University of Essex
Access and participation plan
2020-21 to 2024-25

1. Assessment of performance

At Essex, we are proud to offer a transformational research-led education, welcoming students to the University on the basis of their potential, helping them to fulfil that potential, and transforming the lives of everyone who chooses to study here.

We are rigorous in testing our success in providing a transformational experience for our students, as outlined in section 3, below. We are committed to continuous improvement through systematic reflection on performance data to identify actionable insights about where we need to do better. As a consequence, our analysis focuses on our own internal data, which is updated regularly and can be assessed at a granular level enabling us to interrogate our institutional level performance down to the level of the individual module should we so wish. It also ensures agility in terms of monitoring and evaluation of our performance. In order to ensure our data analysis is robust, we cross reference our internal data and performance evaluation to published data including the published APP dataset. Our assessment largely indicates parity between our internal data and the APP dataset; where we have identified significant differences these are identified in our analysis.

Through the review cycle of our annual planning process, we work closely with all our departments to ensure that analysis of performance data at the departmental level informs action plans to improve our effectiveness in supporting transformational outcomes for our students. The implementation of action plans is monitored and evaluated through our management and governance structures, including oversight by Education Committee and the University's executive board and at least annual reporting to our governing body.

This plan provides an overview of our performance and the key areas where we have identified a need to improve.

1.1 Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

Access

Our students are a diverse community, and we seek to recruit students with the merit and potential to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the University, and to provide all with an educational experience that meets their needs and aspirations, irrespective of their background (e.g. socio-economic background, ability to pay) or characteristics (e.g. protected characteristics). As the University has grown, we have maintained our commitment to attracting students from diverse backgrounds. Using

POLAR4 access data, the pattern of applications, offers and registrations indicates a consistent distribution that is in line with our strategic objectives and ethos. This is true across all quintiles, including quintile 1 (recruitment steady at between 13% and 14%) and quintile 5 (steady at 24%).

Academic Year	POLAR4 Q1 & 2					POLAR4 Q4& 5				
	Applications Submitted		Offers made	Registered Population (Headcount & %)		Applications Submitted		Offers made	Registered Population (Headcount & %)	
2014-15	4678	31.8%	2919	1941	29.6%	7011	47.8%	5062	3226	49.2%
2015-16	5294	31.1%	3439	2126	30.0%	8287	48.6%	5833	3451	48.7%
2016-17	5979	30.1%	3851	2408	30.4%	9732	49.1%	6829	3835	48.4%
2017-18	6779	31.3%	4889	2513	30.0%	10534	48.7%	8011	4121	49.2%
2018-19	6631	31.3%	4901	2589	29.5%	10260	48.4%	7961	4389	49.9%

Table 1: Trends in Undergraduate Access across the past 5 Academic Years, using POLAR4 data (Data source: internal)

Of particular note is the fact that in the period 2014/15 to 2018/19 we have seen an increase of 28.7% in the number of POLAR4 Q1 young students registering at the University (increasing from 254 in 2014-15 to 327 in 2018-19). Between 2014 and 2017 we saw an increase of 27.6% (254 to 324), within a national context of growth in enrolment across the sector from this demographic of only 7.1% (44,870 to 48,045). At Essex, growth in POLAR4 Q1 numbers is 3.4% higher than the percentage increase in POLAR4 Q5 young, registered students. Also, as shown in Table 2, the gap between our newly registering POLAR4 Q1 and POLAR4 Q5 young students has narrowed from 14.6% in 2014/15 to 13.7% in 2018/19.

Application Status	POLAR4 Quintile	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Submitted Application	1st Quintile	2,133	14.9%	2,416	14.6%	2,694	14.0%	3,076	14.7%	2,854	14.1%
	5th Quintile	3,360	23.5%	3,969	24.0%	4,793	24.8%	5,092	24.4%	5,006	24.7%
	Q1-Q5	*1,227*	*8.6%*	*1,553*	*9.4%*	*2,099*	*10.9%*	*2,016*	*9.7%*	*2,152*	*10.6%*
Received Offer	1st Quintile	1,313	13.4%	1,511	13.4%	1,648	12.6%	2,141	13.9%	2,037	13.3%
	5th Quintile	2,467	25.2%	2,866	25.4%	3,387	25.9%	3,845	25.0%	3,839	25.1%
	Q1-Q5	*1,154*	*11.8%*	*1,355*	*12.0%*	*1,739*	*13.3%*	*1,704*	*11.1%*	*1,802*	*11.8%*

Application Status	POLAR4 Quintile	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Registered	1st Quintile	564	10.8%	652	11.4%	742	11.5%	800	11.5%	860	11.5%
	5th Quintile	1,417	27.1%	1,489	26.0%	1,666	25.9%	1,780	25.5%	1,916	25.7%
	Q1-Q5	*853*	*16.3%*	*837*	*14.6%*	*924*	*14.4%*	*980*	*14.0%*	*1,056*	*14.2%*
Registered (excluding returning students)	1st Quintile	254	11.9%	246	11.4%	273	11.2%	324	12.6%	327	11.8%
	5th Quintile	566	26.5%	556	25.7%	649	26.6%	642	24.9%	709	25.5%
	Q1-Q5	*312*	*14.6%*	*310*	*14.3%*	*376*	*15.4%*	*318*	*12.3%*	*382*	*13.7%*

Table 2: Trends in Undergraduate Access across the past 5 Academic Years, using POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 5, under 21 students only (Data source: internal)

As a university, we have a long-standing commitment to increasing access to higher education.

In 2017-18 our Outreach Team worked with 11,100 beneficiaries from over 130 schools in the eastern region. We carefully target resource and activity using Edubase data to identify those schools that would most benefit from outreach intervention. All schools across Essex, Suffolk, Southend, and selected London boroughs (Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge, Newham, Waltham Forest, Hackney and Tower Hamlets) are assessed to ensure that we work predominately with schools who have a higher than average percentage of students in receipt of Free School Meals. GCSE attainment is also considered to identify with which schools we should be engaging more intensively.

Our VI6 Project also enables five local sixth forms to teach A-Level subjects on our Colchester campus to over 300 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. Qualitative surveys from our most recent cohort of VI6 students (2018-19) revealed an increase in students' intentions about applying to university. On the first day of the partnership, 62% intended to apply to higher education, rising to 82% by the end of their first term.

We are also the lead institution for Make Happen, the Essex National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) partnership (currently funded until July 2021); through this, we continue to work to raise the aspirations of pupils in the region and increase application rates to higher education from target wards.

Through our targeted outreach with schools, we have increased participation in aspiration-raising activity by white males from low-income backgrounds from 19% in 2017 to 50% in 2018. More generally, these aspiration raising activities have seen progression into higher education from these schools rise by 3.7% since 2017-18. Applications to the University from our schools' outreach activity, which uses widening participation indicators as a selection basis, increased by 14% between 2015 and 2018 and our data shows that 42.3% of our home undergraduate students come from homes with incomes of less than £25,000.

We have been successful both in welcoming growing numbers of students from POLAR 4 Q1 areas to join us at Essex and in narrowing the access gap between the least and most advantaged groups. In order to understand more fully any trends contributing to this success, we have undertaken intersectional analysis (see 1.6 below) to assist us in assessing whether there are any specific barriers to access and/or to identify further opportunities to improve our performance. The volatility of the data did not expose trends but did suggest that continued vigilance was important if we are to continue to live up to our values of being a university that welcomes students on the basis of their potential. In the light of this analysis, we have identified a target to reflect our commitment to fair access and will continue to monitor access data on an intersectional basis to enable us to adjust activities and interventions as necessary in order to ensure progress across all characteristics.

Success

Non-continuation

For students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (POLAR4, quintiles 1 and 2) the non-continuation gap compared to quintiles 4 and 5 shows no consistent trend and is, on average, well within our tolerance of a significant adverse or favourable variation.

When we look at an alternative measure, the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the picture is not dissimilar, although we have identified a disappointing dip in performance in the most recent figures from 2017-18.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
POLAR4 Q1 & Q2	88.3%	91.3%	89.2%	86.7%	88.7%
POLAR4 Q3	92.9%	91.7%	91.5%	89.2%	87.9%

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
POLAR4 Q4 and Q5	92.1%	91.2%	89.5%	90.0%	87.4%
IMD Q1 & Q2	90.8%	91.7%	88.2%	88.0%	85.9%
IMD Q3	91.6%	91.5%	90.4%	90.1%	88.2%
IMD Q4 & Q5	91.5%	90.9%	91.2%	89.7%	90.4%

Table 3: POLAR4 and IMD continuation rates from 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal)

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
POLAR (Q1+2 - Q4+5)	-3.8%	0.1%	-0.3%	-3.3%	1.3%
IMD (Q1+2 - Q4+5)	-0.7%	0.8%	-3.0%	-1.7%	-4.5%

Table 4: Continuation Percentage Gaps for POLAR4 and IMD from 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal)

Between the areas with the most and least participation in HE (POLAR4 quintiles 1 compared to quintile 5), the data shows no consistent trend, with the majority of the fluctuations within our tolerance levels. The five-year average gap is 1.7%.

POLAR4		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
1st Quintile	%	86.7%	92.1%	89.6%	85.5%	88.0%
	N	209	326	310	306	365
5th Quintile	%	92.4%	90.3%	89.7%	90.4%	87.5%
	N	448	500	485	612	582
Gap		5.7%	-1.8%	0.1%	4.9%	-0.4%

Table 5: POLAR4 Q1 and Q5 continuation rates from 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal)

The national data published by the Office for Students in relation to non-continuation suggests a 5 year average gap between POLAR4 quintile 1 and quintile 5 of 4.4%. However, our internal data for POLAR4 indicates that our performance is better than the national average, with no consistent gap on this measure, and a most recent five year average gap of 2.3%. This is borne out when we replicate the Office for Students data, which excludes mature students.

POLAR4_Quintile		2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
1st Quintile	%	88.7%	87.4%	92.7%	87.8%	83.4%	86.9%
	N	133	153	227	209	216	271
5th Quintile	%	92.7%	92.8%	90.3%	89.4%	90.0%	87.4%
	N	356	412	466	453	557	532
Gap Q5 - Q1		**4.0%**	**5.4%**	**-2.3%**	**1.5%**	**6.6%**	**0.5%**
5yr MA		**3.0%**	**3.1%**	**2.0%**	**2.2%**	**3.0%**	**2.3%**

Table 6: POLAR4 Q1 and Q5 continuation rates from 2012-13 to 2016-17, replicating HESA data (Data source: internal)

The data fluctuates year on year, with our quintile 1 students in one year having better continuation rates than those from quintile 5; no consistent trends have emerged. Having tested our findings further through the additional measure of IMD, the data indicate that socioeconomic background is not currently a significant factor in relation to continuation at Essex. We will continue to review continuation for our POLAR4 quintile 1 students, however, so that we can quickly identify if this changes, and if any consistent gaps emerge.

While the gaps are not changing in any consistent way, continuation rates are nonetheless in decline for our entire population. We are monitoring and evaluating this across our entire population. Supporting and improving continuation for all students is a strategic priority for the University and action is therefore embedded within the annual cycle of change at both institutional and departmental level (see section 3).

Attainment

Analysis of our data shows that, despite a dip in performance in 2014-15, students at Essex from lower participation backgrounds (POLAR4, quintiles 1 and 2) often perform better than the national average with respect to earning good degrees, relative to students from quintiles 4 and 5.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017/18
Q1 and Q2	78.5%	77.0%	83.2%	76.1%	77.6%
Q4 and Q5	77.6%	82.6%	80.1%	77.5%	75.3%
Difference	**-0.9%**	**5.6%**	**-3.1%**	**1.4%**	**-2.3%**

Table 7: Good degree rates (percentage of the number of First and Upper Second class awards from within the population) of all University of Essex undergraduate students by POLAR4 quintiles, from 2013-14 to 2017-18. (Data source: internal)

While POLAR4 data suggested no consistent gap we tested this finding using the alternative measure of the IMD. The data demonstrates that students from the most deprived areas achieve fewer good degrees than those from the least deprived (table 8, below). The gap is most marked between IMD Q1 and Q5, with a 5 year average gap of 16.1%.

Characteristic		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
IMD	Q1	70.6%	139	67.1%	118	68.0%	153	71.7%	213	69.1%	259
	Q5	85.1%	314	84.0%	268	86.3%	283	85.3%	307	86.0%	313
Difference: Q1 -Q5		-14.5%	175	-17.0%	150	-18.3%	130	-13.6%	94	-16.9%	54

Table 8: Students achieving a 2:1 or above by IMD Quintiles from 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal)

We undertook age-related checks to identify if younger students (under 21) from lower participation backgrounds were experiencing larger gaps in attainment than our population as a whole. While POLAR4 data for younger students shows that the differences are much less marked (with an average gap of 1.6% over five years), we elected to use IMD data as this identified more challenging results for us.

Characteristic		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
IMD	Q1	70.9%	124	69.1%	103	69.5%	141	74.3%	191	70.2%	231
	Q5	85.0%	284	84.0%	247	86.1%	261	85.9%	286	85.7%	294
Difference: Q1 - Q5		-14.2%	-160	-14.9%	-144	-16.7%	-120	-11.6%	-95	-15.5%	-63

Table 9: Good degree rates (percentage of the number of First and Upper Second class awards from within the population) of younger University of Essex undergraduate students (under 21) by IMD quintiles, from 2013-14 to 2017-18. (Data source: internal)

While the 5 year average attainment gap between IMD Q1 and Q5 for younger students is lower (at 14.6%) than that for our entire population, the attainment gap between all our Q1 and Q5 students is of concern and a strategic priority for us to address, and we have identified a target to address this.

Progression to employment or further study

Data shows that by each of the two measures we use to identify Higher Education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status, our students achieve comparable results to the general student population, with gaps on average of 2% or below. According to both POLAR4 and IMD, progression trends are in an upward direction, in line with the general population trend. We chose to compare quintiles 1 and 2

here against the overall population in order to present a picture that most closely demonstrates these graduates' chances and experiences in the wider world.

Supporting our students to achieve their aspirations in the world of work remains a priority for the University.

		2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
POLAR4	Quintiles 1 and 2	65.8%	77.0%	81.2%	75.3%
IMD	Quintiles 1 and 2	61.2%	71.6%	77.5%	73.3%
Overall population	**All groups**	**64.1%**	**73.4%**	**79.6%**	**74.3%**

Table 10: Proportion of University of Essex graduates in highly skilled work and/or study by POLAR4 and IMD, from 2013-14 to 2016-17 (Data source: 2016/17 DHLE dataset)

1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

Access

Our Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) student population has been increasing over the past 5 years (see table 11), with Black, Asian and minority ethnic students now representing 47% of the undergraduate student population, a rise of 7% since 2014-15.

We will continue to monitor access data in line with our institutional commitment to nurturing a diverse student community.

Academic Year	BAME (Non-UK Domiciled)		BAME (UK Domiciled)		White (Non-UK Domiciled)		White (UK Domiciled)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2014/15	1,596	17.3%	2,090	22.6%	1,497	16.2%	4,068	44.0%
2015/16	1,697	16.7%	2,507	24.7%	1,534	15.1%	4,398	43.4%
2016/17	1,741	15.8%	3,032	27.5%	1,579	14.3%	4,670	42.4%
2017/18	1,776	15.4%	3,495	30.4%	1,622	14.1%	4,619	40.1%
2018/19	1,846	15.3%	3,832	31.8%	1,746	14.5%	4,631	38.4%

Table 11: UG Student numbers by BAME and White, UK and Non-UK domiciled 2014-15 to 2018-19 (Data source: internal)

We have demonstrated that we are also narrowing the gaps in access to our university for all UK domiciled non-white ethnic groups increasing their representation in our community year on year.

Academic Year	Asian		Black		Mixed		Other Ethnicity		White		Info Refused/Not Declared	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2014/15	574	8.7%	1,095	16.6%	329	5.0%	92	1.4%	4,068	61.8%	425	6.5%
2015/16	690	9.5%	1,306	17.9%	392	5.4%	119	1.6%	4,398	60.2%	395	5.4%
2016/17	843	10.1%	1,585	18.9%	444	5.3%	160	1.9%	4,670	55.7%	684	8.2%
2017/18	973	11.3%	1,806	20.9%	518	6.0%	198	2.3%	4,619	53.5%	515	6.0%
2018/19	1,104	12.6%	1,950	22.2%	556	6.3%	222	2.5%	4,631	52.7%	325	3.7%

Table 12: UG UK domiciled student numbers by ethnicity, 2014-15 to 2018-19 (Data source: internal)

Success

Non-continuation

Our data shows that, since 2014-15, Black, Asian and minority ethnic students have had a higher continuation rate than that of White students, although the gap is closing.

	2013-14	**2014-15**	**2015-16**	**2016-17**	**2017-18**
BAME	98.3%	94.9%	91.3%	93.1%	89.8%
White	97.0%	90.4%	89.7%	88.4%	89.5%
Difference	*-1.3%*	*-4.5%*	*-1.6%*	*-4.7%*	*-0.3%*

Table 13: Continuation rates of undergraduate students by ethnicity, from 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal)

Within our population of UK domiciled students the overall pattern of non-continuation and ethnicity is more variable, with Asian and Black students consistently outperforming White students. The pattern for mixed ethnicity students relative to non-mixed ethnicity students is more volatile showing no clear trend.

The data suggests that, as with our findings in relation to students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, our approach of prioritising the needs and aspirations of every student, regardless of background or characteristics is appropriate. We will continue to focus on supporting every student to continue in their studies rather than focusing disproportionately on a sub-population.

Characteristic	Ethnicity		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
BAME (UK Domiciled)	Asian	%	98.8%	95.6%	93.6%	94.0%	92.5%
		N	154	246	229	295	347
	Black	%	97.8%	95.1%	89.5%	93.1%	89.3%
		N	273	489	398	557	565
	Mixed	%	97.7%	90.3%	90.9%	88.8%	83.8%
		N	102	100	138	149	163
	Other	%	97.1%	94.6%	84.9%	95.2%	80.0%
		N	21	22	32	49	44
White (UK Domiciled)	White	%	96.7%	90.4%	89.7%	88.4%	89.5%
		N	1,084	1,247	1,296	1,316	1,302

Table 14: Continuation rates for Ethnicity (UK domiciled) 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal)

Attainment

Our success in relation to meeting the needs of every student regardless of ethnicity is not yet reflected with respect to attainment outcomes: specifically, the proportion of students achieving a degree of 2.1 or higher.

Academic Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
BAME (all) / White (all)	-21.1%	-15.7%	-17.1%	-18.1%	-15.0%
BAME (UK) / White (UK)	-18.8%	-7.9%	-14.2%	-17.7%	-14.4%
BAME (Non-UK) / White (non-UK)	-17.4%	-20.1%	-15.4%	-15.9%	-13.9%

Table 15: Attainment Gaps for Ethnicity, 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal)

Detailed analysis of the data indicates that Asian and Black students have lower attainment levels than White students.

Academic Year	BAME (UK Domiciled)								White (UK Domiciled)	
	Asian		Black		Mixed		Other		White	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
2013/14	60.2%	62	59.9%	88	78.0%	46	75.0%	9	83.8%	866
2014/15	73.7%	87	68.6%	133	84.3%	59	73.3%	11	82.6%	822
2015/16	66.7%	84	68.2%	159	78.9%	71	94.1%	16	85.9%	785
2016/17	70.0%	135	60.4%	195	78.3%	65	77.8%	14	83.8%	968
2017/18	69.1%	134	63.8%	254	77.3%	92	69.2%	18	81.9%	971

Table 16: Proportion of UK students that achieved above a 2:1 by ethnicity (Data source: internal)

While we have narrowed the attainment gap between Black, Asian and minority ethnic students and White students (see table 17), this remains a concern and does not meet our aspiration to have no large attainment gaps. We have set an institutional target to close this gap.

	Five year average from 2009-10 to 2013-14	Five year average from 2010-11 to 2014-15	Five year average from 2011-12 to 2015-16	Five year average from 2012-13 to 2016-17
Ethnicity gap	21.2%	17.9%	16.4%	15.1%

Table 17: 5 year moving average in terms ethnicity attainment gap (Data source: internal)

Progression to employment or further study

Data relating to graduate outcomes by ethnicity demonstrates no clear trend with gaps between different groups varying from year to year. This suggests that ethnicity is not a significant factor in terms of graduate prospects for Essex. The data suggests that our strategy of focusing on each individual's potential and encouraging them to engage with our services to realise that potential is an effective strategy for Essex. We will continue to monitor our data and align our activities to support and develop students to ensure that their experience at Essex enables them to achieve their aspirations.

Ethnicity	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Asian	66.7%	72.1%	76.3%	70.8%
Black	60.9%	71.4%	82.2%	67.8%
Mixed	81.1%	83.0%	81.4%	73.6%
White	65.3%	75.1%	80.5%	75.1%
Gap between Asian and White	1.4%	-3.0%	-4.2%	-4.3%
Gap between Black and White	-4.4%	-3.7%	1.7%	-7.3%
Gap between Black and Asian	-5.8%	-0.7%	5.9%	-3.0%
Gap between Mixed and White	15.8%	7.9%	0.9%	-1.5%
Gap between Mixed and Black	20.2%	11.6%	-0.8%	5.8%
Gap between Mixed and Asian	14.4%	10.9%	5.1%	2.8%

Table 18: Proportion of University of Essex graduates in highly skilled work and/or study by ethnicity, including gaps between groups, from 2013-14 to 2016-17 (Data source: 2016/17 DHLE dataset)

1.3 Mature students

Access

As a proportion of our applicant pool, mature applicants have remained steady (20% in 2014-15 and 21% in 2018-19). In terms of offers made over the same period, the proportion of mature applicants receiving an offer increased from 14% to 16% (an increase

of 2%). In contrast, the number of young applicants receiving an offer increased by only 1% over the same period.

Mature applicants are now 12% more likely to receive an offer; in 2014-15, 51% of mature applicants received an offer, in 2018-19 this figure was 63%.

Although our overall mature student population headcount has declined by 3% since 2014-15, until 2018-19 the overall proportion of mature students was stable, varying by no more than 1% in four years. Our access data suggests that the recent decline is not a reflection of any change in our recruitment activity, with applications and offers growing, but is in line with national trends. A report from UCAS released in June 2018 cites a declining proportion of students aged 21 and over (mature) entering full time higher education in the UK. It indicated that from 2016 to 2017 there was a proportional decline of 7% and highlighted that the impact of changes to the funding of nursing courses in England has been a contributing factor in this decline.[1]

Academic Year	Mature				Young			
	Applications Submitted	Offers made	Registered Population (Headcount & %)		Applications Submitted	Offers made	Registered Population (Headcount & %)	
2014-15	3,554	1,817	1,670	16.8%	14,434	11,215	8,270	83.2%
2015-16	3,803	1,877	1,735	16.2%	16,238	12,435	8,947	83.8%
2016-17	4,252	2,238	2,008	17.0%	16,554	13,382	9,828	83.0%
2017-18	4,406	2,598	1,954	15.8%	17,762	14,982	10,426	84.2%
2018-19	4,737	2,975	1,790	13.8%	18,345	15,592	11,185	86.2%

Table 19: Trends in Undergraduate Access Stage for Age across the past 5 Academic Years (Data source: internal)

Success

Non-continuation

Data shows that we have closed the gap in continuation for mature students and for the last three years fluctuations between positive and adverse variation for continuation by age have not been significant. This suggests that age has not been a significant factor in continuation. We will continue to monitor this data.

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[1] *Admissions patterns for mature applicants 2017 cycle*, UCAS, June 2018

Characteristic	2013/14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
	Continuation (% & Headcount)		Continuation (% & Headcount)		Continuation (% & Headcount)		Continuation (% & Headcount)		Continuation (% & Headcount)	
Mature	87.6%	276	88.2%	358	91.7%	520	90.5%	571	88.6%	514
Young	92.2%	2,321	92.4%	2,780	90.5%	2,823	90.3%	3,063	89.8%	3,300
Gap	-4.6%		-4.2%		1.2%		0.2%		-1.2%	

Table 20: Continuation by age, 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal)

Attainment

At Essex, our data mirrors the national trend of a lower proportion of mature students obtaining a good degree compared to young students. While our numbers of mature students are small, and this creates volatility in the data, we are committed to meeting the needs of every student. The majority of our mature student population is clustered in one department and action to address this attainment gap is therefore focused locally (see Section 3). Monitoring of progress in closing the gap is undertaken at Faculty and institutional level.

Characteristic	2013/14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
	Good Degree (% & Headcount)		Good Degree (% & Headcount)		Good Degree (% & Headcount)		Good Degree (% & Headcount)		Good Degree (% & Headcount)	
Mature	67.2%	158	72.1%	160	77.1%	165	70.1%	197	71.7%	180
Young	73.9%	1,568	76.8%	1,533	76.2%	1,494	77.8%	1,867	77.7%	1,913

Table 21: Good Degree Rates by Age, 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal)

Progression to employment or further study

Our data demonstrates that mature students are more likely to progress into highly skilled work or further study than the overall Essex graduate population. This can be explained by the fact that most of our mature student population is clustered in a few departments, with the majority studying Subjects Allied to Health.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Age: Mature	72.7%	85.3%	90.2%	88.6%
Overall population	64.1%	73.4%	79.6%	74.3%

Table 22: Proportion of University of Essex graduates in highly skilled work and/or study by age, from 2013-14 to 2016-17 (Data source: 2016/17 DHLE dataset)

1.4 Disabled students

Access

We strive to create a welcoming and inclusive environment – our approach to recruitment including Open and Applicant Days promotes this aspect of our community and we are pleased that this is reflected in our application data from applicants with disabilities.

As a proportion of the applicant pool, the number of disabled undergraduate applicants has increased from 6.2% in 2013-14 to 8.4% in 2018-19.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Declared disability	1,138	1,104	1,407	1,488	1,750	1,933
No disability declared	17,340	16,987	18,829	19,456	20,525	21,149

Table 23: Number of applicants applying to undergraduate courses at the University of Essex by disability, 2013-14 to 2018-19 (Data source: internal).

Year	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Applications from undergraduate students with a declared disability as a proportion of all applications	6.2%	6.1%	7.0%	7.1%	7.9%	8.4%

Table 24: Proportion of undergraduate applicants with a declared disability as a proportion of all undergraduate applications received by the University of Essex, from 2013-14 to 2018-19 (Data source: internal).

In addition to an increase in the proportion of undergraduate applicants with a declared disability, we have also seen an increase in the proportion of students registering with a declared disability, although not at the same rate. Our data indicates that offers to applicants declaring a disability have increased over the last 5 years; in 2014-15 63% of applicants declaring a disability received an offer compared to 78% in 2018-19.

Year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Proportion of students with a declared disability	8.9%	9.5%	9.1%	9.4%	9.8%

Table 25: Proportion of undergraduate students with a declared disability as a proportion of all registered undergraduate students at the University of Essex, from 2014-15 to 2018-19 (Data source: internal).

Success

Non-continuation

The continuation rate of students with a declared disability relative to those with no disability declared has remained comparable over the last five years, with no clear trend, suggesting that students with a declared disability are as likely to continue as students with

no declared disability. There was a decline in performance in 2017-18 and we are monitoring this to ensure that it does not indicate an adverse trend.

Characteristic	2013/14 Continuation (% & Headcount)		2014-15 Continuation (% & Headcount)		2015-16 Continuation (% & Headcount)		2016-17 Continuation (% & Headcount)		2017-18 Continuation (% & Headcount)	
Mental Health Condition	95.6%	38	96.1%	59	87.4%	77	87.7%	86	82.3%	94
Specific Learning Difficulty	96.2%	93	96.0%	104	92.1%	124	84.7%	130	88.7%	110
Disability Declared (all)	95.2%	239	93.4%	269	88.9%	335	91.1%	349	85.7%	347
No Declared Disability	91.4%	2,358	91.7%	2,869	90.9%	3,008	90.2%	3,285	90.0%	3,467

Table 26: Continuation rates for undergraduate students with a declared disability compared with no disability declared, including disaggregated data where population size is over 20, from 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Data source: internal).

We have looked at all of the disaggregated data available for disability but the absolute numbers in most individual categories are very small and it is therefore not possible to draw robust conclusions from the data. In monitoring our performance, however, we do look at the relative performance of students with different categories of declared disability to help us assess whether our strategies are proving effective consistently.

Attainment

A comparison of attainment rates between disabled and non-disabled students shows that, while there is no clear trend overall, on average disabled students are more likely to obtain a good degree than non-disabled. This contrasts to the national picture, where disabled students tend to have lower attainment than non-disabled.

	2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Mental Health Condition	91.3%	21	75.0%	21	92.0%	23	83.3%	35	79.2%	57
Specific Learning Difficulty	78.9%	56	79.7%	51	79.2%	61	81.7%	67	77.9%	88
Declared Disability (all)	80.6%	133	78.3%	126	77.8%	133	77.9%	141	81.7%	197
No Disability Declared	78.9%	938	80.1%	986	81.2%	982	77.7%	1,236	75.6%	1,272
% point Gap (Declared Disability- no declared disability)	1.7%		-1.8%		-3.4%		0.2%		6.1%	

Table 27: Good Degree outcomes across Academic Years for Disability, including disaggregated data where population size is over 20 (Data source: internal)

Progression to employment or further study

The progression of students with a declared disability into highly skilled work or further study is consistently higher than that of the overall population, with these students on average 6% more likely to progress into graduate level work/study.

		2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Disability	**Declared disability**	69.5%	79.3%	87.3%	79.7%
Overall population	**All groups**	64.1%	73.4%	79.6%	74.3%

Table 28: Proportion of University of Essex graduates in highly skilled work and/or study by protected characteristic, from 2013-14 to 2016-17 (Data source: 2016/17 DHLE dataset).

1.5 Care leavers

In 2018-19, across our entire student population, only 90 students declared themselves to be care leavers and no students declared themselves as estranged.

We do not have statistically significant or reliable data in relation to the recruitment, success or progression of these students at our university; however, national data shows that currently only around 6% of 19-21 year olds who experienced the care system while growing up progress into University.

At present these data are not collected at application stage, although UCAS has added this field from 2019-20. As a consequence, we will be in a better position to monitor application and offer data for care leavers from this date.   Once we have a clearer understanding of care leaver related access, from 2020-21, we will baseline, monitor and evaluate the impact of our collaborative access initiative and identify any further appropriate action.

Given the paucity of data, we cannot at present be confident that we will have statistically significant data to enable credible analysis in relation to success. We will be seeking to monitor estranged student outcomes alongside those of care leavers as they face many of the same potential challenges and this has the potential to increase the reliability of any evaluation. 2020-21 will be the first point at which we anticipate being able to evaluate continuation, drawing on the improved admissions data available to us.

1.6 Intersections of disadvantage

Access

As the University has grown, we have maintained our commitment to attracting students from diverse backgrounds. Using POLAR4 access data, the pattern of registrations indicates that, while growth in our student population has been distributed across POLAR4 quintiles, there has been steeper relative growth in the proportion of our Young Undergraduate Home domicile students from lower participation neighbourhoods, compared to those in higher participation neighbourhoods. Between 2014-15 to 2019-20 the size of our Young Undergraduate Home Domicile POLAR4 Quintile 1 population has increased from 556 to 946 (increase of 70.1%). In the same period, our POLAR4 Quintile 5 Young Undergraduate Home student population has increased by 33.6%.   To understand this performance better we considered the intersectionality between low participation (POLAR4, Quintile 1) and other demographics (Sex, Disability and Ethnicity).

An analysis of access by POLAR4 quintile and sex shows no consistent gap between Quintile 5 and Quintile 1. When analysed by sex, the data shows that since 2016-17 the access gaps between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 female students, and between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 male students have been on a narrowing trajectory.

POLAR4 Quintile	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Female Quintile 5 – Quintile 1 gap	11.64%	12.86%	12.80%	8.25%	11.77%	6.51%
Male Quintile 5 – Quintile 1 gap	17.81%	15.83%	17.58%	15.83%	14.97	11.79%

Table 29: Gap in proportion of Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 female and male new Young Undergraduate Home domicile students (Data source: internal)

An analysis of our access data by POLAR4 quintile and disability shows that the gap between Quintile 5 and Quintile 1 for students with a declared disability has fluctuated considerably over the recent academic year intakes and as such, there is no reliable trend. The gap in Quintile 5 to Quintile 1 students has ranged between 24.44% in 2016-17 to 10.42% in 2017-18. The 2019-20 data shows that there has been a large increase in Quintile 1 students with a declared disability, and therefore the gap has narrowed to 6.68% (proportion of Quintile 1 students at 15.17% and a proportion of Quintile 5 students at 21.85%).

POLAR4 Quintile	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Declared disability Quintile 5 – Quintile1 gap	14.96%	13.49%	24.44%	10.42%	19.84%	6.68%
No declared disability Quintile 5 – Quintile1 gap	14.73%	14.47%	14.09%	12.51%	12.47%	9.49%

Table 30: Gap in proportion of POLAR4 Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 students with a declared disability and Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 students with no declared disability (Data source: internal)

A review of the access proportions provided by the Office for Students data by ethnicity and POLAR4 Quintile group (Quintile 1+2 compared with Quintile 3,4 + 5) shows a closing gap between 2013-14 and 2017-18. The Office for Students data is consistent with our internal dataset and findings. An analysis of our access data by POLAR4 quintile and ethnicity shows that the gap between Quintile 5 and Quintile1 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students has narrowed since 2014-15. 2019-20 data shows that there has been a further closure of the gap between New Young Undergraduate Home domicile Black, Asian and minority ethnic students Quintile 5 and Quintile 1 students. The gap in 2019-20 has closed to 14.05%, a reduction of 9.38% compared with the 2014-15 gap of 23.43%. The consistent year-on-year growth in the proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic students from Quintile 1 would suggest that the University's commitment to increasing participation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic students from low participation areas is bearing fruit.

POLAR4 Quintile	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
BAME Quintile 5 – Quintile1 gap	23.43%	20.41%	18.31%	16.46%	18.39%	14.05%
White Quintile 5 – Quintile1 gap	8.22%	10.37%	13.07%	8.44%	8.65%	4.08%

Table 31: Gap in proportion of BAME POLAR4 Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 students and White Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 (Data source: internal)

The intersectional analysis does not suggest that an access target focused on a specific subset of students would be helpful. However, we are committed to supporting students from low participation backgrounds to enable access to higher education at Essex and as such, we will continue to monitor access data in relation to sex and ethnicity and will adjust activities and interventions as necessary in order to ensure progress across all characteristics.

Attainment

Analysis of IMD and ethnicity shows that socioeconomic deprivation compounds the disparity compared to ethnicity and degree outcome alone. However, the gaps between the most and least deprived, according to IMD, are similar for Asian, Black and White students (noting that small numbers distort the statistical significance of the results for 'other' and 'mixed'). This would suggest that, while we need to take focused action to address attainment gaps in relation to ethnicity and those from lower quintiles in the IMD, our 'meeting the needs of every student' approach remains appropriate, as actions are required in relation to all ethnic groups.

Ethnicity	IMD Groups	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Asian	Q1 + 2	56.0%	66.7%	64.1%	68.0%	65.3%
	Q3	66.7%	67.7%	75.0%	72.7%	75.0%
	Q4 + 5	63.0%	96.2%	70.0%	75.0%	70.9%
Gap between most and least deprived		**7.0%**	**29.5%**	**5.9%**	**7.1%**	**5.7%**
Black	Q1 + 2	60.0%	67.7%	65.6%	61.2%	64.8%
	Q3	54.6%	69.7%	75.0%	57.1%	55.1%
	Q4 + 5	58.3%	75.9%	70.0%	56.7%	74.4%
Gap between most and least deprived		**-1.7%**	**8.1%**	**4.4%**	**-4.6%**	**9.6%**
Mixed	Q1 + 2	78.1%	84.6%	70.3%	82.4%	79.7%
	Q3	62.5%	90.9%	66.7%	72.7%	81.3%
	Q4 + 5	82.4%	81.8%	94.1%	73.9%	69.7%
Gap between most and least deprived		**4.2%**	**-2.8%**	**23.9%**	**-8.4%**	**-10.0%**
Other	Q1 + 2	57.1%	77.8%	88.9%	72.7%	66.7%
	Q3	100.0%	75.0%	100.0%		50.0%
	Q4 + 5	100.0%	50.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Gap between most and least deprived		**42.9%**	**-27.8%**	**11.1%**	**27.3%**	**33.3%**
White	Q1 + 2	79.1%	75. 5%	81.6%	81.9%	78.0%
	Q3	83.7%	80.0%	85.8%	82.7%	78.5%
	Q4 + 5	86.6%	87.1%	87.8%	85.3%	85.3%
Gap between most and least deprived		**7.5%**	**11.7%**	**6.2%**	**3.4%**	**7.3%**

Table 32: Good Degree Outcomes split by Ethnicity and IMD (Data source: internal)

Progression

Using the definition determined by HESA and the Times Good University Guide for highly skilled work and/or study, we have seen an improvement in graduate outcomes for all target groups of students over a four year period (from 2013-14 to 2016-17), with all of these groups on average outperforming the overall population. However, adding intersectional data represented by IMD, students from quintiles 1 and 2 perform less well than the general population by a small percentage.

		2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
POLAR4	**Quintiles 1 and 2**	65.1%	76.9%	80.7%	75.2%
Ethnicity	**BAME**	68.0%	75.1%	81.6%	70.8%
Age	**Mature**	72.7%	85.3%	90.2%	88.6%
Disability	**Declared disability**	69.5%	79.3%	87.3%	79.7%
IMD	**Quintiles 1 and 2**	61.2%	71.6%	77.5%	73.3%
Overall population	**All groups**	**64.1%**	**73.4%**	**79.6%**	**74.3%**

Table 33: Proportion of University of Essex graduates in highly skilled work and/or study by protected characteristic, from 2013-14 to 2016-17 (Data source: 2016/17 DHLE dataset)

Ethnicity	**IMD Quintile Groups**	**2013/14**	**2014/15**	**2015/16**	**2016/17**
	Q1 + Q2	75.0%	69.7%	74.4%	70.9%
Asian	**Q3**	77.8%	80.0%	78.9%	64.0%
	Q4 + Q5	42.9%	70.0%	76.2%	76.1%
Gap between most and least deprived		**-32.1%**	**0.3%**	**1.8%**	**5.2%**
	Q1 + Q2	60.6%	68.8%	81.0%	68.6%
Black	**Q3**	80.0%	70.0%	88.0%	65.4%
	Q4 + Q5	56.3%	84.2%	81.8%	64.7%
Gap between most and least deprived		**-4.3%**	**15.4%**	**0.8%**	**-3.9%**
	Q1 + Q2	76.2%	88.9%	73.7%	80.0%
Mixed	**Q3**	100.0%	83.3%	92.3%	71.4%
	Q4 + Q5	81.8%	78.3%	81.5%	68.4%
Gap between most and least deprived		**5.6%**	**-10.6%**	**7.8%**	**-11.6%**
	Q1 + Q2	50.0%	100.0%	85.7%	50.0%
Other	**Q3**	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
	Q4 + Q5	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	50.0%

Ethnicity	IMD Quintile Groups	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Gap between most and least deprived		**50.0%**	**0.0%**	**14.3%**	**0.0%**
White	**Q1 + Q2**	60.9%	70.2%	76.4%	76.4%
	Q3	63.4%	72.7%	79.5%	76.7%
	Q4 + Q5	68.0%	77.9%	82.6%	73.7%
Gap between most and least deprived		**7.1%**	**7.7%**	**6.2%**	**-2.7%**

Table 34: Progression into positive graduate outcomes split by Ethnicity and IMD (Data source: 2016/17 DHLE dataset)

Analysis of IMD and ethnicity shows a complex picture with no clear trends. Analysis across 4 year averages shows gaps in progression between the notionally least disadvantaged group (White, Q4 and 5) and Q1 and Q2 for Asian, Black and White students; however, the gaps are comparable for the low quintile groups. Differences in outcomes across ethnicity for these low quintiles are less than 3%.

This would suggest that, at present, intersectional data does not significantly enhance our understanding of attainment gaps or suggest that we should adjust our approach to closing those gaps that exist. Overall, we have seen an improvement in progression into graduate level work and study for our students and we need to ensure we continue this picture and that the improvement is consistent across all subject areas.

Analysis of the University of Essex Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data shows that at an institutional level and across all subjects our graduates equal or exceed the sector median earnings three years after graduation. This is particularly noticeable when considering students from POLAR quintile 1. LEO data released in 2017 was based on the tax year 2014-15.

1.7   Other groups who experience barriers in higher education

We have identified further student groups whom we are interested in monitoring in terms of success and progression. In these cases the data at present is not sufficient to enable us to reach sound conclusions but we will continue to review and evaluate data as its collection is embedded, and to employ qualitative measures where appropriate to gain feedback from these groups. These include estranged students (who we will consider alongside care leavers), commuting students and students with caring responsibilities. We also assess our performance in supporting our overseas and European students to achieve their potential.

The data we do have suggests that the number of students presently identified as estranged, commuting or carers is relatively low (in the case of estranged, no students have self-identified in this category to date). In order to inform and enhance our decision-making, we are establishing additional, robust data sets to be considered through the evaluation of departmental performance in 2020-21.   In addition to quantitative data, working with the Students' Union we will be seeking specific, qualitative feedback from students from these groups to better understand their experience and the specific barriers they face to ensure that we are taking action to meet their needs in line with our commitment to supporting every student. The efficacy of action taken in response to feedback will be monitored and evaluated alongside the other aims and objectives of the Plan.

2   Strategic aims and objectives

The University's aim, as articulated in our Strategic Plan 2019-2025, is to "support every student, from every background and culture, to achieve outstanding outcomes. This reflects our commitments both to offering a transformational education and to inclusion. We are determined to offer consistently excellent learning opportunities for every student, responding to the needs and aspirations of our diverse student community".

2.1 Target groups

Reflecting on the data in our assessment of performance, we have identified key objectives based on areas where our performance does not meet our expectations. This approach enables us to target our efforts on student populations against specific measures of success. We will continue to monitor and evaluate our performance across all target groups and adjust our approach in response to evidence of need, should this be appropriate.

Access

Analyses of our data indicate that we have successfully maintained a rich and diverse student population, in line with the global and inclusive outlook of our university. We aim to maintain this diversity in our student population.

While we note a recent small decline in mature student numbers as a proportion of our total student population, offer rates for these students have increased.

As highlighted in our assessment of performance, our long standing track record of being a university that welcomes all students, irrespective of background, has seen a growth of 28.7% of POLAR4 Q1 Young students registering at the University between 2014 and 2018. We do not take this performance for granted and, as a consequence, we have identified a target to reflect our commitment to fair access and will continue to monitor access data on an intersectional basis to enable us to adjust activities and interventions as necessary in order to ensure progress across all characteristics.

From 2022-23, we will build on our established collaborative work with schools and colleges (see also Section 3) through developing the Outreach Partnership Programme, an intensive progressive programme with learners at key stages 3 and 4 which targets learners from schools and colleges with low progression rates to higher education. Through subject specific programmes, mentoring and campus visits, students will be supported in their future choices and attainment. The program will be evaluated throughout, to contribute to a robust evidence base. We are committed to using the methodology currently being developed through the NERUPI (Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions) framework and the upcoming TASO evaluation research. NERUPI and TASO have indicated that raising attainment can be measured through an increase in aspirations, self-efficacy, a sense of belonging and a belief in their own academic abilities. We have already started to explore how to use these measures through the NERUPI framework to inform and measure the impact of existing and new outreach activity. We will refine our evaluative approach in the light of TASO evaluation research and will introduce a target as soon as we have sufficient data to do so and no later than in our next Access and Participation plan (2024-25).

Within the Essex Outreach Hub we are delivering a collaborative project to raise the aspiration levels of care leavers and consequently we share a collaborative target for this group (see also Section 3). The project is designed to raise the aspirations and progression to higher education for young people who have experienced the care system. Students will be tracked through HEAT and evaluation of the short term impact will be built into the program. The project aims to increase the overall aspiration level by 20% over the lifespan of our Access and Participation Plan. The baseline will be determined through pre-questionnaires administered in 2019-20. The project will not only work with the HEI partners within the Make Happen partnership, but will also further develop links with the three top-tier local authorities in Essex to ensure the project becomes part of their wider remit for care leavers.

Success

Non-continuation

Our data demonstrates that at institutional level we have no significant gaps in respect of continuation and that our priority should be supporting all students to continue in their studies rather than focusing on particular groups. We are not, therefore, supplementing the national target to reduce the unexplained gap in non-continuation between POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 5, noting that our gap on this measure is negligible.

Attainment

In relation to attainment, our data not only reflects the focus of the national target in relation to attainment in respect of black students but also suggests that a broader target encapsulating all Black, Asian and minority ethnic students is appropriate. Our institutional target is to close significant gaps.

In relation to disability, our data demonstrates that disabled students outperform students with no declared disability. Our strategy will therefore focus on activities to support the broader student population rather than additional targeted work with students with disabilities. Consequently, we have not identified an institutional target for this group.

Analysis of our data demonstrates an attainment gap for our mature students. However, this gap is linked to one subject rather than indicative of an institutional trend. Our conclusion is that an institutional target would not be appropriate. Action to close this gap will be pursued at the subject level. Monitoring of progress will be undertaken at an institutional level.

Progression to employment or further study

Supporting our students towards successful graduate outcomes which meet their personal ambitions is a central commitment in our University Strategy 2019-25. Our data demonstrates our success in improving the prospects of our graduates and suggests that target characteristics such as socioeconomic background or ethnicity are not consistently significant factors in achieving successful graduate outcomes for our students, independent of other factors.

Consequently, we intend to maintain our strategy of seeking to improve the graduate outcomes of all of our students rather than setting a specific target focused on any of the target groups.

As the new national data becomes available from HESA we will review this position and set a target if appropriate.

2.2 Aims and objectives

In assessing our performance, and setting aims and objectives arising from that assessment, we have set ourselves a baseline expectation of acceptable, non-significant variation in performance. The targets we have set reflect those identified nationally by the Office for Students which are applicable to our University, as well as our own, locally-set ones.

Reduce the gap between the proportion of students from the most and least represented groups (POLAR4 quintiles 5 and 1 respectively).

Our data (Section 1) shows that continued vigilance is important if we are to continue to live up to our values of being a university that welcomes students on the basis of their potential. The target is to increase the proportion of POLAR4 Quintile 1 new students to 14.1% by 2024-25, with the aim of narrowing and ultimately closing the gap between those students least likely to attend higher education and other groups of students.

Reduce the gap in non-continuation between the most and least represented groups (POLAR4 quintiles 5 and 1 respectively). Eliminate the unexplained gap by 2024-25.

Our data (Section 1) shows that the variance between our most and least represented groups using POLAR4 data is 1.7% on average over five years. We have tested our POLAR4 data against IMD to provide a robust evaluation of our actual performance. The POLAR4 data fluctuates year on year, with our quintile 1 students in one year having better continuation rates than those from quintile 5.

We do not propose to have a specific institutional target for this target group but will monitor performance to ensure that no gap develops. Should we identify a consistent gap we will introduce a target to address it. Our objective under this target is to remain within our tolerance levels on a rolling average basis.

In measuring our ongoing performance, we will test our performance against the national target in relation to IMD data to ensure that any variation outside our tolerance level is investigated to inform both our understanding and explanation of any gaps and the action identified to address them.

Reduce the gap in degree outcomes (1st or 2.1s) between White students and Black students. Eliminate the unexplained gap by 2024-25. Eliminate the absolute gap (the gap caused by both structural and unexplained factors) by 2030-31.

Our data (Section 1.2) demonstrates that while we have narrowed the attainment gap between Black and White students we have not yet met our aspiration to have no significant attainment gaps. We have tested our data further, focusing on intersections of disadvantage, and identified the determining factor in the attainment gap for degree outcomes as ethnicity.

Consequently, we have an institutional target to close this gap.

The target by 2025 is to have reduced the gap to 9.5%, in line with our institutional ambition to have no significant attainment gaps across our student population.   Our most recent Black students (2018/19) arrived with a tariff 15.4% lower than our White students. On average, over the past five years, our Black students' tariffs on entry are 12.6% lower than our White students. Our target of 9.5% provides a challenging aim to add further value to the learning gain of our Black students by 2024/25. We would expect progress towards this target may accelerate as we get closer to 2025, noting that changes to seek to address structural disadvantage take time to have an impact.

Reduce the gap in degree outcomes (1st or 2.1s) between White students and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students by 2024-25.

Noting that an ethnicity of 'Black' is not the only characteristic where we have identified a gap in attainment, we have set an additional institutional target in our Access and Participation Plan to close gaps across Black, Asian and minority ethnic students..

The target by 2025 is to have reduced the gap to 8.8%. We would anticipate progress towards this target might accelerate as we get closer to 2025, noting that changes to seek to address structural disadvantage take time to have an impact.

Reduce the gap in degree outcomes (1st or 2.1s) between most deprived students and least deprived as identified by IMD by 2024-25.

Our data demonstrates that students from the most deprived areas, as defined within the IMD, are less likely to achieve good degrees than those from the least deprived. This is of concern and is a strategic priority to address. Consequently, we have set an institutional target to address this area.

The target by 2025 is to have reduced the attainment gap between IMD quintiles 1 and quintile 5 (the most and least deprived areas) to 3%. We have chosen to use IMD data rather than POLAR4, as this dataset identifies a greater gap in our students' attainment.

Reduce the gap in degree outcomes (1st or 2.1s) between disabled students and non-disabled students. Eliminate the gap by 2024-25.

Our data demonstrates that we have already achieved this national target. We do not propose to have a specific institutional target for this target group but will monitor performance to ensure that no gap develops. Should we identify a gap we will introduce a target to address it.

Increase the number of potential students within the care system aspiring and progressing to Higher Education by 20% by 2024-25.

Through our collaborative partnership with Make Happen (the Essex Outreach Hub, based at the University), we will contribute to the delivery of a collaborative and sustained programme for young people who have experienced or are currently in care. The baseline data for this target will be established through a questionnaire delivered at the start of the programme. Participants will be tracked through HEAT to determine the success of the programme.

Achievement – mature students

As identified in our assessment of performance, we have identified a gap in attainment for mature students in obtaining a 2:1 or a first. While our numbers of mature students are small, creating volatility, we are committed to closing all attainment gaps. The majority of our mature student population is clustered in one department and action to address this attainment gap is therefore focused locally rather than through an institutional target.

Progression

Our data shows that, looking at all target groups and at intersections of disadvantage, we do not have significant gaps in achievement that would justify an institutional target at this stage. Overall, we have seen an improvement in progression into graduate level work and study for our students and we need to ensure this persists and that the improvement is consistent across all subject areas.

We will monitor performance and if the data changes then we will introduce a target as appropriate.

3   Strategic measures

3.1 Whole provider strategic approach

Alignment with other strategies

Our University's founding vision in 1965 was to be "freer, more daring, more experimental",[2] and this commitment to the 'Essex Spirit' continues to underpin our identity and define our mission of excellence in education and research to improve the lives of people and communities. Our University Strategy (2019-2025) sets out bold ambitions for the next period. Our approach is rooted in our founding principles, in nurturing the Essex Spirit and the values we stand for: transformational education and research, inclusion, academic freedom, partnerships based on shared values, and the commitment to make a difference in the world by putting ideas into action to create benefit for others.

Our University Strategy makes a clear commitment to **"put student success at the heart of our mission, supporting every student from every background to achieve outstanding outcomes, preparing our students to thrive in their future lives and nurturing our community of educators to support and promote student success**". This commitment to ensuring that, irrespective of background, every student has an equal opportunity to succeed is developed in our Education Strategy, which articulates our key priorities in relation to our educational provision. Our Access and Participation Plan is aligned with the vision and mind-set articulated within our University Strategy and realised through the Education Strategy. The University's strategic priorities regarding equality of opportunity are broader than the target groups identified with the Access and Participation

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[2] *Lecture 1: A university in the making; tradition and innovation*, 1963. Reith Lectures 1963: a university in the making. [Radio broadcast]. BBC, The Home Service, 9 November 1963 [Transcript accessible at: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/radio4/transcripts/1963_reith1.pdf]

Plan. Our Strategic Plan KPIs include the ambition to have no significant equality attainment gaps for measures of student success at institutional level – consequently, all of the target groups within the Access and Participation Plan are captured within the Strategic Plan and supporting strategies. Our targets to reduce the gap in degree outcomes between White and Black students and White and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students and to reduce the gap in degree outcomes between most and least deprived students are directly impacted by all the actions taken to meet our Strategic Plan's objectives. Similarly, our overarching Strategic Commitment to have no significant equality gaps ensures the commitments made within our Access and Participation Plan are embedded in action and at the forefront of monitoring, evaluation, review and change to support continuous improvement. The strategic alignment between our Strategic Plan and the Access and Participation Plan ensures that the priorities of the Access and Participation Plan are embedded into key decision-making and action taking at all levels within the institution.

The University Strategy was developed through 18 months of cross-University consultation. Staff and students at all of our campuses participated in workshops to contribute their ideas, as well as having access to online resources to explore emerging themes and contribute ideas and comments. The emerging strategy was also discussed and shaped through the formal committee structure. At all points along this journey, students, both as individuals and via committee and Students' Union representation, had the opportunity to contribute to and shape the strategy. The final document was approved by Senate and Council. A similar process shapes the Education Strategy, which is developed by the Education Committee, led by the PVC (Education).

The Access and Participation Plan provides a specific focus on these key strategies. Drawing on the findings from consultation on the University Strategy, the Access and Participation Plan was drafted by expert staff from relevant professional services and the Students' Union for consideration by the University's executive body (University Steering Group) and for approval by Council.

Strategic measures

Our approach to the implementation of our Strategic Plan, its supporting strategies and our Access and Participation Plan is embedded in our change procedures. Our aims are evidence-based, developed through a consultation process and through data analysis.

The University's Strategic Plan sets out our institutional level KPIs, which are directly linked to our stated objectives, and against which performance is reviewed annually and progress reported to Council. The Access and Participation Plan targets are a sub-set of these institutional KPIs and inform our understanding of our progress against our overall Institutional level target to have no significant equality attainment gaps. Progress in relation to all these measures is monitored and evaluated by the University Steering Group, reporting to the University Council. Performance is reviewed on a planned schedule throughout the academic year, and policies, practice and action plans are reviewed and amended in response to latest data. This means we can identify quickly if we are falling short – or are likely to fall short – of our ambitions and we can respond to this quickly: in these circumstances, actions are amended, agreed and implemented. New actions are always informed by available research and evidence.

Within the context of the Strategic Plan and associated KPIs, each department is required to produce their own five year plan, progress against which is reviewed as part of an annual cycle of reflection and action planning. This process is led by the Faculties, with regular meetings to assess progress, and monitored and evaluated by the University's executive committee, University Steering Group (USG). Departmental plans address institutional KPIs, which are aligned to and embed the Access and Participation Plan targets, and where departmental performance does not align with institutional expectations an action plan is required to address any shortfall. In addition to institutional level actions, therefore, departments are required to identify, measure and evaluate specific local actions to address specific equality KPI performance at departmental and, if necessary, course level. The impact of actions taken is monitored and evaluated by the Faculty and USG.

The strategic measures within our Access and Participation Plan align with our internal priorities and focus on supporting all students to achieve their potential through both institutional and targeted activity to dismantle barriers of disadvantage. Where appropriate, activities to support particular groups are introduced; these activities are informed by evidence (e.g. quantitative and qualitative data to better understand students' experiences and the particular issues faced by specific groups of students). Where actions can benefit and support the whole student population, we do not place restrictions on this. This activity is monitored and evaluated through a process of continuous improvement to ensure it delivers the most appropriate content in the most effective way.

Alongside the thorough critical review, evaluation and improvement action planning undertaken at departmental level, overall progress against our KPIs and consequently our Access and Participation Plan targets is evaluated by the University's Senate and Council.

In order to support robust and detailed scrutiny of progress, including specific monitoring and evaluation of Access and Participation Plan targets, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor chairs an oversight group that meets termly and considers in detail equality and diversity data and progress against targets. If progress does not meet expectations and actions already identified are judged to be inadequate, more detailed consideration of the underlying data and initiatives to support corrective action are commissioned by this group. The remit of this group includes due regard for the Equality Act, and our own Equality and Diversity policies and frameworks.

The curriculum, pedagogic and student support

Academic departments play a key role in ensuring that our commitment to excellence in education for all students is delivered through an inclusive curriculum and other department-based activities. In addition to departmental plans, degree courses within departments are subject to annual monitoring and, where data suggests that performance is falling short of institutional aims and objectives, departments are required to identify local action to address this. Key themes emerging from data analysis and from departmental action plans are collated by Faculties and discussed via Faculty Education Committees. Education Committee is responsible for overseeing all aspects of Education policy and practice across the University and for making recommendations to the Senate to ensure the systematic enhancement of both academic quality and the student experience.

Professional services teams provide supplementary activities to support students directly and to support departments in responding to emerging issues, evaluating impact, equality and diversity, and embedding successful activities, wherever possible, to ensure that they are accessible to all.

In order to demonstrate our commitment to closing our attainment gaps and supporting continuation, we have set out below examples of institutional level measures that we will take in order to achieve the strategic aims, objectives and targets detailed in this plan.

We are part of the **Advance HE "Towards Embedding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Curriculum" collaborative project**. This project focuses on helping our

institution ignite a step change in our understanding and practice of inclusivity in the curriculum, with a specific focus on race and ethnicity. The project has the following aims:

- To support the enhancement of sector-wide understanding of what embedding EDI in the curriculum looks like;
- To explore the obstacles to and opportunities available for embedding EDI in the curriculum, developing a picture of institutional/department/subject readiness for change;
- To identify and implement institutional, department or subject-specific EDI approaches to improve the learning and teaching experiences for our students.

As well as sharing best practice with other institutions, we will reflect on the key findings and implement recommendations as a result. We would expect the work undertaken within this project to support directly our targets to improve Black, BAME and deprived student success. We would also anticipate that the outputs of this project would help us improve the continuation of all of our students, supporting the commitment identified in Section 1.1.

Our annual **Inclusion and Wellbeing Conference** provides a mechanism to share learning from this project. In 2018-19 a specific focus of the conference was mental health, noting the growing student numbers declaring mental health disability and seeking to draw on external expert input to support us in maintaining good outcomes for this student group, as identified in Section 1.4. The conference maintained focus on this important area, raising staff awareness of the challenges faced by students and providing practical tips and information on how we can best support student continuation and success.

We have undertaken to complete the **Equality Challenge Unit's Race Equality Charter**, for which we will be completing a submission in 2020. Key reasons we have signed up to the Race Equality Charter include helping us to improve our understanding of the institutional and local context and identifying staff training needs. Institutional learning from this activity will feed into our actions to address KPI performance via our standard governance structure and the planning cycle.

Our ability to embed change arising from the Advance HE collaborative project and related work will be enhanced by the **Curriculum University of Essex (CUE) project**. One output of this project will improve how we manage and develop our curriculum, to support

the development of new courses and modules and changes to existing provision. One benefit of the changes will be the ability to systematically ensure that guidance around inclusive practices is included in every module and course development or review. CUE will provide a mechanism to embed checks to ensure that inclusive education is considered, and learning from institutional research and development is adopted, when designing or reviewing teaching and assessment

In addition to drawing on our own research to develop actions to support student success, we continue to draw on sector findings to ensure that our interventions are well informed and are impactful. For example, we have already made significant progress in implementing the recommendations from the ***Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #ClosingTheGap* report by Universities UK (UUK) and the National Union of Students (NUS)**[3]. This includes: having an institutional commitment to closing the Black, Asian and minority ethnic students attainment gap in our Strategic Plan; managing attainment-gap data centrally and sharing this at institutional, department and granular programme-level to all appropriate academic staff; sharing our data with the Students' Union and, through our Inclusivity Leads in each department, taking steps to ensure staff are equipped with the knowledge and resources to implement, appropriately, inclusivity measures in their everyday work. We will continue with this work, including conducting more student focus groups with Black, Asian and minority ethnic students to understand particular issues that they face in order to implement actions to tackle attainment gaps affecting this student group. This work will support both local and Institutional progress in relation to our targets to reduce the attainment gaps between our White, and Black, Asian and minority ethnic students.

As identified in Section 1.7, we are interested in exploring further the extent to which commuting impacts on our student success. We continue to put in place **measures to support our commuting student community**; for example, we have introduced a car share scheme to reduce costs for travel and a First Essex special season ticket price for University of Essex students. We have also increased the amount of study spaces on our campuses, our Library is now open 24/7 during term-time and we offer laptop loans on campus in order to remove barriers that we are aware our commuting students face. Furthermore, we also offer an online software hub so that students can access software

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[3] https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf

remotely and free of charge. As our data improves, the efficacy of these steps will be evaluated and further action, as necessary, identified.

Other activities to support different learning styles, intended to promote continuation and success, include a project during 2019-20 to develop and pilot the principles of co-design, with a view to this being rolled out across the University from 2020-21, and work to develop and trial different learning spaces, with an online teaching directory of teaching spaces being launched in 2019-20.

In 2019 the University established a **new Student Development service** to provide the internal leadership and operational support necessary to support our students as individuals as they make the transition into our global learning community, as they develop throughout their educational experience, and as they move into the next stage of their lives and careers. A key focus for the team is the use of data to enable effective prioritisation of activities and an evaluation of impact to make sure actions achieve their aims and contribute to transforming our students' lives. For example, we have a commitment that all programmes should contain at least **5 hours of embedded study and skills support provision delivered by the central team within Student Development**. One of the first priorities for the new team is to evaluate the impact of academic skills support rooted within departments to ensure that it is helping the delivery of departmental performance priorities, including the closing of attainment gaps. Changes to embedded delivery will be introduced from 2020-21, arising from this review and evaluation. This support will continue to be reviewed annually as part of the consideration of departmental performance and progress against KPIs.

The Student Development team have also worked with the Library and the Students' Union to develop **easily accessible resources for students on key skills for success, including tools for independent learning** (e.g. time management). This suite of self-help guides was informed by student feedback: focus groups were held to explore the challenges students faced with regard to independent learning and associated skills, and to understand where students would access help should they need it. Students will be directed to these resources from October 2019 and engagement and impact of the use of the resources on students' marks will be kept under review.

We are committed to working in partnership with students and engaging with students as co-producers of their living and learning experiences. We are developing an institutional **Student Voice action plan** for 2019-20 to 2021-22 to support this commitment and to

ensure that all students have the right opportunities to provide feedback and have their say, that there is a fair and transparent representation system for all students, and that student voice is effectively embedded in the curriculum. We would expect to see improvements in our institutional scores for 'Student Voice' questions in both the National Student Survey and UK Engagement Survey over the next three years as a result of the implementation of actions. At an institutional level, we would also expect to see improvements in scores by demography.

Alongside developments to curriculum and teaching delivery, we seek to support student success, including both continuation and attainment, through facilitating their personal growth. For example, we use Learner Analytics to support students as individuals to understand the impact of their engagement activities and identify steps for themselves to support their own achievement. Phase 3 of the **Supporting Student Success through Learner Analytics** project was implemented during the academic year 2018-19 as part of a four-phase project during the period 2016-20 to develop the use and understanding of data to support student achievement. The final phase will see the project making a transition from project to business as usual; from 2019-20, the Education Committee will be the institutional custodian of the use and impact of LEAP and of our use and understanding of data to support student achievement.

Students and their personal tutor already have access to information about their levels of engagement in their studies, including both timetabled teaching and self-study activities such as library usage and engagement with the virtual learning environment. This information also supports personal tutors in the provision of targeted support to students with low engagement. At an aggregated level, engagement data can inform departmental evaluation of teaching and assessment and support both evidence-based action and evaluation of the impact of actions. Learner Analytics is therefore expected to be an increasingly powerful tool in support of departments achieving success in improving their KPIs.

As our definitions and understanding of student engagement broaden and the use of the LEAP system continues to evolve, we will be reviewing the Progress Procedures to ensure they remain fit for purpose and support all of our students to best effect. In particular, we are keen to ensure that our approach is impactful in meeting students' needs, and we are directing our resources more effectively to ensure appropriate support is in place. This should, in particular, support our work to improve continuation. The review of our Progress Procedures will draw together the learning from the operation of LEAP to enable a revised

approach from 2020-21 onwards, underpinned by a set of principles to guide our approach around:

- An emphasis on support and advice to succeed
- A shared understanding of impact
- Personalised interventions and solutions that are mutually agreed with students
- Parity of experience and appropriate consistency across academic departments and disciplines
- Targeted resources deployment focused on positive student outcomes.

Student wellbeing is a vital component in student success and our **Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service** not only provides support for students who choose to access the service but also works proactively to develop initiatives to promote wellbeing and resilience and support continuation and success. At an institutional level, we have structured our induction to nurture a culture of belonging within the student body, with a particular focus on supporting students to transition into University regardless of educational background and promoting resilience, perseverance and a "growth mind-set". University of Essex-specific **Know Before You Go** and **Student Minds Transitions information guides** have been developed for students for 2019-20. These guides will be promoted to all students and contain vital information on key aspects of University life and support available to help students to prepare for life at University (Know Before You Go) and then to make the transition into University in order to support continuation (Transition), including information on topics such as academic study, money, mental health, sexual health, identity, sexual orientation and gender identity, relationships, living situations, life online and getting help at the University of Essex.

In recognition of the importance of supporting particular groups to feel a sense of belonging at University in order to support continuation, we have improved collaboration and communication across our University by establishing a stakeholder group which identifies upcoming events and significant dates and ensures that we are effectively **celebrating and recognising different student communities** and promoting this to our University community. For example, a comprehensive schedule of activities is planned for Black History Month in October 2019 involving stakeholders from across the University. We will continue to raise awareness and monitor the impact that this has on students feeling a sense of belonging and engagement.

The Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service provides specific and focused support on all three campuses for students from under-represented groups, particularly students with a disability (including long-term mental health difficulties). Support services are tailored for specific student groups such as international students, mature students, care leavers, estranged students and students with caring responsibilities.

We make a number of **anticipatory adjustments** to meet the diverse needs of our students including providing: an advice service for disabled students; Listen Again, our lecture capture service; assistive software in the labs; consideration of disabilities by sensitive marking (where appropriate to the learning outcomes); study skills support; support in each department to provide information to students on staff on academic adjustments; Library adjustments (extended borrowing, Sensus Access availability, Talis Aspire, support in accessing books and materials); adapted accommodation and policies to support access to on campus accommodation and parking. We continue to apply our University's continuous improvement principles to such initiatives to ensure that value is still added and we identify opportunities for further improvement.

Progression into employment/further study

Successful progression into employment begins with early engagement; the likelihood of progression is increased the earlier a student engages with support and services. In support of this, we developed a **Student Aspirations Survey** at the start of the 2019-20 year to capture new students' higher education, career and personal development aspirations and to inform interventions. The data captured from this survey will be used to shape our approach and track progress, and provide understanding of the impact and success of different interventions.

In addition, research shows that the students who most need careers support (e.g. students from low participation backgrounds) are least inclined to seek support proactively. In recognition of this, we have invested strategically in embedded activity wherever possible to ensure that every student can benefit from the support available. As such, we have built **Career Development Learning** into the students' departmental experience for all undergraduate students, either embedded careers education within their degree or as part of a timetabled co-curricular experience. Sessions are jointly designed and delivered by Faculty careers staff and are adapted to each degree. Sessions are reviewed and enhanced through the annual Departmental Employability Action Plans (DEAPs) and are increasingly informed through student panels.

Work placement opportunities can enhance and develop students' employability skills; we have identified that the cost of travel for **Work Based Learning (WBL)** may be an impediment to some students in participating in these. From the start of the academic year 2018, the University has completely covered travel costs for all undergraduate students undertaking unpaid UK based work placements within a module as an integral part of their degree. By increasingly embedding placements and live projects in the curriculum we are removing barriers to access for students who have work or family commitments, and by covering travel costs we are creating a level playing field for students regardless of family income.

Our aim is to equip all students with the skills, confidence and attitudes for successful progression into employment and lifelong learning opportunities. For example, our **Graduate Programme (Generation Essex)** is a service which starts in the students' final year and continues after graduation to support students as they move into the labour market. The scheme provides individual advice, group sessions, on-line support, alumni events organised in conjunction with our Alumni and events teams and supports around 100 funded internships and around 50 start-up grants for budding entrepreneurs. From 2018, this support package was extended to run for almost a year and half after graduation, offering one-to-one career coaching, access to jobs and bespoke internships tailored to the individual graduate.

Collaboration

We have existing collaborative relationships with schools and colleges, local education providers, education trusts and networks. We seek to ensure school, college and university resources are targeted appropriately and are not duplicated. We collaborate with other universities on programmes as part of our aim to encourage geographical mobility of students from under-represented groups, as well as networking with other universities to share good practice.

We identify the schools and colleges that we believe will benefit most from outreach activity delivered by us using indicators such as school attainment, free school meals data, POLAR4 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. For example, our Schools Membership scheme enables 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. Many of these schools have a large percentage of students from widening participation backgrounds with low progression to higher education. Our **Schools Membership programme** has recently expanded with the introduction of a Pre-16 level to increase our engagement with year 9-11 students and their teachers. Our **Aspire project** offers an intensive programme of activity designed to raise aspirations of students in receipt of free school meals and/or those underachieving in comparison to their potential. The project contains two strands: Aspire (year 9-11), focusing on general HE knowledge; and Aspire Higher (year 12-13), with a subject specific focus, centred on Business, Computer Science, Electronics and Engineering and English Literature.

From 2022-23, we will strengthen links with schools and colleges through developing the Outreach Partnership Programme, an intensive progressive programme with learners at key stages 3 and 4 which targets learners from schools and colleges with low progression rates to higher education. Through subject specific programmes, mentoring and campus visits, students will be supported in their future choices and attainment.

We are the **lead institution for Make Happen, the Essex Uni Connect (previously National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)) partnership** which has indicative commitment from the Office for Students until July 2025 . Approximately 20,000 Uni Connect students live in the 55 identified Uni Connect wards in Essex; from these, 86 schools/colleges in Essex have been identified from which learners attend. Make Happen engages with the majority of these schools/ colleges to ensure the maximum number of Uni Connect learners in all wards are reached. Through Make Happen we will target potential students who are in or who have experienced the care system. The programme will be developed using best practice from the sector as well as recent research released from the Centre for Social Justice[4]. It will include visits to different institutions, guidance sessions and the opportunity to meet care leavers who are now University students.

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.

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[4] https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/12by24-Publication.pdf

Financial support

We offer a range of financial support to our students to support their success. We have **specific bursaries of up to £1000 a year for care leavers and/or students 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. We will keep this financial support under review to ensure that it remains effective in contributing to the continuation and success of these student groups.

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. In order to provide the opportunity to experience the fullness of education to all our students, we support students from low-income households to access these experiences by providing **International Experience Bursaries** of up to £1000 to fund an international internship, placement or voluntary activities.

We keep our financial support packages under review in order to ensure that we are using funds to best effect and that the level of the award is sufficient to provide the support it is intended to. While our commitments to financial support made in earlier Plans will not change during the periods covered by those plans, we are reviewing our University of Essex Bursary, targeted at students from low income households and exploring whether the funds presently committed to this might be utilised more effectively to support student success. This bursary was designed to support continuation and success, however, careful evaluation of the evidence of its impact indicates that it has not made a significant contribution to the elimination of the gap in attainment for students from the most deprived areas. Furthermore, the most significant attainment gap at the University relates to good degrees and ethnicity. During 2019-20 we will be exploring alternative uses of the funds presently allocated to this bursary with a view to introducing a revised package of measures to support student success for new students from 2020-21. Where we introduce changes to the bursary offer we will monitor the impact on continuation carefully as previous reviews had demonstrated a small but statistically significant positive impact on continuation of the bursary scheme for students from low income households.[5]

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[5] Our financial forecast regarding investment in our Targets and investment plan will change as and when we review bursary provision and introduce changes.

For students experiencing financial difficulties we have a hardship fund. In 2017-18 and 2018-19 we collected information about worries students had, ahead of starting their studies, in order to inform induction activities. Of the 368 students who completed the survey, 68% said that they were concerned about "managing their money". In response to this, our Funding Team has been providing **advice and support on financial management** in the first few weeks of the academic year, working in partnership with the Students' Union where appropriate.

3.2 Student consultation

At Essex, students play an important role in both shaping our institutional strategy and monitoring our progress in delivering it (see also Sections 3.1 and 3.4). Our Strategic Plan was developed following extensive consultation. This consultation engaged students not only through the Students' Union and the representative system but also by inviting students to contribute through open forums organised on each campus. All students were given the opportunity, via face to face workshops and online mechanisms, to shape the Plan during the course of its 18 month development and their engagement was integral to the agreed priorities and objectives, and associated KPIs.

The feedback gathered through the consultation process was reviewed as part of the process to produce this Access and Participation Plan, to make sure student priorities in relation to support for success and progression were reflected in our priorities for action. The Students' Union was then involved directly in writing the Plan and the targets within it, contributing via the group that met regularly to discuss, plan and draft the Plan prior to its consideration through the formal governance structures of the University.

Students will, similarly, play an integral role in the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the Plan and progress against targets (see also 3.4, below). Student representation and consultation in decision-making over student-related activities is embedded as a core commitment at the University of Essex. Students are represented at departmental meetings where departmental level progress is discussed and monitored. Students are members of the key committees responsible for monitoring and evaluating progress. Students are also represented on working groups tasked with progressing initiatives designed to drive forward progress against specific targets.

3.3 Evaluation strategy

Our commitment to excellence in education is underpinned by the University's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Education Performance Indicators. These institutional KPIs are set out in our University Strategy and performance in relation to these is monitored by the University's Senate and Council. KPIs and PIs are disaggregated to the department and subject level to enable more detailed review of performance in relation to student continuation, good degrees, equality and diversity and graduate employment or further study, and to inform action plans.

In order to ensure the effective delivery of KPIs and PIs and to meet our strategic aims, we operate an annual cycle of review and evaluation, the methodology of which was designed in line with Theory of Change principles. Within this process, through the annual performance and planning round, all departments, supported by Executive Deans and Faculty teams, reflect on and evaluate performance and identify proportionate actions to maintain and improve their performance. The process is structured to require reflection and review of performance against departmental and institutional strategic priorities and the generation of focused short term as well as intermediate and longer term actions to both measure and generate progress. Guidelines on measuring and evaluating impact, including defining and measuring success and embedding successful change, support this process. Consideration through the governance structure of plans and progress towards successful achievement of aims can lead to additional support and resources being made available to departments whose performance indicates they may benefit from extra targeted interventions. Consideration through the governance structure also enables the sharing of best practice and cross institutional learning to further support continuous improvement.

The Access and Participation Plan targets align with our institutional KPIs in order to ensure that progress is evaluated and action taken at all levels across the University. Our approach is designed to ensure that performance is understood at an appropriate level of disaggregation, so that actions to address performance gaps are tailored appropriately within the specific context of the department and measure. Our targeted approach ensures that we are able to monitor our performance closely against the measures set out in our Access and Participation Plan, assess progress and challenge ourselves in the areas where we have identified we should be making the most progress. Progress towards achieving the aims and objectives set out in the Plan therefore forms part of the routine performance monitoring and review processes outlined above.

The University's Education Committee maintains an overview of our performance in relation to supporting our students' achievement and progression through focused equality and diversity data monitoring. This addresses explicitly our Access and Participation Plan priorities.

Alongside departmental consideration of performance, professional services sections participate in the annual planning process and through this also consider data to evaluate the extent to which the services they are delivering are having the expected impact on student success. As with departments, short, medium and long term goals and supporting actions are identified and progress reviewed through this process. The Student Life Directorate has a specific small team to support engagement with data to inform understanding and enhance service impact of changes introduced.

In order to support critical engagement with our KPIs, to inform our plans for supporting students from under-represented groups across the student lifecycle and to measure the impact of our actions, we have improved our data collection, management, and reporting. We have a central data warehouse and central data reporting service (CEDRS). This system provides the opportunity to investigate students' access, retention, progression and success by comparative cohort analysis using identifiers (such as POLAR data, ethnicity, age, disability and gender) and collating data from internal and external sources. We use the Tableau reporting tool which provides enhanced reporting capabilities and is accessible to staff across our departments and professional services in order to inform both their reviews of activities and their priority setting. This also enables close monitoring of our performance against the measures set out in our Access and Participation Plan in order to measure the impact of activities intended to improve performance and take further action as necessary. Tableau enables colleagues to interrogate the data themselves in order to better understand issues (and successes) in departmental context, supporting focused and evidence-based action planning to bring about continuous improvement and delivery of the desired changes.

We have also developed an overarching outreach evaluation strategy which encompasses both process and impact evaluation. This includes the use of pre- and post-activity questionnaires, teacher evaluation through questionnaires and feedback, as well as the NERUPI framework. We are developing our ability to track participants' progression to the University through the use of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT), of which we are a member. Analyses of our findings are used to assess the impact of our outreach

activity and to inform future developments. As a result, our activities are continuously improving in terms of the impact they deliver and how smoothly they operate.

Membership with the NERUPI network also allows us to use their praxis-based evaluation framework to inform the development and assessment of our own activity and evaluation strategy, whilst sharing best practice with other institutions and the third sector. This is an excellent platform for us to further consider the continuous improvement of our activity in terms of both process and impact.

We are also committed to developing our monitoring strategies, specifically via use of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT), which allows us to track participants' progression to Higher Education. On a short-term basis, HEAT reporting tools allow us to target and monitor beneficiaries effectively, highlighting whether we are meeting our targeting criteria and adjusting accordingly. In the long term, such tracking should illustrate how and if the activities offered by the University are impacting progression in the local area, giving some insight into how effective our activities are. As a result, we will be able to ensure the continuous improvement of activity.

3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

The process of implementation, monitoring and evaluation of our Access and Participation Plan takes a number of forms. The clear and careful alignment of our Plan to our Strategic Plan and our Education Strategy means that 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 and reported to Senate and Council. The annual departmental planning process managed by Faculties and overseen by the University Steering Group reviews and evaluates departmental action plans and progress while Faculty Education Committees oversee course level performance via standard quality assurance processes. Our Accountable Officer, the Vice-Chancellor, is responsible for providing assurance to our governing body, Council, about the results of the monitoring against delivery of the plan. Council is ultimately responsible for institutional performance and the delivery of KPIs. Any areas where our performance falls below our targets is identified through our institutional processes and actions identified, recorded, implemented and monitored to bring about improvement.

In addition, our Education Committee is responsible for overseeing our performance in relation to equality and diversity matters to ensure that every student can achieve their

potential at the University of Essex and that a transformational experience is delivered. This oversight encapsulates the Access and Participation Plan, alongside consideration of our performance in relation to the whole student body. In order to monitor delivery of our objectives, Education Committee receives reports and data from national agencies (e.g. HESA, UCAS and TEF metrics), as well as internally available data. These data identify student groups who may be at risk or disadvantaged. Education Committee reviews activity currently in place to support these students and recommends areas where further work is needed to address continuing or emerging inequalities in student access, success and progression.

Finally, Council receives assurance reports regarding progress against our Strategic Plan and our Education Strategy through scrutiny of our annual Education Action Plan.

Ongoing engagement with the student body in this process is secured via student representation on all our University committees, at all levels. At Senate, for example, representation includes both Students' Union Sabbatical Officers and Faculty student representatives.

Students are similarly involved in the monitoring of departmental performance; departmental committees include student representation and students are, through this mechanism, invited to engage in the review and evaluation of performance and help shape departmental priorities. Faculty Education Committees similarly include student representatives in their membership.

The Students' Union additionally has access to our reporting tool (Tableau) and can engage independently with our data. This enables the Students' Union to identify whether there are issues it would like to raise at Department, Faculty or institutional level. To support this, we involve students in the agenda setting for our key committees and they use this mechanism to identify issues they would like to explore.

Through our student representation approach and proactive sharing of data with the Students' Union, we have ensured that students from a range of backgrounds are engaged as thoroughly as staff in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of our Access and Participation Plan.

4. Provision of information to students

We are committed to publishing clear, up to date and accessible information for prospective and current students on the fees that we intend to charge for the duration of their course and the financial support that we intend to offer. We do this by publishing student finance information on our University's webpages and in pre-application material for prospective students, 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 are 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 (for courses that receive applications through UCAS) and the SLC so they can populate their course databases in good time to inform applications.

5. Appendix

The OfS will append the following items from the fees and targets and investment documents when an access and participation plan is published:

1. Targets (tables 2a, 2b and 2c in the targets and investment plan)

2. Investment summary (tables 4a and 4b in the targets and investment plan)

3. Fee summary (table 4a and 4b in the fee information document)

Access and participation plan
Fee information 2020-21

Provider name: The University of Essex

Provider UKPRN: 10007791

Summary of 2020-21 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflationary statement:

Subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations we intend to increase fees each year using the RPI-X

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

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£9,250
Foundation degree		£9,250
Foundation year/Year 0		£9,250
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE		£9,250
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree		£11,100
Sandwich year		£1,850
Erasmus and overseas study years		£1,385
Other	*	*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Targets and investment plan
2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: The University of Essex

Provider UKPRN: 10007791

Investment summary

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

Note about the data:
The figures in Table 4a relate to all expenditure on activities and measures that support the ambitions set out in an access and participation plan, where they relate to access to higher education. The figures in Table 4b only relate to the expenditure on activities and measures that support the ambitions set out in an access and participation plan, where they relate to access to higher education which is funded by higher fee income. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

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

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Total access activity investment (£)	£1,730,206.61	£1,763,823.16	£1,785,891.85	£1,808,610.72	£1,834,771.86
Access (pre-16)	£789,786.25	£816,780.37	£827,110.00	£826,396.11	£838,197.49
Access (post-16)	£851,706.42	£857,037.09	£867,384.65	£889,019.18	£901,450.06
Access (adults and the community)	£88,713.95	£90,005.71	£91,397.19	£93,195.44	£95,124.31
Access (other)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Financial support (£)	£1,912,089.00	£770,013.00	£388,143.00	£273,000.00	£273,000.00
Research and evaluation (£)	£147,522.77	£154,978.23	£158,982.20	£163,705.19	£168,573.86

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Higher fee income (£HFI)	£34,810,880.00	£37,023,570.00	£38,617,300.00	£40,071,435.00	£40,473,265.00
Access investment	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.4%
Financial support	5.5%	2.1%	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%
Research and evaluation	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Total investment (as %HFI)	7.1%	3.7%	2.6%	2.3%	2.3%

Targets and investment plan
2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: The University of Essex

Provider UKPRN: 10007791

Targets

Table 2a - Access

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones 2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
To reduce the gap in HE participation for students from underrepresented groups.	PTA_1	Low Participation Neighbourhood (LPN)	Gap in entry rates for POLAR4 quintile 5: quintile 1 student	No	Other data source	Other (please include details in commentary)	11.3%	10.8%	9.8%	8.8%	7.8%	6.8%	Reducing the inequalities at the access stage, through continued outreach and targetted student activity in schools and colleges within low participation neighbourhoods, is reflected in our milestones which show a steady rate of closure of the access gap. Due to year-on-year fluctuation, the baseline position is derived from the access gap in POLAR4 quintile 5: quintile 1 new students in 2018-19 and 2019-20.
	PTA_2												
	PTA_3												
	PTA_4												
	PTA_5												
	PTA_6												
	PTA_7												
	PTA_8												

Table 2b - Success

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones 2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
To reduce the attainment gap between White and Black students.	PTS_1	Ethnicity	Percentage difference in degree attainment (1st and 2:1) between white and black students.	No	Other data source	2017-18	18%	14.3%	13.1%	11.9%	10.7%	9.5%	We aim to achieve a maintainable reduction in the degree attainment gap achieved by our Black and White students. Data source internal.
To reduce the attainment gap between White and all BAME students.	PTS_2	Ethnicity	Percentage difference in degree attainment (1st and 2:1) between white and non-white students.	No	Other data source	2017-18	14.4%	13.6%	12.8%	12%	10.4%	8.8%	We aim to reduce the gap for all BAME students. Due to population sizes, initial progress against this target for some groups within the BAME category will be masked by the specific gap for Black students. Data source internal.
To reduce the attainment gap between IMD Quintiles 1 and 5 (i.e., the most and least deprived areas).	PTS_3	Multiple	Percentage difference in degree attainment (1st and 2:1) between students from the most and least deprived areas	No	Other data source	2017-18	11.2%	9.5%	8%	6%	4.5%	3%	We aim to bring the attainment gap between students from the most and least deprived areas to within our tolerance of 3%. Data source internal.
	PTS_4												
	PTS_5												
	PTS_6												
	PTS_7												
	PTS_8												

Table 2c - Progression

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones 2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
	PTP_1												
	PTP_2												
	PTP_3												
	PTP_4												
	PTP_5												
	PTP_6												
	PTP_7												
	PTP_8												