

Access and Participation Plan 2019-20

Aston University has demonstrated a sustained and long standing commitment to access, success and employability for its students. Since our founding as an institution in 1895, we have continued to challenge ourselves to provide initiatives which widen access, support student success and enhance graduate outcomes. We are a positive exemplar for widening access, retention and employability. We believe that we truly transform lives. Aston University’s 2018-2023 Strategy is structured around our key beneficiaries which include our students, businesses and organisations, and the wider Birmingham and the West Midlands region.

1. Assessment of current performance

At Aston University our student body is reflective of the demographics of the local community. Our largest student groups are:

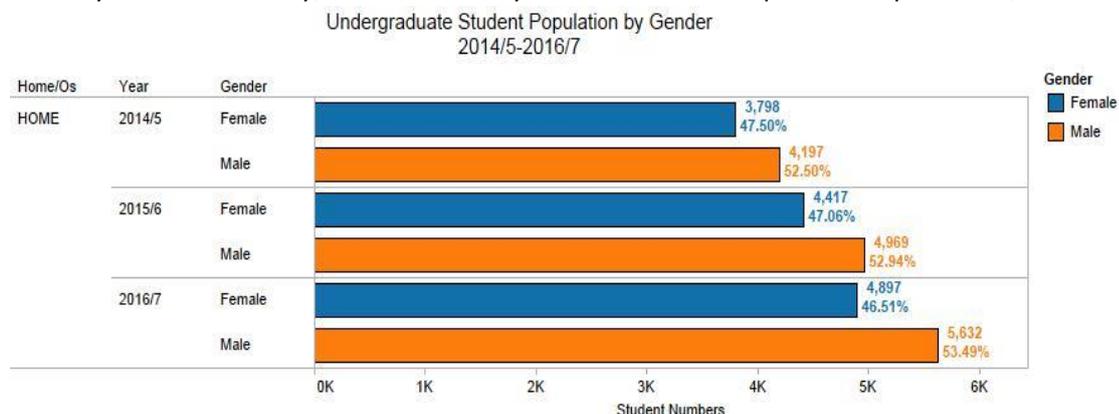
- Asian or Asian British (38.02%)
- White (34.47%)
- Below 20 years old (88.35%)
- From state schools (94.9%)
- From a low household income background of £42, 826 and below (48.6%)

We have examined our data on access to university in terms of household income, ethnicity and gender. Our initial examination of the data shows that Chinese and White British males are more likely to be from lower income families than Chinese and White British females (95% vs. 83% Chinese from lower income families, (71% vs. 67% White British from lower income families). Given our demographics and particular mix of academic subjects we are more successful in recruiting working class white male students than equivalent females which is contrary to the majority of the sector. Our Evaluation Group plan is to develop this model of intersectionality further so that we can better understand the data in relation to our population. We will also include additional characteristics in these analyses, including disability.

1.1 Access

1.1.1 Gender

At entry to the University, Aston University’s annual Student Equalities Report 2017/18 shows:

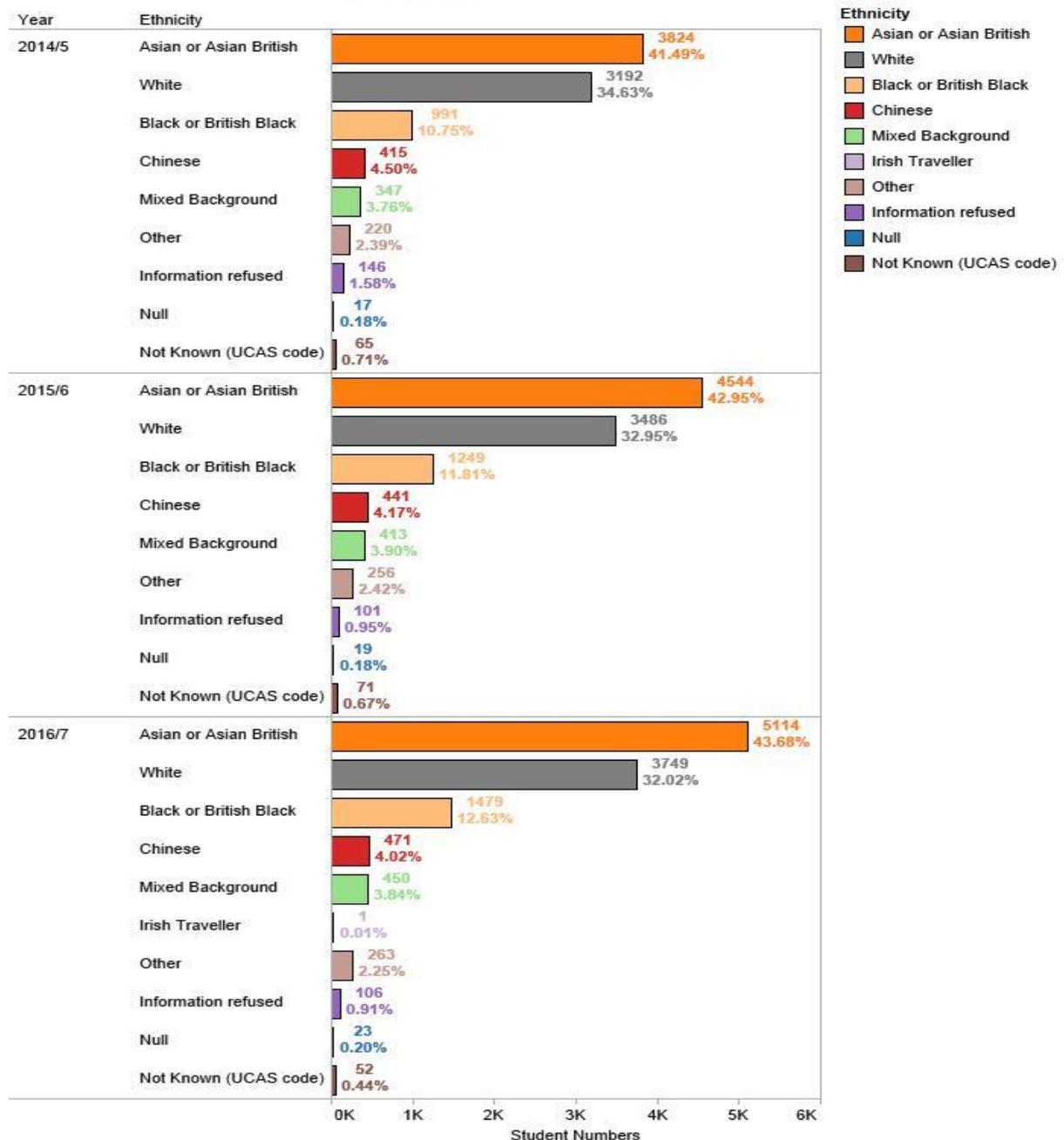


Aston University has had an increase of male students in relation to female students since 2014/15. The gender gap between female and male students on entry in 2016/17 was 7%. We have been successful in attracting a growing number of male students at undergraduate level since 2014/15, despite England’s national trend, which highlights a decline in male students accessing higher education. Recent HESA data (2015) shows a national participation gender gap of 13.4% favourable to females.

Aston’s position can be attributed to the subject portfolio of degree programmes (undergraduate, full time) that the University offers. Work is underway to develop alternative provision, such as degree apprenticeships and accelerated degrees, which we anticipate will change the gender balance. Due to the current gender gap on entry, Aston University will be targeting **female students** to study at the institution in greater numbers, particularly in some subject areas.

1.1.2 Ethnicity

Undergraduate Student Population by Ethnicity
2014/5-2016/7



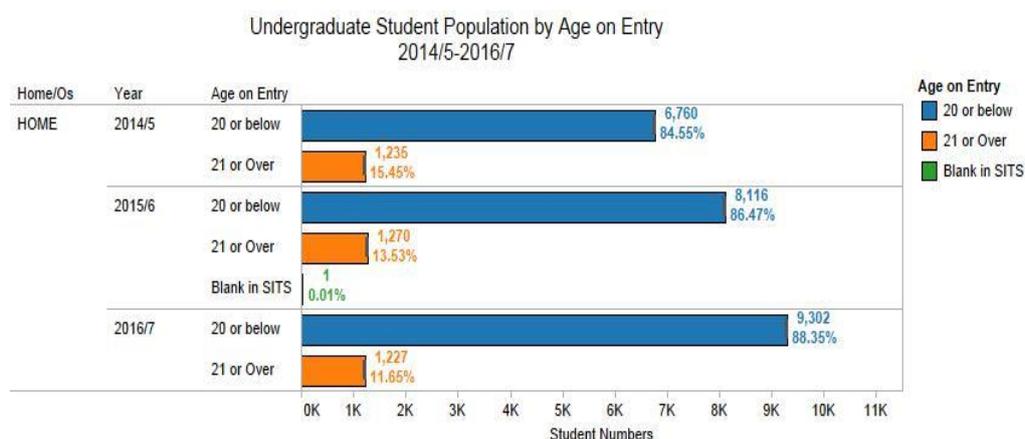
Aston University’s annual Student Equalities Report 2017/18 demonstrates the University’s diverse student population at undergraduate level.

Aston’s largest student group is consistently Asian or Asian British at 43.68% in 2016/17, followed by White at 32%. Although the student population has grown dramatically since 2015/15, groups of Black or Black British Students have not increased as much as other ethnicities.

HESA’s national benchmark for Black or Black British students entering higher education for 2016/17 is 5.4%. Whilst we acknowledge that we are above national benchmark for this student group at 12.63%, we will continue to **target Black Students** on entry to ensure this group grows in line with other student groups.

1.1.3 Age

On entry, the majority of undergraduate students are below 20 years old. Aston University’s annual Student Equalities Report 2017/8 shows:



Despite national trends which show a decline in mature students, Aston University has sustained the absolute number of mature learners since 2014/15 despite a significant growth in in students aged 20 years and below.

Aston University will, therefore, target **mature learners** at access. It is worth noting that the compulsory placement year sometimes discourages mature students, and we will expand our pilot of short work placements to encourage mature students to think about studying at Aston.

1.1.4 Care Leavers

Aston University has a small population of care leavers which has been declining since 2015/16, when we began collecting these data:

	Number of care leavers
2015/16	35
2016/17	32
2017/18	30

We have already increased our work with care leavers and have shown a strong commitment to the Birmingham Virtual School, as well as introducing targeted scholarships. This has not, however, made

the difference we were hoping for. Aston University will continue to target **Care Leavers** at Access and explore other areas of activity, to ensure the numbers of students from this target group grow.

1.1.5 Disability

Aston University has a growing population of undergraduate students who have declared a registered disability. The University's Annual Student Equalities Report shows that numbers have increased since 2014/15, but have remained steady as a percentage, due to the growth in overall student numbers.

At a more detailed level, using HEIDI, we have seen a large growth in students who have declared a mental health condition:

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
A long-standing illness or health condition	45	60	60
A physical impairment or mobility issues	35	40	45
Another disability, impairment or medical condition	65	85	90
Blind or a serious visual impairment	10	10	15
Deaf or a serious hearing impairment	10	15	20
Mental health condition	75	120	160
Social communication/Autistic spectrum disorder	30	35	30
Specific learning difficulty	220	265	290
Two or more conditions	25	50	50
Total With Known Disability	515	680	760

We do, however, acknowledge that we are below HESA and sector benchmarks for students declaring a disability who access higher education:

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Aston	6.5%	7.4%	7.5%
Sector	11.8%	12.5%	13.02%

We will, therefore, be creating a new target to reduce the participation gap between **students who declare a registered disability** and those who do not.

1.1.6 Household Income

Aston University has a good track record of attracting students from low income households. Internal data collected at enrolment shows us that we have maintained a steady number of students from this group, despite an increase in overall student numbers.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Above £42,876	782	880	895
Below £42,876	4,814	4,977	4,717

Aston University will continue to target students from **low household incomes** at access and work on reversing the declining trend.

1.1.7 Intersectionality

Although Aston University performs well on many of the broad measures of participation of students with various characteristics, we are also aware that students with particular combinations of characteristics may be less well represented. In addition, students with particular demographics are

less represented studying particular subjects. In particular, we therefore plan to target at entry:

- White males
- Females studying Engineering and Science related subjects
- Males studying Life and Health Sciences
- Black or Black British students

1.2 Attainment

Aston University was awarded gold status in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF2) in 2017. Our TEF3 metrics show at attainment level Aston University has seen a 4.21% percentage increase in students who have a declared disability and who have achieved a first class honours degree in 2016/17 which we view positively. Attainment by ethnicity is also positive. In 2016/17, there was a percentage increase in comparison to 2015/16 in the following areas:

- Asian or Asian British, First Class Degree: 2.14%
- Black or Black British, Upper Second Class Degree: 6.22%

There is an attainment gap, however, between Asian or Asian British students and White and Black or Black British students achieving a first class degree or upper second class degree and below. Although numbers of students achieving a first class or upper second degree are increasing, there still remains an attainment gap between BME and white students.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian or Asian British	79.7% 542	79.1% 653	82.9% 789
White	89.5% 531	85.7% 506	86.5% 592
Black or Black British	75.3% 107	71.1% 143	73.9% 173

Aston University's gender attainment for achieving a first or Upper Second Class Degree is 6%: 84.61% of females in comparison to 78.29% of males in 2016/17.

Aston University will, therefore, continue to target the largest attainment gap between **BME and non BME students**.

1.3 Continuation and Progression

Our recently published TEF3 metrics show that in terms of continuation, Aston University is above benchmark for all markers and any gaps are less than 6%, however we will maintain all interventions aimed at closing any continuation gaps that do exist. Our TEF3 metrics also show in terms of highly skilled employment or further study, our gaps between white and BME, and disabled and non-disabled are far smaller than in our benchmark. Our gap for young versus mature students is similar

to our benchmark data. We are above benchmark for all except white learners (4.1% below benchmark). We will, therefore, continue to work to close these gaps and enhance all students' employability.

At success TEF3 data shows Aston's position as follows:

	Age		National IMD		Ethnicity		Disability	
	Young	Mature	Q1/Q2	Q3/Q4/Q5	White	BME	Yes	No
Continuation	96.8%	90.2%	95.4%	96.8%	94.6%	96.9%	94.3%	96.2%
Benchmark	95.0%	87.7%	94.9%	95.2%	93.6%	94.5%	93.1%	94.2%
Highly skilled employment or further study	78.8%	88.2%	77.8%	81.5%	80.4%	79.5%	76.4%	80.2%
Benchmark	69.1%	79.5%	60.2%	R	84.1%	58.2%	58.5%	72.6%

Using the latest HESA data available to analyse Aston's graduate level destinations, we can see that Aston is above sector average for the proportion of graduates in professional level employment or further study for gender, ethnicity and disability.

1.3.1 Graduate Level Destinations by Gender

Gender	Aston 2014/15	Aston 2015/16	Sector 2014/15	Sector 2015/16
Female	80.0%	79.7%	72.6%	74.9%
Male	86.0%	80.2%	74.4%	75.9%
Grand Total	83.5%	79.5%	73.3%	75.4%

We are above sector average for the proportion of graduates in graduate level destinations and Aston's gender gap between males and females in professional level employment or further study is less than sector benchmarks.

1.3.2 Graduate Level Destinations by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Aston 2014/15	Aston 2015/16	Sector 2014/15	Sector 2015/16
Asian	84.4%	81.9%	71.2%	72.7%
Black	70.6%	76.2%	68.0%	70.9%
White	82.4%	79.7%	73.5%	75.6%
Grand Total	83.5%	79.5%	73.3%	75.4%

Although we are above sector average for each ethnicity group in professional level employment or further study, there is a 5.7% gap between Black and Asian graduate destinations. There is also a 2.7% gap between White and Asian students.

Aston University will, therefore, continue to target the **ethnicity gap at graduate level destinations**.

1.3.3 Graduate Level Destinations by Disability

Disability	Aston 2014/15	Aston 2015/16	Sector 2014/15	Sector 2015/16
Known Disability	73.3%	77.8%	70.8%	73.4%
No known disability/unknown	83.4%	79.6%	73.7%	75.7%
Grand Total	83.5%	79.5%	73.3%	75.4%

This data set shows that Aston has a 1.8% gap at graduate level destinations between those students who have declared a disability and those who have not. Aston University will continue to target **students with a declared disability** to increase progression even further.

1.4 Summary

We have examined the data available to the University in order to make strategic and informed choices about our investment and activities for target groups during the full student life cycle. On entry, Aston University will be targeting mature learners and encouraging learners with disabilities to declare their disability, in order to close the participation gaps between these groups at Aston and sector and a whole.

We will also continue to target students from low household incomes, female students, care leavers and students who meet multiple markers of disadvantage such as:

- From Low Participation Neighbourhoods
- First in their families to access Higher Education
- With protected characteristics
- In receipt of free school meals

At Success and Progression; Aston University will continue its aim to close the attainment gap between BME and White students who achieve a 2.1/2.2. Finally, Aston University will also continue to target black or black British and white students, and students with a registered disability to encourage them to take up work placements/experience in order to close the gaps identified at graduate level destination.

We know that ultimately, getting students on placement increases their chances of obtaining a graduate level job. In addition, our own research (Moores, Birdi and Higson, 2017) shows that such placement experience helps to narrow the BME attainment gap whilst at university, even when prior attainment is controlled for.

2. Ambition and strategy

Our ambition is to increase and improve access to Aston University and Higher Education more widely, particularly for those coming from local community, in order that we can create the employable graduates that will support our region to thrive.

2.1 Access

In our assessment of current performance we have shown that we have been highly successful at attracting BAME students, students with low household incomes, and male students. We have identified a need to attract more female students, more black students, more disabled students and more mature students. Aston University will, however, continue to build on a well-established track record of working with schools and colleges which have significant indicators of deprivation to widen

participation at access, including those who meet multiple measures of disadvantage. Aston works in some of the most deprived communities in the UK, 46% of our targeted schools and colleges fall in Polar3 Q1 and Q2 classification areas. Of those 46%, 93% of these identified secondary schools have an IMD score of 60% or above and 100% of the primary schools the University works with also have an IMD score of 60% and above. This reaffirms the need to provide support to ensure our local community thrives.

We will continue the interventions from our extensive Outreach portfolio which shows impact linked to aspiration and attainment. These will include interventions aimed at extending access to STEM and professional subjects specifically aimed at female students and other disadvantaged groups. The University is also committed to new outreach work, in line with the guidance issued by OfS, which includes the introduction of intensive and progressive two year pathway programmes aligned to each Aston academic School. The University will also be increasing its primary outreach work to ensure that interventions are sustainable, long term, intensive and not one off events which our research shows, does not make an impact at primary age.

One of the key challenges for Aston University, identified by internal, national and HESA data, is to increase the number of mature learners accessing higher education at undergraduate level. In response to this we will be consolidating our mature student outreach work into one department and raising the profile of higher education for mature students with our key feeder colleges nationally.

Another challenge for Aston University is to increase the number of students declaring a registered disability accessing higher education. We will be building on previous work in this area to ensure that our marketing materials have a higher profile visual representation of this cohort of students. We have made great strides on gender and BME diversity, but recognise that there is still work to do on disability representation.

We will also be increasing the number of case studies and student voice representation involving learners from target groups including, but not limited to, students with a registered disability and mature learners. We will also provide additional support for students to become student ambassadors alongside their first year of study

Aston University has an ambition to increase the number of Care Leavers at the University by 10% year on year. We are a key member of the West Midlands Care Leavers Network. The network enables staff from the region to share good practice in this area.

Aston already works with local Care Leaver/LACES support teams in the region to organise campus visit days for groups of students in care. We also host networking/information events on campus for carers and 'virtual school' coordinators to inform them of the support available from Aston and other Universities. Our scholarships directed at Care Leavers has been increased for 2017/18 to include scholarships at Masters Level.

The University is a founding member of the institutionally funded Aimhigher West Midlands partnership with University of Birmingham, Birmingham City University, University College Birmingham and the University of Worcester, working with young people facing multiple dimensions of disadvantage. This provides a progressive and integrated programme of support and advice including the UniFest Summer School programme and regional Mentoring Scheme, to widen participation in HE at sector level.

The partnership acts as a single point of contact to help schools make the most of the support available. The partnership aims to engage 1,000 young people per year in its intensive outreach and attainment building activity. Jointly-funding the Aimhigher Data Service enables us to track participants, whose GCSE outcomes and rates of entry to HE exceed those of their disadvantaged peers.

The University is also a member of Aimhigher Plus, one of the largest of 29 consortia delivering the National Collaborative Outreach Programme. We have designed a new, innovative programme of activity to address the lower than expected progression to higher education of young people in Year Groups 9 to 13 living in 25 identified gap wards in our region. Our activity has been designed to complement our institutional and Access Agreement funded Aimhigher activity.

2.2 Success

For success, our ambition is to continue to narrow the continuation gap between all benchmarked groups identified in our recent TEF3 data in the assessment section.

Aston University will continue its strategy to have 100% of its undergraduate student cohort taking part in a work placement or study experience. We anticipate that this integrated approach will continue to offer all of our graduates excellent employment prospects and help raise the prospects of our targeted groups.

In addition to the support that we offer other groups of students, Aston University is proposing a range of financial support available to those students identified in the assessment above:

Support	Amount
Aston Care Leavers Scholarship	£1,250 per year
Aston Placement Scholarship (Unpaid or overseas placement, BBB+ at A level, Household Income below £25,000)	£1,250 placement year only
Vice Chancellor's Achievement Scholarship (BBB+ or equivalent at A level, for any students who meet disadvantaged markers)	£1,000 (Year 0/1 only)
Food, Printing, Books Scholarship (Students who have a household income of £25,000 and below)	£150 (Year 0/1 only)

Our financial support is evaluated annually through our scholarships survey and is paid to students either via bank transfer or a fee discount can be applied if the student chooses. In 2019/20 Aston University will be introducing a new scholarship, the Vice Chancellor's Achievement Scholarship. Our scholarship support is aimed at supporting continuation of talented students from families with lower household incomes. We also believe that it raises school and college attainment for students from a widening participation background by being based on post 16 grade outcomes.

Our commitment to graduate-level employment is underlined by our investment in Placement Scholarships to ensure any students who are taking unpaid or overseas placements or come from low income households are financially supported throughout their placement year.

Aston's retention and employability record remains amongst the best in the country. We are, however, continuing to set ourselves ambitious targets for retention and employability because we see this as the best way to build on Aston's expertise in these areas and provide students, particularly from under-represented groups, with a strong start in their professional life.

All degree programmes must have a compulsory placement element included which is aimed at supporting students to achieve their maximum personal development during their time at university no matter where their starting point is. The placement team has developed in order to support the growing number of students unable to take a full-time traditional year-long placement which can often be because of a WP characteristic for e.g. mature learner, student with caring responsibilities or even a parent themselves. This allows the student still to benefit from the placement opportunity and develop their hard and soft skills toolkit enhancing their overall employability.

In order to ensure that new degree programmes are aligned with our beneficiary groups as outlined in the 2018-2023 Strategy, a process has been developed that ensures the academic proposer has considered a broad remit of influencers. These include anticipated subject performance and how it would rank Aston compared to the sector, anticipated entry requirements compared to those of similar institutions and where they are ranked with a similar profile, the labour market and employer demand for both placement opportunities and graduate jobs and more broadly potential labour market or policy changes that could be impactful/influential. This approach ensures we are providing courses that meet the needs of a changing economy both inside and outside the region, identifying skills gaps and using intelligence from the Local Enterprise Partnership and the wider skills agenda to inform decision making. Courses are 'fit for purpose' with employer input and responding to the needs for both hard and soft skills, which in turn should lead to be more graduates securing a positive destination in a graduate job or further study.

An initiative across Careers and Placements that has been developing over the past 12 months is the effective use of data gathered from 'careers registration' - a survey undertaken by all students either enrolling for the first time or re-enrolling in later years. This data asks a series of questions which supports the student to identify with a set of statements enabling the Careers and Placements team to understand their mind-set when it comes to 'careers/placements readiness'. Students who demonstrate low or no interest in placement opportunities are targeted by a calling team in order to engage them in the placement process and help them overcome barriers - real or perceived - and careers consultants actively work with subject areas where high numbers of students have not started their career planning journey.

Aston has over 1,500 active student peer mentors working with other Aston students in earlier years. We will continue to offer mentoring to all undergraduates and postgraduates throughout the student lifecycle. Our professional mentoring programme has been enhanced and developed over the last 12 months and links an external Business Professional with a 2nd year or final year student. The scheme has been successful in supporting students secure their placement for their third year and build in confidence to succeed in the competitive recruitment process. We believe that peer to peer mentoring has a positive impact on supporting retention, and that students who act as mentors are more likely to attain a first class or upper second class degree.

2.3 Progression

At Progression our ambition is to ensure that to ensure that all of our continuing students progress to further study or graduate level employment should they desire it.

Aston University was one of the 20 pilot projects for a HEFCE-funded project in the 2014/15 academic year, which offered funding and support for Home and EU postgraduate students through the Postgraduate Support Scheme (PSS). The objective of the pilot was to widen participation at postgraduate level, and to fill the funding gap before the Postgraduate Loans Scheme came into being in 2016. We used this scheme to scope out support which motivated Masters students best, and we are still implementing the outcomes. Our interventions include scholarships for care leavers and a package of additional support including mentoring, careers advice and internships.

During 2015/16 we have funding from the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to pilot a key strategic initiative to bolster the confidence and capability of our students in terms of social capital and employability. This led to interventions in each year of study, including raising the aspirations of first years via our Personal Tutoring scheme; peer mentoring of Social Science students to encourage them to do a placement year; developing some flexible placement options to allow more students to benefit from the placement year; and supporting academics to design programmes which build on the learning of the placement year when students return to their final year. This work has been embedded in 2017/18 and we are committed to continuing this project beyond this throughout 2019/20.

Aston also supports students to develop their Enterprise and Entrepreneurship skills through a variety of events and workshops through to business incubation and development. Nurturing these skills ensures our graduates have a range of skills to prepare them for their future. A recent extension of ERDF funding will allow us to expand this work.

Our Students' Union Job Shop will continue to offer term time job opportunities. The Job Shop evaluates the opportunities it offers to ensure both the nature of the work and the number of hours involved makes it suitable to take on alongside full-time study, and that the student will gain a combination of confidence, commercial awareness and both hard and soft employability skills from the experience.

Aston University has recognised the importance of languages as a tool to support social mobility. We will therefore continue to offer free modern foreign languages tuition to all first year undergraduate students via our Languages for All programme. We are committed to ensuring outward mobility for those students who may not have had this opportunity prior to studying with us.

This will build on our collaborative outreach work Routes into Languages which we have committed to funding now that funding for this initiative is no longer available. We will also continue to build strong partnerships with institutions and employers overseas to ensure that students have the opportunity to take work placements or study abroad.

2.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

For some of our projects, we are satisfied with our evaluation strategies and can show that our interventions have a significant impact. For other projects, we still need to improve on this aspect. We hold annual Access and Participation monitoring and evaluation group meetings to discuss the best evaluation strategies for the different areas and to disseminate our results and to monitor our performance against targets. In addition, we have appointed a research lead for monitoring and evaluation who liaises with the different groups involved throughout the year.

In some cases, the result of the recommendations made by the monitoring and evaluation group, will involve restructuring our projects so that evaluation is feasible, including ensuring that sample sizes are large enough and that interventions are clearly defined enough in order to have a realistic chance of measuring impact and monitoring success against targets. We plan to bring a greater focus to what we do and streamline and standardise provision to enable accurate assessments of impact to be made and to enable us to understand where we need to amend interventions to make them more successful. Concurrently, we would also appreciate the opportunity to amend our targets so that they are impact rather than input focused. Historically, our outreach work has focused on numbers of people seen, rather than impact made. We welcome the change of approach from the OfS here, with the increased focus on impact, but need to align our targets to this approach so that we are not perceived as failing to meet our targets in this regard.

We can already show evidence of several of our projects working well. Our Learning Development Centre, for example, have provided inferential statistics showing that mature learners, learners with disabilities, BME learners, care leavers, and learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are all more likely to achieve higher performance in their university level studies if they have attended the centre versus if they have not.

We know that ultimately, encouraging students to go on placement increases their chances of getting a graduate job (e.g. Moores and Reddy, 2012). In addition, our own research (Moores, Birdi and Higson, 2017) shows that students who have been on placement have a narrower BME attainment gap whilst at university, even when prior attainment is controlled for. We have published this evidence in our institution and anticipate that it will influence practice across the sector. In addition,

using funds from a HEFCE based project, we also hope to establish a causal link between going on placement and improved degree attainment by increasing the number of BME students going on placement from particular degree programmes. We aim to publish and disseminate the results of this project in the academic literature.

We have now evaluated the success of our first year scholarships using logistic regression method recommended by OfS. The results of our analysis showed that first year scholarships are effective at levelling the playing field in terms of continuation rates between students from households with higher and lower income levels, whilst students from lower income households who do not receive financial support are significantly less likely to continue with their studies.

For shorter interventions such as masterclasses, we will continue to gather student opinions on the efficacy of these for a short term measure, but will also track students via HEAT so that we can see whether we have had a demonstrable impact on application behaviour and eventual access to University.

Should Aston University have areas for improvement which are identified through our monitoring and evaluation measures, the university will act accordingly to ensure quick interventions are identified to ensure targets are met.

2.5 Equality and Diversity

Aston University's Access and Participation Plan works alongside the University's equality and diversity strategy. The Access and Participation Plan goes through an annual equality impact assessment carried out by a separate third party within the university. All internal data used in the Access and Participation Plan is from the University's annual Student Equalities Report and any recommendations made by the student equalities report is reflected in both the Access and Participation Plan as well as the Equality and Diversity Strategy at Aston. We reaffirm our commitment to pay due regard to our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

3. Access, student success and progression measures

3.1 Access

To achieve our ambition of supporting our local community to thrive, we will undertake the following activity:

3.1.1 Primary School interventions

We will expand our already extensive outreach to Primary School learners (and their parents/teachers/advisers) to ensure they recognise university as part of their future. This will include:

- The introduction of Aston Adventure. This programme is for students in years 5 and 6 to introduce the idea of university and raise aspirations. Students learn about university in year 5 and start thinking about their future before visiting Aston University campus in year 6 for a campus day and graduation event
- The expansions of Aspire to Aston, a progressive programme for students in years 7-10 from local, disadvantaged areas to raise aspirations and help them to see the value in higher education. Students learn about university, build soft skills and visit the Aston University campus
- Aston will also continue its commitment to its primary sports outreach event – Aston Olympians. The success of the event has resulted in creating an additional day of engagement in 2018. This will mean the University will engage with over 200 primary school students over a three day period which will be of no cost to any students or primary schools taking part.

Target beneficiaries: Primary School Learners, students from Low Household Income families, students from schools with high IMD.

3.1.2 Mentoring and Tutoring

As well as collaborative working as part of Aimhigher West Midlands, Aston has been delivering intensive and long-term mentoring and tutoring to secondary school learners at all Key Stages. We will:

- Continue the number of student mentors and tutors working in targeted regional schools and colleges
- Continue to address the low access rates of BME and both genders into higher education programmes by offering mentoring and tutoring into the region's most deprived wards
- Create and implement a mentoring stream aimed at White males from low household incomes

Target beneficiaries: all target groups at access.

3.1.3 Employability

We will continue to organise our hugely popular Access to Professional Careers and Beyond Year 12 conferences for Year 11-13 students in partnership with graduate employers and professional institutes.

The University will continue to provide pre-entry careers support and guidance for any school/college requesting the service. 'Pre-Entry Employability Adviser' provides on and off-campus talks and workshops to support to Year 11 pupils and sixth formers. We commit to continuing this support in 2019/20, providing invaluable guidance in line with the government's aims to support young people through their decision-making.

Aston has committed to an increase in Masterclass attendance. We recognise the importance of such activities in inspiring and engaging young learners. We aim to ensure 1,000 students from target schools and colleges to take part in 2019/20.

We recognise demands on schools, particularly those with additional support needs for their pupils, and will continue to deliver off-campus Masterclass sessions to hard-to-reach pupils and those with disabilities for whom mobility may be an issue.

Target beneficiaries: all target groups at access.

3.1.4 Mature Students

To meet the sector wide challenges to increase the number of mature students accessing higher education, Aston University will:

- Continue its annual University Experience Day which offers mature students on Access Courses from local FE Colleges an opportunity to visit the University, and incorporates information, advice and guidance on HE study and support opportunities
- Increase collaboration with the local FE sector facilitates a College Visiting Programme whereby our current students offer information and advice about life at university to students on Access courses
- Continue to offer pre-arrival e-mentoring support via the Peer Mentoring programme to encourage their smooth transition
- Continue to offer short work placement development

Our work based Foundation Degrees impact positively on our mature, part-time numbers. These mature students are also offered mentoring support. A well-established Mature Students' Induction Programme is offered before the start of term to facilitate transition into the HE environment, combining study skills sessions and social activities designed to support this group of learners.

Target beneficiaries: mature learners.

3.1.5 Progression Pathways

Aston University will be creating a new set of pathway programmes aimed specifically at learners who meet multiple markers of deprivation. The pathway programmes will be aligned to each Aston University academic school and will be a two year progressive programme. Through small group mentoring sessions from current Aston University undergraduates and a three day non-residential Summer Research Project led by our academics, we hope to raise aspirations and improve academic attainment for participants, particularly female students.

From 2017/18, our Pathway to Healthcare programme will positively impact at least one hundred learners per annum from these schools/colleges by providing GP work experience, UCAS personal statement-writing workshops, interview/assessment preparation, and intensive A Level tutoring in the sciences. From this programme will be drawn the first year MBChB entrants, whilst the remainder will have been prepared for applications to other medical schools or to related science courses at Aston or other institutions. All one hundred Pathway to Healthcare students will also have benefited from online mentoring provided by The Brightside Trust, and in future years our current medical students will act as mentors to widening participation cohorts on the programme. By 2020 the University hopes to have 100 places ring fenced for students from a widening participation background. The pathways will seek to empower Year 12 students who are considering studying at university to confidently make decisions about their progression to Higher Education.

The University will be welcoming its first cohort of undergraduate medical students to its new Medical School in September 2018. Our Medical School model will provide up to twenty-three first year places annually for pupils attending schools and colleges in the top ten percent most deprived neighbourhoods in the city. We have also recently received approval for an additional 100 home places for first year applicants from 2019. This will allow us to increase the number of medical students from widening participation backgrounds further.

Target beneficiaries: all target groups at access.

3.1.6 Supporting Teachers, Advisors and Parents

In 2019/20 we will host our 26th annual Admissions Conference for Teachers and Advisers. The 2017/18 event was attended by 230 teachers and counsellors from around the UK, and at zero cost to participants. The University will also be running bespoke support sessions on navigating confirmation for school staff during our annual July open day.

Aston University also has an extensive online resource portfolio on the student recruitment and outreach section of the University website. This section is aimed at providing sector updates, useful information on UCAS and the application cycle, finance and university life for both teachers and parents. Finally, we will continue our Parents' Higher Education twilight sessions, where we offer information on university finance and entry processes to parents and guardians from across the West Midlands.

Target beneficiaries: all target groups at access.

3.1.7 Partnerships

Aston has developed multiple lasting relationships with key school and college providers in the region, something which we are committed to continuing and improving. Outreach staff members sit on cross-working groups at Sandwell Academy, Birmingham Metropolitan College, and Solihull Sixth

Form, among others. These ensure the providers understand the higher education landscape and have a voice in how we construct our outreach programmes to best serve their needs.

Beyond committee membership, many Aston staff serve as governors in schools and colleges. Aston also works closely with the Titan Partnership. Titan is a charity which focuses on inclusion, skills and employability to help students from 4-18 years old create opportunity and gain meaningful and sustainable employment to generate prosperity for themselves, their families and their communities. We support Titan by providing access to on and off-campus outreach for Titan schools, hosting Aston Olympians for no cost to schools or participants and supporting cross-Birmingham initiatives such as Titan's annual STEM Fair.

The Aston University Engineering Academy (a University Technical College sponsored by Aston University) opened close to campus in September 2012. A team of Aston students is working as mentors/tutors for learners at the Academy to raise aspirations for GCSE maths and English students who are at risk of failure. We will continue this provision in 2019/20.

The Social Mobility Foundation's (SMF) inaugural Birmingham office has been located at Aston University since 2016. SMF work intensively with 1,200 high-achieving Year 12 students every year who are academically gifted and are either personally eligible for Free School Meals or the first generation in their families to be going to university. Participating students in the West Midlands must attend a school where at least 20% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals. The SMF works with at least 120 local Year 12s per year – the greatest number outside of London – and Aston supports their efforts to increase this figure by providing free-of-charge office space and the expertise of Aston's outreach staff.

Target beneficiaries: students from low household income families, students from schools with high IMDs and all other target groups at access.

3.2 Success

We are committed to meet our success ambition by narrowing the continuation gaps between those learners in our target groups, specifically mature adult learners, and those not in our target groups. We will also continue our ambition to have 100% of our undergraduate student cohort take part in a work placement or experience.

3.2.1 Monitoring progress and engagement

We will continue to implement the findings from the University's Learner analytics project. The University has been conducting a learner analytics project since 2016, which has included the purchasing of attendance recording software to allow staff to identify students who are at risk of non-completion much earlier than in previous years. We will also continue to implement the attendance recording software and other relevant information sources to increase the scope of target groups to ensure any learners at risk of non-continuation, withdrawal or failure are picked up and provided with early intervention

3.2.2 Ensure high quality teaching and academic support for all

We will ensure that all new staff undertake the HE Academy-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice, and raise the number of academic staff who are Fellows of the HE Academy beyond the current 55% level (already double the national average) to ensure the quality of Aston University's teaching. We will also continue to implement findings from the University's Learning and Teaching Committee's Personal Tutor Policy review. Findings included proactive interventions at key transition points in student learning.

We will increase the level of Mathematics support in the Learning Development Centre, moving from term time only support to providing year round support. The LDC is also in its final stages of producing an online Mathematics programme for all students, available at pre and post entry to Aston University.

The Learning Development Centre will also continue to offer academic support through subject embedded and generic workshop programmes, one to one advice for academic writing and study skills support, and access to specialist Mathematics support. The Learning Development Centre will also provide flexible learning to off-campus and part time Aston students via the University virtual learning environment, Blackboard.

3.2.3 Support mature students and students with disabilities

To ensure success for Mature Learners through each stage of the student lifecycle, the University will ensure a dedicated member of staff is in place to support mature students. The staff member's role is to offer practical and financial support throughout the mature students' studies, including supporting the thriving Mature Students' Society and the Mature Student Handbook.

To ensure success for learners who have declared a registered disability Aston University will: ensure appropriate support to facilitate their learning; provide support to staff to facilitate their teaching of students who declare a disability when appropriate; continue to recruit disability specialist members of staff. The University has a dyslexia and mental health specialist to meet the needs of the growing undergraduate cohort who declare this disability. We will also continue with our built in contingency of £250,000 per annum to cover the costs of possible changes to Disabled Students' Allowance.

Target beneficiaries: all target groups at success.

3.3 Progression

Our progression ambition is to ensure that 100% of continuing students' progress onto further education or graduate level employment by 2023.

We believe our strategic approach to interventions at key points in the student lifecycle will help the University to achieve this aim. Aston University will define its success through narrowing any gaps at degree attainment and job attainment.

3.3.1 Supporting progression through placement support

The University leads a HEFCE Catalyst Project; Levelling the Playing Field through Work-Based Learning – Addressing Differential Graduate Employability Outcomes. The project seeks to improve employment and graduate level employment rates for disabled, Black Minority Ethnic (BME) and low Socio Economic Status (low SES) students by: (i) scaling-up and re-focusing existing proven employability engagement initiatives and (ii) supporting partners to introduce new initiatives drawn from other partners' experience. Over two years the project will engage with 1800 students. The project is using a variety of proven employability interventions to engage target students. Up-scaling and actively targeting these activities at the students which will benefit most to increase placement up-take and ultimately level the playing field in graduate employment outcomes.

Trends across partner institutions align with HEFCE's findings of differential graduate employment outcomes for different student groups. Data from across the partners show up to a 10% difference in graduate-level employment for Widening Participation (WP) versus non WP graduates, with the latter up to three times more likely to be unemployed. There is also up to 12% difference in graduate-level employment for BME against non BME graduates.

3.3.2 Offering alternatives

Through two Short Placement pilot initiatives and a small research run by the Careers and Placement Team, it was identified that a small percentage of students are 'unable' to take a year-long placement. This is due to significant influencing factors such as acute health issues, disability, caring responsibilities and other life circumstances. In order to support these students to gain work experience, a flexible short placement model has been designed, namely a period of graduate level work experience with learning outcomes associated that will be assessed. To encourage mature students to apply we will expand this work.

A dedicated Short-Placements Coordinator works with these students to support their placement search and preparation, matching them to suitable employers who meet their needs and can offer the flexibility required by the student's personal circumstances. Student's referrals for short placements come from the wider Placements Team and academics when interacting with students, identifying those suitable for the short placement option, who need that flexibility as part of their employability journey towards work readiness.

TalentBank is a process of identifying difficult to reach, disengaged students and offering tailored recruitment support to help them secure a placement. Talent Bank benefits include:

- The Placements Team proactively contacting students who have not engaged with the services
- The Placements Team seeking opportunities on the students' behalf, matching students' preferences with employer requirements
- 'Fast Track' networking events where students can meet placement employers with live vacancies
- Pre-event preparation session to ensure students are employer-ready
- Motivation event to build resilience, reinstate confidence and boost skills

To encourage more students to study at Aston, a new Outward Mobility Champion role has been designed to support students with disabilities to take up a placement abroad. This role is held by a specialist staff member from the Enabling Team who understands the challenges that those students face as part of the placement journey. Working closely with Placements Team, more students are encouraged to go overseas as part of the placement year.

3.3.3 Listening to students

The aim of the Careers and Placements Associates initiative is to provide a student voice throughout the work of the Department and, as a result, to increase the number of students who engage with employability services, increasing placements uptake and graduate outcomes. The 'Careers and Placements Associates' focus is to support the design, development and delivery of key student facing services, ensuring that what the department offers, meet the needs of Aston students, particularly those from differential groups, students who need extra support and tend to engage less.

C+P Associates are student ambassadors who have returned from placement and support second year students with their placement search and preparation. In a proactive way, Associates deliver a menu of peer-to-peer support activities, act as role models and add student voice when designing and delivering employability services. This is particularly important to reach students from differential groups, who have longer distance to travel in their employability journey, for whom C+P interactions and interventions have a bigger effect.

3.3.4 Placement mentoring

All second year students are offered the opportunity to be matched to a Placement Peer Mentor to give them support during their placement search. Mentors are either students currently on placement or Final Years who have recently completed a placement. This particular strand of the Peer Mentoring scheme has been extended to ensure that students who take longer to secure a placement are still able to access this support later in the academic year. Unplaced students are contacted in the spring and invited to be matched to a mentor anytime during the spring and summer terms up until they successfully secure a placement.

4. Evaluation measures

We will use a number of methods to evaluate whether our access activity supports our aims and targets. This will include:

- Using HEAT to track the participation of students from pre 16 – entry to higher education
- Pre and post event evaluation to ensure that each interventions aims are met (whilst recognising the varying aims of each intervention)
- Showing an increase in attainment for those participants who take part in those interventions
- Showing an increase in the numbers of students identified in the target section at enrolment

We will use the following evaluation measures to ensure the activity we are undertaking at Success and progression meets our ambitions:

- Our Learning Development Centre's extensive evaluation methods to ensure learning access support from the LDC are benefitting from the support
- Our Annual Student Equality and Diversity Report to monitor our student body through the lifecycle
- We will continue to monitor our placements ambition through the number of students accessing a work placement or industry experience during their degree.

Our HEFCE Catalyst project will be fully evaluated in terms of whether it is successful in closing employment outcomes gaps for BME students

5. Investment

Over the past two years Aston has begun the process of rebalancing its investments in favour of success, progression and access whilst retaining a core scholarship package, particularly supporting care leavers and students taking a placement year/year abroad.

In 2019/20 the University will spend £5,340,842 on access, success and progression which is 20.5% of its higher income fee.

We will be introducing a new scholarship specifically aimed at increasing attainment for students from a widening participation background in 2019/20 and will ensure students who have a low household income are given a sum of £150 in their first year of study to help them with costs associated with their chosen degree programme. These plans have been approved by Aston University Senate and Council, which include Aston students, graduates and representatives from secondary education, business and community organisations.

Overall expenditure on OfS countable access, progression and success activities is expected to rise from £3.5M in 2017/18 to £5.6M in 2022/23. Access, Success and Progression spend will increase from £4.0M in 2019/20 to £4.2M in 2022/23.

We are committed to maintaining our sector-leading record for accessible excellence and have set challenging access, success, progression and outreach activity targets from 2019/20 to 2022/23. We are also committed to investing in targeted activities that have evidence-based impact and which exploit economies of scale, for example via collaboration with other HEIs and by centralising services such as placements support and the University's admissions teams.

6. Provision of information to students

We have consulted with Aston Student's Union and shared our Access and Participation Plan. Any feedback has been incorporated. The Student Union Vice President for Education is part of a number of advisory groups which shape the Access and Participation Plan including but not exclusive to – The Scholarship Strategy Group and The Teaching and Learning Committee. The VP for Education was also instrumental in the decision to award students £100 for books in their first year of study.

Students will also form part of the monitoring and evaluation group. All students who take part in interventions evaluate the impact of the intervention and Aston University students who take part in Outreach schemes also fill in pre and post scheme evaluation forms, as well as take part in consultation focus groups for new outreach initiatives.

Prospective students are provided with information on financial support through the University prospectus and on the Aston University website. Students will also receive information on fees and financial support available by email through the admissions process. Current students receive information regarding financial support through their studies via their University portal. All financial support available to students is set out on the Aston University website, as is fee information. The University will also ensure that we will publish this plan on the University website.

* course type not listed.

Full-time and part-time course fee levels for 2019-20 entrants.

Please enter inflationary statement in the free text box below.

The University may increase fees in line with any inflationary uplift as determined by the UK Government, if permitted by law or government policy, in subsequent years of your course. It is anticipated that such increases would be linked to RPI (the Retail Price Index excluding mortgage interest payments).

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£9,250
Foundation degree		£9,250
Foundation year / Year 0		£9,250
HNC / HND		*
CertHE / DipHE		*
Postgraduate ITT		*
Accelerated degree		*
Sandwich year		£1,250
Erasmus and overseas study years		£1,250
Other	Integrated work based learning year	£4,625
Franchise full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		*
Foundation degree		*
Foundation year / Year 0		*
HNC / HND		*
CertHE / DipHE		*
Postgraduate ITT		*
Accelerated degree		*
Sandwich year		*
Erasmus and overseas study years		*
Other		*
Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£6,935
Foundation degree		*
Foundation year / Year 0		*
HNC / HND		*
CertHE / DipHE		*
Postgraduate ITT		*
Accelerated degree		*
Sandwich year		*
Erasmus and overseas study years		*
Other		*

Table 8a - Statistical targets and milestones relating to your applicants, entrants or student body

Reference number	Stage of the lifecycle (drop-down menu)	Main target type (drop-down menu)	Target type (drop-down menu)	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this a collaborative target? (drop-down menu)	Baseline year (drop-down menu)	Baseline data	Yearly milestones (numeric where possible, however you may use text)					Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)
								2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
T16a_01	Student success	Multiple	HESA T3a - No longer in HE after 1 year (All, full-time, first degree entrants)	To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for non-continuation rates of students	No	2014-15	3.2%	3%	3%	3%	3%		latest HESA benchmark 6.5%
T16a_02	Progression	Multiple	Other statistic - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)	To meet or outperform HESA benchmark for % of full-time graduates in employment (including further study)	No	2013-14	91.7%	95%	95%	95%	95%		latest HESA benchmark 91.8%
T16a_03	Other/Multiple stages	Multiple	Other statistic - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)	To increase percentage of eligible students who undertake a uk/overseas work placement or study period abroad	No	2012-13	60.4%	85%	90%	100%	100%		internal data based on Careers and Placements team reports and University Council KPIs, including pre-registration year for some Aston degree programmes
T16a_04	Access	Low participation neighbourhoods (LPN)	HESA T1b - Low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3) (Young, full-time, undergraduate entrants)	To increase % of intake of students in POLAR3 Quintile 1	No	2014-15	10.3%	11.3%	11.6%	12%	12.5%		latest HESA benchmark (location adjusted) 10.5%
T16a_05	Access	Ethnicity	Other statistic - Ethnicity (please give details in the next column)	To increase the number of black students on undergraduate degree programmes	No	2014-15	10.75%	12%	13%	14%	15%	16%	Internal data (Registry). Self-declared 'Black or Black British' student population
T16a_06	Access	Care-leavers	Other statistic - Care-leavers (please give details in the next column)	To meet or outperform target for number of care-leavers enrolling on programmes at Aston	No	2015-16	9	12	13	15	17		10% annual increase sought. Internal data - self-declared care-leavers at Aston across undergraduate and master's study
T16a_07	Student success	Mature	HESA T3a - No longer in HE after 1 year (Mature, full-time, first degree entrants)	To meet or outperform the HESA benchmark for mature progression	No	2014-15	10.4%	9.1%	8.8%	8.5%	8.25%		Latest HESA benchmark 13.1%. 10.4% is non-continuation rate for mature students.
T16a_08	Student success	Ethnicity	Other statistic - Ethnicity (please give details in the next column)	To narrow further the gap between BME and white degree achievement	No	2013-14	10%	7%	6%	4%	4%		Internal data showing 10% attainment gap between white and BME graduates
T16a_09	Progression	Multiple	Other statistic - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)	To meet or outperform the sector using league tables	No	2014-15	30th	38th	N/A	N/A	N/A		Ranking Positions above 60th - 65th to perform better than the median sector average
T16a_10	Access	Disabled	Other statistic - Disabled (please give details in the next column)	To increase the number of students from a known disability background	No	2014-15	6.5%	8%	9%	10%	11%	12%	
T16a_11	Progression	Mature	Other statistic - Mature (please give details in the next column)	To increase the number of mature students enrolled at Aston University	No	2016-17	5.5%	6%	6%	6%	6%	7%	
T16a_12	Progression	Multiple	Other statistic - Progression to employment or further study (please give details in the next column)	To increase the % of students from low participation groups taking up a Masters degree at Aston	No	2013-14	13.3%	14%	14.3%	14.6%	15%		Aston's DLHE returns where Socio-Economic Class is declared. NS-SEC data used, with % classifications 4-7 shown in baseline as progressing to further study from Aston undergraduate courses.
T16a_13	Access	White economically disadvantaged males	Other statistic - Ethnicity (please give details in the next column)	To increase % of white male students on undergraduate programmes	No	2014-15	19.9%	20.9%	21.4%	22%	23%		Internal data (Registry). Self-declared 'White British' student population

Table 8b - Other milestones and targets.

Reference Number	Select stage of the lifecycle	Main target type (drop-down menu)	Target type (drop-down menu)	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this a collaborative target?	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones (numeric where possible, however you may use text)					Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)
								2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
T16b_01	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Number of students engaged in Aston Adventure Progressive Programme (Y5-6)	No	Other (please give details in Description column)	N/A	480	640	800	800	800	This is a new target in response to guidance issued by OFS on primary outreach
T16b_02	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Number of students engaged in Aspire to Aston Progressive Programme (Y7-10)	No	2017-18	500	580	660	740	820	830	A new progressive programme to follow on from Aston Adventure
T16b_03	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Number of students engaged in Aston Pathways Programme (Y12-13)	No	2015-16	88	150	200	200	200	200	This is a new target to incorporate Aston University's new progression pathways programme
T16b_04	Access	Socio-economic	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) in schools and colleges. Number of visits to state schools and colleges where 60% or more of students are from IMD postcodes as above. These include parents evenings, Y9 options evenings, HE Guidance sessions. This is to complement or replace lost funding and staffing in careers and connexions services.	No	2012-13	68	80	80	85	90	N/A	This target is no longer applicable
T16b_05	Access	Attainment raising	Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Student Tutoring, Mentoring and e-mentoring - Aston tutors and mentors working in target schools and colleges on academic and aspiration support via the long established student tutoring and mentoring schemes at Aston. Schools and Colleges with 60% or more of learners who live in the most disadvantaged IMD postcodes will be targeted.	No	2011-12	101	135	140	150	150	N/A	This target is no longer applicable
T16b_06	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)	Number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds engaged in intensive activity with collaborative partnership using a basket of indicators	Yes	Other (please give details in Description column)	500	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	Aimhigher West Midlands is a partnership of 5 HEIs working to provide a programme of HE progression support to disadvantaged KS3, KS4 and KS5 learners in at least 30 regional schools. Baseline year remains 2010/11.
T16b_07	Access	Attainment raising	Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)	Proportion of engaged young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attaining 5 x GCSE A* to C inc. English and Maths (or Attainment 8 equivalent) is greater than local average for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators	Yes	Other (please give details in Description column)	2013/14 FSM 60.2% (regional baseline 36.2%)	25% above baseline	25% above baseline	25% above baseline	25% above baseline	25% above baseline	This medium-term impact target applies to the cohort of young people aged 11-16 engaging in the Aimhigher programme. Baseline year this measure updated to 2013/14. Impact on each cohort passing this milestone will be reported against the relevant benchmarking data for the academic year in which they complete Key Stage 4.
T16b_08	Access	Multiple	Outreach / WP activity (collaborative - please give details in the next column)	Proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in intensive activity target group entering HE and retained for 6 months is greater than local average for YP from disadvantaged backgrounds, using a basket of indicators	Yes	Other (please give details in Description column)	2013/14 FSM6 31.6% (regional baseline 22%). POLAR 3 Q1 40.0% regional baseline 12.4%)	10% above baseline	10% above baseline	10% above baseline	10% above baseline	10% above baseline	Baseline year changed to 2013/14. Due to UCAS policy on access to learner level data, tracking now based on HESA data, reporting % entering any form of HE and retained for 6 months.