



University of Chester

Access Agreement 2016-17

The University of Chester has a strong reputation for welcoming students from a wide range of backgrounds and providing them with a high quality and supportive experience, characterised by an emphasis on both academic and personal achievement. This is especially evident in the opportunities offered for the development of employability skills and work-related learning. The University underpins its work in this area with a commitment to high quality learning and teaching and to the provision of strong support services to include, retain and develop successful learners who may have diverse entry profiles.

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Fees, Student Numbers and Fee Income

Full-time tuition fees

For all new full-time undergraduate entrants, including ITE entrants, to first degree programmes at the University of Chester and at Reaseheath College the tuition fee will be £9,000.

The tuition fee for new postgraduate ITE entrants in 2016-17 will also be £9,000.

This fee will enable the University to extend its investment in enhancing all aspects of the student experience and to take forward further measures in support of widening access for students from under-represented groups.

2016 entrants undertaking sandwich years during their programme may expect to pay 20% of one year's full tuition fee, whilst students on an Erasmus or other study abroad years, later in their programmes, may expect to pay 15% of one year's full tuition fee.

For new full-time entrants to Foundation Degrees at the University, the tuition fee will be £7,650.

This fee may vary for entrants to Foundation Degrees and comparable programmes at other partner institutions. We have consulted in full with our partner Further Education colleges, where the following fees will apply for full-time programmes:

Reaseheath College	£7,650
West Cheshire College	£4,995

Part-time tuition fees

For new part-time entrants to undergraduate programmes at the University and Reaseheath College the maximum tuition fee to be charged in any academic year will vary according to programme between £285 and £6,750. This is in line with the fee regulations under which no part-time student will pay more than £6,750 in an academic year. The fee will vary for entrants to part-time undergraduate programmes at partner institutions, with which we have consulted in full. Many students will pay less than the maximum, depending on how many modules they take in one year.

All of the above tuition fees apply to home and EU students

The University may apply annual real terms increases in all tuition fees, in line with the permitted amount set by Government each year, from 2016-17 onwards.

Assessment of access and student success record

Access to Higher Education

The following indicators of the University's absolute and relative performance in widening access are taken from the UK Performance Indicators of Higher Education produced annually by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

		2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Young full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 1b)						
<i>From state schools or colleges</i>	Chester %	97.8	97.2	97.5	97.7	97.5
	Benchmark %	94.3	94.3	94.1	94.3	94.1
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	95.2	95.5	95.2	95.6	95.3
<i>From NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7</i>	Chester %	36.8	36.6	36.4	39.7	36.8
	Benchmark %	35.5	36.6	35.7	38.3	38.0
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	36.6	37.4	36.6	39.4	38.6
<i>From low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	Chester %	15.6	17.9	17.1	15.9	17.6
	Benchmark	12.3	12.7	12.4	13.4	13.0
	Locally-adjusted benchmark	15.1	15.7	15.1	16.5	15.9
Mature full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 2a)						
Number of FT mature entrants		910	790	805	720	755
% of FT entrants who are mature		31.6	27.3	26.5	24.7	23.7
<i>With no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	Chester %	20.6	18.7	17.6	22.0	22.9
	Benchmark %	15.0	12.9	13.3	15.0	15.3
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	20.1	17.0	17.4	19.5	20.7
Part-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 2b)						
Number of part-time entrants		2430	2795	2430	1265	1235
<i>With no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	Chester %	3.1	3.7	3.4	2.3	3.3
	Benchmark %	2.8	3.4	2.8	2.5	3.0
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	3.4	3.8	3.2	2.6	3.5

For Young full-time undergraduate entrants, the University is performing well against sector and locally adjusted benchmarks for both entrants from state schools/colleges, and from low participation neighbourhoods. Despite a high proportion of young entrants from low socio-economic classes in 2012-13, this appears to be an atypical year, as the proportion in 2013-14 is more in line with the trend over the last 5 years. The proportion of entrants in 2013-14 is below the locally adjusted benchmark, therefore the University may need to address this area and look at ways in which it can attract more entrants from low socio-economic classes, as well as maintaining the proportion of entrants from state schools and low participation neighbourhoods.

With regard to attracting mature and part time entrants with no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhoods, the University does well in this area, performing in line with or above sector and locally adjusted benchmarks. However, the proportion of mature full-time undergraduate entrants compared with the whole undergraduate population has decreased over the last 5 years from 31.6% to 23.7%. Absolute numbers of part time entrants have also decreased by nearly a half since 2009-10, which is in part due to a changing portfolio of courses offered by the University. This decline in mature and part-time entrants at the University mirrors the national trend for declining numbers of this type of student. The University will therefore look at ways in which it might attract and support mature and part-time entrants.

Retention and Student Success

The following indicators of the University's absolute and relative performance in non-continuation of students following year of entry (2012/13) are taken from the UK Performance Indicators of HE produced by HESA.

		2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Young						
Young full-time first degree non-continuation (following previous year of entry) (Table 3a)	Chester – no longer in HE	8.2	9.0	9.6	6.4	9.5
	Benchmark	7.5	8.2	7.6	6.7	6.8
	% continue or qualify at Chester	88.6	88.7	88.3	92.3	88.3
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	89.5	89.4	90.4	91.3	90.8
From low participation neighbourhoods (Table 3b) (POLAR3)	Chester– no longer in HE	9.8	12.0	11.1	9.6	11.0
	Benchmark	8.4	10.2	8.9	8.5	8.0
	% continue or qualify at Chester	86.5	85.6	86.2	89.3	84.2
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	88.7	87.5	89.2	89.6	89.8
From other neighbourhoods (Table 3b) (POLAR3)	Chester– no longer in HE	7.9	8.4	9.3	5.8	9.2
	Benchmark	7.2	7.8	7.0	6.2	6.4
	% continue or qualify at Chester	89.0	89.2	88.8	92.9	89.0
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	89.7	89.7	90.8	91.7	91.1
Mature						
Mature full-time first degree non-continuation (following previous year of entry) (Table 3a)	Chester– no longer in HE	13.1	12.3	9.7	9.0	11.1
	Benchmark	12.9	13.1	11.3	10.2	10.8
	% continue or qualify at Chester	84.1	85.6	89.6	90.3	87.5
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	84.6	85.2	87.3	88.4	87.6
With no previous HE qualification (Table 3c)	Chester– no longer in HE	14.0	11.9	12.0	9.6	12.4
	Benchmark	13.0	13.3	11.8	10.4	11.0
	% continue or qualify at Chester	82.9	85.4	86.9	89.3	86.0
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	84.2	84.9	86.6	88.0	87.2
With previous HE qualification (Table 3c)	Chester– no longer in HE	10.9	13.8	4.7	7.5	6.8
	Benchmark	12.6	12.3	10.0	9.4	10.0
	% continue or qualify at Chester	86.9	86.2	95.3	92.5	92.4
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	85.7	86.3	89.0	89.6	89.1

For Young undergraduates entering the University, the proportion of students continuing or qualifying is less for students from low participation neighbourhoods, than for those from other neighbourhoods. This is also true of mature students with no previous HE qualification compared with those with a previous HE qualification. The University would therefore like to close the gap on this particular group with regard to non-continuation.

Despite good performance overall in terms of non-continuation in 2012-13, the general trend in the proportion of students continuing or qualifying at the University is not improving. The 2011-12 intake (shown in the 2012-13 figures above) were a particularly strong cohort, being the year before higher fees were introduced, therefore any improvements seen in non-continuation for this cohort appear to be atypical. The University will therefore prioritise student success and retention initiatives going forwards, and in particular for students from low participation neighbourhoods/with no previous HE qualification.

Progression to further study or to/within employment

The University has one of the highest employability rates for North West Institutions, with over 92%¹ of all 2012-13 undergraduate leavers reported to be in employment or further study 6 months after graduation. Of all FT First Degree leavers in employment, nearly 76% were in a graduate entry job.

There is a disparity between leavers from low participation neighbourhoods and those declaring a disability compared with the overall population. Therefore the University will need to ensure that initiatives aimed at increasing the employability its students include and support these particular disadvantaged groups.

	In Work and/or Study	FT First degree leavers in employment - Graduate Entry job
All Undergraduate Leavers	92.4%	75.6%
From Low Participation Neighbourhood (POLAR3)	91.2%	73.5%
With a declared disability	85.7%	71.1%

¹ Quoted figures from *Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey 2013-14*.

Strategic Approach to Access and Student Success

The University takes a whole student lifecycle approach to its access and student success activity and has ensured its strategy for 2016/17 is in line with the National Strategy for Access and Student Success. This is achieved through extensive outreach work, student retention and success initiatives, and activities to enhance our students' progression into employment.

The University will protect its own record of fair access and also aims to ensure that within its outreach work, collaborative and broader awareness and aspiration-raising activity will be consolidated and continued. In order to do this, we shall in 2016-17 continue to invest in outreach activities which work with all age groups starting at primary school level. The University will continue work in collaboration with schools, colleges, employers and other HEIs in delivering its targeted outreach activity. It will also seek to develop some long-term, sustained outreach work with particular targeted groups.

The University is also committed to working with Further Education Colleges in the region in order to strengthen the progression of mature students from Access to HE programmes.

Student Success for all students, and in particular for under-represented groups, will remain a priority and particular area of focus in 2016-17. The University will move away from a wider programme of targeted department led initiatives to more cross institutional approaches to improving retention and student success. Underpinned by evidence from the sector, and building on the good practice developed through its previous department led initiatives, it is hoped that this will benefit more students than locally targeted schemes and bring about change at an institutional, rather than a local level.

In order to maintain its excellent employability rates for graduates and ensure that students from under-represented groups, in particular, benefit from interventions to enhance employability, the University will also continue to invest in this area.

The University will also continue to provide financial support in the form of bursary and scholarship schemes. Evaluation of impact of these schemes, both on recruitment and on students' success post entry, is ongoing but remains inconclusive. Students in receipt of bursaries at the University in 2013-14 were less likely to withdraw from their studies than their peers who did not; however this does not constitute a trend and therefore we will continue to offer and monitor the impact of these schemes into 2016-17.

Estimated spend on access and student success measures

In 2016-17, the University estimates that it will spend approximately 20% of projected additional fee income on new and existing measures to widen access and improve the retention, success and progression of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as targeted student financial support commitments.

With regard to Access, this expenditure accounts for posts for new and existing outreach work, events and activities; information, advice and guidance about higher education and financial arrangements; and support in targeting, monitoring and evaluation of outreach and other WP-related activity, including collaborative working and established outreach mentoring schemes with schools and colleges. The investment also supports administration of University of Chester Bursary and Scholarship schemes.

Recognising the need to address retention and student success of students from under-represented groups, the University plans to modify its spending profile to put additional investment into this area, moving some money from existing financial support packages which have had the least impact on recruitment and student success. The University also plans to change the way it spends money in this area to prioritise and support more cross institutional approaches to improving retention and student success, reducing the number of smaller department led initiatives.

Investment in the current Graduate Head Start programme and Chester Difference Award initiatives to enhance students' employability will be maintained, as well as continued investment in a number of other initiatives to promote student progression to employment. This includes the University's Employability Fund which supports low income students to carry out activities which will develop their employability.

All expenditure included in this agreement complies fully with guidance from OFFA on eligibility. Where activity may form part of wider non-targeted activity, only estimated proportions attributed to the targeted aspects have been counted, and this conservatively.

Examples of funded activities

The University has considered its current position in terms of its access and student success record, as well as findings from its own evaluation of previous outreach activity and student success initiatives, in determining the activity funded under its access agreement for 2016-17. It has also been informed by the National Strategy for Access and Student Success. Findings from nationally recognised research, such as the benefits of primary outreach activity and long term, sustained outreach interventions have also contributed to our plans going forwards. Therefore all examples of funded activity detailed below have been determined based on our own evaluation of the estimated impact the activity has already had, or is being assumed to have, on access and student success at the University.

Access to Higher Education

Outreach

A considerable element of the outreach investment in 2016-17 will be in maintaining the resources, staffing and other costs to support the direct targeting and delivery of activity. Evaluation of previous outreach activity has shown that the majority of participants in an increased number of events gained better understanding of life at university; more reported that they would like to go, or definitely would go, than did so before the event. Therefore, the University will continue to fund the posts which enable the University to provide:

- HE awareness- and aspiration-raising events with targeted schools and colleges;
- Information and advice on HE (including student finance) for targeted schools, colleges and individuals;
- Data analysis, monitoring and evaluation of impact of outreach activity;
- Administrative support for the outreach office.

Investment will be continued in this area to provide a consolidated programme of direct delivery of activities with participants.

The University's WP outreach programme will continue to be based on the formation and maintenance of direct links and the development of long-term structured and co-ordinated interventions with a number of targeted schools and colleges with low higher education participation rates or large proportions of disadvantaged students. Work will focus mainly on partnerships with schools, academies and colleges in the Cheshire and Warrington area, and further afield into Merseyside and Greater Manchester, but activity will also extend into those areas within the adjoining regions, for example Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, as well as Staffordshire and Lancashire, where there are opportunities which support targeted engagement and collaborative activity. This will again involve strengthening links with partner and link schools and colleges, so as to build closer networks of relationships and to provide the basis for extending progression pathways.

In addition to general taster days and subject specific events, examples of other types of planned activity in 2016-17 include:

- **Supporting students from low participation backgrounds to make applications to higher education**, by offering information and advice on courses, writing personal statements and student finance. We will also provide appropriate information and awareness raising activities for people who act as key influencers on target populations (e.g. parents; teachers; careers/education guidance staff and careers advisers). Continued investment will allow us to consolidate our existing work in this area.
- **Targeted interventions at key transition points** in a students' learning, for example Level 2 and Level 3 options, parents' evening events, and careers fairs. Feedback from past events has been invaluable in shaping the structure of these activities and events.
- **Mature students** – Access to HE Diplomas remain an important route into Higher Education for mature entrants and the University recognises from its assessment of its Access record for 2013-14 that there may be further work to do here. We will continue to work closely with our feeder colleges through visits and IAG events (both on and off campus). We will also develop bespoke information for mature students pre- and post-application and provide the opportunity for individual advice on admissions and post-application feedback.
- **Progression to HE via a vocational route** still remains a minority option within the university sector. Our outreach activities will be designed to improve the aspirations and perceptions of learners with regards to HE and to provide better information, advice and guidance for vocational learners. We will also work closely with these learners to identify, articulate and promote clear progression pathways into HE. In particular, we will continue to work in collaboration with our Associate Colleges and with other targeted further education colleges to continue to promote smooth transition to the University for vocational learners.
- We recognise the need to **build relationships with individual learners** and their parents/carers and to share information and knowledge with their teachers. Therefore, we are building closer links with targeted schools to provide more **in-depth, structured and sustained outreach work**. This work will begin with Year 7 students and will continue to develop through to Year 13 (where possible) so that students are equipped with the skills and knowledge required to make an informed choice about HE. The 'pupil premium' will be used to identify these learners. Progression (admissions) agreements will form part of the package.
- Continuing and progressing work with **Primary Schools Outreach Activity**, we will use our links with secondary schools across the target regions to include transitional arrangements between primary and secondary schools. Evaluation of past primary activity has shown that the manner in which sessions are delivered is received very positively by both pupils and teachers. Therefore work in this area will continue to introduce the idea of university through a range of fun and interactive activities, including campus and school visits, the use of drama to raise awareness of university, and mini lectures; all culminating in a mini 'graduation' day. Continued investment in this area will allow us to establish and enhance our primary school activities.
- **University-based Residential events** – these events provide a thought-provoking introduction to higher education and to the UCAS application system; students are introduced to the process of choosing and applying to university. Through a number of

activities, they are encouraged to think about their achievements, interests and experiences and how they can incorporate this into their personal statement and course choice.

- Providing **financial support during the admissions process for disabled students** who are unable to secure this support elsewhere, for example where an interview or audition forms part of the selection criteria, and where without this support they are substantially disadvantaged.
- **Targeting institutionally under-represented groups**, specifically in relation to gender in particular course areas, for example male under-representation in Initial Teacher Education and female under-representation in STEM subjects.
- **Work with BME communities** - Reaching BME young people is a particular challenge for this University, given the population demographic of its surrounding areas, such as Cheshire and North Wales. The size of Cheshire West and Chester's ethnic minority population is relatively small at 5.3%. In the regional area this figure is 12.9% and 19.5% nationally². Targeted initiatives are therefore required to attract applications from students within specific communities. We will therefore continue to develop and strengthen positive relationships with schools and colleges with a high percentage of BME students.

Work will also be undertaken with the Faculty of Education and Children's Services in order to offer bespoke outreach activity to work towards a target of 5% entrants from BME groups to Primary ITE programmes in 2016-17.

Evaluation

An evaluation framework for outreach activity has been developed which will focus on the following areas:

- To audit the current schools and colleges that WP officers work with against POLAR3 participation data to enable a more targeted approach and more effective use of resources;
- To assess current evaluation tools and to provide a detailed analysis of short term influence of WP events to date;
- To assess application data from targeted schools and colleges to provide initial indicators of influence;
- To set up systems to enable a longer term assessment of the impact of outreach work on individuals, schools and the University.

Qualitative measures will include questionnaires, focus groups and in-depth interviews with participants, parents, teachers and advisers and will be moderated by an independent market research consultant.

The University also intends to make use of the new Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) to support its longer term evaluation activity.

² Cheshire West and Chester 2011 Census data:

<http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/your%20council/key%20statistics%20and%20data/local%20statistics/2011%20census.aspx>

Looked after children

We currently work with the existing Virtual Head Teachers scheme for Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, and Warrington. Together with colleagues in collaborative networks with other Higher Education Institutions, a series of events will be arranged, for both Primary and Secondary, for students in care from these regions. The activities and sessions are designed for those in care and their carers and advisors, to raise awareness of higher education and the benefits of gaining a university education. Work to support care leavers into Higher Education will build on the good practice and experience developed under the discontinued Buttle UK Quality Mark which was held by the University.

Collaboration

The University will aim to build on and sustain collaborative initiatives that involve working with schools, colleges, employers and other HEIs both in the region and nationally. The University is a member of 2 collaborative networks:

- The **Higher Horizons Network** which delivers outreach activities for young people (including those in care) from Cheshire, Warrington, Staffordshire, Stoke and Shropshire regions. The HEIs in this partnership include Keele University, Staffordshire University, University of Derby, Manchester Metropolitan University, and University of Oxford, together with Reaseheath College. Events are jointly evaluated and are an integral part of the individual University's outreach programme for schools in the region. In light of the changing sector, the Higher Horizons Network has become an important forum for sharing best practice, and ensuring appropriate impartial activities are being delivered.
- As part of the development of National Networks for Collaborative Outreach, the University has joined with the recently formed **Merseyside Network for Collaborative Outreach (MNCO)** along with Edgehill University, Liverpool John Moores University, University of Liverpool, and Liverpool Hope University. Activity planned for this network includes development of long-term sustained activity with Looked After Children, work with BME communities, and development of a website to providing information about access to HE.

The University will also continue its collaborative activity with other organisations, in addition to its work with other universities. These will include collaborative school networks set up to co-ordinate multi-school activities, Academy Trusts which work with a number of schools and colleges, and the Virtual Head Network set up to support students from care backgrounds.

Furthermore, we are involved in local and sector specialist employer networks which support industrial involvement in information about careers and activities relating to higher level skills needs.

Outreach mentoring

The University will also aim to sustain its targeted mentoring programme with schools and colleges, with the aim of supporting those from low participation or disadvantaged backgrounds with the potential to progress to higher education but who may lack aspiration or be at risk of not succeeding in earlier stages of their education. This is an established long-term outreach project, covering two school terms each academic year. The Outreach Mentoring programme's embedded evaluation strategy confirms that primary aims are being met. Impact varies between schools, however evidence that mentees' study skills and confidence levels have improved shows that participants benefit greatly

from their involvement in the scheme. With the introduction of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) pupil progression to Higher Education can begin to be monitored. The scheme will also be developed to investigate the potential for an online mentoring programme to broaden the reach of the University's outreach mentoring.

[Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths \(STEM\)](#)

The University will continue to focus outreach activities at optimum times for student choices to raise awareness of STEM subjects and the advantages of studying them, with a particular focus on its new faculty of Science and Engineering, and its new Food Research Centre. We aim to facilitate continued change, improve communication and make a difference in the region as part of a STEM network. The University, working with Cheshire West and Chester Council, has set up a regional STEMCAT group. The group consists of representatives from key areas of STEM education and industry who meet regularly to develop joint STEM initiatives across the region.

The University will build on previous projects to deliver a curriculum-related Summer School programme and choice of workshops for Years 12/13 and level 3 students on "Preparing for University"; these can also be used to support progression to HE for work-based learners. It is also the custodian of a Large Outreach Careers Maths Kit (LOCMK) which consists of a series of practical activities to support undergraduate teaching and learning as well as outreach work. Other STEM activities include: An annual year 10 STEM Awareness week; a year 12 Women into STEM conference; high profile events in collaboration with external agencies; and continued investment in staffing and student resources, such as 'STEM Buskers' and 'STEM Ambassadors' (STEM undergraduate students available for project work in schools) will further relationships between the University, schools and colleges, as well as external industry organisations.

Impact of these activities will be measured by collecting qualitative and quantitative data, tracking students, case studies, skill shortage areas and career pathways.

[Retention and student success](#)

The University is committed to improving the retention and success of all its students and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is the intention of the University to sustain and enhance a range of learning and teaching, pastoral and welfare, and employability services and structures, to support the retention and success of all of its students throughout their time at the University, and to continue to monitor the relative performance of those from disadvantaged groups. This is an area in which the University plans to increase its investment in 2016-17 and beyond in order to sustain and improve its performance, in particular with regard to disadvantaged students. In addition to existing measures which inform and support the enhancement of learning, teaching and employability across the University, interventions will be strengthened to offer particular support to students who may have been disadvantaged, whether through background or prior educational experience; through disability; as care leavers; or because of other circumstances.

[Department and subject initiatives](#)

Good practice developed through both the University's own Student Retention and Success programme (which ran from 2012-13 to 2014-15) and the University's involvement in the HEA's What

Works? Change programme (which ran from 2013-14 to 2015-16) will be shared and embedded across departments across the University. Evaluation of these programmes has shown that retention is a complex issue, with multifaceted reasons why students find it difficult to achieve, or decide to leave Higher Education. However the evaluation has highlighted a number of areas of good practice which have been found to have the greatest impact. These include study skills development within the academic framework; attendance monitoring; developing students' sense of belonging; and the benefits of peer mentoring and peer assisted learning.

Building on the work of previous department-led targeted student success initiatives, the University will offer departments the opportunity to bid for funds to deliver specific targeted interventions or to do a specific piece of research related to retention and student success.

The University recognises, however that there is still work to do in the area of retention and student success, particularly to support those students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Building on the evaluation of department led initiatives, further progress in this area will therefore be developed through cross institutional approaches. Those to be developed include:

Study Skills Support

Underpinned by evidence from the sector, and endorsed by our Senior University Teaching Fellows and Learning and Teaching sub-committee, the University believes that the most effective approach to developing academic skills is through embedding study skills in the curriculum, rather than through one-off or generic sessions for students once they experience difficulties. The University will therefore prioritise embedding academic skills at every level and throughout modules, rather than just at the commencement of studies, and invest in a team of Academic Learning Advisers to provide this support.

Mathematics Skills Support

The provision of tailored mathematics tutorial support in subject areas with a significant mathematical element have been found to have a positive impact upon students' academic achievement in mathematics related topics; in particular for those subject areas attracting students with non-standard entry qualifications. The University will therefore continue to support the provision and development of targeted mathematics support.

Attendance Monitoring and Follow up

Evidence suggests that good attendance leads to better student outcomes, therefore the University intends to invest in improvements to attendance monitoring and following up and supporting students with poor attendance. This may include the appointment of Attendance / retention officers to work with academic departments, and/or piloting a comprehensive attendance scheme at a new campus building.

Peer Mentoring and Peer Assisted Learning

These schemes build on the University's expertise in school and college mentoring activity to deliver training, and then to manage, students who act as mentors to other students, particularly targeting those subject areas where there has been historically lower retention of students from low participation neighbourhoods. Both Peer Mentoring and Peer Assisted Learning are to be expanded in 2016-17 and beyond, building on pilot schemes delivered in 2013-14 and 2014-15. Peer Mentoring

has a greater focus on transition to the University, including online mentoring providing support to new students during the pre-arrival phase between results days and University induction. Peer Assisted Learning is a discipline specific scheme focusing on academic study skills and course content. Such initiatives, particularly those based in the students' own areas of study, are known to be valuable in increasing student retention and success, and our existing expertise provides a strong base from which to develop mentoring and academic-related peer support.

Disability Support

In light of the reduction in funding for Disability Support, the University will appoint an Assistive Technologist to work with and support students with disabilities. The University will also work on ways it can move towards more inclusive Learning and Teaching approaches which benefit all students as well as those with a declared disability.

Young Carers

The University recognises the additional pressures faced by young adult carers and has in post a Student Welfare Project Officer (SWPO) who is responsible for supporting all Widening Participation students throughout their time at the University of Chester; this includes young adult carers. The SWPO can offer support in a variety of ways:

- Information, advice and guidance offered for all aspects of university and personal life.
- Understanding of the unique pressures Young Carers may have relating to finances. Appointments offered on money management and budget support.
- Academic liaison and support with assessment extensions if necessary.
- Assistance with applying for hardship funds.
- Signposting and links to other university and external support routes.

Student Engagement

The importance of students' sense of belonging to an academic community and the student voice in developing retention initiatives and enhancing academic provision was recognised in evaluation of the University's department led retention initiatives. The University has appointed a Student Engagement Officer and is in the process of implementing a student engagement strategy, which aims to improve and build on existing processes and develop creative projects to ensure every student feels able to contribute to the academic learning community at the University of Chester.

Progression to further study or to/within employment

Careers and Employability has already designed and delivered a number of programmes aimed at enhancing the employability of its students and graduates. It is anticipated that the following initiatives will continue and develop:

Graduate Head Start Programme

This is the most established progression activity within Careers and Employability at the University. The programme has now supported over 575 graduates. The most recent statistic show that 68% of participants went into employment or enhanced employment following this programme. An up-to –

date figure will become available in December 2015. It is anticipated that Graduate Head Start will continue to be offered with similar elements in 2015-16 and 2016-17.

The Chester Difference Award

This was fully launched and offered to the wider University in 2014-15 with an initial cohort of 40 students from a range of disciplines and year groups. The endorsement and active partnership of TalkTalk Business has also been secured and employer recognition of the Award will continue to be a feature. The Award is expected to expand in terms of student numbers, currently standing at 306 participants (March 2015). We would like to see an increase from 31% to 40% uptake of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and anticipate the need to have additional administrative support for this.

Chester Employability Fund

The University has set up a Student Employability Fund which targeted current undergraduate low income students in receipt of bursaries, also care leavers and young carers. Eligible students are encouraged to bid for funds (£250 maximum) to enable them to carry out activities that will help them to develop their employability. The pilot project in 2014/15 has attracted more than 170 applications and the fund has already been increased during the year due to the impact it has already had. In some cases awards of less than £25 have been made so that a greater number of students could benefit from an award. It is anticipated that this fund will be further increased to allow more students to benefit from the range of extra-curricular activities that should help them to be more employable e.g. driving lessons, clothing and travel support for interviews.

Student Ambassadors Project

It is proposed to allocate further funds to employing Student Careers Ambassadors to promote student participation in employability activities, particularly following a non-user survey conducted in July 2014. The department has already made good use of two Chester Difference Award (CDA) Ambassadors.

Work Shadowing Programme

It is anticipated that the existing work shadowing programme will be rebranded and enhanced to celebrate and promote its uniqueness and to increase the already higher rate of participation by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is currently 38% and we hope this would rise to 45%. Additional funding will be made available for relevant students via the Chester Employability Fund who would not be able to participate otherwise.

Other new targeted initiatives which are currently being explored, including the following:

Chester Graduate Applicants Project

Many Chester students apply to the University for Jobs after they graduate. Many are unsuccessful because they do not meet the standards required, either due to poor quality applications or interview skills. This project aims to work with our Human Resource Management Services (HRMS) department and our graduate applicants to provide support for future applications. This may be especially appropriate for students from low income households who may be more likely to remain in the local area for work.

Chester Graduate Internship Programme

A project to scope the funding of a University of Chester Graduate Scheme or Internship programme potentially with placements in departments such as HRMS, Finance, Marketing Recruitment & Admissions, Riverside Innovation Centre, Learning and Information Services, Graphics, Senior Management Team (Project Office work) and Corporate Communications. There may be potential to combine this with relevant part-time postgraduate study.

University of Chester Bursaries and Scholarships

Targeted financial support packages in the form of bursaries and scholarships will continue to be offered as a means to support students. They will be offered to all University of Chester students including those based at our new development sites such as Thornton Science Park, and University Centre Shrewsbury. The 'in kind' element of bursaries will be used to reinforce student retention and success activities. Full details of all of our bursaries will be found on the University's website.

Evaluation of support in the form of fee waivers in 2012-13 indicated that this had no observable effect on student retention and success. However an evaluation of students in receipt of 2013-14 packages, which included cash awards, has shown that students in receipt of these awards were less likely to leave than their peers who did not. This does not represent a trend however, and therefore more evidence is needed to fully understand the impact of financial support. Consultation with student representatives has shown that they are in favour of these awards continuing to be offered. The University will therefore continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of these awards on retention and student success.

Scheme 1 – Chester Bursary

An award to the value of £2,000 in cash³ will be given to any new full-time undergraduate degree entrant paying a tuition fee of over £6,000, who has a declared household residual income of £25,000 or less. This will comprise of £1,000 cash in year one, with £500 cash in each of years 2 and 3 of the programme.

Applicants who receive offers to undergraduate degree programmes at the University will be sent full details of the scheme. The benefit will be awarded to all eligible students who apply. It is estimated that expenditure on this scheme to the cohort in 2016-17 will be approximately £2 million. The scheme is likely to benefit around 1150 students.

Scheme 2 – Chester Bursary for Part-time students

This bursary has a total value of £2000 in cash which will be applied on a pro-rata basis based on the credit intensity at each level of study. Eligibility will be based on new part-time undergraduate degree entrants paying a tuition fee of at least £7000 (full time equivalent), enrolled for a minimum of 40 credits at the start of level 4, and with a declared household residual income of £25,000 or less.

Part time applicants who receive offers to undergraduate degree programmes at the University will be sent full details of the scheme. Students will be informed that eligibility does not guarantee a bursary as numbers may be limited. Exclusions to eligibility apply. Full details will be posted on the University's website.

Scheme 3 – Chester Local Excellence Scholarship

It is anticipated that students who attain grades of ABB (or equivalent⁴), have a home postcode or have attended a school within the local area, and have a household income of less than £42,600 will be eligible for a Local Excellence Bursary (this would be additional to a Chester Bursary). The total

³ Where scholarships and bursaries are stated to contain a cash element, this is likely to be made up of in the most part a cash award with an element of another 'in kind' benefit.

⁴ The list of equivalent qualifications and grades can be found on the University's website.

value of this bursary is £2,000, which will be given as cash, £1,000 in the first year and £500 in each of years 2 and 3. Students must be paying a tuition fee of £9000, and meet one of the following criteria:

- Have a home postcode within the local authority boundaries of Cheshire West and Chester, Wirral, Warrington, Halton, or Shropshire;
- Or have completed level 3 studies at one of our targeted schools or colleges up to two years prior to the start of the undergraduate programme (or completed level 2 studies within the previous four years, in the case of schools that do not offer level 3 studies) – *the list of eligible local schools and colleges can be found on the University's website.*

The University anticipates that circa 100 students may benefit from this bursary and expects to spend approximately £200,000 for students entering the University in 2016-17.

Scheme 4 – Care Leavers Bursary

The University will also provide a Care Leavers Bursary Scheme, which will be available to verified Care Leavers on a first come, first served basis. This opportunity is available to new undergraduate students starting their programme of study in 2016-17. The scheme will normally provide Care Leavers with £7000 of benefits over the three years of their programme. The benefits will be given as part cash and part 'in kind' benefit to be paid incrementally as follows:

Year 1 - £2000 cash and £1000 fee waiver

Years 2 and 3 - £1000 cash and £1000 fee waiver each year

The University may spend up to £70,000 on this bursary scheme in 2016-17.

Scheme 5 – Cheshire Young Carers Bursary

In partnership with Cheshire Young Carers (CYC) the University has developed a targeted financial support package for young carers. This will be in the form of a bursary package totalling £4,500 over three years of study, equating to £1500 each year. This bursary is available in addition to any other University bursary the student is eligible for and recognises the additional financial pressures that young carers face. The University and CYC will identify young carers who would benefit from this support package prior to commencing their studies.

Continuing students

Entrants prior to 2016-17 will continue to receive their entitlements as set out in our previous years' Access Agreements.

Targets and Milestones

The University has considered its Access and Student Success record and the areas which it needs to improve in forming the following targets:

A Applicants, entrants and student body

(i) Young full-time entrants

The University aims to exceed national and locally-adjusted benchmarks for young full-time entrants from NS-SEC classes 4-7, and entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3). It would wish at least to maintain this position and, where possible, to improve on its own performance in absolute terms:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Young full-time first degree entrants (Table 1a)	%	%	%	%
<i>From NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7</i>	37.0	37.6	38.3	39.0
<i>From low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	17.7	17.8	17.9	18.0
Young full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 1b)	%	%	%	%
<i>From NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7</i>	37.2	37.8	38.4	39.0
<i>From low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	17.8	18.0	18.2	18.4

This assumes that the current pattern of applicants to the University remains the same.

(ii) Mature entrants

The University aims to continue to exceed national and locally-adjusted benchmarks for mature entrants with no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhoods:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Mature full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 2a)	%	%	%	%
<i>With no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	23.4	23.6	23.8	24.0

(iii) Black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds

The University also aims to increase the number of UK domiciled entrants from BME backgrounds:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Entrants from BME (non-white) groups %	8.7%	8.8%	8.9%	9.0%

B Outreach activity

(iv) School, college and specialist mentoring schemes

The University aims to achieve the following targets of participants in Outreach mentoring activities:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Mentees	225	230	240	250

(v) Outreach events and activities with targeted schools, academies and colleges

The University aims to enhance and consolidate its Outreach events and activities, and work towards the following targets:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Primary				
Events	24	25	25	25
Participants	1440	1500	1500	1500
Secondary				
Events	30	31	32	32
Participants	1200	1240	1280	1280
FE College				
Events	15	15	16	16
Participants	465	465	496	496

Institutions will be targeted using the following criteria:

- The school or college to be based within a POLAR quintile of 1-2, or to have an above average number of students from these wards within their catchment area/intake;
- For the % of pupils eligible for free school meals currently to be above the national average;
- The school or college itself to have targeted specific student cohorts in regards to their own Pupil Premium allocation;
- The school or college to be based within a geographical area with a significantly diverse demographic when compared to the local regions surrounding University of Chester sites.

Events and participants will be defined as:

- **Event** – On-campus events, which have been proven as making a significant/greater impact on the intentions of the young people involved.
- **Participant** – The schools and colleges will be provided with criteria emphasising the importance of those attending the event being those who have the potential to progress, but may be experiencing potential barriers to their future potential, these would include; POLAR, FSM, Pupil Premium, and first generation etc.

(vi) Outreach events in collaboration with other institutions

The University aims to develop its collaborative activity with its outreach networks and work towards the following number of collaborative events:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Collaborative Events	6	8	10	10

C ITE trainees

The University's targets and milestones relating to outreach activity will include undergraduate but not postgraduate ITE trainees. Two further sets of targets and milestones will apply to ITE trainees.

(vii) To increase the recruitment and retention of males at level 4 to primary ITE UG programmes:

Males on primary ITE UG programmes	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Entrants %	20	21	22	22
Progression from level 4 %	82	84	86	88

(viii) To increase the number of entrants to Primary ITE programmes from BME backgrounds:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Entrants from BME (non-white) groups %	5.0	5.5	6.0	6.5

D Retention and student success

(ix) Continuing or qualifying students

The University aims to improve its absolute and relative performance in non-continuation of students following year of entry, and to increase the numbers of students, in particular those from low participation neighbourhoods, who continue or qualify at Chester each year:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Young full-time first degree	%	%	%	%
% continue or qualify at Chester – all (Table 3a)	89.5	90.0	90.5	91.0
% continue or qualify at Chester – From low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3) (Table 3b)	87.0	88.0	89.0	90.0
Mature full-time first degree	%	%	%	%
% continue or qualify at Chester – all (Table 3a)	87.7	87.8	87.9	88.0
% continue or qualify at Chester – with no previous HE qualification (Table 3c)	86.5	86.8	87.2	87.5

E Progression to Employment or Further Study

Targets relating to participation in employability initiatives are based on approximate numbers of students from WP backgrounds. The University would also like to maintain its excellent rate of progression to work and/or further study, and aims to close the gap on its employability rates of undergraduate students from low participation neighbourhoods and those with a declared disability:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Participation of under-represented groups in Employability initiatives	34%	36%	38%	40%

Progression of students from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR 1 and 2) to work and/or further study	91.3%	91.4%	91.5%	91.6%
Progression of students with a declared disability to work and/or further study	86.5%	87.0%	87.5%	88.0%

Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements

The University recognises the importance of monitoring and evaluation to inform the development of its access and student success and has developed an evaluation strategy which allows it to demonstrate the impact of its WP activity. Local level evaluation undertaken by each area of activity is fed into a central evaluation template. This allows an institutional overview of areas of success and areas for future development to ensure spend is based on evidence of impact. Evaluation is an iterative process and teams involved in WP activity meet regularly to discuss the progress of activities and share good practice.

Use is made of existing management information available from national datasets (such as UK Performance Indicators of Higher Education) and internally available data, as well as the monitoring data collected by all activities about its participants. Qualitative and quantitative data collected by means of, for example, questionnaires are also used to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of specific activities to inform future development, as well as to gauge the short term influence of interventions on individuals' aspirations toward HE and attainment. Such methods have been designed so that they are comparable across different activities and age groups where possible.

The University will also look at ways of monitoring cohorts of individuals involved in WP activity from pre-application outreach work throughout the student lifecycle. This will also aid in its understanding of the impact of interventions. Challenges in accessing data about wider progression to HE remain and difficulties in determining data on, for example, attainment pre-university will need to be addressed. The University will make use of the new Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) to measure the progress of participants in Access initiatives as and when this becomes available. However in the meantime, the University will do all it can to endeavour to collect this information and is open to working collaboratively where potential networks of opportunity exist.

Evaluation of the effect of financial support on student retention and success will also continue to be carried out. As well as analysis of withdrawal and attainment data, this will also take the form of questionnaires to those in receipt of awards, feedback from our own First Year Experience Survey, and national research. The University has a Student Financial Support Working group to which findings from evaluation will be reported and decisions on the future of financial support packages discussed.

Monitoring and evaluation reports, including progress against targets and milestones, are received by the University's Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee, which reports to Senate. There is student representation on both these bodies. Academic faculties and departments are also required to monitor and comment upon the entry profile of new entrants in the University's annual review process. Annual review reports are received by Faculty Boards of Study as well as by the University Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee.

Overall responsibility for the delivery of the agreement resides with the Senior Management Team of the University.

Equality and Diversity

The University has been mindful of its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and has given due consideration to the impact of these proposals on groups of students and potential students with protected characteristics, including those of disability, minority, races, age and gender, and to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as care leavers.

Whilst many activities delivered under our Access Agreement are targeted at specific groups, the University does take an inclusive approach to those within cohorts, whether they share protected characteristics or not. Targeted outreach work and internal initiatives to promote student success take an integrated approach so as to benefit as broad a range of students as possible. Programme level initiatives to promote student success, for example, engage the cohort as a whole so as not to be selective and isolate those from under-represented groups.

The University has also recently appointed a Strategic Academic Development Adviser whose role includes a specific remit for inclusion in Learning and Teaching. It is hoped this role will help to embed equality into teaching practices and therefore improve retention and success for under-represented groups.

At the University, Student Support and Guidance (SSG) offers bespoke support packages to students with protected characteristics. Through the Student Support Project Officer role the department offers one to one support for mature students (age), those who are pregnant or care responsibilities (pregnancy and maternity) and for care leavers or previously looked after children. An International Welfare Officer offers support to international students and uses their specialist knowledge to support diverse students throughout the student body with religious and race related concerns. There is also a named contact for students who are experiencing issues with their gender or sexuality (covering the protected characteristics of gender, sexuality and gender reassignment).

SSG also offers disability support, for disabled students across the University who disclose physical impairments, mental health difficulties and specific learning needs. This department consists of specialists in funding and making reasonable adjustments for a variety of physical impairments, support for students with long term mental health difficulties and crisis management for students who may experience breakdown. The department also offers one to one sessions with Academic Skills Tutors (ASTs) who offer tailored learning strategies for SpLD students who have disclosed learning differences, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. In light of the proposed changes to Disability Support Allowance, the disability support team at the University will be strengthened with appointment of an Assistive Learning Technologist to work with disabled students. The disability support team will also work with the wider University on implementing more inclusive learning and teaching approaches across the curriculum.

University-wide initiatives are developed through the Single Equality Scheme Working Group, chaired by the Pro VC with responsibility for Equality, which oversees a University-wide strategy document (the Single Equality Scheme) to ensure the University complies with and exceeds our institutional responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty 2012 (PSED). This addresses student (and staff) equality concerns throughout all the University's main functions in all support and academic departments. This informs long-term equality projects, such

as Stonewall, Athena Swann and GEM, and opportunity for consultation on University equality issues is presented for staff and students through the open Equality Forum, held in line with the Committee structure termly. Students are also encouraged to attend and participate in the annual Diversity Festival fortnight; running since 2006, the festival champions diversity within the University and seeks to inform, celebrate and challenge those who attend.

The University monitors the effects of its work on equality and diversity in part through an annual report analysing data on student intake, performance and progression according to particular characteristics, including age, disability and ethnicity, which is considered by the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee; this report is supported by a more detailed paper on diversity and achievement. It is worth noting, however, it can often be difficult to draw conclusions from some of this reporting due to the relatively small numbers of students with particular characteristics, such as BME. Results often identify inconsistent trends and year-on-year fluctuations which can be down to local factors.

Provision of Information to Prospective Students

The University will provide information about tuition fees (including aggregate cost), the University of Chester financial support schemes, and other information on student finance on its website. It will also make this information available through leaflets and direct information and advice sessions for prospective students. Information will also be included in offer letters to applicants. Information about tuition fees and financial support will also be provided to UCAS as soon as it is reasonable to do so.

Existing students will benefit from publications and direct advice provided by the University's Student Support and Guidance Team. In particular, information relating to the support offered for students declaring a disability.

Consultation with Students

In framing this agreement, the University has consulted with Chester Students' Union (CSU) officers who have advised on the student perspective.

CSU representatives have been involved in planning meetings for future funded activity and have participated in discussions over the content of the University's Access Agreement. The CSU has been consulted over the proposed tuition fees and the planned form of intended benefits. Feedback from student representatives regarding preferred options for how the 'in kind' element of financial support packages can best support and enhance the student experience will also inform the University's plans for financial awards going forward. CSU has confirmed its support for the full range of student support and benefits packages.

The CSU also has involvement and representation on implementation groups (such as the Student Retention and Success Steering Group) and takes an active role in initiatives to promote student success at the University.