within our outreach evaluation strategy.

8.3. Analysis of the impact of financial support

We have been working with our Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) since March 2015 to investigate the impact of our financial investment on undergraduate student outcomes, specifically retention, progression, good degrees and employability. This project will continue to inform the development and use of our student financial support.

An interim report based on undergraduate students from 2009-10 to 2014-15 is currently being finalised. Early findings suggest that receiving a bursary reduces the risk of non-continuation; this is consistent with previous analyses.

8.4. Progression and student success analysis

We undertake analysis to understand the student experience and the associated patterns of student retention, progression and attainment via multivariate logistic regression on students enrolled on

undergraduate degree courses. This analysis has been undertaken annually to identify student groups who might be at greater risk of non-continuation or not awarded a first-class or upper second-class degree. An iterative process has been adopted so that each year the analysis considers additional variables and data as they become available.

To date, analyses have included gender, age, disability, ethnicity, entry qualifications, entry route (i.e. entered through clearing or otherwise), postcode classification (POLAR2 and POLAR3), bursaries, and term-time living accommodation (university or not) as predictors of continuation and degree outcome. Participation in student activities has also been included in more recent analyses, e.g. involvement in the Frontrunner internship scheme.

Our findings continue to inform our decision-making on allocation of resources and we have increased resources which support the progression and successful outcomes of students from under-represented groups, as outlined elsewhere, based on these findings.

We will continue to undertake this analysis to monitor the retention, progression and success of our students and to inform our strategy and evaluate our increased investment.

8.5. Reporting

Our STARS project sought to create a better understanding of our students' journeys from the point of initial interaction with the University through to their graduate destination. Data sources developed in the STARS project provide the opportunity to investigate and monitor students' access, retention, progression and success by comparative cohort analysis using identifiers such as POLAR data, household income, disability and gender.

We are working to improve our data reporting in order to better inform our plans for supporting students from under-represented groups across the student lifecycle and to measure the impact of our investment for particular target groups.

Evaluation data are currently provided by BIRT, a database which pulls information directly from the student record system and is updated daily. We are working to enhance our provision of data reports through the development of our new central data reporting service (CEDRS); this is a data warehouse pulling together data from internal and external sources and, through our Tableau reporting tool, will provide enhanced reports.

9. Targets

In developing our 2016-17 access agreement, we undertook a major review of our targets. We refocused them to ensure we prioritise those areas where we need to make the most progress and provide the greatest benefit for our student community. Our targets were rebalanced to reflect our proportion of investment to particular areas of the student lifecycle and to support our strategy. Our targeted approach is to challenge ourselves in the areas where we have identified we should be making the most progress.

As significant changes were made to our targets in our last access agreement and focus on these targets needs to be maintained, we have decided to keep these in place for the current agreement, updating milestones for 2020-21 which are generally in line with the trajectories previously set.

9.1. Our outreach

Our outreach evaluation strategy has been in place from September 2011. The evaluation of our outreach activity provides information on the impact and outcomes of pre-application and pre-arrival outreach and informs the development of future activity. The outreach team takes an evidence-based approach and this has been reflected in our targets, which will measure the number of beneficiaries engaging in our outreach activity.

Our annual activity targets are as follows:

- 10,000 beneficiaries, including students, parents, teachers and advisers;
- 1,000 students and their families from younger age groups;
- 120 schools, colleges and organisations.

Meeting our access agreement outreach and intake targets is included within our recruitment sub-strategy.

We have removed the use of targets for the number of specific activities in order to provide flexibility in directing our outreach in response to our evaluation findings and monitoring.

9.2. Our intake

We have made significant progress in fair access and we have played a key role in setting a high benchmark for access by students from under-represented groups to research-led universities. The HESA performance indicator data shows that in 2013-14 our intake of young full-time first degree entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR2) was 14.9%, the percentage of young full-time first degree entrants from state schools was 95.4%, and our proportion of students from National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) classes 4,5,6 and 7 was 36.2%. In 2014-15 the proportions were 13.0%, 96.0% and 38.3% respectively (POLAR3). In all three areas, we are exceeding our benchmarks and the national average. Although we have used NS-SEC here to demonstrate previous successful performance, we do not intend to use this indicator in future.

We have assessed our intake of students from under-represented groups against an identified benchmark group of comparator research-led universities. Our analysis shows we continue to lead in the proportion of under-represented students accessing a research-led education.

Although we use a number of indicators to measure our performance in the proportion of students from under-represented groups, our intake target will use one measure and will focus on the proportion of our intake from POLAR3 quintiles 1 and 2. This applies to the University only and does not include our partner institutions. In order to provide a baseline that is reflective of our performance to date, we will use a two-year average, from 2014-15 to 2015-16.

As part of our internal monitoring we will further break down this target by gender and ethnicity and we will consider the position of white men from within this target group, and take appropriate action if necessary.

9.3. Retention and progression

This access agreement continues to focus on ensuring the retention and successful progression of our students. While we have historically had a target focused on retention and progression, these targets covered a wider group of our student community, separated only by young and mature students. In reviewing our targets, we have focused on stretching ourselves to increase the retention and progression of students from quintiles 1 and 2 (POLAR3) relative to the progression of students from quintiles 4 and 5.

Our previous stretching target seeks to reduce the difference in retention between the two groups to only 1.5%; we will seek to maintain this trajectory to 2020-21.

9.4. Outcomes for students

Through our evaluation and analysis, we have identified a gap in degree attainment of Black, Asian and minority ethnic students (BAME) compared to other student groups. We will continue work to close this gap and have set ourselves a stretching target of achieving this. In recognition of the time needed to impact on outcomes, working with students over a three- or four-year period, we have set our baseline and target to cover an average five-year period.

9.5. Employability

In our 2012-13 access agreement, we set a stretching target to increase the employability of our students from the 2010-11 benchmarks for the proportion of students from quintile 1 achieving a positive graduate destination from 56.4% (POLAR2) and 61.5% (POLAR3) to 70-75% and 61.5-66.5% respectively. We have made significant progress towards our target, achieving an increase of 13.1 percentage points (POLAR2) in two years. Our stretch target was a long-term commitment to increase the employability outcomes for our students from quintile 1 and we remain committed to making further progress.

10. Monitoring

We will undertake ongoing monitoring of activity, expenditure and progress against targets, at relevant key points during the year.

In order to ensure clear responsibility for our access agreement, we have rationalised our process for development and monitoring. The overall responsibility for our access agreement resides with the Registrar and Secretary, with the Director of Student Life having a management responsibility for the content, delivery and day-to-day monitoring. The financial management of our access agreement is overseen by the Head of Faculty Accounting.

As outlined above, delivery of our access agreement commitments across the student lifecycle is embedded within the strategy, management, annual planning, monitoring and evaluation of our education strategy and professional services.

All access agreement submissions and monitoring returns are approved by the University Steering Group.

11. Consultation with students

As in previous years, this access agreement has been informed by consultation with our Students' Union and additional consultation, research and evaluation carried out with current and pre-university students and teachers and advisers in local schools and colleges.

12. Equality and diversity

We celebrate diversity, challenge inequality and are committed to sustaining an inclusive and diverse community that is open to all who have the potential to benefit from membership of it and which ensures equality of opportunity for all its members. We expect staff, students and visitors to be treated, and to treat each other, with dignity and respect regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, political beliefs and affiliations, family circumstances or other irrelevant distinction.

We are committed to a programme of action to ensure that this policy is fully effective. Our equality and diversity framework and sub-strategy 2015-18 includes our commitment to appeal to a broad student market and provide a living and learning environment in which a diverse student population can develop as independent learners and globally-engaged, inter-culturally-aware citizens.

Previous access agreements were used to inform equality and diversity plans, with direct links between our agreement principles and framework objectives for the access, progression and employability of students from under-represented groups.

Our education committee considers department-level data and analysis by protected characteristic of the student body and applicant pool, identifying and pursuing trends as appropriate. It ensures that issues are addressed in the annual planning process and makes recommendations to Senate.

We have undertaken an equality impact assessment of our access agreement to ensure we meet our responsibilities and commitment to equality of opportunity for all.

13. Franchise partnerships

13.1. Edge Hotel School delivered by Edge Hotel School Ltd

The access agreement for Edge Hotel School is attached as appendix A.

13.2. University of Essex Online delivered by Kaplan Open Learning

Kaplan Open Learning delivers University of Essex degree courses through part-time online study under the University of Essex Online brand. The nature of delivery is targeted to provide access for students who require the ability to study in a flexible environment. Tuition fees for courses offered in

this manner will not exceed the basic fee level for part-time courses for students commencing in 2017-18. Therefore, University of Essex Online is not included in this access agreement.

13.3. Colchester Institute

Provisions for Colchester Institute under the terms of this access agreement apply to continuing students only.

The access agreement for Colchester Institute for 2017-18 is attached as appendix B.

13.4. South Essex College of Further and Higher Education

Provisions for South Essex College of Further and Higher Education under the terms of this access agreement apply to continuing students only.

The access agreement for South Essex College of Further and Higher Education for 2017-18 is attached as appendix B.

Appendix A

Access agreement for Edge Hotel School for 2017-18

The Edge Hotel School is dedicated to practical and professional education and to the development of the future leaders of the hospitality industry. Students study the theory to achieve a degree in Hotel Management but also work alongside hospitality professionals – putting their knowledge into context right away – helping to run a real-life, 4* country house hotel.

The Edge Hotel School offers students a two-year accelerated honours degree and will charge a fee of £9,250 per year, £6,167 per qualification level. Applicants joining for Level 6 as a Top Up Award will be charged £9,250. Due to the nature of the course and its offer, the Edge Hotel School students are not included under the general University of Essex student financial support packages. A more appropriate model and programme has been developed specifically for the School's students, suitable for the practical and professional learning focus of the course.

The Edge Hotel School and its academic courses have been developed to attract students from all backgrounds and provide a learning opportunity for students who may otherwise not be able to access and achieve a degree level award.

The Edge Hotel School outreach programme actively seeks to widen access to its courses for non-traditional students. This is partly embedded in the whole culture of the School where students learn by doing but also through some of our primary recruitment channels:

- we work with the hospitality industry and specifically target individuals who may currently work or are seeking work in the hospitality industry. Our aim is to encourage individuals to aim higher and move from some of the many low paid occupations in the industry into education in order that they can fulfil their potential. We achieve this by direct advertising and involvement in industry.
- we also actively work with Schools and Colleges to offer a progression route to students that have come through the NVQ, VRQ and BTEC routes and a number of these students are from disadvantaged backgrounds. We make direct visits to colleges and attend college fairs. Time is involved in providing advice and guidance to these applicants both before, during and after these events as well as processing their applications
- the Edge Hotel School also hosts visits from a range of local and regional colleges which take place within the 4* Wivenhoe House Hotel, which is the practical skill development area of the Edge Hotel School

The School supports the work of one of its main sponsors, the Edge Foundation, in widening access to hospitality courses through numerous events including:

- assisting and attending events such as the Annual Skills Show, in which students and staff of the Edge Hotel School provide hands-on experiences that inspire young people to explore further education, skills and apprenticeships
- visits to and support, of Careers Colleges supported by the Edge Foundation, which combine high quality vocational study and academic study so as to equip 14-19 year olds with the knowledge and skills needed to develop employability skills
- support and attendance at Edge Foundation activities and events

Student Success is enhanced by pastoral support and mentoring which is undertaken for students. A full time Student Support Officer is employed to provide guidance, advice and support for personal student matters on an 'on demand' basis (although in some instances, students are directly referred to this service for professional support). The School also has a managed academic mentoring system to provide academic guidance and review on a regular basis which is managed by the Student Support Officer.

The Edge Hotel School accepts both FdA and BA (Hons) students into a common Level 4 and 5 route. It is the philosophy of the School that, by receiving the same classes and being an academically broad group, FdA entry students can measure themselves against their BA entry colleagues and both aspire and gain confidence to continue their studies through to Level 6 (the BA (Hons) degree). This is assisted through the unique syllabus that has been developed within the Edge Hotel School which places substantial emphasis on the philosophy of 'Learning by doing' and Practical Skill Assessments. These in turn tend to reflect the skill sets of kinaesthetic learners who

may have lower 'academic' or theory based levels of achievement than traditional entrants to Higher Education. Progression from FdA to BA (Hons) is managed through a system of individual advisory discussions with students which cover both a review of academic progress to date as well as advice and direction so that those who do elect to undertake this route have a higher chance of success. A range of additional preparatory classes are also provided for these students so that they maintain their academic momentum and understand the nature of the largely non-kinaesthetic activities which will be required of them.

Additional academic support sessions are available at the start of the course for entrants from a BTEC or vocationally-based qualification background to ensure students are supported in the transition to undergraduate level study.

In order to provide access and high level employment opportunity to students, the School will provide the following:

- a total fee for the course of £18,500 over two years, representing a significant saving over many comparable courses both in the absolute cost of the course but also in the additional year of earnings and reduced living costs, compared to a traditional three-year course
- students will be gaining professional experience, working with real hotel guests and will be highly regarded in the hospitality sector to ultimately secure graduate jobs with excellent employers and excellent career prospects
- a programme of guest lectures and master classes from industry experts will allow students to expand their knowledge and skill set further, and to network with potential employers throughout their course

We will seek to recruit students from all backgrounds, looking for students with a real passion for the industry. The course provision through the Edge Hotel School represents excellent value for students and great employment prospects and has been developed to provide access to high level practical and professional learning.

In 2017-18 Edge Hotel School will spend 15.1% of our OFFA countable income through our Access Agreement. The Edge Hotel School may apply annual fee increases in line with the permitted amount set by the Government each year.

Appendix B

Access agreement for Colchester Institute for 2017-18

1. Context and Background

1.1 University Centre Colchester

Colchester Institute is a large Further and Higher Education college based in North Essex. The college has been delivering degree level awards for over 50 years serving a diverse mixed-economy region.

In 2016 Colchester Institute was given authority by HEFCE and BIS to rebrand its higher education provision as University Centre Colchester (UCC). For the purposes of this agreement specific reference to Colchester Institutes higher education provision will be described as University Centre Colchester (UCC). Reference to Colchester Institute will only be used when specific reference to the larger organisation of Colchester Institute is required.

1.2 Mission Statement

The college's mission statement is: "To continue to develop a learning culture that is inclusive and aspirational and which focuses on assuring the best possible outcomes for every student. This means successful achievement of qualifications, progression to the highest possible level of study and a positive destination for every college leaver" all of which underpins the college's higher education provision. In 2013 the college was commended for the "quality of student learning opportunities" by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2013).

1.3 Partnership Arrangements

University Centre Colchester works with the University of Essex as its main validating partner who validate all programmes with the exceptions of HNC and HND courses which are awarded by Edexcel (Pearson).

1.4 Funding Status

University Centre Colchester is currently in a transitional phase, becoming a HEFCE directly funded institution having previously had split funding between HEFCE and being indirectly funded through the University of Essex/HEFCE. For the academic year 2017/18 University Centre Colchester will be directly funded for all newly recruited students. We will however continue to have a legacy on the University of Essex's Access Agreement until 2020 due to previously recruited part-time students.

Table 1: Projected profile of indirectly funded University of Essex students (2017 – 2020)*

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Full Time	9	0	0	0
Part Time	11	8	5	0

2. Tuition Fees

University Centre Colchester will charge students who commenced prior to 2017/18 an annual tuition fee of £8,000 (increasing annually in line with inflation where permitted) for all UK and EU students on full time undergraduate programmes and full time PGCE programmes.

University Centre Colchester will charge students who commenced prior to 2017/18 an annual tuition fee of £6,000 for all UK and EU students on full time HNC, HND or foundation year programmes.

Tuition fees for UK and EU students studying on a part time basis will be calculated on a pro rate basis, using the £8,000 or £6,000 fee as the full time equivalent rate. In practise students studying at the normal 50 per cent intensity will be charged a maximum annual fee of £4,000 or £3,000. Students who study at a higher intensity, but below 75 percent (and therefore not deemed to be part time), will not be charged beyond the maximum annual fee of £6,935.

The following exceptions to this will apply:

1. Students who are entitled to a fee waiver as part of a pre-2017/18 Access Agreement financial package.

Students who choose to return to University Centre Colchester to study a top-up qualification in 2017/18 will be deemed a new student and be counted in Colchester Institute own Access Agreement and may be subject to a higher fee rate.

3. Fee Income

Our Access Agreement is designed to provide what we believe is the most effective support to ensure that our students exceed their educational expectations and assist them with their long-term aspirations of continuing with their education, moving into employment or engaging in entrepreneurial activities, notwithstanding any desires to become an active volunteer.

It is anticipated that undergraduate tuition fees will generate an 'additional' income above the basic fee of approximately £29,000 in 2017/18. University Centre Colchester will invest 25% of higher fee income into financial support which covers the three areas of Access, Student Success and Progression.

University Centre Colchester's full Access Agreement can be found on the OFFA website and showcases the institutions dedication to the enhancement of learning opportunities to students from:

- Disadvantaged backgrounds
- Low income backgrounds
- Underrepresented groups
- POLAR3 groups

Appendix C

Access agreement for South Essex College of Further and Higher Education for 2017-18

This Access Agreement outlines South Essex College's commitment to activity related to income derived from continuing indirectly funded numbers through the University of Essex's Access Agreement for 2017/18. South Essex College's commitment to activity related to income derived from Directly funded numbers in 2017/18, which includes all new applicants is outlined in a separate Access Agreement published on the OFFA website.

South Essex College has a good record of attracting students from underrepresented groups to Higher Education. Outreach activity is wide ranging through frequent engagement with local and regional educational, community and employer based networks. We are effective at enrolling and supporting students with a disability with 17% of the student population declaring a disability, against a national HE participation level of 9%⁵ in 2015/16. The College recruits students with little or no family experience of HE; for example in 2015-16 68.5% of 18/19 year old students studying HE at the College came from the two lowest quintiles for student participation in higher education (QYPR), with 36% from the lowest alone. Similarly, of adult students in 2014-15, 71% came from home postcodes with the two lowest quintiles of participation in HE, with 36.7% from the lowest alone. BME participants make up 13% of the total College HE student population which is above national population averages and well above regional population averages⁶ but below national HE participation averages (21.5%⁷).

The HE student population of the College is diverse in age range and significantly different to the national HE average. 18 year olds account for just 30% (14%⁸ lower than national average) with 30+ students forming 18.6% of our learner population. Given the decline nationally in mature adults entering HE⁹ the College is working effectively to counter this trend. The percentage of 18 year old learners in the student population has improved in the last year through a range of activity outlined in the previous activity and continues to be a priority supported by measures in this Access Agreement. The activities outlined below and in the College's Access Agreement for Directly Funded students are designed to meet our targets for participation, success and progression.

1. Aims of the College Access Agreement

The College Access Agreement aims to:

- maintain the College's strengths in access for students from groups underrepresented in higher education
- raise aspirations among potential applicants from underrepresented groups.
- Improve retention of students on higher education programmes from underrepresented groups
- use a learner journey centred approach through outreach initiatives to raise awareness and improve attitudes towards higher education of students, enabling them to make informed decisions about their future
- increase applications and acceptances to higher education from targeted groups

2. Tuition Fee

This annex outlines the commitment to continuing students through indirectly funded programmes, not new applicants. The annex covers Home and European Union Full Time progressing students on undergraduate programmes delivered by the College and awarded by the University of Essex for which the College charged a tuition fee of £7,000.

⁵ UCAS Data Sets 2015 Entry

⁶ http://www.essexpartnershipportal.org/pages/uploads/JSNA/Demography_refresh_chapter_-_update_v1.3.pdf

⁷ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2705/278/#age>

⁸ <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1897/239/> HESA 11-12

⁹ <http://www.niace.org.uk/news/hefce-figures-confirm-slump-in-part-time-he-recruitment> Full time mature acceptances for 11-12 cycle fell by 12.1% for 24-39 year olds and 10.2% for 40+.

3. Expenditure

In 2017-18, the College will allocate 19.7% of its additional fee income, as defined by OFFA, from income derived from continuing indirectly funded numbers on additional activities related to raising aspirations and progression to higher education by underrepresented groups, improving retention and providing bursaries.

The College expects to allocate £1,180 from income derived from progressing indirectly funded numbers in 2017-18 to fund activities that will support raising aspirations and progression to HE and improve retention and success.

3.1 Activities to raise aspirations and promote progression to HE

The activities will build on those previously outlined in the 2016/17 Access Agreement Annex.

Typical outreach activities will include:

- school visits to and HE experience days at the College
- information, advice and guidance in local Schools
- information, advice and guidance events for parents and carers on HE progression
- taster sessions on HE programmes
- subject based Research Conferences for local Schools and Colleges
- participation in UCAS fairs in locations that will enable engagement with potential BME applicants

3.2 Activities to improve retention, success and progression of HE students

These activities will raise aspirations for achievement, promote awareness of the world of work and the skills needed in employment and improve retention. Particular focus for these support activities will be students from underrepresented groups who will have been identified using POLAR3 data on entry.

Typical activities will include:

- The further development of the peer mentorship scheme in which a final year HE student from each programme will be appointed to offer on course support to those on lower years. These student mentors create a linkage between students on differing years of the programme and will offer advice and guidance about progression as well as encouraging a programme identity through the management of social activities. Listening to feedback from students is leading us to develop this model to include two forms of peer support through academic/study support mentoring and the new role of Student Listeners to support general well-being of our HE population.
- Development of a Well-Being Centre/Unit for HE Students to access a range of services linked to their well-being including extra support for those with mental health conditions. This service will build on well-established partnerships in the local area.
- The continuation of a skills unit in the HE centre and availability of distance learning courses on Moodle to support learners' development particularly in the early stages of their study from underrepresented groups. To enhance this area further, workshop developments are underway with aims to link this to the peer mentoring scheme. This work is already supporting our Access to Higher Education Diploma cohort with the aim to send these resources wider to our applicants.
- The continued development of HE student experience champions, a group of students who are employed as ambassadors for the College in outreach activity. Additionally they will be involved in evaluative and developmental work with staff at the College to review and improve all aspects of the student learning cycle.
- An annual HE conference and publication providing a focal point for reporting on and sharing outstanding staff and student practice.
- Employability lectures wherein visiting speakers provide insight into industry practice and how to apply for employment.
- Employability summits in which students have opportunity to engage with careers advice, practical job application, providers of higher awards and potential employers.
- Development of Employer Mentors for Year 2 & 3 students.

3.3 Financial support for students - College Progression Bursaries

Continuing students will be subject to the South Essex College annex of the University of Essex Access Agreement for their relevant year of entry.

4. Institutional Monitoring Arrangements

The College's Heads of Higher Education (Curriculum & Quality) undertake regular monitoring of information provided by University partners and the College's registry department including applications, intake, retention and employability. They assess impact, access and progress against targets and report to members of the College's HE Committee. The reports are scheduled to align to the College's annual quality cycle and allow sufficient time for any reasonable adjustments to ensure compliance with this agreement.

College departments review progression rates as part of the Annual Monitoring process which are reported to partners and performance against targets for access, retention and employability are built into the Colleges Key Performance Indicators which are monitored and reported to the FE Corporation.

Current student engagement is central to the success of many of the proposed activities in the Agreement and progress will be discussed and monitored at Programme Board meetings.