

WIDENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2017/18 – 2019/20

Institutions are required to submit information under each of the headings below. Please see the Guidance notes for help with completing this return

1.1 Please provide a high level outline of the Open University's Widening Participation Policy in Higher Education and how this fits in with the institution's strategic direction.

The Students First Strategy reinforces the centrality of Widening Access and Lifelong Learning to The Open University's mission and identity. Educational opportunity and social justice are promoted by providing high quality university education to all who wish to access it and, in so doing, realise both their ambitions and potential.

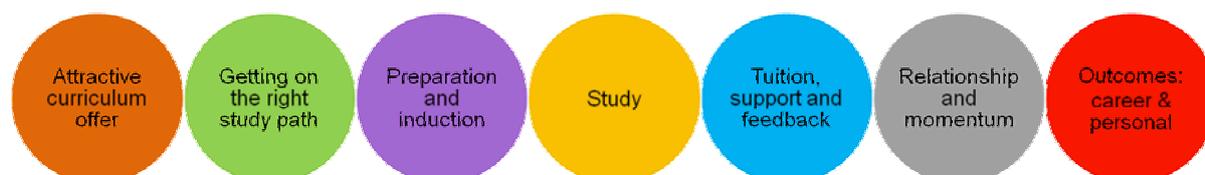
Commitment to widening participation, reaffirmed in recent years, is now encompassed in the Widening Access Action Plan, providing the framework within which our Widening Participation activities are developed and implemented. Co-ordination of Widening Access across the University is led by the Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships. In Northern Ireland, the Assistant Director with responsibility for Student Recruitment and Support leads on Widening Access and Participation.

Key foci are the participation rate targets for priority groups and the priority groups themselves including:

- Students with low socio-economic status (SES);
- Students from Black and Minority Ethnic groups and from low SES;
- Disabled students;
- Offender learners;
- Carers.

Nation-specific targets and requirements are also included in the plan, with an additional focus on young men in Northern Ireland.

Structured around the student value chain, the Widening Access Action Plan supports the OU's commitment to 'deliver an outstanding student experience by providing a study experience that maximises students' success whilst maintaining academic standards' (OU's Strategic Plan 2012 – 17, p4).



[The Student Value Chain]

This approach also supports the sector-wide student lifecycle model: 'widening participation should encompass the whole student lifecycle: preparing to apply and enter higher education; receiving study support and achieving successful completion; and progressing to postgraduate education or to/within employment' (BIS, 2014, p3).

The Action Plan is built upon the following principles:

1. Commitment to a social justice mission, mobility and open access, creating opportunities for those who are socially disadvantaged and under-represented in higher education
2. Upholding the principles of the Student Charter
3. Contribution to the sector, building on our unique strengths and capabilities, including open entry policy
4. Recognition that provision of HE to part-time/mature students needs to reflect the challenges that this non-traditional student cohort face on a day to day basis, and that these challenges are not unique to specific groups
5. Responsive to all parts of the students' journey/life cycle
6. Inculcation of widening access through every part of the University, emphasising that each has a role to play in delivering the strategy
7. Widening of access and success for priority student groups using the learning and teaching technologies designed for the student population as a whole, and commitment to overcome barriers to curriculum access for priority groups
8. Increasing participation of students with backgrounds identified by Access To Success: LSES backgrounds, disability, adult returners, young men, offender learners
9. Identification and development of partnerships with organisations which have complementary objectives, in order to reach and support students and encourage pathways into and progression from the University
10. An evidence-based approach, building on scholarship and research

The University has a commitment to:

1. Create new opportunities for HE study, particularly for defined priority groups, through an attractive curriculum offer
2. Ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are guided and supported onto the right study path
3. Enable these students to be successful in their study through appropriate preparatory

and support interventions

4. Enable students to successfully meet their study goals; develop confidence in their learning ability; and to be aware of and understand their relationship with the University, its community, and how it supports their progress
5. Enhance the enquirer experience to assist potential students efficiently and effectively onto the right course for them
6. Enhance life opportunities for students by supporting them to achieve their personal and career goals
7. Work in partnership, facilitating the journey from informal to formal learning and creating an outreach network across Northern Ireland

1.2 What is your view of the success record of Open University in relation to recruitment, retention and progression for Widening Participation students?

Awareness

As a 'Supported Distance Learning' University, The Open University engages with the local context through awareness raising activities which are designed to inform, generate interest and improve accessibility to education and qualifications.

Open Educational Resources:

The Open University is committed to making learning accessible to anyone who wishes to avail of it. Through OpenLearn, FutureLearn, iTunesU and a number of other innovations, diverse material is available for upskilling, preparing for study or exploring topics of interest. Data relating to the tracking and measurement of the use of informal learning tools and progression to formal education within The Open University has been limited to date. Tracking tools have now been embedded in informal learning resources so that learning and progression will be monitored on a yearly basis. Under Widening Access, several initiatives have been developed to assist people on a journey from informal to formal learning.

- OpenLearn is a free learning website comprising over 800 courses and articles in a wide range of subjects and is central to the University's outreach through informal to formal learning. The site makes high quality learning material available to all and courses range from pre-university level and preparatory resources to Advanced and Masters level topics. Learners can claim a Statement of Participation on completion of a course. The year 2014/15 saw approximately 13,700 unique browsers from Northern Ireland.
- Routes To Learning is a free guide offering structured pathways through

OpenLearn material. Routes are structured to build skills, confidence and knowledge of learning areas in preparation for Higher Education accredited learning. It also provides the opportunity to sample higher education, to discover the right subject pathway and to experience the excellent quality, creativity and scope of the University's learning materials.

- Badged Open Courses (a suite of soft-accredited courses designed as preparatory tools for Higher Education studies) are a range of pre-university courses, available at no cost, on the University's "OpenLearn" website and on "FutureLearn".

Figures for Northern Ireland:

Badged Open Courses were launched in February 2015 and the figures below evidence the number of unique learners in Northern Ireland for the year to February 2016. 79% of people in Northern Ireland who have studied a BOC have no previous experience of Higher Education.

| Badged Open Course | N Ireland |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Succeed with maths | 1277 |
| Succeed with maths | 2174 |
| English: skills for learning | 136 |
| Taking your first steps in HE | 24 |
| Succeed with learning | 14 |
| Facilitating learning in practice | 33 |
| Succeed in the workplace | 44 |

Recruitment

The proportion of new undergraduate students who live in the 20% most disadvantaged areas defined by the index of multiple deprivation and who have no existing HE qualification reached 22.4% in 2014/15, against a UK-wide institutional target of 17.2%. While this is still over the target figure, there is a decrease in the percentage from previous years, resulting from changes to the definition of data involved for England and Northern Ireland to exclude students with previous HE experience from low socio-economic figures, regardless of postcode. Other key figures to note include:

- 75% have no previous HE qualification
- 3% have no formal qualifications on entry.

The proportion of new students in Northern Ireland declaring a disability has reached 15.6%, with 3.4% in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance. Outreach activities with

disability support organisations continue to raise awareness of opportunities and the unique characteristics of study with The Open University. Around a quarter of students studying the University's Access Modules declare a disability. Since October 2014, links have been established with The Cedar Foundation, Action Mental Health, Action on Hearing Loss, Action Deaf Youth and Specialisterne NI. Such relationships have also shaped the University's modes of recruitment and registration, and reasonable adjustments have been implemented to further promote positive attitudes to people with disabilities or health issues and improve accessibility of engagement and enquiry.

The University joined the Regional Pathways group for Looked After Children and Young People in 2016, offering a unique contribution for young adults who wish return to education but who have come from a Care background. Outreach work has been undertaken with the Fostering Network and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to raise awareness of opportunities to study with The Open University, specifically for those aged 24 and above. There has been a small but welcome increase in interest from enquirers from a care background.

Retention

Additional challenges are faced by OU students, almost all of whom study part-time: most students have significant life responsibilities, such as family commitments and work roles. The institution is also aware that the goal of some students is to complete a sub-degree level qualification, and this achievement should be acknowledged. However, there are instances where a student is required to register for a full undergraduate qualification despite this study intention, which creates a challenge for measuring achievement.

Once registered, students have access to a range of services via student home, including an online forum, study skills toolkits and materials designed to support their course. While the majority of student-facing support is delivered through tutors, additional support for study issues and concerns is available via phone and email through specialist staff at the Northern Ireland Centre for the University. A range of additional study support tools have been developed to assist students who would be identified as being at risk of withdrawing or disengaging. Student Support Teams implement strategically planned interventions at certain points during a module. Interventions can be targeted at specific cohorts of students and one to one interventions are made when deemed appropriate.

Students who have completed Access modules prior to Level 1 studies are 17% more

likely to complete their Level 1 module. The typical share of students on Access Modules from low Socio-Economic backgrounds is around a quarter per presentation, which is much higher than the OU average. The gap between LSES and all other undergraduate students' satisfaction rate has decreased. Similarly, LSES students who study an Access Module are 6% more likely to pass modules at Level 1. The modules are designed to improve retention by providing:

- sample studies of several degree pathways, to enable the student to make informed decisions when committing to a named degree;
- activities designed to build study skills and confidence
- opportunity to familiarise with the mode of Open University teaching delivery.

They provide an effective opportunity to sample Higher Education study and to make an informed decision about capacity and desire to progress.

A Seamless Student Journey Project designed to identify potential crisis points or fragmentation of the student experience has been subsumed into a new model for Student Recruitment and Support, aligning all services in one location for students. All Northern Ireland students will continue to access support through this 'one-stop shop' at the Northern Ireland Office, with additional support from specialist academics across the University.

Progression

Students who study an Access Module achieve significantly better on a Level 1 module than new students who register directly onto a Level 1 module. The percentage of Access students who progress to Level 1 is circa 40%. The University aims to increase this to a target figure of 50%. A workshop was held in October 2015 to engage with OU level 1 colleagues on enabling progression and a 'Moving on from Access' website is currently under development. This website will bring together information for students thinking about next steps and include welcome information from OU level 1 modules and links to sources for information, advice and guidance, including Educational Advisors and the Careers Service. The Key Metrics Report 2015 says that "students who have previously passed an Access module consistently perform better than new students and often better than continuing students too".

Examples of WP Initiatives

The University continues to engage with the community sector in areas of deprivation across Northern Ireland. Through partnership with Falls Women's Centre, a group of women have completed the module: 'An Introduction to Health and Social Care', with a view to progressing onto a further module to gain a Certificate of Higher Education. The group, comprising refugees living in the local area, and women native to West Belfast, faced a wide range of challenges, such as academic English, self-esteem, confidence, conflict related and historic insecurities, stress, familial challenges, setting goals, time management, using IT systems, disabilities and childcare. A study group was formed with additional peer Life Coach support from an Open University student in collaboration with the Women's Centre. This initiative demonstrated both the high level of vulnerability for some students and the benefits of a holistic approach to support that encompasses elements of personal development alongside academic progress. Dependent on funding, The Open University in Northern Ireland hopes to upscale this model to assist the most vulnerable students to acquire the necessary personal management skills to complete Higher Education qualifications and the partnership steering group will continue to support groups onto Access Modules for a gentler introduction and preparation for Higher Education study.

Through the Belfast Festival of Learning, and the Take 5 in the West programme, the University provided learning on areas of specific interest and relevance to local communities with the aim of demonstrating the accessibility and important role of learning in daily life. Sessions were delivered in various venues in Belfast: the SKAINOS Centre, Conway Education Centre, Ashfield Girls School and Lagan College. Topics explored the relationship between senses and the brain; geological features of Northern Ireland, Dementia Awareness; the relationship between sport, gender and identity; and astronomy.

In preparation for the launch of a partnership arrangement with NICICTU, The Open University has continued to work with individual unions to offer advice and guidance on accessing Higher Education, train Union Learning Representatives in the use of the Routes To Learning resource, address issues of redundancy and upskilling or reskilling through Higher Education study, and equipping learners to succeed through short courses from the suite of Badged Open Courses. During the academic year 2015/16, 165 union learners undertook courses with The Open University. Additionally, the Financial Services Union, formerly the Irish Banking Officials Association union, has progressed a cohort of members through Access Modules with a view to progression to Level 1 study in September 2016, and plans to replicate this process annually. Work with UNISON continues to be successful through a package of support for workers in the Health Trusts

to undertake study programmes commencing with An Introduction To Health and Social Care, 55% of these students progress to further study with The Open University.

Areas requiring further progress:

1. Offender learner registrations have decreased significantly due to changes in external circumstances and funding arrangements: however a new policy for Higher Education Study has been developed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service in consultation with the University and is due to be implemented in July 2016. Through this new policy, it is hoped to facilitate access to OU study by offender learners.
2. Sustained outreach with Disability Support Organisations;
3. Development of additional support initiatives that assist highly vulnerable enquirers to access Higher Education;
4. Outreach to young men requires further development
5. Improved module completion rates for students in receipt of financial assistance, whether full or partial; improved completion gap for disabled students; a further embedding of WAS in curriculum design.

1.3 Please outline the Widening Participation aims, objectives and targets for next 3 years for Open University.

The approach to Widening Participation at The Open University in Northern Ireland works across the designated WP cohorts in accordance with both Access to Success and the University's institutionally identified groups. Establishment of partnerships with organisations working with such groups across the geography of Northern Ireland underpins the approach since 2014/15 and will continue to be developed going forward. Additionally, the University aims to be flexible and responsive to local needs and offer creative solutions and outreach where required, addressing educational disadvantage in all of its forms.

Recruitment:

The Open University aims to ensure representation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the future student population. The University's UK-wide strategy sets a target of more than 17.2% of students from disadvantaged areas, as defined by the index of multiple deprivation. Substantial work is undertaken to enhance the enquirer experience to progress potential students efficiently and effectively onto the right course for them.

SEC 5-7 and Low Participation Neighbourhoods and Young Protestant Males

- To create opportunities for Higher Education study including via progression from informal to formal learning. Promote “OpenLearn” Ireland as a platform for setting the University in the national context and offering content of local interest as a tool for exploring Open University material.
- Outreach through provision of community education sessions on subjects with a high degree of relevance to local population, such as Dementia Awareness, Sport and Gender Identity, with the aim of: demonstrating accessibility and contribution of Higher Education studies in daily life; raising awareness of The Open University and its mode of study; and providing learning that meets the interests and needs of the local community.
- Through partnerships, raise aspirations and opportunities for residents in areas of high deprivation by facilitating progression of cohorts and individuals onto Access Modules or Level 1 studies.
- Outreach through collaboration with Crusaders Football Club, Cliftonville Football Club and the Irish Football Association.
- Partner with community educators, such as Falls Women’s Centre, Conway Education Centre, and The Ballymac Centre to provide information and advice on accessing Higher Education study through The Open University and to implement a peer mentor programme to tailor support to students with more persistent barriers to studying.
- In partnership with Barnardos, Newtownabbey Borough Council, Statutory Education Providers and the community sector, implement an Action Plan on ‘Improving Outcomes for Children and Young People in Rathcoole and Monkstown’. The University’s role in the partnership is to raise aspirations among parents in the local community through positive engagement with education through Open Educational Resources, Access Modules, community learning and information sessions. This approach recognises the long-term benefit for families of positive attitudes and ambitions towards education that may be enhanced by successful engagement with Higher Education.

Disabilities:

- Continue to engage with Disability Support Organisations to ensure awareness of

opportunities to study with The Open University and the distinct mode of teaching delivery and support available. University-wide targets include more than 3.4% of new undergraduate students to be students with disabilities.

- Pilot a bespoke initiative in partnership with Specialisterne NI to facilitate access to employment and Higher Education for individuals with Social Communication Difficulties. (Ref: Supporting Equality Through Inclusive Employment: An Employment Strategy for People With Disabilities).

People with a Care background:

- As a member of the Regional Pathways Group for Looked After Children and Young People, continue to contribute to discussion and ideas around best practice for supporting people from a Care background. Work with Health and Social Care Trusts, specifically social work teams, and organisations, such as The Fostering Network and Voice of Young People In Care (VOYPIC), to raise awareness of opportunities for studying with The Open University, with a particular target group of adults (aged 24 and above) who wish to return to education.

Learners in Secure Environments:

- The Open University has a long established relationship with the Northern Ireland Prison Service, providing opportunities for study to Degree level and beyond. As a result of the introduction of student loans for prisoners in England there was an unintended consequence for students in Northern Ireland. Through the development of a new policy for Higher Education by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Open University will be able to partner with prisons to facilitate access to Higher Education for those who are put forward through the education staff in the individual establishments. The first cohort of new students will be recruited through this new policy for modules commencing in October 2016.

Adult Returners to Education:

- Raise awareness of The Open University offering within the local and international development sector through capacity-building initiatives, and outreach to their client base.
- Through a formal partnership with the Northern Ireland Council of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, develop collaborative partnerships with trade unions through Education Officers and Union Learning Representatives to promote Open University study, Online Educational Resources and the development of Continuous Professional Development resources.

BME:

- The Open University has an expressed commitment to this group of learners in its institution-wide Action Plan. In Northern Ireland, work is undertaken with the Northern Ireland Council for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS), the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) and the Afro-Caribbean Society Of Northern Ireland (ACSONI) to raise awareness of opportunities to attain qualifications at Higher Education level through studying with The Open University.

Retention and Progression:

To enhance the study experience to maximise students' chances of success in achieving their study goals whilst maintaining academic standards.

- Provide orientation sessions with a focus on building familiarity with university processes and resources, such as Student Home and accessing study materials online.
- Promote 'Moving On From Access' website, access to the University Careers Service and Course Choice team as part of students' journey through the University.
- Consultation is with the Students Consultative Committee on expanding a pilot Level 1 peer mentoring programme offered in partnership between The Open University Students Association and the Social Science Faculty.
- Ensure MILLS interventions are nation-specific and relevant for groups from Widening Participation backgrounds.
- Increased proactivity by Academic staff and tutors to encourage student engagement and identify those at risk of withdrawal.

SEC 5-7 and Low Participation Neighbourhoods

- To reduce the Level 1 completion gap by 3% in comparison to all other students. To achieve a retention gap at Access and Level 1 comparable to the overall University retention KPI of 75%.
- To reduce the attainment gap by 3%.
- Development of projects aimed at meeting the additional support needs of high vulnerability students, such as: targeted MILLS interventions; peer mentor programmes, orientation events.
- Offer peer mentor/coaching programme and additional study support sessions to groups with high levels of vulnerability.

Disability

- Make reasonable adjustments to enquiry and registration processes, along with teaching delivery in response to specific needs

BME

- Promote free learning resources and online student toolkit that have been developed to equip all students to succeed in studies. Contain material specific to English as an Additional Language students.

1.3 (a) TARGETS

You will note that the tables numbered (i) to (vi) below have been pre populated with average enrolment for the last 3 years for Open University (undergraduates only). You are now required to insert numerical targets for each of the groups identified across the 3 years 2017/18 – 2019/20. These groups are regarded as being under represented in Access to Success.

- (i) Group: **MDM Quintile 1**

Outcome: **To increase participation of those from NI MDM Q1**

| AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2012-2015) | Targets/Outcome | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 3 Year Average | | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| 665 | NUMBER OF STUDENTS | 680 | 700 | 720 |

- (ii) Group: **MDM Quintile 2**

Outcome: **To increase participation of those from NI MDM Q2**

| AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2012-2015) | Targets/Outcome | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 3 Year Average | | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| | NUMBER OF STUDENTS | | | |

| | | | | |
|------------|--|------------|------------|------------|
| 697 | | 720 | 740 | 760 |
|------------|--|------------|------------|------------|

(iii) Group: **Students with a Disability**Outcome: **To increase the number of students who declare a disability**

| AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2012-2015) | Targets/Outcome | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 3 Year Average | | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| 641 | NUMBER OF STUDENTS | 665 | 690 | 710 |

(iv) Group: **Students with a Disability**Outcome: **To increase the number of students in receipt of DSA**

| AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2012-2015) | Targets/Outcome | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 3 Year Average | | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| 136 | NUMBER OF STUDENTS | 145 | 150 | 155 |

(v) Group: **Adult Learners**

Outcome: **To increase the number of adult learners participating in HE**

| AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2012-2015) | Targets/Outcome | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 3 Year Average | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| 3068 | NUMBER OF STUDENTS | 3100 | 3150 | 3200 |

HESA data is largely incomplete for this area. Therefore we are asking institutions to determine 2014/15 year as a base year using your own enrolment data.

- (vi) Group: **Number of Care Experienced enrolments**
Outcome: **To increase the number of enrolments for those from a care background**

| BASE YEAR | Targets/Outcome | | | |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2014/15 | NUMBER OF STUDENTS | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| Unknown – data not requested on registration | | | | |

1.3(b) The following tables have been provided for you to now insert any other ‘**specific**’ targets for the Open University. These may be different to those groups identified in 1.3(a) or may relate to targets other than enrolments. In all cases you will need to identify the group and highlight what the target outcome will be e.g. outreach, retention etc.

- (i) Group: **BME**
Outcome: Increase the number of students studying with The Open University from a BME background. An Open University priority group and emerging community in Northern Ireland.

| Baseline (statistical or % participation) | Targets/Outcome |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| | |

| last year monitored) | | | | |
|----------------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2013/14 | | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| 155 | Number | 175 | 190 | 200 |
| | Percentage | | | |

(ii) Group: **Learners in Secure Environments**

Outcome: Increase the percentage of Learners in Secure Environments studying towards Open University qualifications

| D e p e n d e n t o n | Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored) | Targets/Outcome | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------|---------|
| | 2013/14 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| | 44 | * | | |
| | Number | | | |
| | Percentage | | | |

funding from NIPS

(iii) Group:

Outcome:

| Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored) | Targets/Outcome | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2013/14 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| | Number | | | |

| | | | |
|--|-------------------|--|--|
| | | | |
| | Percentage | | |

Please

now outline the estimated 'direct' expenditure required to meet the identified objectives in the table below. You may wish to refer to Part 2 of the guidance notes in "How to Complete your Widening Access and Participation Plan" for a definition of direct spend. Whilst we appreciate that figures for later years are only indicative we do require estimations inserted in each of the categories.

| Activity | Estimated Spend 2017/18 (£) | Estimated Spend 2018/19 (£) | Estimated Spend 2019/20 (£) |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Bursaries | [78,000 | [79,000 | [80,000 |
| Scholarships | [Statutory Financial Support | [| [|
| Other financial Support | [| [| [|
| Outreach | [7500 | [8000 | [8500 |
| Retention | [2250 | [2500 | [2750 |
| Research Activity | [| [| [|
| Staffing/ Administration | [54800 | [57600 | [60150 |
| TOTAL | [142550 | [147100 | [151400 |

1.4 Outline below the key programmes/projects financed from additional student fees that will contribute towards your Institution's performance? (You are advised to refer to the appropriate section of the guidance notes before completing this response)

The Open University does not charge higher fees and, therefore, does not have higher additional fee income with an impetus to spend a proportion on Widening Participation activities. However, the following contribute to the University's institutional activities:

- Three 30 credit Access Modules provide a preparatory step into HE: Arts and Languages; People, Work and Society; Science, Technology and Maths. The modules are designed to: build skills and confidence in students with intention of progression to a degree pathway; and offer a broad overview of learning areas, to

ensure that students make informed decisions about choice of pathway. The majority of Access students are individuals however, projects exist with partnering organisations, such as trade unions and community groups, to offer a bespoke package of more intensive support for groups as required.

- In Northern Ireland a high percentage of students are in receipt of financial support (statutory) -normally around 50%. Statistical data has shown that these students are less likely to complete their modules than students who are self-funding or sponsored. However, given the range of additional responsibilities for mature students, access to funding is a crucial factor in the decision to pursue education.
- A Student Support Tool allows students to be selected for particular interventions depending on their individual circumstances with a view to increasing retention and progression across the entire student population but with particular emphasis on students with particular characteristics or demonstrating particular behaviours.
- Varied Open Educational Resources have been produced to help learners to develop skills, knowledge and interest in Higher Educational studies. For adult returners, employability and life progression are important motivational factors for embarking on undergraduate studies. A new suite of BOCs are due to be launched in Autumn 2016 that aim to upskill the workforce in a range of sectors, such as Health and Social Care, SMEs, and Classroom Assistants.
- As part of our Widening Participation offer, qualifications are promoted in relevant sectors and partnerships with trade unions are generating programmes through the Union Learning structure as a step into Higher Education. This activity is formalised in a partnership with NICICTU.
- The University is taking its place within city-wide and community bodies that promote lifelong learning, developing collaborative partnerships that meet the educational needs of local communities, particularly in areas of stubborn disadvantage. Through these partners, the University promotes its open educational resources, tailored pathways to support learners from informal to formal learning, and Access provision.
- Community Education Sessions – provision of learning that meets a need for understanding or a particular interest in communities with low participation in Higher Education. Sessions on Dementia Awareness, for example, make academic expertise accessible on a subject that impacts on many lives in communities in Northern Ireland. This has dual benefit of promoting understanding and in demonstrating the quality and relevance of Open University

studies, while also making information available about options for study.

- Orientation programme ensures that all new students, and students with Widening Participation characteristics, understand and are confident with university procedures, mechanisms and resources. Orientation is conducted through online and local sessions for groups of students, offering a forum for discussion, Q&A and demonstration of navigating study resources and support services.
- Expansion of the peer mentor/coaching programme, offering support to vulnerable groups of students through an Open University tutor; additional study support sessions and a peer student mentor trained in life coaching skills. This programme offers targeted support to assist students in overcoming barriers that, while external to their studies, impact on capacity to achieve their study goals. Additionally, The OU Students Association run an online peer support scheme through which a bank of students address queries. The Faculty of Social Sciences have collaborated extensively with the OU Students Association to pilot a mentoring scheme, offered to all students with low prior educational qualifications.
- Social and Communication Difficulties project – in partnership with Specialisterne NI, develop a project that combines access to employment with the opportunity to gain a qualification that is directly relevant to the individual's preferred career path.

1.5 Please provide a short summary of how your activities link to the key actions within Access to Success

Key Action 2

The University currently provides reports on module completion against a number of factors which include socio economic, disability, financial support, geography, nation, age, and ethnicity. It also collects data from students on previous educational experience and flags students who self-declare as carers, who are offender learners, who are studying as part of a partnership initiative. Students also have the facility to add their religious affiliation but this is not a compulsory field,

Key Action 3

The University has a series of interventions for each student support team which can be sent to some or all students on a particular module or qualification. Students are selected according to certain parameters for interventions which may be electronic or in some case by telephone, depending on the study behaviour of the student. This system allows us to

combine a number of factors – for example it could be all students under 25 who have disclosed a disability, who are in receipt of financial support and who have failed to submit their first piece of assessed work on time.

Key Action 4

The University works with partners to raise awareness of OU study. In particular the work with community groups, in libraries, with UNISON, ICTU, large retail organisations, NIACRO, NIPSA and DHSSPS, reach out to and encourage application from under-represented groups.

Key Action 5

The University has experience of working with young people in secondary education to facilitate their study of short modules thereby raising aspirations. It also has experience of working with parents through community groups and employers.

Key Action 6

Entry to the Open University undergraduate modules is not linked to previous educational attainment although clearly students do need to be able to read and write in English. There are access modules, described in 1.4 above and a limited range of Foundation degrees however, students can achieve a Certificate or Diploma in Higher Education should they not wish to proceed to a degree. It is also possible for students to transfer credit from qualifications achieved elsewhere and top up to a higher level qualification – this could be from a Foundation degree studied in an FE College to an ordinary or honours degree qualification.

Key Action 7

Given the current admissions policies, the need for an exceptional application route is much less relevant to the Open University.

Key Action 8

The Open University currently monitors student engagement rather than attendance and has regulations in place to deal with students who do not appear to be engaging despite the financial support they receive and where there are no apparent reasons for non-engagement. The focus of student support team interventions is to monitor student activity, provide timely interventions relevant to the module and/or qualification and thereby improve student retention, completion and progression.

Key Action 9

The Open University, through its network of Associate Lecturers, can identify students who are not coping well, for whatever reason, and endeavours to provide the appropriate support through additional support sessions or the provision of alternative format materials. There is a small resource allocation to provide financial help to students who encounter unexpected

hardship.

Key Action 10

The University Development Office works to secure philanthropic funding to support the mission of the University. The funding can provide fee support for individuals or groups of students clearly providing access opportunities. The University is currently working to secure funding for a peer mentor programme to benefit vulnerable students.

1.6 How do you plan to communicate information on the availability of financial and other assistance to students?

The University communicates information on financial and other assistance through a variety of methods: presentations, targeted literature, information events, telephonic enquiries, and through the University's website. Development of partnership networks also enables the cascading of information across Northern Ireland through the reach of organisations involved. Information is provided on eligibility for a Fee Grant, Course Grant (or both of these), or help from the Access to Learning Fund. This information is also presented in hard copy prospectus. Information on the availability of DSA is provided in the same way. Information on credit transfer requirements, processes and time frames is available on the website or advice can be accessed through telephone enquiry. A drop-in facility at the Belfast office is available for learners, should they require face-to-face support or assistance.

1.7 How do you plan to monitor progress against the targets and the achievement of outcomes?

The Information Office produces an annual report on Module completions. This report includes data presented according to level of study, for those in receipt of financial support and those not in receipt of financial support, by curriculum, by ethnicity, by gender, by disability, by socio –economic status and by geographical region within the University. This report provides an overview of performance for different cohorts of students and is presented to allow a three year comparison. This facilitates monitoring of module completion. The University also monitors progression data for new undergraduate students, providing information on the percentage of new students with different characteristics who proceed to the next module. The Office for Students with Disabilities provides data on students with disabilities including the overall percentage of students across the University, by disability type and by geography, facilitating the

monitoring of recruitment of students. At registration, students are asked to declare ethnicity. As part of the Equality Objectives, the University intends to monitor participation, completion and academic attainment of undergraduate students. Receipt of full or partial financial assistance is an indicator of the percentage of students in receipt of benefit or with a low household income. The Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships collate data on the use of Open Educational Resources, completion of Access Modules and subsequent progression, and recruitment and retention of students with WP characteristics. Direct feedback from students is sourced through student surveys, evaluation questionnaires, case studies, partner organisations and Student Consultative Forums.

1.8 As part of the ongoing development of the WAPP we would now like you to provide us with an additional evaluation on how you think your institution is performing. In order to ensure consistency across the institutions we would ask that you use the Kirkpatrick Model for this exercise. To assist you in this exercise we have provided sub headings from the model to help focus your response. *(full details on how to complete this section are in the Guidance document)*

Falls Women's Centre - example

Level 1 Evaluation – Reactions

What they thought and felt about the programme

- While the students enjoyed the programme and successfully completed the module, they found it very challenging and needed the additional support provided by the Women's Centre staff.

Level 2 Evaluation - Learning

The resulting increase in knowledge or capability

- The group successfully completed 60 credits at level 4 QCF. They have developed their understanding and knowledge of theories of Health and Social Care, IT skills and ability to formulate arguments and articulate them orally and on paper.

Level 3 Evaluation – Transfer

Behaviour - extent of behaviour and capability improvement and implementation/application

- Individuals in the group expressed growth in confidence, time management and organisation skills, recognition of their own ability and belief that they could continue to achieve an HE qualification in a written evaluation document completed at the end of the module. Some of the group also identified significant improvements in their English language and the benefits of integration and being part of a mixed group of local women and women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Level 4 Evaluation- Results

Results- the effects resulting from performance

- All of the women in the group have begun the registration process for a second module: Perspectives in Health and Social Care, with a view to completing a BA (Hons) in Health and Social Care or a Crete in Health and Social Care.