

## The University of East London Access and Participation Plan: 2020 to 2025

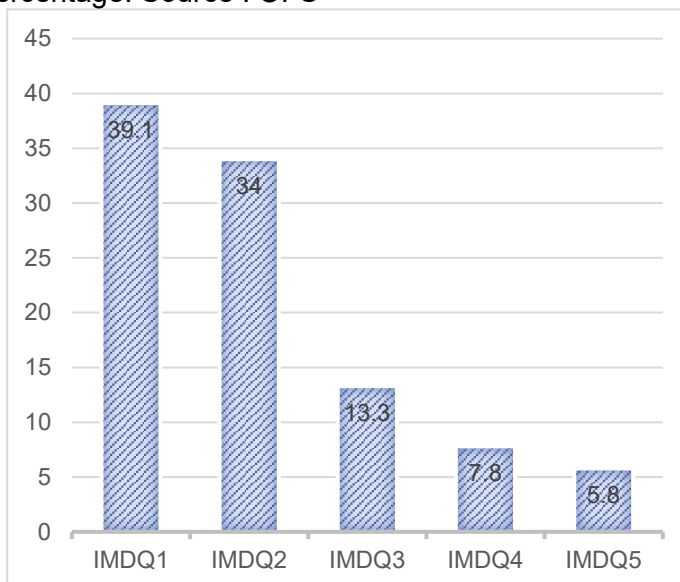
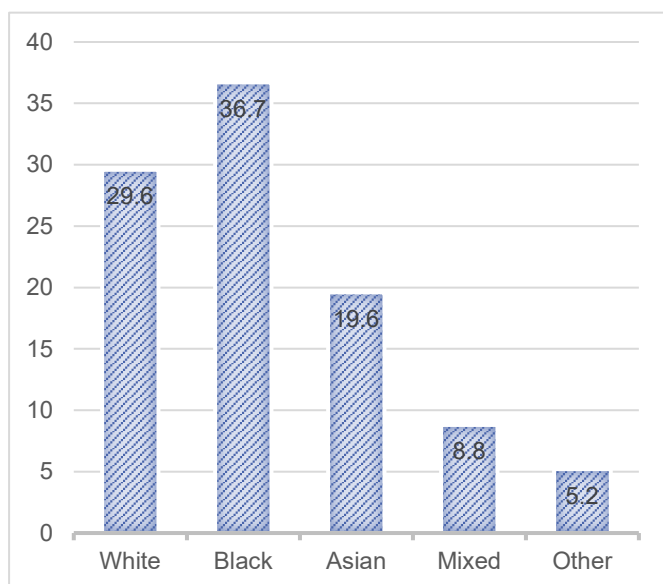
The University of East London's five-year Access and Participation Plan (APP) describes how we will implement high-impact practices to address identified gaps throughout the student journey. Whilst we have made significant strides in our work in driving access and participation over several years, we welcome this opportunity to plan over a 5-year time frame. This is recognised as being particularly important when seeking to address gaps in attainment across different student groups (see, for example, Bensimon, 2005). This 5-year plan has been designed with a focus on high-impact practices which will improve all student outcomes across a range of identified demographic groups.

To further our progress, we have made significant changes to the UEL academic framework and taught curriculum. Explicitly focused on preparing our graduates for future careers, our newly validated programmes (across all subject areas) include embedded core competencies and the knowledge and skills sought by today's employers. Our new curriculum dovetails with the high-impact practices and interventions that are described throughout this APP. Overall, our institutional strategy aims to catalyse participation, progression and the attainment of life-changing educational outcomes.

Our student population is very diverse. As shown in Figure 1, approximately, 70% of the UEL student population is Black, Asian or from a mixed background. Over the last three years, we have seen a decline in mature students. However, this group still accounts for just under 50% of the population. As shown in Figure 2, almost 75% of our full-time entrants are from IMDQ 1-2. Such diversity brings challenges in the context of delivering an ambitious APP, in that we have a wide range of gaps between the range of identifiable student groups. Our diverse and multi-faceted cohorts of students are supported across a highly innovative campus environment that continuously strives to facilitate positive outcomes for all.

Figure 1. Ethnicities of 2017/18 full time entrants in percentage. Source: OFS

Figure 2. IMD Quintile of 2017/18 full Time entrants in percentage. Source : OFS



### 1. Assessment of performance

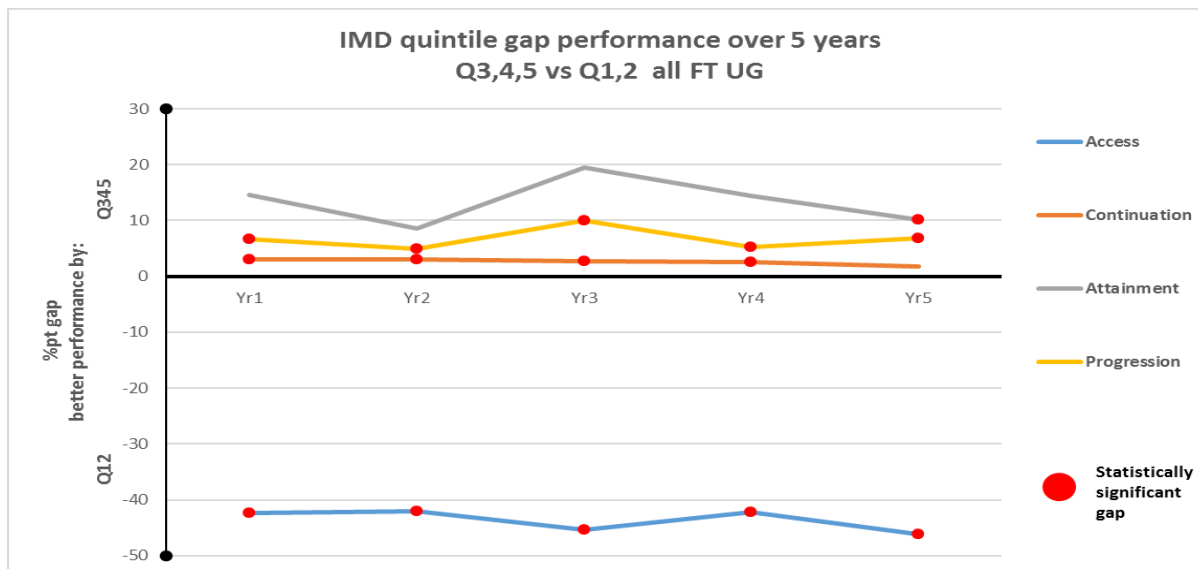
Over the past 5 years, we have made progress in improving specific student outcomes – for example in reducing (but not yet eliminating) the differential attainment gap between white and black students. The Cass School of Education and Communities, and the School of Business and Law have reduced the attainment gap evident in their programmes to 8% and 9% respectively. The institutional graduate-level employment rate has increased from 44% to 65.3% in the same period. These improvements indicate that interventions have resulted in increasingly positive outcomes for UEL's

student population overall. This APP builds on our successes to date, extends effective practices across the university and seeks to drive further improvements in addressing gaps. This 5-year plan is informed by a detailed analysis of gaps in the data provided by OfS and the prioritisation of targets to reduce specific gaps in performance.

### 1.1 Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

Figure 3. IMD quintile gap performance over 5 years, Q3,4,5 vs Q1,2, all full-time undergraduate.

Source: UEL/Office for Students



#### Access.

Overall, the gap between IMD Q5 versus IMD Q1-4 is greatest (88.3%pt), reinforced by the gap between IMD Q1-2 versus IMDQ345 (46.6%pt); we perform well in attracting students from areas of high deprivation (see Figure 2).

- IMD Q1 admitted at higher rates than IMD Q5: gap equals 21%pt
- IMD Q1 admitted at higher rates than IMD Q4: gap equals 31%pt
- Trend of IMD Q gaps mirror local area
- In relation to access, we endeavour to consider Polar 4 data alongside IMD data to understand gaps in performance. This is illustrated by comparing Figures 3 and 4.

#### Success.

A significant gap can be found between IMD Q5 and IMD Q4 outperforming all other groups.

#### Non-continuation.

- No PT Gaps
- IMD Q4 outperforms IMD Q2: gap equals 25%pt

- IMD Q4 outperforms IMD 1235: gap equals 23%pt
- IMD Q5 outperforms IMD Q1: gap equals 5.5%pt
- IMD Q1 and IMD Q3: gap equals 7.5%pt

#### Attainment.

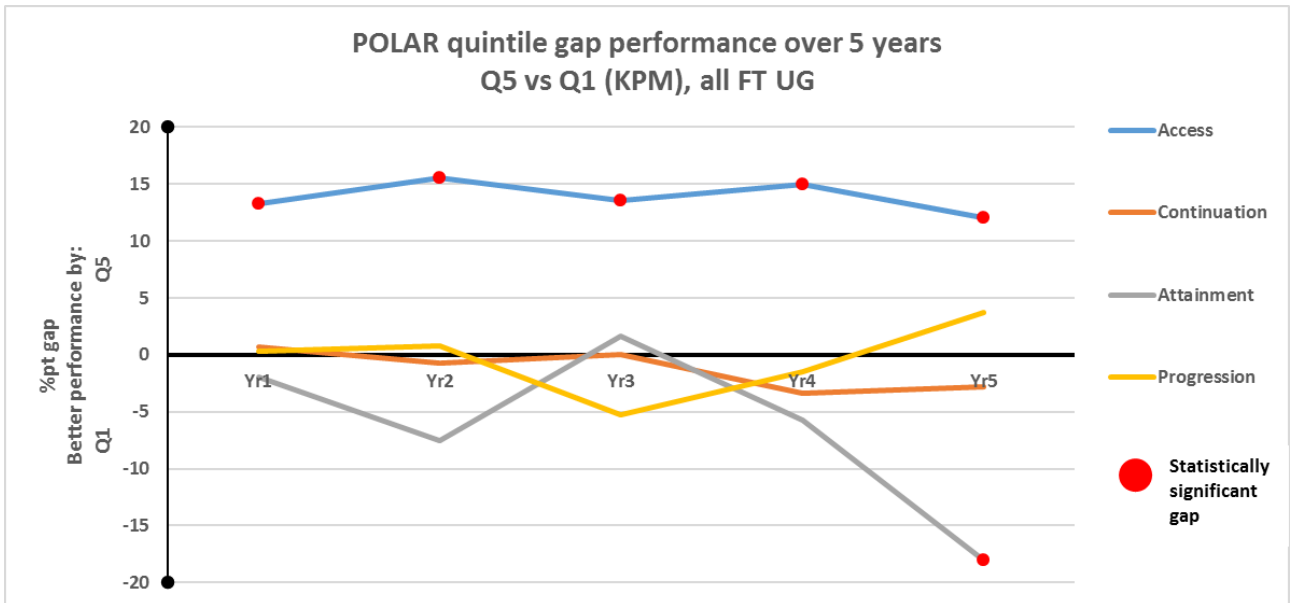
- IMD Q5 outperforms IMD Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q1234: gap ranges from 22%pt -17%pt
- IMD Q4 outperforms IMD Q1, Q2, Q1235: gap ranges from 14%pt – 11%pt

#### Progression to employment or further study.

All significant gaps exist with full-time (FT) students. There are no gaps in part-time (PT) provision.

- Largest gap between IMD Q2 and IMD Q4: gap equals 14%pt
- IMD Q5 outperforms IMD Q1: gap equals 12.5%pt
- Out of the 6 significant gaps, Q4 populations is not performing as well as to Q1, Q2, Q3, & Q5

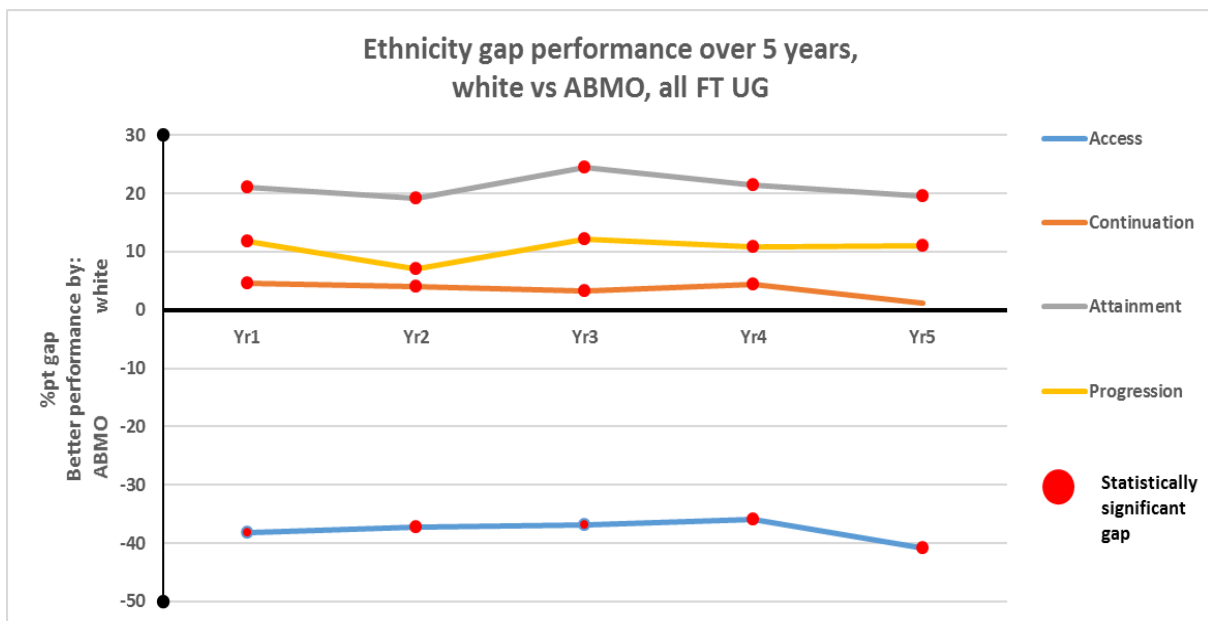
Figure 4. Polar quintile gap performance over 5 years, Q5 vs Q1 (KPM), all full-time undergraduate.  
 Source: UEL/Office for Students



### 1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

The attainment gap between Black and White students is an institutional priority. Our current institutional gap is 19%pt, even though Black recruitment is significantly higher than White and Asian recruitment (reflecting demographics of the local area). White student success and progression is better than other groups.

Figure 5. Ethnicity gap performance over 5 years, white students vs ABMO students. Source: UEL/Office for Students



### Access.

- ABOW and mixed & ABMW and other have gaps 90%pt or above
- White students are admitted at higher rates than Black students on accelerated degrees (w/PG Access): gap equals 64%pt
- FT first degree Black students out-represent White students: gap equals 8.2%pt
- BMOW out-represent Asian students: gap equals 77.1%pt
- Black students out-represent other (FT): gap equals 31.6%pt
- Black students out-represent mixed (FT): gap equals 27.9%pt
- Asian students out-represent other students: gap equals 14.5%pt
- Black students out-represent Asian students (FT): gap equals 17.1%pt

### Success

**Non-Continuation:** Only one significant gap.

- AMOW outperform black students by 30%pt; no gaps with standard first-degree provision

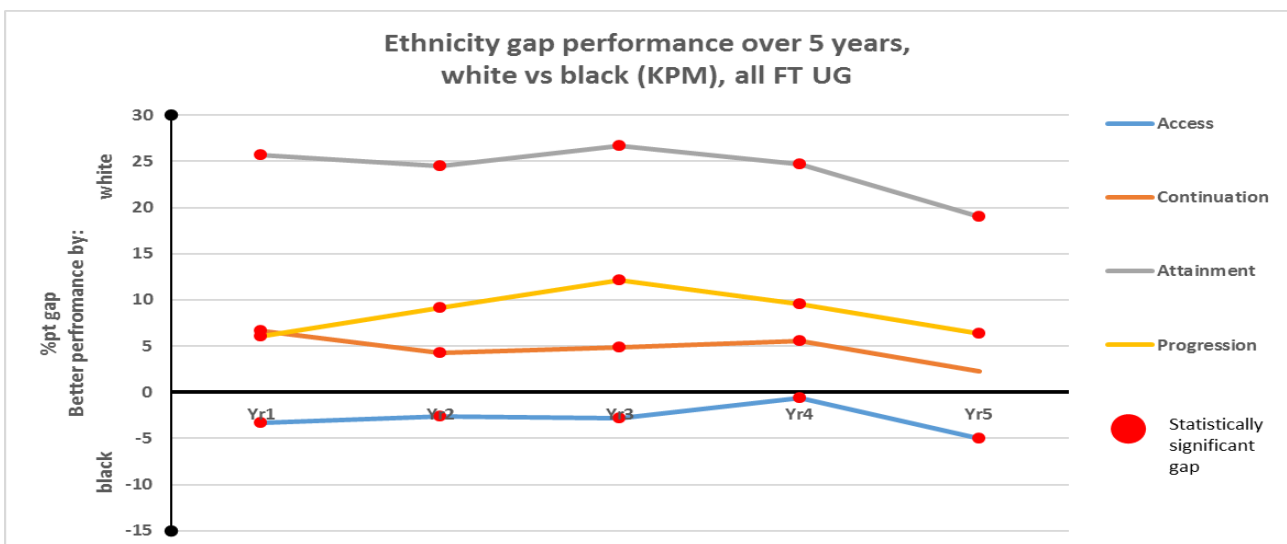
**Attainment.** Significant gaps only exist amongst those undertaking first degrees. PT provision is similar to FT provision with larger gaps though PT population is smaller.

- White students outperform Asian students: gap equals 24.2%pt
- White students outperform Black students: gap equals 19%pt.
- Mixed students outperform Asian students: gap equals 15.8%pt

**Progression to employment or further study.** Only FT provision shows any significant gaps.

- Asian students underperform White students: gap equals 18%pt
- Asian students underperform Other students: gap equals 12%pt
- Asian students underperform Black students: gap equals 12%pt
- White students outperform Black students: gap equals 6%pt

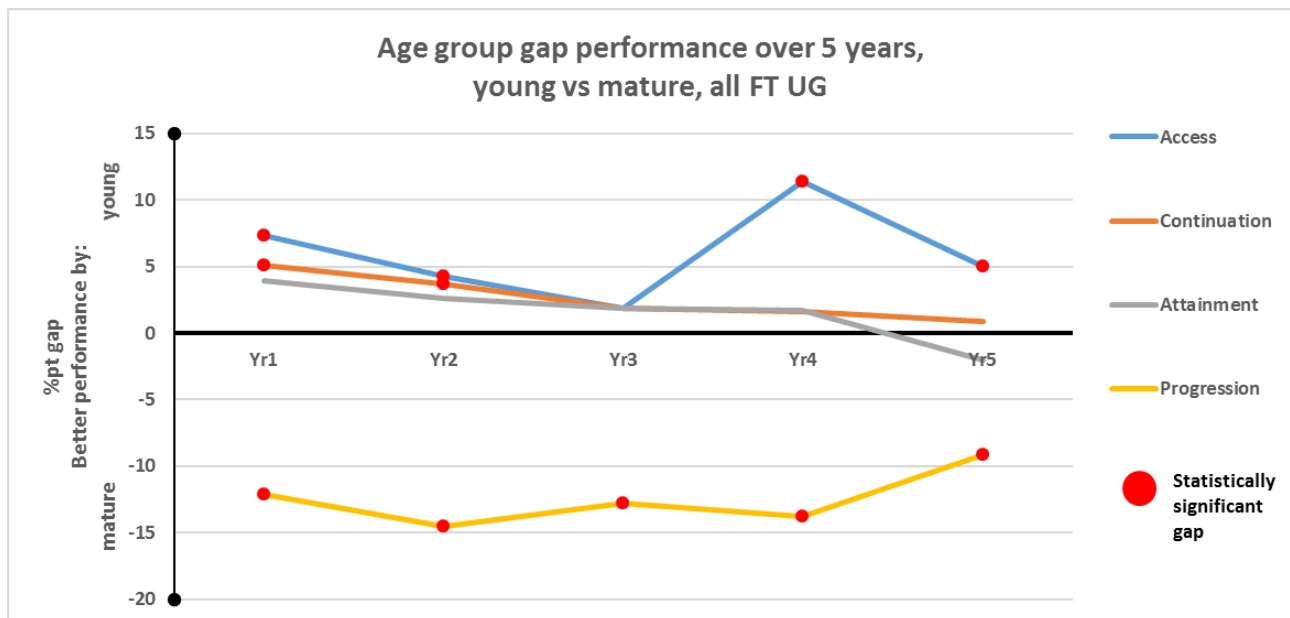
Figure 6. Ethnicity gap performance over 5 years, White students vs Black students (KPM), all full-time undergraduate. Source: UEL/Office for Students



### 1.3 Mature students

Mature students at UEL tend to enrol in part-time provision, while younger students tend to enrol in full-time provision. Significant gaps exist with our mature population.

Figure 7. Ethnicity gap performance over 5 years, Young vs Mature students, all full-time undergraduate. Source: UEL/Office for Students



#### Access.

When it comes to FT provision:

- Mature students (21 and over) are admitted at higher rates than Young students (under 21) in UG with PG – accelerated - courses: gap equals 83.3%pt
- Young students are admitted at higher rates compared to Mature students (51 and over): gap equals 51%pt
- Young students are admitted at higher rates compared to Mature students (41 to 50): gap equals 31%pt
- Overall, students under the age of 40 are admitted at higher rates than older mature students over the age of 41

When it comes to PT provision:

- Mature students (21 and over) are admitted at higher rates than Young students (under 21) for all PT access: gap equals 67%pt.

#### Success

**Non-continuation.** There are no significant gaps between age groups.

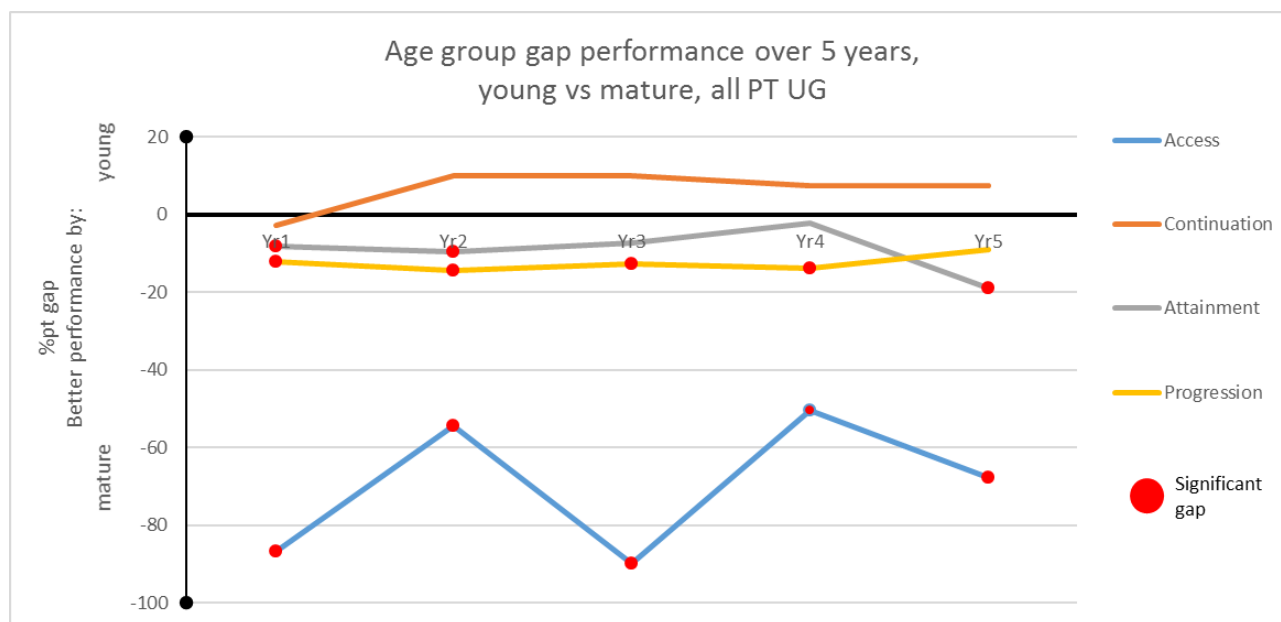
**Attainment.** Gaps only resulted in first-degree provision.

- FT courses; Mature students (21 - 40) perform better than 51+: gap ranges from 32%pt to 10%pt
- FT courses; Young students (under 21) perform better than 51+ students by 20%pt
- PT courses; Mature students (21 and over) perform better than young (under 21) by 19%pt.
- PT courses; Mature students (41-50) outperform Young students (under 21): gap equals 28%pt

#### **Progression to employment or further study.**

- FT first degree students; All mature (except 21-25) perform better than Young students (under 21) ranging from 16%pt to 6%pt.

Figure 8. Age group performance over 5 years, Young vs Mature students, all full-time undergraduate. Source: UEL/Office for Students



#### 1.4 Disabled students

Students with declared disability perform as well as, or better than, those who do not declare a disability, but overall the disabled student population is very small.

##### Access

Across all levels and modes, students with no known/declared disability outnumber those with declared disability by between 83%pt and 71%pt. More specifically:

- No known disability out-represent social & communication skills: gap equals 88.1%pt (PT), 85.3%pt (FT)
- No known disability out-represent sensory, medical & physical: gap equals 87.4%pt (PT), 83.8%pt (FT)
- No known disability out-represent multiple impairments: gap equals 87.4%pt (PT), 83.9%pt (FT)
- No known disability out-represent mental health: gap equals 85.3%pt (PT), 81.9%pt(FT)
- No known disability out-represent cognitive & learning: gap equals 84.6%pt (PT), 81.5%pt (FT)

##### Success

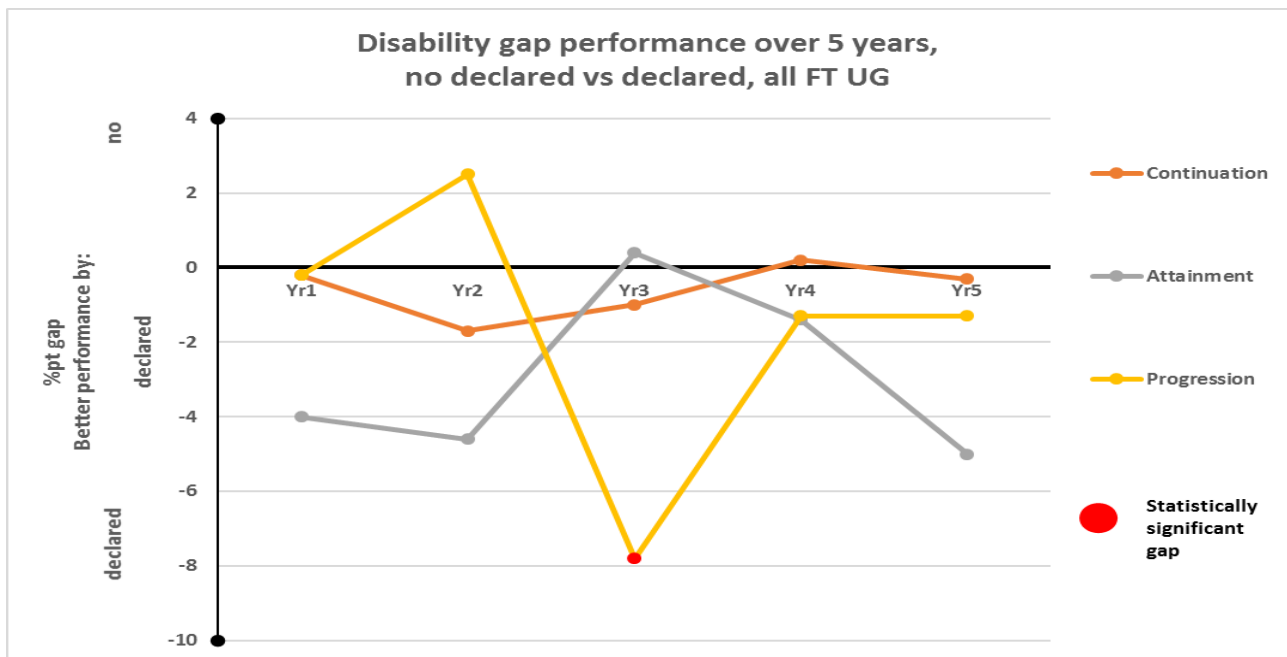
**Non-continuation.** There are no significant gaps in this section.

**Attainment.** The only gap is that those with multiple impairments perform significantly better than those with no declared disability by 14%pt. More specifically:

- Multiple impairments outperform no known disability 14.9%pt

**Progression to employment or further study.** There are no significant gaps.

Figure 9. Disability gap performance over 5 years, no declared vs declared, all full-time undergraduate. Source: UEL/Office for Students



### 1.5 Care leavers

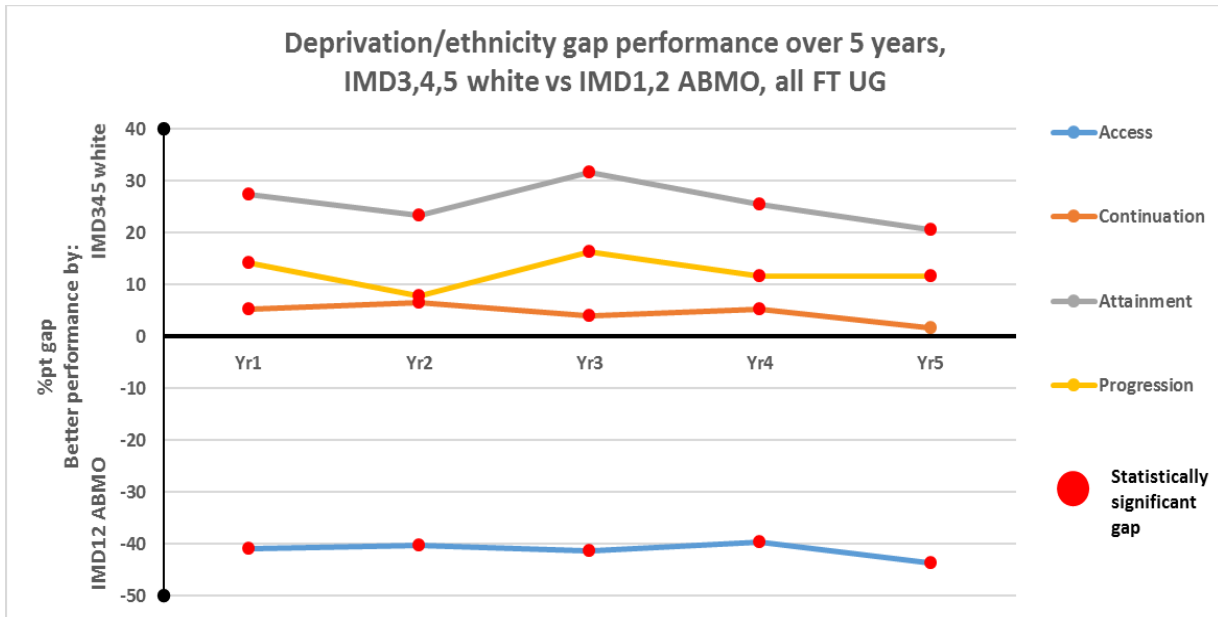
Overall, there is a small proportion of care leavers at the university. We are working to increase collection of care leaver information to provide more data for reporting, and to prioritise opportunities for impactful interventions for this group of students.

### 1.6 Other groups who experience barriers in higher education

Overall, we focus our efforts to support underrepresented groups into higher education; for example, children of military families and refugees. These additional groups are important to the national agenda and they are also important to the UEL agenda. Over the next five years, we expect our demographics to change as the national population changes – we will partner with external organisations and implement high-impact practices in order for those students to be successful in HE.

## 1.7 Intersections of disadvantage

Figure 10. Deprivation/ethnicity gap performance IMD Q3,4,5 white vs IMD Q1,2 ABMO all full-time undergraduate. Source: UEL/Office for Students



### Disadvantage and Ethnicity

#### Access.

- Disadvantaged (IMD Q12) ABMO are represented at much higher levels than other combinations of disadvantage and ethnicity.
- The greatest gap is seen between this group and IMDQ345 white (less disadvantaged white students) with a gap of 44.5%pt.

#### Success.

- Less deprived (IMD Q345) white students perform significantly better than ABMO from all areas of deprivation at between 55%pt (for PT) and 13.7%pt (for FT).

### Participation levels and Ethnicity

#### Access.

- Grouping students by POLAR quartile and ethnicity mirrors our local population with the greatest gap between Q345 ABMO and Q12 ABMO (77.8%pt for UG other provision).
- Almost all gaps shown are where POLAR 345 ABMO outnumber other quintiles or ethnicities and this is seen across all levels and modes.

#### Success.

- Q12 White outperform Q345 ABMO on FT first degrees: gap equals 22%pt.

#### Progression.

- White students from Q12 and Q345 are progressing at better rates than Q345 ABMO with the greatest gap being 17.4%pt for FT first degree holders.



## 2. Strategic aims and objectives

UEL is embarking on an enhanced university strategy that will support access, success and progression of all students. The university has adopted two signature initiatives that support the overall student journey towards graduate outcomes – ‘Mental Wealth’ and the introduction of a ‘Careers Passport’. These initiatives, embedded within the taught curriculum, highlight the importance of mental health, the development of social capital and employability skills, and transition experiences of students from one level to the next. The overarching university strategy recognises the importance of an education that prepares the next generation of graduates for the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution. The objectives set out in this APP are therefore rooted within the core academic student experience at UEL, buttressed and further catalysed through high impact interventions.

### 2.1 Target groups

For the purposes of this APP, the University targets and supports students from the following groups:

#### Access

- HE students from underrepresented groups
- White students from deprived backgrounds
- Participation of students who declare a disability
- Young and Mature students on FT provision

#### Student Success

- Non-continuation of students from underrepresented groups
- Attainment gap for students from underrepresented groups
- Non-continuation gap between Black and Other Students
- Percentage of Mature students achieving good honours

#### Progression

- Progression to graduate employment between White and Minority graduates

In line with the OfS guidance Regulatory Notice 1, we have reviewed our targets and provide new targets within the UEL Targets and Investment Plan. Reporting to the highest levels of university committee and governance structures, the Access and Participation Plan Steering Group will monitor progress towards these targets and the overall performance of activities described within this APP. Both the Education and Student Experience Committee, and the Careers and Enterprise Committee will closely monitor the performance of all our target groups in their areas of responsibility, reporting progress to Academic Board and the University Executive Board.

### 2.2 Aims and objectives

Our ambition is to continue to be an engine of social mobility in our sub-region, to further widen access to transformative higher education and to eliminate gaps in equality of opportunity throughout the student lifecycle. The diversity of our student population in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic background, LPN and other protected characteristics present challenges in delivering equitably in the access, success and progression phases of the student lifecycle. Closing gaps in performance in these stages will require a whole institutional approach, use of data insights to determine a plan of intervention, and a focused methodology for evaluating the impact of our interventions.

Our approach to addressing gaps relating to equality in the **access** phase is highly targeted, with interventions directed towards specific demographic groups. For the **success** and **progression** phases, our approaches to addressing gaps are more broad ranging, in that we will tackle the various gaps across all demographic groups and intersections. We have summarised our objectives in each phase below:

## **Access**

We will:

1. improve the ratio in entry rates for POLAR 4 Q5:Q1 for full time undergraduate students from a baseline of 2.4 to 1.4 by 2024-25.
2. increase the percentage of white, full time undergraduate students from IMD Q1 & Q2 from a baseline of 15.9% to 20% by 2024-2025.
3. reduce the gap in participation between full time undergraduate students who declare a disability versus those who do not, from a baseline of 72.2%pt to 60%pt by 2024-2025.
4. reduce the gap in participation between full time undergraduate young and mature students from a baseline of 5%pt to 3%pt by 2024-2025.

## **Success**

We will:

1. halve the gap in non-continuation rates between POLAR 4 Q5 and POLAR 4 Q1 full time undergraduate students, from a baseline of 2.8%pt to 1.4%pt by 2024-2025.
2. more than halve the gap in non-continuation rates between AMOW and Black full-time undergraduate students (non-first degrees) from a baseline of 31.2%pt to 15%pt by 2024-2025.
3. more than halve the attainment gap between White and Black full-time undergraduate students from a baseline of 19%pt to 9%pt by 2024-2025.
4. more than halve the attainment gap between White and Asian full-time undergraduate students from a baseline of 24.2%pt to 12%pt by 2024-2025.
5. eliminate the gap in attainment between mature (aged 51+) and young full-time undergraduate students from a baseline of 20.8%pt. by 2024-25.

## **Progression**

We will:

1. more than halve the gap in progression to graduate employment between white and minority (ABMO) full time undergraduate students from a baseline of 11.1%pt to 5.0%pt by 2024-2025.
2. more than halve the gap in progression to graduate employment between IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 full time undergraduate students from a baseline of 12.5%pt to 5.0%pt by 2024-2025.

### **2.3 Strategic measures**

The strategic measures listed below are institutional targets that are embedded in the design and evaluation of the APP. The interventions set out here will ensure that our outcomes are met by 2025. The University's 'Vision 2028' is closely aligned to our on-going work in reducing attainment gaps and realising the potential of our students and our community. In short, there is full alignment between our university strategy (and related Key Performance Indicators) and this APP, with the APP identifying gaps and interventions at a more granular level. Our targets ensure that the measures in place are quantifiable, timely and repeatable and enable tracking over time.

### **3. Whole provider strategic approach**

UEL takes a whole-university approach to tackling identified gaps. Our work in this area is overseen by the APP Steering Group which consist of academics, professional service staff and students. This group is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer who has institutional responsibility for supporting student outcomes and manages all student-facing professional services. The group also includes external members (including employer representatives and sector experts) who serve as critical friends.

In addition to our whole-university approach, UEL is investing in the improvement of our current infrastructure. This investment includes staff training and development, improved technological systems, more efficient business processes and a culture of innovation and creativity. Through this effort, the university supports students through a one-stop shop experience, ensuring that detailed and robust information workflows support the student journey. Our high-impact interventions have been designed and will be implemented and evaluated to ensure an ever-greater impact on student outcomes.

### **3.1 Overview**

In 2018/2019 we invested in 35 projects to improve access, progression and success. Projects ranged from supporting students with disabilities to encouraging students to participate in volunteering activities. In addition, UEL has delivered longitudinal attainment programmes to widen participation; supported students in improving their mental health and wellbeing; enabled students to take part in international experiences; provided enhanced academic tutoring, internships and mentoring. We have a comprehensive system that thoroughly assesses and monitors our APP related projects to ensure milestones and metrics have been met. We have implemented a robust system that ensures projects and priorities align with overall goals and objectives, but also provide flexibility to respond to evolving student needs.

Broadly, equality, diversity and inclusion are a central focus of all university activities. Institutional ownership of our theory of change starts with the Board of Governors, and into governance, leadership and management arrangements. Inclusivity for UEL also extends beyond the classroom and the physical campus. Inclusiveness includes the surrounding East London community. From attracting new businesses, to supporting the growth and expansion of the Royal Docks, we enable the local community to access our campus and services. This is also highlighted in our funding provision so that more of the East London community is engaging on campus and provided with the support needed to improve educational and employment outcomes. Overall, this aligns with our long-term engagement plan and commits the university as an anchor institution within the local community.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

In April 2019, we carried out an Equality Impact Assessment to support the design of this APP. In this assessment, we explored the equality groups that we are targeting, recognised gaps in the support that we provide, and identified improvements so that the support available is accessible to all groups. Our new governance structure also includes the institutional oversight of our practices to the Equality and Diversity Committee, chaired by the Vice Chancellor and President. The purpose of this committee is to specifically monitor the REC and Athena Swan action plans.

We have reviewed our APP targets and adjusted these to ensure that our ambitions to be sector leading in inclusive and equitable higher education practice are clearly demonstrated. Our commitment is further exemplified by the creation of a new UEL Office for Institutional Equity (OIE), which will be established in October 2019. Beyond the targeted and focused approach to tackling the gaps set out in this APP, the OIE deploys additional significant institutional resources to further catalyse and support the development of an inclusive, equitable and respectful environment for all within the UEL community. The OIE will deliver equity training for staff and students; add further impetus to whole institutional efforts to eliminate attainment and employability gaps; implement and monitor action plans for Advance HE charter marks; address discriminatory behaviour and practices, and review, amend and monitor the effectiveness of UEL policies from an equity perspective. The OIE will work in partnership with colleagues across UEL who are delivering and evaluating APP projects to ensure whole institutional coherence and contribute to meeting the ambitious targets that we have set.

## Alignment with other strategies

The APP integrates seamlessly with four other major strategies that are currently being implemented:

- 1) **Vision 2028 Corporate Framework:** The Corporate Framework sets out how UEL will evolve over the next ten years. This places a major focus on the student experience, mental health, and employability. The university is shifting the strategic focus from a Civic Engagement University to a Career-led University. This change shapes the institution to closely attend to employment outcomes and develop the curriculum and service offering to ensure that students are supported, retained, and ultimately employable once they graduate.
- 2) **Race Equality Charter & Athena SWAN:** In February 2019, UEL submitted its REC submission. The REC supports the university's commitment to improve outcomes for BME staff and students. UEL was awarded the Bronze award for its work in this area in May 2019. By 2025, UEL aims to receive a Silver award. The action plan aligns with our work within the APP. As the university improves its metrics by 2025, some of its success will contribute to the work of the REC. In 2018/2019, the APP supported the REC's inclusivity working group, established training and development to design and implement key learning and teaching strategies to improve the learning environment across the institution. UEL received an institutional Bronze Athena SWAN award in 2017, and every School is currently working towards an Athena SWAN submission. The School of Psychology was the first UEL school to be awarded Bronze in 2018. In terms of gender equality, it is anticipated that the Athena SWAN process will support the schools in tackling gender inequalities which manifest differently in the range of subject disciplines - for example, lower access for women in computing and engineering and declining progression in other subject areas. The UEL Athena SWAN process also looks at these issues from a perspective of intersectionality - for example, the School of Psychology have actions within their Athena SWAN action plan to address progression gaps for gender intersecting with ethnicity. The Athena SWAN submissions and action plans are key to the alignment with the APP.
- 3) **Learning and Teaching (L&T) Action Plan:** The purpose of the L&T Action Plan is to create an active learning and teaching environment in which our students strive for academic excellence, develop attributes of confidence and resilience and become employable changemakers once they graduate. The targets of this action plan are to ensure that we connect high-impact learning and teaching practices to improve our retention and completion rates, as well as provide students with the skills to secure graduate-level employment upon graduation.
- 4) **Student Success Action Plan:** This action plan specifies the four pillars that the university is committed to in support of students across the student lifecycle, from outreach to employment. It specifically identifies the key research-based activities that support the organisational resources for initiatives that will link to improving outcomes for students. For example, it addresses how scholarships and bursaries will change over time, and the need to include the expansion of work placement opportunities for UG to PG students. The action plan helps to monitor the support from UEL and the APP to ensure that scalability of these initiatives can be achieved by 2025.

## **Access and Outreach**

The university's approach to access and outreach is to combine our reach and impact through supporting students to improve their skills for higher education and employment. The Outreach and Access team deliver meaningful, relevant, timely and informative projects, across three strands of delivery: Awareness, Skills and Knowledge and Attainment. The goals and objectives are to embed robust partnerships with schools and other organisations, building employability skills in young people. Through these means, the activities seek to use badging and Gatsby Benchmarked interventions that ensure students are thinking about education and employment simultaneously.

Our new Talent Futures (TF) programme provides the framework for delivery of these core objectives and focuses on value for money and return on investment. TF focuses on the long-term sustained engagement opportunities, exposing young people from the primary school age phase to educational and career related experiences. These will be delivered through partnerships in schools in longitudinal programmes, with a suite of activities to meet the needs of young people at key decisions points in their education career and exposing them to the potential of higher education as a future

option. These programmes have been piloted during 2018/19 and full roll out to schools in East London from 2020 aims to increase applications to HE from this area by 50%.

We have identified the following priorities to reduce gaps in equality in the access phase at UEL:

- Increase the percentage of full-time undergraduate entrants in receipt of DSA to meet our existing HESA benchmark whilst maintaining the current higher than benchmark equivalent for part-time;
- Support the needs of care leavers pre-entry and in transition;
- Advance our existing work to ensure access for students from socio-economically disadvantaged areas (as indicated by IMD deciles 1-4);
- Maintain our balance of entrants from across the categories of ethnicity whilst also achieving targets for the number of white working-class males.

We are undertaking activities to contribute to priorities identified by the OfS by maintaining performance in advancing access for mature students and reaching students from low participation neighbourhoods. Our access priorities are informed by the analysis of factors contributing to student outcomes which indicate that students entering UEL from some level 3 vocational programmes are less likely to complete, and less likely to achieve 'good honours'. Initial analysis shows a correlation between entrants with vocational qualifications and IMD deciles 1-4, and we are now exploring the impact of this for students from Asian, Black, Mixed and Other backgrounds. Our initiatives are supported by the literature, which suggests that strong collaborative partnerships and early intervention in schools and colleges are key to widening participation (Moore, Sanders & Higham, 2013; Universities UK, 2016). In addition, certain groups – such as care leavers and disabled learners – require targeted interventions to support their access to HE (ARC Network Ltd, 2013). Finally, our initiatives focus on collaborative working to raise attainment for disadvantaged groups. This follows recent research which suggests that regardless of background, students with equal levels of attainment at GCSE level are equally likely to attend university (OFFA, 2018).

Increasing our outreach to additional areas, and to target additional cohorts will require new partnerships with schools and organisations to scale our reach and impact in those areas. For example, with children of military families and estranged children, refugees and asylum seekers and young adult carers, we are developing working partnerships with organisations and networks across the UK to support these students. UEL will work in partnership to scale this reach and ensure that students are provided with the support to access higher education and gain the knowledge and skills that will help them succeed.

We will continue to work in partnership with the Virtual Schools teams in the local boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Barking and Dagenham, to target and engage young people who are in the care system, or who have experience of the care system to provide a range of pre-entry interventions to support their progression into and through higher education. Virtual Schools is a provision of after-school and holiday clubs that raises awareness and supports skills development. Working in collaboration with colleagues across student services to ensure effective transition, and supported by care leaver peer mentors currently studying at UEL, we will develop new and existing programmes and scale growth beyond 2020. Current programmes include a Mentoring Programme where Social Work students work with care leaver students on a six-month mentoring programme. The Verbatim Project is a unique engagement project using applied drama to enable young people to share their thoughts and have their voices heard in relation to aspirations, goals and barriers.

*Focus Area #1:* We aim to significantly increase the number of places available on our dedicated pre-entry programme for mature students – New Beginnings – to 600 in 2019-20. Included in this figure is an increase to 20 Care Leavers and Estranged Students (CEES) and 20 disabled students. The THE award-winning New Beginnings course is the University's flagship programme that prepares students for the majority of undergraduate courses by converting experience and knowledge gained from life and work into academic skills within a collaborative, supportive teaching and learning environment. There has been a significant growth in the number of students admitted to undergraduate programmes after successfully completing New Beginnings and typically, retention, progression, completion and achievement for this group of students has exceeded the

UEL average: Typically, 70% of the students that come through New Beginnings obtain a First or Upper Second-Class degree.

*Focus Area #2:* We have developed more dedicated outreach activities for students with disabilities to increase the percentage of full-time undergraduates in receipt of Disabled Student Allowances (DSA). We will expand existing projects, notably a transition summer school for incoming students on the autistic spectrum to provide familiarisation with the campus, advice and the opportunity to build social networks and an extended applied theatre programme working with disabled students from 25 schools in East London. The extended programme, delivered in partnership with Multi-Sensory Theatre, features UEL students as facilitators and role models, providing stretching learning opportunities to build confidence and workshops supporting students to explore higher education progression options. We will also continue to build links with student support teams in our local colleges to provide fully supported transitions including Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for students with disabilities.

*Focus Area #3:* As part of our commitment to ensure the upskilling of local populations to higher level skills opportunities, we will continue to prioritise and build on our work with mature students through the provision of our Matrix accredited IAG service. We currently offer a community-based service at the Barking Learning Centre and plan to extend our reach into other areas of low HE participation such as Dagenham, Havering and Thurrock in Essex. We will extend this reach through extensive IAG related activities that target more white, working class applicants and more individuals with a disability. We have an ambitious target to deliver 3,300 individual IAG interviews each year by 2021.

*Focus Area #4:* We are a member of two National Collaborative Outreach Partnerships working to increase HE access from low participation neighbourhoods in London and Essex. Make Happen and UEL are collaborating on an ambitious programme with NEON, improving access for white working-class students. To be launched in 2019-20, the programme is funded until 2021 and will be delivered across schools in Thurrock and east London. The project will contribute to DofE research into supporting this under-represented group. Through the London NCOP we are delivering a BTEC transition to HE programme in collaboration with Barking and Dagenham College, Havering FE College and Havering Sixth Form College. For the duration of this APP, we expect through our strategic relationships in Thurrock and Barking and Dagenham to sustain NCOP and parallel UEL work beyond NCOP funding should the latter cease.

*Focus Area #5:* We are working in collaboration with key college partners to support successful transition and attainment. In 2017/18 we piloted a new programme: Curriculum Enhancement through University Partnership (CETUP), with co-delivery of modules on vocational programmes, and plan to extend this to five curriculum areas in 2019/20. Other attainment programmes launched include: Phenomenal Physiology with the Physiological Society for curriculum delivery in GCSE biology; Academic Skills for year 10 and 11; Summer Schools delivering Bronze and Silver Crest Awards for years 8 and 9 and the Longitudinal programme offering sustained engagement to entire student cohorts. We are working strategically with Thurrock and Tower Hamlets Councils on their 14-21yr boards and are represented on the Newham CEIAG network. We are working in collaboration with key college partners to target students to support successful transition.

## **Student Support**

Our institutional initiatives signify the need to bring together transition and retention strategies, mental health initiatives and learning and teaching strategies that use the advancement in technology to improve the support of students from entrance to graduation and beyond. Through a data discovery exercise that was undertaken by the university, we mapped the student journey and identified the gaps in our collection methods and implementation of interventions.

Through this work, UEL has invested in improving the Headstart programme (Pre-Entry Programmes) and Start of Year Induction experience for all students. We have noted that transitioning into university and moving between each year of study can be a challenge for some of our students. Therefore, every UG student will receive a transition experience over the summer and

autumn to ensure they are prepared for the following academic year. This approach is backed by research, which has found that extended transition activities result in increased academic performance, retention and sense of belonging (e.g. Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2012; Richardson & Tate, 2013; Soria, Lingren Clark & Coffin Koch, 2013). By 2025, over 80% of students will engage in face-to-face and online transition activities. By 2025, we will see our retention rate increase to 90%. In addition to student support over the summer and autumn, support services and additional extra-curricular activities will be timetabled to ensure that students are constantly engaged around key activities and initiatives that align with their degree programmes.

As students progress through their academic year, they will be assigned mentors and receive peer-to-peer support that is aligned to degree programmes. Currently, 280 students participate in peer-to-peer support programmes through specific programmes and central services. By 2025, UEL will see 1000 students annually participating in mentoring and peer-to-peer support. Students will not only be co-creators of this programme but will also manage it through the support of central service staff. Indeed, peer support at university has been linked to improved academic performance and confidence, higher levels of engagement and better mental wellbeing (e.g. Chester et al., 2013; Collings, Swanson & Watkins, 2014; Snowden & Hardy, 2012). Students who participate in volunteering (for example as peer mentors) have also shown higher success rates compared to similar students.

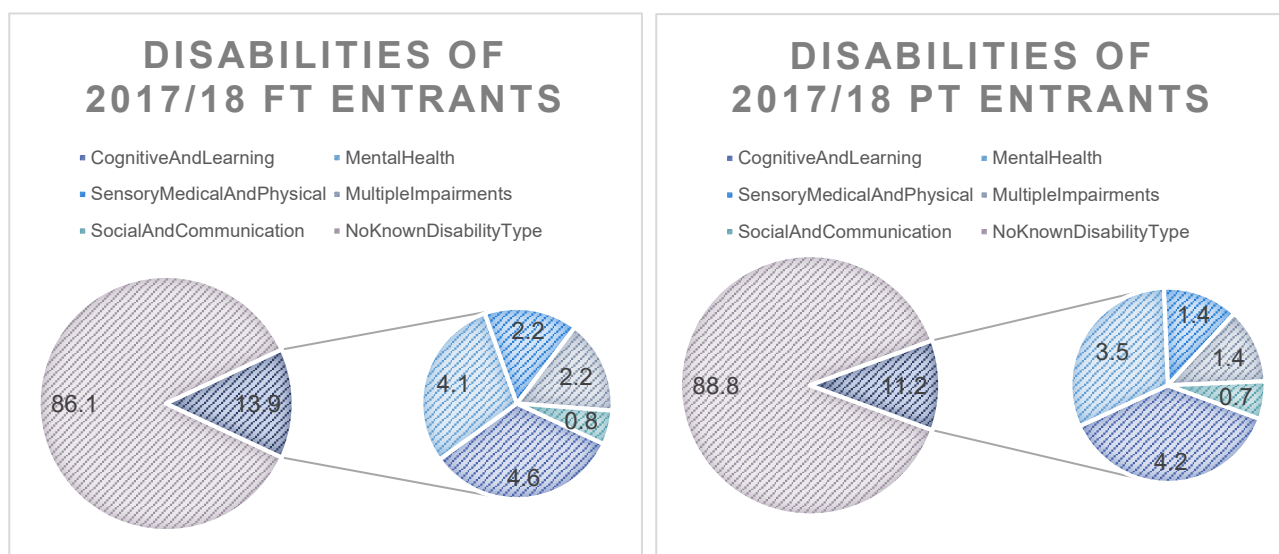
*Focus Area #1:* Prioritising mental health is a key component of our approach to supporting student success. Approximately 18% of our students declare their disability at the admission stage. This increases to 20% of our student population having declared a disability post enrolment, and UEL has seen an increase over the last 5 years of the number of students who are seeking additional support for their mental health diagnosis. This finding reflects a larger national trend in mental health disclosure (IPPR, 2017). Therefore, improvement and expansion of our services and approaches to mental health is essential. We are currently conducting specific research to understand the student experience, comparing experiences of those students who have declared and with those who have not. In line with our participation as a partner institution in an OfS funded mental health project, our ultimate goal is to use machine learning, AI, predictive analytics, sentiment analysis and other tools to build student profiles through our CRM system. Through this initiative, the university will take a strategic, whole-university approach, in line with recommendations from Universities UK's (2017) #stepchange framework. This approach allows for key stakeholders within the university to provide real-time information on the student's wellbeing and for students to receive timely and targeted interventions.

*Focus Area #2:* The introduction of Living Learning Communities and Learning Societies are key to targeting groups with specialised support. Notably, involvement in such communities is associated with an increased sense of belonging (Spanierman et al., 2013). As research shows, social belonging and a connected campus are factors that could cause a student to continue or not continue (Walton & Cohen, 2007; Ostrove, 2007). These projects will ensure that targeted groups have specific connections that allow students and the academics to be co-creators of content and activities. With the support of Residential Services and the UEL Students' Union, the targeted groups will be able to build environments around their interests and achieve academic, employment and overall success.

*Focus Area #3:* Over the last five years, the number of students with disabilities and mental health challenges has increased, accounting for approximately 20% of the student population. Therefore, investment and support will be given to students through partnership organisations that will provide 24/7 support to students when they need it. The collaboration between UEL and these partners will ensure that students are assigned to additional services that are aligned with UEL's objectives and can provide additional targeted and timely support. This approach will reduce waiting times and provide more personalised support to all students who have a need rather than prioritizing support based on severity and risk.

Figure 11. Disabilities of 2017/2018 Full-time entrants in percentage (left). Source: UEL/Office for Students

Figure 12. Disabilities of 2017/2018 Part-time entrants in percentage (right). Source: UEL/Office for Students



## **Employability**

As a key component of Vision 2028, we have introduced the Career Passport Initiative (CPI). The CPI will support the development of students' employability skills by using assessment practices and co-curricular activities to badge skills and competencies. This will also enable students to demonstrate their skills to employers. This initiative is in keeping with research into employer perspectives which suggests that additional learning outside the classroom is as important as formal learning for graduate employment (e.g. Coll & Zegwaard, 2006; Lowden et al., 2011; Raish and Rimland, 2016), and that informal accreditations are viewed as evidence of motivation and love of learning (Radford et al., 2014). UEL students are thought to have less access to social capital than students in some other universities yet are well placed to impact in emerging sectors and careers – those positioned within the so-called 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution. A key focus for us, therefore, is to work closely with our students and employers to facilitate and present the soft skills accrued in their time at UEL. The CP will include a portfolio of skills, badges and micro credentials for each of our students.

Career support and training has been enhanced through the development of a one-stop shop for all employability and employment needs. The UEL Employment Hub provides opportunities for students to access a range of employment opportunities from internships to graduate-level employment, receive one to one career coaching, mentoring and advice on, for example, development of LinkedIn profiles, mock interviews and assessment centre practice. This career-related activity complements the CPI, which lies at the heart of each student's academic programme of study. Each programme has mapped which skills students will learn during each year of study, and these will be monitored and assessed through the Employment Hub system. Each student is expected to provide evidence of completion through improving their CV, LinkedIn profile, applications for jobs and the capturing of badges in virtual places. This customisable system allows the student, employers and academics to work collaboratively so that all stakeholders can ensure that students are securing employment and accessing the support and guidance needed.

*Focus Area #1:* A new mechanism to increase the employability prospects of our students is badging of their skills. By working with major tech companies, we will tackle the issue of credibility and authenticity in digital badging (Dyjur & Lindstrom, 2017). Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and others are investing in badges that are industry-approved and which demonstrate the necessary qualifications needed for employability. In 2019/2020, UEL will pilot a badging system with incoming Level 4 and graduating Level 6 students. We will scale access to the badging system, with 80% of the student



population gaining 5 or more badges by 2025. This is expected to have a positive impact on the number of students securing a graduate-level job within 15 months of graduation.

*Focus Area #2:* Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) datasets suggest that students who participate in placements, volunteering and internships during their studies are more likely to gain higher earnings within five years of graduation. In order to improve outcomes for UEL students, the expansion of internships, volunteering and placements is key to our success. By 2025, 50% of the student population will have obtained at least one internship or placement before graduating. From 2020, at least 50%pt of that population will have secured work with the employer that sponsored their placement annually. The UEL Internship Scheme and embedded placement opportunities will be key opportunities for students to use their Career Passport to secure these jobs. The passport will also facilitate improved outcomes towards graduate-level employment and/or further study.

*Focus Area #3:* In addition to internships and placements, UEL will launch the Phoenix Pathway Fellowship. The Phoenix Pathway Fellowship is an initiative that identifies students as potential researchers whilst at Level 4 and Level 5 and supports preparation for further study at PG level. The fellows will be partnered with an academic who is conducting research and they will gain hands-on experience in supporting research activity. They will then be exposed to various workshops that will support their development towards applying for postgraduate study. These workshops will be led by professional coaches and PG lecturers who can provide the student with the 'HeadStart' into further study (Sowell, Allum & Okahana, 2015).

### **Curriculum Development, Pedagogic Change, Learning and Teaching**

Our institutional approach to supporting the transition and employability of our students also centres on significant curriculum development. Each student will complete an academic programme that has foregrounded the skills required in today's employment sectors. In addition, academics utilise inclusive teaching practices across the curriculum and have a sharp focus on the provision of timely and impactful feedback to support progression of students from one level to the next.

The Inclusive Learning and Teaching strategy and action plan aligns closely with our REC and Athena Swan awards. Each of the action plans highlights the need to scrutinise curriculum materials through an inclusivity audit check. This new audit system evaluates learning and teaching materials on their representation of the population that UEL serves. For example, it will compare the frequency of white representation compared to black representation or the representation of males to females. This is important because – in keeping with students across the UK HE sector – our students have commented on the lack of representation experienced in the classroom and in learning materials. Crucially, modules that have been identified through the inclusivity audit include those with typically low pass rates and/or high non-continuation rates.

*Focus Area #1:* We will introduce Curriculum Designers, in collaboration with academic Directors of Education and Experience and Programme Representatives, to increase greater alignment between support services and the academic community. These champions will serve as trained individuals who can review the current curriculum, learning outcomes, assessment tools and placement opportunities to ensure that the student experience lens is applied in each subject area. The role of these champions is to identify trends and patterns in subject areas and implement curriculum-based support to ensure that academic colleagues connect student support and academic outcomes. Through the development of training workshops and alignment with the university strategy and APP, subjects will apply targeted interventions that support the overall objectives. By embedding the work within Schools, the rate of impact will increase, and improved outcomes will be seen annually.

*Focus Area #2:* A further approach to supporting students in the curriculum is through the MyFeedback platform. MyFeedback is a UEL-designed, personal, timely, online help for students to access 24/7 and receive feedback on written work within 48-72 hours. In its pilot stage, students who participated in MyFeedback had an 11% uplift in their marks and were more likely to pass modules compared to similar students who didn't access this service. Research has shown that timely and personalised feedback improves chances for academic success (Heppleston & Mather, 2007). Feedback interventions are known to be most effective when the tutor is clear on the areas for

development of each student. MyFeedback supports students who might not find traditional lectures engaging, or do not learn optimally in large lectures. Student responses to NSS questions relating to academic support have consistently indicated that we need to support improvements in this area; the continued roll out of MyFeedback will therefore focus on ensuring that support is targeted, personalised and effective.

### **Financial Support**

A systematic review of financial support has been undertaken to ensure that bursaries are impacting positively on students' progression and retention. Some national research has shown that financial incentives and bursaries have little impact on student success (e.g. Callender & Wilkinson, 2013). However, in the UEL context, this is not the case, and our data suggests that reducing or eliminating financial barriers for students improves outcomes on average by 5%pt, with an uplift in students being retained. Our use of financial support ensures that students are focused on academic success, increasing self-efficacy and accessing employment opportunities.

In the use of our predictive modelling of continuation and non-continuation as well as examining other data points that are used in the modelling, we have found that students who are awarded financial support are more likely to continue than their counterparts who share similar characteristics and did not engage or receive a bursary. In most cases, we found approximately a 5%pt uplift. The highest case was our means-tested by SFE students who received additional funding from a bursary are 20% more likely for our lower quartile students and 9% more likely with the overall population. We will continue to monitor the impact of financial support across the 5 year APP period.

#### **Future Graduate Bursary** (Awards ranging from £100-£2,000)

Our Engagement Bursary has been designed to enable undergraduate students from low income backgrounds to engage and succeed.

This scheme is open to our Home and EU full-time students, from low income backgrounds, requiring financial assistance for any of the following categories:

- Childcare costs
- Travel costs
- Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) computer equipment contribution
- Summer support (students unable to work over the summer period, due to caring responsibilities, disability or long-term sickness)

These are the main priorities that students indicate they need the bursary for. Our Student Money Advice and Rights Team (SMART) also assess and recognise other needs that might be identified by the student to ensure that these awards are tailored to impact on the success of each recipient.

#### **Future Professional & Careers Bursary** (Awards ranging from £100-£2,000)

The Progression Bursary will focus on supporting employability by targeting low-income, undergraduate student groups with financial barriers in the following broad areas:

- Travel and adjustment costs, in particular for students with disabilities (for instance attending integral work placements and engaging with study abroad opportunities and co-curricular opportunities)
- Job interview expenses for final year students
- High course-related costs for final year students (for instance support with the costs of final year projects and shows for courses such as fashion, art, photography etc.)

#### **Future Life Bursary** (Awards ranging from £1,000-£1,500)

This will be a continuation of our current offering of £1,000 per year given to full-time, 'home' students, aged under 25 years, who are care leavers or have lived in a Foyer (up to a year before commencing study at UEL). Students who choose to live in University-owned accommodation will be eligible to apply for an additional £500 contribution in their first year of study towards their rent and deposit.

Other packages of financial support are embedded through paid internships, work placements, and research opportunities where students will receive financial support for their work and engagement with particular projects and opportunities.

### **3.2 Student consultation**

We have representation from the University of East London Students Union (UELSU) on all committees and groups charged with the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the APP. UELSU representatives were invited to comment on the proposed plans, relevant structures and committees. In addition, we convened three student focus groups to review the proposed development process and key themes for consideration. The UELSU, Student Sounding Board and the target groups of students are consulted on all projects, initiatives and interventions that are granted funds linked to the delivery of this plan. As part of our bidding process and monitoring regulations, project leads are required to consult with students and provide proof of consultation. We are committed to embedding a strong student partnership approach within our work and support our students to be change agents and co producers in this regard.

#### **Our aims**

- Our aims for carrying out student engagement for our 2020 to 2025 APP is to ensure that the student voice enables us to build a strong and robust APP that creates better opportunities and outcomes for our students and meets students' needs.

#### **Outcomes we would like to achieve**

- Students having the opportunity to express their views about the APP.
- Student voice incorporated into the 2020 to 2025 APP.
- Students join us in our assessment panel for bids.
- Student voice enables us to build a stronger range of projects and programmes for our students.
- Improved access, progression, retention, and success for our students as a result.
- Students at the heart of institutional work that tackles inequality and improves inclusivity.

The draft plan was shared with UELSU staff and officers at two different stages in its development, and feedback received confirmed that UELSU were content and committed to working in partnership to implement and evaluate the plan. The draft was also circulated to the students who attended the focus groups for comment, feedback and questions.

We engaged with a diverse range of students as part of our consultation including care leavers, students estranged from their families, mature students, and students who have been involved in the criminal justice system. We have taken the feedback from students and incorporated them into this current APP. We have attached the consultation notes to show the responses from students.

For example:

- 1) Job Placement, Internships and Work Placements: In our progression area, we have identified this intervention as a high-impact practices from the data collected as well as an expectation from students. Therefore, we are committed to using funds to support the expansion of this project.
- 2) Financial Support: We have committed to keeping financial support in order to support students. In our consultation, students appreciate the support and recognise that it alleviates financial barriers. We have committed to continue with the scheme using funds for this initiative.

We asked for views on projects, initiatives and investments for the future. Based on this feedback, we will be creating new projects and initiatives that include for example: provision of IT training for mature students; more bursaries for marginalized young people; development of spaces to support students with children; creation of a roadmap of support for our students so that they are aware of the range of support and services available to them; developing more support for students with disabilities; create more initiatives to help students improve their physical, mental health and wellbeing, and provide more placements and job opportunities.

UEL students are currently engaged in researching key aspects of our access, success and progression offer in the areas of volunteering, and the experiences of student parents. Findings will be shared with the APP Steering Group. Two other committees have also been formed to allow students various opportunities to feed into decision making about services. In 2018, we launched the Student Sounding Board managed by the Centre for Student Success: this group will be given the opportunity to review and shape Student Success and Progression projects. The Alumni Advisory Board will also be provided an opportunity to reflect on their experiences at university and provide the Steering Group, and other university offices, feedback to improve the student experience.

### **3.3 Evaluation strategy**

The evaluation strategy implemented by the Steering Group was developed in partnership with CFE Research. In 2017/2018, the university commissioned CFE Research to develop a logic model that supported the access and outreach stream of the APP. CFE Research has been commissioned to further develop this work and expand across the rest of the student journey. Our student success and progression streams now have improved mapping to better collect data and utilise data-driven decision making.

CFE Research examined our existing evaluation processes and provided recommendations. These are now being implemented. This includes refining the theory of change through wider stakeholder engagement, adopting a more strategic approach to access and participation funding, ensuring all projects are supported by type 1 evidence, developing a common indicator bank, enhancing project evaluation, ensuring evidence and learning is effectively communicated, and developing a 'community of practice'. We will strengthen the measurement of impact of our projects to ensure that we have robust outcomes and that we deliver value for money. We engage with academics at UEL who have expertise in evaluation to strengthen our approach, particularly in relation to our long-term programmes to ensure that we are using current methods to demonstrate the impact of our outreach activity.

Ongoing research and development are necessary during this APP period, to ensure that targeted interventions are effectively conceived and implemented using current data. The Impact and Evaluation team is tasked with ensuring that interventions and associated project evaluations are delivered in full cognisance of student-level data. For example, research will be carried out in relation to the experiences of care leavers, mature students and students with disabilities.

#### **3.3a Evaluation Implementation**

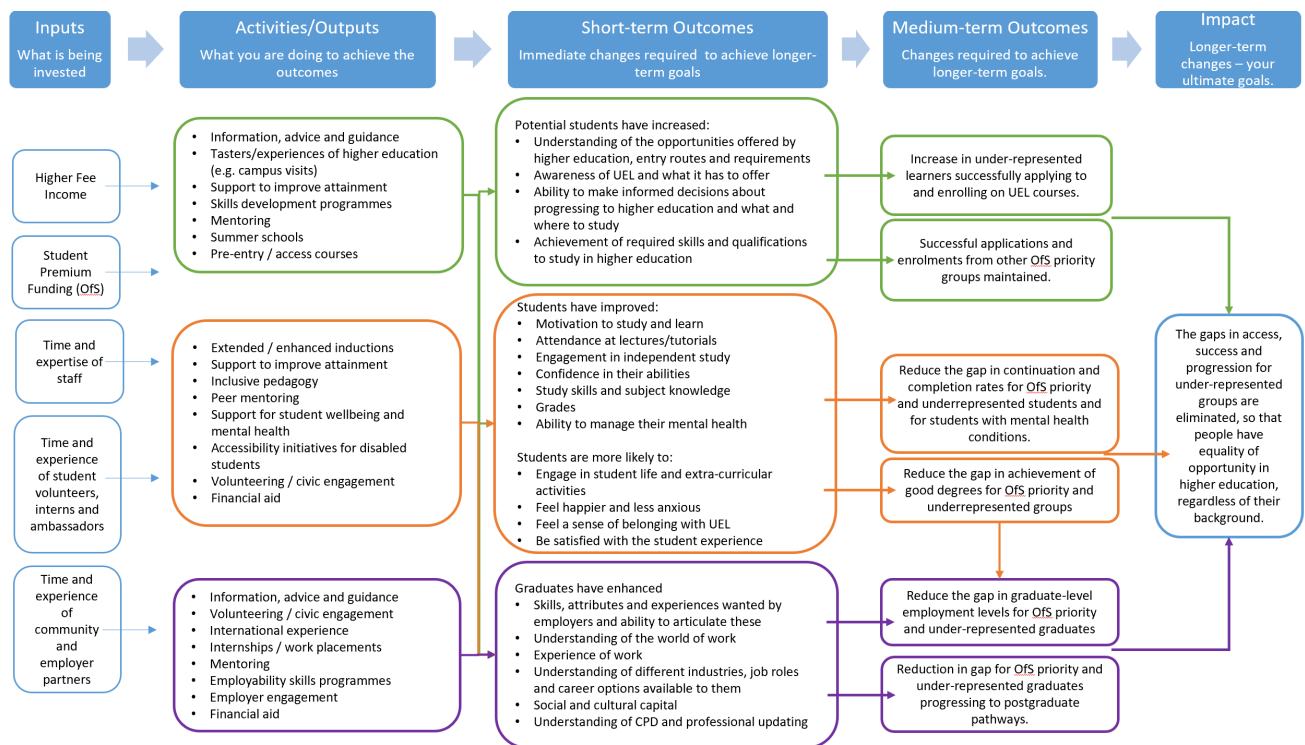
The Impact and Evaluation team has been deployed to collect data and analyse effectiveness of the APP-related projects. The team consists of an Impact and Evaluation Manager and Impact and Evaluation Support Officers (x2). This team will work closely with each project lead to ensure that effective evaluation tools are used to pre-identify the students before the intervention is applied, evaluate the intervention while its being implemented, and then collect data and consult with students at the end of each project. Through this centrally managed approach, the evaluation team will work with project leads to provide a set of common questions to enable comparison of short-term impact across projects, as well as monitoring the use of quantitative and qualitative tools that map outcomes between short-term and long-term projects. Each project lead has been tasked with developing evaluation strategies that align with our overall framework. We recognise the importance of demonstrating the level of performance of all projects which might not immediately be reflected in the overall institutional metrics.

For example, our theory of change (see figure 13 below) identifies the overall intended impact of our access work and the short, medium- and longer-term outcomes mapped to each strand of outreach activity:

- Awareness raising activities: developing learners' awareness of HE as an option for them. We will evaluate how these activities motivate learners to find out more/engage with other outreach.

- Skills and knowledge: activities and programmes that challenge, inspire and engage, encouraging learners to understand what studying in HE will be like and differences between subjects, as well as developing employability skills to encourage progression through HE into employment. We will evaluate impact on skills and knowledge (self-assessment and teacher assessment for some projects).
- Attainment: activities that support young people to fulfil their potential to achieve, to attain the necessary qualifications to reach HE and to develop the academic and transferable skills they need to succeed in HE and beyond. We will evaluate through attainment and progression data.

Figure 13: Theory of change model for UEL APP projects



Through progressing first stage implementation of the evaluation strategy for access, we have identified a bank of indicators and methods for collecting qualitative and quantitative data. In 2018/2019, additional work has been undertaken to expand this into the success and progression streams. It will be the Impact and Evaluation team’s responsibility to take this current framework to scale, with application across each phase of the student journey.

### 3.3b Learning to Shape Improvements

Since 2018/2019, the APP Steering Group has implemented new processes and activities that support high quality management and monitoring of APP related projects. These activities align with learning to shape improvements within the projects. To support a transparent, open and collegial approach, we have migrated APP process and activities to the Microsoft ‘Teams’ platform. This is a virtual UEL space where project leads submit inquiries which are answered and available to all project leads. We have also developed ‘brown bag’ learning sessions where project leads come together to share updates or challenges and receive feedback from colleagues who have received support from the APP. Finally, project leads present and showcase their work through institutional events where the broader community learn and provide additional insight that will help project leads improve delivery.

### 3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

The APP Steering Group has been established to lead the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Plan. The Steering Group, chaired by the UEL Chief Operating Officer, will ensure that the provisions in the Plan are delivered and will report progress against milestones and gaps through the Education and Student Success Committee of Academic Board.

The remit of the Steering Group is to monitor the implementation of the activities identified to address gaps in equality of opportunity, to review the impact of activities and progress against targets, to make recommendations about further work including developing the next APP, and to ensure that effective practice is shared across the university and through stakeholder networks. The members have been drawn from across academic schools and professional services, including representation from the UELSU and the REC Self-Assessment Group. The Steering Group will be supported by working groups focusing on success and progression, data analysis and evaluation and financial support for students. A dedicated project management resource has enabled development of an effective monitoring system to highlight to the Steering Group where action needs to be taken to ensure provisions of the APP are optimally delivered.

In addition to the committee oversight structure for our APP, we will develop greater understanding and awareness of UEL demographic data across the institution. This will ensure that regular reports and subsequent plans are informed by an in-depth knowledge of trends and reflect the specific needs of our student body. Dashboards will be enhanced during this period for use by staff as part of current annual monitoring processes to further embed the central importance of access and participation requirements.

#### **4. Provision of information to students**

We will publish clear, accessible and timely information for applicants and students on the fees that we charge, and the financial support that we offer through a range of media including via UCAS and SLC, our website, publications and social media channels. We will also deliver workshops and road shows in schools, colleges and community locations. Our Matrix accredited IAG service offers an individually tailored guidance service and our SMART team offers specific financial guidance for students pre- and post-entry. The APP will be published prominently on the UEL website.

#### **5. Appendix**

The OfS will append the following items from the fees and targets and investment documents when an access and participation plan is published:

1. Targets (tables 2a, 2b and 2c in the targets and investment plan)
2. Investment summary (tables 4a and 4b in the targets and investment plan)
3. Fee summary (table 4a and 4b in the fee information document)

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