

Writtle University College

Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25



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Introduction and context

1. Writtle University College is a small, specialist provider based in Chelmsford, Essex. We have been providing land-based further and higher education for over 125 years. We were awarded taught degree awarding powers in March 2015, prior to which our HE provision was validated by the University of Essex. We offer undergraduate courses in the areas of Agriculture, Animal Science and Management, Bioveterinary Science, Equine Science, Art and Design, Horticulture, Landscape Architecture, Sports Studies and Veterinary Physiotherapy.
2. We have around 770 HE students enrolled on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. We also teach around 750 FE students across a range of land-based courses, including apprenticeships. We are therefore unusual in the sector for being a higher education provider with an equal balance of FE and HE students. Our access and participation plan involves the fulfilment of equality and diversity objectives for undergraduate students; however, our mission to achieve equality for our diverse communities includes our FE provision, our postgraduate students and our staff, so this plan must be seen as representing part of our wider strategic vision.
3. We recognise the need for more concentrated efforts in some areas to close persistent and specific gaps in access and student success. However, due to the small size of the institution and the high cost base of our provision, we have limited resources to assign to highly targeted and/or standalone activities; our access and participation efforts are therefore focussed on institution-wide measures to improve outcomes for all students, in line with the areas for improvement identified through OfS and HESA data, TEF metrics and our own assessment of performance.
4. This plan has been developed with input from a wide range of staff across the institution and in close collaboration with our Students' Union. We have built upon the open and transparent approach taken in our 2019/20 APP, founded upon a detailed, critical evaluation of our own performance. Every effort has been made to balance an evidence-led, bold and ambitious approach to driving improvements in access and participation with the realities of our resource base and institutional capacity. We have committed to a series of ambitious targets in our identified priority areas which will rely, in part, upon increased investment over the five-year period.

Assessment of performance

5. Our assessment of performance is based on the latest information taken from our student records system and external datasets available from HESA and the Office for Students. We have compiled detailed analysis reports concerning the access, retention, progression and employment outcomes of our students across a five-year period, broken down, wherever possible, by demographic and socio-economic characteristics.
6. The small size of our undergraduate student body (typical intake to first degree courses is around 200 students) poses serious challenges with respect to evaluation and monitoring. This is particularly the case when it comes to understanding the performance of some under-represented groups, where there is insufficient data to inform statistical analysis. According to

the access and participation data dashboard developed by the OfS, there is a very limited number of measures in which we have statistically significant results available to inform year-on-year analysis. These are limited to access measures and concern comparisons between the proportions of students at the provider compared to the general population. The value of these comparisons is also limited, since we recruit the majority of our students from the Essex region.

7. Within our own analysis, we have seen large fluctuations in the performance of certain groups owing to the small numbers involved, which makes it difficult for us to correlate institutional activity with student outcomes. For this reason, our assessment is in some cases based on data aggregated across multiple years and this has informed our approach to target-setting. We are committed to using qualitative approaches to enhance our evaluative capabilities – both to address the limitations of our small datasets in understanding our performance and impact over time, and to better understand the trends and correlations we observe, building a body of evaluated type 1 evidence.

Disabled students

8. The proportion of our full-time undergraduates declaring a disability has risen from 18% to 28% over the last five years. The figure of 28% compares with 14.6% for the sector as a whole. This rise is largely attributable to an increase in students declaring a mental health condition, with around 10% of our undergraduate student body reporting a mental health condition compared to 3.5% across the sector. We also have a consistently higher proportion of students declaring a cognitive or learning difficulty – 9% on average, compared to 6% across the sector.
9. We pride ourselves on offering a safe, friendly, supportive environment for our learners. We believe that this setting, combined with our strong staff-student relationships and the nature of our degree programmes (many involving work with animals), means that we can provide access to higher education for students who may be reticent to study at a larger institution. This is particularly important since two thirds of our students live within a 40-mile radius of our campus. Many of these students would be unable to access their chosen discipline at another provider in the region, and thus we play an important role in creating pathways into higher education for our local community.
10. With less than half of our disabled students accessing DSA funding, there has been a growing need to allocate institutional resources to directly support students with mental health conditions and learning difficulties. Over the last two years we have made a significant investment in the support services provided through our Wellbeing Team, including the introduction of a full-time Senior Warden living on site, a successful scheme involving Residential Student Support Officers and, more recently, the addition of another qualified mental health practitioner. We have taken a proactive, whole-institution approach to supporting student mental health and we believe that this has had a positive impact on all our students, observing a significant increase in continuation rates for undergraduate students in the most recent year at the time of writing (2018/19).
11. However, our own analysis shows that our disabled students are still less likely to complete their degree than their non-disabled counterparts and, of those disabled students that do complete, are less likely to obtain a 'good honours' degree. Over the past five years, 14.1% of our starters with a disability failed to complete the first year of their course, compared to 12.4%

of starters with no known disability. In addition, 41% of undergraduate degree students with a disability that qualified for an award, achieved a 'good degree', compared to 60% for students without a disability. We recognise that additional investment is required in this area to provide more specialist and dedicated learning needs assessment and ongoing support for students with learning needs, particularly where those needs are not being partly or wholly met through DSA funding.

12. Using annual datasets, we are unable to reliably identify whether our disabled students are less likely to progress to professional employment or further study than non-disabled students due to the small cohort sizes involved. Combined data from the last two DLHE surveys (2015/16 and 2016/17) would suggest that there is no gap in this respect.
13. **We have an objective that our disabled students will have the same retention, attainment and progression rates as their non-disabled peers.**

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds

14. We recruit a clear majority of our home/EU undergraduate population from the local region. Just over two fifths (43%) live within a 20-mile radius of our campus, with most of these students coming from just three districts: Chelmsford, Southend-on-Sea and Colchester. Two thirds (66%) live within a 40-mile radius. Overall, our proportion of young students recruited from low-participation neighbourhoods (POLAR quintiles 1 or 2) is 35%, and our proportion of mature students recruited from areas of low adult HE qualifications has increased slightly over recent years, to 42%. Of these three areas, Southend-on-Sea has a particularly low rate of HE participation and we are pleased to have maintained the number of students recruited annually from this part of the East of England. Among our most recent cohort of students recruited from Southend-on-Sea, 63% were from low-participation neighbourhoods.
15. We continue to recruit almost all of our undergraduates from state schools and colleges, which is unusual for a small specialist provider with our subject mix. According to latest available HESA data, 97% of our first-degree entrants were from state schools and colleges compared to a location-adjusted benchmark of 91%.
16. Comparison of continuation rates for students from low-participation neighbourhoods with those from mid-high participation areas, averaged across a five-year period, shows a negative difference (less than 3%) for students from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2. However, when looking solely at POLAR quintile 1, we see a larger gap (6.6%) between these students and others. This pattern is mirrored when looking at students from Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile 1 compared to students from IMD quintiles 2-5, though the numbers involved are smaller, making it difficult to obtain reliable statistics.
17. Our analysis shows a consistent attainment gap between students from low participation areas compared to those from more advantaged areas. The attainment gap is particularly marked for young students from low-participation areas (POLAR quintiles 1 and 2), with only 39% of first-degree qualifiers obtaining a good honours degree, compared to 56% of young students from higher participation areas.

18. Due to the small size of our cohorts, we cannot meaningfully determine whether our students from low-participation neighbourhoods are less likely than others to enter professional employment or further study. However, combined data from the last two DLHE surveys (2015/16 and 2016/17) would suggest that there is a gap in this respect, with 34% of students from LPNs entering professional employment or further study compared to 43% of students from higher LPNs. We do not have sufficient numbers to conduct the same analysis using IMD quintiles.
19. **We have an objective that our students from low socio-economic backgrounds will have the same retention, attainment and progression rates as their more privileged peers.**

White, working class male students

20. Our analysis shows that white, working-class males are a priority group for widening access. The volume and proportion of white, male student applicants from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2 has declined year-on-year for the last three years. This in part reflects an overall decrease in male applicants to the institution, from 24% to 20% between 2016/17 and 2018/19. In addition, the proportion enrolling from low participation neighbourhoods within the male population has declined from 29% to 24%, although this contrasts with the proportion enrolling from low participation neighbourhoods within the female population, which has increased from 29% to 31%.
21. This trend in applicant behaviour has not necessarily translated into enrolments, as the ratio of white female to white male undergraduate entrants has remained consistent over the last three years, at around 77% to 23%. However, we enrol a higher proportion of students from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2 among our white female population than we do compared to our white male population: 34% compared to 25%, respectively. In absolute terms, we enrol nearly five times more female students from low-participation neighbourhoods than we do males.
22. Using IMD measure access for this group provides a similar picture. When aggregating data across the last five years, our proportion of white, male student enrolments from IMD quintile 1 is 1.2%. The rate of applications and enrolments has remained fairly consistent over this period.
23. Analysis of achievement and progression data for this group of students provides variable results year-on-year, with cohorts often too small to inform reliable statistics. However, we know from aggregate data over the last five years that white male students from low participation neighbourhoods are less likely to progress through each year of their course than white male students from higher participation areas. This aligns with our observation – when looking across both female and male populations and all ethnic groups – that we have seen persistent attainment gaps between young students from low-participation neighbourhoods compared to their peers from higher participation areas.
24. In the same way as for other groups, we will gather research insights into the specific needs of our white, working class male students to identify and allow deeper understanding of what we can do to address the particular access, attainment and progression gaps they face. An example of this is that we understand that some subjects attract students unevenly in terms of gender. The growth in courses that have a track record of being dominated by females, including our successful Veterinary Physiotherapy, Equine and Animal Science/Management

courses, has skewed the gender balance of the student body as a whole. Additionally, some of our specialist courses that typically prove more attractive to male applicants, such as agriculture and horticulture, tend to recruit from higher socio-economic groups – a pattern reflected in the land-based HE sector. Improving access for white, working class males will therefore involve wider efforts to rebalance the gender profile of our student body. This will depend on attracting more males to currently female-dominated courses and widening access for prospective students from non-traditional backgrounds for specific subjects. We will look to complete our research in this area by the end of 2019/20, in preparation for launching an access project focused on this group at the beginning of 2020/21.

25. **We have an objective that our white, working class male students will have the same representation in enrolment, and the same retention, attainment and progression rates as their peers.**

Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

26. We continue to face challenges with the recruitment of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students to undergraduate programmes. On average only 4% of our recruitment to first degree programmes comprises BAME students, rising to 11% for other undergraduate courses. One of the difficulties we face with diversifying the ethnic profile of the student body is our traditional catchment areas of Essex and the East of England, where overall there is a low proportion of BAME individuals. Research undertaken by Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester and Tendring local authorities in December 2015, using Census 2011 data, shows the BAME population accounts for 5.2% of the total population across these local authority areas, which is notably lower than regional and national figures (9.1% East of England and 14.5% England).
27. The small number of BAME students in our student body, and their spread across subject areas and qualification aims, makes it impossible to conduct meaningful quantitative analysis of retention, degree completion or progression by ethnicity. Similar challenges exist with respect to attainment data, although an aggregate of degree outcomes from the last three academic years would suggest that we experience an attainment gap in common with many other HEPs, with on average 59% of white students achieving a first or 2:1 degree compared to 48% of non-white students.
28. Over the five-year period of this plan we will develop initiatives and target partnerships to help diversify the ethnicity of our student population and to encourage the access of BAME students into sectors traditionally dominated by white graduates. However, given our rural location and regional recruitment profile, we do not consider it realistic or meaningful to set a target with respect to access for BAME students. A significant increase in BAME entrants to our undergraduate courses would entail shifting our recruitment patterns to reach outer London populations and competing with large HE providers in those areas. This approach does not align with our strategic priorities and cannot be supported with our available resources during the five-year period of this plan.
29. **We have an objective that our BAME students will have the same representation in enrolment, and the same retention, attainment, progression rates as their white peers.**

Mature students

30. The proportion of our first degree entrants aged 21 and over at point of entry is 16%; this increases to 22% when including other undergraduate awards. Unfortunately, we have seen declining numbers of mature students over the last five years, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the undergraduate student body. This reflects national trends in England over the same period. While we have seen drops in the number of mature students entering both full-time and part-time courses, the overall decline in part-time enrolments has undoubtedly undermined our efforts to sustain mature student numbers, given that a large majority (over 80%) of our part-time learners are mature. While we commit to retaining part-time degree pathways, given our location and subject mix we do not believe that we can meaningfully increase mature enrolments until system-wide barriers are removed.
31. Analysis of continuation rates for mature students over the last three years shows that these students are less likely to complete the first year of their course than young students (81.6% compared to 87.8%). However, this difference is concentrated in our one-year Certificate of HE courses, where an average of 20% of mature students fail to complete the year of study; differences across other qualification aims are less significant. We know that students on 'other undergraduate' courses such as one-year certificates are more likely to be mature than young (76% mature over the last five years), hence focussing retention initiatives on these shorter courses is key to improving retention and progression opportunities for mature learners. Mature students completing a first degree course are more likely to achieve a good honours degree compared to their younger counterparts (62% compared to 49% in the most recent year).
32. When analysing our DLHE data by age group, we tend to see that a slightly higher proportion of younger students were in full-time employment or further study six months after graduation compared to mature students. However, across the last two DLHE surveys we see that 49% of mature students were in professional-level graduate roles compared to 34% of young students.
33. **We have an objective that we will enrol mature students in greater numbers – reflecting the desire to study we expect in the wider community – and that they will have the same retention, attainment and progression rates as their peers.**

Care leavers

34. Over the last five-year period, we have recruited a total of nine students identified as care leavers. We have a generous bursary scheme in place to support these learners during their studies. The number of care leavers does not allow us to assess our performance with retaining and supporting these individuals, relative to the rest of the student body. However, we always seek to identify and address the additional support needs which may be required and we are committed to gathering more qualitative evidence about the experiences of these students. We are also working collaboratively with our NCOP, Make Happen, to fulfil a joint access and outreach project with respect to care leavers. In 2019/20 we will collect baseline data to inform a collaborative target regarding the aspirations of care leavers to enter higher education (Harrison, 2017).
35. **We have an objective that we will enrol care leavers in greater numbers and that our students with experience of care will have the same retention, attainment and progression rates as their peers.**

Ambition, objectives and targets

36. In our mission statement, ***‘Transforming lives and the environment through inspiring education’***, we regard ‘transforming’ to enshrine social mobility, and ‘lives’ to encompass students in all their diversity. The objectives specified earlier in this plan show the depth of our mission. We aspire to deliver a range of specialist and practical subjects to a diverse cohort of FE and HE students, enabling them to contribute directly and expertly to the challenges facing the UK’s land-based industries. Our vision is to combine specialist facilities and professional working environments with an inclusive, safe and welcoming environment for our learners on our beautiful 220-hectare estate. Our small size provides challenges when it comes to targeting access and student success activities, but it allows us to provide a highly personal and supportive learning environment, contributing to the fulfilment of our mission to be a proactive partner in the success of every one of our students.
37. In view of our small student numbers and limited resources, we will focus improvements in a limited number of areas to concentrate effort and investment where they can be most effective. The balance of our investment and institutional focus is weighted towards supporting student success and progression, which reflects the areas for improvement identified through our assessment of performance. Our access measures will centre around a long-term programme of activity to reach white, working-class males in deprived areas in our region.
38. While our small size and resource base pose challenges with respect to the scale of activity we can deliver, it means we can readily adopt a coordinated and responsive approach. We are committed to a whole-provider strategic approach at the University College, in which access and participation targets and projects are fully aligned with equality and diversity priorities and with quality enhancement activity to support student outcomes. Access and participation is a core activity for the institution and is embedded in our overall approach to learning and teaching and student support. Our priorities for access and participation will also steer our development of external partnerships, including sector collaboration, fundraising and sponsorship opportunities. We will seek out organisations with shared missions and values to support our long-term objectives.
39. Our overall ambition and measurable objectives are summarised as follows:
- Representative access by 2035
 - Equal continuation by 2030
 - Equal attainment by 2030
 - Equal progression by 2035

We are determined to achieve these objectives as part of our mission. We will target complete removal of the continuation and attainment gap for our students by 2030. We will aim to achieve the same with respect to access and progression to employment/further study by 2035. This reflects how social justice is a core belief for us, but recognises that there are significant external factors and limitations to the influence over society that we can have.

40. We believe the best way to advance our progress is to begin by addressing our most pressing shortcomings and focusing on work that will build momentum through significant visible impact. Based on our assessment of performance, we will consequently focus our available investment on the following target groups and lifecycle stages across the five-year period of this plan:

- **Access** for white males from working-class backgrounds

Increasing the proportion of enrolled white male starters from IMD quintile 1 backgrounds from 1.2% to 5% by 2024-25 (PTA_1)

Increasing the proportion of enrolled white male starters from POLAR quintiles 1-2 from 6.1% to 10.5% by 2024-25 (PTA_2)

- **Continuation** rates of students from low-participation neighbourhoods

Reducing the percentage difference in continuation rates between undergraduate students from POLAR quintile 1 and POLAR quintiles 2-5, from 6.6% to 0% by 2024/25 (PTS_5)

- **Continuation** rates of mature students

Reducing the percentage difference in continuation rates between mature and young undergraduate students, from 6.2% to 0% by 2024/25 (PTS_4)

- **Degree attainment** of young students from low-participation neighbourhoods

Reducing the percentage difference in degree attainment (1st and 2:1) between students from POLAR quintiles 1-2 and quintiles 3-5, from 13.1% to 7.0% by 2024/25 (PTS_3)

- **Degree completion and attainment** of disabled students

Reducing the percentage difference in attainment of the intended award between disabled and non-disabled students, from 5.6% to 0% by 2024/25 (PTS_1)

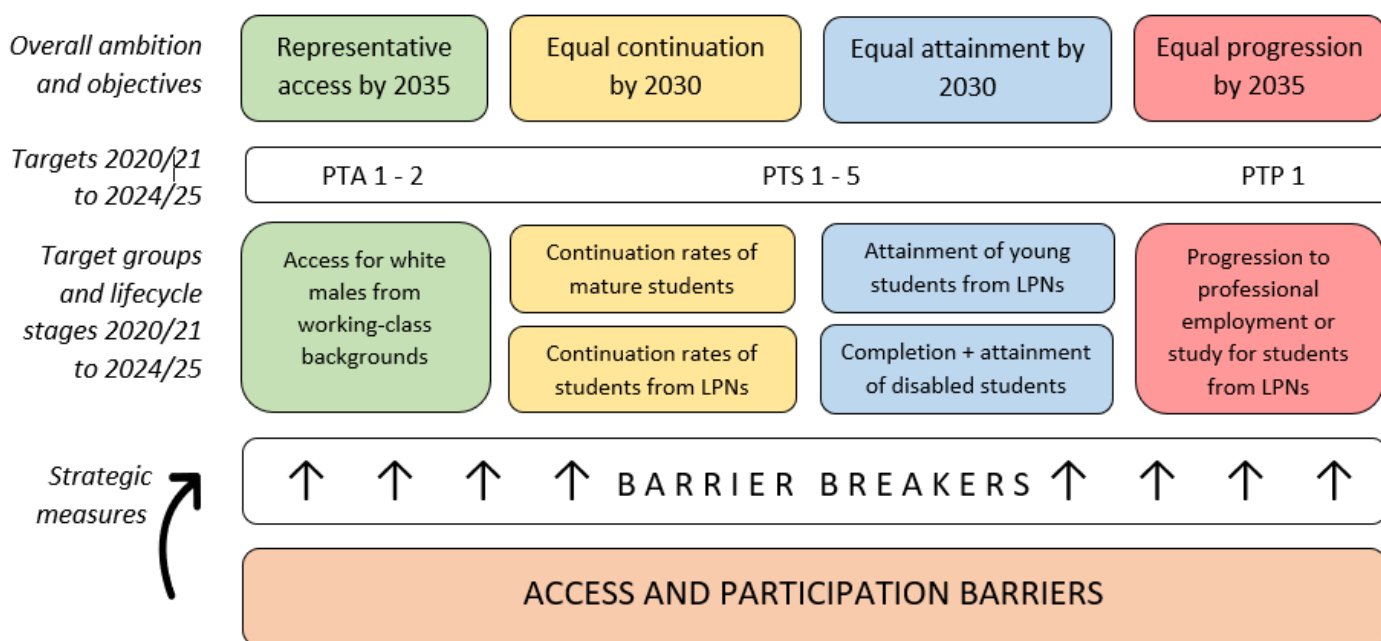
Reducing the percentage difference in degree attainment (1st and 2:1) between disabled and non-disabled students, from 16.5% to 7.0% by 2024/25 (PTS_2)

- **Progression** to highly-skilled employment or professional study for students from low-participation neighbourhoods

Reducing the percentage difference in professional employment/postgraduate study outcomes between students from POLAR quintiles 1-2, and quintiles 3-5, from 6.1% to 0% by 2024/25 (PTP_1)

41. Our aim of improving degree attainment levels for disabled students relates directly to one of the national key performance measures set by the OfS, namely *to eliminate the gap in degree outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between disabled students and non-disabled students by 2024-25*. The other three KPMs set by the OfS are either not relevant to our own institutional context, or do not emerge as WUC priorities given our assessment of performance.
42. In order to achieve a whole provider strategic approach, which we believe will best deliver our access and participation priorities, we have undertaken to consolidate the theories of change within our different current work streams into a single Theory of Change (ToC) statement for the whole institution. Our ToC asserts that there are multiple key barriers to access and participation resulting in the unequal access, success and progression of students from under-

represented groups. We seek to lower – and ultimately remove – each of these barriers to create clearer pathways for our identified target groups to achieve their potential. We have identified various ‘barrier breakers’, some specific to particular groups and lifecycle stages and others broader in scope. These are based on our own understanding and analysis, combined with relevant sector research. We expect our identified ‘barrier breakers’ to become more nuanced over time, as we develop our understanding through further analysis, monitoring and evaluation. A simple overview of our ToC is provided below:



43. Our strategic measures are the basis on which we plan to break down the barriers for our target groups, tailored to our institutional context and resource base. They are described in detail in the following section of the plan.

Strategic measures

44. The development of our 2019/20 access and participation plan marked a shift in our approach to widening participation activities following the appointment of a new vice-chancellor and self-evaluation guided by the new regulatory framework. At the point of developing the 2019/20 APP, we made a significant investment in student support services, including the creation of new Student Success Team, additional resources to support student mental health and some reorganisation of spend on scholarships and bursaries. All the committed investment was in place in the latter half of 2018/19 and will be deployed to support both institution-wide services and targeted projects from academic year 2019/20.

45. We expect key projects and interventions begun in academic year 2019/20 to continue into at least the first two years of this plan, to enable us to develop and evaluate the activity and to determine its impact on our target groups. Many of our medium-term priorities in this APP therefore build upon the commitments laid out in our 2019/20 plan. We have allowed for

increased investment in our access and progression activity through the planning period, in line with our long-term growth plans and financial strategy.

46. Our APP target groups and priorities have been discussed by our Equality and Diversity Committee and we are concerned to ensure that this plan is aligned with our institution-wide Equality Policy. Our Equality and Diversity Committee receives a comprehensive annual analysis report that identifies gaps in representation and outcomes between different groups (including, but not limited to, under-represented groups in higher education). The Committee considers all student groups, including our FE student body where we have observed similar attainment gaps as those identified among our undergraduates. It provides the mechanism by which we will continue to analyse and monitor performance of sub-groups across our student population, including BAME students, disabled students and care leavers.
47. Our APP is the means by which we will improve equality and diversity among our undergraduate student body, and among prospective higher education students more broadly; it becomes the operational plan for achievement of our equality objectives *where those concern (undergraduate) higher education*. The Equality and Diversity Committee receives progress reports and minutes from our Access and Participation Group; likewise, it will receive reports and objectives from FE groups and staff groups where similar plans and objectives exist. This enables the Committee to take an institution-wide overview of progress, identifying where concerns exist across different groups, and where successes can be shared.

Access and outreach

48. Our priorities for access and outreach across this year five-year plan are focussed upon increasing the volume and proportion of white, male students from low socio-economic (working class) backgrounds. We have set stretching targets, in the context of the constrained outreach and marketing resources at our disposal and the progress made to date. We expect progress to be concentrated towards the end of the period given our distance to travel in this area, and since meaningful outreach and access activity can take many years to realise benefits.
49. We have chosen to construct targets using both POLAR4 data and the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), in recognition of the limitations of using only one data source to measure an intrinsically complicated subject. With respect to POLAR4, our focus will be to increase the proportion of white, male students entering the University College from areas classed as POLAR 4 quintiles 1 and 2, from 6.1% to 10.5% over the period. With respect to IMD data, we will focus on applicants in indices 1-2 (quintile 1), targeting an increase from 1.2% to 5.0% over the period.
50. **We will build sustained partnerships with a selected number of schools which are located in low participation neighbourhoods and which have high proportions of pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds.** This method of working has been shown to be beneficial and effective (Harrison, et al., 2018). It will enhance our visibility to this group, bringing awareness of our courses as potential options. We expect most of these partnerships to be focused on secondary, rather than primary, schools. However, our partnership with these schools will involve outreach activity targeted at 11-12 year-old pupils through to Key Stages 4 and 5, given that progress in this area will involve sustained and consistent aspiration-raising over a long period of time. We expect to increase our work with primary schools towards the

end of the period, as new outreach activities have become established and we have more available resource to dedicate to this work. This will be monitored and evaluated to test for effectiveness with reference to current regulatory guidance (Office for Students, 2019).

51. We will use the Higher Education Access Tracker and other sector good practice approaches to monitor the impact of our outreach activities with pupils of all ages. This will be more meaningful where we are able to maintain the same school relationships year-on-year and we know that this has a greater chance of success when the school is located relatively close to our campus. However, as a small, specialist provider with our own FE provision, we often find it difficult to access relevant schools in the area; these schools often prefer to work with large universities, have a minimal understanding of the disciplines we teach, and are reluctant to work with FE providers when they have their own sixth form provision.
52. We will continue using our expertise and facilities to promote engagement with HE among our target groups by **increasing visits to our dedicated campus facilities and by deploying our staff and specialist equipment directly to outreach events and opportunities**. We believe this kind of activity is effective in emphasising the accessibility and attractiveness of our options for these groups. We will look to apply more consistent evaluation approaches to existing activities, such as our 'Discover Writtle' days and the annual 'Food and Farming Day' hosted on our campus, with the latter typically attracting around 2,800 primary school pupils.
53. To help widen the reach and impact of our outreach activity, we will **collaborate with other small, specialist institutions in our field to establish an outreach network and resource bank for land-based subjects**. We believe this will help us increase the impact we can make with the investment we can commit. Working with other institutions, including Royal Agricultural University and Hartpury University, and with support where available from Landex and GuildHE, we will develop a common approach to promoting the value of these disciplines and the associated progression opportunities. We will create shared IAG materials, establish a good practice network and run collaborative events targeted at pupils from deprived areas, along with their parents, teachers and careers advisors.
54. We are also committed to diversifying the ethnic profile of our home/EU student population through increased recruitment of BAME students, notwithstanding the challenges this presents due to our geography and specialist subject focus. **We will actively promote the achievement of BAME students (and staff) and we will pursue direct and co-funded sponsorship opportunities to encourage BAME applicants to envisage themselves achieving success through our courses**, for example, by partnering with charities that have a shared mission to enable diverse talent into the equine industry.
55. **We will recruit a wider pool of student ambassadors and focus on those from BAME and white, working class backgrounds**. Studies such as Gartland (2015) and Hume (2018) have established that such student ambassadors have a greater rapport by virtue of their lived experiences, contributing to the effectiveness of outreach activities. New student ambassadors will receive a high level of input, including paid work opportunities and recognition for demonstrated transferable skills, along with vital skills training in areas such as self-confidence and delivering presentations. This training can also be extended to participants from other HEPs within the NCOP, and the programme as a whole has additional community benefits through assisting schools with their careers and progression responsibilities.

56. As noted in our 2019/20 APP, **we will continue to offer a part-time mode of study across most of our undergraduate course to support entry routes to HE for mature learners**, an approach advocated by Universities UK (2013). We will closely monitor the financial viability of these pathways against the backdrop of declining part-time enrolments across the sector. We will also look to expand work-based and flexible full-time study options, alongside short-course learning opportunities for those who do not want to commit to degree study.
57. We recognise that while our ultimate objective is to widen access to our own courses and diversify our student body, we have a responsibility to remove barriers to HE entry that extends beyond our own institutional priorities. **We will work closely with the Essex National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) to raise aspiration and attainment levels among our target groups regardless of institution or discipline focus.** In particular, we will work with the NCOP to deliver a project aimed at increasing HE attainment levels among the regional care-leaver population.

Student success

58. Our strategy for student success must primarily focus upon a whole-institution approach (see paragraph 3). While we will target support where it is needed, we expect these initiatives and projects to benefit the whole institution. This reflects our small size and our high proportion of under-represented students enrolled at the University College. We therefore plan to continue developing our core service of embedded, whole-institution activities, which we will supplement with a small number of projects launched in 2019/20 to improve attainment outcomes for underrepresented groups by addressing their specific needs. We have co-designed many of these projects with the WUC Students' Union to maximise their influence and reach. Projects will be monitored to evaluate impact and continuously improve the support provided.
59. We have set ambitious targets focussed upon increasing degree completion and attainment rates among disabled students, degree attainment levels for students from low-participation neighbourhoods, and continuation rates among students studying on our HE certificate, HE diploma and foundation degree courses. The activities we describe below will be targeted at supporting these specific groups, in most cases by proactively reaching out to individual students, even where initiatives and schemes are still available for all students to benefit from.
60. Providing spaces where students can access help with their skills and increase their familiarity with HE helps to redress inequalities. **During the academic year 2018/19 we introduced a new role of Learning Mentor to support course teams with student retention, attainment and progression.** The role of our Learning Mentors includes responding fast to referrals and reaching out to students by offering one-to-one sessions aimed at supporting academic achievement, a combination of activities that creates effective action informed by the good practice expressed in the 'Framework for student access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education' (HEA, 2018). The ability to offer this level of personalised service delivery is a strength of our small institutional size. Learning Mentors also track themes and this research proactively informs the delivery of workshops that address key issues for all our learners. Over time, this programme promises to construct a high level of insight into student support good practice aligned to the student lifecycle, informing wider institutional practice through our ToC. This insight will be vital in accurately understanding how and why the needs of

underrepresented groups may differ, and can therefore raise the quality and effectiveness of our targeted support.

61. Our Student Success team will deliver additional **monthly open study support sessions and attainment boosting workshops** in our HE Study Hub, a dedicated study building. This helps to reduce attainment gaps by offering interventions that reports such as 'Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change' (Thomas, et al., 2017) have recommended as effective. We will advertise these widely at the start of each semester but will proactively encourage disabled students and those from LPNs to engage with them throughout the year. They will also provide specific support ahead of key opportunities, such as careers fairs. While open to all, the content of these will be tailored according to research into our under-represented groups by monitoring service delivery as a more specific intervention than the general workshop offer – our ToC will address specific group needs as well as general research.
62. Awareness of and access to support should be straightforward for all students as uneven prior knowledge of HE has the potential to perpetuate inequalities within our learning community. **We will review the location of our student-facing support services, working towards the model of a central student hub.** Our ToC asserts that increased visibility, accessibility and efficiency of all student support services will better enable students to ask for help, and thereby to receive support they are likely to benefit from. We will also explore further the Jisc Learner Analytics project 'Study Goal app' that offers real-time collation of success metrics, the benefits of which have been described in Mullan, Sclater, and Peasgood (2016). This allows students to see the metrics we see, helping them navigate their studies, but also provides the opportunity for us to more actively direct support towards individual students.
63. The way we reward student success can be an effective channel for revealing to all how to successfully navigate HE, reducing knowledge inequalities. **We have therefore introduced Student Spotlight Awards**, which are available to any student who has made a substantial contribution in one of three areas – Community Excellence, Extracurricular Excellence and Enterprise Excellence. This complements the student's academic qualification. Our ToC predicts the profiles will help share the learning community's best practice – reports such as Cracking the code: how schools can improve social mobility (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2014) have described how students from underrepresented groups will particularly benefit from seeing replicable models of success, especially from people whose identities and experiences mirror their own. This will also produce benefits for our access work.
64. Experience of the world of work can help address inequalities between groups, as social mobility can be a barrier to success, as noted in guidance such as 'Social mobility' by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (2018). **We are exploring sponsorship arrangements to fund an annual 'internal intern' scheme from 2020.** This will help develop peer support for all our students, but particularly those from LPNs who will benefit from priority places on the scheme. The scheme will allocate a mentor from industry (including our alumni) for those identified within our target groups and will provide them with a bespoke training package, aiming to enhance students' opportunities to develop their soft skills and social capital ahead of entering the workforce, along with opportunities to build volunteering and fundraising experience. We believe this will empower underrepresented students to access networks and learning that will put their prospects of progression on a level with more privileged peers.

65. Our **Flying Start initiative**, beginning in 2019/20, will focus upon a group of students defined by qualification aim: HE certificates, HE diplomas and foundation degrees. Our ToC asserts that a substantial improvement of the offer to these students will have a significant focused impact on the access and participation of underrepresented groups, owing to the status which shorter courses appear to have in serving as an entry to higher education for students from these backgrounds. This initiative is key to our efforts to improve continuation for mature students and students from low-participation neighbourhoods. Flying Start will include frontloaded academic, co-curricular and support services involvement with a **peer mentoring 'Buddy Scheme'**. This will allow students to make the most of their studies and the campus as quickly as possible through developing a sense of belonging and enabling student success. The benefits of a peer mentoring scheme, and our understanding of 'belonging', have been described in Thomas (2012), and Thomas, et al. (2017). The scheme will aim to reduce the impact of a shorter time before final assessment these students face compared to their peers on BSc courses, and to address any academic or confidence barriers. We anticipate are improved continuation along with improvements in completion, attainment and progression. Impact may also be made in the form of improved access for prospective students with multiple under-represented characteristics emboldened by the enhanced support offer that the initiative provides. The effectiveness of these two linked projects will be evaluated and linked to our ToC and, if they are as effective as we anticipate, we expect to grow the scheme in subsequent years.
66. **We will aim to anticipate the needs of students with disabilities by tailoring our offer with them in mind.** For example, we will include a 'quiet hour' at careers fairs and other large events so that the busy environment doesn't become intimidating or over-stimulating for some of our learners. We will continue a whole provider approach to supporting student mental health, including through the **roll-out of mental health first aid training to a wider group of WUC staff members**. We will maintain the level of resource in our Wellbeing Team, which has recently been supplemented with a qualified mental health practitioner, and will **leverage external resources and support networks through our innovative Student Wellbeing Portal** (see case study on page 24). We believe these measures will improve retention and attainment outcomes for both the students whose specific needs are anticipated, but also their peers as a result of a better-accommodated learning community.

Curriculum and pedagogy

67. Our curriculum is rooted in professional practice and industry projects, with live briefs a feature of many courses. **From 2021/22 we propose to extend this by moving from our current module-by-module assessment approach to include an integrated programme assessment (IPA) regime.** This promotes a more holistic engagement with learning by assessing knowledge and skills at course (programme) level, rather than at a module level. IPA has been developed at a small number of other HEPs, yielding evidence that it can help address over-assessment, reduce student and staff workload, and encourage the creation of a community with shared responsibility for student learning (Harvey, Tree, & Rand-Weaver, 2018). IPA will be rolled out though periodic review and will be supported by a re-organised approach to course leadership in which the existing Course Scheme Manager role is supplemented by Year Tutor roles, who remain with the cohort as they progress. This provides additional support for student progression, with enhanced advice and guidance reinforcing the new approach to assessment.

68. **Over the next three years we will aim to anticipate and meet the needs of our underrepresented students by building inclusive learning approaches into all our undergraduate courses**, utilising the recommendations of contributions to sector best practice such as Thomas (2016). We will achieve this through development of our institution-wide ToC that will benefit from research input from the Wellbeing and Student Success teams, as well as external research and our own research into different aspects of pedagogic theory. We believe this will better support our distinctive population of learners and the relatively high proportion of our students with cognitive or learning disabilities and mental health conditions, thereby improving retention and attainment by developing and encouraging varied forms of learning and assessment from day one of the course. By 2020/21 we will have appointed a Head of Inclusive Learning and Teaching, replacing a more traditional Learning and Teaching role, who will lead on putting inclusive pedagogy at the heart of our ToC, embedding these approaches in our practice. The post holder will be supported by School-based leads who will be given a day a week to work on learning and teaching enhancement projects designed to implement this and build capacity. For example, we will provide training in working with dyslexic students, autistic spectrum disorders and anxiety awareness to all teaching staff. By the end of the APP period, we aspire to be known for our coordinated, whole-provider approach to supporting students with learning difficulties and mental health conditions through our inclusive learning and teaching.
69. The success of our **'Near-Peer Assisted Learning' project** (see case study on page 17) demonstrates the attainment gain achieved by near-peer interaction and evidence shows that this is considered an effective way of transferring knowledge and skills across a 'knowledge gap'. We will look to roll out this initiative, originally delivered for cohorts of Veterinary Physiotherapy students on our four-year integrated master's course, to help address attainment gaps in other courses and modules.

Progression to graduate employment and further study

70. As a specialist and vocationally-oriented HE provider, student employability is core to our mission and long-term strategic objectives. However, we recognise that graduate outcomes, in particular progression to professional employment or further study, represents an area for improvement across the institution. Overall the proportion of our students across all groups going into employment or further study was around 93% from the 2016/17 cohort (95% for 2015/16). When looking specifically at professional employment and postgraduate study, this reduces to 45% (35% for 2015/16). We are pleased that the majority of our graduates choose to enter the land-based and outdoor industries. However, it is often difficult for graduates in these industries to secure high-paying and/or professional-level starting positions, which we see reflected in both our DLHE and LEO datasets.
71. The size of our DLHE (and forthcoming Graduate Outcomes) datasets means that we are not able to conduct meaningful analysis of graduate destinations for each under-represented group. While we have chosen to target improvement in professional-level employment and further study for students from LPNs, where limited data suggests we experience an achievement gap, we will still focus efforts on *all* undergraduate leavers. We consider whole-provider, embedded approaches to supporting student employability to be the most effective way we can support better progression outcomes for under-represented groups.

Case study 1: Near-Peer Assisted Learning

Summary

A significant contribution to the development of the assertions in our ToC relating to educational theory or pedagogy has been made by a study aimed at improving attainment among cohorts of Veterinary Physiotherapy students on our four-year integrated master's course.

The motivations behind the study were to address the difficulty of learning the vast quantities of anatomical information and practical skills required to pass an OSCE (objective structured clinical examination) at the end of Semester B in the fourth year, which must be passed to allow a student to graduate and practice as an accredited Veterinary Physiotherapist.

The study undertook a literature review regarding teaching techniques in the human-medical field and found that near-peer interaction is considered a good way of transferring knowledge and skills across a 'knowledge gap' that can supplement a teacher or lecturer's direct guidance. We are innovative in bringing a medical learning practice to the veterinary field, and evaluating this through a formal trial involving comparing the attainment of fourth-year volunteer participants with students who did not volunteer. Anatomical dissection is only timetabled during the first year of this course, so by matching fourth-year students with first-year students, the fourth-year students gained dissection-based revision as well as experience providing educational training to students less experienced in other areas.

Impact and Evidence

Two academic cycles were used to assess repeatability, and their results are below:

Results: OSCE Examination

Pass at 1 st Attempt	AY 2017-18	AY 2018-19
Volunteer participants	74%	75%
Students who didn't take part	50%	48%

Results: Socratic marks (anatomy knowledge)

Pass at 1 st Attempt	AY 2017-18	AY 2018-19
Volunteer participants	93%	78%
Students who didn't take part	52%	54%

It is also notable that uptake of the opportunity to volunteer in this study programme increased, implying the scheme has enjoyed a positive reception by the student body, which is also corroborated by the quotations below.

- *"Teaching gave me more confidence that I did actually know something".*
- *"It made me realise how far I had come and how much I have actually learnt".*
- *"I would 100% recommend this to help with learning and my confidence".*

Future Vision

The success of near-peer assisted learning has informed our new ToC, and so may be incorporated into course design in other areas. Further such studies will be used to test out other educational theory aspects of our ToC to ensure we follow and enhance best practice

72. **The professional practice elements of our courses provide a powerful base from which to build our employability skills offer, which we will enhance through an institution-wide business development programme to be piloted in 2019/20.** This builds upon new investment in employability and enterprise support from 2018/19, which has allowed us to deliver opportunities for all our students to engage with industry through activities such as business networking breakfasts, keynote presentations by entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial mastermind sessions, and one-to-one mentoring and coaching meetings. Informed by the principles outlined in reports such as 'The case for employer engagement in state schools' (Education and Employers, 2019), we believe these activities allow students to learn about the general expectations and requirements of the business world as well as gain transferable skills and personal development insights, and so reduce inequalities in these areas caused by prior variation in experience and background.
73. Our focus from 2020/21 will be on **embedding essential employability skills training into the academic timetable, informed by the 'Framework for embedding employability in higher education'** (Higher Education Academy, 2016). Subject-specific content and delivery will help develop students' occupationally-specific social and cultural capital as well as supply extra sector knowledge needed to enter and thrive in their chosen profession. Our new provision will be fully informed by ToC recommendations for working with groups and individuals with different needs and levels of prior knowledge to ensure equality of opportunity.
74. Work-based learning opportunities are a highly effective approach to improving graduate outcomes, and equal access to these helps to reduce inequality (Higher Education Academy, 2016). We already offer placement learning in some courses and, as part of our new strategy to enhance graduate outcomes, **we will offer all students entering from 2021/22 the opportunity to undertake a professional work placement.** Thus, by the end of the five-year period, we expect all undergraduate students to have benefited from the opportunity to complete a placement as part of their course. Dedicated support will be essential for successfully expanding this aspect of our delivery and so we will look to appoint a full-time placement support officer during academic year 2020/21. In the meantime we will explore **'micro-placement' opportunities for students from underrepresented groups, targeted in the first instance at students from LPNs.** These placements will run over the summer months (2-5 weeks), to help soft-skill development such as communication, innovation and confidence.
75. We are also **working with SMEs to place a small number of students into short funded placements.** We are part of EIRA, a consortium of seven universities and colleges supporting innovation in the East of England which funds ground-breaking projects to provide businesses with funded knowledge exchange across three key areas: artificial intelligence, biotechnology and digital creative (EIRA, 2019).
76. In addition, from 2020/21, **students will have the option of a project-led final year, in which teams are able to work in a supported way to apply their learning to the running of our extensive professional facilities.** This will involve, for example, our Equine Unit, Farm, Horticulture Unit and Gardens. Our Design students will work in a design agency setting on live projects for paying clients. We expect to pilot these projects in 2019/20.
77. Given the nature of our subjects, we expect and encourage a significant number of our graduates to set up their own small business or to enter family-run businesses, either straight

after graduation or later on in their careers. From 2019/20 we will be offering **timetabled enterprise sessions delivered by our 'Entrepreneur in Residence'** to supplement the more general employment and business advice offered in our modules and the careers advice and guidance provided by our qualified Careers Adviser. From 2020/21, **this will be expanded to include a dedicated start-up business hub to support student enterprise, innovation and partnership working**. The objectives will be to encourage and support new business start-up ideas, and support students in the practicalities of setting up or entering family-run businesses. Students will be supported to work on cross-discipline partnership projects and business competitions to develop their employability skills, regardless of whether they have declared entrepreneurial intentions. All students will be encouraged and supported to access such opportunity, which will help address aspiration gaps among students from underrepresented groups.

78. We believe alumni relations can be harnessed to provide high value to our access and participation work by opening opportunities to grow our students' knowledge and networks. In the past we have built strong, long-lasting relationships with our alumni, many of whom remain in the local area after graduation. **Our long-term strategy involves engaging more alumni, with the intention that a core pool will provide a number of benefits to our students, particularly for underrepresented groups**. These benefits we will seek include: internship and volunteering opportunities at their businesses, providing real-world experiences; practical advice from established, successful businesspeople and leaders; and mentoring and inspirational speaking from successful alumni who have come from underrepresented groups who can raise aspirations and provide role models for success for our students from underrepresented groups.
79. Informed by good practice in employer engagement (QAA, 2014), **we will also continue to build on the relationships we have with key employers, and work collaboratively to provide more opportunities for our students**. This will be in parallel with our planned alumni-relations work as a channel for engaging the business contacts within our network. An example of this is offering interview facilities on campus for companies who wish to offer graduate opportunities to our students. We believe developing closer and stronger relationships with industry will mean employers will value the diversity of our learning community, fostering good relationships and helping to equalise graduate outcomes for our students from underrepresented backgrounds.
80. This is connected to our awareness that some of the industries we serve still give preference to graduates from elite universities and backgrounds, which can undermine the achievements of students from under-represented backgrounds and from institutions such as WUC. We assert that the interests of these employers and the prospective workforce are best served by engaging primarily, and in the first instance, with our high-quality courses designed explicitly to address their needs. We intend to leverage our relationships with industry to promote this view, introducing employers to our graduating professionals who have already distinguished themselves by showing a long-term investment and commitment to enter the sector by undertaking their studies with us.

Financial support

81. In order to ensure the effectiveness of bursaries and scholarships, we have commenced qualitative research and analysis to gather intelligence about our investment in direct financial support, which has initially looked at the offer as it has been experienced by students in the academic year 2018/19. Ongoing research will involve further student surveys and focus groups in autumn 2019 and will drive the development of our ToC assumptions in this area. We will also gather information and best practice from other HEIs to inform our approach to financial support. We expect this work to be complete in spring 2020, ready to re-launch our bursaries and scholarships ahead of the 2021/22 application cycle.
82. Since our research is not complete in time for the publication of this plan, a decision has been made to retain the current suite of bursaries connected to access and participation for academic year 2020/21, with a view to redesigning our approach to financial support from 2021/22 onwards. We expect the eligibility criteria and levels of award to change, hence we will submit a variation of this APP once our new financial support arrangements have been confirmed, in time for the 2021/22 student recruitment cycle. We will put in place a consistent monitoring framework for our new bursaries and scholarships involving qualitative feedback from students and, wherever possible, quantitative analysis of student outcomes. This will allow us to monitor their impact over time and to determine whether our ToC assumptions are proven.
83. In 2020/21, we will continue to offer three key bursary schemes for under-represented groups. Students will be eligible to receive a cash award if they are a care leaver, if they are mature (aged 21 or over at point of entry), or if they have an annual household income of less than £25,000. In all cases, eligible students will receive a cash payment in every year of study (£1,000 per year for care leavers, £1,000 for mature students and £500 for students from low-income households). Based on projected student numbers, the total amount invested in bursaries, scholarships and fee waivers in 2020/21 will be £133,850.
84. **From 2021/22, we have planned to maintain the overall level of investment in financial support for under-represented groups** across the period, but we have not yet determined how these funds will be allocated across under-represented groups. This may potentially change the proportion of the funds allocated to students with household residual incomes up to £25,000 versus the allocation to students from other under-represented groups; in the meantime, estimates have been provided for each category of investment on the basis of current practice.
85. While this research and evaluation project is yet to be completed, our initial findings, based on a questionnaire jointly developed with the Students' Union and subjected to cognitive pre-testing with student volunteers, have established a disconnect between staff and student assumptions. In particular, the receipt of money at the beginning of study was seen by some students as putting a sense of obligation on their behaviour that was unwelcome, even though students are free to spend cash bursaries however they wish and are not asked to account for its use. Students also commented about the extra costs of study they encounter after arriving, in terms of both the absolute scale of this in some subjects and also the relative cost levels between subjects.
86. These early findings suggest significant amendments to the ToC and an operational change to expenses-based delivery methods. **We have already committed to develop a log of 'true'**

course costs encountered by students during study on different courses, which we anticipate will be significant when compared with less specialist courses in other institutions. We will make this publicly available to improve the information available to applicants and to help us provide mitigating financial support, directly and through external sponsorship tailored to subject areas.

87. In summary, we anticipate that our new ToC entries relating to financial support will focus on establishing how scholarships and bursaries remove barriers to attainment, progression and retention for under-represented groups, and their marketing will emphasise this focus. We have so far been unable to identify any evidence that our bursary schemes directly impact on access and, given our scale and resource base, we do not expect to offer very large fee waivers or cash awards to individual students in an attempt to do so. Effects on access through financial support seem to derive mostly indirectly – through the institution signalling its regard for students' welfare – which can be achieved through support directed to meet other objectives.
88. **Investment in hardship funds will be maintained and ring-fenced throughout the period.** Over the course of the next year, and well ahead of academic year 2020/21, we will be adopting a new approach to the award of hardship funds to provide a speedier response to students in immediate need. We have constituted a small panel of relevant senior staff to assess hardship cases and provide a compassionate but consistent approach to hardship support. Our priority is to encourage students to talk to us early on about any money worries they may be facing, so that our interventions – financial and otherwise – have a higher likelihood of succeeding.

Approach to evaluation and monitoring

89. In 2018/19, we established an Access and Participation Group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and comprising academics, professional service staff and students. This permanent Group meets monthly to steer our institution-wide access and participation work and to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of all associated activity and projects. The Group has used the OfS evaluation self-assessment tool to consider the maturity of current approaches and to build in robust evaluation methods for future interventions. It regularly discusses how evaluative data collection can be built into access and participation projects and staff now have a common understanding of the importance of robust evaluation methods. Investment in access and participation activity, including resources to support evaluation and monitoring, are also discussed through our annual integrated planning exercise to ensure that it is appropriately factored into our strategic and financial planning.
90. Responsibility for monitoring access and outreach activity lies with our Head of Student Recruitment and Marketing, while responsibility for monitoring student success and progression activity sits with our Head of Student Success. Both areas are overseen by the Registrar and University College Secretary, and ultimately the Vice-Chancellor. However, monitoring is embedded at project level: each of the key interventions described in this plan is managed as a project and each project is owned by a member of the team and involves an academic and a student lead. Students are represented on all of the groups and committees involved with the design, delivery and monitoring of our APP. We also use our HE Student Council to update and consult with students on our APP activities, including specific project progress updates. At an informal level, our Student Success team frequently meets with students to keep them informed with the work of the team and delivery of APP initiatives. Our student ambassadors are involved

with the design and delivery of access and outreach activities and they will be briefed on, and involved with, monitoring and evaluation of our APP.

91. Progress with each project is regularly reported to the monthly Access and Participation Group, with outcomes linked to student outcome targets that have been agreed by the Academic Board and Board of Governors and communicated to wider staff. Governors will receive regular APP updates through standing reports, and we will also produce an annual APP progress report for consideration by the Academic Board and the Board of Governors. Our Equality and Diversity Committee also regularly considers progress against APP objectives as part of our wider Equality Policy. If our regular monitoring demonstrates that we are falling behind our targets, or that progress is worsening in a particular area, we will of course seek to understand why this is, for example through further data analysis and student feedback. Where evidence shows us that an intervention has not been successful, we will re-profile our investment so that demonstrably beneficial activities can be expanded and so that new or altered initiatives can be delivered. We will not wait until the end of an academic year to act if there is clear evidence that a project is not producing the outcomes we planned; however, in most cases we expect that it will take two full academic 'cycles' before we can conduct a comprehensive evaluation of our key access and student success projects, particularly as this is new activity for the University College.
92. Evaluation approaches are built into our projects at the design phase, which covers the type of data we plan to gather and how this will be used to determine the impact of the intervention. We expect to rely upon type 1 and type 2 evidence for all of our access, success and progression projects owing to our small cohort sizes and the ethical implications of establishing control groups excluded from a service or activity. We will instead make use of questionnaires and focus groups, constructed according to sound research principles, to establish the impact of an intervention on those who participated. Where numbers permit, this will be combined with quantitative analysis of student data to try and understand how those participating have performed academically and with respect to graduate outcomes, particularly relative to earlier cohorts when interventions were not being delivered. In some cases, we have been able to identify benchmarks to inform our evaluation, for example in the case of our peer-assisted learning project and our Success Buddy scheme. We will apply these same programme design principles to our outreach projects as we develop these over the course of the next year.
93. We will concentrate resources for evaluation and monitoring in those areas where we are investing most heavily. For example, our Student Success Advisor will dedicate significant time to evaluating our new Flying Start programme, which aims to address the need for a more intensive welcome and preparation period for under-represented groups enrolled on certificate, diploma and foundation degree courses, and thereby to improve retention and progression rates for these students. The evaluative approach for the project has already been designed and agreed with staff and students and will involve the following: observation of student sessions to understand engagement patterns; gathering of anonymous session approval and feedback during all sessions; focus-group discussions to gather narrative feedback and test approval for components of the programme; collation of findings from all of these methods to form statements and counterfactual statements that will be presented to the entire cohort as a questionnaire at the close of the programme. A final report will provide a summary of the learnings from each part of this evaluation process, which will supply narrative explanations that can be considered alongside the performance statistics gathered by our MIS team. The findings of this report will be widely communicated to students and staff and will inform continuous improvement of the programme in subsequent years.

94. Implementation of our approaches to monitoring and evaluation will be based upon reliable quantitative data, largely drawn from our student records systems and cross-checked where necessary with external data sources such as OfS-supplied data files and HESA statistics. We have a small but expert Management Information Systems (MIS) team who are experienced at analysing student data and re-building performance indicators, using knowledge of HE statutory data returns and our own internal performance measures. Wherever possible we have mirrored sector-standard approaches to measuring outcomes, for example using OfS and HESA methodology to determine student retention and attainment, so that we optimise our ability to benchmark our performance and retain consistency of measurements over time. Where we are using questionnaires to assess the impact of our interventions, these are designed using input from a range of staff and students and are cognitively pre-tested using best practice survey guidelines. The estimated time and resources needed to effectively evaluate our access and participation interventions are built into projects at the design phase. Our Student Success Adviser has been appointed to help with this work, having responsibility for supporting research and evaluation of access and participation projects across the institution.
95. We will apply our learnings from our evaluation to continuously improve our access and participation activity. As we have not yet completed any of the projects and interventions begun under our new strategic approach to access, success and progression, we are not yet able to self-assess our learning approaches. However, the open and transparent culture developed within the institution means that we will be honest in recognising when an initiative is not yielding expected outcomes and will be agile in re-profiling our investment to ensure that resource is directed to the most effective activity. We also know that it may take some time – in some case years – before we are able to reliably assess the outcome of a project and apply the relevant learnings. We will establish evaluation check points and reflection opportunities to support continuous improvement and refinement of our initiatives prior to end-point evaluation.

Case study 2: Mental Health Support

Summary

In response to a significant increase in declarations of disability at the institution, and with the proportion of our students declaring a mental health condition almost three times the national average, we have made a significant investment into our Wellbeing Team over the last two years. The Wellbeing Team provides a range of in-house referral and signposting services including safeguarding, student counselling, wellbeing support, and a recently enhanced provision of mental health advice and support. The team also provides out-of-hours support for residential students.

Part of this investment has been in a Student Wellbeing Portal. This has been created and embedded into our Virtual Learning Environment (as a Moodle course page) and provides clear and accessible information, advice and guidance for all aspects of wellbeing including consent, sexual health, eating well, money management, staying mentally healthy and transitioning to university life. The Wellbeing Portal also has a dedicated staff area with referral capabilities – a new function that will enable the team to prioritise and monitor referrals into the service. It also has the facility to allow the Wellbeing Team to communicate with and broadcast directly to students. It is expected that the whole community will be able to benefit from preventative interaction with the service.

Increased investment has also allowed the development of partnerships and links to external resources, including: rolling out the Student Minds-accredited training programme 'Look After Your Mate', referring students to the CBT-based SilverCloud app, welcoming onto campus the stress-relieving sessions offered by Canine Concern, and combating period poverty through the Red Box Project.

Impact and Evidence

At the time of writing, the Wellbeing Team recorded interactions with 28% of the higher education population during the last academic year (229 students). Comments gathered from some of the students include:

- *"[Wellbeing Staff have] truly made a big impact to student life, by the strong commitment and determination to help others and [their] enthusiastic, positive and open personality towards students..."*
- *"I wanted to thank you for helping me to prepare and manage my anxiety levels, it has really helped!"*
- *"You made a huge difference in helping me to get better and challenge myself".*

Future Vision

Certain features of the Wellbeing Portal will be replicated in the VLE presence of other support services, such as the Student Success team. This project has helped pioneer our delivery of support to students and has paved the way for more evaluation of referral pathways and service demand trends that will increase future institutional knowledge of best practice.

Student involvement

96. Our students have been provided with opportunities to comment on the content of this document and associated targets through a variety of mechanisms. Key among them has been our APP Working Group, which includes student members and has overseen the development of the plan. Drafts of the plan have also been considered by our Academic Board and Board of Governors, both of which include representation from students. More informally, we have worked closely with a range of students over the last six months to design and develop the strategic measures described in this plan, co-designing projects and initiatives from day one to ensure that student input is gathered and acted upon. As plans and initiatives have developed, these have been presented to our HE Student Council for review, with feedback frequently shaping our approach to APP activity. For example, our planned 'Student Spotlight' Awards scheme, intended to raise aspirations among current and future students from under-represented backgrounds, was re-designed in response to student feedback.
97. Informal, small-group 'chat' sessions have also been organised by the Students' Union to help us access the diversity and nuance of minority views. Student opinion was raised in these sessions that individuals with underrepresented perspectives would feel most comfortable talking to staff about their experience in dedicated meetings focused on their needs. In response to this appetite, a question allowing students to opt into profiling of their data for the purposes of targeting invitations to focus groups and surveys has been added during the enrolment process from 2019/20 onwards. This will allow us to discover views within underrepresented groups regarding both the evaluation of current and past APP activities.
98. Our working relationship with the Students' Union (SU) has been enhanced in 2018/19 by augmenting the SU's representation at the Academic Board, Staff/Student Liaison Committees, Course Scheme Review Committees and the foundation of bi-annual HE Student Council meetings. In 2019/20 these will increasingly focus on consultation and evaluation – in particular, regularly opening the institution's ToC to the scrutiny of the student body. The evidence base underpinning the discussions at these meetings will derive from focus groups and surveys constructed by the SU alongside the Student Success team as part of a collaborative approach to consultation that will maximise our channels to reach underrepresented groups, thus helping achieve our shared access and participation objectives. In addition to collaborative consultation, the SU will partner with staff in the design and delivery of its APP projects.

Provision of information to students

99. We commit to publishing clear, accessible and timely information for applicants and students on the fees that we charge and the support that we offer, including our range of bursaries and scholarships. We will publish this information through a range of media including via UCAS and the Student Loans Company, our webpages, and through our publications and social media channels. This information will be available in advance of the 2020/21 admissions cycle, consistent with consumer law requirements.
100. Our agreed access and participation plan, along with our access and participation plans and agreements from previous years, will be clearly published on our website.

Case Study 3: Partnership working with our students

Summary

The Students' Union (SU) represents our students within the institution and provides support and the organisational capability to arrange clubs, societies, campaigns and events. The ability of the SU to connect with students, and to the student population in the wider world (such as through GuildHE and NUS), means it has a lot of strength in the achievement of shared access and participation objectives. We credit the SU's recent partnership with the SST with helping raise NSS completion rates above 85%, which underlines the key role of the SU in engaging students with institutional concerns. Building on the success of this, the Careers Fair in 2018/19 was organised in collaboration between the SU and the SST as a pilot for greater partnership initiatives going forward.

The SU also promotes diverse student voices within the institution through regular meetings between the SU President and the Vice-Chancellor and by sending representatives of the student body to most significant strategic meetings, including the Access and Participation Group where student input pays great dividends in shaping policies and activities in line with the realities of student life.

Impact and Evidence

- *"The Career Fair was such a fabulous success. A partnership event, hosted by President of the Students' Union (Emma-Jane Murray) as our Project Manager, and the Student Success Team. The event was attended by 365 students and 48 Exhibitor stands".* Donna Franklin, Head of Student Success.
- *"By engaging during lectures pre-event we are benefiting more than ever from these events. We would like to host an interview day for applications received after the fair and we'll be in touch soon to see if this is possible. Very useful day".* Careers Fair Exhibitor.
- *"I would like to take this opportunity to say a massive thank you for inviting us to meet your students on the 27th Feb. We admire your dedication and commitment towards providing students with information about options for their future careers. Thank you for taking the time and effort in arranging this visit for us".* Careers Fair Exhibitor.

Future Vision

Further collaborative working planned for 2019/20 will aim to leverage the power of the SU in building student engagement, and so build on the success of the Careers Fair by supporting access and participation projects including the Peer Mentoring and 'Flying Start' schemes. External stakeholder activity is also being considered in the development of a large new volunteering scheme, which will place students in contact with the local community, unlocking opportunities to grow skills, gain new perspectives and enhance employability.

Partnership working between the SU and the SST will also substantially increase the power of evaluation and consultation exercises aimed at improving the policies and practices that affect our students, including the development of our institution-wide ToC.

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Provider fee information 2021-22Provider name: Writtle University College
Provider UKPRN: 10007657**Summary of 2021-22 course fees**

*course type not listed

Table 1a - Full-time course fee levels for 2021-22 students

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Cohort:	Course fee:
First degree		All students	£9,250
Foundation degree		All students	£9,250
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE		All students	£9,250
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 1b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2021-22 students

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Additional information:	Cohort:	Course fee:
First degree	Unified Seevic Palmer's College 10005736	All students	£9,250
Foundation degree	*	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*

Table 1c - Part-time course fee levels for 2021-22 students

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

Table 1d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2021-22 students

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

Targets and investment plan 2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: Writtle University College

Provider UKPRN: 10007657

Investment summary

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

Note about the data:

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

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

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Total access activity investment (£)	£83,028.00	£98,262.00	£112,329.00	£116,937.00	£120,671.00
Access (pre-16)	£33,211.20	£39,304.80	£44,931.60	£46,774.80	£48,268.40
Access (post-16)	£41,514.00	£49,131.00	£56,164.50	£58,468.50	£60,335.50
Access (adults and the community)	£8,302.80	£9,826.20	£11,232.90	£11,693.70	£12,067.10
Access (other)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Financial support (£)	£143,850.00	£143,850.00	£143,850.00	£143,850.00	£143,850.00
Research and evaluation (£)	£86,144.00	£96,126.00	£99,491.00	£102,973.00	£106,577.00

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Higher fee income (£HFI)	£2,088,520.00	£2,449,470.00	£2,619,145.00	£2,674,675.00	£2,674,675.00
Access investment	4.0%	4.0%	4.3%	4.4%	4.5%
Financial support	6.9%	5.9%	5.5%	5.4%	5.4%
Research and evaluation	4.1%	3.9%	3.8%	3.8%	4.0%
Total investment (as %HFI)	15.0%	13.8%	13.6%	13.6%	13.9%

