

University of Essex
Access Agreement
2018-19

April 2017

1. Introduction

This access agreement applies to students enrolling on undergraduate programmes which commence in 2018-19.

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).

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 2018-19, we propose to charge a fee equivalent to the maximum fee cap permitted by Government for full-time students; this cap is currently £9,250. The estimated number of students who will be charged this fee in 2018-19 is 7,097.

For students commencing their studies at the University of Essex in the 2018-19 academic year, fees will increase for each academic year of study. For full-time undergraduate students with a Home fee status (which includes EU students) any fee increases during the programme of study will be limited to the annual increase in the RPI-X index. Increases in fees for full-time undergraduate students with a Home fee status remain subject to UK Government approval.

2.2. Part-time students

The majority of our part-time provision is delivered by our partners; details are included in the franchise partnership section of this agreement.

Where other part-time provision is provided, tuition fees are not expected to exceed the part-time basic fee cap 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 the part-time basic fee cap on access measures.

2.3. Study abroad and placement years

To support our commitment to give students access to the additional opportunities provided by a period of study abroad or a sandwich placement, students admitted between 2012 and 2017 and subject to a £9,000 fee will not be charged a fee for a study year abroad or for a sandwich placement year as part of a four-year course. This is predicted to benefit approximately 535 students in 2018-19 (who entered in 2016-17) and participation will continue to increase in future years.

Students admitted in 2018-19 will be charged a fee of £1,385 for a study year abroad and £1,850 for a sandwich placement year as part of a four-year course.

2.4. Other continuing students

Students admitted prior to 2012 will be subject to fees equivalent to the maximum fee caps which apply to entrants prior to 2012.

3. Expenditure

In 2018-19, 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 2019-20.

Our steady-state expenditure, excluding partners, of higher fee income in 2018-19 will be:

- Access: 1.5%
- Student Success: 4.9%
- Progression: 3.5%
- Financial Support: 9.1%

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.

Despite the drop in funds available from the Student Opportunity funding stream, our access activities remain built into our ongoing financial forecasts for 2018-19 and beyond. The University is committed to continuing to invest in activities which provide strong outcomes in this area. Although the specific HEFCE Student Opportunity funding stream has ceased, these activities have become integral to our business-as-usual operations and are therefore prioritised in our financial plans.

Total expenditure including partnerships within the scope of this agreement will be 19% in 2018-19.

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. In 2015-16 our dedicated outreach team worked with 12,500 beneficiaries from over 130 schools in the eastern region. We recognise the influence that parents, carers, teachers and advisors have on young people and therefore include them in our work where appropriate.

4.1. Targeting

We identify the schools and colleges that we believe will benefit most from outreach activity delivered by us by using various indicators including school attainment, free school meals data, POLAR3 data and pupil premium data. Resources are predominantly focused across the eastern region. We work to ensure an appropriate representation of students from under-represented groups take part in activity and provide the ability for students and schools to benefit from peer support.

4.2. Activity

Our dedicated outreach team currently runs a number of outreach programmes aimed at raising the attainment and aspirations of students and preparing them for entry to university. Utilising past experience and examples of national best practice, the department aims to continue refreshing its approach to access activity. Examples of new activity include:

- A year 12-focused taster week to give students a flavour of university and different courses;
- Workshops to support students and teachers, this includes academic writing and referencing for students studying the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ);
- A teacher continuing professional development (CPD) week providing free training to update teachers knowledge of higher education;
- Current PhD students deliver subject taster sessions in schools;
- In collaboration with Which? University and the Transformation Trust, we facilitate the running of undergraduate workshops in schools. Students taking part produce a subject linked presentation demonstrating their progress in attainment throughout the project;
- We have added value to our campus visits by including subject tasters to expose students to new subjects at a younger age;
- Working in collaboration with the Royal Institution and Essex County Council, we deliver STEM focused workshops over a six-week period for pre-16 students;
- Our summer school has recently taken on a new aspiration- and attainment-raising approach by focusing on topical issues faced by young people today, linked to our award-winning THINK series;
- Alongside the delivery of our Big Bang flagship STEM event with over 40 exhibitors and 17 workshop sessions, we will facilitate a digital festival for creative subject backgrounds following a similar format.

The outreach team is supported by other departments and teams in these activities and will continue to deliver core schools liaison work during the lifetime of this access agreement, e.g. school talks and careers fairs.

4.3. VI6

⁴ Office for Fair Access, Strategic guidance: developing your 2018-19 access agreement, <https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/strategic-access-agreement-guidance.pdf>

Since September 2015 we have supported the development of the VI6 Project. This enables five local sixth forms to teach A Level subjects on campus to over 200 students aged 16-19. This project enables students to access subjects that their schools would not normally be able to offer due to low take-up, staffing shortages or a reduction in education funding. We add value to the students' experience whilst on campus by providing attainment- and aspiration-centred activity once per month. This includes motivational speakers, subject tasters and inviting students to relevant undergraduate lectures.

Partner schools have seen a significant change in their students' attitude to higher education as a result of this project. This increase in aspiration has a direct impact on the students' attainment as they can see the University as an opportunity available to them. This therefore increases their determination to work hard. Our targets reflect the increase in aspiration and attainment through progression to HE.

We have supported the project moving forward by enabling the project to increase the offer from seven to 13 subjects by increasing the number of rooms available. We anticipate that by the beginning of the academic year 2018-19, numbers will have increased to 400 students taking part in study on our campus. We are also anticipating the subjects offered to not be restricted to A-levels but also encompass alternative qualifications, for example the BTEC. Our partnership is open to other schools joining the program which will increase the numbers further.

The University is not currently planning to sponsor one individual school; however, we feel that the collaborative approach to VI6 and the five schools involved is delivering the outcomes that sponsoring a school would achieve. Through conversations with senior leadership within the schools, some of the sixth forms involved were at threat of closure, VI6 has enabled them to stay open, become more financially viable, and offer students from disadvantaged areas an increased range of subjects (some of the colleges did not previously offer all of the available course e.g. Further Maths). For some of these students, the nearest FE provider is 40 minutes away. With the reduction of funding available for students for travel, the lack of local education would be a barrier to accessing the qualifications needed for Higher Education. By sponsoring one school, the University would not be able to sustain the wide range of activity currently offered, not only through VI6, but across outreach more broadly.

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. Progress with Essex

We are currently redefining our progressive project, Progress with Essex, to ensure the project and our National Collaborative Outreach Project (NCOP, further detail below) progressive project work collaboratively and do not focus on the same students. The project will work with students from years 10 to 13 inclusive and university entry and transition. 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 using participant and teacher questionnaires, school data on participants' progression and attainment, and tracking of participants' access and progression to the University. Students' progression is monitored using the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT). We have reflected within our targets our ambition to work with targeted white males from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. As all students on Progress with Essex come from schools with low socio-economic indicators, we are confident that by attracting white males to this project, we will engage this group. White males from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds have been specifically identified by OFFA within the access agreement guidance as least likely to enter higher education. This target is ambitious as males are generally not as receptive as females to taking part in outreach activity; however, we are confident the Outreach team can deliver the target within the specified timeframe.

4.4.2. 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.

4.4.3. 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. Through our Schools Membership Plus scheme (further detail below), we have created special long-term relationships with 37 schools/colleges across the eastern region. As part of this membership each school/college is allocated a dedicated outreach officer to be their single point of contact to promote beneficial working relationships.

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. We currently deliver Make Happen, the Essex NCOP program.

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' pre- and post-arrival skills development.

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 Plus

Our Schools Membership Plus scheme, launched in April 2015, is designed to build on existing relationships, develop new relationships with schools and build a channel to effectively communicate information with local schools and colleges. It has enabled constructive conversations with schools and colleges about how we can work collaboratively, with the primary focus on supporting teachers who in turn have a positive impact on their students' higher education (HE) aspirations. Schools and colleges in the programme also help inform future activity through feedback and evaluation. We prioritise these schools above others and aim to react to their needs. Many of these schools have a large percentage of students from widening participation backgrounds with low progression to HE.

Through their membership, schools and colleges can access exclusive events such as our subject taster week, teacher CPD week and have early access for bookings for all other outreach events. To help raise pupil attainment in these schools we have trained dedicated PhD students as outreach tutors who go into schools to deliver academic writing, research skills and revision skills workshops. We have recently introduced a new innovation fund which allows schools to apply for funding for a HE-focused activity that they would like to facilitate in their school. This fund has already created opportunities among the membership including a trip to GlaxoSmithKline to learn about careers after completing a degree and attainment-raising revision session.

4.5.2. National Collaborative Outreach Programme

We are the lead institution for the Essex National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP). This project, Make Happen, is delivered by the Essex Collaborative Outreach Network and is a continuation of the National Network for Collaborative Outreach, although the aims and objectives have been brought in line with the new programme. This HEFCE-funded programme will work with students from specific disadvantaged areas of Essex to increase the proportion of students progressing to higher education from those areas.

A steering group made up of higher and further education partners as well as schools, colleges, charities and the three local authorities in Essex direct the work of the project. Activity focuses around a long-term progressive programme alongside one-off projects. Monitoring and evaluation of the programme will also be used to inform our partners about effective practice when working with young people. The network is currently funded until December 2018, although it is anticipated that funding will continue until December 2020. The Make Happen team is primarily based within our outreach team with some staff based and working collaboratively with partners across the county. We work proactively to ensure that activities avoid duplication and complement other activities happening within individual outreach teams.

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 may 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.

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.

In 2016, the creation of the new student life directorate brought together many of the services and teams which provide support to our students during their time at the University. It incorporates student support, the employability and careers centre, the student engagement team and, since 2017, the talent development centre. The directorate ensures 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, and black, Asian and minority ethnic (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;
- improvements 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 provision to support community-building and the transition of students into higher education, to foster an inclusive community on our campuses, and to assist in skills development essential for independent living and learning. By helping students to settle at the University, community-building teams support induction, creating a sense of belonging and resulting in better retention of students. This programme will continue to engage students from a wide range of ethnic and social backgrounds. In addition, the experience for students who deliver the service of 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;
- a 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 Rising Stars, 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 and recent 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, we 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 a sandwich placement year as part of a four-year course will not be eligible for this bursary during that year.

Students admitted in 2017-18 and later years to nursing, midwifery and allied health professions no longer receive NHS bursaries. These students will have access to our bursary scheme; this was not previously permissible. Continuing students admitted in 2016-17 or earlier years or 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, 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 – subject to terms and conditions – to fund an international internship, placement or voluntary activity. Any such voluntary activity must be of four- to twelve-week duration over the summer vacation.

7.2.4. Sandwich Placement Year Bursaries

While the vast majority of students who undertake a sandwich placement year are paid by the host organisation, there are some circumstances where students are not paid. Students undertaking an unpaid sandwich placement year as part of a four-year course will be eligible for a bursary of £750.

7.2.5. 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 higher education and enables us to measure the impact of outreach activity to inform future projects. We anticipate seeing the first set of results in summer 2017 and these will be incorporated in future annual outreach evaluation strategies.

8.3. Analysis of the impact of financial support

Our Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) has undertaken research to investigate the impact of our financial investment on undergraduate student outcomes, specifically retention, progression, good degrees and employability. The findings of the report based on undergraduate students from 2009-10 to 2014-15 show that receiving a bursary reduces the risk of non-continuation; this is consistent with previous analyses. However, the positive effect related to receiving a bursary in first year is limited. Therefore, we have changed the balance of our access agreement expenditure to reflect this.

We will continue to review the impact of financial support through an extension of this project or by using the new financial evaluation tool⁵ provided by the Office for Fair Access. We will continue to use these findings to inform the development and use of our student financial support in future.

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

⁵ Office for Fair Access, Understanding the impact of institutional financial support, <https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/impact-of-financial-support>

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

We have made a significant commitment to improve our data collection, management, and reporting 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.

Our experience on the STARS data analysis and reporting project, which sought to create a better understanding of our students' journeys from the point of initial interaction with the University through to their graduate destination, has been incorporated into the development of our new CEDRS data warehouse and central data reporting service. This system provides 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) and collating data from internal and external sources. In addition, our new Tableau reporting tool provides enhanced reporting capabilities.

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.

We have replaced one of our targets, regarding access to our University from applicants from POLAR3 quintiles 1 and 2, through our use of updated postcode mapping data. This has allowed us to identify these students more accurately. This target maintains our already strong performance in attracting students from these quintiles. As the University grows, maintenance of this target will result in an increased absolute number of students at Essex from POLAR3 quintiles 1 and 2.

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 2021-22 which are generally in line with the trajectories previously set.

We continue to refine our reporting data and use of evaluation to plan our activities. This year, we have reviewed our methodology after transferring data and reporting functions to the CEDRS warehouse mentioned above. As a result, we have redefined our targets and set new benchmarks to continue to improve our performance in this area. The respective targets are explained below.

9.1. Outreach

Our outreach evaluation strategy has been in place from September 2011 and is reviewed and updated annually. 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. We take an evidence-based approach and this is reflected in our targets.

Our activity targets are based on increasing attainment through raising aspiration. Schools involved in the VI6 project tend to come from areas with low progression to higher education. By enabling schools to offer a broader range of subjects, students are more likely to raise their attainment through studying subjects they enjoy. The project has not yet seen a full cohort progress through this new project so we have set our targets using existing progression data. We are using whole school averages, rather than basing the target only on the students in the project, as the activity is having a

wider impact, e.g. through peer influence. For 2016 entry, the combined average progression from these schools is 41.6% compared to an average of 46% in the county of Essex. Our target is to raise this average to 43% by 2021-22.

Our outreach evaluation shows that female students are more likely than male students to engage in projects where participation is based on self-selection. We are aiming to increase the number of white male students participating in Progress with Essex, our long-term progressive project. We will do this by working directly with schools, parents and carers and using appropriate marketing and communications to support male students to feel that they can engage and succeed within the project. The baseline data is based on a two-year average. Our target is to ensure that white male students make up at least 40% of the project cohort by 2021-22.

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

9.2. Intake

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. We have previously outlined how we are continuing to make significant progress in fair access and how we have played a key role in setting a high benchmark for access by students from under-represented groups to research-led universities.

In 2016, we stopped using National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) data for reporting purposes. We set a new intake target for our 2017-18 access agreement using POLAR3 data. Although we use a number of indicators to measure our performance in the proportion of students from under-represented groups, this target focuses 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.

While we have achieved our target for our 2017-18 access agreement, we have refined this target based on more accurate data and reporting. We are setting a new target for 2021-22 of achieving 28.0% of our intake from POLAR3 quintiles 1 and 2. The baseline is a two-year average of 28.0% for 2016 and 2017.

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 previously 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 focused on stretching ourselves to increase the continuation rate of students from quintiles 1 and 2 (POLAR3) relative to the continuation of students from quintiles 4 and 5. We have refined our reporting in this area and will maintain a target of reducing the differential to 1.6% by 2021-22.

9.4. Outcomes for students

Through our evaluation and analysis, we have identified a gap in degree attainment of BAME students 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. Reflecting our substantial progress to date on the previous target and based on an updated baseline of 11.8% (2015-16), we are setting a more challenging target of reducing the differential to 6.0% by 2021-22.

9.5. Employability

In 2015, we set a target to increase the proportion of students from POLAR3 quintile 1 achieving a positive graduate destination from our benchmarks of 50.0% (2011-12) and 68.7% (2012-13) to

72.0% (2019-20). We have made substantial progress in this area and 77.9% of the target group achieved a positive graduate destination in 2014-15. 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.

We will review this target after the new methodology for the Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education survey is approved.

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.

Our Students' Union continues to be involved in the steering groups and other committees which oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of our action plans.

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

We have several strategic partnerships which seek to increase access to our education provision.

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 2018-19. Therefore, University of Essex Online is not included in this access agreement.

13.3. Colchester Institute

Our partnership with Colchester Institute will have no new entrants in 2018-19. Therefore, this partnership is not included within this access agreement, although the access agreement for Colchester Institute is attached as appendix B. Continuing students will continue to be covered by the access agreement appropriate to their year of entry.

Appendix A

Access agreement for Edge Hotel School for 2018-19

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 either Hotel Management or Events Management with Hospitality, while gaining experience and putting their knowledge into context right away helping to run a real-life, 4* country house hotel.

The Edge Hotel School offers students two-year accelerated honours degrees and will charge a fee of £9,250 per year, £6,167 per qualification level. Applicants joining for the one-year Hotel Management 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. A range of industry-funded scholarships have been established to financially support students, as well as provide connections with industry professions to further their career development, in addition to the Edge Hotel School means-tested bursaries.

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 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 lower tuition fee over two years when compared to a traditional three-year course, representing a significant saving over many comparable courses both in the absolute cost of the tuition but also in the additional year of earnings and reduced living costs;
- 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 2018-19 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 2018-19

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).

In 2018/19 University Centre Colchester's Initial Teacher Training provision will be validated by the University of Huddersfield.

1.4. Funding Status

University Centre Colchester is currently in a transitional phase, becoming a HEFCE directly funded institution. Previous funding arrangements had seen a split funding model of direct funding and being indirectly funded through the University of Essex. For the academic year 2018/19 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 2019 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 has not recruited any new students on the University of Essex OFFA agreement since 2015/16. The college will charge students who commenced prior to 2015/16 an annual tuition fee of up to £8,200 (increasing annually in line with inflation where permitted) for all UK and EU students on full time undergraduate programmes.

Any student who returns to study either a top up or new qualification will be reclassified as a new direct funded student and revert to University Centre Colchester's own agreement. These students will be eligible for the tuition fees listed in the University Centre Colchester OFFA Agreement and may be subject to a higher-fee rate.

Tuition fees for UK and EU students studying on a part time basis will be calculated on a pro rata basis, using the £8,200 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 £4,100. 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:

- Students who are entitled to a fee waiver as part of a pre-2018/19 Access Agreement financial package.

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 £8,800 in 2018/19. 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