



2019-20 access and participation plan monitoring

Provider impact report

This impact report summarises the progress made by The Open University against targets, objectives and written commitments set out in its 2019-20 access and participation plan. This document is a summary of information submitted by the provider to the OfS. This document is a self-report by the provider only and does not indicate any OfS assessment of compliance.

1. Ambition and strategy

The Open University's ambition and strategy as detailed in the 2019-20 access and participation plan:

The Open University (OU) is the largest provider of flexible part-time HE in the United Kingdom with over 174,000 students (2017/2018) studying through flexible distance learning across the four nations of the UK. Our mission is to be 'open to people, places, methods and ideas' and our open access policy enables this aspiration to be fulfilled. The mature demographic of our student base has been changing over the past few years as the average age of our students continues to fall (currently 27, still well above the sector average). Initiatives that are undertaken to widen participation at the OU therefore have an adult and part-time student focus. Our internal data reveals that 76% of our students study whilst in full or part-time employment (2017/18) and often alongside other caring responsibilities.

Our ambition is to ensure that every one of our students is enabled to achieve equitable outcomes through personalised open learning. Our Access and Participation Plan is tailored to address the challenges faced by students representing the following characteristics:

- Students from low socio-economic backgrounds (POLAR3 quintile 1) and no previous HE experience);
- Black African and Black Caribbean students;
- Disabled students (specifically those with physical, mental and learning difficulties);
- Carers, care leavers or care experienced learners;
- Students with low previous educational qualifications (LPEQs); and - Students in secure environments.

Our APP uses evidence from institutional data, research and scholarship and aims to move away from a deficit model which focuses on fixing the student to one which focuses upon institutional practices that enable student success. The APP has been developed in consultation with colleagues across the institution through the Widening Access and Success Steering Group and the student consultative structure.

In order to achieve our ambitions, we strategically embed widening access and success into everything that we do. Our APP initiatives also align closely with our Equality Diversity and Inclusion student facing objectives and we aim to develop a co-ordinated approach across the institution to address the disparities that our data reveals.

2. Self-assessment of targets

The tables that follow provide a self-assessment by The Open University of progress against the targets approved in its 2019-20 access and participation plan.

Please note the tables contain only a summary of target milestones approved in 2019-20 access and participation plans. Full information can be found in **Table 8a – statistical targets and milestones** and **Table 8b – Other milestones and targets** of The Open University's 2019-20 [access and participation plan](#).

Any optional commentary provided against the targets is given in [Annex B](#).

Statistical targets and milestones

Reference Number (lifecycle stage)	Description	Baseline year	Baseline data	2018-19 milestone	2019-20 milestone	Units of target	Comparison year	Actual performance in comparison year	Target selfassessment
T16a_01 (Access)	The proportion of all new undergraduate students who have no previous higher education qualification (expressed as Fulltime Equivalent) and who live in the 20% of areas with the lowest proportion of 16-74 year-olds with a Higher Education qualification ((based on POLAR 3). Baseline year 2010/11.	Other (please give details in Description column)	13.6	17.5	16.5	Percentage points	2019-20	19.2	Expected progress
T16a_02 (Student success)	Close the gap between the proportion of black students and white students obtaining a 'good pass' on undergraduate modules at levels 2 and 3 from 30.6% to 25.0% by 2022/23	2016-17	30.6	28	27	Percentage points	2019-20	31.1	No progress
T16a_03 (Student success)	Close the gap between the proportion of disabled students obtaining a 'good pass' on undergraduate modules at levels 2 and 3 from 4.8% to 3 % by 2022/23	2016-17	4.8	4.25	3.75	Percentage points	2019-20	4	Limited progress
T16a_04 (Success)	To reduce the module completion gap for students from LPN from 4.8% to -2.8%	2016-17	-4.8	-4.8	-4.4	Percentage points	2019-20	6.9	No progress

T16a_05 (Success)	To reduce the module completion gap for students with low previous educational qualifications from -9.4 to -7.4	2016-17	-9.4	-9.4	-9.3	Percentage points	2019-20	9.8	No progress
T16a_06 (Success)	To reduce the module completion gap for students declaring physical disabilities from -9.3% to -7.3%	2016-17	-9.3	-9.3	-9	Percentage points	2019-20	8.9	Expected progress
T16a_07 (Success)	To reduce the module completion gap for students declaring mental health issues from -16% to -11%	2016-17	-16	-16	-15	Percentage points	2019-20	12.5	Expected progress
T16a_08 (Success)	To reduce the gap in passes for BAME students by 4 percentage points from -7.4% to -3.4%	2016-17	-7.4	-7	-6.3	Percentage points	2019-20	4.9	Expected progress
T16a_09 (Success)	To reduce the gap in good passes for BAME students by 3 percentage points from -13.1% to 10.1%	2016-17	-13.1	-12.7	-12.2	Percentage points	2019-20	17.5	No progress
T16a_10 (Success)	To reduce the module completion gap for Black students by 3 percentage points from -7.6% to 4.6%	2016-17	-7.6	-7.3	-6.8	Percentage points	2019-20	6.5	Expected progress

Other milestones and targets

No data was returned for this section in The Open University's 2019-20 [access and participation plan](#).

3. Investment commitments

3.1. Access and participation investment for the last audited year

Please note that some differences in predicted vs actual spend may be due to reporting differences between academic and financial years.

Financial year	2019-20		
	Predicted spend (£)	Actual spend (£)	Difference (ppt)
Access investment	£0.00	£12,028,000.00	
Financial Support	£3,105,372.00	£2,833,000.00	-9%

4. Action plan

Where progress was less than expected The Open University has made the following commitments to increase the rate of progress against their targets.

Reference Number	Steps that will be taken in the future to make expected progress against target
T16a_02	<p>New resource within the Data and Student Analytics team will provide insight into the drivers behind the awarding gap to inform future practice.</p> <p>A dashboard has been created to enable target setting against APP targets, at faculty level. This enables local, as well as institutional ownership of monitoring progress. Further developments of the dashboard will introduce intersectional analysis and leading performance indicators. Personal Learning Advisors will provide personal support to all students within the APP groups. Pilot peer mentoring programme will be implemented. Theory of Change methodology will be applied to all APP initiatives in order to measure the impact of the initiative on APP groups and to inform institutional practice. We will continue to use learning analytics and scholarship to develop a better understanding of the particular challenges that studying with OU presents to the BAME student body. We will develop a strategic institutional framework for addressing awarding gaps</p>

T16a_03	Our Personal Learning Advisors will provide an additional layer of support which we anticipate will contribute to a further reduction in the good pass gap as we progress through 2021. We are exploring the possibility of offering an app to support student's mental health and wellbeing. We will continue to work with students to understand their experiences of OU study in order to improve our provision.
T16a_04	We will continue to monitor this cohort and seek to understand their experiences in order to provide additional and appropriate support in future academic years. The 2020-25 APP targets in relation to younger students relate to continuation rates and a commitment to monitor student numbers over the course of the plan.
T16a_05	In the first phase Personal Learning Advisers (PLAs) will support Access students to submit their second assignment. We will continue to support students to identify the right study path based on their previous educational experiences, supporting them onto the Access programme as appropriate. We will consider changing the eligibility criteria for the fee waiver on the Access programme to encourage more students onto this route. We will ensure robust evaluation of the fee waiver, the fast track offer and the PLAs to support students better. We will consider alternative financial support initiatives for students on the undergraduate programme.
T16a_09	See response for T16 (above)

5. Confirmation

The Open University confirms that:

Student engagement	
Have you worked with your students to help them complete the access and participation plan monitoring student submission?	
No	
Have you engaged with your student body in the design, evaluation, and monitoring of the plan?	
Yes	
Verification and sign off	
The Open University has confirmed that the information included in this impact report is accurate, that it has been compiled in line with OfS guidance, and that it is being submitted on behalf of the governing body of the provider.	
Yes	
Accountable officer sign off	
Name	Tim Blackman
Position	Vice Chancellor (Accountable Officer)

Annex A: Commentary on progress against targets

The Open University's commentary where progress against targets was less than expected.

Target reference number: T16a_02
How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?
<p>Projects developed under the direction of the Widening Access and Success Steering Group were undertaken. The recommendations have been communicated across the University through faculty assemblies, senior team meetings, boards of study and the Unit Business Planning group with the aim of developing inclusive curriculum, identity & belonging, mentoring, assessment and inclusive recruitment. New resources are available on our intranet site which is continually reviewed (also see Col W). A new monitoring & reporting structure enables institutional accountability for APP targets. It is overseen by the APP Steering Group and reports into the Vice-Chancellor's Executive, Senate and Council. An Inclusive Curriculum tool, embedded in the Learning Design process, and within the Stage-gate process and guidance, influences curriculum content. We have supported development of scholarship that addresses the Black Awarding Gap, with projects embedded within unit business plans. A new Evaluation Strategy and management processes enable effective evaluation across the University.</p>
Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?
<p>Additional steps include a new Centre for Access, Participation & Success (expanding existing resource with the core APS team) and creation of a cross-university community of practice; appointment of two APS Stakeholder Engagement & Delivery Leads, two APS Impact & Evaluation Managers and two APS Data Analysts. The Task & Finish structure ensures progress against our core APP targets is reported to the new APP Steering Group (Chaired by the PVC (Students)). A new Task & Finish group focuses specifically on developing inclusivity within curriculum. Module teams are resourced to embed a review of curriculum, using our 'Inclusive Curriculum Tool', within their operational plans. Further new workstreams focus on student involvement; communications; language; and evaluation. A Decolonising the University Working Group, and a Task & Finish group to explore low declaration of mental health difficulties by Black students, have been established. A New Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion has been appointed.</p>

Target reference number: T16a_03
How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?
<p>We focused on students declaring mental health difficulties as this is an increasing issue across the University. We prioritised earlier stages of the student lifecycle in order to support students to continue their journey by providing additional services and resources, which will ultimately contribute to successful outcomes. We undertook scholarship on the experiences of students declaring mental health issues on the Access programme, the resources that were available and the capacities for tutors to respond to the diverse needs of these students. We are also working on a project exploring mental health in the curriculum.</p>
Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

We recognise the intersectionality of disadvantage and have developed a scholarship project to explore the declaration of mental health by students. We are looking at more inclusive and creative approaches to assessment. Additional resources have been developed and available through the University's Help Centre and signposting to relevant support and guidance within the University and across the sector. We also subscribed to the Togetherall service. We have increased the number of trained mental health first aiders within units and faculties and have developed a tool for students and tutors to work together in terms of reflection on their student journey and triggers of anxiety and stress. We are looking at University systems in terms of deferrals and assessment banking.

Target reference number: T16a_04

How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?

The number of younger students registering with the University is increasing. Our Continuing Student Communications Task & Finish Group focussed on supporting all students in the continuation of their studies. Tasks include the development of a Style Guide for front line staff and a student newsletter which is in development. A Task & Finish Group has now been established specifically focussing on younger students for 2020/21 (See Col W)

Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

A Task & Finish group has been established focussing on younger students in terms of their study experience and their outcomes compared to older students. The Flexible Study Intensity Task & Finish Group works to understand and implement supportive initiatives for students studying at more than 60 credits per year, many of whom are younger students.

Target reference number: T16a_05

How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?

Initiatives developed by the Supported Open Entry Task & Finish Group help ensure new students start at the right level and intensity. These include clearer messaging on University websites around the importance of preparedness and studying at the right level in the context of open access. A new ready-to-study diagnostic tool helps students choose the best starting point and next steps. An Early Start and Bridging Materials Task & Finish Group seeks to: increase preparation for study; increase the level of engagement between registration and module start; and bridge gaps between different levels of study through the development of early start and bridging materials.

Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

Our Access programme is designed to prepare students for HE-level study. University insight suggests that students who have completed an Access module are more likely to be successful in the first year of their degree. Greater flexibility has been introduced by offering a May start date in addition to the October and February cohort for all three Access modules. A pilot of a fast track 18 week version of one of the Access modules is being developed as an attempt to remove the obstacle that some students communicated to us about taking a further year out of their studies as they wait for the next registration period.

Target reference number: T16a_09
How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?
See response for T16a_02 (above)
Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?
See response for T16a_02 (above)

Annex B: Optional commentary on targets

The Open University's commentary on any of the targets listed in [Section 2](#).

Reference Number	Optional commentary
T16a_01	
T16a_02	<p>The University is committed to removing inequalities in outcomes for students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds. It has invested heavily to achieve this ambition, over and above the 20.3% of higher fee income, formally committed within the Targets and Investment Plan.</p> <p>We have adopted a whole-institution approach to address our gaps as part of our Access, Participation and Success Strategy, following its principles of evidencebased, inclusive by-design across the whole student life-cycle.</p>
T16a_03	The University has a high proportion of disabled students compared to other universities and we continue to provide support to enable successful study as part of our core business.
T16a_04	The POLAR4 measure relates to 18-19 year old students, a cohort not typical of the OU's student body although the number of younger students registering with the University is increasing, particularly in response to the pandemic.
T16a_05	The Access programme is designed to prepare students who have been out of education for some time and with low previous educational qualifications for HE level study, developing confidence in academic ability and study skills.
T16a_06	
T16a_07	
T16a_08	
T16a_09	See response for T16a_02
T16a_10	