ACCESS AGREEMENT 2016/17

Fair Access, Widening Participation and Student Success at Aston University

This Access Agreement:

- Will build on Aston’s existing exceptional record in social mobility, student retention progression and access, and reflect the National Strategy for Access and Student Success and the OFFA 2015-2020 Strategic Plan
- Underlines Aston’s commitment to challenging widening participation targets, and to transforming the lives of students from a wide range of backgrounds
- Predicts that over 40% of Aston students will be entitled to Aston University Scholarships, particularly by supporting the placement year or year abroad
- 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 adding social capital and creating employable graduates
- Commits Aston to improving completion and retention rates beyond current high levels
- Underpins Aston’s core strategic objective of delivering ‘Accessible Excellence’ through the provision of core Scholarships targeted at students from low income families as well as those who are high achievers. We predict that over 60% of students who receive Excellence Scholarships (grades of AAB+ including a range of other qualifications) will be from lower income families
- Proposes a rebalancing of scholarship commitments in favour of increased investment in targeted support for student success, access and progression and to provide continued support for students with disabilities and specific learning differences in lieu of expected changes to the Disabled Students Allowance. These plans have been approved by University Senate and Council, which include Aston students, graduates and representatives from secondary education, business and community organisations
- Continues an expanded programme of regional collaboration via the Aimhigher West Midlands partnership, one of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO)
- Further embeds Aston’s University-wide approach to Access, Success and Progression

Introduction

Aston University has a long-standing commitment to widening participation while maintaining a high quality intake, and this is deeply embedded within the University’s strategy. The University’s integrated approach (Appendix 1) 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 students are at University. This includes including enhancing employability and entrepreneurship, supporting career development and providing a placements service which we consider is second to none, 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 focused 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 consistently exceed our benchmarks. Table 1 (below) outlines Aston’s record on access, retention and graduate employment success based on the latest HESA data.

Over the past six years, Aston University has committed an increasing proportion of its resources to enhancing the student learning experience. We will continue intensive collaborative work with four other West Midlands HEIs in the Aimhigher West Midlands Partnership, part of a wider Aimhigher network of 20 HE and FE institutions.

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, 2013).

Table 1: 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% from low participation neighbourhoods (LPN, POLAR2)</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>11.6%*</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% from social classes NS-SEC Classes 4,5,6 &amp; 7</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>35.3%*</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% from state schools</td>
<td>94.0%</td>
<td>90.3%*</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% projected to complete or transfer</td>
<td>92.4%</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% no longer in HE following year of entry</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/Managerial employment within 6 months of graduation+</td>
<td>85.1%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement Year: % of students enrolled on sandwich courses**</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Latest HESA PI data 2012/13 www.hesa.ac.uk

*Location adjusted benchmark
+ Unistats KIS 4, 2014 based on 2012-13 HESA DLHE
** HESA DLHE 2012-13, Aston has an even higher percentage taking a placement because of the pre-registration year for some programmes, which are equivalent to a placement year.

Aston University combines close and important links to the local region (over 40% of students are from the West Midlands region, including around 25% from the wider Birmingham area) with a strong international reputation (20+% from outside the EU). 94% of home students starting full-time first-degree courses at Aston in 2012/13 came from state schools, with 43.9% from the four lowest socio-economic groups. Using these figures, Aston is the most socially inclusive of all the Universities in the top 30 of the 2015 Complete University Guide and top 40 of the 2015 Sunday Times Good University Guide.

58% of our current students are entitled to a maintenance grant from Student Finance England or equivalent, with 38% entitled to full grants (household incomes of under £25,000). The University has a strong retention record (over 95% of entrants were still in Higher Education following their year of entry (HESA PI March 2015)), and our students have an excellent employment record. 85% of Aston’s employed graduates entered professional or managerial employment within six

Our agreement encompasses

- Accessible Excellence
- Access, Outreach and Widening Participation
- Success, Retention and Progression
- Placements and Employability

Our milestones are arranged around these four pillars (See Table 7 in Annex B). We aim to maintain our reputation for widening participation in an increasingly competitive HE arena, whilst maintaining our entry 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 2016/17: COMPONENT ELEMENTS

Aston pioneered the four year “sandwich” placement degree programme 50 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 (Moores and Reddy, 2011) and improve their final degree grades (Driffield, Foster and Higson, 2011.) Our fee and scholarship 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 graduate debt. The number of eligible Aston students on placement, pre-registration year or year abroad has risen from 60.4% in 2012/13 to 67.3% in 2013/14 (based on internal data including pre-registration year students). Our projected figure for 2014/15 is higher still. We are on course to achieve our target of 100% of eligible students within five years, as outlined in our 2020 Strategy.

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 2016-17. 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 continue to be £1,000. This is a heavily subsidised rate compared to actual costs associated with supporting our students entering in 2016/17 when they go on placement in 2018-19. This fee level includes students who take a work or study placement year overseas.

   iii. According to HESA PI data released in July 2014, Aston has the 4th highest percentage of students enrolled on sandwich courses of any UK University, at 58.9% against a UK average of 6%. This £1,000 tuition fee level is aimed at encouraging Aston students to take this academically and vocationally beneficial option, irrespective of family income or social background.

   iv. Aston University has launched an innovative range of integrated Masters programmes 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 enables 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 undertaking this year in 2017/18. This figure will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/BIS for those
students taking this option in 2018/19 and beyond.

v. Home/EU students following full-time HEFCE Countable Foundation Degree programmes will be charged a fee of no more than £6,000 from 2015/16. This fee will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/BIS.

vi. 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 2016/17 and 2017/18, Aston plans to invest over 30% of its fee income above £6,000 into scholarships, access, success and progression. Tables 3a-b in Annex B show the projected additional income accruing from variable fees for the period 2014/15 to 2018/19 and the estimated amount allocated in the form of scholarships and support for access, success and progression activities.

In 2016/17 this investment will take the form of:

i. £3.5M in OFFA countable Scholarships and financial support. The University will maintain a hardship fund (replacing the Access to Learning Fund) to assist students who experience unforeseen financial difficulties during the course of their studies.

ii. We plan gradually to rebalance our investments from 2016 in favour of success, progression and access whilst retaining a core scholarship package, particularly supporting students living away from home and taking the placement year/year abroad.

iii. We have taken this decision based on OFFA guidance and HEFCE-commissioned research which indicates that student access and retention from underrepresented groups is not significantly affected by the availability of scholarships. Our own research from decliners and accepters surveys has shown that while scholarships based on attainment pre-entry have high awareness amongst students, scholarships based on household income have limited awareness. Internal focus groups and research from organisations such as the Debrett’s Foundation (March 2015) have also indicated that cost and living expenses remain a barrier to placement/internship take up. We have, therefore, retained key elements of our scholarship package focusing on the placement year, campus living and academic performance (see section 3.3, page 9 of the access agreement narrative).

iv. Whilst reducing scholarship spend over time, overall annual expenditure on OFFA countable outreach, progression and success activities is expected to rise from £2.6M in 2015/16 to £3.2 million by 2016/17 and will continue at this level to 2019/20.

v. This figure includes modern foreign language tuition offered to all students entering Aston at no additional cost to the student. This will be provided by Aston’s Languages for All Programme. 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 UK students, a significant proportion of whom have not had the opportunity to study an additional language at school. Over 600 of our new intake signed up to Languages for All in 2014/15.

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 Access and Outreach

a. We will be undertaking the following targeted work, building on our current track record. Key targets for activities are listed in Table 7b of the Access Agreement document.

i. Aston University will target schools and colleges with significant indicators of deprivation, using successful role models from the student body and alumni to promote recruitment of learners from widening participation backgrounds. We will focus in particular on extending access to SIV, STEM and Professional subjects.

ii. Masterclasses and subject enrichment will continue to be a major part of our provision. We aim for over 1,000 students from target schools and colleges to take part in 2016/17.

iii. Over 2,000 students in Year 7-13 will visit our campus for HE experience days, again from target schools and colleges.

iv. In response to school/college demand and time pressures on learners, we are expanding the number of subject enrichment activities taking place in school or in local school hubs.

v. We invested in additional Information, Advice and Guidance staffing within the Schools Liaison team in 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, particularly in the light of curriculum reform from 2015.

vi. 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 120 Aston student mentors and tutors will be working with at least 600 learners in 2016/17.

vii. We will make the key elements of study skills and online revision advice available to students who apply to Aston through UCAS via our “GetAhead@Aston” website. In 2016 we also plan to roll out a pilot of our partnership with the “GetRevising” online resource, targeted at applicant from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

viii. Applicants will be enabled and encouraged to interact with the University through online study support resources and via the Aston Progression Pathway (APP). The APP launched in 2014-15 in 10 target schools in Birmingham. Aston mentors and tutors will work with Y12 and Y13 students considering Aston University programmes to support them with their aspirations and attainment. Up to 50 APP students will have access to Learning Development Centre support and our Masterclass and Subject Enrichment 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 APP programme is partly funded via Aston Alumni.

ix. In October 2014 Aston was only the second UK University to publish a statement on A level reform and admissions to University from 2017. We will ensure that Aston academic staff and programme directors are aware of future changes to A levels, GCSEs and other post-16 qualifications from 2015 and continue to provide appropriate
guidance to schools and colleges on their own curriculum development.

x. The Learner Enhancement Team will continue to offer pre-entry support to Access to Higher Education Programme students from local FE Colleges and to mature students.

xi. 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. A team of Aston students is working as mentors/tutors for learners at the Academy. We will continue this provision in 2015. The intake of the Academy is representative of Birmingham’s diverse socio-economic and ethnic mix with over 30% of learners on Free School Meals. Eleven of the first cohort of 70 Year 13 students joined Aston University in 2014. In September 2014 the new Year 10 cohort stayed on campus for their induction programme.

xii. Every two years Aston organises the annual Birmingham UCAS Higher Education Guidance Convention with over 15,000 Year 12 students and their advisers attending. Aston will host this annual event in June 2015 and will bid to host again in 2017. 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.

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

xiv. 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 City of Birmingham Children’s University, Aston Olympians, staff and student volunteering in primary schools and out of school clubs. The Outreach and Schools Liaison team will also host specific university experience days in 2015 and 2016 for primary schools in the region and continue the successful numeracy and literacy programmes with local primary schools.

xv. Aston has extensive experience of supporting the Access to Professions agenda. We have been involved with the Pure Potential organisation since 2007 and are a Gold Partner of its Access Professions website, highlighting our support of the A2P agenda. 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.

xvi. Aston University has announced advanced plans to open a new Medical School on campus in 2017. A key element of the Aston Medical School will be to provide 20 places for students from schools/colleges in local deprived neighbourhoods supported by a Healthcare Aspirations programme to support awareness and access to medicine and related subjects. A Widening Participation Strategy for the Medical School is being finalised and will be published during 2015. We are fully aware of the recent report from The Medical Schools Council (December 2014) on access to medicine and our plans for the Aston Medical School reflect this guidance.

xvii. We are conscious of the need to reach out to rural communities as well as our city-based roots and have a number of small scale projects in place. For example, we are working with the Cumbria Aspires Project (with the support of our placement students/graduates working at the Sellafield Nuclear Facility) to raise awareness of STEM subjects in the county. We will also ensure that rural IMD schools in Worcestershire, Shropshire and Warwickshire are given full access to our activities and as part of the Aimhigher West Midlands Partnership.

xviii. The annual University Experience Day offers mature students on Access Courses from local FE Colleges an opportunity to visit the University, and incorporates information, advice and guidance on HE study and support opportunities. Further collaboration with the local FE sector facilitates a College Visiting Programme whereby our current students offer information and advice about life at university to students on Access courses. The Learner Enhancement Officer will continue to attend Higher Education Fairs, specifically offering advice and guidance to older, non-traditional learners.

xix. Mature students will continue to be offered pre-arrival e-mentoring support via the Peer
Mentoring programme to encourage their smooth transition. Mature part-time distance learners studying on our Work-based Foundation Degrees are also offered mentoring support. A well-established Mature Students’ Induction Programme is offered before the start of term to facilitate transition into the HE environment, combining study skills sessions and social activities designed to support this group of learners.

b. Collaborative Outreach Activities

Aston University will continue the collaborative Aimhigher West Midlands partnership established in 2011/12 with the University of Birmingham, University College Birmingham and Birmingham City University and in 2015/16 will extend to include the University of Worcester. The partnership met its yearly milestones in 2013/14 and is on course to do so again in 2014/15. We therefore confirm our intention to engage 1,000 disadvantaged young people in Aimhigher’s intensive activity in each year from 2015/16 to 2019/20, and to increase the number and geographical range of the schools we work with. Aston University will jointly fund Aimhigher with a contribution of £35,000 in 2016/17 and will be heavily involved in its governance and management.

The outreach activities delivered through the partnership will complement Aston’s own extensive programme of widening access and fair access measures outlined elsewhere in this agreement.

Our non-OFFA linked collaborative work to broker, coordinate and deliver outreach activities and events for higher education advice and guidance practitioners working to support the progression of disadvantaged young people will be greatly extended as a result of Aimhigher West Midlands’ success in becoming part of the HEFCE-funded NNCO initiative.

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. UCAS applications to Aston have increased by over 50% between 2012 and 2015 to 15,500 (Source, UCAS Applicant Digest February 2015). Average UCAS tariff on entry has increased from 313 points in 2002 to 378 in 2012 (Source: Complete University Guide 2015).

3.2 Student Progression 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 continuing to set ourselves ambitious targets for retention and employability (see Table 7a), 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 to maintain our staff-student ratio. Aston’s staff/student ratio has further reduced from 17:1 in 2011 to 16:0:1 in 2014. (Source: Complete University Guide 2013-2016). 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.

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 Fellows of the HE Academy beyond the current 55% level (already double the national average).

iv. We have built in a contingency of £250,000 per annum to cover the costs of possible changes to Disabled Students Allowance from 2016.

v. We have increased the level of support in the Learning Development Centre, providing year round maths support, writing cafes, and support for statistics. The Stats Cafe is facilitated by student mentors, building on the model of our highly successful writing mentor programme.

vi. A dedicated member of staff is in place to support mature students, offering practical and financial support throughout their studies, including supporting the thriving Mature Students’ Society and the Mature Student Handbook.

vii. From 2016-2020 we will also increase targeted retention support for mature learners and other groups of Aston students who are more likely to discontinue their studies. This will be via personal tutors, teaching fellows and by developing our peer and learning mentor programmes.

viii. Aston has over 1,000 active student peer mentors working with other Aston students in earlier years. We will continue to offer mentoring to all undergraduates and postgraduates throughout the student lifecycle.

ix. We will build on our innovative Engineering Conceive, Design, Innovate, Operate (CDIO) interactive learning programme and our intercultural communication workshops across all four academic Schools.

x. We will continue to offer free modern foreign languages tuition to all first year undergraduate students via our Languages for All programme.

xi. Our Scholarship package and Aston Student Villages Campus Development Project seeks to increase the number of students who live in campus accommodation. This will continue 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.

xii. Aston has successfully centralised 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 Annex B, Table 7.

xiii. Our Students’ Union Job Shop offered over 17,000 term time job opportunities in 2013/14. 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.

xiv. 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 prepare them for their future.

xv. In the year to come Careers+Placements will increasingly use management information data to consider equality of opportunity. For example we will identify pockets of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are not achieving positive graduate destinations and design bespoke services to level the playing field.

xvi. The Placements Team is developing new flexible formats and opportunities for gaining credit-bearing placement experience, which may appeal to mature students with previous experience, challenging circumstances or family commitments. Placement support and scholarships are designed to encourage all Aston students, irrespective of their background or age to take up placement years or year abroad programmes.

xvii. Aston is 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 also host networking/information events on
campus for carers and “virtual school” coordinators to inform them of the support
available from Aston and other Universities.

xviii. During 2015/16 we will investigate and engage with schools, local charities and third
sector organisations to enable our student volunteers, mentors and tutors to support
young carers in Birmingham.

xix. Following induction programmes for new students, the Learning Development Centre
(LDC) will continue to offer academic support through subject embedded and generic
workshop programmes, one-one advice for academic writing and study skills support,
and access to specialist maths support. The LDC supports flexible learning, off-campus
and part time Aston students via the University virtual learning environment, BlackBoard.
Students can discuss their learning with Learning Development Advisors by email
tutorials or web conferencing through Skype.

3.3 Aston University Scholarships and other financial support for students

a. Aston Aspire Scholarship

Aston University proposes to offer at least 360 income-based Scholarships in 2016/17.

Aston’s main income based Scholarship offer will be as follows:

- £1,000 of support in year one comprising a £1,000 discount on Aston University campus
  accommodation.
- £1,000 tuition fee discount or payment into a students’ bank account in 2017/18 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 a payment into a student’s bank account
  for that year.

Recipients must be:

- UK domiciled students with residual household incomes of up to £18,000, claiming the
  maintenance grant (including mature students and care leavers), as assessed by Student
  Finance England or equivalent through HEBSS and
- Opting to live away from the family home in Aston University approved campus
  accommodation in year one.

The Aston Aspire Scholarship is particularly designed to support students who believe that they
cannot afford to attend a University away from their home. It is only available to students who live
in University 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
or elsewhere

Care leavers will receive:

- £1,000 of support in year one, two 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 payment into a student’s bank account.
- £1,000 tuition fee discount or a payment into a student’s bank account in 2017/18
  for the Aston sandwich placement year. As already explained, Aston is planning to
  charge a fee for the placement year of £1,000.
We have had to focus income based scholarships on students who live away from home because of the socio-economic mix of our students. As many as 40% of current Aston undergraduate students are assessed as having a family income of under £25,000.

**Other Aston University Scholarships**

**b. Aston Placement Scholarships**

All Home/EU students who undertake a sandwich work or study placement year overseas or an unpaid work placement in the UK will receive the £1,000 Aston Placement Scholarship. Those in receipt of a £1,000 Placement Year Scholarship via the Aston Aspire Scholarship or Excellence Scholarship will not be entitled to an Aston Placement Scholarship as well.

Aston Placement Scholarships will take the form of a choice between fee discount, accommodation discount or payment into a student’s bank account 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 or more for that year.

**c. Aston Excellence Scholarships**

All Home/EU students entering Aston in 2016/17 with at least AAB grades at ‘A’ Level or have achieved grades from a list of other qualifications* will be entitled to Aston Excellence Scholarships. Entrants in receipt of other Aston Scholarships will also be entitled to receive Aston Excellence Scholarships if they have gained the grades required to qualify for the scholarship. This will further promote the principle of accessible excellence. In 2014 we expanded the range of qualifications eligible for Aston Excellence Scholarships, to include A level/vocational mixes and Access Courses. We will continue this in 2016. Over 60% of our current students who receive Excellence Scholarships are from families with household incomes of below £42,000.

Aston’s Excellence Scholarships will be as follows:

- £1,000 entry scholarship in year 1
  - This will be a choice of either a tuition fee discount, residences fee discount in Aston University accommodation or a payment into a student’s bank account
- £1,000 tuition fee discount or a payment into a student’s bank account in 2018/19 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 a payment into a student’s bank account for that year.

*Other qualifications and grades are clearly stated on our website: www.aston.ac.uk/scholarships*

4. **Targets and Milestones**

Our Targets and Milestones are set out in Table 7 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 stretch targets will be used for individual and departmental objectives.

During 2016-17 we will continue to undertake internal evaluation and 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 2014 we set up an Evaluation and Monitoring Group to facilitate this aim.

Aston’s evaluation of outreach, retention and student success includes:

- 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 of Operations and Estates and Director of Marketing Strategy review the impact of our services on students in order to implement improvements
- The Planning Office and Schools Liaison Team draw together the monitoring of Access Agreement targets supported by the Monitoring and Evaluation Group
- As referenced throughout the text of this Agreement, Aston academic staff continue to carry out research on the impact of our activities on student achievement. This research will continue to inform the further development of our approach.
- The regular meetings between the Executive Operations Group, the Vice-Chancellor, and Aston Students Union Officers, and reports from Union Senate, will continue to provide feedback from students on the implementation of the revised scholarship scheme.
- Aston University has consulted with current Aston students via meetings with Union Executive and Sabbatical Officers on the activities and plans associated with our access agreements. University Council and Senate have also been consulted and approved our revised Scholarship plans and Activity spend in March 2015. Both these bodies include Aston student and Alumni representatives. 2012-16 entry UCAS applicants will be surveyed to ascertain the impact and awareness of our scholarship policies. These student views alongside national research evidence will influence our Access Agreement decisions for 2017 and beyond.
- In addition, the Aimhigher West Midlands Partnership has 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.
- The acquisition of Careers Monitoring Software (Symplicity) aims to provide the Careers+Placements team with detailed reports around the engagement and progression of OFFA-countable students. This is a collaborative approach with the Registry team who will provide key data which is then mapped against the Careers+Placements service users as reported through Symplicity. The newly recruited University Operations team have this as a priority project which started in April 2015. Whilst we have an excellent track record for employability the next step will be to analyse the management information and see how we can best use our team to ensure all students are achieving equality in their outcomes after graduating from university.
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. In 2014 we appointed an Employability Advisor to provide pre-entry Careers Advice and Guidance at a range of events both on and off campus, focusing on employability skills and raising awareness of placement years, year abroad opportunities and sandwich courses.

   iii. Aston University organizes annual parents/carers information evenings targeted at under-represented groups and hosts information sessions for them at pre and post-application open days.

   iv. Pre-entry financial guidance is provided by the Advice & Representation Centre (ARC) in the Students' Union, Student Advisers in The Hub's Advice Zone and by University recruitment staff.

   v. The Learning Development Centre provides academic support for pre-entry students through the web-based programme "GetAhead@Aston". All students that will be studying at Aston are provided with access to online advice and support to ease their transition to University.

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 schemes.

   ii. The Student Funds Administrator 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 Learning Development Centre provides face-to-face and online academic support for students in transition to University level study, and throughout the duration of their chosen course. Student engagement with the Learning Development Centre is monitored and evaluated to support academic development and progression.

   vi. Aston’s Peer Mentoring Programmes support our students from pre-arrival to after graduation. These Programmes are supported by relevant research and evaluation (for example: The Pathway to Success: Andrews, Clark and Gorman. 2010).

   vii. Students are supported by the Careers+Placements team through a variety of activities and online resources, such as our dedicated careers portal called Aston Futures. The portal hosts a variety of resources enabling the students to engage with and book on to events and workshops focusing on employability. In addition, students are able to book one to one appointments with Careers+Placements Advisors in order to support their career planning.
Equality and Diversity

Aston University takes seriously its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. 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 critically reflective learners who will make a difference in the global workforce. Aston’s Annual Equality Report, 2014, illustrates the ways in which we have been working to meet both the University’s Equality and Diversity objectives and fulfil our legal duties.

Our 2014 Report focused on analysis of access, performance, success and progression from students with protected characteristics. We did not identify any evidence of potential adverse impact of our access agreement activities for these groups of students. The report was published online and submitted to the Learning and Teaching Committee at Aston. This information was also reported in our 2013-14 monitoring return to OFFA and HEFCE in January 2015. The document will be published on the OFFA website during summer 2015.

Our Equality objectives and reports are available at http://www1.aston.ac.uk/staff/equalops/monitoring/

Five of our objectives are concerned primarily with student participation, retention and success. These focus on:

- student attainment and ethnicity
- promoting Interfaith understanding
- improving the student experience for disabled students such as by helping to offset the cost of Educational Psychologists’ diagnostic assessments for Specific Learning Differences
- developing and promoting Aston as a ‘LGBT 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.

We have also carried out an Equality Impact Assessment using an Equality Screening Form as part of the 2016 Access Agreement preparation. Our analysis for this Access Agreement has focused again 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 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. In particular, we are concerned to monitor the impact on students from under-represented ethnic groups, mature students, disabled students and students with families to support.

We are aware that some of our Scholarship 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 scholarships. As part of our discussions with Council and Senate to reduce our scholarships for 2016 we assessed the existing support from Student Finance England or equivalent. We found our changes to scholarships would not have significant impact on the vast majority of our students from lower incomes, as they already received relatively high levels of grant and maintenance loans. We continue to monitor this situation and will set aside contingency via our £100,000
replacement to the Access to Learning Fund which students in this position will be able to apply for. We have also included a contingency of £250,000 to offset possible changes to DSA funding in 2016 and have retained the additional support previously committed to care leavers. We also found that new planned investments in Student Success and Progression are expected to have a positive impact on students with protected characteristics, for example via flexible options for the placement year and enhanced support for mature students. The percentage of students from ethnic minorities and from the lower socioeconomic groups increased at Aston between 2011 and 2013 according to HESA data published in March 2015.

Our monitoring resources and processes have been strengthened (see section 5) 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


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


Andrews, Jane; Clark, Robin and Gorman, Paul (2010). Peer mentoring and experiential learning: the pathway to success. 7th annual International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conference. Liverpool, 19th-22nd October 2010

Medical Schools Council (2014) Selecting for Excellence: http://www.medschools.ac.uk/AboutUs/Projects/Widening-Participation/Selecting-for-Excellence/Pages/Selecting-for-Excellence.aspx
### Table 7a - Statistical targets and milestones relating to your applicant, entrants or student body

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference number</th>
<th>Please select 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 (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>T14a_01</td>
<td>Outreach / RWP activity (senior schools)</td>
<td>Number of learners from state schools accessing intensive residential or numeracy school type activities on campus, including state-mission bodies staff programmes. Learners will highlyuggy state school and from state schools with 60% or more of students who live in disadvantaged IMD postcodes.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90 90 90 90 90</td>
<td>base HESA benchmark 90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14a_02</td>
<td>Outreach / RWP activity (other - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Methods and scale &amp; support. Number of learners from state schools accessing masterclasses and subject enrichment activities. Learners will be targeted by state school and from state schools with 60% or more of students who live in the most disadvantaged IMD postcode.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>1184</td>
<td>1184 1184 1184 1184 1184 1184 1184</td>
<td>base HESA benchmark 1184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14a_03</td>
<td>Outreach / RWP activity (other - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Campus visits. Number of students from state schools visiting campus for general HE experience days and aspiration raising events. Learners will be targeted by state school and from state schools with 60% or more of students who live in the most disadvantaged IMD postcode.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>2291</td>
<td>2291 2291 2291 2291 2291 2291 2291</td>
<td>base HESA benchmark 2291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14a_04</td>
<td>Outreach / RWP activity (other - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>ASD (Autism, Aspergers and Autistic Spectrum) in schools and colleges. Number of students of state schools and college with 60% or more of students are from IMD postcodes as above. These include parents of students with ASD. Learners will be targeted by state school and from state schools with 60% or more of students who live in the most disadvantaged IMD postcode.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70 70 70 70 70 70 70</td>
<td>base HESA benchmark 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14b_01</td>
<td>Outreach / RWP activity (senior schools)</td>
<td>Student Tutoring. Mentoring and mentoring - Aston tutors and mentors working in target schools and colleges on academic and aspiration support via the long established student tutoring and mentoring scheme at Aston. Schools and Colleges with 60% or more of learners who live in the most disadvantaged IMD postcode will be targeted.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101 101 101 101 101 101 101</td>
<td>base HESA benchmark 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14b_02</td>
<td>Outreach / RWP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds engaged in intensive activity as part of Aston University - West Midlands programme, using a basket of indicators.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1000 1000 1000 1000 1000 1000 1000</td>
<td>base HESA benchmark 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14b_03</td>
<td>Outreach / RWP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attaining 5+ GCSE Grade A*-C inc. English and maths is greater than local average for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1000 1000 1000 1000 1000 1000 1000</td>
<td>base HESA benchmark 1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7b - Other milestones and targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference number</th>
<th>Please select 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 (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>T14b_04</td>
<td>Outreach / RWP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds engaged in intensive activity as part of Aston University - West Midlands programme, using a basket of indicators.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1000 1000 1000 1000 1000 1000 1000</td>
<td>base HESA benchmark 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14b_05</td>
<td>Outreach / RWP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attaining 5+ GCSE Grade A*-C inc. English and maths is greater than local average for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1000 1000 1000 1000 1000 1000 1000</td>
<td>base HESA benchmark 1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes

Alongside applicant and entrant targets, we encourage you to provide targets around outreach and student success work (including collaborative work where appropriate) or other initiatives to illustrate your progress towards increasing access, student success and progression. These should be measurable outcomes-based targets and should focus on the number of beneficiaries reached by a particular activity/programme or the number of schools worked with, and what the outcomes were, rather than simply recording the nature/number of activities.
| Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column) | Proportion of engaged young people from disadvantaged backgrounds applying for a FT place in HE is greater than local average for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators | Yes | Other (please give details of description/amount) | 58.75% | Disadvantaged IMD, 40.8% NS-SEC 4 to 7, 38.21%, LPN (Polar 2 Qs 1 and 2), 9.74% Disabled | >1% over baseline | >1% over baseline | >1% over baseline | >1% over baseline | >4% over baseline | These long term impact targets are reportable from 2014/15, as our cohort increases in numbers through to 2019/20. These milestones are dependent on access to learner-level UCAS data. Baseline year 2010/11 is consistent with other partners and to reflect the start of the partnership after the closure of the national Aimhigher programme |

Optional commentary on milestones:

The cut-off date between T16b_08(6) is day 113/2016. However, we are happy for you to submit additional supporting information as a separate Word/pdf document.

Targets have been included for 2016-17 subject to continuation of specific HEFCE Student Opportunity funding. Activity targets are also subject to demand from schools and colleges and permission to allow them to time out of class to access our activities. Increased pressure on KS4 and KS5 results and curriculum reform will make it more difficult for some schools to engage with University outreach activities. Aston’s strategic plan and indicative intake projections from 2015 to 2020 show a significant projected increase in student numbers from 8,200 to over 11,000 (see table 3). We intend to maintain our excellent record for social mobility and widening access. The numbers of students from the lowest socio-economic groups, state schools and the low participation neighbourhoods is projected to rise in line with our planned student numbers. We believe therefore that our targets, particularly on access, are challenging and stretching in this context and the current climate. Aston University is already the most socially inclusive University in the top 30 of the 2015 UK University rankings (Source: Complete University Guide 2015). Aston’s entrants from state schools, low participation neighbourhoods and the lowest socio-economic groups are already well above English average and HESA benchmark. These targets are particularly challenging because the 2015-20 period is subject to a decline in young 18 year old applicants to HE and increased competition from higher apprentice/ship, school leaver programmes and other Universities whose record on widening access is below benchmark. The removal of the HEFCE student number control in 2015 and changes to post-16 curriculum may mean a significant change in the access/admissions policies of some selective Universities who compete directly with Aston. Aston University is committed to maintaining its strong record for Accessible Excellence, Employability and Opportunity and this is a key element of its 2020 Strategy. We have used the 2012-13 year as a baseline because this reflects the first year of the introduction of higher tuition fees. This baseline year will also allow us to assess access and student performance trajectory more accurately, as the intake mix in 2013/14, 2014/15 and towards 2016/17 may fluctuate significantly at Aston and across England.