



# University of Chester

## Access Agreement 2018-19

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**The University of Chester has a strong reputation for welcoming students from a wide range of backgrounds and providing them with a high quality and supportive experience, characterised by an emphasis on both academic and personal achievement. This is especially evident in the opportunities offered for the development of employability skills and work-related learning. The University underpins its work in this area with a commitment to high quality learning and teaching and to the provision of strong support services to include, retain and develop successful learners who may have diverse entry profiles.**

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## Fees, Student Numbers and Fee Income

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### Full-time tuition fees

For all new full-time undergraduate entrants, which includes programmes including a Foundation Year, Initial Teacher Education and Pre Registration Nursing, to first degree programmes at the University of Chester the tuition fee will be £9,250.

The tuition fee for new postgraduate ITE entrants in 2018-19 will also be £9,250.

This fee will enable the University to extend its investment in enhancing all aspects of the student experience and to take forward further measures in support of widening access for students from under-represented groups.

2018 entrants undertaking sandwich years during their programme may expect to pay 15% of one year's full tuition fee, £1385, whilst students on an Erasmus or other study abroad years, later in their programmes, may also expect to pay 15% of one year's full tuition fee<sup>1</sup>, £1385.

For new full-time entrants to Foundation Degrees at the University, the tuition fee will be £7,850.

This fee may vary for entrants to programmes at our partner institutions. We have consulted in full with our relevant partners, where the following fees will apply for full-time programmes:

The Hammond	£9,250
The Light Project	£6,299

**Note:** \*Tuition fees payable by new full-time undergraduate entrants in their second and subsequent years of study may increase by the amount allowed by the Government.

### Part-time tuition fees

For new part-time entrants to undergraduate programmes at the University the maximum tuition fee to be charged in any academic year will vary according to programme between £285 and £6,935. This is in line with the fee regulations under which no part-time student will pay more than £6,935 in an academic year. The fee will vary for entrants to part-time undergraduate programmes at partner institutions, with which we have consulted in full. Many students will pay less than the maximum, depending on how many modules they take in one year.

The University's tuition fee income will continue to assist in ensuring we sustain our long-standing commitments to students in the context of changes to central (i.e. student opportunity) funding.

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*All of the above tuition fees apply to home and EU students*

\*The University will, or may, apply annual increases for continuing students in line with an appropriate inflationary measure set by the Government each year (within the appropriate maximum fee cap).

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<sup>1</sup> This has been in place since 2015-16.

## Assessment of access and student success record

### Access to Higher Education

The following indicators of the University's absolute and relative performance in widening access are taken from the UK Performance Indicators of Higher Education produced annually by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

	Year of entry	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
<b>Young full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 1b)</b>						
<i>From state schools or colleges</i>	<b>Chester %</b>	<b>97.5</b>	<b>97.7</b>	<b>97.5</b>	<b>96.8</b>	<b>97.2</b>
	Benchmark %	94.1	94.3	94.1	94.5	94.5
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	95.2	95.6	95.3	95.7	95.8
<i>From low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	<b>Chester %</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>17.3</b>
	Benchmark	12.4	13.4	13.0	13.4	13.3
	Locally-adjusted benchmark	15.1	16.5	15.9	16.4	16.1
<b>Mature full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 2a)</b>						
	Number of FT mature entrants	805	720	755	735	795
	% of FT entrants who are mature	26.5	24.7	23.7	22.5	24.5
<i>With no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	<b>Chester %</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>18.4</b>
	Benchmark %	13.3	15.0	15.3	15.4	13.8
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	17.4	19.5	20.7	19.9	16.8
<b>Part-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 2b)</b>						
	Number of part-time entrants	2430	1265	1235	1215	1045
<i>With no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	<b>Chester %</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>3.6</b>
	Benchmark %	2.8	2.5	3.0	2.6	2.9
	Locally-adjusted benchmark %	3.2	2.6	3.5	3.2	3.4

For **young full-time undergraduate entrants**, the University continues to perform well against sector and locally adjusted benchmarks for entrants from low participation neighbourhoods, despite a slight drop from the previous year's percentage. After a small dip last year, the percentage from state schools has risen in line with earlier years.

Analysis of internal data shows that the proportion of **male full-time undergraduate entrants from POLAR groups 1&2** stood at 35.9% in 2014/15 and 35% in 2015/16.

The University also performs well against sector and locally adjusted benchmarks for the proportion of **mature full-time undergraduate entrants** with no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3), despite a small drop in percentage for this group. However the trend of decline in the relative number of all mature students entering the University over the last 5 years appears to have been reversed, with an overall total for 2015/16 of 24.5%

Although the number of **part-time undergraduate entrants** continues to decline, having reduced by more than half since 2011/12, there has been an increase in the percentage of those with no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3), which now stands above both sector and locally-adjusted benchmarks. The overall decline in part-time entrants at the University mirrors the national trend for declining numbers of this type of student. The University will therefore consider further ways in which it might attract and support both part-time and mature entrants.

## Retention and Student Success

The following indicators of the University's absolute and relative performance in non-continuation of students following year of entry are taken from the UK Performance Indicators of HE produced by HESA.

	Year of entry	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
<b>Young</b>						
<b>Young full-time first degree non-continuation (following previous year of entry) (Table 3a)</b>	<b>Chester – no longer in HE</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>9.8</b>
	Benchmark	7.6	6.7	6.8	7.1	7.2
	<b>% continue or qualify at Chester</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>92.3</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>88.7</b>	<b>88.2</b>
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	90.4	91.3	90.8	90.5	90.2
From low participation neighbourhoods (Table 3b) (POLAR3)	<b>Chester– no longer in HE</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>12.0</b>
	Benchmark	8.9	8.5	8.0	8.8	9.1
	<b>% continue or qualify at Chester</b>	<b>86.2</b>	<b>89.3</b>	<b>84.2</b>	<b>83.4</b>	<b>85.7</b>
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	89.2	89.6	89.8	89.0	88.6
From other neighbourhoods (Table 3b) (POLAR3)	<b>Chester– no longer in HE</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>9.3</b>
	Benchmark	7.0	6.2	6.4	6.7	6.7
	<b>% continue or qualify at Chester</b>	<b>88.8</b>	<b>92.9</b>	<b>89.0</b>	<b>89.8</b>	<b>88.8</b>
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	90.8	91.7	91.1	90.9	90.7
<b>Mature</b>						
<b>Mature full-time first degree non-continuation (following previous year of entry) (Table 3a)</b>	<b>Chester– no longer in HE</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>10.8</b>
	Benchmark	11.3	10.2	10.8	10.3	10.3
	<b>% continue or qualify at Chester</b>	<b>89.6</b>	<b>90.3</b>	<b>87.5</b>	<b>87.6</b>	<b>86.4</b>
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	87.3	88.4	87.6	88.1	88.0
With no previous HE qualification (Table 3c)	<b>Chester– no longer in HE</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>11.00</b>
	Benchmark	11.8	10.4	11.0	10.5	10.7
	<b>% continue or qualify at Chester</b>	<b>86.9</b>	<b>89.3</b>	<b>86.0</b>	<b>88.5</b>	<b>86.0</b>
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	86.6	88.0	87.2	87.7	87.4
With previous HE qualification (Table 3c)	<b>Chester– no longer in HE</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>10.5</b>
	Benchmark	10.0	9.4	10.0	9.5	9.3
	<b>% continue or qualify at Chester</b>	<b>95.3</b>	<b>92.5</b>	<b>92.4</b>	<b>84.6</b>	<b>87.8</b>
	% adjusted sector continue or qualify	89.0	89.6	89.1	89.5	89.6

For **young undergraduates** entering the University, there has been an improvement of 2.1% in the non-continuation figure for students from low participation neighbourhoods, and the difference in proportion between these students continuing or qualifying and those from other neighbourhoods has narrowed. However, the general trend in the overall proportion of students continuing or qualifying is not improving and remains below the sector and locally-adjusted benchmarks. The

2011/12 entry cohort were a particularly strong cohort, being the year before higher fees were introduced, therefore this appears to be an atypical year.

Overall young full time first degree entrants still have a lower proportion of students continuing or qualifying at the University than the adjusted sector benchmark for this group. Therefore the University recognises it needs to develop further the steps being taken to address this.

The proportion of **mature students** continuing or qualifying at the University provides a similar picture to that for young undergraduates. The proportion of mature students with a previous HE qualification continuing or qualifying at the University improved and was higher than those without a previous HE qualification. However, the overall figure for mature students is also below the adjusted sector benchmark, so again the University continues to recognise the need to address the retention rates of mature students

### Analysis of differential student outcomes

In addition to the published HESA performance indicators, the University has also conducted its own analysis of disparities in outcomes within its student body over the past three academic years from 2013/14 to 2015/16. The University is extending its research analysis and strategic approaches across the institution to better understand and address the factors affecting its success and achievement rates, particularly for those from low participation groups or disadvantaged backgrounds. Analysis of internal data on student performance outcomes from the three previous years shows that **overall student success rates at all levels improved in 2015/16, with success for students overall at level 4 improving from 78.6% to 80.7%**. However, the following differential performances are also highlighted (in cases where characteristics are known).

**BME** - The difference between success of students identifying as white and those identifying as BME remained at 6.6% overall in 2015/16 but widened to 13.2% at level 4:

Level	Ethnicity	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
4	White	80.1%	79.5%	81.9%
	BME	74.9%	71.6%	68.7%

Notwithstanding the small BME population size at Chester, this difference at level 4 is clearly a particular concern that we will seek to understand and address. Although, the differential narrows at each level, reducing to 3.8% at level 5 and 1.4 at level 6, a much lower percentage of BME students than white students gain first or upper second class honours degrees:

Degree class	Ethnicity	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
1 <sup>st</sup> or 2i	White	63.8%	68.0%	69.3%
	BME	48.1%	48.0%	54.7%

**Low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR 1 and 2)** - Comparison of the outcomes for students from low participation areas with those from other areas indicates that the **difference in success rates between the two groups has narrowed** considerably at all levels since 2013/14.

Level	POLAR group	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
4	1&2	74.5%	78.1%	79.6%
	Other	82.4%	79.0%	81.3%
5	1&2	84.9%	86.9%	89.7%
	Other	87.9%	89.0%	90.4%
6	1&2	88.7%	86.3%	90.7%
	Other	92.9%	90.8%	91.3%
All levels	1&2	81.6%	83.4%	86.1%
	Other	87.6%	86.0%	87.6%

From this it can be seen that in 2015/16 the gap in outcomes stands at 1.7% for level 4, reducing to 0.7% at level 5, and 0.6% at level 6. We will continue to monitor this and deliver actions at institutional level to ensure that this narrowing trend is maintained.

**We have also analysed performance further within these groups by gender, POLAR groups and ethnicity.**

Over the last three years, **female students have achieved better success rates than males**, both within POLAR 1&2 groups and within other POLAR groups. The **percentage gap in differential outcomes between female and male students** in these groups, however, appears to be narrowing overall:

Level	In POLAR group	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
		% gap F/M	% gap F/M	% gap F/M
4	1&2	5.9	9.1	2.0
	Other	9.7	5.5	2.6
5	1&2	8.9	4.1	2.5
	Other	5.1	4.6	3.6
6	1&2	4.2	7.2	2.4
	Other	3.0	2.6	4.6
All levels	1&2	6.7	7.3	2.5
	Other	6.5	4.8	3.6

However, male students overall achieve lower degree classifications than their female peers. In 2015/16, 56.9% of male students from low participation neighbourhoods achieved a first or upper second, compared to 71.4% of female students from the same group. This parallels the figures for male and female students from other POLAR groups (58.3% and 72.2%, respectively).

The **percentage gap in success rates between students from higher participation neighbourhoods (HPN) and those from POLAR 1&2 groups (LPN) has narrowed** considerably at all levels since 2013/14. This includes a narrowing of the percentage gap in success rates of **males from social-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods (POLAR 1&2)** and their male peers from other POLAR groups, to a greater extent than for comparable groups of female students:

Level	By Gender	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
		% gap HPN/LPN	% gap HPN/LPN	% gap HPN/LPN
4	Male	5.8	3.1	1.4
	Female	9.6	-0.5	2.0
5	Male	5.9	2.0	0.1
	Female	2.1	2.5	1.2
6	Male	5.0	7.9	-0.7
	Female	3.8	3.3	1.5
All levels	Male	6.3	4.4	0.9
	Female	6.1	1.9	2.0

Great caution must be applied when analysing **sub-sets of our BME student population**, however, since the numbers are so small. Due to the statistically insignificant size of these populations, the differentials in performance between sub-sets of BME students vary greatly between years, by gender, POLAR group and level of study and in most cases therefore no trends are evident. For example, in 2013/14 and 2014/15, male BME students from POLAR 1&2 groups have better success rates than male white students from the same group at level 4; however, in 2015/16, they performed much worse. This contrasts with the performance of the same sub-set at level 5, where in 2015/16 male BME students in POLAR groups 1&2 performed 5.3% better than those in other POLAR groups; and at level 6, where the success rates of male BME students in POLAR groups 1&2 were better than white male students from POLAR groups 1&2 by 6.1% and male BME students from other POLAR groups by 10.6%. The percentages also vary greatly between BME and white students from other POLAR groups at other levels in and other years. Female BME students from POLAR 1&2 groups have consistently better success rates than female white POLAR 1 & 2 students at level 4. However, the patterns are very variable at other levels, with no discernible trends. Overall, this variability highlights the unreliability of drawing conclusions from such statistically very small numbers.

**Disability** - The success rates of students with a declared disability are generally improving in line with our student performance overall, despite a slight drop at level 4 in 2015/16. However, there remains a **differential in success rates at all levels** between those students with disabilities and those without:

Level	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
4	1.9	-1.0	4.3
5	1.5	5.8	4.0
6	4.0	8.3	4.6
All	2.8	4.2	4.5

Notwithstanding this differential in overall success rates, the percentage of students with a declared disability who achieved a good honours degree (66.8%) was comparable to those without a declared disability (66.7%) in 2015/16.

**Entry qualifications** - The University is aware that **students entering with vocational BTEC qualifications consistently have lower success rates than those entering with 'A' levels**. The differential percentage in success outcomes applies at all levels, but most noticeably at level 4:

Level	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
4	20.2	14.2	17.8
5	7.7	9.8	10.4
6	9.5	8.4	4.1
All	14.4	12.0	12.9

Similarly, 56.4% of students with BTEC entry qualifications gained a first or upper second degree in 2015/16, compared to 71.9% of those who entered with 'A' levels.

### Progression to further study or to employment

The following statistics are derived from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey:

Graduating year	In Work and/or Study			Graduate Prospects <sup>2</sup>		
	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Undergraduate FT First Degree Leavers	92.8%	93.4%	91.9%	65.3%	62.8%	64.2%
From Low Participation Neighbourhood (POLAR3)	90.9%	93.7%	91.7%	61.7%	62.8%	62.1%
With a declared disability	86.5%	88.8%	88.4%	60.8%	62.0%	61.7%

*All data in this table relates to Home and EU Full time first degree leavers only.*

From the above table it can be seen that the proportion of FT first degree graduates from the University of Chester in work and/or study 6 months after graduation decreased for the 2014/15 cohort, although graduate prospects for this group as a whole improved.

The proportion of students from a **low participation neighbourhood** in work and/or study mirrors the overall trend and is comparable to the proportion of FT first degree leavers as whole. Compared with 2013/14, graduate prospects for this group remain stable but do not reflect the same improvement as for students overall.

For graduates with a **declared disability**, the proportion of students in work and/or study and graduate prospects remains steady but below the proportion for all FT first degree leavers in 2012/13 and 2013/14, although the gap has narrowed. However, there has been a slight decrease in graduate prospects for 2014/15 leavers compared with 2013/14 leavers, and a widening of the gap with the overall cohort.

Additionally, the HESA performance indicator for 2014/15 (Table E1) which uses slightly different metrics to the above table and provides data for UK domiciled students only, also indicates that compared with the sector benchmark of 94.7%, Chester's performance at 94.3% has dropped slightly.

<sup>2</sup> proportion of students with known destination in graduate level job and/or further study

The University recognises that we still have work to do to maintain the good employability rates of our graduates and will therefore continue to invest in this area and to monitor the employability rates of different groups of students leaving the University.

## Strategic Approach to Access and Student Success

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The University takes a whole student lifecycle approach to its access and student success activity and has ensured its strategy for 2018/19 is in line with the national steer, as well as targeting the areas for improvement it has identified in evaluation of its own activity.

The University will protect its own record of fair access and also aims to ensure that its outreach work, collaborative and broader awareness and aspiration-raising activity will be consolidated and continued, whilst also strengthening the focus on attainment-raising particularly with our sponsored academies. In order to do this, we shall in 2018/19 continue to invest in outreach activities which work with all age groups, starting at primary school level. The University will continue to work through its established links with schools, colleges, employers and other HEIs in delivering its targeted outreach activity. It will also continue to develop long-term, sustained outreach work with particular targeted groups identified through collaborative links with schools and colleges in the region. The University also continues to be committed to working with Further Education Colleges in the region, particularly in order to strengthen the progression of mature students from Access to HE programmes.

Student retention, success and achievement for all students, and in particular for under-represented groups and entrants from low participation neighbourhoods, will remain a priority and particular area of focus in 2018/19. The University will continue its focus on cross-institutional approaches to improving retention and student success in order benefit more students than targeted local departmental subject schemes and bring about more change at an institutional, rather than only at local departmental level. However for those areas where targeted activity has been found to make an impact, such targeted activity will continue and support will be available for new initiatives.

In terms of employability rates for graduates, where gaps have been identified for specific groups of students, activity will be supported, targeted and monitored as appropriate. In order to improve the graduate prospects of all students at the University, particularly those in under-represented groups, with disabilities or from low participation backgrounds, investment in interventions to enhance employability which have been found to particularly benefit these groups will continue.

The University will also continue to provide financial support in the form of bursary schemes. Evaluation of impact of these schemes, both on recruitment and on students' success post-entry, is ongoing. However, having previously taken note of research which questions the impact of financial awards for students we propose to maintain the previous year's reallocation of spend from financial support packages to support activities. Those with the lowest incomes will still be supported in 2018-19 through continuing bursary schemes which have been found to have the greatest impact. Whilst we have to date undertaken our own approach to evaluation, we are now proposing to adopt the model currently advocated by OFFA.

## Spend on access and student success measures

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In 2018/19, the University estimates that it will spend approximately 20.9% of projected additional fee income on new and existing measures to widen access and improve the retention, success and progression of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as targeted student financial support commitments. In a number of areas noted below there will be increased expenditure on new activities and support for students.

With regard to access, the expenditure accounts for posts for outreach work, events and activities; information, advice and guidance about higher education and financial arrangements; and support in targeting, monitoring and evaluation of outreach and other WP-related activity, including collaborative working and established outreach mentoring schemes with schools and colleges. The expansion of work on attainment-raising with our sponsored schools and academies will also be supported under access. The investment additionally supports the administration of University of Chester bursary schemes.

Recognising the need to address retention and success of students from disadvantaged groups, the University plans to maintain its high levels of spend into this area. We will continue to prioritise and spend money on cross-institutional approaches to improving retention and success, including through analysing and promoting active student engagement, while continuing investment in selected targeted interventions which have been found to have had the greatest impact. Additional investment will also be targeted to support the retention and success of students on pre-registration nursing programmes.

Student financial support will continue to be offered to students in the form of student bursaries and hardship fund support which has been found to be of particular benefit to mature students.

Investment in initiatives which enhance employability will continue to include the Graduate Head Start programme, the Chester Difference Award, and the University's Employability Fund which supports low income students to carry out activities which will develop their employability. Investment in other activities to promote student progression to employment which have been identified as having an impact will be extended.

All expenditure included in this agreement complies fully with guidance from OFFA on eligibility. Where activity may form part of wider non-targeted activity, only estimated proportions attributed to the targeted populations have been counted, and this conservatively.

## Examples of funded activities

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The University has considered its current position in terms of its access and student success record, as well as findings from its own evaluation of previous outreach activity and student success initiatives, in determining the activity funded under its access agreement for 2018/19. It has also been informed by the National Strategy for Access and Student Success and the OFFA strategic guidance for 2018/19. Findings from nationally recognised research, such as the benefits of primary outreach activity and long term, sustained outreach interventions have also contributed to our plans. Therefore, most examples of funded activity detailed below have been determined based on our own evaluation of

the estimated impact the activity has already had, or is being assumed to have, on access and student success at the University.

## Access to Higher Education

### Outreach

The University's WP outreach programme is based on the formation and maintenance of direct links and the development of long-term structured and co-ordinated interventions with a number of targeted schools and colleges with low higher education participation rates or large proportions of disadvantaged students. Partnerships with schools, academies and colleges are developed in the areas of Cheshire and Warrington, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, Staffordshire, and West Midlands, where there are opportunities which support targeted engagement and collaborative activity. This will again involve working more intensively with partner and link schools and colleges, so as to build closer networks of relationships and to provide the basis for extending progression pathways.

An outline of the approaches taken to this activity, as well as expanding on other types of planned activity for 2018/19, can be found below:

### Targeted approach

We have developed close links with approximately 45 targeted schools to provide more in-depth, structured and sustained outreach work. This work begins with Year 7 students and continues through to Year 13 (where possible) so that students are equipped with the skills and knowledge required to make an informed choice about Higher Education. This is distinct from our work under the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP).

To ensure that we are focusing on groups who are underrepresented in higher education, our targeting will include the use of data such as pupil premium, free school meals, socio-economic background, GCSE attainment, and the resources available to us through the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT).

### Target groups

Complementing our work with our network of target schools and colleges, and in line with the strategic priorities, we are also proposing to continue our work with several specifically identified target groups:

**Young white males from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds** - The University will continue to explore ways in which we can further raise aspirations and influence attitudes of young white males, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Work will involve the development of 'professions pathways', using male role models to demonstrate the importance of education on future career aspirations. We will adopt a cohort-based approach to engaging these students from across our target network, outlining specific career pathways in the wider STEM areas, including engineering. Following recent research delivered as part of our membership of the Higher Horizons NNCO Network, we also expect to engage our partners in schemes targeting these students through a collaborative approach. Additionally, the University is developing

a range of degree apprenticeship programmes, some of which may prove particularly attractive to young males from these backgrounds.

**Black and minority ethnic (BME) students** - Reaching BME young people is a particular challenge for this University, given the population demographic of its surrounding areas, such as Cheshire and North Wales. The size of Cheshire West and Chester's ethnic minority population is relatively small at 5.4%. In the regional area this figure is 12.9% and 19.4% nationally<sup>3</sup>. Targeted initiatives are therefore required to attract applications from students within specific communities. We will continue to develop and strengthen positive relationships with schools and colleges in areas such as Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and West Midlands, therefore enabling us to reach more pupils from BME backgrounds to encourage them to consider applying to universities outside their local community.

In expanding our activity to engage with the relevant NCOP networks working in these areas, these collaborations will allow us to expand our audience, via direct links with schools and colleges alongside engaging partner networks, to engage a wider demographic.

Work will also continue within the Faculty of Education and Children's Services in order to offer bespoke outreach activity to work towards our stated target of 6.0% entrants from BME groups to Primary ITE programmes in 2018-19. We note that progress against this target is proving particularly challenging although further understanding of the factors affecting BME recruitment is being gained by working with current students from under-represented groups. Marketing materials, including filmed media, have been specifically designed to reach out and appeal to such groups. Although we are not yet in a position to fully evaluate the impact of such work, it is hoped that these strategies will increase the percentage of successful applicants to the programmes.

The University is also participating in the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) Project - Increasing Diversity: Recruiting Students from Under-represented Groups. The aim of this project is to gain greater understanding of the University of Chester's BME student recruitment, based on robust research, to further develop effective pre-enrolment outreach for the purposes of increasing the number of BME students we enrol. We are also working with two local HE institutions as part of the project who are also looking at BME recruitment, specifically for BME recruitment into teaching-related programmes.

**Students with disabilities** - Our wider targeted approach with schools and colleges enables us to ensure that all our activity is accessible to all students within those target groups. In addition, we are also providing financial support during the admissions process for disabled students who are unable to secure this support elsewhere i.e. where an interview or audition forms part of the selection criteria, and where without this support they would be substantially disadvantaged.

**Mature and part-time learners** - We will continue to work closely with local Further Education Colleges to facilitate mature student entry to higher education, through visits and Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) events (both on and off campus). These will include dedicated 'access to the professions' days, for example, in Law, Education, and Health & Social Care. We will also develop

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<sup>3</sup> Cheshire West and Chester 2011 Census data:

[http://inside.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/find\\_out\\_more/datasets\\_and\\_statistics/statistics/census\\_2011](http://inside.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/find_out_more/datasets_and_statistics/statistics/census_2011)

bespoke information for mature students pre- and post-application and provide the opportunity for individual advice on admissions and post-application feedback.

The University of Chester has introduced an extensive range of Foundation Years to its degree courses. These Foundation Years have been designed for students who may not have the academic qualifications necessary to enter directly into the first year of a degree but who have the ability and commitment to do so. The Foundation Year may prove to be of particular interest to mature students who have been out of formal education for an extended period of time or who wish to change their academic field of study. However, we are currently finding that Foundation Years are also attractive to some younger or more vulnerable students who are choosing to enter at this level to gain confidence and improve their ultimate prospects of degree success.

The University will continue to promote part-time study options through our website and other marketing materials, as well as through general outreach activity, highlighting the benefits of part-time study and the financial support packages available. Pilot activity will be undertaken with selected academic departments to develop online video material that highlights opportunities for flexible learning and part-time study, as well as emphasising the way their courses engage with cultural diversity.

### Other outreach activities

In addition to the general taster days and subject specific events offered as part of our outreach activity, examples of other types of planned activity include:

**University-based 'Residential' events** provide a thought-provoking introduction to higher education and to the UCAS application system; Year 12 students are introduced to the process of researching courses and applying to university. Through several activities, they are encouraged to think about their achievements, interests and experiences and how they can incorporate this into their personal statement and course choice.

We will maintain provision of our **Primary Schools Outreach Activity**, using the links formed with target secondary schools across the target regions, to provide transitional arrangements between primary and secondary schools. This area will continue to introduce the idea of university through a range of fun and interactive activities, including campus and school visits, the use of drama to raise awareness of university, mini lectures; all culminating in a mini 'graduation' day. Continued investment in this area will allow us to establish and enhance our primary school activities.

The **Future First Programme** will aim to identify cohorts of students from across our target institutions (including Looked-after children), to engage in approximately 6 interventions per year between Y10 and Y11.

The **LIFE Programme** builds on an activity previously delivered in the Warrington region as a partnership between local schools and employers. The project includes a series of 'off-site' events (5-6 across a term) delivered within individual employers, to showcase employability skills, while also identifying the benefits of educational attainment in line with career aspirations.

**Targeted interventions at key transition points** in a students' learning e.g. Level 2 and Level 3 options, are undertaken at parents evening events and careers fairs. Feedback from past events has been invaluable in shaping the structure of these activities and events going forwards.

We will also continue to provide information and awareness raising activities for people who act as key influencers on our target populations (for example, parents; teachers; careers/education guidance staff and careers advisers).

### Outreach mentoring

The University will aim to sustain its targeted mentoring programme with schools and colleges, with the intention of supporting those from low participation or disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to progress to higher education, but who may lack aspiration or be at risk of not succeeding in earlier stages of their education. This is an established long-term outreach project, covering two school terms each academic year. The Outreach Mentoring programme's embedded evaluation strategy confirms that primary aims are being met. Impact varies between schools, however evidence that mentees' study skills and confidence levels have improved shows that participants benefit greatly from their involvement in the scheme. For 2018/19 new activities to support student attainment in schools will be explored.

### Collaboration

The University will aim to further build on and sustain collaborative initiatives that involve working with schools, colleges, employers and other HEIs both in the region and nationally. The University is a member of two HEFCE-funded National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) networks:

- The Higher Horizons + Consortium which delivers collaborative outreach targeted activity for young people from target wards within Cheshire, Warrington, Staffordshire, Stoke and Shropshire regions. The HEIs in this partnership include Keele University, Staffordshire University, University of Derby, Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Oxford, together with Reaseheath College. In line with HEFCE guidance, events are jointly evaluated and are designed to complement the existing activity which all partners currently deliver as part of their own Access Agreements.
- The University of Chester is also a member of the Merseyside Collaborative Outreach Programme (MCOP). The network was initially established via HEFCE's NNCO initiative and will now act as the NCOP provider within the Merseyside region. As a committed partner of this network, the University will endeavour to support the activity of this network, in providing complementary activity to that which is already being delivered to these target students.

The University is also committed to continuing its collaborative activity with other organisations, in addition to its work with other universities. These will include collaborative school networks set up to co-ordinate multi-school activities, Academy Trusts which work with a number of schools and colleges, and the Virtual Head Network set up to support students from care backgrounds.

### Looked-after children

We will continue to work with collaborative partners in terms of communicating with Virtual Head Teachers, and local authorities, in Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, and Warrington. Support is provided to deliver a series of events for both Primary and Secondary, for students in care from these regions. The activities and sessions are designed for those in care as well as their carers and advisors, to raise awareness of higher education

and the benefits of gaining a university education. Work to support care leavers into Higher Education will build on the good practice and experience developed under the discontinued Buttle UK Quality Mark which was held by the University.

### Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)

The University will continue to focus outreach activities at optimum times for student choices to raise awareness of STEM subjects and the advantages of studying them, with a particular focus on its Faculty of Science and Engineering, and its Food Research Centre. We aim to facilitate continued change, improve communication and make a difference in the region as part of a STEM network. The University, working with Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East and Warrington Councils, has set up a regional STEMCAT group. The group consists of representatives from key areas of STEM education and industry who meet regularly to develop joint STEM initiatives across the region.

The University of Chester STEM Outreach programme offers school students opportunities to see what 'real' engineers and scientists do through practical applications and problem solving activities in Science, Engineering and Mathematics. Activities are designed to inspire young people and raise awareness of higher level study and future career opportunities in STEM, whilst offering curriculum enhancement and enrichment. The aim is to target students early enough to influence subject choices and also to widen access to include those students underrepresented in STEM courses at University.

The programme will highlight the links between physics, chemistry, biological sciences and engineering with core mathematics and computational sciences. Young people participating in STEM activities at the University will gain an understanding of the cross-disciplinary skills in STEM that reflect the nature of scientific enquiry and technological innovation in the world of work.

University and employer partnerships provide opportunities for schools to take part in projects set by the University in collaboration with regional and national employers. Employers and University undergraduates as mentors for young people working on these projects act as powerful role models. Teachers and parents can also become engaged in the learning activities, thereby helping students to make the right decisions for successful careers in STEM.

Whereas we will continue the best practice, improving and refining as appropriate, we will also develop new initiatives to further STEM and focus on meaningful and measurable outcomes.

We will build on previous projects to deliver a curriculum-related Summer School programme and choice of workshops for Years 12/13 and Level 3 students on "Preparing for University"; these can also be used to support progression to HE for work-based learners.

**Other STEM activities include:** Years 8/9/10 workshops to raise awareness of future skill needs in STEM and preferred subject areas for progression; a celebration of International Women's Day for Years 11/12/13; collaborative workshops with external agencies, companies based at our Thornton Science Park, University alumni and retired Shell employees; continued investment in staffing and student resources, such as 'STEM Ambassadors' (STEM undergraduate students available for project work in schools) and staff going out to talk to schools about courses we offer. These activities will continue to further relationships between the University, schools and colleges, as well as external industry organisations.

A new STEM initiative will be to work with a small number of schools to target a cohort of **white males from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds**. The programme will consist of a range of activities spread across the academic year including workshops, working alongside Level 4 undergraduate students in the laboratories and a works experience package.

The University is also the custodian of a Large Outreach Careers Maths Kit (LOCMK) which consists of a series of practical activities to support undergraduate teaching and learning as well as Maths workshops in secondary schools provided by postgraduate maths students.

Impact of these activities will be measured by collecting qualitative and quantitative data, tracking students, case studies, skill shortage areas and career pathways.

### Raising attainment in schools and colleges, including sponsorship of schools

**University of Chester Academies Trust** - The University currently sponsors four secondary academies, two primary academies and one primary free school. A number of University staff give considerable amounts of time to school and FE College governance, both in the immediate area and elsewhere. The University is also represented on the Cheshire West and Chester School Improvement Board.

Working in collaboration with the University of Chester Academies Trust, the University is developing a **progressive programme of activities** appropriate for each secondary year group with the overall aim of raising awareness of university and levels of attainment within each school.

- Year 7 engagement will provide an introduction to university (for pupils and parents), including a visit to a University campus, and will lay the foundations for the subsequent programme.
- Year 8 and Year 9 will focus on raising aspirations through talks by WP staff and student ambassadors and will introduce a range of career pathways through curriculum-based activities. We will also include targeted sessions for parents and guardians.
- For Year 10 and Year 11 students, the programme continues with aspiration- and attainment-raising and building up information and awareness of progression routes, degree subjects and the HE environment. GCSE-linked study activities will be provided as required by the school, for example study skills and revision techniques. This is accompanied by a mentoring programme for each of the four schools. The mentors offer support and encouragement to these pupils to help improve their attainment.
- In Year 12, the programme offers further support with researching courses and places to study, the importance of Open Days, the UCAS application process and deadlines, help with completing their UCAS application form and personal statement. Finance and student life talks.
- For Year 13 students help is on hand for completing UCAS forms and giving further information and support about student finance, preparing to live away from home, and encouragement up to and including the exam period.

The University's Faculty of Education and Children's Services (ECS) also has a long history of working to raise attainment in schools and colleges, especially where there are issues of disadvantage, and

this remains a significant element of its work. In awarding Outstanding status for the Faculty's secondary teacher training programme and all 3-7 and 5-11 primary/primary early years' programmes (December 2016), OFSTED reported that 'The partnership is committed to working with schools in challenging circumstances and raising the achievement of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils'. The Faculty currently partners with over 330 schools. Whilst these schools provide placement opportunities, the focus of our students' work is to raise attainment for all pupils.

**TeachMeet** - The Faculty designs, supports and facilitates regular informal meetings and CPD sessions, to provide participating teachers with a forum for sharing good practice and activities and personal insights into work that has taken place in schools.

Faculty staff are also already engaged in a number of subject specific projects, which will be scaled up in future, to support the raising of attainment in sponsored schools. Examples of these include:

**Maths** - Raising attainment of middle/lower-performing GCSE students by engaging with specific cohorts of year 10 and 11 pupils. The students are taught about algebraic concepts using multiple representations and using teaching designed to allow them to reason from known facts. Quantitative data from lesson observations, student and teacher interviews and students' work is analysed to begin to construct a narrative interpretation of this; the analysis demonstrates some promising outcomes in terms of students' perceptions of learning mathematics.

**English** – Working with year eight students in one of the University-sponsored academies, staff and students from the Faculty delivered a sequence of sessions focussed on 'reading for pleasure'. The majority of the group, who had not previously enjoyed reading, were boys.

Future plans - The University plans to commit significant additional investment in 2017/18 and 2018/19, by providing subject tutor time from Faculty of Education and Children's Services to work with subject specialist staff in academies to improve and develop their teaching knowledge of national curriculum subjects. Furthermore, a range of subject tutors from other University faculties will also contribute to selected sixth form courses.

This work will begin in 2017/18 and during the early part of this project appropriate outcome targets will be explored and agreed.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

The evaluation framework for outreach activity has been developed to focus on the following activities and methodology:

- To continuously audit the current schools and colleges that WP outreach officers work with against the data available via HEAT and other data sources e.g. POLAR3, to ensure a targeted approach and effective use of resources;
- To continually develop the existing evaluation tools and activities, to provide detailed analysis of short term influence of WP events to date;

- To further assess application data from targeted schools and colleges to provide initial indicators of influence on applications to higher education;
- Evaluation strategies relating to individual programmes and schemes of activity will continue to be developed and enhanced to measure the effectiveness of new activity. These will include qualitative measures such as pre-and post-event questionnaires, focus groups and in-depth interviews with participants, parents, teachers, and advisers;
- To monitor the uptake of outreach activities by targeted learners and schools and colleges.

### **Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT)**

The University of Chester is a member of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) membership service which assists Higher Education Institutions in England to target, monitor and evaluate their outreach activity.

The University records data about its outreach and participants on the HEAT database. This is entered into the HEAT longitudinal tracking system which matches records on individual outreach participants to administrative datasets spanning Key Stage 2 data through to postgraduate study and employment. Tracking reports received from HEAT help the University to better understand the relationship between our outreach provision and the attainment and progression of disadvantaged young people. We are able to track student progression to any HEI, including this institution, so that we can assess the extent to which we are contributing to the increased participation rates of disadvantaged young people as a whole.

Being part of the HEAT service also enables the University to engage with collective WP sector research. By using data from all members as an aggregate, the HEAT service is now able to explore new multi-dimensional ways of defining under-representation, disadvantage and differential outcomes and the effect that outreach can have on different groups of participants.

By subscribing to HEAT we can take an evidence based approach to planning outreach delivery so that we can continue to invest in outreach activities that optimise progression with disadvantaged cohorts.

### **Raising attainment**

As noted, the University plans to provide 200 hours of national curriculum subject tutor time to staff and 145 hours from subject tutors to sixth form courses for our sponsored academies. We will work with staff in these academies to develop appropriate mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of this support, using both qualitative perceptions and, where this proves possible, quantifiable outcomes.

### **Retention and student success**

The University is committed to improving the retention and success of all its students and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is the intention of the University to sustain and enhance a range of learning and teaching, pastoral and welfare, and employability services and structures to support the retention and success of all its students throughout their time at the University, and to continue to monitor the relative performance of those from disadvantaged groups. This is an area in which the University plans to prioritise and continue to invest in 2018/19 and beyond in order to sustain and improve its performance, particularly with regard to disadvantaged students. In addition

to existing measures which inform and support the enhancement of learning, teaching and employability across the University, interventions will be strengthened to offer particular support to students who may have been disadvantaged, whether through background or prior educational experience; through disability; as care leavers; or because of other circumstances. The University will continue to direct significant investment towards institutional level mechanisms and developments to improve student retention and success.

Good practice developed through both the University's own Student Retention and Success programme and the University's involvement in the HEA's What Works? 2 Change programme will continue to be shared and embedded across departments across the University. Evaluation of these programmes has shown that retention is a complex issue, with multifaceted reasons why students find it difficult to achieve, or decide to leave Higher Education. However the evaluation has highlighted a number of areas of good practice which have been found to have the greatest impact. These include study skills development within the academic framework; attendance monitoring; developing students' sense of belonging; and the benefits of peer mentoring.

The University recognises that overall there remains still further work to do in the area of retention and student success, particularly to support those students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The University is particularly committed to investing in a number of cross institutional approaches which it will continue to develop, extend and evaluate. These approaches include:

#### Attendance and student engagement monitoring and follow up

Working on external and internal evidence suggesting that good attendance leads to better student outcomes, the University intends to add further investment in improvements to its systems for attendance and other student engagement monitoring, follow-up and support for students with poor patterns of engagement. The University attendance monitoring pilot (2015/16) has been rolled out across the majority of the University's campuses in 2016/17, using an in-house system based on the University's own app and online reports. This produces real-time accessible reports for both staff and students and provides academic staff with the tools to monitor and follow up in a timely manner students with attendance issues, and strengthen support for these students to be successful at University. Future investment in this area will include extending established attendance monitoring mechanisms, reporting and follow-up processes to the development and use of wider learning analytics for oversight and facilitation of individual students' academic progress. The University is linking with JISC on these developments, which will be taken forward during 2017/18 and 2018/19.

#### Study skills support

Underpinned by evidence from the sector, and endorsed by our Senior University Teaching Fellows and Learning and Teaching Sub-committee, the University believes that the most effective approach to developing academic skills is through embedding study skills in the curriculum, rather than only through one-off or generic sessions for students once they experience difficulties. The University is therefore continuing to prioritise the embedding of academic skills in the curriculum at every level and throughout modules, but in particular at level 4 where there is the most pressing need to improve student retention and achievement. The University is also making additional investment to extend its team of study skills advisers, who work closely with the faculty-based Senior University Teaching Fellows to take forward this ongoing development work with academic staff. This joint approach will

also focus on exploring ways to improve the success and attainment rates of students with entry qualifications other than 'A' levels. As well as maintaining its timely responses to individual student requests for one-to-one and individualised email 'feedforward' support, the Study Skills Advisory Team will continue to develop more targeted work with particular groups of students and staff.

### Mathematics skills support

The provision of tailored mathematics tutorial support in subject areas with a significant mathematical element have been found to have a very positive impact upon students' academic achievement in mathematics related topics; in particular for those subject areas attracting students with non-standard entry qualifications. The University will therefore continue to support the provision and development of targeted mathematics support, and the extended skills and knowledge coverage gained from the recent creation of a dedicated mathematics adviser post will be maintained.

In addition an e-learning maths programme will be developed to support the work of study skills advisers and tutors and provide access for students across the University, as needed and in their own time and space. This e-learning programme could also be adapted for use by schools and colleges.

### Study skills resources

Students will continue to receive free texts relating to their programme of study in their first year, which include a study skills book. The Study Skills Advisory Team will also extend development and enhancement of its online resource bank of support activities for both staff and students, accessed through a dedicated site on the University intranet.

### Disability support

As a result of reduction in funding for students with a declared disability through Disability Support Allowance, the University continues to raise the profile of available assistive technologies through our Assistive Technologist, who has a remit to work with and support students with technology and learning resource needs. It is also exploring ways it can make assistive technologies more accessible to all students, by making core assistive technology available across the whole University. In addition, the appointment of a Senior Disability Officer also provides extra support to students with a declared disability. As well as support already offered including drop-in sessions, this role will develop and enhance the successful support groups for disabled students introduced in the 2016/17 academic year: one aimed at students with a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome/high functioning autism, and one for other disabled students. Both of these groups aim to support transition and integration into HE. A further targeted project, aimed at supporting successful outcomes for students with a diagnosis of a mental health difficulty, aims to establish a baseline measure and drive improvements in successful outcomes for this student group. We aim to reduce the overall differential in successful outcomes between students with declared disabilities and those without by 0.5% each year.

Students with specific learning differences will continue to be targeted pre-entry to raise awareness of the self-help resources available at the University, and this will be followed up with targeted support aiming to build their academic confidence and improve their outcomes. A suite of academic study skills for students with a specific learning differences and group/seminar based academic study skills sessions aimed at disabled students will continue to be made available, with an increased emphasis on the availability of podcast sessions to improve their accessibility to students.

The University has established minimum standards for online programme materials and is exploring further inclusive learning approaches such as more extensive use of online learning resources, lecture capture and continued advice to academic staff on inclusive learning and teaching practice.

### Male students

As the overall success rates and degree classifications of male students in the University are consistently lower than those of female students, our Student Support and Guidance team plans to run a project exploring the university experience of male students at our institution, including those from social-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Recommendations and interventions based on the outcomes will then be developed. Understanding their particular experiences and barriers to success will provide a sound starting point, against which targets may then be later refined.

### Black and minority ethnic (BME) students

The success rates of BME students at level 4, and their degree outcomes (firsts and upper seconds) require improvement to address disparities with white students. The University will extend its work on developing greater inclusivity in the curriculum and build on existing research in an effort to better understand and meet its target to reduce differences in outcomes, working through its Learning and Teaching Institute, the Senior University Teaching Fellows, and other faculty-based initiatives.

### Part-time students

The University will build on its own research of the part-time student experience and work to develop and enhance its provision and support for part-time study. Work to support and promote part-time study will include wider promotion of the part-time student bursary, a review of the resources on offer to part-time students to ensure comparability with the full-time student experience and a review of existing provision which could be better tailored to the part-time student. Development work with the Students' Union to promote the engagement and representation of part-time students will be maintained.

### Student belonging, feedback and representation

The importance of students' sense of belonging to an academic community and the student voice in developing retention initiatives and enhancing academic provision was recognised in evaluation of the University's department-led retention initiatives. The University has a Student Engagement Officer and a Student Engagement Strategy, which aims to improve and build on existing processes and develop creative projects to ensure every student feels able to contribute to the academic learning community at the University of Chester. The University will continue to develop its mechanisms for gathering and using student feedback, including through a newly-refreshed First Year Experience Survey, to ensure that it understands and is acting upon the views of all its students. The Student Engagement Officer will continue to facilitate the collation and triangulation of student feedback from a range of sources to ensure that all students, including those from less advantaged backgrounds, understand that their views form an important part of the University's enhancement work at all levels. The University will ensure that its Student Academic Representatives (StARs) scheme continues to

include and support diversity and inclusion of representation from students with protected characteristics and from under-represented groups, and mature and part-time students.

### Peer mentoring

This scheme delivers training for, and then support to, students who act as mentors to other students, particularly targeting those subject areas where there has been historically lower retention of students from low participation neighbourhoods. Peer Mentoring is to continue to be expanded in 2018-19, in terms of the number of Mentors and Mentees participating. Peer Mentoring has a greater focus on transition to the University, including online (email) mentoring providing support to new students during the pre-arrival phase between results days and University Induction. Further developments to the Peer Mentoring scheme to be explored include mentoring of Level 6 students, and incorporating alumni/industry professionals. These projects are intended to support students across the whole student-lifecycle.

### Care leavers

We offer a specific support package for care leavers, which includes a named contact to support with all aspects of university life, budgeting sessions, accommodation all year round, assistance when applying for financial support, support with childcare and support into employment or further study. Currently there are 65 care leavers at the University, and 23 have made contact with Student Welfare. The most common issues are financial problems, mental health issues and academic concerns. In addition, we offer the Care Leaver Bursary, to all care leavers who meet the eligibility criteria.

### Young carers

We recognise that it can be difficult balancing university life with responsibilities at home and for this reason there is a dedicated person at the University to support Young Adult Carers. Currently there are 5 students, who have identified themselves as young adult carers and four students are receiving the Young Adult Carers Bursary, which consists of £1,500 per year.

### Department and subject initiatives

Building on the work of previous department-led targeted student success initiatives, the University will also continue to offer departments the opportunity to bid for funds to deliver specific targeted interventions or to do a specific piece of research related to retention and student success.

As an example of subject-specific investment, the University is committing additional resource to the support to pre-registration nurses, including whilst on placements. The Faculty of Health and Social Care is establishing appointments to a new role of Practice Learning Lecturer in recognition of the added support required by many nursing students, particularly the high proportion from low participation backgrounds, during the practice element of the programme. This is in response to the small but growing evidence base demonstrating the significant impact of the first placement on the student nurse and the potential impact this can have on attrition from the programme. There is also evidence of the importance of the final transitional placement in preparing the student nurse for their role as a qualified professional. An accompanying evaluation project will review the impact of the role on both the student experience and retention.

## Progression to Further Study or to Employment

Careers and Employability (C&E) deliver a number of programmes aimed at enhancing the employability of its students and graduates. It is anticipated that the following initiatives will continue and develop during 2018/19.

### Graduate Head Start (GHS)

GHS is the most established progression activity within C&E. The programme has supported over 632 graduates (including the September 2016 cohort). Between September 2015 and May 2016, 68% of participants gained employment or enhanced employment following GHS, this equates to 69% since commencement of the programme overall. GHS will continue to be offered in a restructured format from June 2017 to better target the individual needs of graduates, many of whom are more vulnerable and fit within the OFFA target groups. This will result in additional spend for promotional materials and resources required for the delivery of the programme.

### The Chester Difference Award (CDA)

Following the full launch of the CDA during 2014-15, 695 students are currently participating in the Award. The CDA is expected to expand during 2018/19, with greater focus being placed on promotion of the Award through CareerHub. Our aim in 2018/19 is to increase the percentage of participants from POLAR 1&2 areas.

### The Chester Employability Fund (CEF)

The CEF exclusively targets current undergraduate, low income students in receipt of bursaries, along with care leavers and young carers. Eligible students are encouraged to apply for funds (maximum £250) to enable them to carry out activities to develop their employability. The CEF addresses areas of personal development for students, helping them to not only improve their employability prospects but also their confidence in relation to employability. Since the pilot in 2014/15, the CEF has attracted 654 applicants (up to November 2016), with 203 students having received awards. Our aim in 2018/19 is to increase the number of students who benefit from the CEF through increased communication with eligible students on how to submit a strong application for funding.

### The Student Ambassadors Project (SAP)

The SAP is an 8-week paid opportunity for students at all levels. Students work 15 hours per week to support research into various student engagement-related issues, the aim being to improve engagement directly with C&E but also to encourage earlier attention to career planning to achieve the best outcomes.

Potential themes include:

- How C&E can help students understand and articulate the employability skills gained from their degree
- What action C&E can take to support students through their degree to completion
- The role lecturers and academic departments play in offering careers guidance to students

- How C&E can help students recognise that undertaking extra-curricular activities can improve their employability
- Reasons for and solutions to student non-engagement with C&E at Level 4.

In addition to funding the Ambassadors' salaries, the remaining budget will be used to implement their feedback and findings. Our aim in 2018/19 is to continue this work, in order to support improvement in engagement and retention, with a range of projects that will be co-led and/or directed by students aimed at enhancing communication. This may involve recruiting additional Ambassadors or continuing the employment of existing Ambassadors.

### Work Shadowing (WS)/Brand U

During 2018/19 it is proposed that the current model of delivering WS will be significantly re-structured and rebranded to take the form of a combination of on-campus/off-campus Q&A panels. We anticipate that the new format of WS will enable students from a WP background to benefit from increased networking opportunities, with other students and employers, within a peer supported environment. We propose a total of 24 individual activities relating to this new format. These will be organised over the summer vacation period of 2017/18, to be delivered across the 2018/19 academic year.

Brand U is a work experience app which aims to enhance the satisfaction and quality of a placement experience for both a student and an employer. The app will provide an innovative way for students to apply for work experience, based on their academic merit and experience only. This methodology aims to remove any bias by employers, relating to a student's institution and its position in the Top UK University league tables, or based on the student's socio-economic status, thereby working towards the objective of inclusion for all students.

### The Warrington Discretionary Fund (WDF)

The (WDF) was set up in 2015/16 to promote interdepartmental activity on the Warrington campus, and to support student employability and continuous improvement. The jobs provided by the WDF allow Warrington students to put their career goals into practice, following guidance and training provided by C&E. In 2018/19 we plan to expand the fund to a Chester based campus (Kingsway) which houses students studying creative courses. Students here have fewer graduate skill-enhancing opportunities through part-time work directly linking to their future careers and we believe that the fund would benefit this student population. This campus also has a high proportion of students with registered learning disabilities and we hope the roles available through the fund would be appealing to them.

### The S:PEAR Programme

C&E continue to provide input into University Centre Shrewsbury's (UCS) S:PEAR Programme – Skills: Professional, Entrepreneurial, Academic, Research. We anticipate that support for S:PEAR will continue in some form, depending on student recruitment to UCS. As UCS was developed to meet the higher education needs of local communities, it is likely that there will be a high proportion of students from WP backgrounds taking part in S:PEAR. Students are encouraged and enabled to work in the local community whilst studying, while developing their skills and preparing them for the world of

work on completion of their degree.

### The Venture Programme

Venture, an enterprise skills enhancement programme, is open to all students, across all campuses, and is designed to equip students with the confidence and knowledge to start their own business, undertake freelance work or consider self-employment. Venture is a three-part, multi-year programme of events and interactive activity designed to help would-be student entrepreneurs. Venture also has considerable value to students considering freelance or self-employed career paths in all industries, including those hoping to build a portfolio career. Currently 204 participants are engaged in Venture from a wide variety of disciplines. The programme is supported by Santander Universities UK, who offer an 'Excellence in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Award' to students showing promise in starting up a business, during a pitching event in June, with access to start-up funding and business support packages.

### The Chester Internship Programme (CIP)

The CIP provides 4 and 10 week internships to current students (Levels 4-7). Our aim in 2018/19 is to continue to grow the CIP programme.

### University of Chester Bursaries

Targeted financial support packages in the form of bursaries will continue to be offered as a means to support students. They will be offered to all University of Chester students including nursing students and those based at our other sites such as Thornton Science Park and University Centre Shrewsbury. The 'in kind' element (Aspire Credit) of bursaries will be used to reinforce student retention and success activities. Full details of all of our bursaries including what students can spend their Aspire Credit on will be available on the University's website.

Consultation with student representatives showed that they were in favour of these awards being reconfigured while they continue to be offered to those from the lowest income households. The University will therefore maintain its approved 2017/18 bursary package and continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of these awards on retention and student success.

### Scheme 1 – Chester Bursary

An award to the value of £1,500 in cash<sup>4</sup> will be given to any new full-time undergraduate degree entrant paying a tuition fee of over £6,000, who has a declared household residual income of £25,000 or less. This will comprise of £500 cash in each year of the programme.

Applicants who receive offers to undergraduate degree programmes at the University will be sent full details of the scheme. The benefit will be awarded to all eligible students. It is estimated that expenditure on this scheme to the cohort in 2018-19 will be approximately £1.77 million. The scheme is likely to benefit around 1200 students.

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<sup>4</sup> Where bursaries are stated to contain a cash element, this is likely to be made up of a cash award in the most part with an element of 'in kind' benefit (Aspire Credit).

### Scheme 2 – Chester Bursary for Part-time students

This bursary has a total value of £1,500 in cash which will be applied on a pro-rata basis based on the credit intensity at each level of study. Eligibility will be based on new part-time undergraduate degree entrants paying a tuition fee of at least £7000 (full time equivalent), enrolled for a minimum of 40 credits at the start of level 4, and with a declared household residual income of £25,000 or less.

Part time applicants who receive offers to undergraduate degree programmes at the University will be sent full details of the scheme. Students will be informed that eligibility does not guarantee a bursary as numbers may be limited. Exclusions to eligibility apply. Full details will be posted on the University's website.

### Scheme 3 – Care Leavers Bursary

The University will also provide a Care Leavers Bursary Scheme, which will be available to verified Care Leavers on a first come, first served basis. This opportunity is available to new undergraduate students starting their programme of study in 2018/19 (including students at level 3). The scheme will normally provide Care Leavers with £6000 of benefits over the three years of their programme (or up to a maximum of £8000 if the award is made from the Foundation Year of the programme) The benefits will be given as £1000 cash / 'in kind' benefit and £1000 fee waiver at each level of study. The University may spend up to £90,000 on this bursary scheme on student entering 2017/18.

### Scheme 4 – Young Adult Carers Bursary

In partnership with organisations such as Cheshire Young Carers (CYC) the University has developed a targeted financial support package for young carers. This will be in the form of a bursary package of £1500 per year, totalling £4,500 over three years of study (or up to a maximum of £6000 if the award is made from the Foundation Year of the programme). This bursary is available in addition to any other University bursary the student is eligible for and recognises the additional financial pressures that young carers face. The University and organisations such as CYC will identify young carers who would benefit from this support package prior to commencing their studies.

### Foundation Year

All students (home and EU) on our extended degree programmes including a level 3 foundation year, will receive a £1000 fee waiver in the first, foundation year of study.

### Continuing students

Entrants prior to 2018/19 will continue to receive their entitlements as set out in our previous years' Access Agreements.

## Targets and Milestones relating to our student body

The University has considered its Access and Student Success record and the areas which it needs to improve in forming the following targets:

### A Applicants, entrants and student body

#### (i) Young full-time entrants

The University aims to exceed national and locally-adjusted benchmarks for young full-time entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3). It would wish to at least maintain this position and, where possible, to improve on its own performance in absolute terms:

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Young full-time first degree entrants (Table 1a)	%	%	%	%
<i>From low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	17.8	17.9	18.0	18.1
Young full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 1b)	%	%	%	%
<i>From low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	18.0	18.2	18.4	18.5

*This assumes that the current pattern of applicants to the University remains the same.*

#### (ii) Mature entrants

The University aims to continue to exceed national and locally-adjusted benchmarks for mature entrants with no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhoods:

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Mature full-time undergraduate entrants – all (Table 2a)	%	%	%	%
<i>With no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3)</i>	23.6	23.8	24.0	24.0

#### (iii) Black and minority ethnic (BME) entrants

The University also aims to increase the number of UK domiciled entrants from BME backgrounds:

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Entrants from BME (non-white) groups %</b>	8.8	8.9	9.0	9.0

#### (iv) Young white males from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Young white males from POLAR 1&amp;2 %</b>	35.2	35.4	35.6	35.8

### B Outreach activity

#### (v) School, college and specialist mentoring schemes

The University aims to achieve the following targets of participants in Outreach mentoring activities:

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Mentees</b>	230	240	250	260

#### (vi) Outreach events and activities with targeted schools, academies and colleges

The University aims to enhance and consolidate its Outreach events and activities, and work towards the following targets:

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Primary</b>				
Events	25	25	25	20
Participants	1500	1500	1500	1600
<b>Secondary</b>				
Events	31	32	32	40
Participants	1240	1280	1280	1400
<b>FE College</b>				
Events	15	16	16	16
Participants	465	496	496	500

*Institutions will be targeted using the following criteria:*

- The school or college to be based within a POLAR quintile of 1-2, or to have an above average number of students from these wards within their catchment area/intake;
- For the % of pupils eligible for free school meals currently to be above the national average;
- The school or college itself to have targeted specific student cohorts in regards to their own Pupil Premium allocation;
- The school or college to be based within a geographical area with a significantly diverse demographic when compared to the local regions surrounding University of Chester sites.

*Events and participants will be defined as:*

- Event – On-campus events, which have been proven as making a significant/greater impact on the intentions of the young people involved.
- Participant – The schools and colleges will be provided with criteria emphasising the importance of those attending the event being those who have the potential to progress, but may be experiencing potential barriers to their future potential, these would include; POLAR, FSM, Pupil Premium, and first generation etc.

#### (vii) Outreach events in collaboration with other institutions

The University aims to develop its collaborative activity with its outreach networks and work towards the following number of collaborative events:

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Collaborative Events</b>	8	10	10	10

(viii) **Activities to raise attainment in schools**

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Raising Attainment in schools</b>	To develop a programme of work with schools on raising attainment	To develop appropriate outcome measures	To improve on the outcome measures	

**C ITE trainees**

The University's targets and milestones relating to outreach activity will include undergraduate but not postgraduate ITE trainees. Two further sets of targets and milestones will apply to ITE trainees.

(ix) **To increase the recruitment and retention of UK domiciled males at level 4 to primary ITE UG programmes:**

UK domiciled males on primary ITE UG programmes	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Entrants %</b>	21	22	22	22
<b>Progression from level 4 %</b>	84	86	88	88

(x) **To increase the number of entrants to Primary ITE programmes from BME backgrounds:**

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Entrants from BME (non-white) groups %</b>	5.5	6.0	6.5	6.5

**D Retention and student success**(xi) **Continuing or qualifying students**

The University aims to improve its absolute and relative performance in non-continuation of students following year of entry, and to increase the numbers of students, in particular those from low participation neighbourhoods, who continue or qualify at Chester each year:

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Young full-time first degree</b>	%	%	%	%
<b>% continue or qualify at Chester – all (Table 3a)</b>	90.0	90.5	91.0	91.2
<b>% continue or qualify at Chester – From low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3) (Table 3b)</b>	88.0	89.0	90.0	90.2
<b>Mature full-time first degree</b>	%	%	%	%
<b>% continue or qualify at Chester – all (Table 3a)</b>	87.8	87.9	88.0	88.2
<b>% continue or qualify at Chester – with no previous HE qualification (Table 3c)</b>	86.8	87.2	87.5	87.8

**(xii) Black and minority ethnic (BME) students**

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Good degree outcomes (1<sup>st</sup> &amp; 2i) of BME (non-white) students %</b>	57.0	58	59	60

**(xiii) Students with a declared disability**

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Overall success outcomes of students with a disability</b>	83.5	84.0	84.5	85

**E Progression to Further Study or to Employment**

Targets relating to participation in employability initiatives are based on approximate numbers of students from WP backgrounds. The University would also like continually to improve its rate of progression to work and/or further study, and ensure that the employability rates of undergraduate students from low participation neighbourhoods and those with a declared disability are comparable to other students:

	2017-18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Participation of under-represented groups in Employability initiatives %</b>	36	38	40	40.5
<b>Progression of students from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR 1 and 2) to work and/or further study %</b>	91.4	91.5	91.6	91.8
<b>Progression of students with a declared disability to work and/or further study %</b>	87.0	87.5	88.0	88.5

**Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements**

The University recognises the importance of monitoring and evaluation to inform the development of its access and student success and has developed an evaluation strategy which allows it to demonstrate the impact of its WP activity. Local level evaluation undertaken by each area of activity is fed into a central evaluation template. This allows an institutional overview of areas of success and areas for future development to ensure spend is based on evidence of impact. Evaluation is an iterative process and teams involved in WP activity meet regularly to discuss the progress of activities and share good practice.

Use is made of existing management information available from national datasets (such as UK Performance Indicators of Higher Education) and internally available data, as well as the monitoring data collected by all activities about its participants. Qualitative and quantitative data collected by means of, for example, questionnaires are also used to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of specific activities to inform future development, as well as to gauge the short term influence of interventions on individuals' aspirations toward HE and attainment. Such methods have been designed so that they are comparable across different activities and age groups where possible.

The University will continue to examine ways of monitoring cohorts of individuals involved in WP activity from pre-application outreach work throughout the student lifecycle to aid its understanding

of the impact of interventions. The University will also make use of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) to measure the progress of participants in Access initiatives.

Evaluation of the effect of financial support on student retention and success will also continue to be undertaken. As well as analysis of withdrawal and attainment data, this will also take the form of questionnaires to those in receipt of awards, feedback from our own First Year Experience Survey, and national research. The University has a Student Financial Support Working group to which findings from evaluation will be reported and decisions on the future of financial support packages discussed.

Monitoring and evaluation reports, including progress against targets and milestones, are received by the University's Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee, which reports to Senate. There is student representation on both these bodies. Academic faculties and departments are also required to monitor and comment upon the entry profile of new entrants in the University's Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement programme review process. These reports, which include comment and actions on student retention and success data, are received annually by Faculty Boards of Study, with department and faculty overviews reported to the University Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee.

Overall responsibility for the delivery of the agreement resides with the Senior Management Team of the University.

## Equality and Diversity

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The University has been mindful of its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and has given due consideration to the impact of these proposals on groups of students and potential students with protected characteristics, including those of disability, minority, races, age and gender, and to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as care leavers.

Whilst many activities delivered under our Access Agreement are targeted at specific groups, the University does take an inclusive approach to those within cohorts, whether they share protected characteristics or not. Targeted outreach work and internal initiatives to promote student success take an integrated approach so as to benefit as broad a range of students as possible. Programme level initiatives to promote student success, for example, engage the cohort as a whole so as not to be selective and isolate those from under-represented groups.

The University's academic learning advisory work has a focus on inclusion in Learning and Teaching, reflected in the updated Learning and Teaching Strategy (2017). This is intended to embed equality into teaching practices and thereby improve retention and success for under-represented groups.

At the University, Student Support and Guidance (SSG) offers bespoke support packages to students with protected characteristics. Through the Student Support Project Officer role the department offers one-to-one support for mature students (age), those who are pregnant or have care responsibilities (pregnancy and maternity) and for care leavers or previously Looked-after children. An International Welfare Officer offers support to international students but also uses their specialist knowledge to support diverse students throughout the student body with religious and race related concerns. There is also a named contact for students who are experiencing issues with their gender or sexuality (covering the protected characteristics of gender, sexuality and gender reassignment).

SOG also offers disability support, for disabled students across the University who disclose physical impairments, mental health difficulties and specific learning needs. This department consists of specialists in funding and making reasonable adjustments for a variety of physical impairments, support for students with long term mental health difficulties and crisis management for students who may experience breakdown. The department also offers one-to-one sessions with Academic Skills Tutors (ASTs) who offer tailored learning strategies for SpLD students who have disclosed learning differences, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. In light of the changes to Disability Support Allowance, the assistive technologist and Disability Support team ensure that the student has all the equipment and training they need to be successful in their chosen course. The Disability Support team will continue to work with the wider University on implementing more inclusive learning and teaching approaches across the curriculum.

University-wide initiatives are developed through the Equality Forum, held in line with the Committee structure termly and chaired by the Pro VC with responsibility for Equality. The Forum oversees the University-wide Equality and Diversity strategy and objectives to ensure the University complies with and exceeds our institutional responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty 2012 (PSED). Any student (and staff) equality issues throughout all the University's main functions in all support and academic departments can be raised and discussed at this Forum. This informs long-term equality projects, such as the Athena SWAN Charter Mark, and opportunity for consultation on University equality issues is presented for staff and students through the open Forum. Students are also encouraged to attend and participate in the annual Diversity Festival fortnight; running since 2006. The festival champions diversity within the University and seeks to inform, celebrate and challenge those who attend with a range of events covering all Diversity areas. The University monitors the effects of its work on equality and diversity in part through an annual report analysing data on student intake, performance and progression according to particular characteristics, including age, disability and ethnicity, which is considered by the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee; this report is supported by a more detailed paper on diversity and achievement. It is worth emphasising, however, it can often be difficult to draw conclusions from some of this reporting due to the relatively small numbers of students with particular characteristics, such as BME. Results often identify inconsistent trends and year-on-year fluctuations which can be down to local factors.

## Provision of Information to Prospective Students

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The University will provide information about tuition fees (including aggregate cost), the University of Chester financial support schemes, and other information on student finance via its website. Tuition fees will be published at individual programme level and the current section on 'Finance' is regularly updated.

It will also make this information available through direct information and advice sessions for prospective students, notably through finance talks on Open Days, Applicant Days, and through general outreach activity. Information will also be included in offer letters and timely email communications to applicants, including how and when to apply for financial support. Information about tuition fees and financial support will also be provided to UCAS as soon as it is reasonable to do so.

Existing students will benefit from publications and direct advice provided by the University's Student Support and Guidance Team, in particular information relating to the support offered for students declaring a disability.

## Consultation with Students

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In framing this agreement, the University has consulted with Chester Students' Union (CSU) officers who have advised on the student perspective.

CSU representatives are involved in the planning and delivery of funded activity and have participated in discussions over the content of the University's Access Agreement. The CSU has been consulted over the proposed tuition fees and the planned form of intended benefits. Feedback from student representatives regarding preferred options for how the 'in kind' element (Aspire Credit) of financial support packages can best support and enhance the student experience has also informed the University's plans for financial awards going forward. CSU has confirmed its support for the Access Agreement 2018/19 and for the full range of student support and benefits packages proposed. In particular it welcomes the increased support offered by the University to improve student retention and successful outcomes for its students.

The CSU also has involvement and representation on implementation groups (such as Attendance Monitoring User Group, Engagement Analytics Steering Group etc.) and takes an active role in initiatives to promote student engagement and success at the University.