

## PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY- INTERIM

### WIDENING PARTICIPATION STRATEGIC STATEMENT FOR 2012-13 and 2013-14

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Plymouth University's Widening Participation strategy embraces a targeted approach to identified 'groups' who are, and have been historically, underrepresented in HE, their life chances reduced by social and economic disadvantage and other barriers. The strategy is underpinned by the University's core Access Value, and centres, though not exclusively, on the role that the University plays within the region. The strategy supports the maintenance and enhancement of quality standards in HE, through actions supporting the social inclusion of able, high quality students whose talents and potential may otherwise be unrecognised, undervalued and/or underdeveloped. Widening participation actions aim to impact on disadvantage by increasing the participation of target groups in HE, ensuring appropriate support for their transitional and HE experience at Plymouth, optimising their chances of retention and 'success' on undergraduate and postgraduate level programmes through to access to graduate or postgraduate level paid employment and career opportunities.

The University's Widening Participation Strategy has been developed to complement and integrate into the University's Strategic Plan and all other University strategies. This approach ensures social inclusion considerations are embedded into all aspects of planning and policy implementation, whilst specific targets for WP and social inclusion are also set to ensure positive action and continuous improvement.

The student experience lies at the heart of WP at Plymouth and it places the needs of potential, actual, and alumni students at the centre throughout the student journey and student life cycle. This permeates through our approach to outreach, fair access, supporting students' transitions into the University, their on course experience at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, achievement and employability. Students are also the messengers for widening participation and gain valuable enterprise experience in their role in delivering WP activities – as student ambassadors, mentors, project leaders, as examples.

Whilst delivering our WP commitments, associated programmes and target during 2011-12, staff and students from across the University were heavily engaged in planning for the introduction of the new funding/fees regime for 2012-13 onwards and the imperatives of institutional sustainability within the new environment. This planning is being consolidated during 2012/13 as the University delivers its new Access Agreement and evaluates progress and performance. The 2013/14 Access Agreement, already approved by OFFA, will be refined in the light of lessons learned. No major revisions are envisaged at this stage.

#### II. WP TARGET GROUPS 2012-13

Whilst the university supports some specific targets relating to Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion, for example work to correct gender imbalances such as males into primary ITT and females into certain STEM subjects, the main focus for widening participation activities will be on the following underrepresented Widening Participation target groups:

- low income socio-economic class groups 4 to 7 and 8 (unemployed) NSEC classification groups and those from Low Participation Neighbourhoods

- mature students, particularly those from low income groups
- disabled students
- children in care/care leavers
- underrepresented minority ethnic groups

Each is the focus of a specific programme of designed outreach interventions in the Plymouth Access Scheme—and the main focus of design for new retention and employability measures detailed in the 12-13 Access agreement and 2013-14 Access Agreement. This also informs our approach to other activity, funded through the WP Premium allocation.

### **III. WP PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS TO DATE**

The university has a strong performance in WP and a good reputation in the sector for best practice in both outreach and retention.

Appendix 3 of the Access Agreement submission for 13-14 analysed the university's performance during 2010-11, updating performance information against direction of travel outlined in the targets the university has set for 2012-13 Access agreement. This process has been repeated in support of the 2014-15 Access Agreement.

The targets aim to illustrate the university's contribution to the broader national social mobility outreach agenda and commitment to

- (i) improving an already excellent performance on participation of key target groups at Plymouth University
- (ii) continuous improvement on retention benchmarks when performance at Plymouth is already over benchmark
- (iii) continuous improvement on employability and destination outcomes, when annual studies already show positive outcomes for WP student experience at Plymouth

The university's performance in 2010-11 and 2011-12 held well with the majority of indicators showing continued improvement. Where a small dip in performance has been noted, this has been the focus for more concentrated planning.

### **IV. WP STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2012-14 – KEY PRIORITIES**

#### ***1. Raising aspirations and increasing participation***

The University will:

- (i) provide opportunities, actions and associated information to inspire our target groups in order to raise their aspirations towards education and HE
- (ii) work with appropriate partners to contribute to and support activities to raise standards of achievement in target schools/colleges and organisations, hence facilitating progression

- (iii) further develop specific information, advice and guidance services to cater appropriately for the needs of identified WP target groups. IAG services and outreach IAG activities will follow HELOA/MATRIX guidelines
- (iv) provide appropriate information and awareness raising activities for people who act as key influencers on target populations (e.g. parents; community enablers; school teachers; FE lecturers; careers/education guidance staff)
- (v) invest in key local community and voluntary organisations and their links with staff and research experts at the University through its programme of Community Research awards
- (vi) continue to raise aspirations and increase participation in STEM subjects.
- (vii) plan the new Plymouth University Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry outreach activities for 2013 onwards
- (viii) provide regional opportunities for links with key influencers in collaboration with the other twelve HEIs in the South West. As examples – Regional events for Virtual Head Teachers/local Authority staff relating to work with looked after young people/care leavers; for SENCOS and agencies working with disabled learners; for Access to HE programme/OCN staff working with mature learners
- (ix) work collaboratively with partners to deliver the Combined Universities in Cornwall/ESF funded “Raising Aspirations” programme
- (x) seek to optimise and reframe further progression opportunities available to target populations through locally accessible HE provision delivered through the University’s partner-college provision and HE in FE framework
- (xi) further develop specific link activities, progression and fair access arrangements with key target groups, schools and colleges
- (xii) develop through continued lead sponsorship, link activities and interventions with staff and students at the Marine Academy in Plymouth (the University School) and with the new University Technical College in Plymouth, opened in September 2012. This includes aspiration raising, supporting the progression of learners, the development of new educational pathways, and the provision of CPD opportunities to staff
- (xiii) continue to provide, at a subsidised fee rate, two Foundation Year 0 programmes at the University in science and technology, as they are both key components of opening up opportunities for WP cohorts to access progression to HE, and a wide range of honours programmes at the University
- (xiv) further develop work-based learning/apprenticeships/ pathways into Plymouth University validated provision
- (xv) develop the staff and student resource base at the University and through the partner college framework to enhance contributions to WP activities, and to ensure a strategic approach which continues to own, embed and mainstream the work longer term

## **2. Supporting student transitions to the University**

The university will:

- (i) apply best practice regarding fair admissions processes and procedures  
<http://www1.plymouth.ac.uk/applicant/admissions/Pages/admissionspolicy.aspx>
- (ii) deliver appropriate transition programme models for target WP populations as highlighted in the Access Agreement 2012-13 and Access Agreement 2013-14 to provide enhanced support from pre-entry to induction through stage 1 of an HE programme
- (iii) deliver appropriate transition programme models to target populations to enhance support for students who completed early stages of their HE programmes at partner colleges and who seek to top up to honours programmes at the University

### **3. Retaining and supporting target students**

The University will:

- (i) deliver and evaluate 26 new programmes in 2012-13 to support target students on programmes across the University. In 2011-12 an internal bidding process was facilitated for the identification and implementation of new practice relating to retention measures identified in the Access Agreement. These programmes are described in section 6 (Pg 7&8) of the 2012 Access Agreement. The programmes will establish best practice models for wider dissemination across the University for 2013-14 onwards and will be extended by a further bidding process in 2013-14. Key criteria for approval of funding for proposals for new programmes include evidence of plans for impact measurement of interventions on student experience for WP student cohorts. The new programmes tend to be located in programme areas where there are high WP student cohorts and/or higher than normal attrition levels
- (ii) deliver and evaluate phase 1 of the Plymouth On track programme, as described on page 7 of the Access Agreement 2012-13
- (iii) develop and support a wide range of specific faculty/subject based WP initiatives to support target learners on programmes.
- (iv) reframe arrangements for the delivery of appropriate levels of disabled student support services (from pre-entry activities, initial assessments and through to exit from University) available through the Disability ASSIST and Learning Support Services at the University
- (v) target additional student funding support arrangements through the creation of institutional scholarships, continuation of the Care Leavers bursary, and the implementation of a new £1.5 million Student Retention fund in 2012-13
- (vi) monitor closely the implementation of the National Scholarship Programme, and its potential link(s) to supporting the retention of WP students to ensure maximum impact on the WP agenda

### **4. Increasing the employability of target students**

The University will:

- (i) focus schemes, such as specific employer mentoring programmes and targeted employability programmes, through the University's jobs service and Employability Gateway(as defined in 2011-12 and 2012-13 Access Agreement) on WP students as their prime beneficiaries
- (ii) increase opportunities for input into the development of the curricula from local employers and community representatives including social enterprise initiatives and, where appropriate provide work experience and work-based learning opportunities for students
- (iii) increase supported work experience opportunities and careers insights experience for target students through the Enterprise Target programme, is the third element of the NSP award during 2012-13
- (iv) further design and develop forms of recognition and accreditation relating to unpaid/paid part-time work/volunteering opportunities to add to the student experience whilst studying. Examples include the Plymouth Award, Student Ambassadors and Student Leadership modules
- (v) continue to identify and develop appropriate tracking, monitoring and evaluation systems to measure target students' progress, achievements and exit destinations. This includes an annual comparative study on WP/non-WP student cohorts and destinations study. This includes graduate employment and further study destinations
- (vi) target after-care employability programmes to WP students

#### ***5. Investigating the WP/Social Inclusion Issues as they relate to Postgraduate Study at Plymouth University***

The university is currently examining data and issues relating to WP and postgraduate study.

#### **V. KEY WP TARGETS SET IN THE UNIVERSITY'S ACCESS AGREEMENT FOR 2012-2017**

The University has set fourteen key performance targets (KPIs) to 2017 within its access agreements for 2012-13 and 2013-14. Eleven KPIs relate directly to maintaining and/or increasing performance in Plymouth University's WP target student groups' participation, retention, achievement and employability profile at the university. The other three KPIs highlight the scale of the university's contributions to strategic partnership working and broader social mobility agendas in outreach, as required by OFFA/HEFCE.

Process and performance in other areas highlighted within this Interim WPSA will be monitored and evaluated through other established quality assurance mechanisms and reported within our annual WPSA.

#### **VI. STRATEGIC DIRECTION- GENERAL POINTS**

The University will:

- embed ownership of the widening participation agenda through annual action plans produced centrally with activities provided through central team staff in the Student Gateway and Student Life areas, through

Faculty programmes, HE in FE partnership planning, partnerships with target schools and colleges, and through collaborative approaches with other HEIs where appropriate

- reframe Plymouth University validated Higher Education provision in Further Education colleges providing geographical accessibility for communities across the SW peninsula, and in Devon and Cornwall in particular. Participation and support work implemented by partner colleges in relation to their HE provision will maintain synergy with the widening participation in FE agenda
- ensure the mitigation of financial barriers to study by the augmentation of national student funding with locally sourced funding. Details regarding additional funding support for WP target students form an essential component of the University's Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access for 2012 onwards. Opportunities for students to earn whilst studying will also be developed where possible
- work to support the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and other strategies which address key transition, retention, support for achievement, and employability issues for target groups
- ensure equitable provision and positive action in relation to disabled student experience to support DSA compliance
- ensure effective cross university planning and delivery through the University's Widening Participation Strategy and Access Agreement Monitoring Group. New programmes went through a rigorous Panel approval process in 2011-12.
- monitor impact and progress towards targets set through the Widening Participation Strategy and Access Agreement Monitoring Group and OVC Fees Advisory Group. Summary annual reports will be considered by Deputy VC, Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Body. Reports will provide details on performance, progress towards targets, and issues relating to the University's OFFA reporting and annual WP Strategic Assessment.

## **VII. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE**

The University believes that establishing rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes are key to further embedding a widening participation philosophy in the institution. This rests, however, on a monitoring process which is rigorous and constructive, formative as well as summative, and enables opportunities for dissemination of good practice and lessons learnt within the process itself.

Monitoring processes are well established for faculty action plans and central WP initiatives. The construction of annual access agreement targets for WP provides an opportunity to include all parties within an Annual Review process to measure progress towards target achievement.

Data relating to WP performance will be collected and examined through the Widening Participation Strategy and Access Agreement Monitoring Group and OVC Fees Advisory Committee. An annual report will be provided for consideration by the University Governing body.

The University will provide annual reports on progress and performance to external bodies through, as example, the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment, and OFFA Access Agreement reporting mechanisms.

During 2011-12, the University has sought to further refine a full monitoring and evaluation strategy from which the university can measure performance, track individuals and groups on their journeys to, through, and from HE. In July 2012, a full scoping study was completed by PedRIO (Pedagogic Research Institute and Observatory at Plymouth University). On the basis of this study an evaluation strategy was developed addressing the University's widening participation strategy. In addition research is being conducted to support the monitoring and evaluation strategy. This includes a longitudinal study by PedRIO of the experience of students in receipt of the National Scholarship Programme award during 2012-13.

The University has also ensured that plans described in the access agreement 2012-13 will be the subject of regular Impact Assessments during implementation. An initial screening tool has been used this year to assess any issues pre-implementation in 2012-13, and this did not raise issues to be addressed prior to 2012. A full impact assessment will be conducted in 2012-13 and reviewed through the Widening Participation Strategy and Access Agreement Monitoring Group who will put into place any mitigating steps should issues arise.



## **VIII. USE OF FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE WIDENING PARTICIPATION AGENDA AT PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY**

The University has clearly set out in its Access Agreements the additional expenditure committed from additional fee income over £6k during 2012-13 to be spent on access and retention measures to support the target groups. During 2012-13 this provides £1,362,000 for outreach, £2,664,000 for retention, and £900,000 for National Scholarship Programme awards at Plymouth i.e. totalling £4,926,000. During 2013-14 this commits a further £1,630,000 for outreach, £4,227,506 for retention, and £2,716,450 for National Scholarship Programme awards at Plymouth i.e. totalling £8,573,956.

The University reported fully on the use of WP Premium monies within the parameters required by HEFCE/OFFA for 2010-11 and 2011-12 in its WP Strategic Assessments.

Faculties were required to provide interim audit statements for 2011-12 against activities and expenditure from their WP premium money allocations, as well as predictive spend against intended activities for provisional allocations for WP premium monies for 2012-13. Both actions supported more detailed accounting of WP premium monies for the Autumn 2012 WPSA. Further initiatives are underway to ensure robust compliance with a targeted approach to the WP agenda for 2012-13 and 2013-14. WP Premium monies are used to complement, add capacity to and enable added value to the majority of activities as described in this Interim WPSA. They complement measures as described in the Access Agreement, at programme, school, faculty, student service, and directorate level. The initiatives supported through WP premium monies across all aspects of the student journey in such a large complex organisation are numerous and will continue to be comprehensively reported within our full WPSA illustrating their integral contribution to all aspects of the WP/Social Inclusion agenda

## **IX. STUDENTS AS PARTNERS**

The students as partners agreement made in 2011-12 [www.plymouth.ac.uk/studentgateway](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/studentgateway) illustrates Plymouth's approach to widening participation as well as all other university strategies and activities. Plymouth University Students' Union representatives have been active participants in all strategic and practitioner discussions/forums/committees regarding widening participation and planning going forward for 2012-13. For WP student journeys, students are "With Plymouth".

Students also lead on the delivery of certain activities and projects relating to WP. Example: - Volunteering in deprived communities.

It is intended that this relationship moves closer in 2012-13 and 2013-14

Students are also integral to the delivery of all aspects of the WP agenda- as student ambassadors, mentors, peer assisted learning leaders, interns etc. During 2012-13 there will be an expanded number of accreditation opportunities available for the recognition of student contributions to the delivery of the WP agenda at Plymouth