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 recent guidance from The Office For Fair Access (OFFA) and the government’s recent paper “Schools that Work for Everyone”
- 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 Collaborative Outreach Partnerships (NCOP)
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. Aston University will also be seeking to strengthen further our existing links through continuing sponsorship to the Aston University Engineering Academy to raise attainment for specific subjects amongst year 11 and year 13 students.

The League Table data below was taken from the 2017 Complete University Guide.
Part Two: What we have achieved so far

Our strategy for 2018/19 entry carries on from our previous year’s Access Agreement, in which we set in train some important initiatives. For 2017/18 entry we sought to start to rebalance our spend profile. Building on our research into the effect of student scholarships, we began moving 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 to a spend of £100,000 on two learning enhancers to help students improve their progression, £49,000 on extra careers and placement support, an increase in Mental Health Specialist hours, and £35,000 to facilitate our contribution to the West Midlands Aimhigher collaborative outreach programme.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Baseline 2009/10</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2015/16</th>
<th>Target 2016/17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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>8.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<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>93.1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for non-continuation rates of all students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5.8</th>
<th>4.7</th>
<th>5.1</th>
<th>5.2</th>
<th>3.3</th>
<th>3.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for % of full-time graduates in employment (including further study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>95.8</th>
<th>91.5</th>
<th>91.9</th>
<th>91.7</th>
<th>93.8</th>
<th>94</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

To increase percent of eligible students who undertake a UK/overseas work placement or study period abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>56.7</th>
<th>67.3 (1237 students placed)</th>
<th>73.4 (1260 students placed)</th>
<th>71 (1444 students placed)</th>
<th>69 (1543 students placed)</th>
<th>75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Please note, although our percentage figures for work placement looks to decrease, we have actually placed more students. The decrease in percentage is attributed to growth in student numbers.

Part Three: Proposed targets for 2018/9 and beyond

1. Fee(s) limits and fee income above £6,000
   - We propose that our full-time Home/EU undergraduate tuition fee is £9,250 per annum in 2018/19. This fee will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/Department for Education (DfE). The University reserves the right to alter its fee levels for students in future years, in accordance with the relevant government policy in force at that time and following outcomes of the TEF.
   - Our four-year placement degree programmes enable students to spend the third year on industrial/professional placement. Our placement fee for Home/EU students will continue to be £1,250. This is a heavily subsidised rate compared to the actual costs associated with supporting our students entering in 2018/19 when they go on placement in 2020/21. This fee level includes students who take a work or study placement year overseas.
   - According to HESA PI data released in July 2016, Aston has the 4th highest percentage of students enrolled on placement degree courses of any UK University, at 61% against a UK average of 6%. This £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. A high proportion of Aston University students will be eligible to benefit from a Placement Scholarship to cover the fee cost.
   - 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 £4,625. This figure will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/DfE for those students taking this option in 2020/21 and beyond. The University reserves the right to alter its
fee levels for students in future years, in accordance with the relevant government policy in force at that time and following outcomes of the TEF.

- Home/EU students following full-time HEFCE Countable Foundation Degree programmes will be charged a fee of no more than £9,250 from 2018/19. This fee will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/DfE. The University reserves the right to alter its fee levels for students in future years, in accordance with the relevant government policy in force at that time and following outcomes of the TEF.

- 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 £6,935 in any academic year, as per the fee cap. This fee will rise by an inflation rate set by HEFCE/Department for Education (DfE). The University reserves the right to alter its fee levels for students in future years, in accordance with the relevant government policy in force at that time and following outcomes of the TEF.

2. Financial support

We have reviewed our scholarship portfolio to make it more focussed on under-represented groups. We offer students a choice of whether to take their scholarship as a tuition fee discount or a bank payment to allow the financial support to be tailored to the student’s individual needs.

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.

As in previous years we have closely monitored and evaluated the impact of our financial support through our annual scholarships survey conducted in December. The findings from this survey dictate the changes that we make to our financial support which includes giving students the choice in the way they receive their financial support as well as providing the university with attitudinal data on the impact of our offer. We will continue to do an annual survey and use the results to shape our financial support.

With this in mind the scholarships we propose to offer from 2018/19 are:

- **Aston Aspire (Care Leavers)**
  £1,250 per year by bank transfer.

- **Aston Excellence Scholarship (AAB+ at A level or equivalent)**
  £500 of support in year 1 by bank transfer.

- **Aston Placement Scholarship (Overseas, low household income or unpaid placement)**
  £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 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\(^1\).

In 2016/17 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 nationwide) wards for the greatest negative differential in young higher education participation\(^2\). In these we have continued targeted activities from primary to post-16 level, including our Numeracy in Schools programme which targets high indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) schools, a primary programme which focuses on literacy skills, several years of intensive mentoring at a range of secondary schools, and will continue to ring-fence 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.

We have streamlined our electronic newsletter to ensure that content is relevant to the needs of the target audience. Our newsletter reaches 2,000 school teachers and support staff every month, a high proportion of whom work within schools with high IMD. We have also introduced a termly hard copy newsletter which is circulated nationally and details relevant outreach opportunities such as residentials and summer schools.

Aston has also built on the development of a suite of print and online resources for teachers and parents/guardians by providing bespoke materials on information, advice and guidance on all options post 18. We continue to build lasting and meaningful links with schools and colleges locally and regionally.

3.2 Outreach and Access

- In 2018/19 we are planning a number of events to target the primary school cohort and we are aiming to engage 700 primary school students throughout once again. This will range from one off interactions to a series of progressive and higher intensity off campus and on campus events. 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 region.

- 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. This is one-to-one, highly targeted intervention and provides measurable impact, in-line with OFFA’s guidance.

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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/)
• We will continue to organise our hugely popular *Access to Professions* and will be increasing the opportunities available to young people to engage in events which are linked to employers from the region. We will also be building on the launch of two new employer engagement events in June 2017 with CADCOE (design and technology in Engineering) and Healthtec (careers in medical fields.)

• The University provides pre-entry careers support and guidance for any school/college requesting the service. Aston University’s ‘Pre-Entry Employability Adviser’ provides on and off-campus support to Year 11 pupils and sixth formers. We commit to continuing this support in 2018/19, providing invaluable guidance in line with the government’s aims\(^3\) to support young people through their decision-making.

• Aston University has strong links with the Aston Engineering Academy. This has involved members of the University Executive playing an active role on the board of governors and contributing to strategic decision making, as well as providing a band of mentors to work with 15-16 year olds. From 2018 Aston University will be strengthening their links to the academy through the creation of bespoke progressive programmes delivered both on and off campus to support the raising attainment of key cohorts of students.

• Raising attainment work with AUEA will include:
  - 100% of year 10 students on arrival to take part in a two day “Introduction to Higher Education” aspiration event
  - A new pilot to mentor targeted students with English mentoring
  - Continuing to provide library facilities at the evening and weekend for free to any students at AUEA
  - Assemblies focused on STEM, applying to higher education and student finance throughout key points in the year
  - Broadening of taster sessions to include industry specific sessions with employers

• The University hopes to welcome its first cohort of undergraduate medical students to its new medical school in September 2018. Depending on the outcome of the government consultation on medical education and subsequent HEFCE competition, our medical school model will provide a significant proportion of places for pupils attending schools and colleges in the top ten percent of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city.

• From 2017, 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. The first year MVCHB entrants will be drawn from the programme, 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

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\(^3\) Careers guidance and inspiration in schools (March 2015)
2014 and is in line with the government’s wishes for universities to improve widening access if they want to benefit from the extra medical school places available.

- The Learning Development Centre will further develop GetAhead@Aston – an online resource providing support and advice about making the transition to learning in Higher Education. Furthermore the University will continue to provide online revision advice to students who apply through UCAS by offering a free GetRevising.co.uk profile to its undergraduate offer holders with the aim of helping offer holders with no parental HE history, those in Polar4 quintiles 1-3 and care leavers.

- In 2018/19 we will host our 24th annual Admissions Conference for Teachers and Advisers. The 2016/17 event was attended by 170 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.

- Aston University has a strong working partnership with the King Edwards VI schools consortium in Birmingham as part of its innovative Opening Doors initiative. The partnership involves the delivery of a Primary Aspirations Day targeted at primary schools from low participation areas. The day involves a range of interactive activities focused on raising aspirations and attainment with this cohort.

- Aston University collaborates with the local Further Education sector by facilitating a College Visiting Programme, whereby our current mature students offer information and advice about life at university to students on Access courses. A mature student ambassador initiative has been implemented and the mature student ambassadors help to facilitate information, advice and guidance stands at University wide Open Days. 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 with the University of Birmingham, Birmingham City University, University College Birmingham and Worcester University. The partnership has consistently met its targets. We therefore confirm our intention to engage 1,000 disadvantaged young people in Aimhigher’s intensive activity in each year from 2018/19. As part of this collaborative programme we will seek opportunities to extend and enhance our work with young people facing multiple dimensions of disadvantage. This will include support for children in care via our relationship with the Birmingham Virtual School.

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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)
• We will align the management and delivery of this collaborative activity with that of our National Collaborative Outreach Programme consortia, monitoring the engagement of regional schools and colleges and the ages of the students we engage to ensure those outside the scope of the NCOP are not marginalised. We will also increase our efforts to engage schools and colleges in the region’s only Opportunity Area (Stoke-on-Trent).

• Aston University will continue jointly to fund Aimhigher with a contribution of £35,000 in 2018/19 and will be intimately 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.

• Aston University commits a significant proportion of its income to its OFFA countable targets. The projected spend does not currently take into account anticipated reductions of £500,000 in our HEFCE Student Opportunity funding which forms part of the overall spend by the University. This is a one off investment and beyond the investment that we are required to make. There is not the expectation that Aston will be able to do this every year.

• Aston is an institution with a high proportion of students with low participation backgrounds which would lead to an expectation that we should be investing 15% of our income to support this area of work. We have decided to pump prime our activities to currently invest a significantly higher proportion of income.

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.
• Aston University recently undertook an evaluation project to address the differentiation of maths skills level from new University entrants. This led on to the following changes:
  i) Aston Business School first year design: redesigning of first year modules to allow two separate routes for students which varied in numerical intensity
  ii) Analysis of data: using student data to identify which modules had the highest number of students who needed additional learning support and putting in place early intervention methods to stop this cohort of students disengaging from their programme
  iii) Delivery of teaching sessions to support maths tutors: additional training for staff who have a lead discipline other than maths to help develop their skills to support students
  iv) Developing pre-arrival maths support: we are working to develop an in-house maths support programme which would allow earlier identification of any students with numeracy development skills needs

• We have increased the level of maths support in the Learning Development Centre, moving from term time only support to providing year round maths support. The LDC is developing an online maths programme for all students, available pre and post entry, aiming to reduce maths anxiety and improving progression through raising maths ability.

• The Learner Enhancement team have also increased their academic and pastoral support to any students who were identified as repeating a module for a second or third attempt in January 2016 and were considered a risk for non-progression or potential withdrawal. This included telephoning students (direct contact was made with 112 students) and offering further support. Additional help was given to 25 students.

• The Learner Enhancement Team also supports mature students offering a bespoke induction day, practical advice and guidance throughout their studies and working closely with the Student Union to maintain and develop the thriving mature student community.

• 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.

• 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 graduate and 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 have increased staff resource in this area by appointing an Advice Zone Manager. 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.

• 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 Wellbeing and Enabling 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 on and off campus. During placement year this is conducted in close collaboration with the Placements Team. 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

![Graduate Prospects Performance by Widening Participation Proportions](image)

This table shows the latest 2017 Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide Graduate Prospects rankings mapped against the proportion of students each University has from the lowest Socio-Economic Groups (groups 4 to 7).
Aston University was only one of two institutions in the top 20 for Graduate Prospects that had more than a third of their students from the lowest socio-economic groups.

The average proportion of students from the lowest Socio-Economic Groups among the Graduate Prospects top 20 institutions (excluding Aston) is just 20.1%; Aston’s proportion is more than double this average according to the latest figures released by HESA in 2016. 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 is continuing to work towards a central KPI to increase the proportion of students who undertake a placement experience, with a target of 100% by 2020. Currently in 2016 69% of our students are on placements or pre-registration years. Our commitment to this is underlined by our investment in Placement Scholarships.

- 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). We used this scheme to scope out support which motivated Masters students best, and we are now in our second year of implementing this. Our interventions include Masters scholarships for care leavers and a package of additional support including mentoring, careers advice and internships. Following on from the PSS project and as a wider departmental initiative Careers+Placements take an active role in encouraging undergraduate students to explore suitable postgraduate options.

- From 2017 to 2019 we will be using HEFCE catalyst funding to bolster our careers and placement activity focussing on WP students. Our research has shown that WP students are those which benefit most from participating in placement year experience in terms of final year degree marks. We also expect these students to benefit in terms of employment outcomes. We anticipate that by encouraging students to undertake placement experience, we can address differential graduate outcomes and increase the success of students with lower UCAS entry tariffs.

- 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, and students faced with 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 rolled out in 2017/18.

- Our highly successful Business School focussed Professional Mentoring Programme will be expanded in 2017/18 with a roll out across all schools of study. Targeted engagement activities will be implemented to maximise the participation of WP students, as the scheme offers a powerful opportunity for students to develop networks, build cultural capital and raise aspirations. Impact will be measured by capturing any changes in particular students’ confidence, resilience, placement uptakes and ultimately graduate outcomes.

- 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 up 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. A new volunteering service is also offered to students. A range of volunteering opportunities aligned to the degree subject are offered to students across all years of study to supplement their learning.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets for 2017/18</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| • % 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 | • A range of Outreach activity from the Student Recruitment and Outreach team  
• Launch of Aston Medical School Pathways to Health | Ongoing 2018 |
| • % 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 | • As above  
• Social Mobility Foundation collaboration | September 2017 |
| • Increasing recruitment of care leavers by 10% a year (11 care leavers in 2017/18) | • Refined scholarships offer | 2018 entry |
| • Collaborative Targets across Birmingham | • As part of Birmingham AimHigher partnership | Ongoing |

13
### Progression

| 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 | Recruitment of two Teaching Fellows and action plans in the Schools  
Development of data analytics to assist targeted support  
Appointment of a permanent lecturer in CLIPP to carry out this work | 2017/18  
2017/18 |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Success

| To narrow further the gap between BME and white degree achievement (2013/14 those attaining 1st and 2:1, attainment gap 10%) 2017/18 target 8% declining to maximum 4% in 2020 | 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 | Ongoing  
2017/18 |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To increase the proportion of engaged young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attaining 5 x GCSE A* to C inc. English and Maths (or Attainment 8 equivalent) is greater than local average for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators</td>
<td>To reach 25% above baseline</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Employability and Further Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
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</table>
| To increase the number of students who complete a placement experience (2012/13 60.4%), target for 2017/18 75% rising to 100% by 2020 | - Extra investment in placement and careers support from year one  
- Placement scholarships continue  
- Introduction of flexible placements support | 2017/18  
2017/18 |
| Maintain top 20 position in DLHE positive destinations of graduate employment (2015/16 18th) | - Extra investment in placement and careers support from year one  
- Greater employability skills development in the curriculum  
- Expansion of professional mentoring programme | 2017/18  
Continuation of pilot in 2017/18  
2017/18 |
| 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.) | - Build a campaign on PSS research  
- Marketing restructuring  
- Scholarships for care leavers | 2017/18  
2017/18 |

### 5. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements

We have recently undertaken a review of our monitoring and evaluation activities. Going forward we will be implementing a range of measures in order to assess the impact of our activities. We plan to take a lifecycle approach so that we can measure and compare impacts of our activities in terms of (i) Outreach, (ii) fair admissions, (iii) scholarship support, (iv) success at university and (v) successful graduates.

i) Outreach: For the first time we will start to use HEAT to track whether our activities influence students’ applications and success to other HEIs, rather than just Aston University. In addition, for each pre-entry activity undertaken we will explicitly categorise its purpose in terms of whether it is primarily for improving attainment or whether it is intended to raise aspirations. We will then measure its impact accordingly at a proximal time point e.g., by gathering data on performance changes: maths/literacy (primary school activity) or changes in aspiration.

ii) Fair admissions: Our undergraduate admissions forums will consider equality and fair admissions data as a standing item and investigate ways of identifying and tackling any points of inequality. Equality monitoring will be introduced for admissions interviews.

iii) Scholarships: The impact of the changes in our scholarship support package will be monitored, in particular for the removal of scholarships for students with high grades.

iv) Success at University: We will continue to monitor usage of our Disability and Counselling services, careers and placement services and our Learning and Development Centre. We will also continue to monitor our success rates, attrition rates and attainment gaps. As previously, an annual report on progression and related action...
plans will be required from individual academic Schools. In addition, a HEFCE funded data analytics project will also be evaluated for its efficacy in reducing attrition and improving success.

v) Successful graduates: We will continue to monitor employment statistics for different groups of students. In particular we will be looking at the BME gaps (see below).

• Our postdoctoral research on BME achievement (Moores, Birdi and Higson 2016) has already led to a successful HEFCE catalyst bid (Aston University as lead partner) to attempt to address the BME gap in terms of employment outcomes. The additional finding that students with lower UCAS tariffs benefit more from the placement year in terms of final year improvements in marks has also informed our new placement scholarship offerings (i.e removing the scholarship for high UCAS tariff students). We will now seek to disseminate this work further in academic publications and will be evaluating the impacts of the project – at least in terms of employment outcomes – across the different institutions involved.

• The Market Research team produce an annual Decliners and Enrolment survey. Admissions teams and marketing will be asked to produce action plans from this survey to address any relevant points of feedback.

• We conduct formal evaluation through our Learning and Teaching committee and a new evaluation sub-committee set up for 2016/17. This includes agreeing required evidence as the Access Agreement is being formulated and then requiring regular reports on progress. This includes an annual Student Equality and Diversity report related action plan.

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 under consumer protection law 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.

- The Student Recruitment and Outreach Team run events on campus information, advice and guidance for community groups and parents to increase engagement.

- Our Employability Advisor provides 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.

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

- 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.

- All incoming UG and PGT students are offered a peer mentor prior to arrival and during the first term to support transition.

Post-Arrival

- The Advice Zone 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 oversees the provision of additional financial assistance for students in the form of hardship funds 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 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. 2010$^5$).

• 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 regularly and routinely consults with current Aston students via meetings with the Students’ Union Executive and Sabbatical Officers. University Council and Senate have also been consulted. Both these bodies include student and alumni representatives. Students are consulted on support options annually via the accepters and decliners surveys. These prospective student views will influence our Access Agreement decisions for 2019 and beyond.

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$^5$ 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
### Table 7 - Targets and milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference number</th>
<th>Stage of the lifecycle (drop-down menu)</th>
<th>Main target type (drop-down menu)</th>
<th>Target type (drop-down menu)</th>
<th>Description</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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T16a_01</td>
<td>Student success</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>HESA T16a - No longer in HE after 3 years (All, full-time, first degree entrants)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for non-continuation rates of students</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>T16a_02</td>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Other statistics - 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</td>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>T16a_03</td>
<td>Other/Multiple stages</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Other statistics - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To increase percentage of eligible students who undertake an appropriate work placement or study period abroad</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2015-13</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>T16a_04</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Low participation neighbourhoods (LPN)</td>
<td>HESA T16a - Low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3) (Young, full-time, first degree entrants)</td>
<td>To increase % of intake of students in POLAR3 Quintile 1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2016-15</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>T16a_05</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>White economically disadvantaged males</td>
<td>Other statistics - Ethnicity (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To increase % of white male students in undergraduate programmes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2016-15</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>T16a_06</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Care-leavers</td>
<td>Other statistics - Care-leavers (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To meet or outperform target for number of care-leavers enrolling in programmes at Aston</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>T16a_07</td>
<td>Student success</td>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>HESA T16a - No longer in HE after 3 years (Mature, full-time, first degree entrants)</td>
<td>To improve the % of mature students progressing</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2016-15</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>T16a_08</td>
<td>Student success</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Other statistics - Ethnicity (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To narrow further the gap between BME and white degree achievement</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2016-14</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<td>T16a_09</td>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Other statistics - 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>2016-15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16a_10</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Low participation neighbourhoods (LPN)</td>
<td>Other statistics - Location (please give details in the next column)</td>
<td>To increase % of students from rural coastal postcodes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Please details in commentary</td>
<td>Please commentary</td>
<td>Please commentary</td>
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<td>T16a_11</td>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Other statistics - 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>2015-14</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aston is expanding the reach of its Masterclass programme and will 2000 outreach / WP activity (summer schools).

Some of this activity will be part of the Aimhigher West Midlands Partnership mentioned below under collaborative activity.

Activity targets are also subject to demand from schools and colleges and permission to allow their learners time out of school.

This is owned by Aston and excludes collaborative partnerships. Aimhigher West Midlands collaboration partnerships target state schools and colleges in support of changes to the government’s CSF44 agenda.

This figure includes activities such as after school clubs, STEM ambassadors, e-mentors and intensive mentors. The figure refers to Aston Student Volunteers/Mentors and not learner numbers. Learner numbers will vary according to the type of engagement and time of year.

This medium-term impact target applies to the cohort of young people aged 11-16 engaging in the Aimhigher programme. Baseline year this measure updated to 2013/14. Impact on each cohort pasting this milestone will be reported against the relevant year using data for the academic year in which they complete Key Stage 4.

This measure updated 2013/14. Impact on each cohort pasting this milestone will be reported against the relevant year using data for the academic year in which they complete Key Stage 4.

This is to complement or replace lost funding and staffing in careers and connexions services.

This is an example of replace lost funding and staffing in careers and connexions services. This figure includes activities such as after school clubs, STEM ambassadors, e-mentors and intensive mentors. The figure refers to Aston Student Volunteers/Mentors and not learner numbers. Learner numbers will vary according to the type of engagement and time of year.

Aston Student Volunteers/Mentors/ambassadors working to provide a programme of HE progression support to disadvantaged FSM6 students aged 15-16 in at least 20 regional schools.

This is to complement or replace lost funding and staffing in careers and connexions services.

This is an example of replace lost funding and staffing in careers and connexions services.