



University of Chester

Access Agreement 2017-18 – 2nd Revision 17th August 2016

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.

Table of Contents

FEES, STUDENT NUMBERS AND FEE INCOME	2
FULL-TIME TUITION FEES	2
PART-TIME TUITION FEES	2
ASSESSMENT OF ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS RECORD.....	3
ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION	3
RETENTION AND STUDENT SUCCESS	4
PROGRESSION TO FURTHER STUDY OR TO/WITHIN EMPLOYMENT	5
STRATEGIC APPROACH TO ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS	7
SPEND ON ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS MEASURES.....	8
EXAMPLES OF FUNDED ACTIVITIES	9
ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION	9
RETENTION AND STUDENT SUCCESS.....	15
PROGRESSION TO FURTHER STUDY OR TO/WITHIN EMPLOYMENT	18
UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER BURSARIES	20
TARGETS AND MILESTONES	22
A APPLICANTS, ENTRANTS AND STUDENT BODY.....	22
B OUTREACH ACTIVITY.....	22
C ITE TRAINEES.....	23
D RETENTION AND STUDENT SUCCESS	24
E PROGRESSION TO EMPLOYMENT OR FURTHER STUDY	24
MONITORING AND EVALUATION ARRANGEMENTS	25
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY	26
PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS	27
CONSULTATION WITH STUDENTS	27

Fees, Student Numbers and Fee Income

Full-time tuition fees

For all new full-time undergraduate entrants, which includes programmes including a Foundation Year, Initial Teacher Education and Pre Registration Nursing, to first degree programmes at the University of Chester and at Reaseheath College the tuition fee will be £9,250.

The tuition fee for new postgraduate ITE entrants in 2017-18 will also be £9,250.

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.

2017 entrants undertaking sandwich years during their programme may expect to pay 15% of one year's full tuition fee, £1385, whilst students on an Erasmus or other study abroad years, later in their programmes, may also expect to pay 15% of one year's full tuition fee¹, £1385.

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	£5,135

Note: *Tuition fees payable by new full-time undergraduate entrants in their second and subsequent years of study may increase by the amount allowed by the Government.

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 £6,935. This is in line with the fee regulations under which no part-time student will pay more than £6,935 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.

With the new higher fees and consequential higher fee incomes this will assist in ensuring we sustain our long-standing commitments to students in the context of expected changes to central (i.e. student opportunity) funding.

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 2017-18 onwards.*

¹ This has been in place since 2015-16.

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).

	Year of entry	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Young full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 1b)						
<i>From state schools or colleges</i>	Chester %	97.2	97.5	97.7	97.5	96.8
	Benchmark %	94.3	94.1	94.3	94.1	94.5
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	95.5	95.2	95.6	95.3	95.7
<i>From low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	Chester %	17.9	17.1	15.9	17.6	18.5
	Benchmark	12.7	12.4	13.4	13.0	13.4
	Locally-adjusted benchmark	15.7	15.1	16.5	15.9	16.4
Mature full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 2a)						
	Number of FT mature entrants	790	805	720	755	735
	% of FT entrants who are mature	27.3	26.5	24.7	23.7	22.5
<i>With no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	Chester %	18.7	17.6	22.0	22.9	20.5
	Benchmark %	12.9	13.3	15.0	15.3	15.4
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	17.0	17.4	19.5	20.7	19.9
Part-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 2b)						
	Number of part-time entrants	2795	2430	1265	1235	1215
<i>With no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	Chester %	3.7	3.4	2.3	3.3	2.6
	Benchmark %	3.4	2.8	2.5	3.0	2.6
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	3.8	3.2	2.6	3.5	3.2

For **young full-time undergraduate entrants**, the University is performing well against sector and locally adjusted benchmarks for entrants from low participation neighbourhoods.

The University also performs well against sector and locally adjusted benchmarks for the proportion of **mature full-time undergraduate entrants** with no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3). However the relative number of mature students entering the University has decreased over the last 5 years from 27.3% to 22.5%.

Part-time undergraduate entrant numbers are also declining, having reduced by nearly a half since 2011/12. This is in part due to a changing portfolio of courses offered by the University, however mirrors the national trend for part time undergraduates in Higher Education. While the proportion with no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3) is in line with the sector benchmark, it is below the locally adjusted benchmark.

The 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 further 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 are taken from the UK Performance Indicators of HE produced by HESA.

	Year of entry	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	9.0	9.6	6.4	9.5	9.4
	Benchmark	8.2	7.6	6.7	6.8	7.1
	% continue or qualify at Chester	88.7	88.3	92.3	88.3	88.7
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	89.4	90.4	91.3	90.8	90.5
From low participation neighbourhoods (Table 3b) (POLAR3)	Chester– no longer in HE	12.0	11.1	9.6	11.0	14.1
	Benchmark	10.2	8.9	8.5	8.0	8.8
	% continue or qualify at Chester	85.6	86.2	89.3	84.2	83.4
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	87.5	89.2	89.6	89.8	89.0
From other neighbourhoods (Table 3b) (POLAR3)	Chester– no longer in HE	8.4	9.3	5.8	9.2	8.4
	Benchmark	7.8	7.0	6.2	6.4	6.7
	% continue or qualify at Chester	89.2	88.8	92.9	89.0	89.8
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	89.7	90.8	91.7	91.1	90.9
Mature						
Mature full-time first degree non-continuation (following previous year of entry) (Table 3a)	Chester– no longer in HE	12.3	9.7	9.0	11.1	10.2
	Benchmark	13.1	11.3	10.2	10.8	10.3
	% continue or qualify at Chester	85.6	89.6	90.3	87.5	87.6
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	85.2	87.3	88.4	87.6	88.1
With no previous HE qualification (Table 3c)	Chester– no longer in HE	11.9	12.0	9.6	12.4	9.2
	Benchmark	13.3	11.8	10.4	11.0	10.5
	% continue or qualify at Chester	85.4	86.9	89.3	86.0	88.5
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	84.9	86.6	88.0	87.2	87.7
With previous HE qualification (Table 3c)	Chester– no longer in HE	13.8	4.7	7.5	6.8	13.5
	Benchmark	12.3	10.0	9.4	10.0	9.5
	% continue or qualify at Chester	86.2	95.3	92.5	92.4	84.6
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	86.3	89.0	89.6	89.1	89.5

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. The general trend in the proportion of students continuing or qualifying is also not improving, despite the slight increase seen for 2013/14 entrants compared with 2012/13 entrants. There has also been a significant decline in students from low participation neighbourhoods

continuing or qualifying. The 2011/12 entry cohort were a particularly strong cohort, being the year before higher fees were introduced, therefore this appears to be an atypical year.

Overall young full time first degree entrants still have a lower proportion of students continuing or qualifying at the University than the adjusted sector benchmark for this group. Therefore the University recognises it has work to do here.

The proportion of **mature students** continuing or qualifying at the University provides a similar picture to that for young undergraduates. Mature students with no previous HE qualification actually had a higher proportion of students continuing or qualifying at the University compared with those with a previous HE qualification. However the overall figure for mature students is also below the adjusted sector benchmark, so again the University continues to recognise the need to address the retention rates of mature students

In addition to the published HESA performance indicators, the University has also conducted its own analysis of differential outcomes within its student body over the past 5 academic years from 2010-11 to 2014-15. From this analysis the University has identified that students from low participation neighbourhoods, students entering the University with BTEC qualifications, and male students are less likely to continue or qualify at the University, and therefore the University will endeavour to focus resource and initiatives on those that are most likely to have an impact on these groups of students.

Progression to further study or to/within employment

The following statistics are derived from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey:

Graduating year	In Work and/or Study			Graduate Prospects ²		
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Undergraduate FT First Degree Leavers	90.3%	92.8%	93.4%	69.8%	65.3%	62.8%
From Low Participation Neighbourhood (POLAR3)	89.5%	90.9%	93.7%	70.4%	61.7%	62.8%
With a declared disability	90.5%	86.5%	88.8%	70.6%	60.8%	62.0%

All data in this table relates to Home and EU Full time first degree leavers only.

From the above table it can be seen that the proportion of FT first degree graduates from the University of Chester in work and/or study 6 months after graduation has increased over the last 3 years, however graduate prospects for this group as a whole are falling.

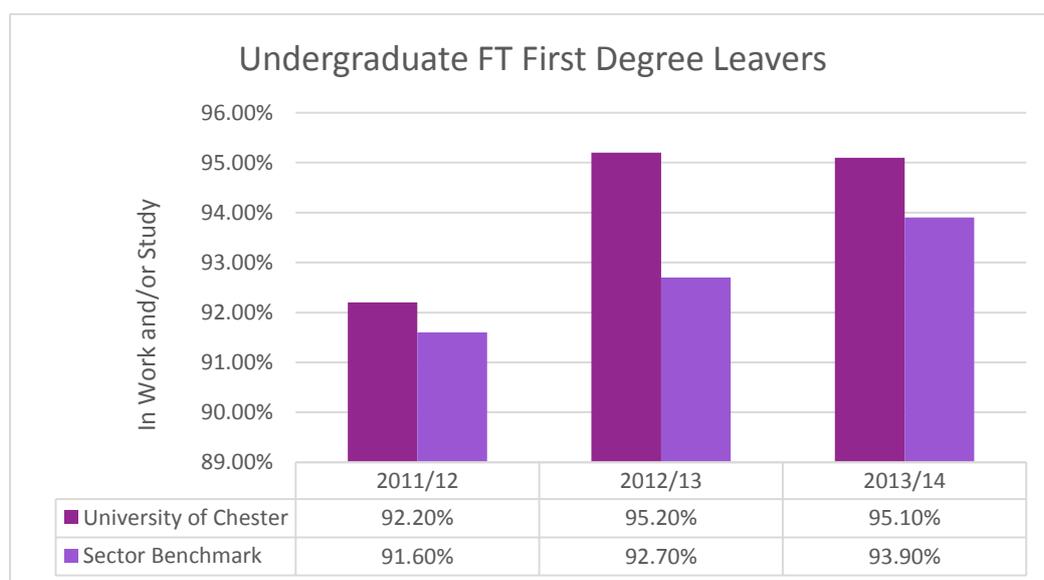
The proportion of students from a **low participation neighbourhood** in work and/or study mirrors the trend of increase over the last 3 years and compares well to the proportion of FT first degree leavers as whole. Compared with 2012/13 graduate prospects for this group have increased and,

² proportion of students with known destination in graduate level job and/or further study

other than for 2012/13 leavers, the graduate prospects for students from low participation neighbourhoods compares well with students overall.

For graduates with a **declared disability**, the proportion of students in work and/or study and graduate prospects was below the proportion for all FT first degree leavers in 2012/13 and 2013/14. There is also a decreasing trend for this group over the last 3 years. As for students from low participation neighbourhoods, an increase in graduate prospects for 2013/14 leavers was seen compared with 2012/13 leavers, therefore some progress is being made here.

The following data is taken from the HESA performance indicators (Table E1) which uses slightly different metrics to the above table and provides data for UK domiciled students only.



Compared with the sector benchmark, Chester performs well, however recognises that it still has work to do to maintain the good employability rates of its graduates. The University will therefore continue to monitor the employability rates of different groups of students leaving the University.

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 2017-18 is in line with the national steer as well as targeting the areas for improvement it has identified in evaluation of its own activity.

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 2017-18 continue to invest in outreach activities which work with all age groups starting at primary school level. The University will continue to work through its established links with schools, colleges, employers and other HEIs in delivering its targeted outreach activity. It will also continue to develop some long-term, sustained outreach work with particular targeted groups identified through collaborative links with schools and colleges in the region. The University also continues to be 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 retention and success for all students, and in particular for under-represented groups and entrants from low participation neighbourhoods, will be a priority and particular area of focus in 2017-18. The University will focus on cross-institutional approaches to improving retention and student success as it is hoped that this will benefit more students than targeted local departmental subject schemes and bring about more change at an institutional, rather than a local departmental level. However for those areas where targeted activity has been found to make an impact, this targeted activity will continue.

The University has excellent employability rates for graduates, however where gaps have been identified for specific groups of students, activity will be monitored and targeted as appropriate. In order to improve the graduate prospects of all students at the University, particularly those in under-represented groups or from low participation neighbourhoods, investment in interventions to enhance employability which have been found to particularly benefit these groups will continue.

The University will also continue to provide financial support in the form of bursary schemes. Evaluation of impact of these schemes, both on recruitment and on students' success post entry, is ongoing and our own evidence shows that this form of financial support is of particular benefit in retaining certain groups of students including mature students, care leavers, and young carers. However we take further note of research which questions the impact of financial awards for students and, given our continued need to strengthen retention performance, we propose to reallocate some spend from financial support packages to support for student retention and success. Those with the lowest incomes will still be supported through continuing bursary schemes which have been found to have the greatest impact in 2017-18.

Spend on access and student success measures

In 2017-18, 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, the 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 the administration of University of Chester bursary schemes.

Recognising the need to address retention and success of students from disadvantaged groups, the University plans to extend its spending profile to put additional investment into this area, continuing to move some money from existing financial support packages which have had the least impact on recruitment and student success. The University will prioritise and spend money on more cross-institutional approaches to improving retention and success, while continuing investment in targeted investments which have been found to have had the greatest impact.

Student financial support will continue to be offered to students in the form of student bursaries and hardship fund support which has been found to be of particular benefit to mature students.

Investment in initiatives which enhance employability will continue to include the Graduate Head Start programme, the Chester Difference Award, and the University's Employability Fund which supports low income students to carry out activities which will develop their employability. Investment in other activities to promote student progression to employment which have been identified as having an impact will also continue.

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 2017-18. 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

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 working more intensively 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 these general taster days and subject specific events, examples of other types of planned activity in 2017-18 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 e.g. Level 2 and Level 3 options, parents evening events, careers fairs, etc. Feedback from past events has been invaluable in shaping the structure of these activities and events going forwards.
- **Mature students** – Access to HE Diplomas remains an important route into Higher Education for mature entrants and 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.
- The University of Chester is also developing a wide range of **Foundation Year courses**. These Foundation Year courses have been designed for students who do not have the necessary

academic qualifications needed to enter directly into the first year of a degree but who have the ability and commitment to do so. The Foundation Year will also include a fee waiver of £1000 and be of interest to mature students who have been out of formal education for an extended period of time or who wish to change their academic field of study.

- **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 Higher Education. The 'pupil premium' will be used to identify these learners. Progression (admissions) agreements will form part of the package.
- **University-based 'Residential' events** – these events will 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.
- Continuing and progressing work with **Primary Schools Outreach Activity**, using our links formed 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, 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.
- Providing **financial support during the admissions process for disabled students** who are unable to secure this support elsewhere i.e. 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 ITT and female under-representation in STEM subjects. There is a target of increasing male entrants to primary ITT undergraduate programmes to 20% in 2017-18.
- **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% nationally³. 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 5.5% entrants from BME groups to Primary ITE programmes in 2017-18.

- **White working class males** - To help address the substantial gap in the progression of white males from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher education, the University will look to explore ways in which we can further raise aspirations and attitudes in particular for white males from disadvantaged backgrounds. Work will involve the use of male role models to demonstrate the importance of education, ensuring all outreach activities are attractive to male as well as female learners, the engagement of parents and carers and promoting topics and subject areas that are of interest to different sub-groups of boys.

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, advisers and will be moderated by an independent market research consultant.

The University will also be subscribing to the HEAT (Higher Education Access Tracker) database to record and track the participation of such learners in widening participation activity and their progress into and through higher education.

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.

³ Cheshire West and Chester 2011 Census data:

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

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.
- The University of Chester is a member of **MNCO (Merseyside Network for Collaborative Outreach)**. The network was established via HEFCE's NNCO initiative and provides schools and colleges within Greater Merseyside with a Single Point of Contact (SPoC) to signpost teachers and advisors to relevant outreach activities at each of the partner organisations. In addition to developing a web portal (www.mnco.org.uk), the network has developed a series of projects targeted at disadvantaged groups and supporting resources for teachers, parents and carers.

The University of Chester is committed to continuing to deliver collaborative outreach beyond the initial funding period of December 2016, and will endeavour to work with other providers in the region to ensure schools in identified 'cold spots' are prioritised for outreach projects in order that those groups significantly under-represented in HE are targeted. The network will ensure those groups most in need of Information, Advice and Guidance pertaining to the accessibility, affordability and benefits of HE will be engaged with significantly in an impartial manner. Collaboration between partners will support efficiency of provision from institutions across the region, through development of a shared strategy focussing on key groups such as young white males from lower socio-economic groups, and those from certain black and minority ethnic communities.

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.

Part time study

The University will continue to promote part-time study options through our website and other marketing materials, as well as through general outreach activity, highlighting the benefits of part-time study and the financial support packages available.

Outreach mentoring

The University will aim to sustain its targeted mentoring programme with schools and colleges, with the intention of supporting those from low participation or disadvantaged backgrounds who have 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 be developed to launch mentoring for Looked After Children in 2017-18. Data regarding white working class males will also be collected in-line with sector research regarding this group.

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 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, Cheshire East and Warrington Councils, 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 of Chester STEM Outreach programme offers school students opportunity to see what 'real' engineers and scientists do through practical applications and problem solving activities in Science, Engineering and Mathematics. Activities are designed to inspire young people and raise awareness of higher level study and future career opportunities in STEM whilst offering curriculum enhancement and enrichment. The aim is to target students early enough to influence subject choices and also to widen access to groups who are under-represented in STEM subjects to address future skills needs, for example, by encouraging more girls into engineering.

The programme will highlight the links between physics, chemistry, biological sciences and engineering with core mathematics and computational sciences. Young people participating in STEM activities at the University will gain an understanding of the cross-disciplinary skills in STEM that reflect the nature of scientific enquiry and technological innovation in the world of work.

University and employer partnerships provide opportunities for schools to take part in projects set by the University in collaboration with regional and national employers. Employers and University undergraduates as mentors for young people working on these projects act as powerful role models. Teachers and parents can also become engaged in the learning activities, thereby helping students to make the right decisions for successful careers in STEM.

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 Ambassadors' (STEM undergraduate students available for project work in schools) and staff going out to talk to schools about courses we offer will further relationships between the University, schools and colleges, as well as external industry organisations. Staff from local companies based at our Thornton Science Park, University alumni, and retired Shell employees also help out with Outreach activities to further the promotion of STEM in the region.

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 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 prioritise and continue to invest in 2017-18 and beyond in order to sustain and improve its performance, particularly 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.

The University will invest in extending its research analysis and strategic approaches across the institution to better understand and address the causes for its falling retention rates, particularly for those from low participation neighbourhoods.

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 continue to 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 also continue to 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 continue to be developed through cross institutional approaches. These approaches 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 continue to prioritise the embedding of academic skills at every level and throughout modules, rather than just at the commencement of studies. The University will also extend its team of study skills advisers. It is hoped that increasing the capacity of this team will help those students

identified as requiring the most support such as student entering the University with BTEC qualifications.

Mathematics Skills Support

The provision of tailored mathematics tutorial support in subject areas with a significant mathematical element have been found to have a very 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, and the extension of its study skills advisers will include tutors to provide maths support specifically.

Study skills resources

Students will also receive free texts relating to their programme of study in their first year, which will include a study skills book.

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. The University attendance monitoring pilot, which ran during 2015-16, will be rolled out across all University campus' from 2016-17. This will provide academic staff with the tools to be able to monitor and follow up students with attendance issues, and strengthen support for these students to be successful at University. Future investment in this area may include the appointment of Attendance / retention officers to work with academic departments and provide an extended mechanism for oversight and facilitation of individual students' academic progress at a University level.

Peer Mentoring and Peer Assisted Learning

These schemes build on the University's expertise in outreach mentoring activity to deliver training for, and then to support, 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-Led Study Sessions are to continue to be expanded in 2017-18. 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. Further developments to the Peer Mentoring scheme to be explored include mentoring of Level 5 and 6 students, specific Mature Student mentoring and PGR mentoring. These projects are intended to support students across the whole student-lifecycle. Peer-Led Study Sessions are discipline specific workshops 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

As a result of reduction in funding for students with a declared disability through Disability Support Allowance, the University has appointed an Assistive Technologist to work with and support students with technology and learning resource needs. It is also looking at ways it can make assistive technologies more accessible to students, particularly at outlying campus. In addition the

appointment of a Senior Disability Officer also provides extra support to students with a declared disability. As well as support already offered including drop-in sessions, this role will help to introduce 2 support groups for disabled students: one aimed at students with a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome/high functioning autism, and one for other disabled students. Both of these groups aim to support transition and integration into HE. A suite of academic study skills for students with a specific learning difficulty and group/seminar based academic study skills sessions aimed at disabled students will also be made available.

The University is also exploring further developments towards inclusive learning approaches such as the development of online learning materials and continued advice to academic staff on inclusive learning and teaching practice as a way to further support these students.

Care Leavers

We offer a specific support package for care leavers, which includes a named contact to support with all aspects of university life, budgeting sessions, accommodation all year round, assistance when applying for financial support, support with childcare and support into employment or further study. Currently there are 65 care leavers at the University, and 23 have made contact with Student Welfare. The most common issues are financial problems, mental health issues and academic concerns. In addition, we offer the Care Leaver Bursary, to all care leavers who meet the eligibility criteria.

Young Carers

We recognise that it can be difficult balancing university life with responsibilities at home and for this reason there is a dedicated person at the University to support Young Adult Carers. Currently there are 5 students, who have identified themselves as young adult carers and four students are receiving the Young Adult Carers Bursary, which consists of £1,500 per year.

Part Time Students

The University will build on its own research of the part time student experience and work to develop and enhance its provision and support for part time study. Work to support and promote part-time study will include wider promotion of the part-time student bursary, a review of the resources on offer to part-time students to ensure comparability with the full-time student experience and a review of existing provision which could be better tailored to the part-time student.

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 a Student Engagement Officer and 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.

Student Representation

The University will ensure that its Student Academic Representatives (StARs) scheme continues to include and support diversity and inclusion of representation from students with protected characteristics and from under-represented groups.

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 627 graduates (inclusive of February 2016 cohort). The most recent statistics show that between September 2014 and May 2015 78% of participants went into employment or enhanced employment following this programme. Since the commencement of the programme overall this equates to 69%. It is anticipated that Graduate Head Start will continue to be offered with similar elements in 2016-17 and 2017-18, although the team who deliver GHS are currently looking to re-structure the programme, with a potential re-brand to follow.

The Chester Difference Award

The CDA was fully launched and offered to the wider University in 2014-15 for students from a range of disciplines and year groups. The endorsement and active partnership of TalkTalk Business was secured and employer recognition of the Award continues to be an ever prominent feature. The Award is expected to expand in terms of student numbers, currently standing at 510 participants (April 2016). 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's Student Employability Fund targets current undergraduate low income students in receipt of bursaries, and 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. Since the pilot project in 2014/15 the Fund has attracted 414 applicants and 143 students have been awarded a total of £24,986.67 between them, including some smaller claims for travel expenses through our Work Shadowing programme.

Early evaluation of the pilot year has shown that students receiving money from the Fund has enabled them to try new activities they wouldn't previously have considered or been able to afford. The Fund has also addressed specific areas of personal development for students, and improved both employability and confidence in relation to employability. Therefore based on the positive outcomes found through evaluation, and the high number of applicants applying for funds in the pilot year, additional funding was awarded to the Fund in 2015-16. This has allowed 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. It is hoped that increased funding will be available in 2016-17 and 2017-18 as the Fund continues to grow and more students will therefore be supported.

Student Ambassadors Project

We propose to allocate further funds to employing Student Careers Ambassadors to promote student participation in employability activities. The department has already made good use of two

Chester Difference Award (CDA) Ambassadors and expects to extend this to our EYE training programme and Work Shadowing, CDA and Venture activities.

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.

Some of our other progression initiatives which will benefit students from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups include the following:

Warrington Unijob Discretionary Fund

The Warrington Discretionary Fund (WDF) was set up in 2015/16 to promote interdepartmental activity on the Warrington campus, and support student employability and continuous improvement. While a full evaluation of this fund has not been completed at the time of writing, having a stronger permanent presence in Careers and Employability at the Warrington campus has shown a tangible increase in student engagement in this activity at Warrington. The jobs provided by the WDF allow students at Warrington to put their career goals into practice following guidance and training provided by our team.

S:PEAR Programme

At the heart of all the degree programmes offered to undergraduates at the new University Centre Shrewsbury site is the **S:PEAR programme** – Skills: Professional, Entrepreneurial, Academic, Research. This programme runs throughout all three years of degree programmes at Shrewsbury, bringing all students in a year group together, and is designed to integrate the named skill areas through workshops and projects, interactive activities and structured learning for students, preparing them for life after their degree in the workplace. Because the University Centre was developed to meet the higher education needs of local communities, it is likely that there will be a high proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds taking part in the S:PEAR programme. Students are also encouraged and enabled to work in the local community during their degree, developing their skills and preparing them better for work after their degree has ended.

Match-Funded Work Placement Programme

This programme enables an increased number of paid work opportunities to be available for our students during their studies, to improve their employability through real-life work experience, and to provide an alternative to unpaid placements.

Venture

The Venture Programme is a three part multi-year programme of events and interactive activity designed to help would-be student entrepreneurs. It also has considerable value to students considering freelance or self-employed career paths in all industries, including those hoping to build a portfolio career. An increasing number of students (currently 266) are now taking part in this programme from a wide variety of disciplines, ranging from Biology to Fine Art, Education, Law, Nursing and Computer Science.

University of Chester Bursaries

Targeted financial support packages in the form of bursaries will continue to be offered as a means to support students. They will be offered to all University of Chester students including nursing students and those based at our other sites such as Thornton Science Park and University Centre Shrewsbury. The 'in kind' element (Aspire Credit) of bursaries will be used to reinforce student retention and success activities. Full details of all of our bursaries including what students can spend their Aspire Credit on will be available on the University's website.

Evaluation of students in receipt of 2013-14 and 2014-15 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 being reconfigured while they continue to be offered to those from the lowest income households. The University will 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 £1,500 in cash⁴ 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 £500 cash in each year 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. It is estimated that expenditure on this scheme to the cohort in 2017-18 will be approximately £2 million. The scheme is likely to benefit around 1300 students.

Scheme 2 – Chester Bursary for Part-time students

This bursary has a total value of £1,500 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 – 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 2017-18. 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:

⁴ Where bursaries are stated to contain a cash element, this is likely to be made up of a cash award in the most part with an element of 'in kind' benefit (Aspire Credit).

Year 1 - £2000 cash/in-kind 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 2017-18.

Scheme 4 – Young Carers Bursary

In partnership with organisations such as 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 organisations such as CYC will identify young carers who would benefit from this support package prior to commencing their studies.

Foundation Year

Students on our extended degree programmes including a level 3 foundation year, will receive a £1000 fee waiver in the first, foundation year of study.

Continuing students

Entrants prior to 2017-18 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 low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3). It would wish to at least 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 low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	17.7	17.8	17.9	18.0
Young full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 1b)	%	%	%	%
<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 ensure that the employability rates of undergraduate students from low participation neighbourhoods and those with a declared disability are comparable to other students:

	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's academic learning advisory work will include a focus on inclusion in Learning and Teaching. It is hoped this 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 are involved in the planning and delivery of 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 (Aspire Credit) of financial support packages can best support and enhance the student experience has also informed the University's plans for financial awards going forward. CSU has confirmed its support for the Access Agreement 2017-18 and for the full range of student support and benefits packages proposed. In particular it welcomes the increased support offered by the University to improve student retention and successful outcomes for its students.

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