ACCESS AGREEMENT 2014-15

Fair Access, Widening Participation and Student Success at Aston University

This Access Agreement

- ensures that over 60% of Aston students will be entitled to Aston University or NSP Scholarships.
- underlines Aston’s commitment to challenging widening participation targets, and to transforming the lives of students from a wide range of backgrounds.
- proposes a subsidised tuition fee of £1,000 for a year of employer-based learning or year abroad (via a placement year) which students will be strongly encouraged to take up - emphasising the critical role placement years and work-based learning play in creating employable graduates.
- commits Aston to improving completion and retention rates from current high levels.
- underpins Aston’s core strategic objective of delivering ‘Accessible Excellence’ through the provision of Scholarships targeted at students from low income families as well as those who are high achievers. We predict that over 15% of students will receive scholarships aimed at low income groups AND Aston Excellence scholarships aimed at those entrants with AAB+ or equivalent qualifications.
- Continues a programme of regional collaboration, building on the successful Aimhigher partnership.

Introduction

Aston University has a long-standing commitment to widening participation which is deeply embedded within the University’s strategy. At the same time, Aston has also been successful in its efforts to increase the quality of entrants to its programmes. The University’s integrated approach extends across the ‘student lifecycle’: from aspiration-raising outreach, mentoring and masterclass work with schools and colleges, to provision of a wide range of academic, learning, social and financial support services whilst at University, including enhancing employability and entrepreneurship, supporting career development and providing a sector-leading careers service, through to continuing careers support into our graduates’ early careers and alumni mentoring. We want to extend opportunities for successful participation in our excellent programmes to all who are capable of benefiting from them regardless of their background. We are committed to transforming the lives of our students and focussed on giving them a great start in their futures.

Aston University has invested in excellence in teaching and learning to provide innovative support to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. As a result, the University’s completion rates now consistently exceed our benchmarks. Table One below outlines Aston’s record on access, retention and graduate employment success.

Over the past six years, Aston University has committed an increasing proportion of its resources to enhancing the student learning experience. We are already allocating additional funds to replace Aimhigher and to continue collaborative work with three other Birmingham HEIs as part of the new Aimhigher West Midlands Partnership.

Our widening participation and retention support is evidence-based, building upon research commissioned and conducted by the University and its collaborative partners into the experiences
and needs of under-represented students within Higher Education (e.g. reports to Aston’s Learning and Teaching Committee by Ingleby, 2009 and Gorman, 2011).

Table One: Aston University’s record on Access, Retention, Student Success and Widening Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aston University</th>
<th>HESA benchmark for Aston</th>
<th>UK Average</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% from low participation</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>9.7%*</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neighbourhoods (LPN, POLAR2)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% from social classes NS-SEC</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>29.8%*</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classes 4,5,6 &amp; 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% from state schools</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
<td>86.9%*</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% projected to complete or</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% no longer in HE following</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year of entry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate level employment</td>
<td>89.2%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within 6 months of graduation+</td>
<td></td>
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Latest HESA PI data 2011/12. www.hesa.ac.uk
*Location adjusted benchmark
+ Sunday Times University Guide 2013, Aston in UK Top ten

Aston University combines close and important links to the local community (over 40% of students are from the West Midlands region, including around 25% from the wider Birmingham area) with a strong international reputation (22% from outside the EU). Over 90% of home students starting full-time first-degree courses at Aston in 2011-12 came from state schools, with 35% from the four lowest socio-economic groups.

Over 60% of our current students are entitled to a maintenance grant, with around 40% entitled to full grants. At the same time the University has a strong retention record, over 95% of entrants were still in Higher Education following their year of entry (HESA PI March 2013), and an excellent employment record, 89.2% of employed graduates entering “graduate level employment” within six months of graduation (Sunday Times University Guide 2013, based on 2010-11 HESA DLHE Data).

Our agreement encompasses

- Accessible Excellence
- Outreach and Widening Participation
- Retention and Progression
- Placements and Employability

Our milestones are arranged around these four pillars. (See Table 5a in Annex B). We aim to maintain our reputation for widening participation in an increasingly competitive HE arena, whilst strengthening our entrance standards and enhancing further the quality and vocational relevance of programmes. We will invest further in improving the retention, degree achievement and graduate employment success of our students beyond their current high levels.

ACCESS AGREEMENT 2014/15: COMPONENT ELEMENTS

Aston pioneered the four year “sandwich” placement degree programme over 40 years ago and
remains the leader in this type of degree programme. A placement year enables Aston students to spend the third year of their course off campus, either undertaking a work or study placement. Placement programmes make Aston graduates highly employable – indeed around 35% of our students are offered graduate positions with their placement companies - and underpin strong relationships with business, industry and the professions. Research carried out at Aston shows that sandwich programmes increase the employability of our graduates and improve their final degree grades (Driffield, Foster and Higson, 2011.) Our fee proposals seek to enhance further this position, and encourage more students to take placements, despite the increased length of the degree course and concerns over ‘student debt’.

1. **Fee limits and fee income above £6,000**

   i. We propose that our full-time Home/EU undergraduate tuition fee is £9,000 pa in 2014/5. This fee will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/BIS.

   ii. Our four-year sandwich degree programmes enable students to spend the third year on industrial/professional placement. Our placement fee for Home/EU students will be set at £1,000 (a heavily subsidised rate compared to actual costs for those students entering in 2014/5 when they go on placement in 2016-17). This includes students who take a work or study placement year overseas. The fee figure will rise by inflation for those students entering Aston University in 2015 and beyond.

   iii. According to HESA PI data released in July 2012, Aston has one of the highest percentage of students enrolled on sandwich courses of any UK University, at 50% against a UK average of less than 6%. This £1,000 tuition fee level is aimed at encouraging students to take this academically and vocationally beneficial option, irrespective of family income or social background. The £1,000 fee level set by Aston for integrated placement years was endorsed by the recommendations made by the Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration (BIS, February 2012).

   iv. Aston University is piloting an innovative range of integrated Masters programmes for where a year’s placement is combined with academic study (at a much more intensive level than is associated with the conventional placement year). This will enable Aston students on specific programmes to gain an MEng, MOptom or MSc qualification in four years, whilst also gaining relevant professional experience. The tuition fee for the placement/study year on these courses will be £4,500 for those students entering Aston University in 2015 and beyond.

   v. Home/EU students following full-time Foundation Degree programmes will be charged a fee of no more than £6,000 from 2014/15. This fee will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/BIS.

   vi. Aston also wishes to support and encourage students to undertake EU ERASMUS year abroad programmes in future and would welcome further guidance on this issue from HEFCE and BIS as soon as possible so we can set our year abroad fees.

   vii. Fees for Part Time students will be set at the same rate as Full Time students on a pro-rata basis. Foundation Degree students will be charged at a pro rata fee of £6,000.

2. **Expenditure on additional access and retention measures**

   In 2014/15, Aston plans to invest 26.2% of its fee income above £6,000 into Aston University Scholarships, outreach, retention and employability. This is projected to rise from 2015-18. Tables 3a-d in Annex B show the projected additional income accruing from variable fees for the period 2013/14 to 2017/18 and the estimated amount allocated in the form of scholarships and support for academic activities.

   In 2014/15 this investment will take the form of:

   i. £2.7M in OFFA countable Scholarships and financial support including NSP allocation.
The University will increase its hardship funds to assist students who experience unforeseen financial difficulties during the course of their studies. Overall expenditure on outreach and retention activities rising to over £2 million by 2016/17.

ii. Modern foreign language tuition for all students entering Aston from 2012-13 at no additional cost to the student. This will be provided by Aston’s Languages for All Programme rising to a cost of up to £1.4M over 4 years. This offer is a central feature of Aston’s Widening Participation strategy, ensuring that all students have access to critical language and cultural training, building up their employability and intercultural competence as part of our strategy to provide education for effective ‘Global Citizenship’. National graduate employment and employer surveys show that those students who study a language or have language competence increase their chances of gaining graduate level employment (HEFCE, 2008). This is particularly important for our home (UK) students, a significant proportion of whom have not had the opportunity to study an additional language at school.

3. Additional Access Measures

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of Widening Participation at Aston are embedded within the University’s Learning and Teaching and Employability Strategies. Priorities include:

- maintaining wide accessibility to our programmes and offering flexible delivery tailored to individual needs
- understanding student performance issues and implementation of improvement plans
- innovative curriculum design and delivery, to support the needs of a diverse student population and to develop essential, high level employability skills
- continuous improvement and enhancement of learner support systems to enable student achievement, including promoting mentoring
- extending targeted placement preparation support, and career management support and guidance
- enhancing student employability outcomes through: opportunities for entrepreneurship training and experience; promoting work-based learning opportunities; enhancing the value of placements; and employer and alumni engagement.

3.1 Outreach

a. We will be undertaking the following targeted work, building on our current track record. Key targets for activities are listed in Table 5b of the Access Agreement document.

i. Aston University will target key feeder schools and colleges to use successful role models from the student body and alumni to promote recruitment of pupils from widening participation backgrounds and those with excellent entry qualifications, focusing in particular on extending access to SIV and STEM subjects.

ii. Masterclasses and Student Conferences will continue to be a major part of our provision. Over 750 students from target schools and colleges will take part in 2014/15.

iii. Over 1,500 students in Year 7-13 will visit our campus for HE experience days, again from target schools and colleges.

iv. We are appointing a new Information, Advice and Guidance role within the Schools Liaison team during 2013 to work with target schools across the region to strengthen and complement other advice and guidance support. This will focus on Year 8-12 students including supporting Year 9 options and GCSE choices.

v. We will expand the number of student mentors and tutors working in targeted regional schools and colleges, both in person and via e-mentoring. Over 100 Aston student
mentors and tutors will be working with up to 500 learners in 2014/15 in addition to our contribution to the Aimhigher Partnership.

vi. We will make the key elements of study skills and online revision support available to students who apply to Aston through UCAS. Applicants will be enabled and encouraged to interact with the University through online study support resources and a Progression Enhancement Programme. This support will be specifically targeted to students from the lower socio-economic groups and from schools/colleges whose performance is below the UK average at GCSE and A level. The Learner Enhancement Team offers pre-entry support to Access to Higher Education Programme students from feeder colleges and to mature students.

vii. The Aston University Engineering Academy (a University Technical College) opened close to campus in September 2012. The Academy provides a crucial pipeline from local schools in low participation areas to degrees and apprenticeships in engineering. In 2013 15 Aston students are working as volunteer mentors/tutors for learners at the Academy. We will expand this provision in 2014.

viii. Aston regularly organises the annual Birmingham UCAS Higher Education Guidance Convention with over 12,000 Year 12 students and their advisers attending. Aston is hosting this annual event in 2013 and will bid again for 2015. This event is open to all West Midlands schools/colleges, the majority of which have significant percentages of students from the four lowest socio-economic groups.

ix. There will be continuation of the Routes into Languages programme (led from Aston in the region), aimed at promoting languages in schools.

x. We will expand our already extensive outreach to Primary School learners (and their parents/teachers/advisers) to ensure they recognise university as part of their future. Activities will include our key involvement in the Children’s University, Aston Olympics, staff and student volunteering in primary schools and out of school clubs. For example, over 600 primary school learners will “graduate” at Aston in 2013 via the Children’s University. The Outreach and Schools Liaison team will also host specific university experience days in 2013 and 2014 for primary schools in the region and continue the successful numeracy and literacy programmes with local primary schools.

xi. Aston has extensive experience of supporting the Access to Professions agenda. We have been involved with the Pure Potential organisation since 2007 and its related A2P website. We will continue to organise our hugely popular Access to Professional Careers and Beyond Year 12 conferences for Year 11-13 students in partnership with graduate employers and professional institutes.

xii. We intend to monitor closely our efforts to maintain and enhance participation from under-represented groups and to this end we have employed a member of staff in the Planning and Management Information Team to provide information and support to our monitoring and research efforts in this area.

b. Collaborative Outreach Activities

Aston University will continue the collaborative partnership established in 2011 – 12 with University of Birmingham, Birmingham City University and University College Birmingham to take forward the legacy of Aimhigher. The Aimhigher Collaborative Partnership exceeded its baseline year milestones in 2011/12 and is on target to do so again in 2012/13. We therefore confirm our intention to increase the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds engaged in Aimhigher’s intensive mentoring and residential activity to 750 in 2013/14 and to 1,000 each year from 2014/15 to 2017/18, retaining a focus on pre-16 students. In response to demand we will also continue to deliver less-intensive activities for young people and parents, and support events for higher education advice and guidance practitioners working to support the progression of disadvantaged young people.

Aston University will jointly fund Aimhigher with a contribution of £35,000 in 2014-15 and will continue to be intimately involved in its governance and management. Opportunities to engage
other HEIs in Aimhigher will be pursued, as will opportunities to align with the National Strategy for Student Access and Success and other relevant policy developments and initiatives. These partnership activities will complement Aston’s own extensive programme of widening access and fair access measures outlined elsewhere in this agreement.

Aston University takes an active role in the work of HELOA (The Higher Education Liaison Officers’ Association) with a member of Aston’s Schools Liaison team elected as Midlands Chairperson in 2012. HELOA is the professional association of higher education staff who provide guidance and information to prospective higher education students, their families and advisers. HELOA has in excess of 800 members from over 130 UK Universities and Higher Education Institutions. HELOA has a code of practice which encourages collaboration, good practice and ethical standards.

c. Admissions Policy and ‘Accessible Excellence’

Aston’s Admissions Policy aims to be fair and transparent and to enable the University to meet (and to exceed) both the widening participation and state school benchmarks at the same time as maintaining high entry standards. This underpins our reputation for ‘Accessible Excellence’.

As outlined in Table 1, above, Aston consistently exceeds benchmarks on state school entry, socio-economic groups and non-continuation, despite increasing competition for places and a higher UCAS tariff on intake. Average UCAS tariff points have increased from 313 points in 2002 to 395 in 2011 (Source: Complete University Guide 2014).

3.2 Student Retention, Employability and Success

i. Aston’s retention and employability record remains amongst the best in the country, but we are committed to improving this, recognising that with a major change in the level of loans to be repaid, failing to complete a degree becomes an even greater worry for students and families. We are setting ourselves ambitious stretch targets for retention and employability (see Table 5a), because we see this as the best way to build on Aston’s expertise in these areas and provide students, particularly from under-represented groups, with a strong start in their professional life.

ii. From 2012/13 Aston is committed to offering further specific support for student retention by appointing additional teaching and academic staff in our academic Schools. This will supplement existing academic personal tutors, and student engagement initiatives to identify where students need additional support in their academic and personal lives. The University’s learning and teaching committee has developed a Personal Tutor Policy including proactive interventions at key transition points in student learning. Aston’s staff/student ratio has further reduced from 17:1 in 2011 to 16.2:1 in 2012. (Source: Complete University Guide 2014)

iii. We will continue to ensure that all new staff undertake the HE Academy-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice, and raise the number of academic staff who are Associates or Fellows of the HE Academy beyond the current 40% level (already above the national average).

iv. We have increased the level of support in the Maths Drop-In Centre (part of the Learning Development Centre) by appointing student maths mentors following the model of our highly successful writing mentors and IT programming support.

v. Aston has over 1,000 active student peer mentors working with other Aston students in earlier years. We aim to increase this number by 2014-15 and continue to offer mentoring to all undergraduates throughout the student lifecycle.

vi. We will build on our innovative Engineering CDIO interactive learning programme and our intercultural communication workshops across all four academic Schools.
vii. We will invest up to £1.4M in the next four years to offer free modern foreign languages tuition to all first year undergraduate students via our Languages for All programme.

viii. Our NSP package seeks to increase the number of students who live in university managed accommodation on campus. This will help to ensure that more of our students living away from home would benefit from personal and social support on campus via our Residence Tutors and other pastoral services, which our internal research shows helps to maximise their performance (Arya and Smith, 2004).

ix. Aston has reorganised its Placements, Careers and Employability activities to enable an increase in the number of students taking a period of work experience integrated into their degree, to embed employability and life skills more effectively into the curriculum, and to contribute to the delivery of the increased graduate employability targets set out in Table 5a.

tax. Aston also supports students to develop their Enterprise and Entrepreneurship skills through a variety of events and workshops through to business incubation and development. Nurturing these skills ensures our graduates have a range of skills to fully prepare them for their future.

xi. Our Students’ Union Job Shop offered over 17,000 term time job opportunities in 2011/12. The Job Shop evaluates the opportunities it offers to ensure both the nature of the work and the number of hours involved makes it suitable to take on alongside full-time study, and that the student will gain employability skills from the experience. Due to focused marketing campaigns with local business SME’s, the vacancies advertised now encapsulates and reflects the skills sets of Aston Students and the local economy. This service will continue to be funded by the University beyond 2013.

xii. Aston University has been awarded the Buttle Trust UK Quality Mark, demonstrating our support for Care Leavers. Aston is also a key member of the West Midlands Care Leavers Network. The network enables staff from the region to share good practice in this area. Aston already works with local Care Leaver/LACES support teams in the region in organising campus visit days for groups of students in care. We are also hosting networking/information events on campus for carers and “virtual school” coordinators to inform them of the support available from Aston and other Universities.

3.3 Aston University Scholarships and other financial support for students

a. National Scholarship Programme (NSP)

Aston University proposes to offer 309 Scholarships in 2014/15 as part of the National Scholarship Programme (NSP). We will use our matched contribution to offer a fee-free placement year and further support in year 2 and final year.

Aston’s NSP offer will be as follows:

- £2,000 of support in year one comprising a £2,000 discount on Aston University campus accommodation in year one.
- £1,000 tuition fee discount or cash bursary in 2016/17 for the Aston sandwich placement year or year abroad. As already explained, Aston is planning to charge a fee for the placement year of £1,000.
- Students on MEng/MBiol/MOptom courses with an integrated placement study year will be given a £1,000 tuition/accommodation fee discount or cash bursary for that year.
- NSP students may be eligible for Aston Progression Scholarships (page 8) in subsequent years subject to annual Student Finance England Assessments.

Recipients must be:

- English domiciled students with residual household incomes of up to £25,000, claiming the
maintenance grant (including mature students and care leavers), as assessed by Student Finance England through HEBSS) and

- Opting to live away from the family home in Aston University campus accommodation in year one.
- Entrants through Clearing will not normally be offered NSP Scholarships as Clearing entrants do not form part of our Accommodation Guarantee – which has an earlier application deadline than the start of the UCAS Clearing process.

The Aston NSP is particularly designed to support students who feel that they cannot afford to attend a University away from their home. It is only available to students who live in University managed campus residences for the duration of their first year (and have paid residences fees for the full year). The scheme will also support care leavers who live in University accommodation.

Care leavers will receive:

- £3,000 of support in year one comprising a £1,000 tuition fee discount and a £2,000 discount on Aston University campus accommodation in year one.
- £1,000 tuition fee discount or cash bursary in 2016/17 for the Aston sandwich placement year. As already explained, Aston is planning to charge a fee for the placement year of £1,000.
- £1,000 scholarship in year 2 and Final Year
  - **This will be a choice of either a £1,000 fee discount, £1,000 residences fee discount in Aston University accommodation or £1,000 cash bursary**

We have had to focus the scholarships on students who live away from home because of the relatively small number of scholarships we have in relation to the socio-economic mix of our students. Around 40% of current Aston first year undergraduate students are assessed as having a family income of up to £25,000, whilst the NSP provision will only be available for around 15% of first year undergraduates. The section below describes our approach to supporting other students in this low income category.

**Other Aston University Scholarships**

**b. Aston Progression Scholarships**

For 2014/15 the University will offer an Aston Progression Scholarship of £500 pa to all Home/EU students paying deferred variable tuition fees who are in receipt of full or partial state support – i.e. with household income of up to £42,000 who do not qualify for the NSP. This support will be guaranteed in each year of study where a tuition fee of £9,000 is charged, subject to satisfactory academic performance. Based on historical access trends it is anticipated that over 60% of students paying deferred variable tuition fees at Aston will be entitled to these Aston Scholarships or the National Scholarship Programme.

Aston Progression Scholarships will provide:

- £500 scholarship in each year of study where a tuition fee for £9,000 is charged.
  - **This will be a choice of either a £500 fee discount, £500 residences fee discount in Aston University accommodation or £500 cash bursary**

Aston Progression Scholarships have been structured in this way for the following reasons:

- The current Government plans for interest charges on fee and maintenance loans are for RPI plus 3% while students are studying, with possible variable levels of interest after graduation. A £500 Aston fee discount would effectively mean that Home/EU students’ fee loans would not increase in interest each year based on a typical interest rate of just over 5% if fees are set at £9,000 (£1,000 for the placement year). In a typical financial period this would mean
that on graduation students would not “owe” more than they originally borrowed in fee loans after three or four years of study at Aston. Aston students who opt for discounts on residences fees will be able to access high quality en suite rooms on campus at a cost around £4,000 per year, considerably below the UK average for comparable accommodation.

Students will be annually assessed for eligibility through the Higher Education Bursary and Scholarship Scheme (HEBSS) or equivalent which is administered by the Student Loans Company.

c. Aston Placement Scholarships

All Home/EU students who undertake an unpaid sandwich work or study placement year in the UK or overseas will receive a tuition fee discount or cash bursary of £1,000 (Those in receipt of a £1,000 Scholarship via the Aston NSP will not be entitled to an Aston Placement Scholarship as well). Again this is intended to encourage more Aston students to take the placement option which we know is beneficial to their success as graduates.

Aston Placement Scholarships will take the form of a choice between fee discount or a cash bursary paid during the placement year/year abroad. We have introduced this choice because some students may face financial barriers when undertaking a placement year such as travel costs, moving away from home, spending a year abroad. The placement scholarship is only available if a student is required to pay a tuition fee of £1,000 for that year.

d. Aston Excellence Scholarships

All Home/EU students entering Aston in 2014/15 with at least AAB grades at ‘A’ Level or equivalent* will be entitled to Aston Excellence Scholarships. Entrants in receipt of NSP of Aston Progression Scholarships will also be entitled to receive Aston Excellence Scholarships if they have gained at least AAB grades or equivalent. This will further promote the principle of accessible excellence. We predict that over 30% of students from lower income backgrounds will benefit from Aston Excellence Scholarships IN ADDITION to other forms of Aston scholarship support.

Aston’s Excellence Scholarships will be as follows:

- £1,000 scholarship in each year of study where a tuition fee for £9,000 is charged (normally amounting to £4,000 for a standard 4 year sandwich programme)
  - This will be a choice of either a £1,000 fee discount, £1,000 residences fee discount in Aston University accommodation or £1,000 cash bursary
- £1,000 tuition fee discount or cash bursary in 2016/17 for the Aston sandwich placement year. As already explained, Aston is planning to charge a fee for the placement year of £1,000. Students on MEng/MSc/MOptom courses with an integrated placement study year will be given a £1,000 tuition/accommodation fee discount or cash bursary for that year.
- Excellence Scholarships will be awarded annually, subject to satisfactory academic performance.

* AAB equivalences are clearly stated on our website: www.aston.ac.uk/scholarships

4. Targets and Milestones

Our Targets and Milestones are set out in Table 5 of Annex B.

We are setting OFFA targets which maintain our current access levels whilst improving retention and employability.
5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Key targets are already in place for the main strategic themes of Aston’s 2020 Strategy. The University’s Executive and Council meetings currently monitor a range of indicators, including widening participation, retention/continuation rates, degree attainment, employability, and student satisfaction levels. The detailed monitoring and analysis of widening participation activity is carried out across two University Committees: Business and Community Engagement, and Learning and Teaching. The ‘OFFA Targets’ in this agreement will become those used for Executive and Council KPIs. The stretch targets will be used for individual and departmental objectives.

Aston has invested in evaluation and reflection on the impact of all its key initiatives, including outreach, retention and student success:

- Surveys across the whole student life cycle are carried out by our market research team, and lead to action plans to address issues
- our Chief Operating Officer and Director of Marketing Strategy review the impact of our services on students in order to implement improvements
- the Planning Office will draw together all the monitoring of this Access Agreement.
- as referenced throughout the text of this Agreement, Aston academic staff will continue to carry out research on the impact of our activities on student achievement. This research will inform the further development of our approach
- the regular meetings between the Chief Operating Officer, the Vice-Chancellor, and Aston Students Union Officers, and reports from Union Senate, will provide rapid feedback on student concerns and any problems with implementation of the new support schemes.
- We intend to appoint a National Scholarship Programme Adviser in 2014 if resources are available. This post will be the public face of our Scholarships Programmes, advising and monitoring Aston NSP and other Scholars on retention, success and performance. This will also allow us to ensure that future students are kept informed of Scholarship opportunities at Aston.
- Aston University has consulted with current Aston students via meetings with Union Executive and Sabbatical Officers. University Council and Senate have also been consulted. Both these bodies include Student and Alumni representatives. 2012-14 entry UCAS applicants will be consulted via applicant surveys. These prospective student views will influence our Access Agreement decisions for 2015 and beyond.
- During 2013-15 we will undertake significant internal research on student engagement with our retention, success and performance initiatives to ensure that students from OFFA countable backgrounds are benefitting fully from them and to assess their impact
- in addition, the Aimhigher West Midlands Partnership has developed a comprehensive impact and evaluation plan which will monitor student engagement in partnership activities, track the progression of those learners with whom the partnership works most closely, evaluate the overall effectiveness of the partnership activity and disseminate good practice. Evaluation will include both quantitative and qualitative measures and will provide evidence to partner HEIs and schools engaged in the programme.

6. Provision of information to students

Aston has arranged its provision of information and guidance to students in two key areas:

a. Pre-Arrival
   i. Applicants are informed of the nature and level of tuition fees, bursaries and awards via the prospectus, the University website and special promotional leaflets. Finance talks feature as part of a programme of secondary school visits and HE guidance evenings for parents in schools. The University also provides pre-entry information and guidance on financial matters through Open Days and events for parents and teachers on the Aston campus.
ii. For entry in 2012 and beyond the University expanded the amount of printed information about scholarships, fees and bursaries to ensure that key messages are read by potential students and disseminated to their parents, advisers and carers.

iii. The University has developed a Guide for Parents which includes information on financial matters, and will be updated in the light of 2014 entry changes as and when they are formally confirmed: www.aston.ac.uk/parents. Aston University organises two annual Parents Information Evenings targeted at under-represented groups and hosts parents’ information sessions at pre and post-application open days.

iv. Pre-entry financial guidance is provided by the Advice & Representation Centre (ARC) in the Students’ Union, Financial Support Officers in The Hub Student Advice Centre and by University recruitment staff.

v. Aston is committed to the national KIS (Key Information Sets) initiative. This will be linked in to development of an applicant portal which will allow better communication with students, pre-application and pre-arrival.

b. Post-Arrival
   i. The Hub (our one-stop student advice point) and the ARC provide face-to-face financial, and other, advice and guidance to all Aston students throughout the year, including advice on the Aston Scholarship and Bursary schemes.
   ii. The Financial Assistance Unit in the Hub oversees the provision of additional financial assistance for students in the form of funds, trusts and bursaries, all of which are targeted and allocated on the basis of need.
   iii. Students are informed at enrolment and re-enrolment of their position in relation to the information on their HEBSS record concerning their eligibility for Aston Bursaries and Scholarships.
   iv. The student portal (MAP) is used as means to communicate with students about their entitlements during the on-line enrolment and re-enrolment processes. Messages are sent to all potentially eligible students individually reminding them of their entitlement and informing them of any problems with their HEBSS records which might affect the payment of their Bursaries or Scholarships.
   v. The University has invested in a co-ordinator for the Students’ Job Shop and in research into the level and impact of debt and part-time work upon Aston University students. Information generated from these sources will be used to improve our support and advice to students.
   vi. We will work with our academic Schools to ensure that Aston’s NSP students and other Scholarship recipients are supported and monitored to help ensure their attendance, progression and success throughout their time at Aston.

Equality and Diversity

Aston University takes seriously its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and, in particular, its duty to have due regard to the need to ‘Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act’, ‘Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a ‘protected characteristic and those who do not’ and ‘Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not’.

We value and celebrate the diversity of the Aston community. One of our key aims is to enable students, whatever their background, to develop as critical, reflective learners who will make a difference in the global workforce. Aston’s Annual Equality Report, 2012, illustrates the ways in which we have been working to meet both the University’s Equality and Diversity objectives and fulfil our legal duties. In line with our legal obligations we published our Equality objectives in April 2012: http://www1.aston.ac.uk/staff/equalops/monitoring/

Five of our objectives are concerned primarily with student participation, retention and success and focus on: student attainment and ethnicity; promoting Interfaith understanding; improving the
student experience for disabled students; developing and promoting Aston as a ‘Gay friendly’ place to work and study; Widening Participation: ensuring high potential students from all backgrounds can gain the benefit of university education and social mobility that comes with professional careers. Our initial equality analysis for this Access Agreement has focused on the way that we are proposing to administer Aston scholarships. It does not identify any evidence of potential adverse impact for students with specific protected equality characteristics. We are conscious however that the overall changes in University funding and fee structures may present challenges for students from some backgrounds, students with certain family responsibilities, or at different stages of their career. We are concerned in particular to monitor the potential impact on students from under-represented ethnic groups, mature students, disabled students and students with families to support.

We are aware that our NSP awards are focused on students living on campus in first year and are mindful of the fact that some students unable to live away from home or on campus (for example mature students with family/childcare commitments) may not benefit from our NSP scholarships. We intend to monitor this situation and will set aside contingency via our Access to Learning Fund which students in this position will be able to apply for during their studies. Our own research (Arya, R. and Smith, R. 2004), indicates that where students are living away from home in their first year, on-campus University managed accommodation provides them with the best possible pastoral and academic environment to succeed.

Our monitoring resource and processes have been strengthened (see 3.1 xii) to ensure that we are able to identify any changes in intake, retention and degree outcomes over the coming years and take appropriate action where required.

References

Arya, R. and Smith, R. (2004), 'Living at Home: an investigation into the degree to which University facilities are used by students living off campus', Aston Widening Participation Working Group.


Gorman, P. (2011), ‘Enhancing the Student Experience: Giving students a voice and asking the right questions’, Learning and Teaching Committee, February 2011.


Wilson, T. ‘Wilson Review of Business-University Collaboration’ Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 28th February 2012
## Table 5 - Milestones and targets

### Table 5a - Statistical milestones and targets relating to your applicants, entrants or student body (e.g. HESA, UCAS or internal targets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Please select milestone/target type from the drop down menu</th>
<th>Description (500 characters maximum)</th>
<th>Is this a collaborative target?</th>
<th>Baseline year</th>
<th>Baseline data</th>
<th>Yearly milestones/targets (numeric where possible, however you may use text)</th>
<th>Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>State School (HESA Table T1b)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for the % of students from state schools whilst maintaining entry quality</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>90 90 90 90 90 90</td>
<td>Stretch Target. HESA Benchmark 87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NS-SEC (location adjusted) (HESA Table T1a)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for the % of students from NS-SEC 4,5,6,7 whilst maintaining entry quality</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>35 35 35 35 35</td>
<td>Stretch Target. HESA Benchmark 30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>LPN (location adjusted) (HESA Table T1a)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for the % of students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods whilst maintaining entry quality</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.7 8.8 8.9 9 9.1</td>
<td>Stretch Target. HESA Benchmark 8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Non continuation: All (HESA Table T3a)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for non-continuation rates of all students</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.8 3.7 3.6 3.5 3.4</td>
<td>Stretch Target. HESA Benchmark 6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Projected outcomes (HESA table T5)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for % of students projected to complete or transfer</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>92 93 93 93 94</td>
<td>Stretch Target. HESA Benchmark 88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Other (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for % of full-time graduates in employment (including further study)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>93 93 94 94 94</td>
<td>Stretch Target. HESA Benchmark 89.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Other (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To increase percentage of Full Time employed graduates in graduate level employment</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>97.7</td>
<td>92 93 84 85 85</td>
<td>Stretch target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Other (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To increase percent of eligible students who undertake a UK/overseas work placement or study period abroad</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>65 65 70 75 75</td>
<td>Stretch target</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alongside applicant and entrant targets, we encourage you to provide targets around your outreach work (including collaborative outreach work where appropriate) or other initiatives to illustrate your progress towards increasing access. These should be measurable outcomes based targets and should focus on the number of pupils reached by a particular activity/programme, or number of schools worked with, and what the outcomes were, rather than simply recording the nature/number of activities.

### Table 5b - Other milestones and targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Please select milestone/target type from the drop down menu</th>
<th>Description (500 characters maximum)</th>
<th>Is this a collaborative target?</th>
<th>Baseline year</th>
<th>Baseline data</th>
<th>Yearly milestones/targets (numeric where possible, however you may use text)</th>
<th>Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (summer schools)</td>
<td>Number of targeted learners accessing intensive residential or summer school type activities on campus. Learners will be targeted by state school and from schools/colleges with 60% or more of students who live in disadvantaged IMD postcodes.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60 100 100 120 120</td>
<td>Some of this activity is expected to be part of the Aimhigher West Midlands Partnership mentioned below under collaborative activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Masterclasses and subject enrichment. Number of learners accessing masterclasses and subject enrichment activities. Learners will be targeted by state school and from schools/colleges with 60% or more of students who live in the most disadvantaged IMD postcodes.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>700 750 750 1000 1000 1200</td>
<td>Activity is partly dependent on continued demand from Schools, Colleges, Academies and learners and use of Pupil Premium and other funding for cover, transport etc. Demand has been extremely high under the Aimhigher arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Campus visits. Number of students visiting campus for general HE experience days and aspiration raising events. Learners will be targeted by state school and from schools/colleges with 60% or more of students who live in the most disadvantaged IMD postcodes.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1500 1500 2000 2000 2000 2000</td>
<td>Activity is partly dependent on continued demand from Schools, Colleges, Academies and learners and use of Pupil Premium and other funding for cover, transport etc. Demand has been extremely high under the Aimhigher arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) in schools and colleges. Number of visits to schools and colleges where 60% or more of students are from IMD postcodes as above. These include parents evening, Y9 options evenings, HE Guidance sessions. This is complement or replace lost funding and staffing in careers and connections services.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50 60 70 70 70 70</td>
<td>Some of this activity will be part of the Aimhigher West Midlands Partnership mentioned below under collaborative activity. This figure may arise as and when more schools across the city contribute to the HE Progression Partnership. This figure is at present dependent on funding from Schools as part of Pupil premium or other sources. Please note this targets is for Aston Student Mentors and not learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Intensive mentoring in schools and colleges as part of the Aimhigher West Midlands Partnership. Number of mentors working (assume 5 learners/mentees per mentor). Mentees and Schools will be highly targeted as part of the Partnership mentioned below.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25 25 25 25 25</td>
<td>This figure includes activities such as after school clubs, STEM ambassadors, e-mentors and intensive mentors. This figure refers to Aston Student Volunteers/Mentors and not learner numbers. Learner numbers will vary according to the type of engagement and time of year. Some of these numbers may become part of the Aimhigher West Midlands collaborative partnership if more schools contribute to funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Student Tutoring, Mentoring and e-mentoring - Aston tutors and mentors working in target schools and colleges on academic and aspiration support via the long established student tutoring and mentoring schemes at Aston. Schools and Colleges with 60% or more of learners who live in the most disadvantaged IMD postcodes.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>80 100 100 100 100 100</td>
<td>Aimhigher West Midlands is a Partnership of 4 HEIs working to provide a programme of progression support to disadvantaged KS3, KS4 and KS5 learners in at least 20 local schools. in at least 20 local schools. The partnership will also engage significant numbers of young people aged 14-19 in element of its programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds engaged in intensive activity with collaborative partnership using a basket of indicators.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500 750 1000 1000 1000 1000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Proportion of engaged young people from disadvantaged backgrounds engaged attaining 5 x GCSE Grade A* to C in English and maths is greater than local average for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>44.1% Bham FSM 32.3% Solhull FSM</td>
<td>Refresh baseline to include IMD POLAR SEN (subject to modeling) in progress</td>
<td>Refresh baseline</td>
<td>1% over baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Proportion of engaged young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in intensive activity target group applying for FT place in HE is greater than local average for YP from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>59.75% Disadvantage d IMD 40.9% NS-SEC 4 to 7 58.21% LPA (Polar 2 Co 1 and 2) 7.4% Disabled</td>
<td>Refresh baseline. In progress</td>
<td>Refresh baseline</td>
<td>1% over baseline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Optional commentary on milestones. This box is character-limited to 1000 characters; however, we are happy for you to upload additional 'supporting information' as a separate Word/pdf document.