

The University of Sheffield

2019-20 Access and Participation Statement

Ambition and strategy

The University of Sheffield is a highly selective institution with a strong track record of attracting and retaining students from under-represented groups in Higher Education (HE). The University has a long-standing commitment to widening participation and fair access, not only to its own programmes of study, but also to HE in general. The University has worked altruistically with schools and colleges for decades, to improve achievement of young people within the region and to raise awareness of and aspiration to a range of educational opportunities. This strongly reflects the University's Mission, Vision and Identity and the foundation on which the University was built:

The University of Sheffield has roots going back to 1828 and was founded formally in 1905 via penny donations from the local citizens. The aim was to bring higher education within reach of the children of the people working in the great industries of Sheffield, to give support to those industries and to serve as a centre for the study of diseases. The University is proud of its origins and continues to value the role it has come to play in its city and region.¹

The University continues to play a key role within the city and the region and has a strong sense of civic responsibility. This is demonstrated, amongst other things, through the broad ranging initiatives we deliver collaboratively with schools, colleges and other local HE providers in order to widen participation to higher education.

In our Access and Participation Plan for 2019/20 we continue to take a whole student lifecycle approach to widening participation and aim to address the challenges that students from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds continue to face when engaging with Higher Education.

The principles that underpin our widening participation strategy focus on two key and distinctive areas:

Outreach and Civic engagement

Building on the foundations of the University and our lasting commitment to support the people of Sheffield we will work to raise aspirations and attainment across Sheffield and the wider South Yorkshire region. We will work collaboratively to ensure that appropriate information, advice and guidance about progression opportunities is available to all with the potential to progress to Higher Education, not just to highly selective institutions such as the University of Sheffield.

Widening Participation to the University of Sheffield

Many students from widening participation backgrounds have the academic potential to progress to, and succeed at selective institutions such as the University of Sheffield but choose not to apply. Through targeted sustained engagement with individual high achievers from WP backgrounds, we will support these learners to make informed decisions throughout their education to give them the confidence and skills to succeed.

Key Priority Areas

HESA data shows that we have consistently performed well and above benchmark in recruiting students from state schools and colleges and from low participation neighbourhoods. Internal data also suggests that our performance continues to be strong in the most recent academic year and that we have recruited increasing proportions of students from BME backgrounds and mature students.

¹ See full Mission, Vision and Identity at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ourplan>

The University has a low non-continuation rate compared with the benchmark and we aim to maintain this level of non-continuation.

Within our access and participation plan for 2019/20 we continue to build on the following priority areas of focus right across the student lifecycle.

Access:

- Increasing participation from white males from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Supporting access to Higher Education with alternative qualifications
- Developing vocational routes into Higher Education
- Addressing participation of under-represented genders by disciplinary area

Student Success:

- Addressing the BME attainment gap
- Enhancing support for mature entrants

Progression:

- Supporting progression to postgraduate study by undergraduates with WP characteristics

Full details of work across the University can be found in our Access and Participation Plan for 2019/20.

Monitoring and evaluating our performance

The Vice President for Education (a member of the University's Executive Board) is responsible on behalf of the President and Vice-Chancellor for oversight of the University's widening participation commitments.

The University of Sheffield has long been committed to evidence-informed widening participation and student success policy and practice and has a Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Unit (WPREDU) focussed on this important work. The unit designs, delivers and supports a range of research activities to develop an institution-specific evidence base and contribute to broader sector knowledge. Within this, we are increasingly working with students as co-creators of knowledge and we draw on existing academic expertise from across the University.

Equality and Diversity

The University of Sheffield is committed to the elimination of unlawful discrimination, to the promotion of equality of opportunity and to fostering good relations, for students and prospective students, in all its functions:

- Access and recruitment
- Admissions and retention
- Assessments and progression
- Provision of student services and related facilities
- Teaching, learning, examining, curriculum development and quality assurance
- Community links and partnerships

The aim of the policy is to ensure that all students and prospective students are treated equally, irrespective of race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marital (including civil partnerships) or parental status, pregnancy, age, disability, religion and belief or socio-economic class or spent criminal convictions.

Activities and support for students

Access

Outreach and widening participation programmes

Our outreach and widening participation work spans a considerable age group, from Year 2 primary through to Year 13 students and prospective mature learners as they prepare for entry to HE. The activities range from large scale events that aim to raise awareness of and aspiration to Higher Education, to smaller more targeted events that include attainment raising, confidence building, teamwork, and familiarisation with the University and/or with specific disciplines, professions and careers.

Participants of outreach programmes are targeted and selected in line with HEFCE targeting guidelines², at both area level and learner level. We adapt our approach according to the nature of the initiative, with broader targeting for primary activity than for our intensive, sustained programmes, which are targeted at individual students who meet a number of widening participation and academic criteria. The WP criteria focus on Low Participation Neighbourhood (POLAR3) data, parental occupation, school type, eligibility for free school meals, whether the pupil would be the first generation to enter HE, and Indices of Multiple Deprivation ("IMD" - based on the individual's postcode) alongside specific criteria such as being from an under-represented ethnic or gender group, in local authority care, being disabled or having a specific learning difficulty (SpLD). In addition to official data available about an area, a school or an individual we also use our local knowledge and information provided by school and college staff to pragmatically identify suitable participants for programmes.

Links with Schools and Colleges

The University has developed strong links with schools and colleges over a number of years. In addition to the operational links in place as a result of our widening participation programmes, we have developed more strategic alliances with schools and colleges in the region, facilitating more effective two-way communication. Examples include: staff acting as school governors; an annual schools and colleges conference; a newsletter for staff in schools and colleges; an education stakeholder advisory group formed of local school and college senior staff; regional activity (CPD for teachers and targeted activities with pupils) delivered in collaboration with Sheffield Hallam University and local providers of HE in further education through the Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP).

As a highly selective institution, we are aware that low attainment presents a barrier to accessing Higher Education. However, as outlined in the Russell Group publication 'Opening Doors: the root causes of under-representation', we are very aware of other barriers such as poor advice and misconceptions, low aspirations or low confidence which prevent students from under-represented or disadvantaged groups accessing Higher Education. Through our widening participation work with schools and colleges we aim to develop students' confidence through a series of interventions focused equally on raising aspirations and attainment as we believe the two are intrinsically linked.

We are currently engaging with local school teachers and Higher Education advisers, together with academics from our School of Education and our Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Unit to investigate the most effective way for the University of Sheffield to add value to attainment in schools. Our proposal is to pilot mathematics support for Y10 and Y11 pupils in three schools with ambition to grow this over the coming years.

Geographical focus

The University has a longstanding commitment to working with schools and colleges in the Sheffield City Region (SCR), which encompasses South Yorkshire and neighbouring areas (Bassetlaw, Bolsover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales and NE Derbyshire).

² *Higher Education outreach: targeting disadvantaged learners. HEFCE, 2007/12*

We have expanded our geographical reach by building on our existing collaborations with other selective HEIs, e.g. in the Yorkshire and Humber region (through our Excellence Hubs partnership with the universities of Leeds and York) and nationally through our active role in the Russell Group as well as through participation in the Realising Opportunities Programme.

From a national perspective, we continue to use a more systematic approach to the use of contextual data in the admissions process. By highlighting students from disadvantaged backgrounds from across the UK, we can reach under-represented groups of students on a national basis and consider such applications in a holistic way as part of the admissions process.

Collaborative outreach

The University continues to work collaboratively with other HEIs and other stakeholders to maintain and further develop our successful regional and national partnerships. Partnership working is key to our widening participation activity, ranging from our longstanding local work with Sheffield Hallam University through the Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP), to national collaboration such as Realising Opportunities and Advancing Access. More information about these are our other current partnerships can be found by following the links below:

Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP) - <http://www.hepp.ac.uk/>

National Collaborative Outreach Programme - <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/heppsy>

Excellence Hub partnership - <http://www.york.ac.uk/excellencehub>

Advancing Access - www.advancingaccess.ac.uk

Realising Opportunities - www.realisingopportunities.ac.uk

The Brilliant Club - www.thebrilliantclub.org

Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) - www.heat.ac.uk

National Educational Opportunities Network (NEON) - www.educationopportunities.co.uk

NERUPI Consortium - www.nerupi.co.uk

Equality Challenge Unit - www.ecu.ac.uk

MSC Selection Alliance - www.medschools.ac.uk/our-work/selection/msc-selection-alliance

Contextual information

Contextual information sets an application in its educational and/or socio- economic context, allowing admissions selectors to consider challenges an applicant has faced in their education and the effect of such challenges on their performance in qualifications. The University has an established 'Disrupted Studies' process which allows applicants to let us know if they have experienced issues of a personal, social or domestic nature that have affected their Post-16 studies. This information is then used alongside other contextual data in the selection process.

Pre-entry Disability support

Our Disability Champions scheme supports disabled students through the recruitment phase and at induction and orientation through participation in Open Days, information stalls in the Union and also contributing to outreach visits to schools and colleges. We offer specific pre-arrival events to prepare applicants on the autism spectrum for university life. We also employ a disability transitions officer to support prospective and new students, work with individuals, schools and colleges and provide information and advice to prospective students and their families.

Addressing our key priority areas for Access

Activities that we will undertake include:

- Increasing participation from white males from disadvantaged backgrounds - White males from disadvantaged backgrounds are well represented in our access work across the University. We aim to increase this from 20% of pupils taking part in our sustained widening participation programmes to 26% by 2020/21. IMPACT (our Y7 and Y8 *Parent And Child Together* programme) was highlighted by the Office for Fair Access as an example of best practice in the topic briefing on White British males from low socio economic status backgrounds.
- Supporting access to Higher Education with equivalent qualifications - The University of Sheffield received HEFCE Catalyst funding for a successful project exploring the transition of students with BTECs, involving close collaboration with local FE providers to develop a range of interventions to support the students with HE preparation and adaptation. We have also evaluated the impact of a module designed to prepare 'non-traditional' students for HE level study, which generated greater understanding of the expectation and experience of mature students and those joining the University with qualifications other than A levels.
- Developing vocational routes into Higher Education - We are working within the institution to offer alternative options to young people that open up opportunities for progression to higher level skills and qualifications through to PhD level. This work includes the continued growth at our Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre (AMRC-TC) which offers a non-traditional route to Higher Education through Advanced and Higher/Degree Level Apprenticeships. The Training Centre works to widen participation to Degree Apprenticeships through sustained engagement with year 10, 11, 12 and 13 in a number of local schools and organisations including the Sheffield UTC and Prince's Trust. Activity includes; supporting the curriculum delivery of the BTEC level 2 in Engineering to raise attainment and uptake of the BTEC, providing specific skills training and careers advice to students who may be considering a range of STEM options. The scope of our apprenticeship education across the University continues to grow, with options in health and management available soon.
- Increasing participation of under-represented genders by disciplinary area - There are a range of disciplines where either men or women are significantly under-represented. While there is some overlap here with the focus on white males from disadvantaged backgrounds, in this priority area it is the gender mix in the discipline not the student background that is the focus. Specific outreach work in faculties seeks to address this under-representation.

Student success and progression

A whole institution approach to student success and progression

Within our broader institutional framework for inclusive learning and teaching we have committed to specific activities to support success and progression of all students from widening participation backgrounds, as well as targeted activities for specific groups. Our [Learning and Teaching Strategy](#) provides direction for our current activities, and ensures transparency about the learning experiences and opportunities provided to all taught students (UG and PGT). Our current priorities aim to ensure sustaining high quality teaching that inspires and actively engages students in an inclusive research intensive environment; prepares students for the world beyond the University through learning which creates and builds upon connections with communities and external partners; and supports innovation by exploring new accessible ways of teaching and learning, both face to face and online.

Widening participation and the implications for inclusive practices in learning and teaching and student support are supported through our structures and practice at University, Faculty and Department level where there is opportunity to promote and review progress against strategic priorities and KPIs at all levels. Indeed, our framework for quality management and associated cyclical activities are undertaken with reference to data about student recruitment, retention and outcomes, including analysis of differential

retention and outcomes e.g., gender, age/mature, BME, as well as looking for alignment with learning and teaching priorities and policies.

To support inclusive learning and teaching we have a number of University wide initiatives including a dedicated forum for devising, sharing and reviewing approaches to widening participation which reports to our Learning and Teaching Committee. Our framework for professional recognition for teaching staff also embeds inclusivity as an essential dimension of good practice in learning and teaching. We are also at the early stages of examining how we use student data and learner analytics to develop and support learning and teaching in future.

Following a comprehensive review our Personal and Academic Tutoring System was re-launched in 2016-17. Implementation is currently being evaluated through our cyclical quality management activities which will inform future developments. This initiative has formed the basis of a successful collaborative HEFCE Catalyst Call B bid to explore how personal and academic tutorials provide a mechanism for addressing differential attainment. The project, a collaborative endeavour with King's College London and the University of Portsmouth, is currently being piloted in the Faculty of Engineering and integrates policy, tutoring practices and tools to tackle attainment gaps within Higher Education, in particular among students from BME groups and lower socio-economic backgrounds. The project aims to strategically improve the quality of personal tutoring to provide a more consistent, effective and inclusive approach. Outcomes will be rolled out across the institution and will include a package of staff CPD initiatives and extensive research on closing attainment gaps through personal tutoring, with data and a team of leading researchers sharing insight with the wider sector.

Overall the University has a strong track record on student retention and progression, as evidenced by relevant HESA data. On this basis, our focus is on sustaining and building on existing good practices and, as such, enhancement and good practice in learning and teaching methods and associated support are relevant to all students. Therefore in many instances our activities will not be restricted to targeted groups/individuals.

Financial Support

Our proposals for financial support are specifically aimed at students from widening participation backgrounds and have been developed by assessing the extent that financial support can overcome barriers to participation for under-represented groups, primarily for:

- Students from less advantaged and low income backgrounds.
- Looked after children/care leavers
- Young carers
- Estranged students

Full-time students

- Come from a household with an assessed income of £40,000 pa or less and they may be eligible for an enhanced bursary if they meet one or more other criteria:
- Home postcode is in a disadvantaged area as measured against the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
- High achieving students from low participation areas in the Sheffield City region, as measured by Polar 4 Quintile 1.
- Students who meet low income and IMD or Polar 4 Quintile 1 will be awarded the maximum bursary of £1,250 per year with a minimum bursary of £250 for students who only meet the upper household income threshold.

Household income	£0- £25,000	£25,001 - £30,000	£30,001- £40,000
Household income award	£1,000	£500	£250
Low IMD award OR	£250	£0	£0
Polar 3 Quintile 1 (local only) ABB+	£250	£250	£250
Max possible bursary	£1,250	£750	£500

Exceptions

Care leavers, young carers and students estranged from their families will be eligible for a bursary of £4,500 each year of study rather than being assessed against the criteria above.

Students with assessed household incomes of £25,000 or less and registered on specific foundation programmes entering higher education with non-traditional qualifications will be eligible for a bursary of £1,250 each year of study.

Part-time students

Household income	£0- £25,000	£25,001 - £30,000	£30,001- £40,000
Bursary	£625	£250	£125

Unforeseeable costs

The University is committed to provide a hardship fund of £300,000 to support our students with costs they could not have foreseen or budgeted for; awards from this fund are intended to help students at risk of leaving their studies to remain on course and successfully complete

Additional Opportunity Grants

Participation Grant – We provide additional financial support for students to take part in Students' Union activities and sports. Students can apply for an award of up to £200.

Study Abroad – Students can apply for a £3000 grant to support the additional costs associated with a study period abroad.

In addition, and responding to the outcomes of a previous HEFCE-funded project, which focused on the progression of under-represented students to postgraduate study, we provide a range of postgraduate scholarships. Each scholarship awarded is worth £10,000 to students who met WP and/or academic-merit criteria. The funding is made available from University funds and from money raised through donor contributions. In 2017/18, 174 awards were made to new PGT students. The University will continue to offer Sheffield Postgraduate Scholarships based on similar criteria and in 2018/19 will offer at least 100 scholarships, again each worth £10,000. As part of our work to support progression to postgraduate study,

the University will also reflect on the integrated Masters route and how best this can support students from widening participation backgrounds to gain higher levels skills.

Collaborating with the Disability and Dyslexia Support Service the Financial Support Team have also looked to streamline reimbursement for disabled students' required contributions (required by Student Finance England) to the cost of specialist equipment which is part-funded by the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). A similar scheme has been developed to reimburse students for extra accommodation costs related to disability, as these costs are no longer met by DSA.

Our annual evaluation of Financial Support will this year be drawing on OFFA's evaluation tool, whilst also taking the opportunity to explore existing student data as a means of modelling students' academic experience and engagement, with a view to developing a set of metrics that can be used in future research and evaluation projects, including those focusing on differential outcomes and success.

Activities to support student success and progression

- **Orientation and transition support** – We provide a range of targeted orientation and transition support to care leavers, carers, estranged and mature students, commuter and local students, students with a disability. These interventions include information and guidance on issues such as accommodation, finance and welfare support; an orientation programme; a transitional and social peer mentoring scheme *Sheffield Mentors*. Additional tailored and sustained support is available throughout the student journey for care leavers, carers and estranged students – this includes links to financial support and funding advice; priority in obtaining University owned accommodation; all supported through our pledge with Stand Alone and other external organisations such as Sheffield Young Carers. Supplementary transitional support is provided to those students who are returning from a period of leave of absence.
- **Supporting academic development** – We have seen a significant increase in annual recruitment to our integrated degrees with Foundation Years and plan to expand this suite of programmes, which have been specifically designed for mature students returning to HE level study who do not possess standard entry qualifications. Within this full-time mature cohort, at least 35% declare a disability and many are from low participation neighbourhoods. For all students at the University, we provide academic support throughout their programme through 301 (Student Skills and Development Centre), including activities targeting students with specific widening participation characteristics. This work includes in-curricular academic skills sessions and a pre-entry programme for offer holders with BTEC qualifications; Peer Assisted Study Schemes (PASS); Maths & Statistics Help (MASH) with workshops on 'maths anxiety' and Maths4All materials for returners to study. In addition, ring fenced bursaries are available for participation in the Sheffield Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) scheme and our data demonstrates that the scheme has a significant impact on conversion rates from undergraduate to postgraduate programmes.
- **Supporting diversity, disability, health and wellbeing** - Our Disability and Dyslexia Support Service includes Mental Health Advisers and Support and Guidance mentors who provide support for students with long-term mental ill health with academic-related matters. The Mental Health Advisers also liaise with external services (e.g., NHS) to support transition, retention and progression. In addition, a significant development of a 'single point of access' approach to mental health and well-being involving closer working between various teams is now in place, increasing retention and supporting progression. Although we have a balance between female and male students at undergraduate level, genders are not equally dispersed across different subject areas. One example is the under-representation of female students in the Faculty of Engineering, which is being approached through a variety of projects including a 'Women in Engineering' student society and an inspiring 'Wall of Women' web page that features students, alumni, academic staff and technicians.
- **Supporting attainment** - We have been analysing data to explore attainment outcome differences between different student cohorts, focusing specifically on ethnicity. Our approach to

understanding and closing these outcome differences are strongly research and evidence informed³. We have produced a literature summary for colleagues across the sector: The Ethnicity Attainment Gap: Literature Review (<https://goo.gl/ysutnA>). Our approach is institution-specific. We have undertaken analysis, including substantial contributions from student interns, and are also undertaking qualitative research to explore the student experiences of different cohorts, particularly in terms of ethnicity. More broadly, we are exploring issues of diversity and inclusion across disciplinary curricula, including a student-facing collaboration with our Students Union Officers on decolonising/liberating the curriculum. Work on ethnicity outcome differentials is used to inform, and is informed by, wider institutional projects focusing on inclusive learning and teaching.

- **Developing employability and supporting successful graduate outcomes** - In addition to a programme level approach to employability, we offer comprehensive complementary support through our Careers Service, including a growing number of digital initiatives to increase student engagement and provide flexible inclusive learning opportunities. We support student progression to both graduate level employment and into postgraduate study. We offer a specific programme to support the employability journey of students from widening participation backgrounds as there is clear evidence³ that students entering university with limited 'social capital' will be disadvantaged when transitioning into the graduate job market. Work experience bursaries enable students who would otherwise have been unable to undertake unpaid opportunities to do so – we plan to develop the scheme to allow more students to benefit. Outcomes so far from evaluations of these interventions suggest that they are successful in increasing opportunity, employability skills and confidence. Our e-mentoring programme aims to provide access to role models and labour market knowledge for students from widening participation backgrounds. We are expanding this work with the additional aim of targeting publicity to BME students, particularly those in departments where graduate prospects scores for BME students is lower than for other students. Other targeted initiatives include giving care leavers priority for one-to-one appointments. We intend identify other WP characteristics or departments who require further tailored interventions throughout the student lifecycle.

Provision of information to students

The University communicates with prospective and current students through a range of media. For prospective students, we use the University-wide prospectus, the University website, electronic newsletters, specific printed brochures (for example for financial support information) as well as face to face activity, targeting prospective students, their families and teachers/advisers in schools and colleges. We commit to providing accurate and timely information to prospective students, parents, teachers and other advisers, through a range of communications channels, to enable prospective students to make informed choices about what and where to study, the associated tuition fee costs, as well as details of financial support available.

We also commit to providing accurate and timely information to UCAS and Student Finance England to ensure that up to date information is available at all times.

³ Cousin, G. & Cureton, D., 2012. *Disparities in Student Attainment (DISA)*, Available at: www.wlv.ac.uk/disa;

³ Dandridge, N., Rawat, S., Williams, J., Cousin, G., Hammond, N., Masterson, J., Sin, C., 2008. *Ethnicity, gender and degree attainment project*. York: Equality Challenge Unit and Higher Education Academy. Available at: <https://goo.gl/GjwgiQ> ;

³ Hockings, C., 2010. *Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education*. York: Higher Education Academy, pp.1–67. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ZzTWVG> ;

³ Mountford-Zimdars, A., Sabri, D., Moore, J., Sanders, J., Jones, S., Highlam, L., 2015. *Causes of differences in student outcomes*. Bristol: HEFCE. Available at: <https://goo.gl/vUZLSL>;

³ NUS, 2011. *Race for equality: A report on the experiences of Black students in further and higher education*. London: National Union of Students., Available at: <https://goo.gl/UDzbg4> ;

³ Tomlinson, M. (2007) Graduate employability and student attitudes and orientations to the labour market, *Journal of Education and Work*, 20 (4): 285-304.

Another mechanism for communicating information to students and their families is through advisers within schools and colleges. This is achieved via consultation events, as a result of delivering presentations at gatherings of teaching staff (e.g. Secondary Heads' Association) and also through regular communication to schools and colleges through the termly "REACH" e-newsletter.

We communicate with current students, primarily through web-based resources, to ensure that they are effectively supported throughout the duration of their studies, including, for example, links to money management tools to help them budget effectively.

Our Access and Participation Plan for 2019/20 has been developed in conjunction with the University of Sheffield Students' Union, with representation from the Students' Union President and other elected officers.