



2019-20 access and participation plan monitoring

Provider impact report

This impact report summarises the progress made by The University of Essex against targets, objectives and written commitments set out in its 2019-20 access and participation plan. This document is a summary of information submitted by the provider to the OfS. This document is a self-report by the provider only and does not indicate any OfS assessment of compliance.

1. Ambition and strategy

The University of Essex's ambition and strategy as detailed in the 2019-20 access and participation plan:

Offering each student, irrespective of background, a transformational education is fundamental to the University of Essex. We believe that our track record is one of exemplary success both in offering students access to a challenging, research-led education, irrespective of their backgrounds, and in supporting all students to fulfil their potential. Our ambition for 2019-20 was to build further on our current practice, focusing our efforts in those areas which can have the greatest impact.

Our University's 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 plan, focuses on a very clear mission: to contribute to society through excellence in education and excellence in research.

Through this, Essex is one of a small number of universities which offers its students a gold-standard education, within a research-intensive environment. Our students come to us from a wide variety of backgrounds. We aim to add value through all of their experiences by offering them a life-changing education. Some of our work undertaken to achieve this ambition was described in our 2019-20 Access and Participation Plan.

The pursuit of our mission and ambitions continues to be underpinned by our University's 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 university. This means that students are at the centre of our thinking and student benefit is at the heart of everything we do. We recruit students with the merit and potential to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the University, irrespective of their background (e.g. socio-economic background or ability to pay) and we seek to develop their skills and attributes that will allow them, as active citizens, to make significant positive contributions to the development of society. Our 2019-20 Access and Participation Plan is aligned with this vision and mindset.

As was set out in our 2019-20 Access and Participation Plan, we have adopted a whole lifecycle approach to access and participation, starting with primary school outreach, through to progression into employment and further study. To support this, 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 underrepresented groups, as well as networking with other universities to share good practice.

In terms of access, we identify the schools and colleges that we believe will benefit most from outreach activity delivered by us using various indicators including school attainment, free school meals data, POLAR4 data and pupil premium data. We work to ensure an appropriate representation of students from under-represented groups in activities, and provide the facility for students and schools to benefit from peer support. As stated in our Access and Participation Plan 2019-20 we did not plan to sponsor an individual school; rather, since September 2015 we have supported five local sixth forms through our VI6 Project, which enables these schools to teach A Level subjects on campus to 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. We feel that the collaborative approach to VI6 and the sustained commitment to the five schools involved delivers outcomes aligned with sponsoring a school. By delivering VI6, we can support 5 schools instead of one. This is further evidenced when our wider outreach activity with these schools is taken into account.

Through conversations with senior leadership within the schools we have ascertained that 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 courses 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. Our engagement with schools enables us to sustain a wide range of activities for the benefit of the students, the extent of which would simply not be possible by sponsoring a single school.

Our partnership working with our Students' Union also supports outreach and access, for example, through volunteering schemes and engagement with local schools. This partnership provides opportunities for local school staff and pupils, and for our University students who participate in these activities.

We continue to be the lead institution for Make Happen, the Essex Uni Connect partnership. Whilst Make Happen activity is not APP accountable, our commitment to supporting and leading collaborative outreach for the county of Essex evidences our continued narrative around the importance of fair access. The majority of the Make Happen team are based at the University with 6 Outreach Officers remotely based at other Make Happen partner institutions. There are approximately 20,000 Uni Connect students living in the 55 identified wards in Essex; from this 86 schools/colleges in Essex have been identified from which learners attend. Make Happen engages with all these schools/ colleges to ensure the maximum number of Uni Connect learners in all wards are reached. The majority of Make Happen activity is sustained, allowing for students to take part in multiple interventions over a number of years, to ensure maximum impact. To help achieve the Uni Connect national targets, Make Happen has a local evaluation plan that aims to work with 20% of all Uni Connect learners in Essex, , increasing the application rate to HE from target wards, increasing the awareness of Higher and Degree level Apprenticeships. In 2019-20, Make Happen delivered activity to 36,303 unique learners, with 31% from Uni Connect wards. They delivered 590 activities to 180 schools and colleges, both through online and in person activity. The increase in online activity enabled activity to be opened up to schools and colleges outside of the identified 86 schools and colleges.

The Make Happen team and the Outreach Team at the University work collaboratively to ensure that no work is duplicated and that schools and colleges have access to all the opportunities available to them. The Uni Connect funding allows for existing University of Essex activity to be enhanced as well as allowing the implementation of new and innovative ideas that support the Make Happen aims. As the Uni Connect programme moves into Phase three from August 2021, we will continue to ensure that Make Happen work alongside the University and other partners to deliver collaborative outreach that adheres to the targeting guidelines for Uni Connect as well as avoiding duplication within Outreach activity.

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, irrespective of their background, by developing themselves within our living and learning community as independent learners equipped to take responsibility for their personal and professional development throughout their lives. Rather than targeting specific student groups, therefore, an inclusive approach has been adopted wherever possible to ensure that every student is able to achieve their potential at our university. To support our ambitions, our Education Strategy and our Access and Participation Plan are aligned, and delivery of our Access and Participation Plan activity is directed and supported by our annual Education Action Plan. Progress against our commitments is monitored and reviewed by the Education Committee (a sub-committee of Senate) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education).

Our University's Equality and Diversity Strategy sets out a framework to ensure staff, students and visitors are aware of our University's values and commitment to advancing equality in order to provide a fair and inclusive working, living and learning environment in which all members of the community are treated with dignity and respect and solely on the basis of their merits, abilities and potential. One example of an inclusive approach taken to support the student experience is how we have developed an inclusive curriculum and appropriate pedagogical practice through resources, guidance and training to staff – integrating inclusivity into curriculum design and approval documentation. Other examples are the development of both our curriculum review toolkit and resources for our Annual Review of Courses (ARC); these ensure that the consideration of inclusivity is standard practice.

Achievement of our education ambitions is underpinned by our University's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets, which include institutional and departmental KPIs and targets relating to student continuation, good degrees and graduate employability. Academic departments are expected to reach and maintain their KPIs and these are monitored closely. Departmental level evaluation is complemented by institutional consideration through our committee structure. All departments, supported by their Faculty, consider their performance and identify actions to maintain and improve this. Additional support is made available to departments whose KPI performance indicates they may benefit from additional support. Our targeted approach ensures that we are able to monitor our performance closely against the measures set out in our access and participation plan whilst challenging ourselves in the areas where we have identified we should be making the most progress.

This alignment of our Access and Participation Plan and our strategic goals results in strategic investment in support of our priorities. For example, the Learner Engagement Activity Portal (LEAP) system was developed to achieve a step change in understanding and supporting student engagement. The system was rolled out across the University in 2018-19, providing regular reports on levels of engagement for every student to each department so that students who were not engaging (e.g. low attendance coupled with lack of other academic activity, such as use of Moodle) could be contacted by their department early in the term to offer support. The engagement data enables departments to understand better the progress of learners within their own context and in real time, and empowers lecturers and tutors to adapt their teaching if, for example, they identify that students are struggling with a particular topic. As well as being useful in the analysis and improvement of learning and teaching, learner analytics can also be used as a tool for supporting student wellbeing as much of the data is useful in assisting personal tutors, providing them with information about the course their students are studying and their progress. Using the engagement information at institutional level enables us to better understand student activity in learning environments and behaviours of different student groups, helping us to identify barriers to engagement for particular groups of students and thus, helping to inform policy development to enable all of our students to achieve their potential.

Within our Education Strategy, we commit to working collaboratively with our students to draw on their views and experience to inform the development of the University's educational provision, and to shape and transform their living and learning community. The student voice is key in ensuring that we understand the needs of all of our students, no matter what their background. We use this information to develop our plan and targets, to adjust our services to respond to students' needs, and to provide targeted support.

Our 2019-20 Access and Participation Plan set out how we would invest our higher fee income to provide transformational opportunities to our students across the student lifecycle. In developing our Plan we were committed to ensuring our investment is focused on delivering impact and on providing students with the ability to achieve successful outcomes.

2. Self-assessment of targets

The tables that follow provide a self-assessment by The University of Essex of progress against the targets approved in its 2019-20 access and participation plan.

Please note the tables contain only a summary of target milestones approved in 2019-20 access and participation plans. Full information can be found in **Table 8a – statistical targets and milestones** and **Table 8b – Other milestones and targets** of The University of Essex's 2019-20 [access and participation plan](#).

Any optional commentary provided against the targets is given in [Annex B](#).

Statistical targets and milestones

| Reference Number (lifecycle stage) | Description | Baseline year | Baseline data | 2018-19 milestone | 2019-20 milestone | Units of target | Comparison year | Actual performance in comparison year | Target self-assessment |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|--|------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| T16a_01 (Access) | University of Essex (excluding partner institutions) proportion of quintile 1 and 2 neighbourhood entrants through UCAS calculated from HESA return data (POLAR 3). Excludes those with no application postcode data, as well as those for whom HEFCE has not published a POLAR mapping or where that mapping is 'Removed'. | Other (please give details in Description column) | 29.2%, based on a two-year average from 2014-15 to 2015-16. | 29.2% | 29.2% | N/A (see description / commentary) | 2019-20 | | Expected progress |
| T16a_02 (Progression) | University of Essex (excluding partner institutions) calculated from HESA return data - no longer in HE after 1 year quintile 1 and 2 neighbourhoods compared to quintiles 4 and 5 (POLAR 3) | 2013-14 | Gap of 5.7% | Gap of 3.1% | Gap of 1.6% | N/A (see description / commentary) | 2019-20 | | Expected progress |
| T16a_03 (Student success) | University of Essex (excluding partner institutions) - degree outcomes (Ethnicity) | Other (please give details in Description column) | Gap of 19.6% (five year average from 2009-10 to 2013-14) | Gap of 11.8% | Gap of 10% (five year average from 2013-14 to 2017-18) | N/A (see description / commentary) | 2019-20 | | Expected progress |
| T16a_04 (Student success) | University of Essex (excluding partner institutions) – positive graduate destination of students from low participation neighbourhoods (quintile 1 POLAR 3 data, internally constructed). Calculated using DLHE survey responses and Times Good University Guide graduate destination definition. | 2011-12 | 2011-12: 50% 2012-13: 68.7% | 71% | 72% | Percentage | 2019-20 | 73.8 | Expected progress |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| <p>T16a_05 (Access)</p> | <p>University of Essex (excluding partner institutions) two-year moving average of the proportion of POLAR3 quintile 1 and 2 neighbourhood entrants through UCAS calculated using internal data. Excludes those with no application postcode data, as well as those for whom HEFCE has not published a POLAR mapping or where that mapping is 'Removed'.</p> <p>Baseline data is a two-year average for 2016 and 2017.</p> | <p>Other (please give details in Description column)</p> | <p>28.0%</p> | <p>28.0%</p> | <p>28.0%</p> | <p>Percentage</p> | <p>2019-20</p> | <p>28</p> | <p>Expected progress</p> |
| <p>T16a_06 (Student success)</p> | <p>University of Essex (excluding partner institutions) - calculated from individualised PI data - differential between proportion of 'At other UK HEP / Not in HE' students after one year for POLAR3 quintile 1 and 2 neighbourhoods compared to quintiles 4 and 5.</p> <p>Baseline data is a two-year average to 2014-15. Target is a two-year average to 2021-22.</p> | <p>Other (please give details in Description column)</p> | <p>3.2%</p> | <p>2.2%</p> | <p>2.0%</p> | <p>Percentage</p> | <p>2019-20</p> | <p>-1.2</p> | <p>Expected progress</p> |
| <p>T16a_07 (Student success)</p> | <p>University of Essex (excluding partner institutions) five-year moving average of the differential between white and BAME undergraduate students achieving first or upper second class honours degree outcomes.</p> <p>Baseline data is a five-year average to 2014-15. Target is a five-year average to 2021-22.</p> | <p>Other (please give details in Description column)</p> | <p>14.3%</p> | <p>9.5%</p> | <p>8.3%</p> | <p>Percentage</p> | <p>2019-20</p> | <p>13.68</p> | <p>Limited progress</p> |

Other milestones and targets

| Reference Number (lifecycle stage) | Description | Baseline year | Baseline data | 2018-19 milestone | 2019-20 milestone | Units of target | Comparison year | Actual performance in comparison year | Target self-assessment |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| T16b_01 (Access) | Annual target for outreach activity to work with: 10,000 beneficiaries, 1000 students and parents from younger age groups and 120 schools/ colleges/ organisations. | 2011-12 | 10,000 beneficiaries, 1000 students and parents from younger age groups and 120 schools/ colleges/ organisations. | 10,000 beneficiaries, 1000 students and parents from younger age groups and 120 schools/ colleges/ organisations. | 10,000 beneficiaries, 1000 students and parents from younger age groups and 120 schools/ colleges/ organisations. | N/A (see description / commentary) | 2019-20 | | Expected progress |
| T16b_02 (Access) | Percentage of students from schools participating in VI6 project progressing to a UK higher education institution. Baseline is whole-school average progression to higher education from schools in VI6 project. Compiled from Department for Education data. | 2014-15 | 41.6% | 42% | 42.5% | Percentage | 2019-20 | 49.1 | Expected progress |
| T16b_03 (Access) | Percentage of participants in our Progress with Essex long-term project who are white males. Baseline is two-year average based on 2015 and 2016. | Other (please give details in Description column) | 19% | 25% | 30% | Percentage | 2019-20 | 38 | Expected progress |
| T16b_04 (Access) | Percentage of students who increase their grade boundary by 3 or more after taking part in our Summer School. As there are three grade boundaries within one grade (e.g. C-, C, C+), this is the equivalent of an increase from the bottom of one grade (e.g. C-) to the bottom of the next grade up (e.g. B-). As data is only available for one year we do not yet have enough information for a reliable baseline. | 2016-17 | N/A | 60% | 61% | N/A (see description / commentary) | 2019-20 | | No progress |

3. Investment commitments

3.1. Access and participation investment for the last audited year

Please note that some differences in predicted vs actual spend may be due to reporting differences between academic and financial years.

| Financial year | 2019-20 | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Predicted spend (£) | Actual spend (£) | Difference (ppt) |
| Access investment | £463,956.00 | £1,529,000.00 | 230% |
| Financial Support | £2,824,999.00 | £3,071,000.00 | 9% |

4. Action plan

Where progress was less than expected The University of Essex has made the following commitments to increase the rate of progress against their targets.

| Reference Number | Steps that will be taken in the future to make expected progress against target |
|------------------|--|
| T16a_07 | The University's Education Committee is reflecting on changes introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure lessons learnt are embedded in practice in the future. |
| T16b_04 | We are not able to report against this target as activity was not delivered in 2019-20 due to COVID-19 restrictions. |

5. Confirmation

The University of Essex confirms that:

| Student engagement | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Have you worked with your students to help them complete the access and participation plan monitoring student submission? | |
| Yes | |
| Have you engaged with your student body in the design, evaluation, and monitoring of the plan? | |
| Yes | |
| Verification and sign off | |
| The University of Essex has confirmed that the information included in this impact report is accurate, that it has been compiled in line with OfS guidance, and that it is being submitted on behalf of the governing body of the provider. | |
| Yes | |
| Accountable officer sign off | |
| Name | Professor Anthony Forster |
| Position | Vice-Chancellor |

Annex A: Commentary on progress against targets

The University of Essex's commentary where progress against targets was less than expected.

| |
|---|
| Target reference number: T16a_07 |
| How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target? |
| Yes |
| Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone? |
| Yes. There was a project focused on de-colonising the curriculum in 2019-20. In addition, we made rapid adjustments to assessment methodologies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These adjustments were made with careful consideration to inclusivity. Subsequent evaluation of efficacy of these changes, showed that they had a positive impact on attainment gaps. |

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|--|
| Target reference number: T16b_04 |
| How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target? |
| We are not able to report against this target as activity was not delivered in 2019-20 due to COVID-19 restrictions. |
| Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone? |
| We are not able to report against this target as activity was not delivered in 2019-20 due to COVID-19 restrictions. |

Annex B: Optional commentary on targets

The University of Essex's commentary on any of the targets listed in [Section 2](#).

| Reference Number | Optional commentary |
|------------------|--|
| T16a_01 | This target has been discontinued, and replaced with T16a_05 |
| T16a_02 | This target has been discontinued, and replaced with T16a_06 |
| T16a_03 | This target has been discontinued, and replaced with T16a_07 |
| T16a_04 | Due to the discontinuation of the DLHE survey, we are not able to measure our success against this target as the data source is no longer available. If we use a proxy in the form of the Graduate Outcomes survey, noting the different methodology used in each and the experimental nature of this data, we can report that the percentage of POLAR4 Q1 students in graduate employment and further study is 73.8%. There is a positive performance gap between Q1 and Q5 for students in graduate level employment or further study of 4.0% (73.8% compared with 69.8%). |
| T16a_05 | This target has been updated using our revised APP dataset (as used in our APP 2020-21 to 2024-25). We have met our target for maintaining the proportion of students from Q1 and Q2 neighbourhoods. 2018-19 percentage is 27.71 and the 2019-20 percentage is 28.22, resulting in a two year moving average of 28%. We have achieved this alongside growth in UK undergraduate young students. |
| T16a_06 | This target has been updated using our revised APP dataset (as used in the APP 2020-21 to 2024-25). The gap in continuation rates between Q1+Q2 and Q4+Q5 students has continued to narrow each year since the benchmark was established. Our data now shows that there is a positive performance gap between in the continuation rate of Q1+Q2 student compared with Q4+Q5 students. The 2 year moving average (up to 2019-20) indicates that the continuation rate for Q1+Q2 students is 1.2% higher than the rate for Q4+Q5. |
| T16a_07 | The attainment gap 5 year moving average has continued to close year-on-year. The 5-year moving average (up to and including 2019-20) is 13.68%. The most recent single year of data (2019-20) shows a gap of just 6.8%. |
| T16b_01 | This is no longer a target |
| T16b_02 | |
| T16b_03 | Male self-selection in Outreach activity is traditionally lower than female. Our target has aimed for an incremental increase in the proportion of white males from 2017 to 2020. 2018-19 exceeded this target with a 50% participation rate by males. This was due to increased marketing within schools and teachers being able to encourage more males to take part. In 2019-20, this figure has dropped to 38%, despite using the same marketing techniques, however it still exceeds the target set. |

| | |
|---------|--|
| T16b_04 | We are not able to report against this target as activity was not delivered in 2019-20 due to COVID-19 restrictions. |
|---------|--|