

# University of Reading

## Access and participation plan

### 2020/1 to 2024/5

The University of Reading (UoR) is a research-intensive university with a world-class reputation for teaching, research and enterprise. We are a global institution with students from around 150 countries enrolled on our programmes, and an increasing number of international teaching partnerships as well as branch campuses in Malaysia, China and South Africa. Our broad portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes covers the arts, humanities, business, sciences and social sciences. We regularly update and improve our programmes as new ideas emerge, and industry and student needs change. Our ongoing investment in staff and teaching and learning facilities of the highest quality ensures that our students are challenged to achieve their full potential while at University and are well prepared for the wider world when they leave. Our aim is to provide opportunities to those who are equipped to benefit irrespective of background or personal circumstance.

The UoR is committed to access and participation and recognises that, although our student population has diversified over the past five years in terms of ethnicity and disability, our current student population disproportionately represents the more advantaged parts of society. Our track record for retaining students once enrolled is however strong (96.3%<sup>1</sup> in 2017/8), degree outcomes gaps are narrowing and 94.9%<sup>2</sup> of our 2017 graduates were in employment or study within six months of graduating. Of those who enter full-time work, 83.1%<sup>3</sup> found employment in professional or managerial roles.

This plan reviews our access and participation performance over the period 2012/3 to 2017/8 (the most recent available validated dataset), sets out our access and participation ambitions and objectives, the measures we will take to improve and maintain access and participation and the specific targets for improvement.

## 1. Assessment of performance

This assessment of performance looks at full-time first-degree students, drawing on the Office for Students (OfS) dataset for the analysis. Assessment of our performance reveals the following headlines:

- The only gaps that have been found to be statistically significant over a five-year period across all of the lifecycle stages is the **access gap** between black and white students, where the proportion of all black students recruited is higher than the national population while the proportion of all white students admitted is lower than the national population.
- The **access gaps** between the proportion of entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds (as measured by participation of local areas (POLAR)<sup>4</sup> and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)) in relation to the national population are statistically significant in each year from 2013/4 to 2017/8.
- No five-year changes in **continuation gap** data were found to be statistically significant and only 1 out of 425 yearly continuation gap data items (in the OfS dataset) over the last five years were found to be statistically significant<sup>4</sup>.
- No five-year changes in **degree outcomes gap** data were found to be statistically significant, however the yearly gap data between ABMO ethnicities (White and Asian, Black, Mixed and Other ethnicities aggregated) degree outcomes were statistically significant in four out of the last five years.
- **Progression** is a lifecycle stage that has been a strategic focus for the University for several years. No five-year changes or yearly gaps in progression data were found to be statistically significant.

The analysis below drills into the gap data in more detail and identifies the specific target groups and lifecycle stages where we need to focus our future work which is broader than those trends that show statistical significance.

Our course portfolio provides very few part-time options for undergraduate students, therefore the data does not allow for reliable statistical analysis of performance in relation to part-time students due to small numbers.

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<sup>1</sup> 96.3% of all Home funded Undergraduate (UG) entrants completed the year (HESA UK PI T3a)

<sup>2</sup> Percentage of 2016/7 UK-domiciled leavers with a known DLHE destination obtaining first-degrees from full-time courses who were employed, studying or both.

<sup>3</sup> Percentage of 2016/7 UK-domiciled leavers with a known DLHE destination obtaining first-degrees from full-time courses who were in full-time professional or managerial employment

<sup>4</sup> This gap was between POLAR4Q1234 v POLAR4Q5 in 2013/4

## 1.1 Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

The statistically significant gaps in relation to people from disadvantaged areas are between the proportion of entrants from disadvantaged and less disadvantaged backgrounds. There is also some intersection of under-representation where degree outcome gaps have been statistically significant in some years for specific intersections with ethnicity and gender.

### Access

The POLAR4 entrance rates over a five-year period show the gap between Q1 entrants and those in the general population is increasing (11.6% in 2013/4; 12.1% in 2017/8). The gap between POLAR Q1 and Q5 entrants to the UoR has also widened to a ratio of 1:6 in 2017/18 from 1:5.8 in 2013/14 albeit with some positive progress in the middle of this period (1:4.9 in 2015/16). The subsequent widening of the gap coincides with rapid student numbers growth at UoR. This pattern reflects the national position where the gap between Q1 and Q5 students access to higher education (HE) is an OfS Key Performance Measure (KPM1). Our aim is to reduce this gap at UoR with a specific focus on entrants from POLAR4 Q1.

The pattern for IMD shows more positive progress with the Q1:Q5 ratio reducing from 1: 7.8 in 2013/14 to 1:5.9 in 2017/18.

Table 1: Gaps compared to the general population\*

	2013/4	2014/5	2015/6	2016/7	2017/8	5 year Gap Change
POLAR4Q5	-15.3	-15.1	-13.6	-15.6	-17.2	Gap Increasing
POLAR4Q1	11.6	11.2	10.4	12	12.1	Gap Increasing
IMDQ5	-19	-16.3	-20.2	-21.6	-16.9	Gap Decreasing
IMDQ1	17.1	17	17.9	16.9	16.3	Gap Decreasing

\*While none of the five-year trends were found to be statistically significant, each yearly data gap was statistically significant (shaded red)

Our entry rates for full-time first-degree students eligible for free school meals over the last two years is increasing, showing some progress to increasing participation from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Although the proportion of IMD Q1&Q2 entrants has increased in the five-year period, the proportion of those who were white has declined. The proportion of white POLAR4 Q1&Q2 entrants has also declined. The proportion of non-white entrants from both IMD Q1&2 and POLAR Q1&Q2 have increased. The entry rate for men from disadvantaged backgrounds has increased over the five-year period measured through both POLAR4 and IMD.

Access for full-time first-degree entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds is our main focus over the next five year period. This is in line with KPM1.

### Success: Non-continuation

Reviewing our OfS data set reveals that full-time first-degree students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Q1 alone or Q1 combined with Q2) are experiencing lower continuation rates than students from less disadvantaged backgrounds over a five-year period, and that the gaps between IMD and POLAR4 advantaged and disadvantaged quintiles are increasing. This reflects the national position where the continuation gap between POLAR4 Q1 and Q5 students is an OfS Key Performance Measure (KPM3).

Looking at intersections of IMD and POLAR4 with ethnicity, we see that students of all ethnicities have lower continuation rates when they come from IMD Q1&Q2. All IMD Q1&Q2 regardless of ethnicity are seeing increasing gaps in comparison to white students from IMD Q3-5. This indicates that disadvantage is more of a concern for continuation rates than ethnicity.

Gender analysis indicates that there is no gap between females or males from POLAR4 Q1&2 and POLAR4 Q3-5.

The UoR gaps in continuation rates concerning disadvantaged students are neither statistically significant over the five year period nor by individual year, however this is an area where we want to drive improvement in alignment with the national KPM.

### Success: Degree Outcomes

Reviewing our OfS data set reveals that full-time first-degree students from disadvantaged backgrounds are seeing lower degree outcome rates over a five-year period, and that the gaps between both IMD and POLAR4 disadvantaged and advantaged quintiles are increasing. Although none of these gaps are statistically significant, the IMD Q1 and Q5 gap has increased (6% in 2013/4 to 12% in 2017/8), and the IMD Q1&2 and Q3-5 gap has increased (5% in 2013/4; 10% in 2017/8).

Looking at intersections of characteristics, we see that the six largest degree outcomes gaps across all measures from 2017/8 are all related to ethnicity and/or IMD quintile. However, when the ethnicity data and

POLAR4 data are combined we see that all white and non-white comparison degree outcomes gaps are decreasing over a five-year period, which is consistent with the trends for non-white ethnicities as a whole. This indicates that for degree outcomes, levels of disadvantage need to become a specific focus of our attainment work alongside the existing focus on ethnicity.

Gender analysis indicates that male students from IMD Q1&2 experienced the largest (although not statistically significant over five years) degree outcomes gap in 2017/8. The (only) intersection between POLAR4 and gender where the degree outcomes gap is increasing over a five-year period is male students from POLAR4 Q1&2 compared to male students from POLAR4 Q3-5 (-2% in 2013/4; -5% in 2017/8). While the degree outcomes gap between IMD Q1&2 and Q3-5 is increasing the degree outcomes gap between genders, although present, is decreasing. When comparing degree outcomes of the same gender from different IMD quintiles we see that an increasing IMD quintile degree outcomes gap is present, whereas when comparing degree outcomes of the same IMD quintile we see a decreasing gender degree outcomes gap over the five-year period. This suggests that our main focus needs to be on disadvantage although mindful of the fact that there is a gap between the genders.

Although the UoR gaps in degree outcomes concerning disadvantage are neither statistically significant over the five-year period nor by individual year, this is an area where we want to drive improvement in alignment with the national KPM.

### **Progression to highly skilled employment or further study**

Progression is a strong area for the UoR, with none of our gaps (across all student characteristics) being marked as statistically significant. Reviewing our OfS data set reveals that full-time, first-degree graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds face the largest progression gaps, especially graduates from IMD Q1&Q2, where the gaps are increasing over a five-year period (2% in 2012/3; 7% in 2016/7). The largest progression gap in 2016/7 was between POLAR4 Q1 and Q5 students (1% in 2012/3; 7% in 2016/7). Some progress is however being made in this area as the gap between POLAR4 Q1&Q2 and Q3-5 graduates is decreasing over a five year period (4% in 2012/3; 2% in 2016/7).

Looking at intersections of IMD and POLAR4 with ethnicity we see the progression gaps between the same IMD quintile groupings when comparing white and non-white students are decreasing which is consistent with the overall ethnicity gap closing. Meanwhile, five of the six progression gaps intersecting POLAR4 quintile by ethnicity are decreasing over a four-year period while the other gap is steady over four years. This indicates that disadvantage is of more concern than ethnicity when working to improve progression for UoR students.

Gender analysis indicates that while the gap between female and male students is decreasing, female students from IMD and POLAR4 Q1&2 are experiencing increasing progression gaps in five out of six gaps across both characteristics. Our work focussed on enhancing the progression outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds needs to be mindful of the gap between the genders, despite the fact that there is no statistically significant difference between them.

## **1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students**

**The statistically significant gaps relating to ethnicity concern access and degree outcomes. We are currently recruiting a higher proportion of students of Asian, black mixed and other ethnicities than exist in the national population and a lower proportion of white ethnicities. For four out of five years the degree outcomes gaps between White and ABMO<sup>5</sup> students was statistically significant (in favour of white students).**

### **Access**

The UoR has a strong record of recruiting full-time first-degree students from ABMO ethnicities and our entry rate for black, Asian, mixed and other ethnicities are each increasing<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, the proportion of our entrants who are white has declined (84% in 2013/4; 76% in 2017/8). We are currently recruiting a higher proportion of Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicity entrants than is proportionate for the general population for each of these ethnicity groupings. The access gap between black and white students (i.e. under-recruitment of white students) is the only statistically significant pattern over the five-year period across all of the lifecycle stages for UoR. Our increased recruitment of Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicity students reflects a strategy set in line with the government's 2015 objective to achieve a 20% increase in the numbers of students from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds entering HE by 2020.

<sup>5</sup> The term ABMO is used specifically in this plan to indicate when Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicities are aggregated

<sup>6</sup> The proportion of entrants identifying as black increased from 2.4% in 2013/4 to 5.4% in 2017/8. The proportion of entrants identifying as Asian increased from 9.1% in 2013/4 to 12% in 2017/8. The proportion of entrants identifying as mixed ethnicity increased from 3.6% in 2013/4 to 4.9% in 2017/8)

Entry rates for ABMO ethnicities from disadvantaged backgrounds are increasing (POLAR4: 2.9% in 2013/4; 4.6% in 2017/8) but decreasing for white ethnicity from disadvantaged backgrounds (POLAR4: 15.4% in 2013/4; 13.4% in 2017/8).

### **Success: Non-continuation**

Continuation gaps between ethnic groups are small although the continuation rate gap between White and ABMO students has widened slightly over the five-year period (0% in 2012/13; 2% in 2016/7). The largest gap in 2016/7 was between black and white students (3%). The gaps between white and Asian students and between white and mixed ethnicity students are smaller (2% or less). None of these gaps are statistically significant.

### **Success: Degree Outcomes**

The UoR degree outcomes gap has been an area of focussed access and participation work for a number of years and as a result the gap between full-time first-degree white students and students from ABMO ethnicities is decreasing (16% in 2013/4; 11% in 2017/8). None of the gaps between ethnic groupings<sup>7</sup> are statistically significant over the five-year period, but although the gap between white and ABMO ethnicities is decreasing, four out of the five of the yearly gaps are still statistically significant. The degree outcomes gaps between black and white ethnicities and black and Asian, mixed, other and white (AMOW) are the widest (although not statistically significant). This mirrors the national position where the gap between black and white students degree outcomes is an OfS Key Performance Measure (KPM4).

### **Progression to highly skilled employment or further study**

Progression is a strong area for the UoR, with none of the gaps (across all student characteristics) being statistically significant and most of the UoR progression gaps are decreasing over a five-year period<sup>8</sup>. Our progression gap between black and white full-time first-degree graduates was nil in 2016/7 decreasing from 20% over a four year period. This positive trajectory is due to a university strategic focus on employability over the last decade and in particular our emphasis on employability within the core curriculum ensuring that all students are exposed to career development learning. Mixed ethnicity graduates have the largest progression gaps; however the data fluctuates from one year to the next.

## **1.3 Mature students**

**The number of undergraduate mature students at UoR is very small. In 2017/8 a total of 612 mature students were enrolled amounting to 6% of the full-time first-degree population. This is due to the nature of our course portfolio. Therefore, statistical data relating to mature students must be treated cautiously and with the expectation of fluctuations from one year to the next. None of the five-year trends or yearly changes for mature students have been found to be statistically significant.**

### **Access**

Mature full-time first-degree student entry rates show little change over five years (6.5% in 2013/4; 6.6% in 2017/8). However, our Foundation Degree in Children's Development Learning run with partner colleges has high mature student numbers. In 2018/9 89% of all students enrolled across the three<sup>9</sup> years of study on these programmes were mature.

### **Success: Non-continuation**

Mature full-time first-degree students have a consistently lower continuation rate than young students. The continuation gap between young and mature students spiked at 11 percentage points in 2015/6 but has reduced to 8 percentage points in 2016/7. It is widely recognised that this phenomenon is often explained by factors outside the University's control and relates to family/work commitment or life events that are not as prevalent for younger students. Nevertheless, the continuation rate for mature students aged 21-25 is the University's largest continuation gap in 2016/7, and although this figure has fluctuated between years, it will be important to monitor this as part of our annual monitoring process to ensure that mainstream retention measures are having positive outcomes for mature students as well as for young students.

### **Success: Degree Outcomes**

While degree outcomes for full-time first-degree students over a five-year period is increasing for mature students (73% in 2013/4 and 75% in 2017/8) the degree outcomes gap between young and mature

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<sup>7</sup> Between White and ABMO, white and Asian, white and black, white and mixed ethnicities, AMOW and black, black and Asian, black and mixed ethnicities.

<sup>8</sup> Between White and ABMO, white and Asian, white and black, white and mixed ethnicities, Asian and mixed ethnicities, black and Asian.

<sup>9</sup> This includes the 2 years of the foundation degree and the third year taken at UoR to achieve the BA in Children's Development and Learning

students is increasing over a five-year period in favour of young students (6% in 2013/4; 9% in 2017/8). Many of the factors that impact on continuation rates also impact on degree outcomes for mature students, nevertheless, and although this pattern in neither statistically significant annually or over the five year period, it will be important to monitor this as part of our annual monitoring process to ensure that mainstream attainment raising measures are having positive outcomes for mature students as well as for young students.

### **Progression to employment or further study**

Progression is a strong area for the UoR, with none of our gaps (across all student characteristics) being marked as statistically significant by the OfS. Mature full-time first-degree graduates are performing better than young graduates in progression and the progression gap is decreasing however it still favours mature graduates (-8% in 2012/3; -3% in 2016/7).

## **1.4 Disabled students**

**There are no statistically significant trends or yearly gap differences in relation to disabled students across any of the lifecycle stages. However, some large but fluctuating gaps exist for some specific disability types.**

### **Access**

Full-time first-degree disabled student entry rates are increasing over the five years (12.6% in 2013/4; 16% in 2017/8). It has also been noted that the profile of disability types being declared is changing. In 2013/4 the largest disability type was 'Cognitive and Learning' (6.2% in 2013/4; 4.8% in 2017/8). In 2017/8 the largest disability type is now 'Multiple Impairments' (3.6% in 2013/4; 6.7% in 2017/8). However, it is likely that the majority of these students have a cognitive or learning disability combined with another condition.

### **Success: Non-continuation**

The gap for all full-time first-degree disabled students is closing over a five-year period (2% in 2014/5; 1% in 2016/7). However, as one might expect, continuation gaps show a mixed picture across disability types. The data shows students with cognitive and learning disabilities consistently continuing at rates that align with non-disabled students while those with multiple impairments had a continuation rate in 2016/7 that was 6 percentage points lower. The gap was narrower in previous years. Although this pattern in neither statistically significant annually or over the five year period, it will be important to monitor as part of our annual monitoring process in order to identify any specific measures and to ensure that measures intended to increase retention rates generally are having a positive impact on disabled students.

### **Success: Degree Outcomes**

Degree Outcomes show a similar picture where the university saw students with cognitive and learning disabilities consistently attaining at rates that align with non-disabled students while those with multiple impairments tended towards lower degree outcome rate with a pronounced dip to an 11-percentage point gap in 2017/8. However, the gap fluctuated across previous years and although the gaps are neither statistically significant annually or over the five year period, it will be important to monitor this as part of our annual monitoring process and to ensure that mainstream attainment raising measures are having a positive impact on disabled students.

### **Progression to employment or further study**

Progression is a strong area for the UoR, with none of our gaps (across all student characteristics) being marked as statistically significant by the OfS. All progression gaps for disabled graduates fluctuate from one year to the next, most likely a result of very small numbers of survey responses (220 disabled students in 2016/7), making it difficult to identify real trends. The overall picture and the additional needs of disabled students suggest that we should continue our pro-active work in this area and to regularly monitor to ensure that more sustained gaps do not develop.

## **1.5 Care leavers**

The data on care leavers<sup>10</sup> at the UoR does not allow for reliable analysis due to small numbers. However, care leavers are a group that we target in our access work. We also provide a specific and broad ranging support package for care leavers studying with us including additional financial support, access to accommodation, and free graduation gown hire etc (detailed in section 3.2 Strategic measures).

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<sup>10</sup> A care leaver is someone who has been in local authority care for at least three months since the age of 14, is registered on a full-time undergraduate course, is classed as a home fee paying student and is under 25 years of age on the 1st August before commencing their studies at the University.

## 2. Strategic aims and objectives

In formulating our strategic aims and objectives for access and participation we have considered: our access and participation performance; the OfS key performance measures; and the positioning of the Institution<sup>11</sup>. The UoR's strategic access and participation aims are to ensure that:

- The UoR plays an active role in improving equality of opportunity in the UK in terms of access to HE
- All students who choose UoR experience an inclusive and supportive environment in which they are able to develop personally, academically and professionally to have the best possible chance to achieve their potential

The strategic objectives that underpin these aims are to:

### **a) Reach more disadvantaged people through programmes of activity that support a successful application to UoR courses**

We know our intensive widening participation programmes are effective at reaching students from under-represented groups<sup>12</sup>. By expanding these intensive programmes of activity (both in number and by geographical region) we expect to reach more of these students and impact our student profile from 2020/1, with the most substantial progress being seen from 2021/2 entry onwards as the outputs of our newly implemented regional work and the expansion of our Scholars activity take effect.

### **b) Further reduce perceived and real barriers to entry to UoR for applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds**

To date, supporting access has been largely focussed at pre-application stage, and aside from additional financial support, students from under-represented groups have received the same advice and guidance as their non-disadvantaged peers at this point. Some measures are already in place to introduce additional activity to support these applicants (regional applicant events) and as we build on and improve our offering we expect to see impact from 2020/1, with our rate of progress increasing from 2021/2 to 2024/5.

### **c) Achieve a student population that is more representative of society**

This will be the main goal of our access activity in the next five years. We know that it takes time to impact the complex behaviours behind university choice but expect that the combination of measures recently implemented around the application process (set out in section 3) along with the expansion of our targeted outreach work already underway, will begin to show some visible difference by 2020 intake and to have achieved our targets by 2024/5.

### **d) Ensure that under-represented students who begin their studies at UoR remain on course and complete their studies**

Recent and planned measures to enhance retention (see section 3) should show improved continuation rates incrementally from the 2016/7 benchmark levels. However, the introduction of consistent student attendance management is intended to have a substantial positive impact for students enrolled from 2021/2 onwards. We aim to achieve our target in this area by 2024/5.

### **e) Close the unexplained degree outcomes gaps that correlate with ethnicity, disability, disadvantaged backgrounds**

Recent and planned measures to enhance degree outcomes (see section 3) should reduce gaps incrementally from the 2017/8 benchmark levels. However, we anticipate that a number of large-scale transformational projects will be delivered and embedded over the five-year period of this plan. They will have a mutually reinforcing impact and we will close the gaps for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and for disabled students by 2024/5 but that the gaps correlating with ethnicity are more entrenched and complex and likely to take longer to close (2028).

### **f) Close the unexplained gaps in progression that correlate with disadvantaged backgrounds**

The trajectory in this area is likely to continue to be spiky due to the small data sets that exist when the student population is broken down and the fact that many datasets are reliant on survey responses. There is also a good deal of uncertainty about what a positive but realistic trajectory should look like given the change from DLHE survey to the Graduate Outcomes exercise. We will be better able to forecast the shape

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<sup>11</sup> Our average entry tariff places us at the top end of middle tariff universities, but our subject spread is more similar to many high tariff HEIs, with a large proportion of academic subjects as distinct from applied subjects.

<sup>12</sup> Our year 12 Scholars programme has 300 participants, 100% of whom meet at least one widening participation indicator. Of the students reached in our newly established regional work in the W Midlands, 70% to date have been from IMD Q1 or Q2.

and schedule of progress when the first Graduate Outcomes Survey results are available, but in broad terms we plan to achieve our targets in this area by 2024/5.

These objectives reflect our ambition to focus on the whole student lifecycle and they have determined the prioritisation of the access and participation measures identified in section 3 of this plan. The targets set out below relate directly to these objectives.

## 2.1 Target groups

Based on assessment of our performance over the last five years we have identified separate target groups for four areas of activity (access, continuation, degree outcomes and progression) that span the student lifecycle. They reflect a commitment to contribute to the OfS Key Performance Measures on access and participation as well as our own institutional analysis of areas for improvement.

Table 2: Target groups for 2020/1 – 2025/6

	Access	Continuation	Degree Outcomes	Progression
Disadvantage	✓	✓	✓	✓
Asian Black Mixed and Other ethnicity students			✓	
White students from disadvantaged backgrounds	✓			
Disabled students			✓	

There are a number of areas where we have identified some gaps between student groups but where the gaps are small and/or fluctuate from year to year, often due to the populations being small, or where the gaps relate to even smaller sub-sets of the group. These are: mature student continuation and degree outcomes; disabled students continuation, degree outcomes and progression; and some intersections with gender and ethnicity as described above. It would not be productive to set numeric targets for these areas at this point, however we will monitor the gaps as identified in the dataset and will be mindful of these groups in assessing the impact of our strategic measures.

### Access targets

We have focussed our targets on the main areas that we want to improve on and where our entrant population is statistically significantly different to the national population, i.e. the proportion of entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds and the proportion of entrants who are white and from disadvantaged backgrounds. We recognise the OfS National Key Performance Measure on closing the gap between entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from advantaged backgrounds (i.e. POLAR4 Q1:Q5 ratio) and have aligned our target accordingly. However, our access work will not focus only on POLAR4 Q1 and therefore a second target captures both Q1&Q2 against Q4&Q5. We have also included a target (PTA\_2) to improve the proportion of our entrants who are white and from disadvantaged backgrounds. The targets we have set for this demographic represent a 35% increase in students from these backgrounds among our entrants, assuming a steady state in other groups. Should we also see an increase in non-disadvantaged white students entering the University as we exit the current demographic dip, these targets will represent an even greater increase in the finite numbers of white and disadvantaged students entering our University.

Many of the strategic measures outlined in section 3 of this plan are relating to outreach and attainment raising we therefore recognise the need to identify outcome based targets to frame this work. A provisional target on school level attainment raising is included with milestones. During 2019/20 we will also undertake the work to formulate a further target focussed on applications to HE.

### Continuation Targets

Although none of our continuation gaps are statistically significant our largest gaps concern students from disadvantaged backgrounds and these gaps have widened in the last two or three years. We recognise the OfS National KPM on closing this gap and therefore have set a UoR target. Given that the gaps are

consistently present and wider in the IMD datasets and we have chosen to set our target based on the IMD quintiles (focussing on both Q1 and Q1&Q2) rather than on POLAR4.

## Degree Outcome Targets

The widest UoR degree outcome gaps correlate with ethnicity and/or disadvantage. The widest (single criteria) gap is between white students and black students, however the gap between the degree outcomes of white ethnicities and ABMO ethnicities, although not as wide and is decreasing over time, is nevertheless statistically significant (in four of the past five years). The gap between white and black students' degree outcomes is not statistically significant. We have therefore set targets on the gap between white and ABMO degree outcomes as well as the gap between white and black student degree outcomes. We also have a gap that has been increasing over the last three years between the degree outcomes of advantaged and disadvantaged students. None of the gaps between various measures of disadvantage are statistically significant in themselves although for some years when combined with ethnicity or gender there is statistical significance. The gap for disadvantage alone is wider in the IMD datasets than the POLAR4 datasets and we have therefore chosen to set our target based on the IMD quintiles focussing on both Q1 and Q1&Q2. We have not set specific intersectional targets in relation to disadvantage because, although there are some indicators of statistical significance for particular intersections, the data shows that the level of disadvantage has an impact across the board. However, we will monitor these intersections as they may not close at the same rates as the over-arching gap.

Although the degree outcome gap for UoR disabled students in comparison to those without disabilities is not statistically significant and had closed entirely in 2015/6, we recognise the OfS National Key Performance Measure on closing this gap. It is also an agreed target in our UoR Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and we feel it is an area that requires a specific access and participation target in order to maintain a strong focus on improvement.

All three degree outcome targets above are currently set on the basis of the absolute gaps between groups, however we will be undertaking the analysis needed to revise these targets to specifically focus on the unexplained gaps<sup>13</sup>.

## Progression Targets

The widest gaps in progression correlate with disadvantage. Although not statistically significant, the gaps are evident in both the POLAR4 and the IMD datasets. The gaps are widest and more consistently present in the IMD data and therefore our target in this area is formulated on the IMD data. The gap is consistently largest between IMD Q1 and Q5 however, for consistency, robustness of data<sup>14</sup> and effective targeting we have chosen to set the target as the gap between IMD Q1&Q2 and IMD Q3-5.

As with the degree outcome targets above the progression target as currently formulated is based on absolute gaps between groups, however we will be undertaking the analysis needed to revise these targets to specifically focus on the unexplained gaps<sup>15</sup> as well as adjusting the target to accommodate the replacement of the DLHE Survey with the Graduate Outcomes Survey.

## 2.2 Aims and objectives for target groups

### A. Disadvantaged groups

Over the period 2020/1 to 2024/5 we will have a specific focus on students from disadvantaged backgrounds across the whole lifecycle. Our aims for this target group are to:

- increase the awareness of the UoR as a suitable destination through increased engagement with this target group;
- facilitate and support access to ensure students from these backgrounds do not experience, or are able to overcome barriers which prevent them from entering our institution;
- close gaps in continuation and degree outcomes (particularly the unexplained gaps) through a strong focus on academic engagement and achievement;
- and close the progression gap for students from disadvantaged backgrounds through maximising engagement with career development opportunities both in-curricula and extra-curricula.

Our objectives that reflect these aims are:

In terms of reducing the access gap, to:

- Increase numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds participating in our intensive engagement programmes (e.g. year 12 Scholars, year 10 Scholars, Brilliant Club etc.).

<sup>13</sup> Unexplained gaps with remove differential entry standards as a factor in degree outcome attainment.

<sup>14</sup> The population of Q1 graduates for whom we have data tends to be very small meaning that comparison of Q1&Q2 against Q3-5 provides a much more robust and meaningful dataset

<sup>15</sup> Unexplained gaps with remove differential degree outcome as a factor in progression success.



- Increase numbers of disadvantaged students applying to UoR from different routes (e.g. from FE Colleges and from identified schools in newly targeted geographical regions)
- Deploy contextual offer making to increase the number of applications from disadvantaged groups and to ensure that conversion of this group at least matches the conversion rate of those from other groups

In terms of closing continuation and degree outcomes gaps, to:

- Increase student engagement with measures designed to enhance academic achievement (e.g. pre-arrival transition support, academic tutoring, our new Student Progress Dashboard, class attendance, peer assisted learning)
- Increase capacity for pro-active intervention strategies that focus on the individual needs, rather than the needs of their demographic group (e.g. welfare notification follow-ups, referrals to specialist teams, follow-ups on coursework non-submission, class absence, performance gaps etc.)
- Engage students from disadvantaged backgrounds with our financial education platform pre-and post-arrival

In terms of closing the progression gap after University, to:

- Increase participation from students from disadvantaged backgrounds (in particular female students) in:
  - careers advice and guidance opportunities (e.g. 1:1 appointments, workshops, webinars/remote learning, careers fairs and employer engagement opportunities)
  - career development schemes & tools (e.g. the RED Award, THRIVE mentoring scheme, Peer Assisted Learning)
  - relevant work experience (e.g. placements and internships)

## **B. White ethnicity**

White disadvantaged students are a group targeted and prioritised within our pre-entry access activity, throughout our outreach and subsequently within our contextualised offer-making and bursary offerings. There are 10 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Reading within the worst 20% nationally, with two LSOAs within the most deprived 10%. Our aim is to continue to identify and work with students from this demographic in these immediate local regions and beyond to increase those that see the UoR as a suitable destination and the proportion of white disadvantaged students within the UoR population increases.

Our objectives that reflect these aims are, to:

- Increase numbers of white participants from disadvantaged backgrounds in our intensive engagement programmes (e.g. year 12 Scholars, year 10 Scholars, Brilliant Club etc.)
- Increase numbers of white students applying to UoR from (e.g. from FE Colleges and from identified schools in newly targeted geographical regions)
- Deploy contextual offer making to increase number of applications from disadvantaged groups and to ensure that conversion of this group at least matches the conversion rate of those from other groups

## **C. Asian black mixed and other ethnicity**

The gap between degree outcomes achieved by white students and students who identify as ABMO ethnicities has been widely acknowledged at the UoR. Since 2012, we have actively implemented a range of measures to address this challenge with many documented successes but we recognise that the gaps in degree outcomes of some ethnicity groups are not decreasing as rapidly as other ethnicities (e.g. black students compared to all other ethnicities). Our aim is therefore to reduce further the degree outcome gaps between different ethnicity groups noting that the gap between white and black students is the largest.

Our objectives that reflect these aims are, to:

- Increase ABMO students' engagement with measures designed to enhance academic achievement (e.g. pre-arrival transition support, academic tutoring, our new Student Progress Dashboard, class attendance, peer assisted learning)
- Increase our capacity for pro-active intervention strategies that focus on the individual needs, rather than the needs of their demographic group (e.g. welfare notification follow-ups, referrals to specialist teams, follow-ups on coursework non-submission, class absence, performance gaps etc.)

## **D. Disabled students**

We are committed to providing an inclusive teaching and learning (T&L) environment for students that not only removes barriers to success in HE but one that also anticipates the needs of our learners. We are pleased that we have made progress in substantially reducing or eliminating the gaps in the continuation

rates for disabled students compared to those with no known disability and although there is no statistically significant difference in the degree outcomes or progression rates of disabled students compared to their peers, some gaps (that fluctuate in size) have opened up. Our aim is to close these gaps.

Our objectives that reflect these aims, in terms of closing degree outcomes gaps are to:

- Provide tools that support inclusive learning as standard, or easily available (e.g. accessibility checking tools, automatic generation of alternative file formats (including audio), lecture capture & transcription and note taking software)
- Provide a positive arrival and transition experience through pre-arrival information and induction, a new early start programme for those who need a calmer start or extra time to adjust, the application of reasonable adjustments and additional support arrangements in place from the start
- Increase student engagement with measures designed to enhance academic achievement (e.g. pre-arrival transition support, academic tutoring, our new Student Progress Dashboard, class attendance, peer assisted learning)
- Assess and monitor adherence to our inclusive T&L Policy
- Increase capacity for pro-active intervention strategies that focus on the individual needs, rather than the needs of their demographic group (e.g. welfare notification follow-ups, referrals to specialist teams, follow-ups on coursework non-submission, class absence, performance gaps etc.)

## **E. Mature students**

Mature UG students are small in number at UoR and we recognise that our portfolio of programmes and our predominant focus on campus based classroom teaching is not appealing for mature learners who wish or need to manage work and/or family commitments at the same time. Although we have not set any targets in relation to mature students (explained above) our aims are to maximise their continuation and academic success:

Our objectives which reflect these aims are to:

- Undertake an analysis of the intersectionality patterns of our small mature student cohort in 2020/21 in order to inform our strategies
- Achieve a stronger sense of community amongst mature students
- Engage mature students with appropriate measures designed to enhance academic achievement (e.g. pre-arrival transition support, academic tutoring, our new Student Progress Dashboard, peer assisted learning)
- Engage mature students via our pro-active intervention strategies that focus on the individual needs, rather than the needs of their demographic group.
- Engage mature students in our pro-active student welfare support provision (e.g. Life Tools and Black Bullion)

## **F. Care Leavers**

There are tiny numbers of disclosed care leavers at UoR and we have not set specific targets relating to this group, however, our aim is to encourage and facilitate their entry to UoR.

Our objectives that reflect this aim are to:

- Continue to reach care leavers through our existing work with the local authorities in the region providing advice, information and guidance to care leavers and their supporters, and engaging care leavers in campus/subject taster days and bespoke events.
- Engage care leavers in the new package of individualised support provided throughout the application process
- Engage care leavers in our sustained outreach programmes, continuing to prioritise access for these groups.
- Establish what a reasonable proportion/number of applications from care leavers would look like (2020/21).
- Build on activity within the NCOP to identify additional needs and opportunities to engage with and support looked-after children, and to develop links with additional surrounding local authorities to raise awareness of our outreach and provision for care leavers (2020/21 – 2021/22).

# **3. Strategic Measures**

## **3.1 Whole provider strategic approach**

The UoR aims to align its access and participation strategy with the University's overall strategy and to take a whole University approach. We believe that aligning activity at a strategy, governance, policy and operational level provides the best context for progress.

At a **strategy level** the University's Access and Participation Plan (APP), Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategy, T&L Strategy and employability strategies are all aligned. The Diversity and Inclusion Strategy<sup>16</sup> sets out goals and targets in relation to ethnicity and disability (and gender) that focus on the same lifecycle stages as the APP, thus creating an institution-wide focus on a shared set of goals. The T&L Strategy 2018-2021, recognises and celebrates our diverse learning community, placing our curriculum framework and its core principle of diversity and inclusion at its heart. The focus of our over-arching employability goals are to provide equality of opportunity by engaging students who don't naturally engage with the Careers Service and to support those that do not have the personal resources and networks to achieve positive progression outcomes alone.

At the **governance level**, the Access and Participation Committee (APC) is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and reports to the University Board for Teaching & Learning and Student Experience as well as the University Executive Board. The wide-ranging membership is designed to enable both a whole student lifecycle and a whole institution approach.<sup>17</sup> The Dean of Diversity and Inclusion works closely with the members of the APC and with Reading University Students' Union (RUSU) and marks a further commitment to enhancing equality and diversity across the whole institution. The University's Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Board is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Resource), has shared membership with the APC and reports to the University Executive Board. The Recruitment and Admissions Steering Group (RASG) (again with overlapping membership with APC) will in future monitor progress against access targets in order to inform admissions policy and practice particularly around contextual offer making.

At the **policy level**, the University has agreed that all degree programmes should be designed to be diverse and inclusive as one of the core pedagogic principles of our curriculum framework. The University's policy on inclusive practice in T&L emphasises our commitment to inclusive T&L. It outlines the University's specific expectation that assessment practices will be inclusive and teaching materials will be accessible and provided in advance.

At the **operational level** there is shared membership across the key governance boards for A&P, D&I, T&L and employability. Key reports that monitor progress in these areas are drafted and scrutinised by staff who are regularly involved in working across the broader context of all of these areas ensuring that the work is not siloed, but rather co-ordinated to incorporate a range of institutional drivers including increased access and participation progress.

Responsibility for access and participation is embedded in our T&L roles, with accountability, monitoring and reporting formalised within our T&L committee structures. For example, annual quality assurance reports include analysis and reflection on continuation, degree outcomes and progression in light of equality and diversity characteristics of student cohorts. School Planning and Enhancement of L&T plans will require Schools and Departments to set targets for their access and participation measures and will hold them accountable.

We are working towards achieving the Race Equality Charter Mark and an institution-wide steering group is leading work in this area that is central to the experience and achievement of our ABMO students. The LGBTQ+ student experience is part of our annual submission to the Stonewall Equality index where we have achieved a top 100 position as a result of recent work.

## 3.2 Strategic measures

Outlined below is a wide range of measures that we believe will act in combination to reduce or close the gaps that have been identified in this plan. In devising these measures we have adhered to two over-arching principles. Firstly, it is essential to take a holistic approach. There are few measures that will act in isolation to successfully close the gaps. Barriers to entry, continuation and success at (and after) university are known to be influenced by a very complex interaction of factors so only a multi-faceted approach can succeed in addressing them. Secondly, in contrast to our approach to access activity which is closely targeted to who individuals are, we have deployed an inclusive approach to the design of most of our student retention, success and progression strategic measures. We are identifying and addressing the challenges students are experiencing, e.g. below expected academic performance, or poor academic engagement, or lack of work experience. These are identified for all students and intervention implemented. This is a strategy based on the individual and what the student actually needs rather than a deficit approach which assumes their needs based on demographic characteristics.<sup>18</sup> Given what we know about the

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/diversity/diversity-commitment.aspx>

<sup>17</sup> Membership includes Director of Global Recruitment and Admissions, Deans for Teaching and Learning, Director of Student Services, Director of Careers and Employability, Director of Student Success & Engagement, Head of Student Financial Support and Students' Union.

<sup>18</sup> Exceptions to this include: eligibility for financial support packages and specific disability support, e.g. the Early Start Programme

challenges experienced by under-represented student, and taking a pro-active approach this will mean that that under-represented students will be supported to succeed.

Therefore we do not for example plan to introduce different intervention for different ethnicity groups. We are, however, open to identifying that different ethnicity groups may experience different challenges. This will be identified in evaluation and monitoring activity and which will be undertaken by disaggregated ethnicity groups where the data is sufficiently robust. Any such findings will inform future development of inclusive approaches or indeed cause us to identify areas where inclusive interventions are not actually the most effective.

### **Objective 1: Reach more disadvantaged people through programmes of activity that support a successful application to UoR courses**

Our evidence to date shows that our outreach programmes are successfully engaging with our target groups, and that these students do progress to Higher Education, indicating the activity is successfully supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing HE (see sections below). Capacity on our intensive schemes, and breadth of subject offering currently limits the numbers who can benefit from them, and so we will be significantly expanding this work to achieve the ambitious targets we have set to impact the overall demographic profile of our entrants. Our strategy is to continue with successful programmes, with regular review to ensure participants meet our target profile, and to expand our programmes (in particular Key stage 5 activity) to reach more of our target students. We will continue to work across the year groups to build and maintain a pipeline.

A Theory of Change evaluation framework is now embedded within all the access programmes set out below. At the outset, within each series of interventions measurable competencies and learning outcomes are identified, with each activity designed to support this development. Throughout the programme and at key milestones, these outcomes are assessed and reviewed, enabling us to track impact (particularly useful with younger years, where resulting entry to HE can take many years to measure) and review and develop our activities accordingly.

**Key stage 5 – Reading Scholars.** We will continue to expand the numbers on our Reading Scholars programme<sup>19</sup>. In 2018/9, 300 individually selected Year 12 students participated from across the region and beyond; 100% met at least one of our access and participation targeting criteria, and over 65% meet 2 or more. 60% of participants came from POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 and/or IMD Q1 or Q2. 45% of the cohort were ABMO ethnicities in line with previous objectives and overall aims to diversifying our student intake. We will redress this balance in 2019 onwards, to ensure that we also target access to white students from low progression and disadvantaged areas.

Progression to HE is greater for students having accessed this programme than their peers with 70% progressing to HE (including UoR, Russell Group and Oxbridge universities)<sup>20</sup>. In the most recent cohort, our own survey revealed that 90% of respondents had applied to university. The UoR received the most applications, directly supporting the number of students within our applicant pool from disadvantaged backgrounds. Currently we offer this programme across ten subject strands; to ensure this programme supports access to the full range courses and therefore has the potential to impact our intake across the University, directly supporting our targets, we will continue to grow the number of participants to 400 students by 2020/1 and expand the number of academic subject streams involved. We aim that the Scholar's scheme will provide an access route to all our subject areas by 2022/3.

**Key stage 4 – Young Reading Scholars.** Attainment at KS4 is recognised as strongly correlated with continued success in education, progression to University and sustained employment<sup>21</sup>. We will expand our year 10 programme in order to raise attainment and aspiration at key stage 4; to ensure informed choices at GCSE to enable progression to desired careers and routes of study in the future; and to ensure participants are able in the future to make an informed and successful HE application. This activity supports our longer-term targets in ensuring a more diverse and representative student body as well as a pipeline through to our Year 12 Scholars Programme. We will develop our information, advice and guidance for teachers and parents of Scholars participants to ensure that students receive high-quality support at school and at home, outside of their direct engagement with the programme. A further development over the five years of this plan will be to offer further in-school activity to schools with high proportions of students accessing both

<sup>19</sup> Students on the programme receive information, advice and guidance; a range of HE experiences; mentoring from a current undergraduate; and the opportunity to engage meaningfully with academic departments over the course of a year

<sup>20</sup> Of the 135 students in the 2014/5 cohort of Reading Scholars, 70% progressed to HE according to HESA tracking. Of those that progressed, 10% were studying at the UoR and 62% were studying at a Russell Group institution, including 3 students studying at Oxford or Cambridge.

<sup>21</sup> 95% of disadvantaged pupils who achieved A\*-C grades in English and maths GCSEs went on to stay in education, employment or training for two terms, 2 percentage points less than other pupils who had achieved this (98%). However, only 41% of disadvantaged pupils achieved these grades compared to almost 68% of all other pupils. (DfE Destinations of key stage 4 and key stage 5 students, England, 2016/17)

the Key Stage 4 and Key stage 5 Scholars programme – creating a halo effect and opportunities for Scholars peers and similarly disadvantaged students to benefit from additional support and activity and to increase their awareness of opportunities at Reading.

**Key stage 2, 3, 4 and 5 - The Brilliant Club.** In April 2018 we began working with the Brilliant Club to expand the number of students the UoR works with intensively. The Brilliant Club programme aims to increase participants' aspirations and attainment to facilitate progress to highly-selective universities through a combination of university visits and PhD researcher-led seminar courses. Research undertaken with UCAS has shown that Year 12 students who complete the programme are much more likely to progress to a highly-selective university than a control group of students from a similar background (56% compared to 30%). As we build participation we will work with the Brilliant Club in coming years to track the rate of progression to the UoR for participants who attend a trip to the UoR and/or are taught by a UoR PhD tutor to assess the impact that each aspect of the programme has in isolation and in combination. We will also review the activity in line with our regional work ( see Objective 3) and a further development over the five years of this plan will be to work with the Brilliant Club to engage schools and students in our identified 'satellite' regions. Specific targets in terms of numbers accessing our activity with the Brilliant Club, and attainment have been set for 20/21. (235 pupils working with UoR PhD students, 60% of these with attainment data that make at least 5% progress between baseline and final assignment). As a new partnership, we will monitor progress and expect to be able to set longer term targets for this activity from 2021 onwards.

**Key stage 2 and 3 - Younger Years.** Research shows that the disadvantages that cause disparities in progression to HE for some groups are entrenched at an early age; it is therefore critical that we start working with under-represented groups as early as possible. Building on the activity delivered in recent years, we will continue to extend our younger years activity intended to familiarise young people with HE at an earlier age than the post-16 outreach. Alongside a general increased understanding of HE, this programme enables participants to experience subjects beyond the school curriculum, equipping students with the tools to research and access the most appropriate courses for their interests and talents. Activities are offered at a school level, and schools are targeted based on proportion of their school population meeting the above under-representation criteria. Activity is also offered to support specific cohorts within schools, such as students in receipt of Pupil Premium funds, to more intensively address the needs of disadvantaged students. The programme of activity is continually reviewed and developed, informed by feedback from teaching staff, and outputs of the evaluation framework. Participating students are tracked into HEAT, enabling evaluation of the success in terms of attainment of cohorts at key decision points and milestones ( e.g GCSE results). Targets for numbers (and key eligibility criteria) accessing our provision are set each academic year based on our overall targets, and priority schools reviewed to ensure they continue to reflect the demographic we are seeking to work with.

During the 2017/8 school year, approximately 2,000 pupils were reached from schools with high proportions of students from disadvantaged or under-represented groups in HE<sup>22</sup>. Over the lifetime of this plan, we will continue to review and expand our target and priority schools, both locally and also by identifying and including schools within our newly targeted geographical satellite regions. We will also seek to increase the number of schools engaging in our 'mapped' programme of sustained activity from this wider offering across KS3, to ensure cohorts within these target schools receive multiple interventions which build on the knowledge and skills acquired each year. We will also continue to develop our provision, and expand our offering (increasing our range of subject -based activity to support decision making at key points) and our supporting materials, (e.g. we have developed a 'younger years prospectus' tailored to provide University information found in a typical prospectus at a level suitable for a KS3 audience). By working with students from these groups from an early age, we expect to embed an expectation and understanding of HE as a viable option. leading to additional routes and support programmes for these students as they reach their University decision points, and supporting them to ensure they have all the tools and skills to successfully apply.

**Healthreach.** Students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience additional barriers to accessing Health related courses and professions beyond academic attainment and awareness. This is a new outreach programme working with primary and secondary schools to widen participation into the health-related field, and to facilitate entry to UoR related courses from under-represented groups. This activity began in 2018/19 and ongoing development and review is in place to ensure the programme complements existing outreach activities in areas such as pharmacy, psychology, biomedical sciences and speech and language therapy as well as health and life science careers in general. Successful applications to these courses typically require evidence of work experience, often beyond the reach of students without the social networks to enable this opportunity. The Healthreach programme also offers work experience and clinical placement opportunities for young people who otherwise would not have access to them. Although available to target schools across Berkshire, a large proportion of this activity is targeted within the Whitley area of Reading, an area of great economic disadvantage and low progression to HE.

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<sup>22</sup> 28% from POLAR3 Q1 and Q2, 22% from NNSEC 4-7 Q1 and Q2, 23% with 3 or 4 indicators of deprivation (POLAR3, Indicators of multiple deprivation, Education, Skills and Training, Income deprivation affecting children index), 32% ABMO Pupils: 32%, 5% Care experienced pupils (73 pupils total) and disabled pupils: 5. % (70 pupils total).

## Objective 2: Further reduce perceived and real barriers to entry to UoR for applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds

We already undertake much work in this area but our aim for the future is to evolve a whole-journey approach to address barriers encountered from very early in the decision making process to after the application stage. Existing work addresses barriers including knowledge and understanding of university and subjects and role models to enhance attainment. Further work will address school level attainment, entry pathways, and finance. We will grow our capacity to tackle the issues both directly with prospective applicants but also with parents and teachers.

**Attainment raising in schools.** Many students from under-represented groups already have the aspiration to access HE, but do not always have support to develop the additional study skills required to achieve their full potential or make a successful application. We have developed a programme of study skills with targeted schools and colleges who currently perform below the national average to enable the academic success of more students from these schools and colleges. We will also develop and introduce (with the UoR Institute of Education) a study-skills training package for NQTs and other teaching staff to enable school staff to equip their students with the skills to succeed.

Over the next three years this work will be expanded to engage more schools, directly impacting on the ability of students to access HE and, in particular, University of Reading courses and supporting our overall access targets. We have developed a number of programme-level targets for the first 2 years relating to numbers accessing this activity and the impact on attainment levels of these. In 2019/20, our first full year, our aim is for 55% of students attending multiple study skills sessions to show an increase in academic capacities associated with attainment, for 2020/21 this is 60%.

**Progression routes.** This activity is key to increasing the numbers of students accessing our courses from non-traditional backgrounds. We will work with colleges and schools in our region, to identify and proactively promote progression opportunities to UoR degrees for those undertaking non A-level qualifications. We will build on our existing Associate College Network<sup>23</sup> and work with at least 10 key identified FE and sixth form colleges in the local and surrounding counties. We will map out current routes and work together to bridge gaps. The aim is to build visible and well understood pathways onto our degrees from colleges (and schools offering alternative qualifications) in our region, with in-person support to enable students to make a successful application. We will review progression from each college annually and if successful we will consider expanding this intensive work to other FE colleges, including those in our geographical satellite regions.

**Foundation Years.** We have introduced STEM foundation years for nine of our science based undergraduate degrees in 2017/8. The aim was to provide an alternative route into a UoR degree for applicants who did not have the required standard in a required subject. While we do not yet have any success or progression data from these courses, our entrant data for the 2018/9 intake show potential for the initiative to help redress some of our access gaps<sup>24</sup>. We therefore intend to expand our foundation year provision to ensure an alternative access route to as many subjects as possible, however, we are mindful that successful completion and progression from the foundation year onto a UoR degree are critical measures of success. We will undertake a review of success rates of the first two cohorts early in 2019/20 and monitor progression throughout the degrees. This will allow us to identify and implement improvements to ensure these programmes are fulfilling their access and participations objectives.

**Applicant Support.** As part of our holistic approach to access, it is important to us that the additional support and resource given pre-application continues once a student has applied to study with us. Applying to University is only the first or part of a number of barriers that students have to navigate through and it is applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds that are more likely to fail to overcome these barriers as they do not have access to the knowledge and experience at home or often at school. As such, we are putting a number of additional measures in place to support the transition from school or college to Higher Education, and give students the confidence and skills to do so successfully, with the aim on increasing the numbers of these students enrolling on course, and in turn improving retention and outcomes for these individuals. We will therefore appoint a dedicated role to introduce a tailored programme of engagement to support applicants to UoR from disadvantaged groups from the point of application. The aim will be to reduce concerns, provide guidance and advice regarding finances and other support and to equip them for HE study and transition. Engagement will include:

- 1) A calling campaign which provides offer-holders the opportunity to speak to a peer from their subjects, creating a sense of connectedness, as well as allowing applicants to ask questions they would only ask of other students.
- 2) Opportunities for students in receipt of contextualised offers to engage with an academic tutor prior to entry, creating a sense of connectedness and reducing the sense of distance between school/college and University.

<sup>23</sup> Members include: Basingstoke College of Technology, Berkshire College of Agriculture, Newbury College, Bracknell and Wokingham College, Reading College, Henley College, Sparsholt College and University Centre

<sup>24</sup> In 2018/9, UoR data shows that 81.55% of full-time first-degree entrants on foundation years meet at least one WP marker as distinct from 32.4% of entrants to first-degree level study; within the foundation year entrants 20.87% are from POLAR4 Q1&2; 39.32% are from IMD Q1&2; 61% are from non-white ethnicities; 14% are disabled.

- 3) These applicants will be invited to benefit from attainment raising activity and resources.
- 4) An online course, LiveSmart, will support students (and parents) as they prepare for the transition to living as a university student (be that away from home or not) and will address barriers about abilities to live independently, money and access to wider support services.

Crucially, it will also enable learners to engage with each other, and normalise the concerns they have, highlighting that they are not alone in their journey to HE and creating a sense of belonging and community prior to entry.

**Parent support.** Parents are key influencers in the lives of young people but can have limited experience of HE and a lack of confidence when attending HE events. To support them we are establishing an online parent course that will equip parents with information and tools to understand and research their options. It will guide parents through the research and apply phases and instil the confidence to support their children (or dependents) in their application journey as well as providing the opportunity to engage with other parents who may also have similar concerns. By creating an online course, parents can access the information at a time to suit them, and can increase their knowledge prior to attending any in-person events, reducing the pressure of not 'knowing' what to do or ask. This online course is expected to launch in January 2020. Although an 'open course', to ensure it is accessed by our target groups, we will promote the opportunity to parents of our Scholars students from January 2020, and share at in-school events such as parent evenings. Impact will be assessed through engagement with the course, completion, and a short post-event survey. The course will also signpost to other resources on the University of Reading website specifically developed for parents, and we will track engagement. We will continue to assess and develop methods to capture and evaluate the effectiveness through engagement with the platform provider (Futurelearn) as we re-run the course throughout 2020 and beyond.

Locally we will be continuing to expand and build on our 'Marvellous Mums' initiative<sup>25</sup>. It is an innovative project to empower one of the key influencers in the lives' of young people in the Whitley area of Reading. Research confirms the importance of an influential adult to supporting and inspiring young people, but work in the Whitley area revealed that although mothers are key influencers and have aspiration for their children they don't always have the knowledge or the confidence to inspire and motivate them to fulfil their potential. Research had also identified that the community wanted to drive some of the many initiatives in their area themselves so we have established a 'Marvellous Mums' group who identify for themselves what support they need in order to be able to inspire and motivate their children. The UoR facilitates the group. This work is currently small scale but as engagement grows it has the potential to be transformational for our outreach work in the area.

**Financial Support Packages.** We recognise that finance is a barrier to entry for some student groups and we provide a range of financial packages<sup>26</sup> designed to help specific groups overcome this barrier. Eligible students entering in 2020/1 will receive financial awards under the following schemes:

- **Pre-entry Travel bursary<sup>27</sup>:** Covers the cost of travelling to on-campus events (e.g. visit days, taster days etc.) 30p per mile up to a maximum award of £300 for applicants from low participation neighbourhoods and care leavers.
- **Pre-application Bursary<sup>28</sup>:** Covers the costs of travelling to on-campus events of up to £500 for disabled applicants.
- **Care Leavers, Foyer students<sup>29</sup> and estranged students<sup>30</sup>:** As part of our ongoing commitment to care-leaver students and in recognition of the specific needs of these three groups of students, we will supplement the standard Reading Bursary Scheme provision by offering additional financial support of £1,000 in each year of study.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.tes.com/news/mums-word-bridging-disadvantage-gap>

<sup>26</sup> The Total amount we will spend of financial support is estimated at £3million, this includes the financial packages outlined here as well as those designed to enhance retention outlined under objective 4

<sup>27</sup> Pre-entry travel bursary is available to UK domiciled undergraduate applicants who have been invited to an offer holder's Visit Day or Interview by the department to which they have applied and who live in a POLAR4 quintile 1 and 2 area or have Care Leaver Status.

<sup>28</sup> Pre-application bursary is available to disabled applicants requiring a visit to the University prior to accepting an offer to ensure their support needs can be fully met.

<sup>29</sup> Foyer students are students who have come to the University from Foyer accommodation for homeless young people

<sup>30</sup> An estranged student will be under 25 years of age on the 1st August before commencing their studies at the University, and has experienced an irrevocable breakdown in their relationship with either of their biological parents and often their wider family, for a significant period of time (usually 12 months).

- **Refugee Bursaries and fee waivers<sup>31</sup>:** Eligible students registered on a range of courses (foundation year<sup>32</sup>, language courses and undergraduate courses) will receive a bursary and/or fee waiver relevant to their eligibility for funding from Student Finance.
- **Foundation Degree Fee Waivers:** Students entering our Foundation Degree in Children's Development and Learning or progressing onto our BA Children's Development and Learning programme<sup>33</sup> will receive a 50% fee waiver; this waiver applies to both years of the Foundation Degree<sup>34</sup>.

Students commencing their studies prior to 2020/1 will be eligible for financial support as outlined in the Access & Participation Plan (or equivalent) relevant to their year of entry.

### Objective 3: Achieve a student population that is more representative of society

The measures outlined under objectives one and two above provide an essential foundation for meeting this objective but as well as extending our engagement with target groups and reducing the real and perceived barriers, further measures are needed to ensure success in increasing the proportions of entrants from disadvantaged groups and increasing the proportion of white entrants from disadvantaged groups. These measures include:

**An integrated university-wide strategic approach.** Progress towards access targets will in future be monitored by the Recruitment and Admissions Steering Group chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Planning). This will ensure that decisions related to admissions policy, procedures and development work are informed by integrated consideration of progress against access targets.

**Geographical targeting/satellite operations.** Additional resource to extend our reach is a high priority for the University of Reading and considered a critical aspect of new activity in order improve the demographic profile of our intake. We expect to see a significant impact from 2020 entry and beyond as we increase our capacity and include new areas, extending our now established programmes of regionally based UoR specific outreach and recruitment activity to students from our target groups that are beyond our typical reach. In 2018/9, we appointed regionally based officers working intensively in South Wales and West Midlands<sup>35</sup>, to raise the profile of UoR among under-represented groups. We have delivered information and guidance and support across the application lifecycle for target schools, colleges and individuals, implementing a strategic plan of activity to raise awareness of options at the UoR. Our typical suite of information and guidance sessions has also been tailored to address specific barriers for the demographic groups in these regions<sup>36</sup>. Evaluation data indicates we are successfully reaching our target audience, with 54.2% from POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 and 70.3% from IMD Q1 or Q2. Impact on applications is not expected until 2020 entry, but we have already seen applications from some previously unengaged, but now target schools and colleges. We have also seen an increase in the number of Open Day bookings from students in these regions. In 2019/20 we will appoint a number of further roles to expand this activity in other regions. We will review annually and consider further expanding this approach if it proves effective.

**Contextual offer-making.** The Sutton Trust note that it is now well established that applicants to HE do not arrive on an equal footing and that the barriers faced by people from disadvantaged backgrounds can have a significant impact on their attainment level at school<sup>37</sup>. Having reviewed the evidence from the sector we have adopted a contextual offer-making approach. Applicants who meet the criteria (POLAR4 Q1 or Q2, IMD Q1 or Q2, declared disability or MEM flag from UCAS) will receive an offer that is 2 grades lower than the standard offer. Our intention is to make UoR a viable choice for applicants who may previously have felt they would not achieve our standard entry requirements. In our pilot year (2019 entry) we introduced the contextual offers late in the admissions cycle so would not expect to see a strong impact on the overall profile of entrants, however we have seen a decrease in declines from students in receipt of a contextual offer in comparison to their counterparts with standard offers<sup>38</sup>. We hope by the 2021 entry the greater accessibility created by the early promotion of and immediate issuing of contextual offers will have facilitated a shift in the profile of our entrants. Our specific aim is that contextualised offers will increase the number of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds, we will therefore monitor this at key points

<sup>31</sup> Refugee Bursaries and fee waivers are available to students who meet the University's entry requirements (including the legal status of the refugee and the prior academic attainment). Applications are assessed via personal statements detailing the barriers overcome and the applicant's potential to succeed. A selection committee is formed as a sub-committee of RASG to undertake the selection. This committee would be chaired by a Dean of Diversity & Inclusion, and with representatives from the Reading Refugee Centre, Student Financial Support, Student Support, International Study and Language Institute (ISLI), Admissions, and the academic Schools.

<sup>32</sup> One-year Integrated Foundation Year

<sup>33</sup> We are particularly keen to support these students because ca. 80% are mature students, ca. 95% are female (many with families) and many are on low incomes. When qualified they have a very strong impact on the local community.

<sup>34</sup> Note that recipients of these fee waivers are not eligible for other financial awards

<sup>35</sup> These areas and associated target schools were identified using data and methodology combining levels of under-representation and recruitment potential for Reading, factoring in progression to HE, attainment levels and metrics of POLAR, FSM and ABMO.

<sup>36</sup> Student Finance for Welsh students, and we have worked (with support from SFE) to develop resources to provide information for students concerned about potential conflict between religious beliefs and the taking out of loans.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/newsarchive/moving-the-dial-on-contextual-admissions/>

<sup>38</sup> Students were 7% less likely to reject UoR if in receipt of a contextualised offer.



throughout the application cycle each year as well as analyse the conversion rates for such applicants, this will allow us to assess the effectiveness of the scheme and provide the evidence base for other offer making considerations

**Tailored for individuals with specific constraints.** We recognise that some prospective students/applicants would benefit from individual, tailored advice, support and consideration that will address their particular concerns and needs, e.g. applicants who are care-experienced, refugee applicants and applicants whose only HE option is UoR for life circumstance reasons. Therefore we will work towards developing the IT and business processes systems in place that will identify and flag those applicants in a manner that will allow us to take an individualised approach to support throughout the application process from initial enquiry to arrival.

**National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP).** The Study Higher NCOP is key part of the UoR's local and regional strategy supporting access and our communities. The UoR is committed to delivering the aims, and related targets, of Study Higher in collaboration with its key partners: Buckinghamshire New University, Oxford Brookes University and the University of Oxford. The aim of the Study Higher NCOP is to increase application rates to HE from target schools by 2021. Study Higher is working towards this aim by delivering, to targeted geographical areas, a range of aspiration raising events and activities to young people as well as providing high quality, impartial advice and guidance about the variety of HE opportunities on offer. The target groups for the NCOPs align closely with our access target groups and we therefore expect the highly focussed work of the NCOP will, within the five years of this plan, assist in achieving our Q1 and Q1&Q2 access targets as well as increase the proportion of white entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds to UoR. We will also build on work within the partnership targeting care leavers, to further engage with these groups from the University of Reading specifically.

We expect that the combination of contextualised offer making, geographical targeting, the expansion of Foundation Years and the expansion of the Year 12 Scholars scheme to cover all subjects will be the key measures that act to close the access gaps

#### **Objective 4: Ensure that under-represented students who begin their studies at UoR remain on course and complete their studies**

Improving the retention of under-represented student groups is an institutional priority. Continuation rates are a key performance indicator and T&L leadership groups within Schools are expected to formally address these rates, reporting progress at School Boards of Teaching and Learning and Student Experience, in annual programme reviews (AQAR) and through the annual School Planning and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching process. Bespoke School and programme level enhancements are further supported by University-wide initiatives and centralised support. University initiatives aimed at improving student retention and achievement are described below.

We believe that in order to tackle the continuation gap we need to address a range of factors concerning the broad experience of being a student. Specific areas that we will prioritise are:

- financial constraints
- understanding of the HE setting and preparedness for academic study
- access to academic and welfare support and sense of belonging

Over the five-year period we will aim to provide support that covers all of these dimensions and we will build our capacity and tools to reach out to students pro-actively.

**Financial Support Packages.** Finance is a major concern for students and particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is often a contributory element of the decision to withdraw from University. The average household income for UoR Home/EU undergraduate students has declined from £32,267.33 in 2015/6 to £30,208.68 in 2017/8<sup>39</sup>. We regularly consult with and listen to students on what is most useful to them while at University and therefore the default option for on-course financial support is a cash bursary that students can exercise choice over how to use. Students will be able to opt for a fee waiver should they wish. Evaluation of our financial support (using the Financial Support Toolkit) provides strong evidence of a positive impact on retention and success and supports our strategy to invest access and participation funds in this area.

We will deploy an estimated total of £3 million in financial support for UoR students. The majority of which is dispersed through the schemes listed below that specifically help students stay on course and achieve their goal and ambitions.

Eligible students entering in 2020/1 will receive financial awards under the following schemes:

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<sup>39</sup> Data from the Student Loans Company

- **Reading Bursary Scheme (RBS):** All eligible students<sup>40</sup> from households with annual incomes of less than £27k will receive a cash award of £1,100<sup>41</sup> in each year of undergraduate study. All eligible students will automatically receive this award as long as consent has been given to share household income with the University.
- **Postgraduate ITT students:** Eligible students from households with annual incomes of less than £27k will receive an award worth £550.
- **Work and Study Placement Bursaries:** Covers expenses such as travel, accommodation and/or childcare. Students from households with annual incomes of less than £45k may apply to receive a bursary of between £200 and £1,000 dependant on the cost of undertaking the placement.
- **University Student Support Fund:** Any student in financial hardship may apply to the University Student Support Funds.
- **Diagnostic Testing:** We will provide diagnostic tests for students from households with annual incomes of less than £27k who have been recommended by the Disability Advisory Service for Dyslexia or Asperger's diagnostic testing to confirm disability.
- **Part-time students:** Part-time students will be eligible for the above financial support on a pro-rata basis in each year of study.
- **Year Abroad or year-in-industry/placement students:** despite not paying the full tuition fee, students on a year abroad or a year-long placement will continue to receive the full amount of any bursary that they are otherwise eligible for.

**Financial Education and Training.** Through partnering with Blackbullion we will be pro-active in engaging our applicants and students in financial awareness training in order to support them to be more financially prepared to come to University in areas such as budgeting and debt management. We will launch this new platform in 2019/20 and expect to build participation and embed the resources. We anticipate an initial evaluation and review in 2020/1 leading to improvements and a more substantial evaluation in 2021/2.

**Supporting student transitions to Higher Education.** We have supplemented our long-standing activities designed to support the transition of students to University such as our Welcome week activities with schemes that focus on the challenge of transition for students from under-represented groups. In particular in recent years we have focussed on pre-arrival measures to begin that process earlier e.g. we introduced the Student Transitions at Reading (STaR) mentoring scheme, and our pre-arrival online course, StudySmart both of which are proving successful in boosting confidence and developing a sense of belonging. By 2020/1 we will also have introduced an Early Start Programme providing disabled students with the opportunity to arrive at University a few days early, if they feel they would benefit. It will allow them extra time to seek out any additional support they may need, find their way around in a less crowded campus and to generally be introduced to the university in a calmer and more tailored fashion. We hope it will also allow them to engage fully with Welcome Week activities in order to integrate more easily. This will improve the likelihood that they will overcome any challenges that might lead to withdrawal from their studies.

**Individualised Academic and Welfare Support.** Professional and accessible support covering both the academic and personal spheres are essential for improving continuation rates.

**Academic 1:1 support.** The availability of 1:1 academic contact is essential for both a general sense of belonging within the subject discipline but also to access support within the academic context. Academic tutors provide essential connectedness and reassurance particularly for students who may not feel naturally at home in the University or subject context. The new Academic Tutor role was created in 2018/9 following an overhaul of our traditional personal tutoring model and we are beginning to assess the effectiveness of this new model. We expect the evaluation over this period to inform the bedding in and further development in the early part of the five-year period.

**Student Welfare Team.** We recognise the impact that personal and welfare issues can have on student retention and in response to student and staff feedback we have introduced a professional Student Welfare Team. In 2018/9, they have supported more than 900 students with wide ranging concerns. They work closely with the Counselling, Mental Health, Disability, Student Finance, and Accommodation teams. The support provided is particularly important for students who do not have a strong network of family support (care leavers, estranged students, LGBTQ+, refugees) or experience of the pressures at University (e.g. first generation HE attenders). We will be capturing the engagement of students from our target groups with our Welfare Team and will be identifying whether there are patterns in the issues presented in order to inform pre-emptive interventions.

**Big White Wall.** We recognise that it is not always possible or desirable for some students to seek out face-to-face support when they are struggling to cope, e.g. male students are known to be less likely to register with support services. We therefore provide access to the on-line 24x7 mental health resource, Big White

<sup>40</sup> Eligible students are UG students including those with a One-year integrated Foundation Year who are eligible for funding through the Student Finance Authorities of England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the EU. This is guaranteed for all students who are eligible and not subject to a limit on the number of awards. Degree Apprenticeship students are not eligible for Reading Bursaries.

<sup>41</sup> Increased from £1000 to £1100 for 2018/9 entrants onwards and will be reviewed annually to reflect inflationary increases in the future.

Wall (BWW), where students can find a (moderated) forum to share how they are feeling and seek advice and guidance. This resource is important for students who do not have strong supportive networks (as listed above) or for those who do not spend as much time on campus (commuters, mature students, part-time students etc.). Many of these criteria overlap with disadvantage. We are in the early stages of adopting BWW but will be undertaking an evaluation during 2020/21 to inform our future strategy.

**Life Tools in Schools.** The University's established Life Skills programme has been well received by students wishing to find ways to better cope with the academic and personal demands of their University life. We are seeking to increase the reach of this successful programme to benefit more students by embedding the sessions in the curricula. This will ensure that students who may not be able to engage with the extra-curricular Life Tools programme (e.g. mature students who spend little time on campus) or do not have the social/cultural capital to recognise its importance have equality of opportunity to benefit. Annual review and assessment of impact will take place against agreed criteria in order to establish the effectiveness of this approach. Should it have significant preventative impact we will explore expansion opportunities.

**Mature student community building.** We know that mature students encounter a wide range of challenges while at University and their continuation rates tend to be lower than for younger students due to issues beyond their studies in their personal and professional lives. Our enhanced individualised welfare and academic support will benefit mature students, but we also know that mature students can be quite isolated at university meaning they lack peer support which we know to be very effective for retention and success. We will therefore (in 2019/20) work to identify how best we can facilitate the development of a strong sense of community amongst mature students with the aim of implementing some measures in 2020/21.

**Attendance management.** Implementation of a university-wide attendance management system is underway and should be available in central teaching facilities from 2021/2. It will provide the capacity and triggers to pro-actively reach out to students on an individual basis. Successful pilots have shown that attendance management is an effective tool to identify students who are not engaging with their studies and require additional support. Anecdotally we know that those students are disproportionately from under-represented groups. We anticipate that attendance management will successfully identify students from our target groups who may not have the social and culture capital to pro-actively seek out that support. Encouraging students to access available support sooner will increase continuation. This is a very large project which will be subject to iterative review and assessment as it is rolled out through its various phases. A key criteria for ultimate success will be the observable impact on continuation rates of under-represented groups.

We expect that our new model of individualised academic and welfare support combined with attendance management and the embedding of resilience building tools within the academic co-curriculum will be the key factors in closing the gaps in continuation.

### **Objective 5: Close unexplained degree outcomes gaps that correlate with ethnicity, disability and disadvantaged backgrounds**

We recognise that academic attainment is a critical outcome of time spent at University, and it is therefore essential that we enhance equality of opportunity by closing degree outcomes gaps. We acknowledge the multi-faceted approach that is necessary to tackle the phenomenon of degree outcome gaps. Our strategy has four key strands:

- 1) an institution-wide co-ordinated approach
- 2) continued progress on inclusive curriculum, pedagogy and assessment
- 3) provision of effective academic support that is accessible to students, and
- 4) development of the means to trigger tailored/individualised support and follow-up.

We are implementing these through the following:

**An institution-wide co-ordinated approach** will be implemented via three main mechanisms:

- **A Key Performance Indicator.** The UoR will from 2020/21, have a key performance indicator on closing the unexplained gaps between the degree outcomes of white students and ABMO students in the University's top level KPIs. Schools will be expected to explicitly address this KPI in their annual reflection on performance prior to formulating T&L plans. This is our largest statistically significant gap and progress on this gap will have knock-on positive impacts on our other target groups.
- **An integrated strategic approach.** Access and participation targets in relation to degree outcomes will be integrated into School level strategic planning<sup>42</sup> carrying equal weight to considerations of TEF and NSS outcomes and planning.
- **An Institution-wide Degree Outcomes Task Force.** In order to focus progress on closing degree outcomes gaps we will form a University-wide Task Force lead by a new role with strategic leadership for this area. It will include a wide range of stakeholders to ensure a co-ordinated approach and a unified direction of travel across the University.

**Inclusivity in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment** will be enhanced through activity at a number of levels.

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<sup>42</sup> Differential continuation rates and progression outcomes are already included via consideration of TEF data

**Policy.** Our inclusive T&L policy requires all teaching staff to comply with an explicit set of expectations which ensures a baseline level of accessibility for students with disabilities as standard. This has been recently introduced and its effectiveness will be assessed as part of the work of the above Task Force before 2020/1.

**Curriculum Review.** Regular curriculum review is undertaken against the UoR Curriculum Framework where one of the key dimensions is D&I. Academic teams are required to ensure that curricula, pedagogy and assessments are accessible and inclusive of all students. We know that diversifying the curriculum is a particularly important action in relation to reducing the degree outcomes gap between white and ABMO ethnicities. The first phase of the curriculum framework review will be completed by the end of 2018/9. By 2020/1 we will have planned what the next phase of curriculum review should look like and in particular, whether more focus needs to be placed on D&I.

**Understanding the lived experience of students.** In order to inform practice we will continue to carry out participatory research to understand the real and detailed challenges faced by our target groups. Our current focus is on ABMO students but in 2020/1 we will decide whether to extend a similar approach to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with disabilities.

#### **Providing staff and students with the tools to be inclusive**

- **Lecture Capture.** By 2022 teaching rooms will be equipped with lecture capture facilities as standard. We anticipate that, in particular, students with disabilities will find the recording of lectures particularly of benefit. It will also benefit mature students who often have significant time constraints and commuter students who are disproportionately likely to be mature and/or of ABMO ethnicity and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds and who have recognised challenges in attending classes at particular times of the day. As with all large projects there will be an iterative review and assessment process as it is rolled out through its various phases. A key criteria for ultimate success will be the usage by students from under-represented backgrounds and correlation with degree outcomes for these groups
- **Blackboard Ally.** In support of our inclusive T&L Policy and following successful piloting of Blackboard Ally we will be rolling this out in 2019/0. Students will have access to teaching and learning materials in alternative formats that suit a variety of learning styles or needs and staff can better assess the accessibility of their teaching materials. This will benefit students with disabilities but also those who commute, who are disproportionately likely to be mature and/or of ABMO ethnicity and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds, will be able to exploit these resources, e.g. being able to listen to audio versions of materials while travelling.
- **Assistive tools for students with disabilities.** Recognising that delays in assessment of needs and recommendations for reasonable adjustments can impact the academic achievement of students with disabilities, we are investing in tools to support disabled students waiting for disability recommendations; for example, we are investing in 100 licences for Sonocent, an audio note-taking tool. Sonocent will particularly benefit students with cognitive and learning impairments as well as many of the students with multiple impairments as this also involves cognitive and learning difficulties.

**Academic Support.** High quality and accessible academic support is essential to reduce and close the degree outcomes gaps.

**Academic Tutoring System.** As noted above our new Academic Tutoring System focusses the role of the Academic Tutor on academic development and success. This narrower focus will ensure a higher quality tutoring experience and greater consistency which will most benefit students who have yet to develop the particular academic skills needed, e.g. students who have entered university with BTEC qualifications, or with lower grades (possibly through contextualised offers) or students on Foundation Years or mature learners returning to education after a substantial gap. In many cases, these students will overlap substantially with our target groups for closing the degree outcomes gap. The evaluation plans are outlined above.

**Peer-assisted learning.** Peer-assisted learning (PAL) provides peer academic support. It provides different perspectives to learning, helps students to more fully understand the expectations of HE learning, deepens learning and helps develop independent learning skills. Our analysis and evaluation demonstrates that engagement with the University's PAL scheme benefits disadvantaged students and students who identify as ABMO ethnicities. We are aiming to increase engagement of these target groups through the further expansion of PAL which will increase student achievement and narrow the unexplained degree outcomes gaps. PAL is subject to annual monitoring and evaluation reviewing not only engagement but also impact on grades achieved.

**Tailored/individualised Support and follow-up.** We are introducing two new strategic mechanisms that we anticipate will transform our ability to tailor meaningful support to the needs of individuals over the five-year period of this plan. Each of these are extremely large projects that require substantial investment to bring to life. However, they will provide the tools and the data to drive one-to-one intervention that we believe is required to make the step change needed to close degree outcomes gaps.

- **Student Progress Dashboard.** The dashboard, to be launched in 2019/20, will provide students and their academic tutors with an up-to-date visual presentation of assessment results from all of their modules in one place, along with a running average. It will provide facilities for goal setting and reflection that will provide a rich basis for Academic Tutors to discuss with students their performance to inform development action for upcoming work. The dashboard is designed to encourage students to pro-actively consider their progress and what they need to do to improve. It will equip Academic Tutors with the contextual information to guide and advise students. Together these two factors will have a positive impact on the academic attainment of individuals that will in turn impact on the demographic groups with lower degree outcome levels.

We are conscious that different student groups (ABMO ethnicities, mature students, female/male students etc.) may engage with the dashboard differently so key criteria for success will be the extent to which it is being used by students from specific under-represented groups as well as the extent to which it becomes embedded in normal practice for both staff and all students. Initial evaluation will be carried out in 2020 which will inform the future development of the dashboard to possibly include other engagement data and other functionality.

- **Attendance management.** Attendance management will be introduced in central teaching facilities from 2021/2 and will be used as a tool to identify students who find themselves unable to engage fully with their studies. We anticipate that attendance management will successfully identify under-represented students from our target groups who require additional support but who do not feel comfortable seeking out that support. Pilots in some of our Schools show that where attendance management is in place attendance generally improves particularly amongst ABMO ethnicities and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It has also helped students access other information and support. As noted above the project will undertake iterative review and evaluation as it is rolled out through its various phases. A key criteria for ultimate success will be the observable impact on degree attainment rates of under-represented groups.

We expect that the introduction of a KPI on closing the degree outcomes gap between white and ABMO students combined with our new individualised academic and welfare support model and the provision of tools that will facilitate individualised follow-up will be the key strategic measures that will make the biggest impact on closing the degree outcomes gaps for the three target groups.

## **Objective 6: Close the unexplained gaps in progression that correlate with disadvantaged backgrounds**

We are proud of the strong, sustained positive employment outcomes that our students achieve, particularly given that a large proportion of them study subjects where the route to employment is not obvious or direct. Over 60% of our home undergraduate population come from demographic groups that nationally have lower rates of progression into graduate employment. These factors have focused our attention on positive outcomes for students from all backgrounds. We have continuously trialled and evolved our employability strategies and approaches to student development and have defined four 'what works' principles that are now core to our employability strategy:

1. employability should be embedded in the academic curriculum
2. exposure to a range of employment sectors is essential
3. work experience is a powerful enabler for students, and
4. employability support should be personalised and tailored to need.

Over the next five years, we will use these principles to shape an evolving provision.

The activities listed below sit on top of an extensive programme of: career learning in curriculum; opportunities to meet employers on campus and; workshop, 1:1 and online advice information and guidance all of which together expose students to a wide range of development opportunities, broadens horizons and raise aspirations particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are less likely to have extensive personal networks working in graduate or professional/managerial contexts. Specific initiatives below also support those students who are managing challenges such as disabilities or caring responsibilities.

**Work Experience Framework.** The value of work experience is well evidenced, and we have traditionally emphasised in-curriculum placements (available in all UoR undergraduate degrees). Although this has increased the uptake by 10% between 2015/6 and 2017/8 we now recognise that students from under-represented backgrounds experience more barriers in taking up in-curriculum placements and understand that we need a broader work experience strategy that promotes a wide range of different forms of work experience to suit the different needs and circumstances of students. In 2020/1 we will launch a work experience framework that identifies different forms of work experience (beyond in-curriculum placements) and provides guidance how to make the most of them. This will particularly benefit students in our target groups who face barriers to taking up in-curriculum placements. In 2022/3 we will review the impact that this shift in strategy has had and a key success indicator will be the impact on under-represented students.

**Reading Internship Scheme.** We will continue to expand the paid internships we facilitate with organisations across Reading, the South East and London. The level of pay for these internships will allow students to take a temporary break from other part-time jobs such as working in retail or hospitality. This will particularly

benefit students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In order to expand this scheme we are currently exploring how the model could be diversified to attract a wider range of employers and suit the needs and circumstances of different students. By 2020/21 we will have implemented changes that we aim to facilitate a 50% expansion of the scheme in the five year period of this plan. The Scheme is monitored and evaluated annually.

**Thrive Career Mentoring.** Over the next five years we will seek to engage even more students, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds in career mentoring (currently almost 500 matched mentor pairs). Mentoring is a form of development that we know is particularly attractive to female students and will therefore help to address the gaps noted for female students from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is strong evidence of impact and although the scheme is open at all students, those from under-represented groups made up 66% of participants (in comparison to 61% of the cohorts that Thrive was available to<sup>43</sup>). Impact reported including improved clarity of career direction, confidence in securing graduate level employment and sector/job knowledge, as well as providing role models that gave them a real-world view of their chosen career, among other benefits. Impact is assessed against agreed criteria annually. Through sharing successes and benefits of the scheme as well as targeting promotion we aim to expand the scheme by 50% over the five years of this plan, maintaining the high proportion of students from under-represented backgrounds

**Supporting students who manage a disability or health condition.** In 2018/9 we introduced specific provision focussed on this group. Initial take-up of this provision has been low but we are reflecting on how to better reach this target group with a refreshed approach in 2019/20.

**Supporting students to participate in extracurricular career training and activities.** Students from our target groups can face barriers to accessing extracurricular support for a number of reasons, e.g. due to disability or caring responsibilities or needing to spend a lot of their spare time in paid employment. We are therefore launching a new dedicated online course (Career Smart) to run over July and August. The course is aimed at students about to start their final year at University and aims to make students "application ready" by autumn and levelling the playing field. This will be of particular benefit to students who cannot add to their core employability skill set over summer due to other constraints. Initial evaluation will take place early in 2019/20 and will inform the future direction of this new initiative. A key criteria will be the participation of students from disadvantages backgrounds.

**Career coaching programme for finalists.** In 2018/9 we introduced a pilot programme for finalists addressing the barriers and challenges experienced by students from under-represented groups. Part of this programme is pro-active reaching out to students who report they have not secured employed by the time they leave the university. Take up has been strong in this initial year and we will build on it further for 2019/20, with a view to evaluating impact against Graduate Outcomes data when it is available for this cohort in 2020/1. We will place particular focus on engagement of and impact on students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Transition to work.** We have identified that students with disabilities are negatively affected by the sudden removal of the complex support structures the University provides during their time with us. Equally, our female students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to take up careers support whilst at University. We will be creating a pro-active post-university careers support programme that positively engages these students and helps them manage their transition away from university and into graduate level employment.

We expect that the introduction of the work experience framework in combination with the career coaching for finalist programme and the Career Smart online course will be the key strategic measures that will make the biggest impact on closing the progression gap for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### 3.3 Student consultation

Reading University Students' Union has been involved in the creation of all of our Access Agreements since 2012/3 and in the overall formulation of strategy and policy on access and participation. Both the RUSU Diversity and Education Officers were full members of the writing group who authored this 2020/21 APP. They were involved in all discussions relating to the assessment of performance, the setting of strategic aims, objectives and targets, as well as the strategic measures identified in this plan.

The APC membership includes one of the sabbatical officers ensuring that students are involved in monitoring progress towards targets in the plan. Student representatives also sit on other related T&L, D&I and employability boards where they monitor and challenge access and participation progress, voicing their concerns, sharing the student perspective and informing the evolution of practice.

Students contribute to the planning of access and participation work through representation on the University's APC which plans the overall access and participation strategy and considers the prioritisation of

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<sup>43</sup> The proportion of participant from POLAR Q1 and Q2 was 4 percentage points higher than from the cohort population as a whole demonstrating effective engagement from this target group.

spend across the lifecycle stages and activities within each area. A broader representation of students also contributes through a specific annual consultation to which the 400 strong community of course representatives are invited. Barriers and priorities are discussed and views sought. In the most recent consultation to inform this 2020/21 APP students were supportive of the UoR approach, the balance of spend across the lifecycles stages and the strategic aims and objectives set. For major strategic projects relating to access and participation student representatives sit on project boards and steering groups and specific student consultation is carried out as appropriate to the project.

Students are also an integral part of the evaluation and monitoring of access and participation activity. Much evaluation activity has feedback from students as its central core. Additionally, the annual evaluation report is presented to the APC and student representatives are in a position to scrutinise and challenge the effectiveness of measures and therefore of access and participation spend.

Planning is underway to develop a representative student consultative panel at UoR to ensure there is a means to consult with a wide range of students from different (often under-represented) groups on a wide range of student experience matters including access and participation.

### **3.4 Evaluation strategy**

The results of undertaking the OfS self-assessment of evaluation at UoR confirms that our recent and current work to develop a more strategic approach to evaluation has been moving us in the right direction.

Our process for agreeing new access and participation activities requires demonstration of an evidence-based approach. The access and participation objectives must be articulated as should the theory of change being applied. A multi-disciplinary team of professionals assess proposals and judge the likelihood of each achieving the cited outcomes. Proposals must also specifically set out at the planning stage how the effectiveness of the activity will be assessed.

We follow an annual cycle of evaluation with structured reporting to the APC. Access and participation objectives are identified for each activity, the methods of evaluation described, the findings presented and an indication of how the findings will be taken account of in future plans for the activity. Reports are reviewed, and feedback provided, particularly concerning the development of more effective and focussed evaluation methodologies. Judgements on the effectiveness of the activities inform decisions on whether activity should continue.

We place a particular focus on the evaluation of our targeted outreach programmes. A theory of change (underpinned by the praxis-based NERUPI framework.<sup>44</sup>) exists for each programme, detailing the changes we anticipate in our participants' attitudes and competencies, and the impact we expect on university progression. The theory of change forms the basis of the evaluation strategy: the specified attitudes and competencies are measured at the beginning and end of the programme, as well as before and after each intervention within the programme, and a final time approximately six months after the programme ends. This allows us to monitor the extent to which each programme equips participants with the knowledge, disposition and skills required to progress to HE.

Simultaneously, we use our admissions systems and the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) to track each of our outreach participant's progression or non-progression to the UoR and to HE more widely. Together with the monitoring data, this allows us to evaluate the impact of our outreach activity based on the extent to which the feedback from participants and their progression to HE aligns with the theory of change. These data are reported and fed back into the development process to inform refinements to the theory of change for the next iteration of the programme.

For success and progression activity, we employ an institution-wide evaluation framework to ensure a coherent institutional approach to evaluation. Use of the framework aims to ensure a strong evidence base from which to develop the effectiveness of our practice across all areas. The framework is based on Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation as this provides a flexible but consistent approach that we believe can be tailored to all activity. It will be supported by a toolkit that will guide staff from all parts of the University in how to undertake appropriate, robust, but proportionate evaluation.

A culture of evaluation and evidence-based approaches is in the early stages of development at UoR. Over the five-year period of this plan the evaluation framework and its associated toolkit will be embedded and we will build expertise and greater capacity to ensure that the University is reflecting, learning and developing.

### **3.5 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan**

The APC is the body responsible for the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the APP. The APC assesses progress against targets and milestones and monitors the evolving action plan, by soliciting regular reports on the progress of activity. The APC reports to the University Board for Teaching and Learning and the University Executive Board. The University Council receives and considers annual

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<sup>44</sup> Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions: <http://www.nerupi.co.uk/>

accounts of access and participation progress. A key aspect of monitoring and evaluation is having a detailed understanding of the relevant statistics which is supported through a dedicated Planning Officer with responsibility for WP data and monitoring, who has developed a standard dataset for assessing and monitoring progress against the access and participation targets and Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) benchmarks. This includes analysis of our performance in relation to national and regional trends using the HEIDI datasets and now the OfS Access and Participation dataset. In addition, our Access and Recruitment Officers are responsible for ensuring that we fully use and contribute to the HEAT service to monitor the progression rates of our outreach participants into HE Institutions.

#### **4. Provision of information to students**

The UoR provides appropriate and timely information, advice and guidance to prospective applicants, prospective students, teachers and parents, as well as to key organisations such as the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), HESA for the Unistats data return and the Student Loans Company (SLC).

We will provide information on fees, loans, fee waivers, financial support, and pre-entry bursaries, along with eligibility criteria using mechanisms such as websites, prospectuses, mailing lists, etc. and will also work hard to build professional relationships with teachers to ensure that they are able to readily provide local students with relevant information.

Our APP will be published in an accessible form on the UoR website.



# Access and participation plan

## Fee information 2020-21

Provider name: The University of Reading

Provider UKPRN: 10007802

### Summary of 2020-21 entrant course fees

\*course type not listed

#### Inflationary statement:

We do not intend to raise fees annually

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

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£9,250
First degree	BA Accounting and Business	£7,400
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	Early Years	£7,000
Postgraduate ITT	PGCE	£9,250
Postgraduate ITT	Schools Direct	£7,700
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year		£1,385
Erasmus and overseas study years		£1,385
Other	*	*

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

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	Basingstoke College of Technology 10000560	£9,250
Foundation degree	Berkshire College of Agriculture, the (BCA) 10000654	£9,250
Foundation degree	Bracknell and Wokingham College 10000833	£9,250
Foundation degree	Newbury College 10004596	£9,250
Foundation degree	The Windsor Forest Colleges Group 10002107	£9,250
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

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

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£6,935
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

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

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

# Targets and investment plan

## 2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: The University of Reading

Provider UKPRN: 10007802

### Investment summary

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

Note about the data:

The investment forecasts below in access, financial support and research and evaluation does not represent not the total amount spent by providers in these areas. It is the additional amount that providers have committed following the introduction of variable fees in 2006-07. The OFS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

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

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>Total access activity investment (£)</b>	£2,528,538.23	£2,621,223.47	£2,767,283.62	£2,816,669.39	£2,867,783.66
Access (pre-16)	£739,509.14	£767,497.48	£812,847.69	£826,338.42	£840,301.33
Access (post-16)	£1,768,479.09	£1,833,175.99	£1,933,885.93	£1,969,780.97	£2,006,932.33
Access (adults and the community)	£18,000.00	£18,000.00	£18,000.00	£18,000.00	£18,000.00
Access (other)	£2,550.00	£2,550.00	£2,550.00	£2,550.00	£2,550.00
<b>Financial support (£)</b>	£3,039,354.00	£3,203,436.00	£3,296,928.00	£3,344,304.00	£3,392,184.00
<b>Research and evaluation (£)</b>	£83,475.39	£67,210.02	£69,194.22	£61,729.37	£63,854.90

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>Higher fee income (£HFI)</b>	£29,400,930.00	£29,661,165.00	£30,792,350.00	£31,371,260.00	£31,953,410.00
Access investment	7.5%	7.7%	7.9%	7.9%	7.9%
Financial support	10.0%	10.5%	10.4%	10.3%	10.3%
Research and evaluation	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
<b>Total investment (as %HFI)</b>	17.8%	18.4%	18.5%	18.4%	18.4%

