



## 2019-20 access and participation plan monitoring

### Provider impact report

This impact report summarises the progress made by Writtle University College against targets, objectives and written commitments set out in its 2019-20 access and participation plan. This document is a summary of information submitted by the provider to the OfS. This document is a self-report by the provider only and does not indicate any OfS assessment of compliance.

#### 1. Ambition and strategy

Writtle University College's ambition and strategy as detailed in the 2019-20 access and participation plan:

The University College has around 800 HE students enrolled on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The small size of the institution and the high cost base of our provision means that we have limited resources to assign to highly targeted and/or standalone activities; our access and participation efforts are instead concentrated on institution-wide measures to improve outcomes for all students, in line with the areas for improvement identified through HESA data, TEF metrics and our own assessment of performance. Nonetheless, we recognise the need for more concentrated and targeted efforts in some areas to close persistent and specific gaps in access and student success.

The 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. We embrace the role we play as a driver of social mobility and we believe we have a valuable contribution to make as a specialist provider in the East of England region. In 2019-20 and future years we will ensure that access and participation activity, and our approach to equality and diversity more broadly, is treated as fundamental to what we do, and that its value is recognised by all members of our community.

Writtle University College aspires 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. On our beautiful 220-hectare campus we combine best-in-class facilities and professional working environments with an inclusive, safe and welcoming environment for our learners. Our small size provides challenges when it comes to targeting access and student success activities, but it has the crucial benefit of allowing us to provide a highly personal and supportive learning environment.

We are proud of our heritage as an agricultural college, but know that we must continue to broaden our appeal by promoting the wide range of rewarding and valuable careers available in the land-based and outdoor industries. We have a duty to help diversify these sectors, which are still often seen as the preserve of white, rural middle-class populations, by providing learning opportunities and career pathways for under-represented groups. The diversification of our student (and staff) body benefits all learners and prepares them to be ethical citizens with a strong sense of responsibility, both towards each other and towards the environment.

#### ACCESS

Sustained access and outreach work plays an important part in removing barriers to HE entry. We know that strong relationships with schools and colleges over a long period of time, starting at the primary school level, is an effective way to raise aspirations and widen access. Across all of our outreach and recruitment activities we commit to challenging preconceptions and stereotypes about the subjects we offer and about HE-level study in general. We will do more to identify under-represented learners amongst our FE student body and to nurture and support those with the ability to succeed at HE level to ensure they do not face barriers to university entry, either at Writtle University College or elsewhere.

We will address low educational attainment by developing new routes into degree-level study for students with low achievement at level 3, and for mature students with no formal qualifications. We will continue to offer a part-time mode of study across some of our undergraduate programmes. We recognise that part-time study can be an important entry route to HE for mature learners, but we believe that our mature learners may be better served through a combination of work-based and flexible full-time study options, alongside short-course and unregulated learning opportunities for those who do not want to commit to degree study.

#### SUCCESS

Our strategy for student success is founded upon a whole-institution approach which prioritises improved outcomes for all learners. We will also identify a small number of projects and interventions to address the specific attainment gaps identified in our current assessment of performance. In addition to targeted interventions aimed at improving outcomes for particular student groups, we will improve the training we provide to staff on how to support learners who may require additional and specific support during their studies.

We are committed to raising the aspirations of our learners and believe this is an on-going process which extends beyond the research and application process, through to each level of HE study and onto graduate employment. We will launch institution-wide, multi-year

campaigns to sustain the aspiration-raising process beyond the point of entry. These will be focussed upon developing study skills and confidence levels in approaching examinations, reducing module failure rates by setting strong expectations around assessment attempts, and steering students to stay on track and to complete on time. The University College has a direct and practical approach to managing teaching style and quality, linked in part to the fact that we are used to observing, assessing and reporting on teaching quality at FE level. Our Head of Learning and Teaching will continue to focus her time on enhancing and tailoring our teaching and assessment methods, developing learning resources and training staff on how to enhance in-classroom support for different groups of students. We will work with our Students' Union to develop a framework for managing year-on-year transition which helps to communicate study changes and new expectation to students and better signposts available support. We will address increased demand for academic writing and other study support skills at levels 5 and 6, in particular as students approach the capstone project element of their degree.

In addition to the academic and professional skills which are crucial to the attainment of our HE learners, we are cognisant of the rise in mental health conditions reported by students, and of more general wellbeing issues which may negatively impact on degree completion and attainment. We will seek to bolster our in-house support to cope with growing demand and we will continue to work with local partners in Essex to signpost students to appropriate external services. We will also seek to integrate sessions on mental health, wellbeing, stress-management and resilience into all undergraduate tutorial classes and to provide mental health first aid training for student-facing staff.

#### PROGRESSION

We are ambitious for our students and we want to ensure that all WUC graduates are equipped with the subject knowledge, professional skills and personal confidence to pursue rewarding careers in their chosen fields. The practical, vocational focus of our degree programmes, combined with our excellent estate and facilities, should provide our students with a significant advantage in the employment market. Our on-site practice facilities provide students with the opportunity to gain hands-on, industry-relevant experience whilst at the University College. We seek to manage these facilities in a manner which reflects the professionalism and rigour of a 'real' workplace environment. We will also leverage our estate and facilities to engage employers and industry partners, either by hosting them on campus, or by mobilising our expertise and equipment. We have a number of supplementary professional competency courses available to our degree students which equip them with industry-standard skills and help to provide more direct routes into professional employment.

Over the last three years we have redesigned our foundation degree provision, withdrawing programmes which we did not feel provided the right combination of academic and workplace skills and launching a refreshed approach to the qualification. We plan to extend our foundation degree offering over the next 3-5 years, which we believe will make an important contribution to access, success and progression for students from under-represented groups.

We embrace the fact that many of our graduates will choose to set up their own businesses or to enter family-run companies. We will commit to provide enhanced support for these students in the form of business start-up advice, workshops on practical business skills and a range of events to encourage enterprise and innovation amongst our student body. We will continue to build strong, long-lasting relationships with our alumni, many of whom remain in the local area after graduation. We believe that our alumni can play an important role in helping to raise the career aspirations of our current students, as well as providing practical advice, mentoring, internship and volunteering opportunities. We will make particular efforts to engage successful alumni who have come from under-represented groups.

## 2. Self-assessment of targets

The tables that follow provide a self-assessment by Writtle University College of progress against the targets approved in its 2019-20 access and participation plan.

Please note the tables contain only a summary of target milestones approved in 2019-20 access and participation plans. Full information can be found in **Table 8a – statistical targets and milestones** and **Table 8b – Other milestones and targets** of Writtle University College’s 2019-20 [access and participation plan](#).

Any optional commentary provided against the targets is given in [Annex B](#).

### Statistical targets and milestones

Reference Number (lifecycle stage)	Description	Baseline year	Baseline data	2018-19 milestone	2019-20 milestone	Units of target	Comparison year	Actual performance in comparison year	Target self-assessment
T16a_01 (Access)	Maintain the percentage identified in NS-SEC 4-7 tables (HESA table 1a) at above 39% and grow this to 44.5 % by 2019/20.	2012-13	31.9%	41%	44.5%	Percentage	2019-20		Expected progress
T16a_02 (Student success)	To reduce the overall non-completion rate so that the College performs within the top 40% of English HEIs, with a long term aim of reducing the overall non-completion rate to 5% by 2019/2020.	2012-13	8.5%	9.0%	8%	Percentage	2018-19	9.5	No progress
T16a_03 (Access)	The proportion of the HE student body drawn from black and ethnic minority groups should be substantially greater than the proportion of black and ethnic minority groups in the regional population from which the College draws many of its students. This currently stands at approximately 3.7% (regional and local population census data). The College will endeavour to 1) maintain the proportion of black and ethnic minority students above 12% and 2) to increase this to 15% by 2019/20.	2011-12	11.5%	17.5%	18%	Percentage	2019-20	5.8	No progress
T16a_04 (Access)	To maintain the proportion of HE students who declare a disability at 17% and increase this to 20% by 2019/20 (data from Writtle College Student records - Unit-e)	2012-13	17.1%	19.5%	20%	Percentage	2019-20	28.6	Expected progress

T16a_05 (Access)	To maintain the proportion of our Higher Education students aged 21+ at 40% or greater. (data from Writtle College Student records - Unit-e)	2013-14	44%	41%	42%	Percentage	2019-20		Expected progress
T16a_06 (Access)	The college aims to grow its part-time enrolment from 3% to at least 5% of home students. (data from Writtle College Student records - Unit-e)	2014-15	3%	6%	7%	Percentage	2019-20		Expected progress
T16a_07 (Access)	The College aims to increase the total percentage of eligible Writtle College FE students progressing to HE at Writtle and elsewhere above the 2013/14 baseline value of 25%. The College has set a long term goal of ensuring the over 35% of eligible Level3 learners successfully enter HE. (data from Writtle College Student records - Unit-e)	2013-14	25%	32.5%	34%	Percentage	2019-20	52.1	Expected progress
T16a_08 (Access)	The College aims to increase recruitment from LPN from the baseline value of 10.6% to above 16% by 2019/20.	2014-15	10.6	14.9%	16.1%	Percentage	2019-20	8.8	No progress

Other milestones and targets

Reference Number (lifecycle stage)	Description	Baseline year	Baseline data	2018-19 milestone	2019-20 milestone	Units of target	Comparison year	Actual performance in comparison year	Target self-assessment
T16b_01 (Access)	To sustain our education outreach activity (in terms of volume and variety) at the high level attained in previous years, to deliver at least 30 events benefiting 5,000 participants annually.	2014-15	30 events	30 events	30 events	Other	2019-20	70	Expected progress
T16b_02 (Access)	Within our outreach activities to run at least 10 activities that target and are designed to raise aspiration and participation among learner from regional 'cold-spot' low-participation neighbourhoods identified by HEFCE.	2014-15	6 events	10 events	10 events	Other	2019-20	21	Expected progress
T16b_03 (Access)	Within our outreach activities to run at least 5 activities that promote and support the take up of higher education by part-time students and mature return to learning students.	2014-15	0 events	5 events	5 events	Other	2019-20	1	Limited progress
T16b_04 (Multiple)	Work with students in KS3 from schools predominantly situated in POLAR3 areas to improve attainment of disadvantaged and under-represented groups to enable them to apply to HE if they wish to.	2017-18	1	5 events	5 events	Other	2019-20	8	Expected progress
T16b_05 (Access)	Deliver annual Writtle Skills Show event, aimed at year 9, 10 and 12 pupils in local schools and colleges. The Skills Show will aim to raise aspiration and ability to enter HE by supporting attainment raising at the beginning of the GCSE and A-Level cycle, with a particular focus on STEM subjects. Pupils from local schools and colleges will be invited, using NCOP networks and support, with numbers to expand as the event is developed over time.	2018-19	200 attendees	200 attendees	250 attendees	Other	2019-20	420	Expected progress



### 3. Investment commitments

#### 3.1. Access and participation investment for the last audited year

Please note that some differences in predicted vs actual spend may be due to reporting differences between academic and financial years.

Financial year	2019-20		
	Predicted spend (£)	Actual spend (£)	Difference (ppt)
Access investment	£45,728.00	£48,000.00	5%
Financial Support	£126,500.00	£133,000.00	5%

### 4. Action plan

Where progress was less than expected Writtle University College has made the following commitments to increase the rate of progress against their targets.

Reference Number	Steps that will be taken in the future to make expected progress against target
T16a_02	<p>WUC plans to work towards developing a Student Support Hub (online and on-campus) to enable effective and efficient triage between services and increase transparency of the support available, and normalise access to support.</p> <p>The Student Success team plans to support the social mobility of students by offering a WUC Intern scheme that provides students with paid work experience, mentoring and a training package. Students from underrepresented groups will be encouraged to engage in this opportunity to be a 'real role model' for their peers. As we grow the Buddy Team of peer mentors, we will endeavour to recruit a diverse pool of peer mentors so that all underrepresented groups are represented.</p>



T16a_03	<p>Following focus groups exploring the experience of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students at WUC, we have identified some priority workstreams that have emerged from findings. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop teaching and learning interventions to foster peer support and integration (e.g., design courses and develop in-teaching strategies to promote student cohesion, evaluate the scope of curricula).</li> <li>- Adopt a whole-institution response to increase understanding and awareness of diversity (incl., staff training, whole-campus communication and promotional/awareness campaigns).</li> <li>- Conduct further research and evaluation (incl. multivariate analysis of data and feedback where possible, mindful and informed collaborative research with students and staff with lived experiences of racism and discrimination).</li> </ul> <p>While continuing to ensure participation in HE for students from all backgrounds remains a key commitment, in our revised approach in our 20-21+ APP, which has been informed by a more sophisticated and up-to-date performance assessment and broader research, we have agreed with the OfS not to set a BAME Access target. This is in consideration of context, particularly WUC as a small provider with limited resources, in a rural, predominantly white location with a land-based specialism; and acknowledging the OfS national KPM in relation to focusing on supporting the national agenda to increase participation of white working class males in HE (as detailed in our 20-21+ APP), as a group which is significantly under-represented in HE; whilst more broadly in contrast, BAME learners participate in HE at a much higher rate. WUC remains committed to welcoming a diverse community, despite the structural challenges that exist for us in attracting BAME learners.</p> <p>In line with our wider access targets we will continue with the following to diversify our intake:</p> <p>Work with schools from Essex/London boroughs with higher representation of BAME learners and offer taster day and in school activities.</p> <p>Launch our exciting new 3X3 Basketball facility in 2021 and offer summer schools and weekend activity clubs, working with Active Essex and Sport England to target underrepresented groups.</p> <p>Collaborate with external partners and relationships with charitable trusts, including Make Happen (Essex branch of Uni-Connect) and Essex Cultural &amp; Youth Society to raise aspiration and attainment levels amongst underrepresented groups.</p> <p>Continue to explore the opportunity to work on shared resources with other universities as part of Guild HE and HELOA to raise awareness and importance/value of the disciplines taught in land-based institutions.</p> <p>Continue to engage alumni so that they inspire others to follow their passion with a focus on careers in industry.</p>
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T16a_08	<p>In our 5 Year Investment Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25, we've focused on reducing in the gap in participation for white economically disadvantaged males, across all undergraduate provision (not restricted to other undergraduate), using POLAR quintiles 1 and 2.</p> <p>This approach means we can establish larger population sizes, and therefore be able to monitor this area in a more meaningful way, whilst targeting our limited resources on helping to address a sector priority of improving participation rates of white working-class males in HE.</p> <p>We are revolutionising our Sport offer at WUC by launching the UKs first bespoke 3x3 basketball courts. We will leverage our developing sports offer to enable WUC to attract students from underrepresented backgrounds. We will develop and launch a Saturday Club for Sport from May 2021, utilising the 3x3 basketball facilities and water-based activities. This will be targeted at learners from low participation backgrounds interested in sport.</p>
T16b_03	<p>We have seen a good response to our online marketing campaigns promoting the integrated Foundation Year and targeted promotion around return to learn or career change. Increased content on our website, specifically relating to mature learners, using the profiles of current students has been seen good engagement. We will increase WUC's presence in town centre locations and at job centres. This will focus on promoting retraining, career change and foundation year options as an access route into Higher Education. We will also promote part-time schemes through digital marketing campaigns.</p>

## 5. Confirmation

Writtle University College confirms that:

Student engagement	
Have you worked with your students to help them complete the access and participation plan monitoring student submission?	
Yes	
Have you engaged with your student body in the design, evaluation, and monitoring of the plan?	
Yes	
Verification and sign off	
Writtle University College has confirmed that the information included in this impact report is accurate, that it has been compiled in line with OfS guidance, and that it is being submitted on behalf of the governing body of the provider.	
Yes	
Accountable officer sign off	
Name	Professor Tim Middleton
Position	Vice Chancellor

## Annex A: Commentary on progress against targets

Writtle University College's commentary where progress against targets was less than expected.

<b>Target reference number: T16a_02</b>
<b>How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?</b>
<p>Commitments made in the 2019-20 Access and Participation plan to improve continuation rates for young, FT first-degree entrants, have been largely met through intended delivery. Our 2018/19 non-continuation rate (HESA T3a) is 9.5%. This is 0.5% above the milestone of 9.0%, however is an improvement of almost 2 percentage points compared to 2017/18 (11.3%). Following the launch of our Student Success Team in Jan 2019, we're looking forward to building on this positive direction of travel. Our strategy for student success is a whole-institutional approach for improving outcomes for all students. We interrogated our data and launched a small number of projects to help address specific gaps in performance. Learning from sector best practice, these projects were piloted, robustly monitored and evaluated. The following were designed to help improve continuation rates of our young, FT, first-degree entrants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Flying Start' aims to reduce gaps in academic skills/knowledge, boost confidence, normalise access to support and develop a sense of belonging, community, equality and encouragement. Following feedback, Flying Start 2020/21 was broadened to include pre-arrival support, to help new students have a smoother transition into university life.</li> <li>• We established a mentoring scheme to enhance support networks, which is a co-creation between Student Success and the SU. Peer mentors ensure new students feel included, welcomed and supported. The scheme provides current students (the Buddy team) with an opportunity to develop skills around communication, coaching and leadership. Members of the Buddy team are matched with an external mentor to help career progression and social mobility.</li> <li>• The Learning Mentor (LM) team was established 2018/19 as part of Student Success. LM's reach out to students to ensure they stay on track, to help develop confidence around study practices, and to triage to other support (e.g. study skills, careers advice, wellbeing support etc.). Referrals to LM's are made through Progress Committee meetings, and by staff across academic and learning support teams.</li> <li>• Pitstop Workshops aim to address gaps in study skill knowledge (covering topics such as organisational skills and assessment preparation) and help alleviate feelings of becoming overwhelmed. Advice codes are recorded against themes to ensure demand is captured.</li> <li>• Study Skills service targets HE-specific academic tutoring support where there is an increased risk of non-completion. The service supports students to complete 'on time' and achieve personal success, and Attainment Booster workshops help encourage healthy study habits.</li> <li>• Study Booster sessions are targeted around particularly challenging modules to help students be more prepared, and achieve the best possible degree outcome.</li> <li>• Our Wellbeing and Inclusion team cultivate a supportive community environment, encouraging peer support and pro-active self-care. Delivery of key workshops/sessions, as well as a virtual learning platform for wellbeing, enables students to access a range of supportive resources.</li> <li>• Improved internal reporting has meant we've been able to more easily identify patterns/trends to inform specific interventions/initiatives. For example, we've increased focus on student on-boarding in response to a high proportion of student withdrawals occurring in semester 1, particularly for new students.</li> <li>• 'Entrepreneur in Residence' initiative enables students to receive regular support, advice and guidance from a successful business owner and entrepreneur. To ensure greater benefit for</li> </ul>

our under-represented groups, sessions were embedded into teaching for 2019/20, promoting equality of opportunity. Students are also able to engage with industry in other ways such as business network meetings, keynote presentations from experts and one-to-one coaching/mentoring. This is in addition to matrix standard impartial careers IAG provided by our qualified Careers Adviser

Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

In addition to the projects and interventions, further insight gained from systematic monitoring of student retention led us to focus on understanding the reasoning behind withdrawals during year one, semester one. Therefore, we have applied greater focus on student on-boarding, to ensure students feel included, supported and welcomed to the WUC community, by front-loading support during the critical first half of semester one. All support teams, the Students' Union and the peer mentor Buddy Team are actively involved, to help ensure a sense of belonging and networks are established as soon as possible.

The annual Student Spotlight Awards established in 2019/20 provide a platform to celebrate success and showcase real role models from the WUC community. This not only celebrates achievements of individual students, but also helps raise aspirations across our student body and in turn improve continuation rates and aspiration (both FE and HE), by shining a light on real and relatable role models. Learning from sector best practice, this is a mechanism to build a strong community, belonging and attachment to WUC. Along with providing evidence of employability skills of our students by raising their professional profile.

Our Student Success and student support teams are committed to exploring and pilot different forms of student engagement, to continually build on providing a positive student experience. Example of this, is in AY 2019/20, we piloted a 'quiet time' during the on-campus career fair, to support students who may experience barriers when faced with a busy and bustling environment. Evaluation of this activity suggests we'll need to refine this particular offer to promote engagement in future to widen the benefit to those who may benefit (including disabled and young full-time students).

We took part in the Applied Inspiration sector research to explore the barriers for staff and students during the Covid-19 pandemic helping us to understand more about any unique challenges faced and benchmark against other small and specialist institutions.

**Target reference number: T16a\_03**

How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?

We've not met target for increasing proportion of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students by 2019/20. Some commitments relating to target have been met through intended delivery, as well as reasonable adjustments due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst we've developed closer relationships with schools across the region, we've been unable to progress with establishing additional partnerships specifically with schools where there are high proportions of BAME pupils at this stage.

We've developed links with schools and colleges in Harlow, Epping Forest and Thurrock by offering taster experience days via email marketing. During 2019/20, we attended 16 careers events at schools in outer London boroughs, Harlow, Epping Forest and Thurrock (all have higher BAME representation than the Chelmsford area), including Opportunity Thurrock and East London UCAS Fair. We also ran mock interviews at Passmores and Burnt Mills in Harlow, and hosted Harris Academy (Thurrock) and Stewards Academy (Harlow) for on campus taster days.

The pandemic has significantly impacted our ability to deliver taster days on campus. To share

widening participation materials with schools, we developed the WUC Outreach Hub and Virtual Applicant Hub, and promoted these across targeted postcodes via social media. The diversity and representation of our student ambassadors has been reviewed to ensure we represent the BAME community, and we've encouraged BAME students to take part in marketing activities and communications.

We've developed our relationship with Brixton based, Ebony Horse Club, who provide riding lessons and youth work to 8-18 year olds. In Jan 2020 we hosted 13 members of the Horse Club as VIP Guests to see World Champion rider, Ros Canter, at our equine facility. During lockdown, we continued to provide online resources, including access to our Equine Campus tour and virtual applicant hub.

We began development of a year-long Foundation Year (FY) in 2019/20, which has been launched for applications (subject to validation) for 2021 entry. We're hopeful this will be an attractive offer for underrepresented applicants, by providing another access entry point into HE.

We've profiled Natasha Williams, a WUC graduate who started riding at Ebony Horse Club, in our prospectus and website, and promoted the work of the club, as well as Natasha's journey and achievements in the equine field.

During lockdown, our SEER service membership provided opportunity for an external-led evaluation project, using online focus groups of students from key groups. The objective was to more effectively engage students with the qualitative research and evaluation process and develop understanding of experiences of these groups. The project, 'Diving Deeper: Increasing Understanding of the Learning and Broader Student Experience at WUC for target BAME, Disabled and Care Experienced Students', ran Feb-Mar 2021, and was commissioned by WUC to gain further understanding of experiences of target students to provide valuable insight to drive forward change. There were three main components: 1) collation and review of existing internal analyses and evaluation pertinent to target students' experiences of studying at WUC; 2) qualitative evaluation via a series of semi-structured focus groups with target students, and; 3) collation and analysis of sector wide key themes and issues to help direct the evaluation and provide benchmarking/ comparisons with emerging WUC data. The focus group for BAME students explored topics including decision-making about HE prior to enrolment, experiences of studying at WUC with attention to challenges, levels of academic support and meeting of prior expectations, and wider student experiences in relation to feelings of inclusivity, extra-curricular learning and socialising opportunities and formation of relationships with peers. Discussion also centred on future plans, including career plans, and feelings of belonging and connection to WUC.

Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

In addition to broader commitments from our 2019/20 Access and Participation plan, we have continued to build on the collaboration with our partner college, USP, to broaden our Sport offer in areas with higher proportions of under-represented learners.

Our FE and HE Sport areas are also now more strategically aligned, which should further support progression into HE of our under-represented FE students, including BAME students. WUC was also proud to be the lead sponsor of the Active Essex Sports Awards 2019, celebrating the outstanding achievements of sports clubs across Essex encouraging increased participation across all groups, of Sport in Essex (<https://www.activeesseximpact.org/sports-awards>).

We are a member of GuildHE and welcome the opportunity to network and learn from other small and specialist institutions, so we are supported in driving forward the GuildHE Anti-Racism programme.



**Target reference number: T16a\_08**

**How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?**

Commitments made in the 2019/20 Access and Participation plan to increase the proportion of young, FT, other undergraduate entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (LPNs) have been broadly met through intended delivery, as well as reasonable adjustments due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We've continued to build upon our existing outreach work with schools and colleges, and have developed a targeted taster day programme specifically for schools with high proportions of pupils from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2. We've worked closely with key partner schools (Moulshams, Great Baddow, New Rickstones and the Steward Academy), to develop in school programmes (GCSE Sport support), and Year 8-13 taster events. In 2019/20 we ran events interacting with 142 pupils from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2 schools, as well as an additional 55 pupils on Sports specific activities. Prior to the pandemic, we'd developed a closer relationship with New Rickstones Academy (Polar 4 Q1 School in Witham, Essex) and mapped out a programme of initiatives from Year 8 upwards. Due to impact of Covid-19 however, all in-person events planned from 20/03/2020 onwards were cancelled/put on hold. To further support our under-represented FE learners to transition to HE-study, either at WUC or elsewhere, we ran a programme of development workshops supported by Uni-Connect during 2019/20. This included HE taster events in November 2019, as well as a parent and carers event hosted in the evening, which included workshops on student finance, personal statement writing and graduate careers. Evaluation showed the event helped 57% of students to better understand the difference between FE and HE. 46% of attendees stated they were going to apply to HE, with 25% maybe considering HE. To support this programme of activity, we've engaged with Future Ready to use learner postcode data to highlight students with WUC FE for targeted programmes and have delivered a programme of 6 workshops across the year for Year 1 and 2 students (School Year 12 and 13). 109 students have engaged with this programme, with 29 students completing all 6 activities. The national lockdown restrictions meant we needed to offer this programme in a virtual format across MS Teams, including study skills and personal statement writing.

Whilst our student ambassadors could not work on in person events, they've supported development of our online tools and webinar programme. In May 2020 we launched a series of student focused blogs, sharing experiences of going into HE from LPN backgrounds. This was supported by participation in the Uni-Buddy programme in association with Make Happen. We've also launched a three-part student lead webinar series, covering Student Finance, Living at University and Student Life.

We've also targeted FE students from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2 with additional information, advice, guidance and funding to attend activities such as University Open Days. This included additional Maths and English 1-1 tuition for FE learners from LPN households.

Much of our progress around improving access for entrants from LPN's has been facilitated through a new dedicated role focused on widening participation, outreach and FE to HE progression. In addition to supporting the activities outlined above, this resource has enabled us to attend/lead 21 events with schools from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2, which included careers fairs, aspiration raising assemblies, and mock interviews.

During 2019/20 we developed a refreshed partnership with Active Essex to widen reach and impact of sports participation and education, and supported Active Essex in the sponsorship of their Annual Sports Awards and hosted campus events.

Due to Covid-19, our 'in school' and on campus activities could not take place as planned. We therefore refocused our activity programme and provided a number of other resources for our partner schools detailed in the Column W.

Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

During 2019/2020 we developed a learner mentoring programme targeted at learners from low participation areas. This programme, 'Think Achieve Believe' based on a 1:1 mentoring support programme targeted Year 12 students, to raise attainment and aspiration. The launch to schools however, has been impacted by Covid-19, and we have therefore reconfigured plans to launch in September 2021, following a test launch on a sample of our FE learners from May 2021.

Due to impact of Covid-19, our 'in school' and on campus activities could not take place as planned. As a result, we refocused our activity programme by providing the following resources for our partner schools:

- Creation of a virtual university experience through the launch of a 'Virtual Applicant Hub', providing resources for school leavers to develop understanding of our programmes and student life [www.wuc-virtualhub.co.uk](http://www.wuc-virtualhub.co.uk). This central resource hub was supported by a webinar programme, including specific events on managing student finance, moving away from home and student life.
- Creation of a resource centre for Schools as an 'outreach hub' with learning and personal development resources. This resource was promoted to Polar 4 Q1/2 schools through Make Happen (Uni-Connect) and via our newsletter to schools.
- Offer bespoke online events via Google Classrooms to schools, supporting personal statement development, student finance and study skills.

#### Target reference number: T16b\_03

How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?

Prior to national lockdown, we attended the Chelmsford Careers Training and Jobs Fair to promote awareness of degree programmes and progression routes, including the foundation year pathway. This event ran over 3 days with a specific focus on returning to education. We've also made our course prospectus available to local job centres and community centres. Due to lockdown restrictions we've been unable to attend in-person events, and therefore applied greater focus on digital advertising, as well as greater promotion of mature learner role models across our website.

During 2019/20 WUC began the development of a year-long Foundation Year (FY), that has been launched for applications (subject to validation) for 2021 entry. We plan to extend our foundation degree offering over the next 3-5 years, which we believe will make an important contribution to access, success and progression for mature students along, with others from under-represented groups. The FY is a level three precursor to our existing science-based degrees, enabling those with non-traditional academic backgrounds and/or low attainment of academic qualifications an entry to higher education not previously available at WUC. The FY sits as the common level 3 entry year for all of our awards in Animal, Sport, Equine, Animal Therapy, Agriculture and Horticulture. It will be contextualised at the point of delivery to ensure engagement by the students, and makes extensive use of our estate and resource units for real-world internal industry placements. The year includes support for academic and personal skills development alongside science-based content. Following a paid search and social media marketing campaign and detailed website content, we have received in excess of 120 applications for 2021 entry.

Social media campaigns are aligned to the benefits for mature students exploring a career change and providing prospective students with guidance on financial support including bursaries and scholarships.

We continue to use our Further Education provision as a progression route into Higher



Education, highlighting course progression routes for our mature learners, and raising aspirations to enter Higher Education.

We have ensured representation of mature learners in our student ambassador team and at recruitment events. Given that some ambassadors are due to graduate this year, we continue to have an ongoing recruitment drive for new ambassadors, with a view to continuing to ensure diversity and representation. We have removed barriers to becoming a paid casual worker by providing a paid bonus at start of role acknowledging that necessary pre-employment training can take around 4 hours.

Through 2019-20, the strategic planning work identified and reviewed portfolio/opportunities for Level 6 and Level 7 apprenticeships, however the standards are yet to be approved by the awarding bodies. Meetings continue through 2020-21 to determine chartership and professional accreditations.

In 2019 we increased the number of available Mature Students 'Return to Learn' bursaries from 5 to 20 in number, and to a value of £20,000. Return to Learn bursaries are promoted to all new mature learners via our website and social media.

Further work has undertaken in 2019/20 to establish targeted bursaries which more closely aligned to our access and participation targets. Building on the research carried out in early academic year 2019-20, 'Applied Inspiration' Specialist Evidence, Evaluation and Research service (SEER) were commissioned to carry out a discrete piece of work to help design a financial support package that enables and empowers success, and provides equality of opportunity. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this work was not completed in time for AY 2020-21. However, a significant piece of research was conducted with staff and students to really understand the impact of a bursary support package and learn what would make a meaningful difference to outcomes

Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the reduction of face-to-face events to promote mature learners to progress into higher education, we have developed new website content including mature student profiles as role models and a dedicated adult learners website page. This digital outreach was necessary due to the limitations experienced. Mature learner student profiles provided real role models and authentic examples of adult learners, along with those progressing from Further Education into Higher Education.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic we introduced a 'Class of 2020' postgraduate progression award for WUC students graduating in 2019 and 2020, acknowledging the impact of the economic environment and in employment opportunities. 14 students applied for this bursary award.

In 2019, as highlighted in Access investment, we took the decision to repurpose unspent access investment into hardship funding, recognising that access to IT equipment may be challenging, particularly for disadvantaged students, and therefore provision was made for students without suitable equipment to be allocated laptops.

## Annex B: Optional commentary on targets

Writtle University College's commentary on any of the targets listed in [Section 2](#).

Reference Number	Optional commentary
T16a_01	As noted in AA Monitoring return 2017/18, this target has been replaced with T16a_08 HESA T1c, participation from LPN (POLAR)
T16a_02	None
T16a_03	<p>As noted in our 2019/20 Access and Participation Plan, we face challenges around BAME recruitment, in part due to our traditional catchment areas of Essex and East of England, where overall there is low proportion of BAME individuals (Chelmsford local authority area had a BAME population of 6.0% recorded in the 2011 Census), as well as land-based programmes not typically attracting BAME students. (Of the 2019/20 UK domiciled first degree enrolments on CAH level 3 Animal Science subjects across the sector, 5.4% were BAME students, and 3.0% in Agriculture subjects).</p> <p>Whilst the intentions of the Access Agreement (19/20) target were well meaning, it was not designed based on a robust understanding of key factors such as demographics and subject areas (as outlined above). Our improved understanding of this area is now well analysed and reflected in our 5-year Access and Participation Plan (20/21 to 24/25), which, as agreed with OfS, does not contain a specific target relating to BAME access.</p> <p>Whilst WUC does not have a specific Access and Participation target around BAME students, this remains an important area for us. Our most recently available applicant data from UCAS, indicates a greater proportion of applicants for September 2021 are from black and minority ethnic groups (6.4%) compared 2020 (4.8%). This recent applicant data helps demonstrate recent activities around access overall are having a positive impact, and the conversion of applicants to student enrolments will continue to be monitored.</p>
T16a_04	
T16a_05	As per the 2017/18 AA Monitoring return, this target has been discontinued.
T16a_06	As per the 2017/18 AA Monitoring return, this target has been discontinued.
T16a_07	

T16a_08	<p>The numerator for 2019/20 was less than n=5 and denominator less than n=35. As noted, our small population sizes associated with this measure mean percentage values can significantly vary year-to-year. Our targets associated with participation of entrants from LPN's in our 5 Year Investment Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25 allow for larger population sizes whilst remaining targeted at under-represented groups, and will enable more meaningful trends to be revealed. We have seen a positive direction of travel for this indicator between academic years 2015/16 and 2018/19, with the 2018/19 outturn (23.1%) representing a 12.8 percentage point increase on 2015/16 (10.3%).</p> <p>The outturn for 2019/20 however, is much lower at 8.8%, and means we have fallen short of the baseline (10.6%) and 2019/20 target (16.1%). Given WUC has particularly small group sizes associated to this measure (numerator values are typically n=5 (rounded), percentage change differences year to year can be wide ranging, and so as detailed in Column X 'What will you take in the future to make expected progress against this target', our measures for our 5 year investment plan have been compiled to mitigate the impact of this, allowing for more robust and meaningful trends to be seen.</p>
T16b_01	<p>During 2019/2020 we attended a total of 70 events (interacting with an estimated 3092 learners), including careers fairs, school assemblies and mock interview days, across a 40 mile radius of the univeristy. 21 of these where targeted aginast Polar 4 Q1&amp;2 areas. From March all events we cancelled due to Covid 19. We quickly developed online resources and launches our webinar series from April 2020, including subject webinars and student life support webinars (ask a student/home from home and student finance). This was supported by te development of the Virtual Applicant Hub, a online resource with prerecorded student presentations, key information on how to apply, student finance, support as well as student blogs focused on personal experiences on advancing into higher education.</p>
T16b_02	<p>We have focused on developing relationships with schools from low participation areas. - Introduced a regular monthly newsletter to go out to all schools to promote outreach work, share news from taster days and encourage schools involvement.</p> <p>- From August through to March, attended 21 careers events with schools in low participation areas. We supported mock interview days at Polar 4 Q1/2 schools: Burnt Mills, William Edwards, Passmore academy and New Rickstones</p> <p>- Developed and ran On CampusTaster events for Swards Academy, Harris Academy and Aspire Higher with 73 students attending.</p> <p>- Extended School Assemblies at Colchester Academy and Thurstable School. In line with our objective to partner with schools from low participation areas, we developed a programme of activity with New Rickstones School with activities plan across Years 8 -12. Due to Covid-19 these events were postponed.</p>
T16b_03	
T16b_04	<p>Work here has included running mock interview workshops at LPN schools, taster days and collaborative events with Aspire Higher, Make Happen, Canterbury College.</p>
T16b_05	<p>The planned activity (Writtle Skills Festival) was superseded by the launch of the 'Chelmsford Skills Festival' at Hylands Park in 2019, attended by circa 420 Year 8 / 9 students. Working closely with Chelmsford City Council, WUC lead as one of the main sponsors to the event, running STEM focused activities on food supply</p>

	<p>chain, insect pollination and on health and fitness. We ran interactive activities and fitness testing, led by our Students Ambassadors in Horticulture and Sport.</p>
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