



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

## Access Agreement 2015/16

## Section 1: The current context

### Introduction

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.<sup>1</sup>*

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, as well as a renewed strong commitment to part-time adult higher education.

### 1.2 A changing environment

In developing the Access Agreement for 2015/16, the University has built on the analysis and commitments within previous agreements, taking into account how the considerable changes that have taken place within the sector in recent months and years have, and will continue to, impact on our ability to deliver our proposed widening participation strategy. This includes consideration of the following issues:

- The changing regulations around student number controls have led to a degree of uncertainty in relation to admissions, with the cap for AAB+ students being lifted one year, changing to ABB+ the next year, and a plan to remove the cap completely for 2015/16.
- In 2012/13, 80% of our intake achieved ABB+. In 2013/14 82% achieved ABB+ and we know that the majority of such students are from higher socio-economic backgrounds. For example at Sheffield, over two thirds of our ABB+ students are from households with income over £40,000 p.a. Our concern is the tension between continuing to target and attract ABB+ students whilst also targeting students from WP backgrounds who may not typically be in the types of school we are (by necessity) working with for recruitment, all within the context of ensuring that we admit the students who can best benefit from the opportunity to study for a Sheffield degree regardless of their background.

---

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

- Public debate about A Level reforms continues to take place and this has again led to a level of confusion and uncertainty for staff, students and parents regarding post-16 qualifications and preparation for HE level study: the piecemeal nature of the changes, which have begun with the withdrawal of January sittings and will continue through wholesale reform of various A Level subjects over a number of years, poses an ongoing challenge to the perception of fair and equitable admissions. We also note that there has been a much larger take up of vocational qualifications, with less than 50% of young applicants nationally now taking A Levels.
- Reduction or withdrawal from funding streams that had previously been used to support students who were struggling financially or were in financial hardship, e.g. the National Scholarships Programme funding (which were used for first year fee waivers at the University of Sheffield), Access to Learning funds (some of which was directed towards disabled students), Disabled Students' Allowances and Student Opportunity funding, (much of this being used to support the infrastructure for supporting current students within faculties and departments). The impact of this is that there is increasing pressure on funding committed through our Access Agreement, which in turn has led to a necessary rebalancing of funds in relation to the three key areas of financial support, outreach and retention / support activity.
- Previous reductions or withdrawal of funding from the sector (e.g. the loss of Aimhigher funding) has led to different forms of collaboration between HEIs and other stakeholders, with significant financial implications for HEIs. Collaborative activities typically have long lead-in times and we may therefore not see tangible results of this work, or be able to generate evidence of the impact of this work for some time. However, institutions are being asked to consider and engage in new forms of collaboration through initiatives that will run parallel to the 2015/16 Agreement. It is difficult to plan strategically when national initiatives are launched at short notice and cut across the life of our Access Agreements.
- We continue to consult with a range of stakeholders to share information about changes within post-16 education and within the HE sector. These discussions have shown that there is still a degree of confusion and misunderstanding about how the HE fees and funding systems work, amongst staff, students and their parents.

The factors highlighted above mean that despite our commitment to this agenda, we continue to have concerns relating to our future performance against targets and milestones that were initially set a few years ago.

Given these changes and other relevant developments, such as the recent publication of the *National Strategy for Access and Student Success*, which was issued too late for consideration in this document, we intend to review our existing widening participation strategy during the period 2014-15. This review will inform the development of our 2016-17 *Strategy for Access and Student Success*.

## **Section 2: Fee levels**

### **2.1 Full-time programmes**

The University proposes that new UK and European Union students starting their studies in September 2015 will be charged £9,000 per year in tuition fees. This is applicable to all full-time undergraduate programmes apart from our foundation programmes, as well as being applicable to students entering the PGDE. Continuing students who entered in previous years will continue to be charged fees at the level set when they joined their course (subject to permissible annual increases in line with inflation).

Fees for students entering via a foundation route have been agreed as follows for 2015/16 entry students:

- Our Medicine foundation gives students with a non-scientific background the necessary basic scientific knowledge to read for the MBChB degree. It is based at Sheffield College and the fee for 2015/16 will be £6,650.
- Our Science & Engineering foundation programmes are for students who have not studied maths and sciences to Advanced Level. Successful completion of the programme leads to an offer for first year entry of a number of mainstream degree courses. The fee for these programmes in 2015/16 will be £6,000.
- Our new FT foundation programme, currently being developed by TILL, will charge £9,000.

We plan for full-time fees to increase each year for all students in line with inflation or within the limits of any guidance provided to us.

### **2.2 Part-time programmes**

Following a review of part-time fees the University intends to charge £4,500 per 60 credits (£9,000 full-time equivalent) for students starting in 2015/16.

We plan for part-time fees to increase each year for all students in line with inflation or within the limits of any guidance provided to us.

### **2.3 Sandwich years and study abroad**

Students taking a full year abroad in 2015/16 will be charged the maximum fee permitted by the regulations which is currently £1,350.

Students on a year in industry or a year in employment will be charged up to £1,100, but an exception applies to the year in industry programmes in Chemistry and Molecular Biology & Biotechnology where the fee charged will be the maximum fee permitted by the regulations which is currently £1,800.

## **Section 3: Assessment of overall position**

In order to reach an appropriate spend for this agreement, the University has evaluated its performance in widening participation against a range of measures, including:

- official recruitment and retention figures as published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
- performance against our widening participation benchmarks
- performance against our peers
- absolute performance in relation to the diversity of our intake
- internal applications and registrations statistics

### **3.1 Performance relative to the rest of the sector – HESA benchmarks**

The University is in the middle third of institutions in England and 7th in the Russell Group for recruitment of young, full-time first degree entrants in 2012/13 from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3). The University exceeds its benchmark in this area.

The University is in the top third of institutions in England and 1st in the Russell Group for recruitment of mature, part-time undergraduate entrants with no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhoods in 2012/13. The University is flagged as being statistically significantly above the benchmark in this area.

The University is in the bottom third of institutions in England and equal 6th in the Russell Group for recruitment of young, full-time first degree entrants in 2012/13 from state schools and colleges. The University is flagged as being statistically significantly above the benchmark in this area.

The University is in the bottom third of institutions in England and =13th in the Russell Group for recruitment of young, full-time first degree entrants in 2012/13 from lower socio-economic groups. The University has been flagged as statistically significantly below the benchmark for this area.

The University is in the middle third of institutions in England and 4th in the Russell Group for the proportion of full-time first degree students who are in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance in 2012/13. The University exceeds its benchmark in this area.

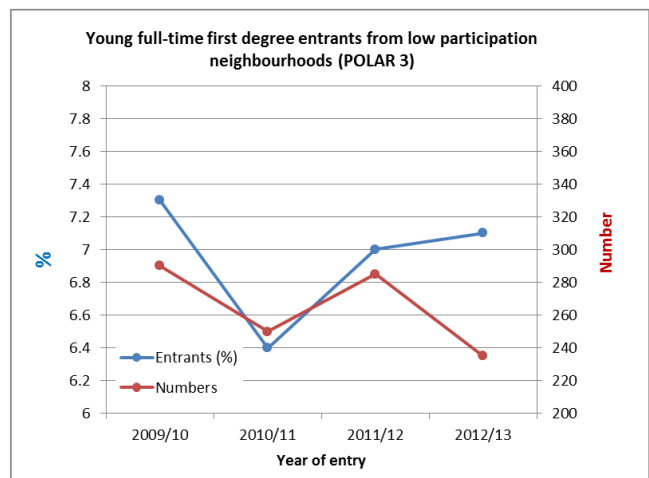
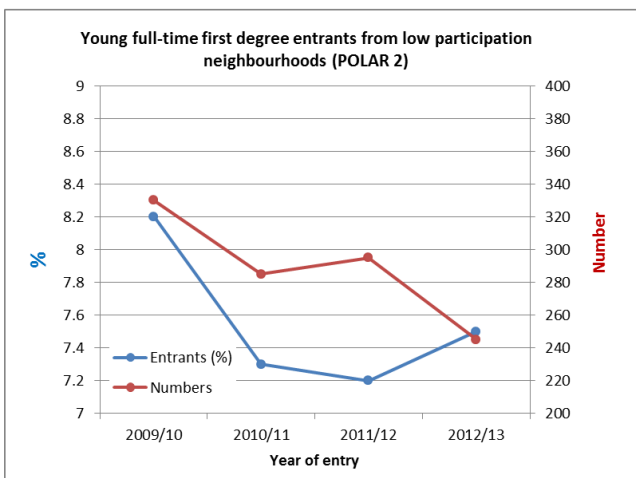
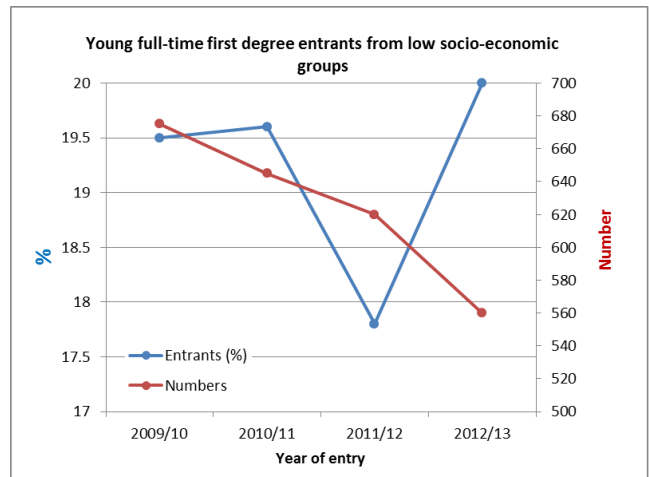
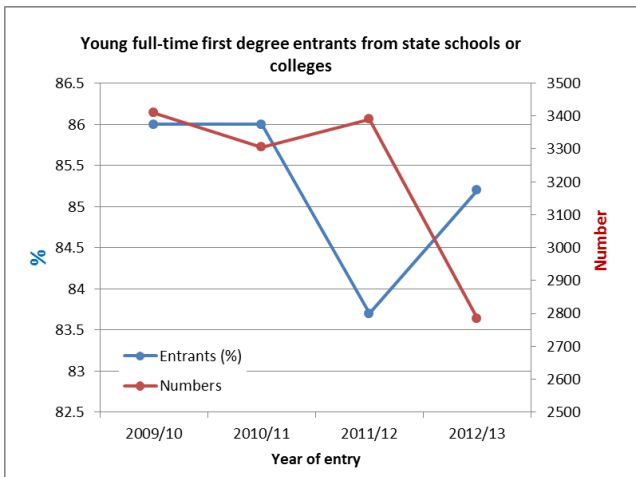
The University is in the bottom third of institutions in England and 6th in the Russell Group for non-continuation 2 years after entry of part-time entrants in 2010/11 aged over 30. The University performs better than its benchmark in this area.

As noted, we believe there are a number of factors, both internal and external, that will impact on our performance in years to come.

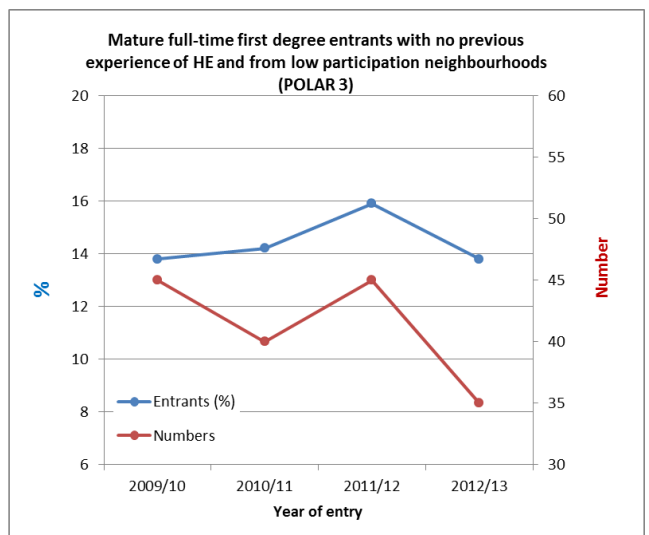
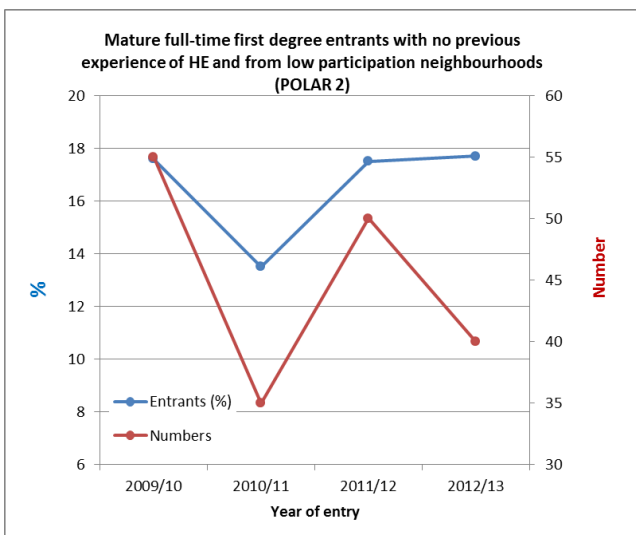
### **3.2 Absolute performance by specific WP group – HESA data**

In addition to monitoring our performance against peer institutions we feel it is also important to identify trends in absolute numbers, for both entrants and non-continuation rates. Progress against a number of the key HESA Performance Indicators for entrants and non-continuation is provided below:

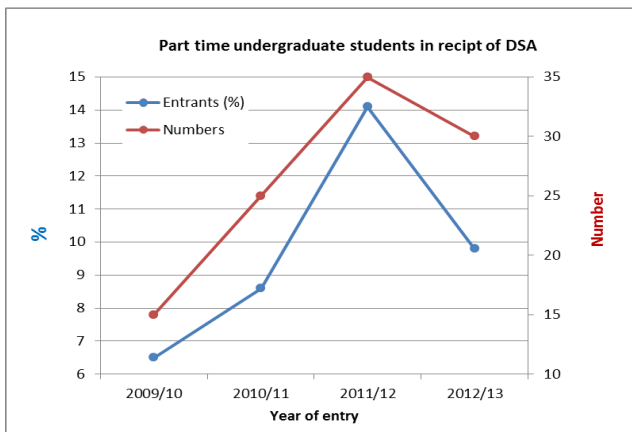
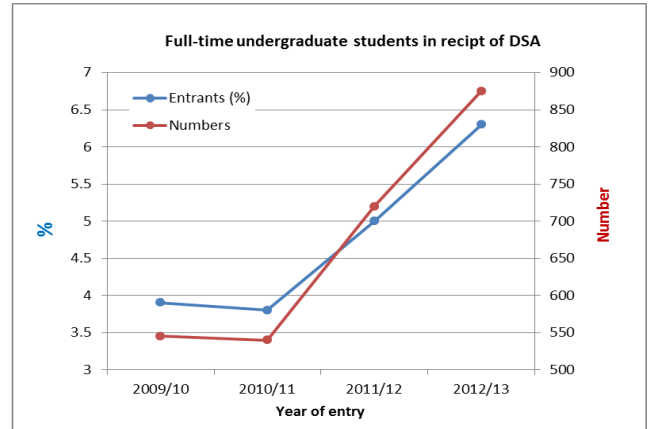
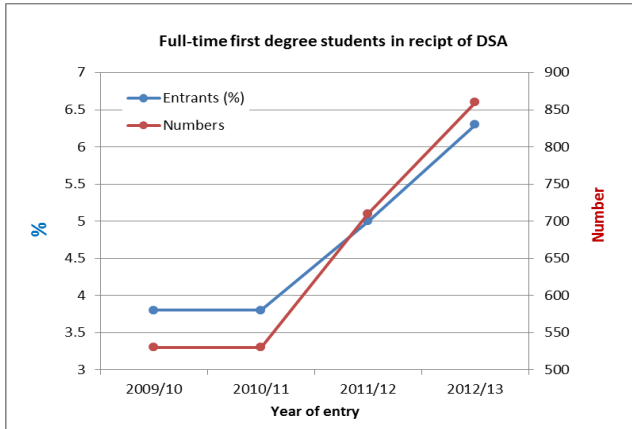
### 3.2.1 Young full-time students: State school, low socio-economic group and low participation neighbourhood



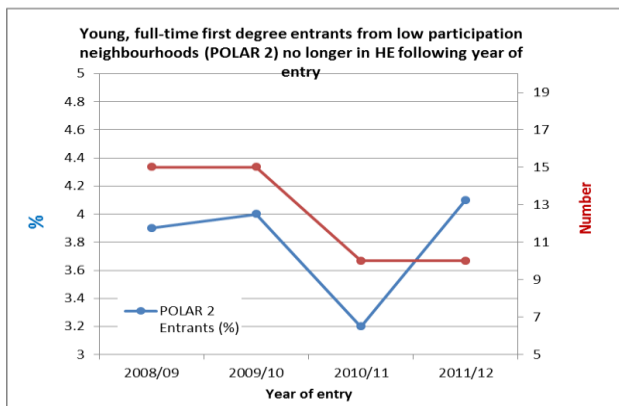
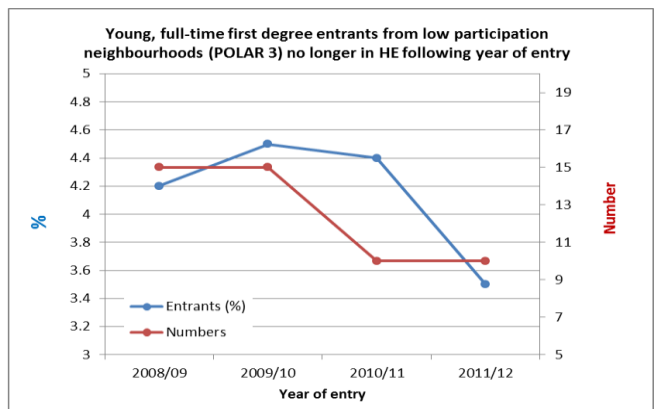
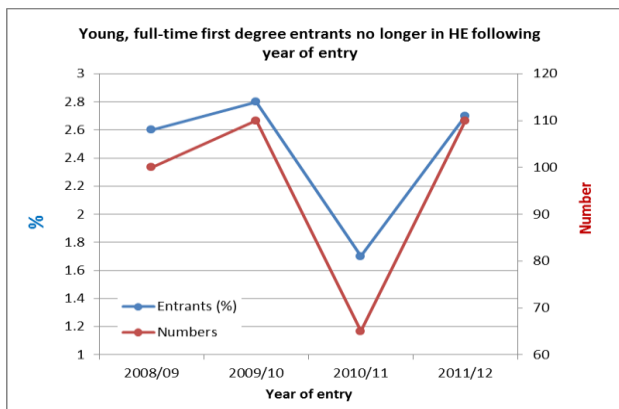
### 3.2.2 Mature students: Low participation neighbourhood



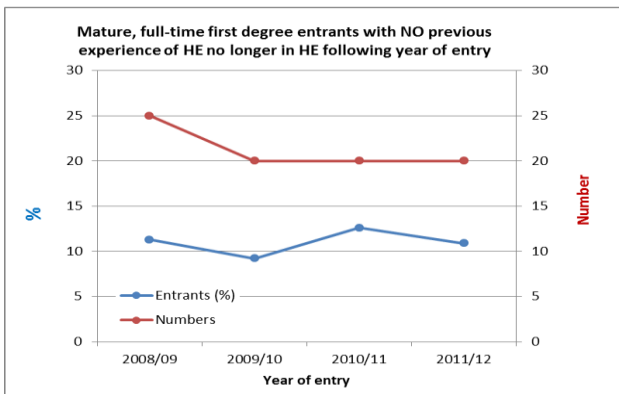
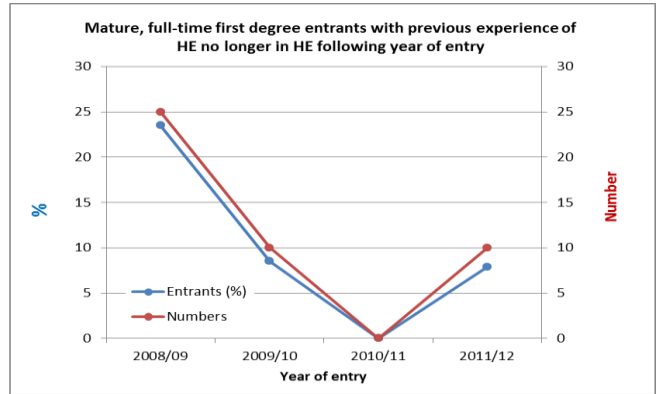
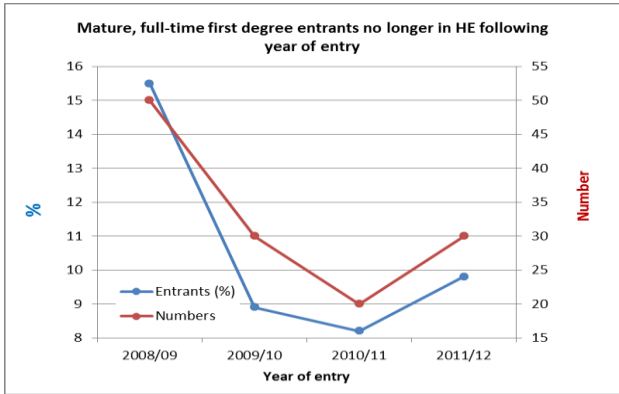
### 3.2.3 Undergraduate students in receipt of DSA



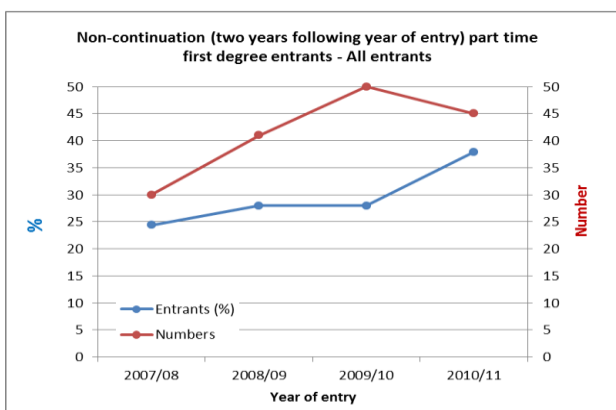
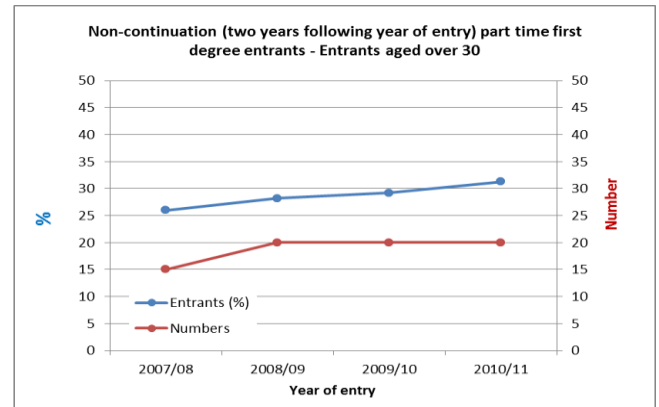
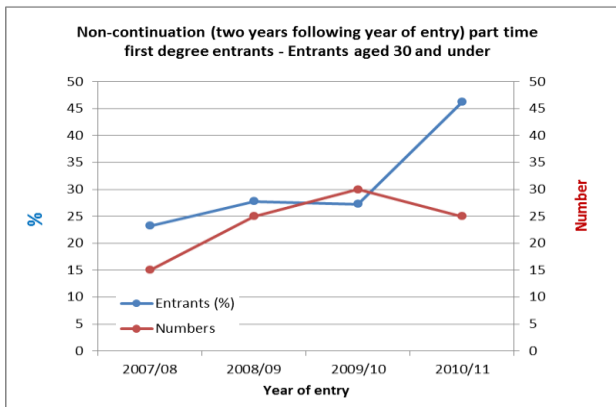
### 3.2.4 Young full-time students: No longer in HE following year of entry



### 3.2.5 Mature full-time students: No longer in HE following year of entry



### 3.2.6 Non-continuation part-time students





In summary, the charts show:

- Small reductions in the actual number of entrants against all of the Performance Indicators highlighted
- Despite those falls, all but one of the indicators (Mature full-time first degree entrants with no previous experience of HE and from low participation neighbourhoods - POLAR 3) have seen improvements in the proportion (%) of entrants

### **3.3 Analysis of internal 2013 registration data**

Our initial analysis of internal student registrations data in September 2013 (as a proportion of all full-time first degree entrants) suggests that;

- Our intake of young FT entrants from state schools has increased to 82% compared with 71% in 2011 and 73% in 2012).
- Our intake of young FT entrants in receipt of DSA has fallen back to 5% (as in 2011) following a 1% increase in 2012.
- Our intake of BME students has remained at 13% for a second year, a slight increase on two years previously.

In relation to young full-time first degree entrants:

- Our intake of students from low participation neighbourhoods has increased, with 12% in 2013 compared to 7% in 2012 and 10% in 2011.
- The proportion of students from low NS SEC groups has also increased, from 14% in 2011 to 16% in 2012 to 17% in 2013.

Mature entrants:

- Our intake of mature students has increased slightly but mature entrants from low participation neighbourhoods has remained stable as a proportion.

### **3.4 Financial commitment to additional access and support measures**

In line with the commitments made in previous Access Agreements, in 2015/16 we have forecasted to spend £12.3 million on measures to further improve access, retention and progression of students from WP target groups. This equates to 28.7% of projected additional fees income above the standard fee for the currently predicted undergraduate student intake and includes 10% of fees associated with the PGCE intake at the University.

As noted in previous sections of this agreement, we feel that we have a strong record of retention of our students. Having considered the research published by OFFA relating to the impact that bursaries and financial support have on retention of students, but also considering our own institutional research on this matter, we propose to allocate funds across the strands of activity as follows:

- Outreach: £3.1 million
- Student success and progression support: £1.7 million
- Financial support to students: £7.5 million

## Section 4: Future plans

The University of Sheffield, at the time of writing this Access Agreement, is embarking on a project to redevelop its Strategic Plan for 2015 – 2022. As part of this thinking, we also wish to undertake a more thorough review of our institutional approach to widening participation in the context of all of our institutional priorities. This may, for the future, lead to a refocusing of effort, or a redirection of effort in support of the emerging priorities for WP. For that reason, for the 2015/16 Access Agreement we have decided not to extend the life of our targets and milestones beyond those in the 2014/15 agreement. There are, however, some developments we would like to highlight:

### 4.1 Evidence-based approach

The evidence base for “what works” in widening participation is still relatively small. Our future plans take account of the evidence provided by organisations such as the Sutton Trust<sup>2</sup> and OFFA<sup>3</sup> as well as our own internal evidence of what has worked within our own institution, for example data relating to the progression of participants of a range of our outreach programmes, especially those on our long-term, intensive programmes. The University shares with both OFFA and the Sutton Trust the view that these sorts of programmes result in a higher level of progression of students from under-represented groups into HE.

We committed in the 2012/13 Access Agreement to creating a Widening Participation Research & Evaluation Unit (WPREU) within the University, to develop quantitative and qualitative research into the long-term impact of our widening participation initiatives. The initial priority for this unit has been to develop a consistent evaluation framework to help assess the impact of our outreach activities and longer term research activity to measure, for example, the impact of financial support packages on widening participation.

Outcomes from the first year of evaluation (November 2012-July 2013) indicate that although the targeting of our activities is a complex issue, the programmes we evaluated were effectively targeted, reaching the intended cohorts. Activities were widely seen by participants as successful in achieving their skills and knowledge development objectives. In addition, evaluation indicated that:

- Activities provided them with a peer group that shared their HE aspirations, often in contrast to their school or college peer group. This was seen as invaluable in helping them maintain their focus and aspiration
- student ambassadors played an important role in providing advice and information and were viewed by participants as being trustworthy and authoritative
- the social and peer-networking opportunities provided by activities (in particular sustained programmes) were seen by participants as significantly supporting their journeys into HE
- what most concerned participants was their ability to achieve the grades required to progress into Higher Education. Many of our programmes and activities included an academic component and participants frequently reported that these increased their confidence in their ability to achieve the grades need for entry into HE

---

<sup>2</sup> Sutton Trust Submission to Sir Martin Harris: Widening Access to Selective Universities, 2010

<sup>3</sup> What more can be done to widen participation to selective universities”, OFFA, 2010/03

- participants responded particularly strongly to activities with a practical 'hands-on' component.

On the basis of our evaluation outcomes, we have made a number of changes to our activities and programmes; increasing the proportion of 'hands on' activities, providing more targeted and/or refocused support and IAG in some areas, including additional academic support and revision sessions, making more taster sessions available, increasing the number of places available and expanding the role of student ambassadors in some activities.

We also carried out a survey into the impact of the University's financial support package. We surveyed current students who had received fee waivers from the University and carried out some fieldwork with Year 13 students from a range of local schools and colleges. Outcomes suggest the following:

- The financial support offer had a substantial impact on Higher Education decisions for around a fifth of University of Sheffield students who responded to the survey.
- Many respondents indicated an awareness of their entitlement to support at some or all of the universities they considered applying to, suggesting that information about financial support was generally available at the application stage. However, far fewer reported that this was an important consideration when comparing institutions.
- Respondents' preferences for how financial support might be provided was mixed, although a small majority (<10%) of respondents expressed a preference for receiving a higher proportion of support as a fee waiver rather than a cash bursary. There did appear, however, to be a strong preference for receiving support across all years of study.

This was the first of what will be an annual survey assessing the impact of the University's financial support provision. The outcomes this year helped to inform our thinking about how we package and present our financial support offer.

Further details of our current and future evaluation activity can be found in Section 6.

## **4.2 Additional access and retention measures**

Our plans for access and retention build on our success over recent years. They can be split into five broad categories:

- Outreach and widening participation programmes, including collaborative outreach
- Contextual data
- Retention and support activity
- Support for progression into graduate level employment or postgraduate study
- Financial aid
- Outreach and widening participation programmes

### **4.2.1 Range of activities**

Our outreach work spans a considerable age group, from Year 4 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 will focus on attainment raising, confidence building, team

work, and familiarisation with the University and/or with specific disciplines, professions and careers.

The more 'generic' schemes will typically allow participants to sample a range of taster events, whereas the sustained programmes will work with selected cohorts of students and will typically focus on particular professions and 'allied' professions. In addition to the more well-established schemes in Medicine, Dentistry and Law we have now implemented "Discover STEM", "Discover Social Sciences" and "Discover Arts & Humanities".

Students on these schemes are flagged within the admissions process; students commencing post-16 outreach schemes in 2015 will be offered alternative entry requirements conditional on meeting certain criteria. We believe that the overall package of participating in a sustained programme, with the offer of adjusted entry requirements and the possibility of a financial support package will be attractive to students from currently under-represented groups. The whole package is intended to support recruitment of students from the target groups, but perhaps more importantly, we feel that it supports retention and progression of students, by improving the preparedness for HE level study and by providing financial support so that students do not need to spend a disproportionate amount of time working to earn money (with a possible detrimental impact on their studies).

The development of MOOCs is already starting to improve access to University activities for a significant cohort of students we otherwise would not have been able to engage with. The Discover Dentistry MOOC, for example, which is primarily targeted at 16-18 year old students, has received excellent feedback from participants. Through this one MOOC alone we have extended our reach to over 1,200 students, over 500 of these being educated to secondary school level or less. Some of these students may already be involved in our face to face outreach programmes, but using technology in this way provides the University a mechanism through to engage with people who are not able to join such targeted programmes. The idea of moving from informal to formal learning is one we will be looking at and evaluating over time.

We are also working within the institution to offer sub-degree level options to young people that may subsequently open up opportunities for progression to higher level skills and higher level qualifications. A good example of this is the work being undertaken by our Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre offering advanced and higher level apprenticeships for local students. The Training Centre also works with local industry partners to offer outreach activities for schools and colleges in the region.

#### **4.2.2 Targeting of our outreach programmes**

Participants of outreach programmes are targeted and selected in line with HEFCE targeting guidelines<sup>4</sup>, 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 will generally be targeted at individual students who meet a number of widening participation and academic criteria. The WP criteria typically include Low Participation Neighbourhood (POLAR) data, Indices of Multiple Deprivation ("IMD" - based on the individual's postcode), parental occupation (as a proxy for low socio-economic group), whether the pupil would be the first generation to enter HE, alongside specific criteria such as being in care. In

---

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education outreach: targeting disadvantaged learners. HEFCE, 2007/12

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.

As our evidence base of what works grows, and as our strategic priorities in this area are re-stated, we will further refine our approach to targeting. We will also develop our approach to targeting and the range of activities we offer to attract emerging WP target groups based on changes in demographic and progression data.

#### **4.2.3 Faculty developments**

In line with our previous Access Agreement commitments, we have developed and implemented Faculty-based Widening Participation plans across the University. A key feature of these plans has been the development of the previously highlighted additional sustained, intensive programmes targeting individuals from under-represented groups in HE (primarily, but not exclusively, at post-16 level).

#### **4.2.4 Geographical focus**

The University has a longstanding commitment to working with schools and colleges in the Sheffield City Region, which encompasses South Yorkshire and neighbouring areas (Bassetlaw, Bolsover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales and NE Derbyshire). This will continue to be the primary focus of our face to face outreach activity. However, through continued and expanded collaboration with other selective HEIs, we continue to offer a range of outreach opportunities to students from further afield, e.g. Yorkshire and the Humber (through our Excellence Hubs partnership with the universities of Leeds, Hull 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 (see 4.2.2). Our financial support for students also applies to students nationally.

As previously highlighted, the development of MOOCS will allow us to engage with prospective students further afield than we are able to for face to face activities and may in the future provide us with a mechanism for targeting students from WP target groups on a national scale.

#### **4.2.5 Collaborative working with other HEIs**

The University continues to work collaboratively with other HEIs and other stakeholders to maintain and further develop our successful regional and national partnerships. These include:

- the HE Progression Partnership, in collaboration with Sheffield Hallam University and other stakeholders in the Sheffield City Region. This partnership is jointly funded by the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University.
- the Excellence Hubs partnership (between the Universities of Leeds, York, Hull and Sheffield). Excellence Hubs targets high achieving students from currently under-represented groups within the region to encourage and facilitate progression of the “most

able, least likely” group of students to selective HEIs. A key aim of this work is to encourage young people to consider entering selective HEIs and to better prepare them for study at a research-intensive university.

- wider collaboration with other Russell Group HEIs, including provision of up to date and accurate information to prospective students, parents, teachers and other advisers in schools and colleges.
- the Realising Opportunities Programme, a national collaborative partnership of research intensive universities working together to promote fair access, geographical and social mobility of students from under-represented groups.

#### **4.2.6 Realising Opportunities Collaborative Target**

The Partnership has set a joint target with regard to progression to research intensive universities (RIU). The aim of the partnership is that 36% of students starting the RO Programme in Year 12 in 2013 will progress to a research intensive university in 2015 and that 38% of students starting RO in Year 12 in 2014 will progress to an RIU in 2016.

#### **4.2.7 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 outreach programmes, we have developed more strategic alliances with schools and colleges in the region, facilitating more effective two-way communication. For example:

- We currently have approximately 100 University staff acting as school governors, and have been working with the School Governor’s One Stop Shop and local Governor Support teams in recent months to explore how our participation in governing bodies can be expanded over time
- Our annual Schools and Colleges conference provides an opportunity for teaching and guidance staff to be updated on developments both at the University of Sheffield and in the wider sector
- “REACH”, our e-newsletter is available to all staff in schools and colleges within the Sheffield City Region
- Further development of our consultation programme for Heads and Principals of local schools and colleges has resulted in the development of an advisory group, which can be a helpful source of information about the pre-HE sector as well as acting as a sounding board for any developments we would like to ‘test’ with schools and colleges
- We also contribute to regional activity targeting schools and colleges in collaboration with HEPP, from a CPD perspective for teachers as well as with activities targeting pupils

#### **4.2.8 Part-time study and mature students**

In our Access Agreement for 2014 we reported on a reaffirmation of our commitment to part-time and mature students from non-traditional backgrounds and a review of our current offer with the objective of updating and where possible extending our undergraduate curriculum for these students. This review has now been completed, against the background of further decline in the uptake of higher education from these students, both nationally and within our own institution.

The University has committed to a major restructure of this work, moving from separate provision in a discrete unit to an integrated and embedded approach. The new Department for Lifelong Learning (DLL) will become a clearly accessible gateway to the University and build flexible pathways into and through the University for mature learners from non-traditional backgrounds, particularly those living within Sheffield and its surrounding area.

In addition to the existing Foundation Degree in Working with Communities: Identities, Regeneration and Change (FdA) the Department for Lifelong Learning will lead on two key developments:-

1. The introduction of a FT Foundation Programme from 2014. This programme will provide an entry route into the University for mature students without traditional entry qualifications and will provide guaranteed progression into Department based UG provision subject to the achievement of agreed academic thresholds. 17 pathways have currently been approved in the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences Faculties, with additional pathways under discussion. These will be delivered through the Department for Lifelong Learning and will complement the existing PT Foundation Programme in Combined Studies.
2. The development of new, PT UG provision offered collaboratively through a Faculty based model with DLL support for introduction in 2015. The model enables the development of PT routes through at least 11 degree programmes in the Faculties of Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences and also 14 Certificates in Higher Education for students based in DLL. This approach combines the academic breadth and rigour of Faculties with tailored support for the target group of students, drawing on longstanding expertise within DLL. It transforms the curriculum offer to PT students which is currently limited to a small and reducing number of degree programmes and Certificates in HE, both based in separate and discrete provision outside the mainstream University.

#### **4.3 Contextual Data**

Contextual information sets an application in its educational and/or socio-economic context, allowing Admissions Selectors to take into account challenges an applicant has faced in their education and the effect of such challenges on their performance in qualifications.

After the completion of a significant research project in 2011, the University has implemented a contextual data scheme designed to:

- 1) effectively highlight students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- 2) enable Admissions Selectors to make informed holistic decisions which take into account the challenges an applicant has faced.

As part of the above the University is using a broad range of data which includes residence in an area with low participation rates in Higher Education (POLAR2), residence in a deprived neighbourhood (Indices of Multiple Deprivation rankings) and participation in the University's outreach programmes (e.g. ADOPT, Discover, SOAMS).

In addition, the University has established a 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.

#### **4.4 Retention and support activity**

The University has committed significant effort to support and retention activity, as demonstrated by our strong performance against non-continuation benchmarks. Examples of the support we offer to students (funded through our additional fees income) to facilitate their transitions into and through the University include:

- Orientation programme for students, with particular emphasis on local students, commuter students, mature students and students with a disability.
- Peer mentoring activity for a range of target groups including mature students, disabled students and local students.
- Individual telephone contact at pre-arrival to students entering through clearing and adjustment routes; providing a contact point for information and guidance on issues such as accommodation, finance and welfare.
- Counselling service available to all students but with specialist support for students with mental ill health, including one-to-one, group work and on-line counselling and psychological wellbeing support including interactive university web sites and external 24/7 online monitored provision.
- University health service targeted to students' needs, maximising the opportunities for retention and progression through its work with patients, other support services and academic departments.
- Targeted psychological wellbeing/mental health campaigns at strategic points, such as Intro Week, study abroad preparation period, post-exams, mental health week.
- Leave of absence returner project, providing a named contact, support information, and referrals to assist the transition of students back to the University following a period of leave.
- Financial support and specialist one to one advice for students facing financial difficulties.
- 301: Student Skills and Development Centre provides academic support to students, with some activity specifically targeting students from specific WP target groups. Specifically targeted activity includes the weekly Asperger Social Group, Maths and Statistics Help, transition workshops for first year students, dyslexia support and understanding and using feedback workshops targeted at Law students from WP groups.
- Disability Champions scheme, which supports disabled students through participation in Open Days, through information stalls in the Union and also contributing to outreach visits to schools and colleges.

#### **4.5 Post-degree progression support – targeted careers guidance**

The Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance to students from WP backgrounds at the pre-entry stage in order to raise aspirations and awareness of graduate and professional career opportunities. This is undertaken in collaboration with central Outreach staff, focusing on key points such as Year 9 (options), Year 11 (progression to post-16 education), and Year 12/13 (higher education choices); activities include visits to target schools to deliver awareness sessions, involvement in school visits into the University, and work with the University's Department of Lifelong Learning to support potential mature entrants.



In addition, the Careers Service develop and deliver a range of resources (for example in relation to the graduate labour market) to support teachers and other influencers who assist pupils in making decisions about HE.

In order to enhance the knowledge and awareness of current students from widening participation backgrounds of the need to gain relevant skills and experience for entry into specific professions, the Careers Service also delivers a programme of support during their time at the University to assist their transition into the graduate labour market. Tailored workshops are delivered for specific target groups and students also have access to additional individual guidance sessions, support with job applications and targeted promotion of other Careers Service provision.

#### **4.6 Post-degree progression support – Postgraduate Taught**

The HEFCE funded Postgraduate Support Scheme project started in January 2014 and runs until August 2015. This is part of an initiative aimed at removing barriers to postgraduate education for students from under-represented groups who wouldn't ordinarily consider going onto postgraduate study such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students and those with caring responsibilities. The partner institutions (Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Warwick and York, led by Sheffield) are matching nearly £3m of HEFCE funds with additional funds to provide a total project worth £5.4m - 80% of these funds will go directly to support students financially.

The project, Widening Access to Postgraduate Study and the Professions, aims to provide an evidence-based understanding of what it means to be WP at postgraduate taught level. Our interventions in other areas will enable us to evaluate the impact various innovations have on the ability of WP students to progress through education and into professional and academic careers. It consists of several strands:

##### **4.6.1 Finance**

- Scholarships - Sheffield is offering a new scholarship scheme which will provide financial assistance to about 90 students based on a range of criteria we think may have an impact in terms of widening participation. The total consortium offer will provide scholarships to more than 300 students
- Career development loans - the Consortium is talking to financial institutions and other lending providers to look at new ways of lending to postgraduate taught students in general
- Matched funding - we are also approaching alumni and employers to help us explore sustainable funding models for future PGT WP funding

##### **4.6.2 Academic innovation**

- Assessing the content and mode of delivery of existing and new courses to see how they might attract more students from WP backgrounds
- Engaging employers and industry organisations to include them in course development activity thus making courses that help students become more employable once they have completed their studies

### **4.6.3 Information, Advice and Guidance**

- Examining ways of supporting WP students to apply to and remain on PGT courses

### **4.6.4 Understanding the Student**

- Using our own and other existing data sources to better understand barriers and drivers for students when they are considering postgraduate study.

### **4.7 Financial Support**

In 2015 undergraduate financial support schemes will not include National Scholarship Programme funding; we understand this will be retargeted at taught postgraduate students from WP backgrounds. The Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme (PSS) at the University of Sheffield is a HEFCE funded project and is currently piloting scholarship schemes to evaluate impact and help inform the guidance for NSP PGT 2015.

Our proposals for financial support are specifically aimed at widening participation students and are broadly the same as those proposed in our 2014/15 Access Agreement, which were developed by assessing to what extent 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

We estimate that approximately 35% of our full-time, Home/EU undergraduate intake will receive some form of financial support from the University each year.

#### **4.7.1 Full-time students**

Our financial support scheme for new home and EU students commencing full-time programmes of study will be a bursary for each year of study. Students will have a choice of taking their bursary as a direct payment, a fee waiver or a rent waiver for University accommodation only. There is no limit on the number of bursaries we will award.

Students must meet the following eligibility criteria:

Come from a household with an assessed income of £42,620 pa or less (i.e. eligible for a living cost grant), 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 3.

Students who meet all three criteria will be awarded the maximum bursary of £3,000 per year with a minimum bursary of £750 for students who only meet the upper household income threshold.

<b>Household income</b>	<b>£0-£25,000</b>	<b>£25,001 - £30,000</b>	<b>£30,001-£35,000</b>	<b>£35,001-£42,620</b>
Household income award	£1,500	£1,250	£1,000	£750
Low IMD award	£1,000	£0	£0	£0
Polar 3 Quintile 1 (local only) ABB+	£500	£500	£500	£500
Max possible bursary	£3,000	£1,750	£1,500	£1,250

Exceptions:

- Care leavers and young carers 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 and progressing into higher education will be eligible for a bursary of £3,000 each year of study rather than being assessed against the criteria above.

#### **4.7.2 Externally branded scholarships**

##### *HSBC*

The University has entered an agreement with HSBC to provide 5 high achieving care leavers with a fee free course commencing in 2015/16. This award will replace the University care leaver bursary (£4,500). HSBC will provide a contribution of £5,000 for each student each year and the University will match fund this amount. Each student will benefit from not being charged any tuition fees and will receive a HSBC bursary of £1,000 each year of study, this is in addition to other income based bursaries they are eligible for (£1,500).

##### *Lloyds*

Lloyds Scholars is a unique social mobility programme run by Lloyds Banking Group in partnership with the University; offering students from low income households (£25,000 or lower) a Lloyds bursary, paid internships, a business mentor and the opportunity to develop their employability skills.

#### **4.7.3 Part-time students**

Home and EU students from assessed household incomes of up to £25,000 pa; studying at least 60 credits on a part-time programme of study and who do not already hold an equivalent level qualification will be eligible for a bursary of £1,500 each year of study. Part-time students from assessed household incomes greater than £25,000 but less than or equal to £42,620 will be eligible for bursary of at least £375 each year of study. Eligible programmes include our part-time foundation programme, part-time certificates and part-time degrees. Eligible students can take a fee loan from Student Finance but are not eligible for any statutory living cost support.

Students will have a choice of taking their bursary as a direct payment to them or a fee waiver. There is no limit on the number of bursaries we will award.

<b>Household income</b>	<b>£0 - £25,000</b>	<b>£25,001 - £30,000</b>	<b>£30,001- £35,000</b>	<b>£30,001 - £42,620</b>
Bursary	£1,500	£625	£500	£375

NB: Students who progress from part-time foundation programmes onto full-time degree programmes will be eligible for a full-time bursary as illustrated in the previous table; a reassessment of eligibility will not be necessary.

#### **4.7.4 Additional opportunities**

##### *Global opportunity*

In 2015 the University is offering our widening participation students the chance to apply for one of two global opportunities:

- study abroad scholarship worth £3000 to support their costs during their year abroad – 15 available
- a place at a summer school at one of our overseas partner institutions, this award covers the cost of tuition fee, travel to and from the summer school and accommodation – 20 available.

##### *Participation grant*

We are working with our Students' Union (SU) to provide our widening participation students with grants of between £100 - £250 to help with the costs of taking part in societies and other SU led activities.

##### *Volunteering and work experience grant*

We are working with faculties and the Careers Service to provide a number of our widening participation students with a grant of up to £2,000 to enable them to engage in unpaid work experience.

##### *Unforeseeable costs*

The University is committed to provide a hardship fund to support our students with costs they could not have foreseen or budgeted for; to help students at risk of leaving their studies remain on course and successfully complete.

## **Section 5: Targets & Milestones**

### **5.1 Targets**

As previously noted, as a result of the changing environment but also in light of the University's commitment to reviewing and updating the Strategic Plan (which will cover a number of institutional strategies that link to our work in WP, e.g. Learning & Teaching, Equality & Diversity, our approach to civic engagement) we do not intend to change the targets and milestones we had previously set, except for those relating to our developments for the part-time and mature markets.

Our key aims in relation to widening participation, as stated in previous agreements, continue to be to:

- increase our recruitment of academically capable students from the lowest socio-economic groups
- grow the number of students with disabilities entering the University
- maintain our strong our performance in recruitment of students from low participation neighbourhoods
- maintain our mature student intake
- maintain our intake of students from black and other minority ethnic groups
- grow the number of part-time students entering the University and improve progression and success rates of students through first degree programmes.

The targets we set for 2012/13 and 2013/14 reflected our aspiration to maintain our strong position with regard to HESA benchmarks and other institutionally driven targets, specifically to:

- increase recruitment from students from socio-economic groups 4-7
- sustain our success in relation to attracting students from state schools and low participation neighbourhoods.

Please see Annexe B, table 7a for details of our quantitative targets.

### **5.2 Milestones**

We continue to be committed to expanding our outreach provision across all sectors (primary school activity through to post-16 activity), expanding our retention, support and progression activity for post-entry students and undertaking research into the impact of our activity to inform future policy and practice. Our milestones set out how we will deliver on the proposals for growth and development in these areas.

In addition to consolidating the milestones we previously committed to within previous agreements, we have also included some more specific milestones to reflect developments we wish to implement in future years in relation to part-time mature learners.

Please see Annexe B, table 7b for details of our milestones.

## **Section 6: Monitoring and evaluation arrangements**

### **6.1 Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Unit**

The University's Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Unit (WPREU) was created in May 2012 to establish a consistent approach to the monitoring and evaluation of WP activities across the University and deliver institution-specific WP related research.

### **6.2 WP Evaluation Framework**

The University is continuing to expand its wide-ranging outreach evaluation toolkit using a mixed methods approach, consisting of semi-flexible questionnaires coupled with qualitative techniques such as focus groups, case studies and interviews.

#### **6.2.1 WP Outreach Evaluation**

Participant, parent and teacher questionnaires are used to collect demographic data from participants and measure key activity impacts; how successfully an activity is changing participant attitudes, helping them develop relevant skills/knowledge and delivering activity specific objectives.

The data collected from questionnaires is used to provide 'instant' formative feedback to practitioners for each activity, monitor the effective targeting of activities and provide overall feedback on the effectiveness and impact of the institution's WP activities.

Our qualitative evaluation research, which includes case studies, focus groups and individual interviews with participants, their parents and teachers is used to capture and extend our evidence base of what works best in our outreach activities.

We also carry out a destination online and telephone survey for previous participants at the end of Year 13 to determine their post-18 destination and level 3 qualifications.

#### **6.2.2 Student Success Evaluation**

We are currently working with student support and guidance colleagues to map support service usage and student retention patterns. We are also engaged in a number of targeted student success evaluation projects which currently (April 2014) include the impact evaluation of work experience bursaries, targeted careers support and peer-assisted learning.

### **6.3 Further developments of our evaluation framework**

Mapping the WP outreach and student success activities delivered across the institution has revealed a very wide range of WP activity types, methodologies and target cohorts. This throws up significant evaluation challenges.

Accordingly, we will continue to adopt a broad spectrum approach to capturing overall impact by a) expanding the range of activities that we evaluate and continuing to develop specialised toolkits (e.g. for primary school pupils, or particular student support services) and b) evaluating as full a range of activities as is practically possible. At the same time, we will also aim to reflect the diversity of activities, objectives and outcomes by developing a rolling programme of

evaluation projects focused on specific programmes or activities. Where possible these projects will include a control population of non-participants to increase the robustness of the research outcomes. This will enable us to develop a more nuanced approach to measuring the specific impacts of particular activities.

In addition, we plan to:

- improve the quality of data about destination outcomes of previous participants. Given the continued absence of a nationwide data set, there is currently no mechanism for easily and consistently tracking participants to identify progression to HE. We will mitigate this by a) building into all of our sustained programmes, the expectation that all participants will engage with an end of Year 13 survey and b) working with partner schools and colleges to improve data-sharing arrangements
- develop a dedicated database to enable the consistent recording, monitoring and reporting of interactions with both individual participants and partner schools
- expand our use of internal and external datasets (e.g. University progression and destination data, partner school attainment and HE progression data) to provide a broader view of impact and success measures
- develop a more nuanced view of activity costing and funding against which evaluation outcomes can be contextualised to enable more analysis of value for money factors
- expand our research engagement with University of Sheffield academics. This will be done by funding more research and evaluation projects through WPREU
- establish a formal evaluation outcomes review cycle to explore the implications of outcome for strategy, policy and practice. This will be timed to coincide with the summer planning process (June / July). An additional reporting point in November / December will coincide with both the monitoring return and academic Learning and Teaching annual reflection process.

#### **6.4 Collaborative Evaluation**

Alongside Sheffield Hallam University, we are working through the Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP) to jointly evaluate 'Heads Up', a collaborative sustained outreach programme, which works with 50 young people from local schools. The evaluation plan includes a close focus on the individual activities making up the programme, but also a longitudinal focus on the overall impact of the scheme on participants. The evaluation design is structured to include access to a non-participant ('control') group against which impact can be assessed

The HEPP also represents an excellent opportunity for the two institutions to share evaluation tools, data and expertise, to expand the focus of evaluation across the sector and, potentially, to undertake additional collaborative research in the future.

Our participation in Realising Opportunities is being evaluated centrally by the Realising Opportunities team, but we are also carrying out local evaluation of activities where appropriate.

#### **6.5 Academic research**

In addition to the evaluation projects discussed above, WPREU is working with academic staff across the university who have a research interest in this area to deliver a range of institution-

specific projects. We intend that outcomes of these projects will be disseminated across the sector. Current examples include:

- Sheffield Student 2013 – a three year longitudinal project, led by a post-doctoral researcher in collaboration with staff from the departments of Sociology and Geography and staff from Student Support and Guidance, using both data and qualitative methods to track the lowest income students through three years of study to inform future development of financial and other student support packages;
- A qualitative project exploring the impact of our intensive WP programmes on students and alumni, focusing on our intensive programmes in Medicine;
- A qualitative project exploring the decision-making process of the most able students who decide not to progress onto University at Key Stages 4 and 5;
- WPREU are also co-ordinating a University wide researcher network that brings together researchers and practitioners with an interest in this area to encourage increased cross-fertilisation.



## **Section 7: Provision of information to prospective 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.

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.

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.

## **Section 8: Consultation with the student body**

The University benefits from very strong relationships with our student body and has consulted with the Students' Union throughout the process of developing the 2015/16 Access Agreement. The President, the Education Officer and the Women's Officer of the Students' Union have been involved in our Access Agreement working group to represent the views of our student body and to recommend changes to our approach for the benefit of our students.

The University encourages student representation on major University level committees, including, for example, the Learning & Teaching Committee and the Admissions and Outreach Sub Committee, which is involved in signing off and approving the University's Access Agreement commitments. This ensures that the needs and wishes of current students are taken account of through discussions that contribute to the setting of targets, milestones, financial support for students, as well as other key issues.

## Section 9: Consideration of Equality and Diversity

Our transformational Equality Objectives are categorised under 3 key themes, which are:

- “Recruiting for difference”, for staff and students
- Addressing the disconnect between the University’s Equality and Diversity policies and their implementation
- Addressing inequalities in the City.

Work is ongoing looking at diversity of recruitment for both staff and students, including a pilot study within one department around communication of jobs and increased flexibility within positions. One key objective within the policy implementation theme is ‘We will work to improve the qualitative and quantitative data around equality.’ Targeted actions have included direct communications with faculties via our LGBT Senior Champion, HR Managers and Equality & Diversity Committees, asking all staff to complete their equality data, resulting in significant increases in completed equality information. For example, between April 2013 and 2014, sexual orientation disclosures increased from 5% to 21%, religion and belief from 5% to 21%, ethnicity from 78% to 83% and disability from 70% to 75%. A project is also in development around attaching student equality data to records; this would enable us to track student progression by factors such as attainment and drop-out rates, to develop targeted actions benefiting specific equality and student groups.

Throughout Spring and Summer 2014, the University is working with an inclusion expert on a project designed to develop a clear rationale for diversity, which in particular speaks to the educational needs of the University – we are calling this “The Big Message”. One of our key aims is to understand how diversity and inclusion can help us to work together in order to enhance the student experience. To formulate the rationale for diversity, we are collaborating with staff from across the University including Human Resources Executive and Management Team, Principal Investigators, Sheffield Leader participants, Heads of Academic Departments and Professional Services, and Faculty Directors of Operations. We will also be involving students, via Student Officers and student committees. Through discussion sessions we aim to highlight the beneficial impact of diversity on the student experience, and on research outcomes, and to inspire staff and students to reflect on their own behaviours, and on the role they can play in influencing culture and making inclusive decisions to help create a remarkable place to work and study.

We collaborate with and involve staff across the University on implementing our Excellence Through Inclusion equality strategy and helping achieve the equality objectives. Each academic faculty has an Equality and Diversity Committee with clear links to their own faculty executive boards, and to the University’s Equality & Diversity Board. The review of data is a key part of what these committees do, with a view to identifying areas of good practice and where more work needs to be done. This includes looking at student data for different protected characteristics, and we will work with them to help them consider this in relation to the Widening Participation strategy of the University.

During 2012/13 the University worked with AMOSSHE (the Student Services Association) and ECU (the Equality Challenge Unit) on attracting and retaining BME students.

Three of the objectives of this project were to consider the collection of data on access and referrals made, the need to consider the collection and retrieval of data on protected characteristics, particularly BME, who can see this and how can we use it and to pull together E&D information focussed at students on the webpages

The University is currently The actions taken included:

- The introduction of recording ethnicity data in Counselling and Disability Services to enable monitoring access to and evaluation of services..
- iGraduate data to include ethnicity information;
- A review of web page and other information.

This work coincided with the re-launch of the Black and Minority Ethnic Students' Committee, a very committed and active committee who helped to inform this work.

At a more operational level, through our outreach and retention programmes we have already implemented a number of specific actions to encourage and support progression of students from diverse groups. Further examples that link more closely to the protected characteristic groups are provided below:

- Pre-entry activities targeting female students for Science and Engineering degrees and careers. Although this may not be a key target group for general WP activity, our analysis shows an under-representation of female students and staff within the Engineering Faculty; we have therefore taken steps to redress the balance, including “Discover STEM for girls” activities, the creation of a Women in Engineering Student Society (which already has over 100 members) and events promoting University options for Girls in Science, Maths and Engineering targeting Year 12 students.
- The appointment of a disability transitions officer who supports prospective and new students, working with individuals, schools and colleges to minimise difficulties at the most vulnerable stage of the student journey, providing information and advice to prospective students and their families.
- Delivering a comprehensive support programme (“Supporting the Supporters”) offering staff training in the support of diverse student groups, e.g. those on the Autistic spectrum, with dyslexia, dyspraxia or mental health difficulties and a Disability Liaison Officer within each academic department.
- Our multi-faith chaplaincy (including a Muslim chaplain).
- Specialist services and support package co-ordination by mental health professionals, working with staff from academic departments, support and wellbeing teams, accommodation and faculty administration to join up support for students with the most complex mental health needs.

All of this work will feed into our impact assessment, which will enable us to consider all protected characteristics and widening participation groups in a holistic manner, to inform future actions and targets.