KEY PRINCIPLES:
This Access Agreement:

- Demonstrates Aston’s commitment to stretching widening participation targets and to transforming the lives of students from a wide range of backgrounds
- Will build on Aston’s exceptional record in social mobility, student retention, progression and employability, and will reflect the National Strategy for Access and Student Success and the Office of Fair Access 2015-2020 Strategic Plan
- Commits Aston to improving completion and retention rates beyond current high levels
- Further embeds Aston’s university-wide approach to access, success, progression and employability
- Focusses resources to create the most impact to facilitate under-represented groups to succeed in their studies at Aston University
- Continues an expanded programme of regional collaboration via the Aimhigher West Midlands partnership, one of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO)
Part One: Introduction

Aston University has recently celebrated over half a century of making a difference to peoples’ lives through higher education. Aston has a long-standing commitment to widening participation, while maintaining a high quality intake, which started from our foundation in the nineteenth century, and this remains core to the University’s strategy.

This Access Agreement shows continuity of strategy and objectives. Since the introduction of deferred variable tuition fees, Aston has continued to demonstrate a sustained contribution to the sector on outreach, access, success and employability. We have continued to challenge ourselves to improve our outcomes for widening participation and achievement. Once again we set ourselves stretching targets in this Agreement, not because we are asked to do so, but because raising aspiration is the very essence of our institution. As well as continuing with the work schemes that we had already in train, we will focus even more on target groups to whom our evaluation shows we can make a difference, thus continuing to make a significant contribution to the region and the sector. A reminder of our achievements is set out in the table below, based on data relating to 2014/15.
Part Two: What we have achieved so far

Our strategy for 2017/18 entry leads on from our previous year’s Access Agreement, in which we set in train some important initiatives. For 2016/17 entry we sought to start to rebalance our spend profile. Building on our research into the effect of student scholarships, we moved funding away from scholarships towards targeted support which would bring greater effect in terms of access, student progression and success. This included a plan to invest an additional £380,000 per annum in support for access, progression, success and employability, phased in between 2015 and 2019. This has already led in 2015/16 to spend £100,000 on two learning enhancers to help students improve their progression, £49,000 on extra careers and placement support, and £35,000 to facilitate our contribution to the West Midlands Aimhigher collaborative outreach programme. Overall we aim to spend approximately £6 million on access, success, progression and financial support in the 2017/18 academic year.

Our achievements so far against our Access Agreement targets are set out in the following table.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark on % of students from NS-SEC 4,5,6,7 while maintaining quality</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for the % of students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods whilst maintaining entry quality</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for the % of students from state schools whilst maintaining entry quality</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>90</td>
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Part Three: Proposed targets for 2017/18 and beyond

1. Fee(s) limits and fee income

- We propose that our full-time Home/EU undergraduate tuition fee is £9,250 per annum in 2017/18. This fee will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/BIS.

- 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 £1,250. This is a heavily subsidised rate compared to the actual costs associated with supporting our students entering in 2017/18 when they go on placement in 2019/20. This fee level includes students who take a work or study placement year overseas.

- 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%. The £1,250 tuition fee level is aimed at encouraging Aston students to take this academically and vocationally beneficial option, irrespective of family income or social background.

- 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 integrated placement year on these courses will be a maximum of £4,625. This figure will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/BIS for those students taking this option in 2019/20 and beyond.
• Home/EU students following full-time HEFCE Countable Foundation Degree programmes will be charged a fee of no more than £9,250 from 2017/18. This fee will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/BIS.

• Fees for Part Time students will be set at the same rate as Full Time students on a pro-rata basis. We will not charge part time students more than £6,750 in any academic year.

2. Financial support

We have reviewed our scholarship portfolio to make it more focussed on under-represented groups. Whilst the rationale for our previous scholarship portfolio was consistent with what we wanted to achieve at the time, we believe that we now need to make our support more broadly available in terms of initiatives and services, and focus financial support at those groups that need it most. We have reviewed our scholarship portfolio and used feedback received through decliners and acceptors surveys, annual reports and through a widening participation evaluation group. With this in mind the scholarships we propose to offer from 2017/18 are:

• **Aston Aspire (Care Leavers)**  
  £500 of support in year 1, a £1,250 placement year to be taken as either a tuition fee discount or bank transfer

• **Aston Excellence Scholarship (AAB+ at A level or equivalent)**  
  £500 of support in year 1, a £1,250 placement year to be taken as either a tuition fee discount or bank transfer

• **Aston Aspire Placement (Household income of £18,000)**  
  £1,250 placement year to be taken as either a tuition fee discount or bank transfer. Recipients must be UK domiciled students with residual household incomes of up to £18,000, claiming the maintenance loan (including mature students and care leavers), as assessed by Student Finance England or equivalent through HEBSS.

• **Aston Placement Scholarship (Overseas or unpaid placement)**  
  £1,250 placement year to be taken as either a tuition fee discount or bank transfer

• **Aston Masters Scholarship**  
  £3,000 for care leavers to be taken as either a tuition fee discount or bank transfer

3. Access, student success and progression measures

3.1 Access

Aston University will build on our significant track record in this area and continue to target schools and colleges with significant indicators of deprivation. We will use successful role models from the student body and recent alumni to promote higher education options to learners from widening participation backgrounds. We will continue to focus on extending access to STEM and professional subjects. Aston works in some of the most deprived communities in the UK, with a high proportion of our targeted schools and colleges falling in Polar3 Q1 and Q2 classification areas.

In 2014-15 Aston University’s Outreach Team heavily targeted its outreach provision at learners in areas where the higher education participation gap was far below HEFCE’s expected level. Three wards in Aston’s immediate neighbourhood figure in the top five (of almost 8,000) wards for the greatest negative differential in young higher education participation. In these we have implemented activities from primary to post-16 level, including our Numeracy in Nechells primary

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1 See Polar3 map of UK [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/Map_of_young_participation_areas/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/Map_of_young_participation_areas/)

2 Gaps in young participation in higher education; [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/)
programme, several years of intensive mentoring at Small Heath and Heartlands Schools, and ring-fenced summer school provision over several years for multiple schools across all three wards. Such activities are also offered in neighbouring areas with similarly low higher education uptake levels, and we actively target schools and colleges that consistently fail to engage our team. Our electronic newsletter reaches 2,000 school teachers and support staff every month, a high proportion of whom work within schools with high levels of indices of multiple deprivation. Aston has also developed a suite of print and online resources for teachers and parents/guardians, and we continue to build lasting and meaningful links with schools and colleges locally and regionally.

3.2 Outreach and Access

- 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. For example, in July 2015, Aston hosted the City of Birmingham Children’s University graduation ceremony for 147 primary pupils, and will do so again in July 2016. In 2015/16 a total of 700 primary school students were hosted on our campus, some in partnership with Enabling Enterprise and others with local Aimhigher University partners. We will also continue our successful numeracy and literacy programmes with local primary schools, including Reading Buddies, a long-term scheme focussed on very deprived parts of the country such as Nechells, Sparkbrook and Small Heath.

- As well as collaborative working as part of Aimhigher West Midlands, Aston has been delivering intensive and long-term mentoring and tutoring to secondary school learners at all Key Stages. We will expand the number of student mentors and tutors working in targeted regional schools and colleges, both in person and via e-mentoring and mentors. This is one-to-one, highly targeted intervention and provides measurable impact, in-line with OFFA’s guidance. Since much of our activity takes place in some of England and Wales’ most deprived wards, including Yardley, Small Heath and Soho, this work will continue to address the low progression rates of BME and genders into higher education programmes.

- To encourage access to the professions, Aston University has 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. In February 2016 we took more than fifty Year 12 pupils to PwC’s offices for a day of academic and expert practitioner guidance on careers in accountancy and auditing. Pupils attended from Sussex, Essex, Manchester and the West Midlands.

- The University provides pre-entry careers support and guidance for any school/college requesting the service. ‘Pre-Entry Employability Advisers’ provide on and off-campus support to Year 11 pupils and sixth formers. We commit to continuing this support in 2017/18, providing invaluable guidance in line with the government’s aims3 to support young people through their decision-making.

- Aston has committed to an increase in Masterclass attendance. We recognise the importance of such activities in inspiring and engaging young learners, and in 2015/16 increased by 40% the number of sessions we offered to Year 12 learners. Masterclasses will continue to be a major part of our provision, and we aim for over 1,000 students from target schools and colleges.

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3 Careers guidance and inspiration in schools (March 2015)
colleges to take part in 2016/17. We recognise demands on schools, particularly those with additional support needs for their pupils, and in 2015/16 have delivered several off-campus Masterclass sessions to hard-to-reach pupils, including several sessions at a secure hospital school for young people with eating disorders.

- The Aston Progression Pathway (APP) seeks to empower Year 12 students who are considering studying a STEM subject at university to confidently make decisions about their progression to Higher Education. Through one-to-one mentoring sessions from current Aston University STEM undergraduates and a three day non-residential Summer Research Project led by our academics, we hope to raise aspirations and improve academic attainment in STEM focused subjects. In 2015/16, the APP scheme has expanded greatly and now works with 18 target schools across Birmingham, Solihull, Dudley, Oldbury and West Bromwich. APP Mentors now work with 128 local Year 12 students on a weekly basis for 8–15 weeks. Once again these students will have access to an intensive 3 day summer project and priority booking on all post-16 activity we offer. In 2016/17, we intend to work with 25 target schools and engage with around 160 Year 12 students.

- The University hopes to welcome its first cohort of undergraduate medical students to its new medical school in September 2017. This unique medical school model will provide up to twenty-three first year places annually for pupils attending schools and colleges in the top ten percent most deprived neighbourhoods in the city. From 2016, our Pathway to Healthcare programme will positively impact at least one hundred learners per annum from these schools/colleges by providing GP work experience, UCAS personal statement-writing workshops, interview/assessment preparation, and intensive A Level tutoring in the sciences. From this programme will be drawn the first year MBChB entrants, whilst the remainder will have been prepared for applications to other medical schools or to related science courses at Aston or other institutions. All one hundred Pathway to Healthcare students will also have benefited from online mentoring provided by The Brightside Trust, and in future years our current medical students will act as mentors to widening participation cohorts on the programme. Our medical school widening participation plans reflect the Medical Schools Council’s ‘Selecting for Excellence’ guidance of December 20144.

- Additional Outreach Resource: Aston recognises the importance of reaching rural communities, and from January 2017 will invest in a new Outreach Officer post to deliver enrichment and IAG activity in rural and coastal communities. As with current outreach activity, this post will work closely with employers within these communities to provide guidance to secondary school pupils at all levels of study. Our focus will be on schools in areas of high deprivation, as measured by multiple indices, and Aston will bring more of these pupils to our campus for residential and non-residential activity. This post will support the work of our existing outreach team, and will work with schools in low participation postcodes and cold-spot areas identified by HEFCE and not yet addressed by collaborative outreach work delivered by NNCOs.

- Online Support: we will continue to maintain the study skills and online revision advice available to students who apply to Aston through UCAS via our “GetAhead@Aston” website. In 2016, Aston was one of only two Universities in the UK to offer a free GetRevising.co.uk profile to its undergraduate offer holders. This A Level revision support was targeted at offer holders with no parental HE history, those in Polar3 quintiles 1-3, and care leavers.

- In 2017/18 we will host our 24th annual Admissions Conference for Teachers and Advisers.

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4 [http://www.medschools.ac.uk/AboutUs/Projects/Widening-Participation/Selecting-for-Excellence/Pages/Selecting-for-Excellence.aspx](http://www.medschools.ac.uk/AboutUs/Projects/Widening-Participation/Selecting-for-Excellence/Pages/Selecting-for-Excellence.aspx)
The 2015/16 event was attended by 230 teachers and counsellors from around the UK, and at zero cost to participants. We provided curriculum insights from sector leaders representing KCL, Bath and UCAS, and here we reaffirm our commitment to offering honest advice and support to those guiding young learners. Similarly, we will continue our Parents’ Higher Education twilight sessions, where we offer information on university finance and entry processes to parents and guardians from across the West Midlands.

- **Strong External Partnerships/Relationships:** Aston has developed multiple lasting relationships with key school and college providers in the region. Outreach staff members sit on cross-working groups at Sandwell Academy, Birmingham Metropolitan College, and Solihull Sixth Form, among others. These ensure the providers understand the higher education landscape and have a voice in how we construct our outreach programmes to best serve their needs. Beyond committee membership, many Aston staff serve as governors in schools and colleges. Aston also works closely with the Titan Partnership, providing access to on and off-campus outreach for schools from the wider West Midlands area, and supporting cross-Birmingham initiatives such as Titan’s annual STEM Fair.

- **The Aston University Engineering Academy (a University Technical College) opened close to campus in September 2012. A team of Aston students is working as mentors/tutors for learners at the Academy and we will continue this provision in 2016/17. The intake of the Academy is representative of Birmingham’s diverse socio-economic and ethnic mix with 25% of learners eligible for Free School Meals. Eleven of the first cohort of 70 Year 13 students joined Aston University in 2014, with a further ten joining in 2015. In September 2014 and 2015 the Year 10 cohorts each stayed on campus for their induction programmes.**

- **The Social Mobility Foundation’s (SMF) inaugural Birmingham office will be located at Aston University from 2016. SMF work intensively with 1200 high-achieving Year 12 students every year who have at least 5 A grades at GCSE and are either personally eligible for Free School Meals or the first generation in their families to be going to university. Eligible students in the West Midlands must attend a school where at least 20% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals. In 2015/16 SMF work with 120 local Year 12s – the greatest number outside of London – and Aston will support their efforts to increase this figure by providing free-of-charge office space and the expertise of Aston’s outreach staff.**

- **Aston’s 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.**

- **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.**

- **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. The partnership met its yearly milestones in 2014/15 and is on course to do so again in 2015/16. We confirm our intention to engage 1,000 disadvantaged**
young people in Aimhigher’s intensive activity in each year from 2017/18 to 2020/21. We will also take steps to increase the proportion of white males from disadvantaged groups within this cohort, whilst maintaining our strong engagement with learners from BAME heritage backgrounds. Aston University will jointly fund Aimhigher with a contribution of £35,000 in 2017/18 and will be involved in its governance and management. The outreach activities delivered through the partnership will complement Aston University’s own extensive programme of widening access and fair access measures outlined elsewhere in this agreement.

- The AimHigher partnership is exploring ways to sustain the wider collaborative work it undertakes with a further seven regional institutions as part of the National Network for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) initiative, HEFCE funding for which ceases at the end of December 2016. Our collaborative outreach is focused on underrepresented groups in higher education, targeted to schools with high indices of multiple deprivation, and includes rural communities in Worcester, Herefordshire and Warwickshire. Aston will continue to work with NNCO partners through 2016/17, delivering activity in hard-to-reach communities as well as on our campuses. Aston is also in the early stages of considering a future bid for collaborative HEFCE-funded outreach with a specific focus on rural hard-to-reach communities. In 2016/17 we expect to continue our delivery of support for underrepresented groups, particularly working class white males, care leavers and those from identified geographic cold spots in the region.

3.3 Progression and achievement measures

As can be seen by the Table above, 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 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.

- The University's Learning and Teaching Committee has developed a Personal Tutor Policy including proactive interventions at key transition points in student learning. In 2015/16 this has been reviewed as part of a student-led HEA-funded project.

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

- 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.

- 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.

- From 2016 we increased targeted retention support for mature learners and other groups of Aston students who are more likely to discontinue their studies. We appointed two Teaching Fellows in our Centre for Learning Innovation and Professional Practice (CLIPP) who are dedicated to supporting students and staff to increase progression. We are investing heavily in this area of work and by 2017/18 expect to have our new Student Analytics software in operation to help us with this work. It is being piloted in autumn 2016.

- Aston has over 1,500 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 through this and our professional mentoring programme.

- We will continue to offer free modern foreign languages tuition to all first year undergraduate students via our Languages for All programme. This builds on our collaborative outreach work Routes into Languages which we have committed to funding now that HEFCE funding for this initiative is no longer available.

- 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 to organise 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. Our scholarships directed at Care Leavers will be increased for 2017/18 to include scholarships at Masters level.

- 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.

- 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).

- The Disability Team at Aston has been developing its service over the last few years to create an inclusive culture throughout the university. This includes support for students who declare
a disability so that they can have the appropriate support put in place to facilitate their learning. The team also provide support to staff to facilitate their teaching of students who declare a disability when appropriate. In the last twelve months the team has recruited two specialist members of staff. One of whom leads on the work supporting students with dyslexia, who form the largest group of students who declare a disability. This member of staff undertakes assessments and also provides advice and support. The team also includes a mental health specialist whose role is to help students who declare a mental health issue to manage their conditions and signpost them towards appropriate external services when required.

3.4 Employability and Progression to Further Study

As this table above shows, Aston ranks amongst the best for its employability outcomes, despite the background of its students. We are proud of our tradition for adding real value to the lives of graduates by helping them into graduate and professional jobs in significant numbers. The reason for this success is founded on three key principles: a relevant curriculum designed with employers; investment in the increase of students’ social capital during their degree, and of course the Aston placement year.

- Aston has a central KPI to increase the proportion of students who undertake a placement year to 100% by 2020. We are well on the way to this; currently in 2016 75% of our students are on placements or pre-registration years. Our commitment to this is underlined by our investment in Placement Scholarships. Even where we have reduced direct student support we are proposing to maintain our fees for the Placement year at 2011/12 levels, and to offer the majority of our students the opportunity of going on a placement year without paying any fees.
Aston University was one of the 20 pilot projects for a HEFCE-funded project in the 2014/15 academic year, which offered funding and support for Home and EU postgraduate students through the Postgraduate Support Scheme (PSS). The objective of the pilot was to widen participation at postgraduate level, and to fill the funding gap before the Postgraduate Loans Scheme came into being in 2016. We used this scheme to scope out support which motivated Masters students best, and we are now implementing this. Our interventions include scholarships for care leavers and a package of additional support including mentoring, careers advice and internships.

During 2015/16 we have used funding from the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to pilot a key strategic initiative to bolster the confidence and capability of our students in terms of social capital and employability. This has led to interventions in each year of study, including raising the aspirations of first years via our Personal Tutoring scheme; peer mentoring of Social Science students to encourage them to do a placement year; developing some flexible placement options to allow more students to benefit from the placement year; and supporting academics to design programmes which build on the learning of the placement year when students return to their final year. This work will be embedded during 2016/17 and 2017/18.

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

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. These will be up and running for 2017/18.

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. A recent extension of ERDF funding will allow us to expand this work.

Our Students’ Union Job Shop will continue to offer term time job opportunities. 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.

4. **Targets and milestones**

Aston University, as mentioned above, has achieved considerable success in its widening access and achievement work. We have evidenced success of helping students from a variety of backgrounds achieve success in a research active, highly ranked university. We are now shifting the focus of our targets to be more specific and granular. This means we will continue to support high-level achievement for all, but focus in more on the detail of helping under-represented groups achieve success in higher education. Our targets and milestones are set out below.
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<tr>
<th>Targets for 2017/18</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Access</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>% of intake from students in Polar 3 (Quintile 1): 10.3% in 2014/15 (adjusted benchmark 10.5%), suggested target 10.7% in 2017/18 rising to 12% by 2020</td>
<td>A range of Outreach activity from Schools and Colleges Liaison team</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td>% of intake from rural/coastal postcodes (Awaiting data, target to be set once baseline has been defined.)</td>
<td>Recruitment of an additional Outreach Officer (Grade 7)</td>
<td>January 2017</td>
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<td>% of white male students (19.9% of Aston undergraduate population in 2014/15, UK average 34.1%), suggested target 20.5% in 2017/18 rising to 22% by 2020</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>September 2016</td>
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<td>Increasing recruitment of care leavers by 10% a year (11 care leavers in 2017/18)</td>
<td>New Scholarships</td>
<td>2017 entry</td>
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<td>Collaborative Targets across Birmingham</td>
<td>As part of Birmingham Aimhigher partnership</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Progression</strong></td>
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<td>To outperform HESA benchmark for non-continuation (2014/15 Aston was 3.2%, HESA Benchmark 6.5% and UK average 7.2%) 2017/18 target 3% and maintained at this low level to 2020</td>
<td>Recruitment of two Teaching Fellows and action plans in the Schools</td>
<td>2015/16</td>
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<td>To improve the % of mature students progressing (2014/5 10.4% non-progression, HESA benchmark 13.1% and UK average 11.8%), 2017/18 target of 9.4%, declining to 8.5% by 2020</td>
<td>Schools and Learning Development Centre actions</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td>Success</td>
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<td>To narrow further the gap between BME and white degree achievement (2013/14 those attaining 1st and 2i, attainment gap 10%) 2017/18 target 8% declining to maximum 4% in 2020</td>
<td>Continued research in this area Initiatives to improve transition into HE support, to increase peer and professional mentoring by suitable role models and focussed personal tutoring</td>
<td>Ongoing 2016/17</td>
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<tr>
<th>Employability and Further Study</th>
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<td>To increase the number of students who complete a placement experience (2010/13 60.4%), target for 2017/18 75% rising to 100% by 2020</td>
<td>Extra investment in placement and careers support from year one Placement scholarships continue</td>
<td>2015/16</td>
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<tr>
<td>To be top 20 in DLHE positive destinations of graduate employment (2014/15 26th)</td>
<td>Extra investment in placement and careers support from year one Greater employability skills development in the curriculum Expand professional mentoring</td>
<td>2015/16 Pilot 2016/17 2016/17</td>
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<td>To increase the number of students from low participation groups taking up a Masters degree at Aston (2013/14 13.3% 2017/18 target 13.7%. To be 14.6% by 2020/21.)</td>
<td>Build a campaign on PSS research Marketing restructuring Scholarships for care leavers</td>
<td>2016/17 2017/18</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements

We have a programme of reflection and evaluation. This has meant that we are constantly monitoring what we do. This takes the form of:

- Formal evaluation by our Learning and Teaching Committee and a new evaluation sub-committee set up for 2016/17, including an annual Student Equality and Diversity report and related action plan. The evaluation committee will set up a framework to assess the continuation and attainment gaps of different groups of students. In particular this group will seek to evaluate the academic performance, progression and retention of students in receipt of different types of financial support between academic years. It will also aim to compare
recruitment profiles (in terms of household income) of those students in receipt of financial support.

- Analysis of outreach and recruitment activities by the Schools and Colleges Liaison team and as part of the Birmingham Aimhigher partnership
- The Market Research team produce an annual Decliners and Enrolment survey
- Sponsorship of PhD students to provide research in this area. Currently looking at transition into postgraduate education (Tabrizi) and the influence of the family on undergraduate learners (Foster)
- Annual report on progression and related action plans in academic Schools, supplemented by the development of data analytics and support from Learner Enhancement Teaching Fellows
- Annual collection, analysis and action plan by the Learning Development Centre of their activities with students
- Postdoctoral research on BME achievement (Moores, Birdie and Higson) in collaboration with the National Union of Students (NUS)
- Disability Unit review of disability support and particularly increased support for students with mental health challenges
- Building on Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded Strategic Excellence Initiative looking into improving employability outcomes and support via the curriculum, including a project focussed at each year of the student lifecycle
- Building on HEFCE-funded Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme grant, a set of 10 masters dissertations exploring the motivations and barriers to studying at Masters level also gives rich data.
- Analysis of non-continuation and attainment of different groups of students through the employment of a researcher to work on the specific identification and assessment of the BME progression and attainment gap.
- Piloting a data analytics system in 2016/17 which will help us to evaluate our progress against targets more effectively. In addition, our Market Research team will continue to survey students and potential students via our Decliners and Acceptors Surveys, and the Careers + Placements team will continue their annual survey of students and employers.

6. Equality and Diversity

Aston University has 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 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/

We have carried out an Equality Analysis on our proposed Access Agreement. This analysis recognises that when targeting specific groups this will have an impact on equality issues. The issues identified relate directly to the aim of advancing equality of condition for under-represented groups and not to impact on equality of opportunity for all groups.

Our main concern highlighted in the Equality Analysis is the movement by the Government from maintenance grants to loans which may impact negatively on those students whose religious beliefs preclude them from taking loans.

In this Access Agreement we have removed the link between some of our Scholarships and University based accommodation. We believe that this makes our Scholarships more accessible. It has also given us the opportunity to focus our scholarship provision on groups that have more specific challenges such as students who have declared that they are care-leavers.

We will be monitoring any negative impacts through our monitoring and evaluation arrangements as mentioned in the previous section.

7. Information for prospective students

From 2015/16 Aston University set up a new sub-group of its Learning and Teaching provision to oversee information for students. Aston has arranged its provision of information and guidance to students in two key areas:

Pre-Arrival

- Aston is aware of its duties under the Competitive Market Authorities legislation around the information that should be made available to applicants and students. 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.

- For entry in 2016 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.

- We have 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.

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

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

- Aston is committed to the 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.

- 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 this online advice and support to ease their transition to University.

Post-Arrival

- The Hub (our one-stop student advice point) and the ARC provide face-to-face financial advice and guidance to all Aston students throughout the year, including advice on the Aston scholarship and bursary schemes.

- The Advice Zone, based 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.

- 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.

- The My Aston Portal (MAP), the student portal, is used as a 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.

- 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 continues to be used to improve our support and advice to students.

- 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.

- 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. 20105). A comprehensive review of mentoring programmes at the University was undertaken in 2013-14.

- From day one, Aston students are supported by the Careers and 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 focussing on employability. In addition, students are able to book one to one appointments with Careers and Placements Advisors in order to support their career planning.

8. Consulting with students

Aston University has consulted with current Aston students via meetings with the Students’ Union

5 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
Executive and Sabbatical Officers. University Council and Senate have also been consulted. Both these bodies include student and alumni representatives. UCAS applicants will continue to be consulted via applicant surveys. These prospective student views will influence our Access Agreement decisions for 2018 and beyond.
### Table 7a - Statistical targets and milestones relating to your applicants, entrants or student body

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference number</th>
<th>Stage of the lifecycle (drop-down menu)</th>
<th>Target type (drop-down menu)</th>
<th>Description (500 characters maximum)</th>
<th>Is this a collaborative target? (drop-down menu)</th>
<th>Baseline year (drop-down menu)</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>T16a_03</td>
<td>Student success</td>
<td>HESA T1b</td>
<td>No longer in HE after 1 year (All, full-time, first degree entrants)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for non-continuation rates of students</td>
<td>No 2014-15</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_06</td>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>Other statistic</td>
<td>- Progression to employment or further study (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 2013-14</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_08</td>
<td>Other/Multiple stages</td>
<td>Other statistic</td>
<td>- Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To increase percentage of eligible students who undertake a UK/overseas work placement or study period abroad</td>
<td>No 2012-13</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_09</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>HESA T1b</td>
<td>Low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3) (Young, full-time, undergraduate entrants)</td>
<td>To increase % of intake of students in POLAR3 Quintile 1</td>
<td>No 2014-15</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_10</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Other statistic</td>
<td>- Ethnicity (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To increase % of white male students on undergraduate programmes</td>
<td>No 2014-15</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_11</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Other statistic</td>
<td>- Care-leavers (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform target for number of care-leavers enrolling on programmes at Aston</td>
<td>No 2015-16</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_12</td>
<td>Student success</td>
<td>HESA T1b</td>
<td>No longer in HE after 1 year (Mature, full-time, first degree entrants)</td>
<td>To improve the % of mature students progressing</td>
<td>No 2014-15</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_13</td>
<td>Student success</td>
<td>Other statistic</td>
<td>- Ethnicity (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To narrow further the gap between BME and white degree achievement</td>
<td>No 2013-14</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 7a - Other milestones and targets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Number</th>
<th>Select stage of the lifecycle</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>T16a_14</td>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>Other statistic - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To be top 20 in DLHE positive destinations of graduates in employment</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30 30 30 30 30 30</td>
<td>DLHE survey data. Ranking positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_15</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Other statistic - Location (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To increase % of students from rural/coastal postcodes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Other (please give details in Description column)</td>
<td>See commentary</td>
<td>See commentary</td>
<td>See commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_16</td>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>Other statistic - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To increase the % of students from low participation groups taking up a Masters degree at Aston</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>13.5% 13.7% 14% 14.3% 14.6%</td>
<td>Aston's DLHE returns where Socio-Economic Class is declared. NS-SEC data used, with % classifications 4-7 shown in baseline as progressing to further study from Aston undergraduate courses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Table 7b - Other milestones and targets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Number</th>
<th>Select stage of the lifecycle</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>T16b_01</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (summer schools)</td>
<td>Number of learners from state schools accessing intensive residential summer school type on-campus, including Easter revision/study skills programmes. Learners will be highly 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>2012-13</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>120 120 120 120 120 120</td>
<td>Some of this activity will be part of the Arnthigher West Midlands Partnership mentioned below under collaborative activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16b_02</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>Mastersclasses and subject enrichment. Number of learners from state schools accessing mastersclasses 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>2011-12</td>
<td>1184</td>
<td>1200 1200 1200 1200 1200 1200</td>
<td>Aston is expanding the reach of its Masterclass programme and will seek to engage more schools and colleges off-site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16b_03</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Outreach / WP 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 schools/colleges with 60% or more of students who live in the most disadvantaged IMD postcodes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>3291</td>
<td>3000 3000 3000 3000 3000 3000</td>
<td>This activity is owned by Aston and excludes collaborative engagements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16b_04</td>
<td>Access</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 state schools and colleges where 60% or more of students are from IMD postcodes. These include parents evenings, Y9 options evenings, HE Guidance sessions. This is to complement or replace lost funding and staffing in careers and connections services.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>75 80 80 80 80 80</td>
<td>2012/13 reflects the beginning of Aston's strategic plan to increase engagement with schools/colleges in support of changes to the government's CEIAG agenda.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Number</th>
<th>Select stage of the lifecycle</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>
</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.

Activity targets are also subject to demand from schools and colleges and permission to allow their learners time out of class to access our activities. Increased pressure on KS4 and KS5 results and curriculum reform make it more difficult for some schools to engage with University outreach activities. Aston is seeking to expand the number of schools/colleges with which it interacts, and will do so by investing in outreach delivery capacity and by engaging employers more effectively. This will also offer pupils a great range of pathways to employment and further study. We have added several new targets as we seek to further stretch our outreach and access agenda. These include improving upon our already excellent overall non-continuation rate (3.2% 2014/15), and working harder to support mature learners. A 5.7% improvement in mature non-completion was seen in the last full year of figures, testament to the support service activity at Aston. We have updated several benchmarks to provide more testing targets, and will seek to advance the government’s agenda to bring more white male students to HE. We believe that our targets on access are challenging and stretching in the current climate. This is because the 2016-20 period is subject to a continuing decline in young 18 year old applicants to HE, as well as increased competition from degree apprenticeships, school leaver programmes and other HEIs whose record on widening access requires improvement. The removal of the HEFCE student number control in 2015 may mean a significant change in the access/admissions policies of some highly selective Universities which compete directly with Aston. Aston University is committed to continuing its strong record for Accessible Excellence and Opportunity and this is a key element of its 2020 strategy.

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**T16b_05**

| Access | Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column) | Student Tutoring, Mentoring and e-mentoring - Aston tutors and mentors working in target schools and colleges on academic and career support via the long established student tutoring and mentoring schemes at Aston. Schools and Colleges with 60% or more of learners who lie in the most disadvantaged IMD postcodes will be targeted. | No | 2011-12 | 100 | 125 | 130 | 135 | 140 | 150 | 700 7000 1000 1900 1000 1000 7000 7000 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline 10% above baseline | This figure includes activities such as after school clubs, STEM ambassadors, e-mentors and intensive mentors. This figure refers to Aston Student Union ambassador/Mentors and not learner numbers. Learner numbers will vary according to the type of engagement and time of year. Some of these mentors will be part of Aimhigher West Midlands collaborative partnership targets set before the HEFCE NNCO announcement in January 2015.

**T16b_06**

| Access | Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column) | Number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds engaged in intensive activity with collaborative partnership using a basket of indicators | Yes | Other (please give details in Description column) | 500 | 1000 | 1000 | 1900 | 1000 | 1000 | Aston is seeking to expand the number of schools/colleges with which it interacts, and will do so by investing in outreach delivery capacity and by engaging employers more effectively. This will also offer pupils a great range of pathways to employment and further study.

**T16b_07**

| Access | Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column) | Proportion of engaged young people from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving 5 x GCSE A* to C (or equivalent) is greater than local average for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators | Yes | Other (please give details in Description column) | 2013/14 FSM 60.3% (regional baseline 36.2%) | 25% above baseline | 25% above baseline | 25% above baseline | 25% above baseline | 25% above baseline | 25% above baseline | 25% above baseline | 25% above baseline | 25% above baseline | This medium-term impact target applies to the cohort of young people aged 11-16 engaging in the Aimhigher programme.

**T16b_08**

| Access | Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column) | Proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in intensive activity target group entering HE and retained for 6 months is greater then local average for YP from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators | Yes | Other (please give details in Description column) | 2013/14 FSM 31.6% (regional baseline 22.4%) | 10% above baseline | 10% above baseline | 10% above baseline | 10% above baseline | 10% above baseline | 10% above baseline | 10% above baseline | 10% above baseline | 10% above baseline | This medium-term impact target applies to the cohort of young people aged 11-16 engaging in the Aimhigher programme.

**Baseline year changed to 2013/14.**

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Due to UCAS policy on access to learner level data, tracking now based on HESA data, reporting % entering any form of HE and retained for 6 months.