

Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2020-21 to 2024-25

1. Assessment of performance

Context

The Royal Agricultural University (RAU) is a small and specialised land-based institution of approximately 1100 students. While we have comparatively high levels of diversity in our postgraduate community (c10% of students), recruitment to the undergraduate land-based programmes has traditionally come from those who reside within English rural communities which are not diverse. Although widening participation has been a focus for the RAU for a number of years, given this recruitment context, this continues to be a challenge for ourselves and the wider land-based sector.

Our approach to widening participation in recent years has been multifaceted. This has included an ongoing ambitious outreach programme and expanding our offering to include more science-based subjects and business-related programmes. This has resulted in an increase in the proportion of students drawn from state schools and from lower socio-economic groups (SEG).

Following the recent appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor and senior administrative and academic leadership teams, the University has developed a transformational strategic plan (2018-2022) and is adopting an **evidence-based approach** to ensuring its effective delivery. This prioritises our **whole institution approach** to achieving student growth and diversity articulated in this APP.

When considering how to achieve our aims, there are important contextual factors affecting the social profile of RAU students that need to be considered:

- a) Rural communities, from which RAU students are largely recruited, have lower rates of participation in Higher Education (HE) and higher levels of social exclusion, compared to the national average¹.
- b) The vast majority of POLAR4 quintile 1 and 2 wards are located within urban communities where 81.5% of the general population reside (2011 census).
- c) There is a significant under-representation of BAME communities in rural settings; at the 2011 census BAME communities accounted for only 5% of the rural population, compared with 22% in urban areas.
- d) As a small and specialist university which offers a range of high cost subjects, the RAU is also working with a comparatively small budget. Consequently, the activities outlined in this Plan are proportionate to the budget and resources available.

Many of these challenges are also relevant to the wider land-based and rural industries, which face a skills shortage and lack of diversity in their workforce. It is likely that this will be exacerbated by Brexit. To help address this, in 2017 we were awarded funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for a Catalyst project to develop new programmes that will attract a more diverse community of learners into the sector to help the industries we serve meet the challenges of Brexit and address global food security.

In addition to the specific recruitment activities outlined later in this Plan, we are fully committed to helping the sector address these challenges via a number of activities including our wider engagement with other land-based institutions, the promotion of Agriculture as a STEM subject, membership of Food and Farming Futures, and via our ongoing research and thought leadership activities.

¹ Social Mobility Commission:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017_-_Social_Mobility_in_Great_Britain.pdf

RAU Assessment of Performance

Overview

Our self-assessment indicates that our performance in the success and progression areas of the student lifecycle has been generally positive, as shown in the analysis of data set out below. Building on this performance, our key focus in this plan will therefore be in the areas of **access**, and **attainment levels specifically for disabled and mature students**, within the context of the structural factors noted above.

While data on access to the RAU is not available for children of military families² or military veterans, many are attracted by a land-based career. Many military veterans used to attend the RAU but in recent years this has fallen away; however national data indicates that there remains a need to engage both military personnel and their families in HE and the RAU is well-placed to offer this opportunity – land-based, small, specialist, good accommodation, secure setting, and with an entrepreneurial mindset – all the factors that are likely to be significant to ex-service personnel. Consequently, we will address these as under-represented groups where we believe we can make a difference.

Data sources

The data referred to are those provided to the Institution by the Office for Students (OfS) and are for full-time provision except where stated. The data covers the previous five years, from 2013/14 (year 1) to 2017/18 (year 5). The student population relevant to this analysis averages 363 over the 5 year period. Therefore, interpretation of the data requires a degree of caution because of the relatively small number of students belonging to certain cohorts.

In the majority of this analysis and in the setting of targets, POLAR4 data have been used, rather than IMD, due to the significant overlap between the two datasets and the relative strengths of POLAR4 as a robust and widely used measure.

Positive situation and trends

- **State schools**

The percentage of new students enrolled from state schools has shown a steady increase in recent years (see Figure 1 and HESA T1), reflecting the move away from POLAR4 quintile 5 and the increased proportion of students from POLAR4 quintiles 3 and 4 (see figure 2). While enrolment remains below the national average for the sector (89.8% HESA 2019), it has improved significantly from 47.6% in 2013/14 to 62.8% in 2017/18.

This represents a very positive step forward in the rate of progress that has been made; our target is to achieve an enrolment rate of 70% after 5 years. To achieve this we will continue to work with colleges and schools that are either underperforming, or with high populations of disadvantaged students. Continuing to close this gap in participation is an area of strategic priority for the RAU, as reflected in the targets set out in sections 2.3 and 2.4.

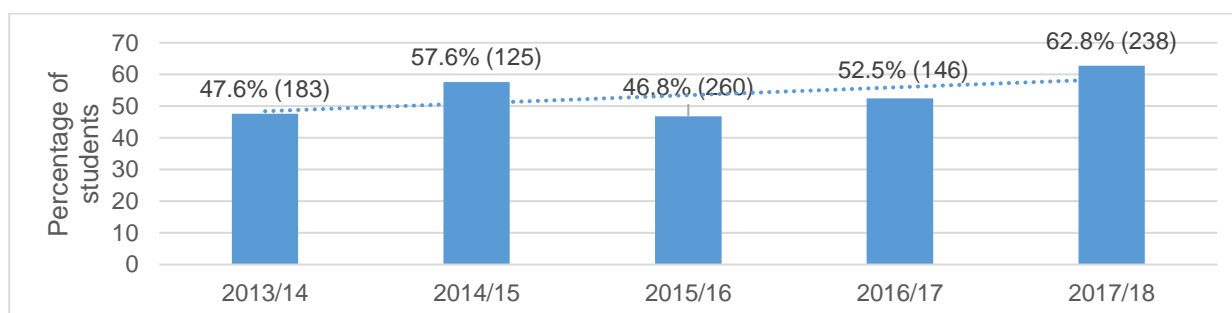


Figure 1: Proportion of state school students enrolling at the RAU over a 5 year period. This compares with a national average of 89.8% for students from state schools (HESA 2019 for 2017/18).

² McCullough and Hall, 2016: Further and Higher Profession for Service Children: https://www.scipalliance.org/assets/files/UoW-research-paper_Further-and-Higher-Progression-for-Service-Children.pdf

- **Male to female student ratios**

In 2017-18 males were underrepresented in HE nationally. At the RAU, there is a more balanced participation across the male (49.7%) to female (50.3%) population, which has been maintained over a period of years (Table 1).

Table 1: Male to female student enrolment for 2017/18 compared with the national average.		
	Female	Male
RAU	50.3% (191)	49.7 (188)
National	55.9%	44.1%

- **Non-continuation rate**

Non-continuation rates at the RAU have been consistently excellent, although they increased slightly from 1.6% for 2015-16 entrants to 4.7% for 2016-17 entrants (HESA T3). Notwithstanding, the overall non-continuation rate for RAU students remains significantly lower than national averages which are 15.2% for mature and 7.8% for young students (OfS Dashboard, 2016-17).

1.1 Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

Access

Figure 2 demonstrates an improving level of representation of RAU students from POLAR4 quintiles 3 and 4, while quintile 5 has reduced as a proportion of the total population. Recruitment from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2 have remained steady at around 6-8% (approximately 20-30 students). Addressing this gap in participation is an area of strategic priority for the RAU, as noted above.

Students from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2 are proving much more challenging to recruit than other quintiles, despite significant activity in this area both independently and in collaboration with National Collaborative Outreach Partners (NCOPs) such as GROWS. This is true both for the RAU and nationally. Over the period of this APP our aim is to maintain the progress already made in quintiles 3 and 4 while focussing on improving quintiles 2 and 1 through our targeted interventions.

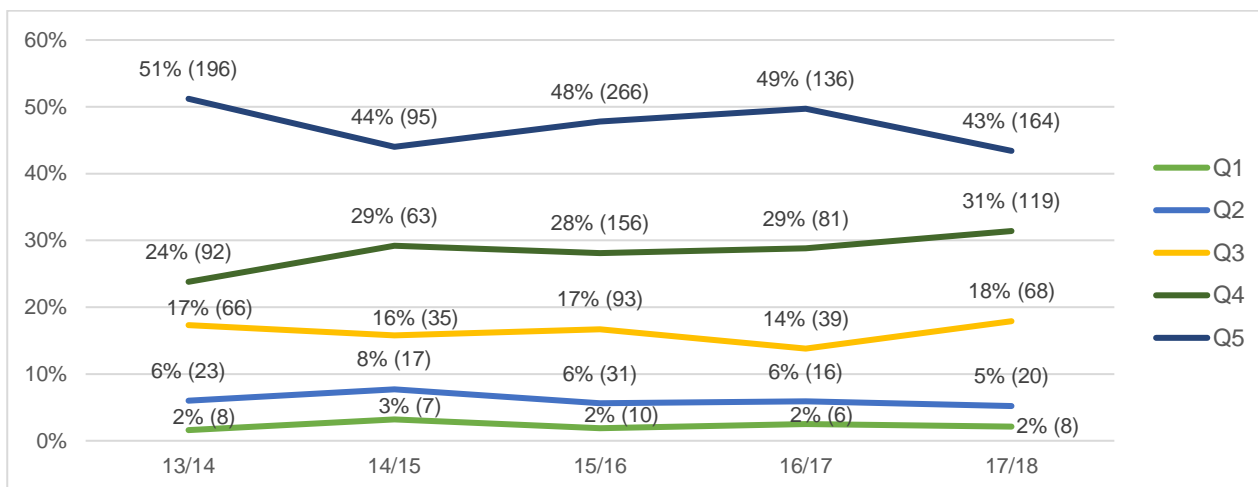


Figure 2: Students enrolled at the RAU according to POLAR4 classification over a 5 year period.

Success - Non-continuation

Overall continuation rates for RAU students are well above the national average, and this success continues when broken down by POLAR4 quintile (see Figure 3 below). For students from POLAR4 quintiles 2, 4 and 5 the continuation rate has declined from year 1 to year 5; in contrast, there has been improvement of quintile 3. However, because of the small numbers of students in each cohort, it is difficult to interpret the significance and implications, if any, of these trends.

Although Figure 3 indicates a decline in continuation in percentage terms from year 1 to year 5 for Q4 students, the actual number of continuing students in this group has increased over the period. No significant gap is seen in the continuation rate for the most disadvantaged students (Q2) compared to the other quintiles, and is testament to the success of our student support.

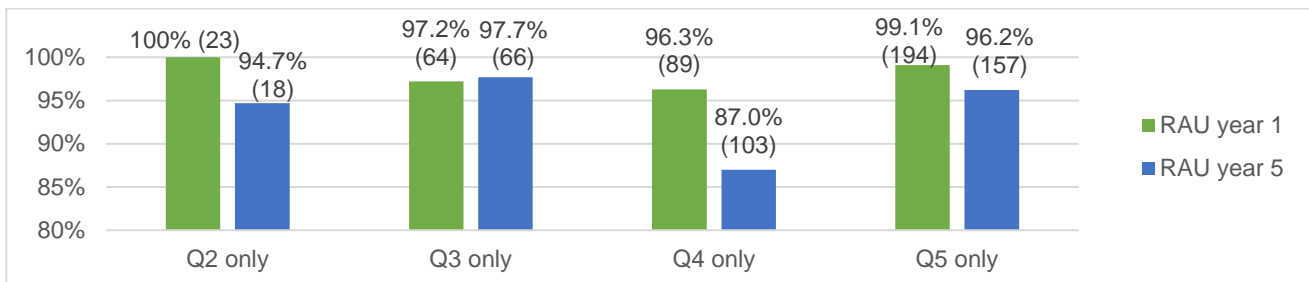


Figure 3: Continuation rate measured by POLAR4 quintiles 2-5 from year 1 (2013-14) to year 5 (2017-18). (OfS Dashboard 2016-17).

Note: due to small sample size POLAR4 quintile 1 is not available for analysis.

Success – Attainment

When comparing attainment rates across the POLAR4 quintiles, no clear pattern emerges (see Figure 4); again this reflects the challenge of interpreting data where the numbers are small. For all students from POLAR4 quintiles 2 and 4, the attainment rate has declined from year 1 to year 5. For students from POLAR4 quintiles 3 and 5, the attainment rate has increased.

When looking at the actual student numbers involved, these changes represent only small fluctuations with no even pattern of change. However, for all quintiles the attainment rates remain below the national averages and we are investigating this as part of our ongoing curriculum review (Section 3).

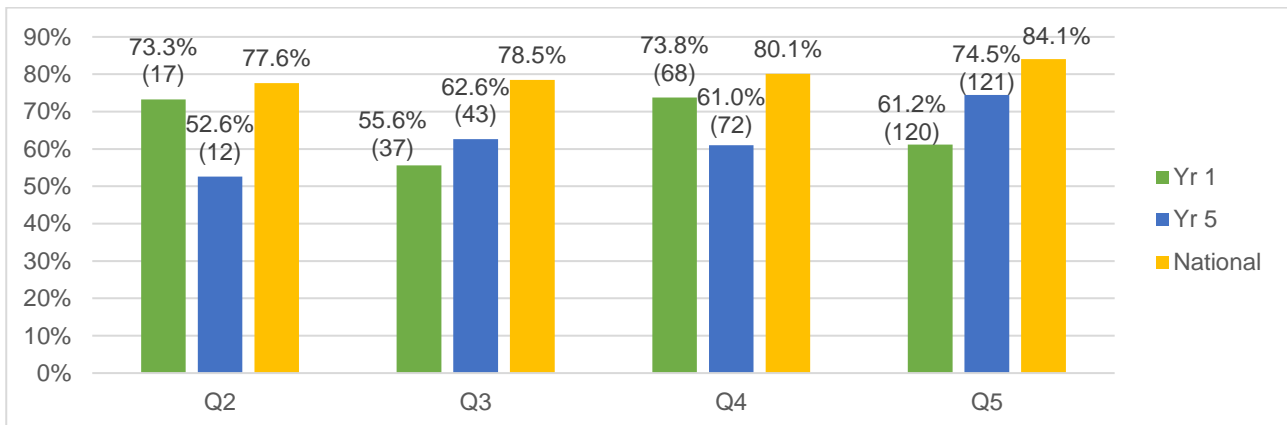


Figure 4: Attainment rate as measured by POLAR4 quintiles 2-5, for year 1 (2013-14) and year 5 (2017-18), compared to the national averages for those years.

Note: due to small sample sizes, data on POLAR4 quintile 1 is not available for analysis.

Progression to employment or further study

The rate of progression for all RAU graduates from POLAR4 quintile 2 areas has increased over recent years. Although data is unavailable for year 1 (2013-14), the rate in year 2 was 61.1% (10 students) and this has now increased to 81.3% (16 students). This is higher than the rate for all other POLAR4 quintiles, and also higher than the national figure for this quintile, of 70.7% (OfS Dashboard, 2016-17).

The rate of progression for all other quintiles has slightly decreased from years 1 to year 5, and is lowest for quintile 5 students (see Figure 5). However, the data for intervening years do not provide a consistent pattern and any changes are very small in real terms. As a result, it is not possible to tell whether this indicates an emerging pattern or is anomalous and relating to a specific year group.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that in recent years we have been attracting students to the RAU due to the entrepreneurial development available. The success of our award-winning enterprise programme, named as a Centre of Excellence by the Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs in 2019, is a contributing factor to our students deciding not to enter directly into employment. Our students often prefer to seek self-employment in the years immediately following graduation. Approximately 30% of our students investigate how to start a new enterprise each year. Those that pursue this route achieve an 82% success rate³ compared with 44% for new start-ups nationally (Office for National Statistics 2018).

³ RAU Enterprise unit data

Consequently, as these students are not included within the HESA employment data, we believe that this indicator is not an effective representation of their actual circumstances shortly after graduation. We will be developing our own Outcomes Survey to gain a clearer perspective on how best to measure progression to further study, employment or enterprise amongst our students. While not a specific target, we are also considering Progression within this APP (see section 3.4).

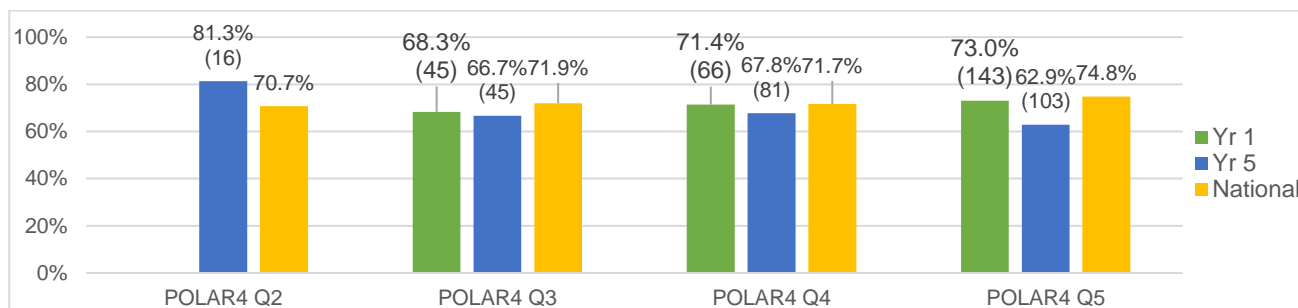


Figure 5: Progression rates as measured by POLAR4 quintiles 2-5 for year 1 (2013-14) and year 5 (2017-18), and compared to the national averages for those years.

Note: Due to small sample size, POLAR4 quintile 1, and quintile 2 in year 1, is not available for analysis.

1.2 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students

Access

The ethnic profile of home undergraduate students at RAU is predominantly White at 97.4% in 2017-18. This proportion has remained high throughout the 5 year period for which there is data. Consequently, the percentage of students from Asian, Black, Mixed and other ethnicities is low at 2.6% (10 students) in year five, with a similar level of under-representation for the other four years of data (see Table 2).

2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
2.6% (10)	2.3% (5)	1.8% (10)	1.8% (5)	2.6% (10)

There is clearly a significant gap in this ethnic profile at the RAU (2.6%) compared with the national average across the HE sector (27.3%). Addressing this gap in participation is an area of strategic priority for the RAU, as reflected in the targets set in section 2.3 and we intend to increase participation to 8% over 5 years. However, this does need to be considered within the rural context in which the University operates, both in its location and curriculum offer.

It is not evident from the data available what the national or regional rates of access are for BAME students from rural communities. However, data from the Office for National Statistics 2018⁴, shows that the South West and Wales have BAME populations of 4-5%. When taken against this measure for our region of the South West, access for BAME students at the RAU, while still lower, is closer to the regional average populations for these groups (Table 3 below).

There is greater ethnic diversity in our postgraduate and international communities, and these students are able and very willing to act as mentors and ambassadors to support diversification in our undergraduate population (see section 3).

	RAU (OfS Dashboard 2017/18)	S.W. Region (ONS 2018)	National (OfS Dashboard 2017/18)
Asian	0.5%	2%	14.5%
Black	1.3%	0.9%	6.3%
Mixed	1.1%	1.4%	4.8%
Other	0.3%	0.3%	1.7%

Success - Non-continuation

Our continuation rates are excellent.

⁴ Office for National Statistics (ONS) <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest#ethnic-groups-by-type-of-location-urban-or-rural>

The continuation rate for White students over the 5 year period ranges from 98.1% for year 1 to 93.6% for year 5, higher than the current national average of 91.3% (OfS Dashboard 2016-17).

The continuation rate for Asian, Black, Mixed, and White students is similarly at a high level, ranging from 97.7% for year 1 to 93.2% for year 5. Because of the low numbers of BAME students, disaggregated data are not available for comparative purposes between different groupings.

The fact that the continuation rate for students from all ethnic groups is at a similar level, demonstrates that, even given the size of the cohorts, there are no significant gaps in continuation between groups of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Success - Attainment

As shown in Table 4, the attainment rates for White vs aggregated Asian, Mixed, Other and White (AMOW) students are at an almost identical level over the 5 year period with a negligible difference between the groups (as compared with a national figure of 80.2%, OfS Dashboard 2017-18).

Because of the low number of non-White students, disaggregated data are not available for comparative purposes between different groupings. The attainment rates for students from all ethnic groups is at a similar levels to White students, indicating no significant gaps in attainment between students from different ethnic backgrounds.

	Year 1	Year 5	National (Year 5) (OfS Dashboard 2017/18)
AMOW	66.2% (180)	66% (165)	68.8%
White	66.2% (180)	65.9% (165)	80.2%

Progression to employment or further study

As shown in Table 5, progression rates for White students over the 5 year period follow an almost identical pattern to the aggregated AMOW students, with a negligible difference between the groups. Because of the low number of BAME students (see Table 2), disaggregated data are not available for comparative purposes between different ethnic groupings.

The progression rate for students from all ethnic groups is at a similar level to White students, demonstrating no significant gap in progression between students from different ethnic backgrounds.

	Year 1	Year 5	National (Year 5) (OfS Dashboard (2016/17)
AMOW	72.3% (200)	65.5% (170)	73.4%
White	72.2% (195)	65.2% (165)	74%

1.3 Care leavers

Access

The very small data set for this cohort of students precludes further analysis as to do so would present a significant likelihood of individuals being identifiable. Nonetheless, we are aware that this is a group who face significant barriers in progressing to HE and are vastly underrepresented within the sector.

However, many of the factors that would attract ex-service personnel to the University - small, specialist, good accommodation, secure setting, are likely to also attract care-leavers interested in a career in the land-based industries.

Addressing this gap in participation is a strategic measure for the RAU, as reflected by our targets set in sections 2.3 and 2.4, and the specific strategic measures to improve access, success and progression for students from looked after backgrounds outlined in section 3.

Success - Non-continuation and Attainment

N/A: Due to small data size, information on students' continuation and attainment is not available for analysis.

Progression to employment or further study

N/A – Due to small data size, information on students' progression is not available for analysis.

1.4 Disabled students

Access

The sector percentage of students declaring a disability is 14.6% (OfS Dashboard, 2017-18). The percentage of RAU students declaring a disability has consistently been much higher than this, increasing over the 5 year period by 8.2 percentage points to 33.5% (see Figure 6). The percentage of students indicating a cognitive disability also increased by 4.1 percentage points to 24.9% and makes up a significant proportion of the number of students who have declared a disability.

The proportion of students with an issue of mental ill health also increased from 0.7% to 4.5% while the proportion of students categorised with a sensory, medical and physical disability decreased by 0.5 percentage points to 1.8%. The proportion of disabled students with multiple impairments has also increased to 1.8% over the five year period.

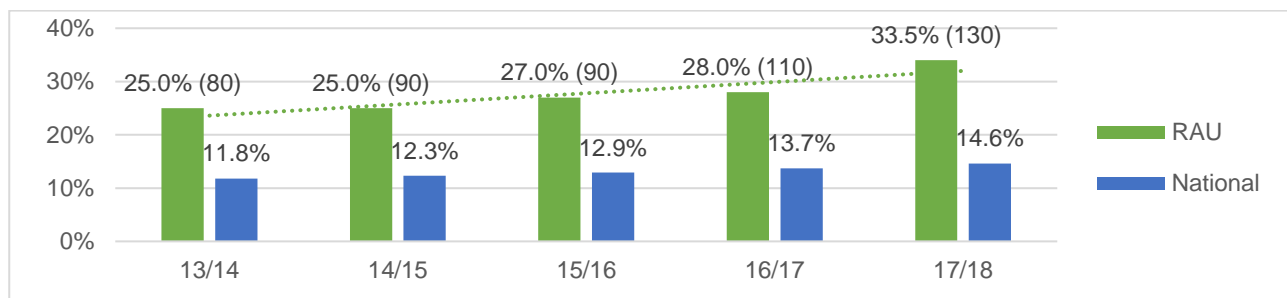


Figure 6: RAU access rates over a 5 year period for disabled students.

Success - Non-continuation

The continuation rate for students with a disability is very strong. It has varied slightly over the five year period from 100% (75 students) in 2012-13 to 90.7% (95 students) in 2016-17. This fluctuates over the intervening years but remains higher than the national rate of 89.4% in 2016-17. Maintaining this high continuation rate for disabled students will remain a priority.

Success - Attainment

The attainment rate for students with a disability varied over the 5 year period from 2012-13 to 2016-17 as shown in Figure 7, showing a general decline from 65.6% in year 1 to 53% in year 5, but with an uneven pattern. It is consistently below the attainment rate for students with no known disability, with the difference being most apparent in years 2 and 5 at 15.2% and 17.4% respectively. The attainment rate is also consistently below the current national rate of 75.9% (OfS Dashboard, 2017-18).

Students with a cognitive and learning disability had a 9.9% reduction in their rate of attainment over the 5 year period from 60.8% to 50.9% in 2017-18. Again, the statistics do not indicate a continuous pattern of decline in attainment as years 3 and 4 involved higher rates of attainment than in year 1. The largest rate of increase in the gap was in years 4 and 5 at 12.2%. Data sets for other students with a disability are too small to be included for this analysis.

Addressing the attainment gap in students with a disability is an area of strategic priority for the RAU, as reflected in sections 2.3/2.4. Our ambition is to close the gap entirely. The reasons for the changes seen year on year are being investigated to identify what specific interventions may be needed. We are already putting in place a new approach for disabled students, ensuring they receive an individualised approach to support them in achieving the best outcomes possible. This is alongside our institutional change programme as outlined in section 3.1.

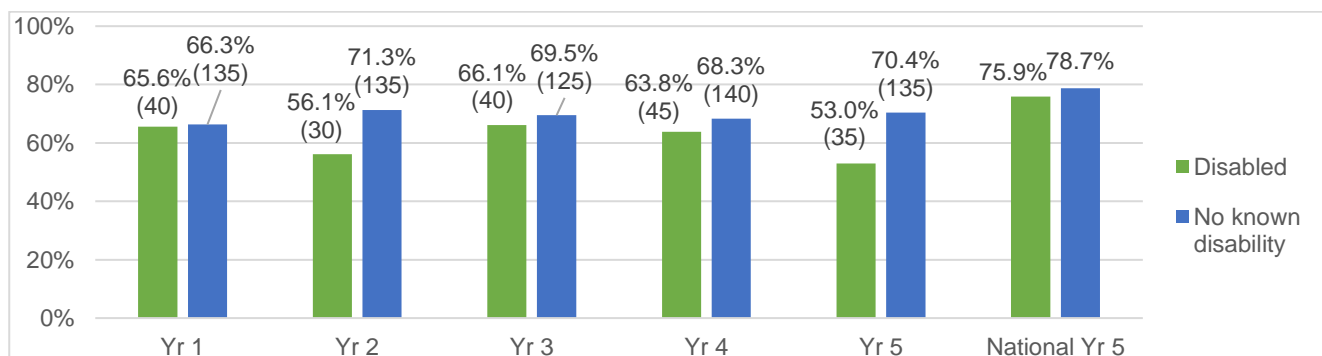


Figure 7: Attainment rates for students with a disability, compared to those with no known disability for year 1 (2012-13) to year 5 (2016-17) and compared to the national average for 2016-17.

Progression to employment or further study

The rate of progression for students with a disability at RAU decreased over the 5 year period by 8.2% from 70% in 2012-13 to 61.8% in 2016-17. However, as can be seen in Figure 8, this rate has fluctuated year on year by only small amounts in terms of actual student numbers, and regularly has been comparable with the current sector rate of 71.5% (OfS Dashboard, 2017-18).

While the most recent rate of progression for students with a disability at RAU is slightly lower than the rate for those with no known disability, this has fluctuated throughout the period. Measures being put in place to improve progression are set out in section 3.4. We believe these interventions will obviate the gap between the two groups, bringing us in line with national averages for both cohorts (target 8, p12).

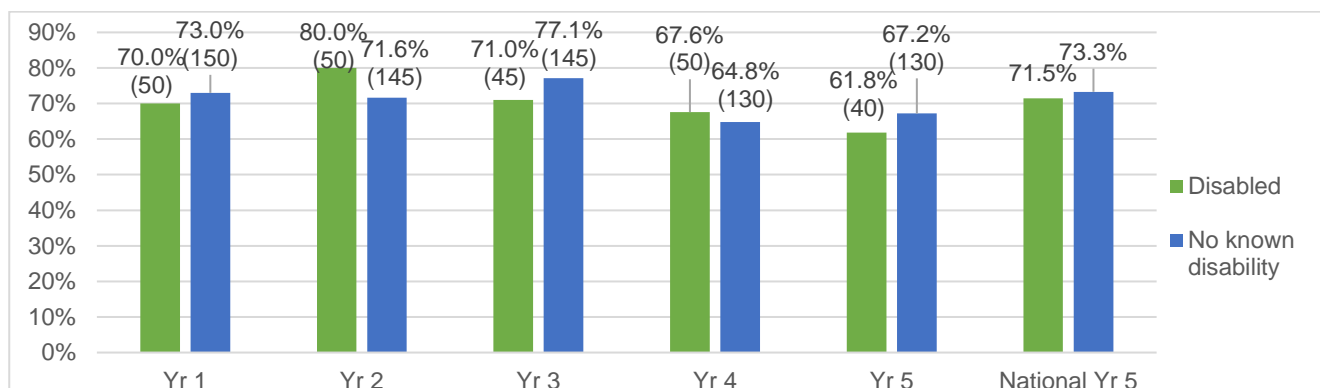


Figure 8: Progression rates for students with a disability compared to those with no known disability from year 1 (2012-13) to year 5 (2016-17) and compared to the national average in 2016-17.

1.5 Mature students

Access

As shown in Table 6, the proportion of mature students (i.e. those over 21 years old) enrolled on undergraduate courses has increased over the five year period from 18.4% (71 students) to 23.6% (90 students) in 2017-18 compared with a national figure of 27.8% (OfS Dashboard, 2017-18). The percentage access gap between mature and young students at RAU has therefore fallen 10.3 percentage points over the five year period to 52.9%.

	Year 1	Year 5	National (Year 5) (OfS Dashboard 2017/18)
Mature	18.4% (71)	23.6% (90)	27.8%
Young	81.6% (314)	76.4% (290)	73.1%

It is noteworthy that there are significant gaps in the recruitment of students from the age bands 21-25 and 41-50 compared with the enrolment of young students (under 21). Nonetheless, over a five year period the gap in mature student recruitment compared with young students has been closing as follows:

- 21-25 year olds: the difference has reduced by 9.3 percentage points;
- 41-50 year olds: the difference has reduced by 6.6 percentage points.

We will continue closing this gap in participation through targeted outreach activities and an appropriate academic offering with new study routes, e.g. accelerated degrees as described in section 3.

Success - Non-continuation

As discussed in section 1, the non-continuation rates for both mature and young students at the RAU are consistently excellent and lower than the national averages. As in the national picture, young students do perform better than their mature counterparts but this gap is closing, from 4.5% in year 1 (2012-13) to 3.8% in year 5 (2016-17). We plan to continue closing this gap through the work described in section 3.

Success – Attainment

As can be seen from Table 7 below, the overall attainment rate of good honours (a 2:1 or a First) for all young students has increased by 2.3% over a 5 year period, but has decreased for mature students over the same period by 15.9%. For both young and mature students, the attainment levels are below the national average in 2017-18 (OfS Dashboard, 2017-18).

Comparing these two attainment rates (mature and young) indicates a significant shift in percentage points; the gap has reversed from 10% in year 1 (with mature students performing more positively than young students) to a gap of 8.2% in year 5 (with young students performing more strongly than their

mature counterparts). The reasons for the change in the pattern of attainment are currently being investigated and we plan to address this, and to close the gap in attainment, as a matter of priority, as reflected in the targets in sections 2.3 and 2.4.

	Year 1	Year 5	National Year 5 (OfS Dashboard 2017/18)
Mature	75% (25)	59.1% (25)	70%
Young	65% (155)	67.3% (140)	80.2%
Gap	10%	-8.2%	-10.2%

Progression to employment or further study

As shown in Table 8, the progression rate for mature and young learners has decreased at a similar rate over the 5 year period (by 6.6% for mature learners and 6.4% for young learners). Mature students continue to outperform their young counterparts on this measure, but both mature and young learners are below their respective national averages in 2016-17. There is not an even pattern of change on this measure and the number of students involved is low, so we will continue to monitor and act to address concerns if they arise.

	Year 1	Year 5	National Year 5 (OfS Dashboard 2017/18)
Mature	75% (35)	68.4% (25)	75.7%
Young	71.7% (165)	65.3% (145)	72.3%

1.6 Intersections of disadvantage

Due to the small sample size for individual student groups seen throughout this self-assessment, it is not possible to assess gaps in Access, Success and Progression at the RAU for many intersections of particular characteristics. Consequently, only those gaps with statistical significance are outlined below⁵.

Access

There is a gap in access to RAU between POLAR4 quintile 1 and 2 students from White ethnic backgrounds and POLAR4 quintile 1 and 2 students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. This gap fluctuates between approximately 6% and 10% (20-30 students) over the 5 year period from 2013-14 to 2017-18 with no even pattern. The number of POLAR4 quintile 1 and 2 students from BAME backgrounds is consistently lower than 3 per year across the 5 year period.

We have already identified gaps in access for both POLAR4 quintile 1 and 2 students and students from BAME backgrounds in sections 1.1 and 1.2 respectively, and set targets accordingly in sections 2.3 and 2.4. It is clear that this particular intersection of disadvantage is one that we need to address and these targets, along with the plans set out in section 3 will enable this.

Continuation

There is a gap of 6.4% in 2017-18, as indicated in the 5 year data in respect of males from POLAR4 quintiles 3, 4, and 5 compared to females from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 3 in years 1, 3 and 5. This may be an anomaly but we will keep under review.

Attainment

N/A – Due to small data size, information in respect of students' attainment from particular intersections of disadvantage is not available for analysis.

Progression

There is a gap indicated for males from POLAR4 quintiles 3, 4 and 5 compared to females from POLAR4 quintiles 3, 4 and 5. We will keep this under review as, while this was statistically significant in 2015-16, it was not for the other 4 of the 5 years of data.

⁵ While we will continue to monitor access and success for all groups, the actual numbers are such that the statistical significance of any areas of difference will be meaningless.

2. Strategic aims and objectives

2.1 Outcome from Assessment of Performance

Assessment of our performance has highlighted that the RAU is in a unique position to be able to address **access** for under-represented groups within rural and also peripatetic communities such as military families. In addition, there is a need to improve **success** in degree attainment for disabled and mature students in particular, and **progression** for disabled students.

2.2 Whole Provider Strategic Approach

Overview

The RAU aspires to be the leading small specialist university in the land agri-food and rural enterprise sectors. To that end, our strategic goals include two that are specifically focussed on widening participation to a more diverse student body:

- **To grow and diversify our student community** by providing an outstanding student experience and excellent employment outcomes.
- Strategic and sustainable partnership working: partnerships with land-based colleges and schools will **diversify our student community** and extend the reach of the learning opportunities we offer.

We aim to **increase participation and social mobility**, particularly from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2. Preliminary internal data suggests that rural students represent a high proportion of the RAU population but further work is needed to identify if they are also disadvantaged. In addition, we are setting targets to **close the attainment gaps for disabled and for mature student groups**, and to **close the gap in progression for students with a disability**, when compared with the wider RAU student population.

As a small specialist university with limited resource, we are focussing our outreach activities in those areas where we can make the biggest difference. We are specifically focussing on rural areas of deprivation in our local and nearby counties of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. These are locations where we have strong connections with groups such as the Royal Three Counties, enabling higher awareness raising.

We believe we will see the largest impact of our activities in these areas of rural deprivation, but are not limiting our activities to these areas. The University recognises that we have a wider mission to serve the needs of the UK economy by increasing productivity in the agri-food and land management sectors.

Strategic leadership at the RAU has been transformed with the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor in 2016 and subsequently a new senior team who have put widening participation at the core of the University's new strategic plan. This transformation of leadership includes:

- A Director for Students responsible for widening participation and consideration of the whole student lifecycle.
- A Director for Education providing strategic direction for improvement in academic quality, programme development and a new pedagogic framework.
- Staff with appropriate experience appointed at all levels of the institution
- Recruitment, outreach and admissions teams brought under the same line management, giving a more holistic approach, including the consideration of context, to the admissions process.
- Widening participation work at the RAU that had previously been contracted to an external agency has now been brought in-house to provide greater ownership and institutional tie-in.
- New senior leadership appointments in all academic schools providing direction and embedding diversity throughout the academic offering, to ensure it is engaging to a wider audience.

Our Governing Council has been involved in the development of this Plan, with two Council members being designated as Link Governors to monitor this work (section 3.7). This provides Council with close contact with the Plan, its implementation and performance monitoring. In addition, we are developing stronger engagement with our students having introduced a student Access and Participation Panel (section 3.5) as well as other student experience and staff/student liaison committees and groups, to ensure that they are contributing to the strategic development of the University and to their student experience, as well as having opportunities to hold us to account.

Alignment with other strategies

Equality, diversity and inclusion

The APP aims and objectives are concerned with widening access to the RAU for underrepresented groups. We also recognise the importance of maintaining a climate of trust and transparency in which all students feel positively welcomed, included and valued. It is therefore an integral part of our strategy and theory of change to raise awareness and understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion issues, and to drive changes in behaviour and culture to ensure that all students, including those from

underrepresented groups, feel equal members of our learning community and are supported by the academic and social environment of the institution.

Our academic staff are actively engaged in the equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) debate within the land-based industries, as consistent with our Equality Policy. The RAU has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group (EDIG) tasked with driving forward change in support of our strategic goals.

Teaching, learning and assessment

The RAU is redesigning the curriculum to make it more accessible to students from all backgrounds and embedding diversity within teaching content. We are implementing a new Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy that will drive the agenda around pedagogy. We aim is to lead the way with regard to understanding how curriculum design and delivery can improve attainment for different student groups attracted to the land-based sector, many of whom have cognitive disabilities.

For example, we have recognised that traditional, closed book examinations were not serving our students well as an assessment tool, particularly given the high proportion of students with a disability and particularly those students with a learning disability. To enable all of our students to be better able to demonstrate their learning, we are introducing alternative assessment methods, and have introduced semesters to provide a more balanced assessment schedule across the academic year.

As an academic community, we are developing the curriculum to be world referencing and to use a wide range of exemplars within case study materials. Examples include the introduction of courses specifically focussed on the international business environment, international food supply chains and tropical agriculture, and some programmes have introduced bursaries for international trips to ensure all students, irrespective of background, are able to benefit from a broader world view.

Investment, in partnership the University College of Estate Management (UCEM) and the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), into the new Catalyst programme of courses will also provide blended learning opportunities including distance learning, accelerated degrees and credit accumulation, to enable more flexible participation and work-based learning. The Catalyst programmes are designed to appeal to a wider audience beyond the traditional rural communities where POLAR4 quintile 1 and students from BAME backgrounds are underrepresented.

With the support of Swindon Borough Council we have invested in a satellite site in the former GWR Carriage Works in Swindon where there is no significant HE presence. This will offer initially offer courses focussed on cultural heritage. The increased opportunities provided by being part of the more diverse Swindon community, together with the integration and cross-fertilisation of students and staff between the main campus and the Swindon hub, are intended to provide a positive virtuous circle effect across the whole institution.

2.3 Target groups

Our targets for Access are:

1. Students from low participation areas

We will target students from POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2, with a specific focus on rural communities
In addition, our aim is to increase the numbers such that quintiles 1 and 2 can be separated and reported on individually as we seek to close the gap between Q1 and Q5.

2. Students from state schools

We will target state schools and colleges, with a specific focus on underperforming and/or high proportion of disadvantaged groups

3. Students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds

4. Students who have been in local authority care

Our aim is to increase numbers so that we can analyse care leaver performance across the entire student lifecycle to enable us to evaluate differences in performance from the student population as a whole.

In addition, we are seeking to improve opportunities for access for military veterans and children of military families, as these are also underrepresented groups and are communities where we believe we can have a positive impact on their access to HE. This will require further analysis and understanding of the available data internally and across the HE sector.

For Success, our targets are to close the gaps in the levels of attainment between:

5. Disabled students and those with no declared disability

6. Mature students and young students.

For Progression, our target is to close the gap in the progression rates between:

7. Disabled students and those with no declared disability

2.4 Target goals

We will **improve access for under-represented groups, close the attainment gaps for disabled and for mature student groups**, and **close the progression gap for disabled student groups**, when compared with the wider RAU student population⁶.

Table 9 below shows the target overall for the different groups we are targeting. We do anticipate that achievement of these will be staggered over the 5 year period and will be monitoring the results regularly to ensure that we remain on track, and increase our targets as necessary. However, we do believe these figures are both realistic and stretching for an institution of our size, specialisms, resource and location.

Target	Baseline %	Current Number	2024-25 Target %
1. Increase % of students from POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 areas ⁷	7.3%	20	14%
2. Increase % of students enrolled from state schools	52.5%	146	70%
3. Increase the % of enrolled BAME students	2.6%	10	8%
4. Increase number of students who are care leavers	N/A*	N/A*	2.5%
5. Reduce the gap in entry levels between students from POLAR4 Q1 and Q2, compared with Q5	36%	136	25%

Recognising the most significant gaps identified in our self-assessment, we aim to significantly **support the Success and Progression of underrepresented groups** at the University as below.

Our expectation is that we will achieve these goals within 5 years, and will be moving to close the gaps in attainment and progression for these groups when compared with the wider RAU population.

6. Close the gap in degree attainment (1st and 2:1) between disabled and non-disabled students	17.4%	N/A**	0%
7. Close the gap in degree attainment (1st and 2:1) between mature students and non-mature students	8.2%	N/A**	0%
8. Close the gap in progression outcomes between students disabled and non-disabled students	5.4%	N/A**	0%

**Numbers not shown as providing too strong a likelihood of individuals being identifiable.*

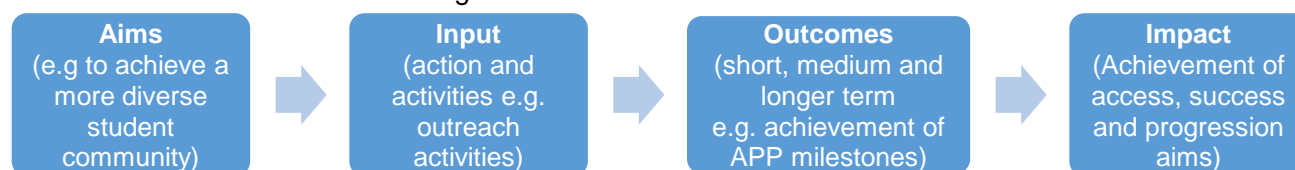
*** Given the differential in the numbers of students in these categories (disabled to non-disabled / mature to young), only percentage figures are provided.*

3. Strategic measures

3.1 Change programme

We are committed to implementing a programme of change, enabling the RAU to recruit students from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds; to ensure that they flourish and succeed academically, that they are well equipped to progress to employment, start their own business, or engage in further study.

We have identified our aims, and are developing a wide range of inputs to help us achieve our outcomes over the short medium and longer term. This will result in our achieving our first RAU strategic aim as set out in 2.2. This is illustrated in the logic chain below.



⁶ The data provided represented the results we expect to achieve within the 5 year time span for this Plan; metrics for the different targets may vary in terms of the achievement dates.

⁷ Currently the targets for POLAR4 quintile 1 and quintile 2 are combined as the small numbers do not support detailed analysis of these areas.

We are basing our strategies for Access, Progression and Success, on existing evidence-based good practice from within the sector⁸. Where there is no existing work for our specific institutional context, we are adapting these for our use. For example we are using the findings of the HEFCE funded '*Levelling the Playing Field*' project to close the employment outcome gap for BAME students, to influence our own employability and enterprise strategy.

We are also aware that we need to change behaviours in order to change the culture and one input we are implementing is the recent UUK/NUS report⁹ which highlighted five of the most significant steps needed for success in reducing attainment differentials as follows:

- Provide strong leadership
- Have conversations about race and changing the culture
- Develop diverse and inclusive environments, working with our students and staff on ensuring that under-represented groups have a good sense of belonging at the RAU
- Getting the evidence and analysing the data
- Better understanding of what works

The strategic measures include the implementation of the five steps above to ensure that RAU develops a culture of trust and transparency where all students feel included, which inculcates a strong sense of belonging to ensure that no group feels isolated or alienated. In doing this we will take a whole institution approach, where we engage the student body as well as our executive, academic, professional and support staff communities.

3.2 Access

The RAU's work on improving access seeks to raise the profile of careers in the land-based industries in schools, as well as in groups that are under-represented in HE. As noted previously, this will relate specifically to improving levels of participation and social mobility in rural areas of deprivation. While the activities below refer to POLAR 4 quintiles 1 and 2, we will be targeting quintile 1 as a priority throughout.

Colleges and Schools

We will develop strategic relationships with targeted schools/colleges, including partnerships, outreach and progression agreements to raise aspirations and widen access from the following target populations: POLAR4 Q1 & Q2; students from state schools; BAME students; Care leavers. Specifically, the RAU has strong partnership links with 8 FE colleges across the UK, which deliver RAU awards through franchising (Capel Manor) or validation arrangements. These Colleges have high levels of access to the key student groups outlined above, with the potential of extending the reach of the RAU to wider and more diverse cohorts of students.

The Colleges comprise: Askham Bryan; Berkshire College of Agriculture; Bishop Burton College; Capel Manor College; Cirencester College; Kingston Maurward College; Plumpton College. Wiltshire College. We are in discussion with a further two colleges regarding closer partnerships- Cornwall College including Duchy/Bicton and East Durham College.

In addition, we are establishing close and long-term strategic relationships with targeted schools which are under-performing or where the proportion of disadvantaged groups is higher, or both. These include the following Gloucestershire schools, as well as schools in Wiltshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire:

- Holmleigh Park High School: **63% Quintile 1** and 33% Quintile 2
- Gloucester Academy: 36% Quintile 1 and 44% Quintile 2
- The Forest High School: **73% Quintile 1** and 27% Quintile 2
- Archway School: 60% Quintile 2
- St Peters' Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre: 21% Quintile 1 and 36% Quintile 2
- All Saints' Academy, Cheltenham: **57% Quintile 1** and 35% Quintile 2
- Pittville School: **59% Quintile 1** and 18% Quintile 2
- Maidenhill School: 78% Quintile 2

Our new satellite site in Swindon, described above in section 2.2, will provide an excellent platform to engage with the more diverse Swindon schools and wider community, which includes 15.4% from BAME

⁸ What Works? Student Retention & Success: *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change* March 2012 and *Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change* April 2017

⁹ UUK/NUS: *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities – #Closing the Gap* May 2019

backgrounds. The local HE strategy completed by Swindon and Wiltshire LEP¹⁰ highlights that the region; has a high population in the most deprived 20% in England; Key Stage 5 attainment in Swindon is below regional and national averages; progression to HE is lower than the national average, significantly so for students receiving Free School Meals. This includes wards in North Swindon with participation rates of just 9.9% - amongst the lowest in the UK. This will be of particular importance in raising access for audiences from POLAR4 Q1.

Individual Outreach team members are assigned as link staff for specific schools and colleges, ensuring the development of long-term and sustained relationships. This is intended to support our access targets, deepen our understanding of the needs of the individual schools and their pupils, and enable a more tailored approach to IAG, attainment raising and data analysis. Targeted outreach activities for these schools and colleges will include: compact scheme activities (see below); summer schools; academic outreach; mentoring support, to build confidence and skills in learning, and a teacher conference.

Compact Scheme

The introduction of a Compact Scheme¹¹ will provide a structured and progressive programme of HE activities to increase levels of attainment and aspiration within targeted schools and colleges. In particular, we will be focused on schools with high proportions of Q1 students, to encourage them to participate in higher education. The programme will comprise two stages as described below. A wider group of targeted students will participate in stage 1; only students with an active interest in taking a subject offered by the RAU will progress to stage 2.

Example programme outline:

This provides an example of the activities that can be offered throughout the programme. Students from target schools and colleges who complete the Scheme and achieve suitable level 3 qualifications will be guaranteed an offer of an appropriate course at the RAU, as part of a contextualised offer.

<p>Stage 1 Pre-GCSE (years 10 and 11) At this stage the focus is on raising awareness and understanding about higher education opportunities and the different pathways pupils might follow. It will also support increased attainment at GCSE by offering revision sessions in specific subjects where the RAU can add value such as geography and the sciences.</p>	
<p>Year 10: Thinking Ahead</p> <p>Exploring how university can help you on the right track to thinking about career choices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IAG visits e.g. university vs school, pathways • Campus visit • Subject tasters • Summer School 	<p>Year 11: Learning to Succeed</p> <p>Reflect on your experiences at the Summer School and how they will inform your learning in your GCSE year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study Skills • IAG/Careers workshop • Revision sessions • Campus visit
<p>Stage 2 Post-GCSE (years 12 and 13) The focus here is on giving students a significant experience of HE, their subject and the RAU. Students will understand their HE options in more depth and consider the career opportunities available after their degree. Support for higher attainment will also be provided through mentoring and participation in masterclasses.</p>	
<p>Year 12: Progression Focus</p> <p>Find out more about being an independent learner and build your personal statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAU campus visits – autumn and Y12 Summer School • Study Skills • University applications and personal statements • Student Finance • Making the most of UCAS Fairs • Masterclass sessions • Short HE assignment completed during Y12 Summer School 	<p>Year 13: Preparing for University</p> <p>Reflect on experiences of the programme as a whole. Focus on the transition part of the learning journey:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAU campus visit - autumn • Budgeting & Student Life workshops • Study Skills (in school) • IAG/Careers • Interviews • Revision sessions • Masterclass (RAU campus) • HE applications

¹⁰ swlep.co.uk/docs/default-source/sub-groups/skills-talent/higher-education-draft-strategy-evidence-base---april-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=6bc84124_4

¹¹ https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100303153540/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_32

Raising Aspirations and Attainment

In order to support our access goals 1-5 as identified above, we will support the raising of attainment in targeted schools/colleges particularly for geography and sciences subjects. This will build on existing academic outreach activities to complement and reinforce the work of schools and colleges¹².

Activities include: the delivery of HE modules in schools; revision sessions and masterclasses mapped into school curriculums, as outlined in the Compact scheme above. This will include raising understanding of the career opportunities¹³ that can result from completion of these courses.

We will develop a template for use by schools that supports the collection of data to measure the impact of outreach activities on attainment and progression levels within their constituency, particularly for quintile 1 students.

In addition, we will support a climate of aspiration and success for target schools/colleges by encouraging our academic and professional service staff to provide their expertise to schools and colleges individually and through such groups as the Gloucester Colleges Group.

Community Groups and NCOPs

Through the expertise of our staff, we will develop links and deliver outreach with community groups to increase awareness of and participation in the land-based sector to new audiences. This will build on our collaboration with the School Farms Network, and within 2 years we will identify and have developed joint activities with specific city and community farms, initially in London (working with Capel Manor College), Swindon and Gloucester, to achieve access targets 1-5.

GROWS/GAP and Study Higher

We are a member of GROWS/GAP in Gloucestershire including the associated outreach hub for this region. We are also an associate member of Study Higher which includes Swindon and Wiltshire. We will support the goals of access that these NCOPs have agreed with the OfS, particularly around POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 access (our targets 1 and 5 above). The Outreach Hubs also have a broader outreach remit, including increasing access amongst groups such as Care Leavers (our target 4).

The development of our presence in Swindon will enable deeper collaboration with the local LEP, local authority, schools/colleges and employers. This will deliver learning via a hub and support raising aspirations and widening access for target populations 1-5, as well as for mature students.

In addition to the collaborative activities with the Study Higher NCOP, we will also deliver Compact Scheme activities to 4 additional schools and colleges within the Swindon area with high proportions of quintile 1 students.

Western Vocational Progression Consortium

In partnership with the WVPC (Western Vocational Progression Consortium), we will continue to support and promote their IAG work to achieve access targets 1-5. The WVPC provides careers information about HE study and providers to students from underrepresented backgrounds, including the ongoing provision of impartial Careerpilot (for young learners) and Lifepilot (for mature learners) websites.

We also support the WVPC in the delivery of highly successful and award-winning support for schools to meet their statutory careers responsibilities, via classroom-based and online workshops.

Virtual Schools Network

We will actively encourage care leavers (target 4) to study at the RAU. As a small HEI, we are able to provide a safe and supportive learning community for this group. We are the lead institution on a collaborative project with the GROWS/GAP outreach hub, to increase levels of IAG for care leavers. As part of this activity, we have already invited students and their carers from the Virtual Schools Network to visit the campus, and we will further develop this programme. We have also begun working with CHYP (Cirencester Housing for Young People), to increase outreach to young people leaving care.

¹² <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/536f4e79-4e32-4db0-a8a2-66eb4e2b530b/raising-attainment-in-schools-and-colleges-to-widen-participation-ofs-topic-briefing.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/young-people-education-attitudes-full.pdf>

In signing the Care Leavers Covenant by year 1 of this plan, the RAU will commit to providing comprehensive and personal student support to care leavers through, for example, personal tutors, student buddies, and prioritisation when recruiting to student jobs on campus¹⁴.

Children of Military Families and Military Veterans

An additional goal is to actively encourage access to HE for military veterans and children of military families. These two related groups have been identified as underrepresented within the HE sector and we are working towards developing a target for their participation and success¹⁵.

From September 2019 we will collect and analyse data on the number of enrolments from these groups to the RAU, and their experience of studying here, including success and progression, with a view to further developing our support.

We will work with resettlement teams to support the transition to civilian life for those military personnel seeking a land-based career. This includes committing to the Armed Forces Covenant. Similarly, we are in the process of joining the South West hub of Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP) to improve educational outcomes for children from military families such that they can make informed and confident transitions into HE.

Financial support

We are planning to invest over £220,000 per year in a range of bursaries and hardship funds to support access to HE for underrepresented groups (targets 1-5). Eligibility criteria include:

- Household income of £25,000 or less (higher levels of support);
- Household income of £42,620 or less;
- From an underrepresented group targeted in this Plan (i.e. low-participation postcode, minority ethnic background, target school/college or looked after child);
- Participation in an RAU outreach summer school.

We are continuing to use this approach following an evaluation completed in 2018 using the OFFA-approved evaluation of financial support methodology. Our evaluation highlighted that 70% of respondents saw their financial support as being important to their ability to continue their studies. Evidence suggests that this support is also critical to the success stage of the student lifecycle:

- 86% agreed that it helps them to afford to participate along with fellow students;
- 86% agreed that it helps them to be able to concentrate on studies without worrying about finances;
- 81% agreed that it helps them to be able to balance commitments such as work, study and family;
- 76% agreed that it helps them to be included on social and study trips;
- 84% agreed that it helps them to feel more satisfied with life as a student.

The evaluation described above suggested that students and applicants need to be made aware of financial support and eligibility criteria earlier in the student lifecycle.

Bursaries are available to support the differing needs of students. Our Widening Access Bursary is our key bursary for students from POLAR4 quintiles 1 or 2 (targets 1 and 5), with a household income of £42,620 or lower. This provides a bursary of £1,500 per year plus a travel allowance, and is provided at the same level for each year of study.

Students awarded this Widening Access Financial Support bursary may also be eligible for other means-tested bursaries. Combined together, these could add up to a potential value of £10,500 over a three year course. This provides financial support to students who require additional funding either with costs such as travel, accommodation or participation in course trips. Reimbursement of travel costs to open days or other applicant events will also be available for target groups.

Details of our financial support packages are now communicated directly to applicants and are explained on our website. This includes other awards from external donors.

The OfS Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit will continue to be used to monitor the effectiveness of this activity and changes to our offering will be made accordingly.

¹⁴ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/care-leavers-and-looked-after-children/>

¹⁵ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/children-from-military-families/>

Contextual admissions

Contextual admissions processes are being considered to support access from under-represented groups (targets 1-5), as well as increasing access to mature students¹⁶. The intention is that this will provide a positive and natural progression route to study at the RAU. This will include extended admissions benefits for target students taking part in the Compact Scheme, as detailed above. In addition, a guaranteed offer of a place, subject to meeting the conditions of the offer, is being considered for students from target groups outside of the Compact Scheme.

The success of this activity will be measured by:

- The number of students accessing the Compact scheme;
- The number of students accessing the Compact scheme who then go on to HE;
- The number of students who go on to study at the RAU, via a contextualised offer.

Land-based and sector bodies

We recognise that although our courses are primarily land-based, they attract very different constituencies. Our strategy for outreach activities has been designed to take account of this.

To help widen the reach and impact of our outreach activity we will collaborate with other small specialist institutions in our field, to establish an outreach network and resource bank for land-based subjects.

Working with other institutions including Writtle University College and Hartpury University, in conjunction with Landex and GuildHE, we will develop a common approach to promoting the value of these disciplines and the associated progression opportunities. Our intention is to create shared IAG materials, establish a good practice network and run collaborative events targeted at pupils from deprived areas, along with their parents, teachers and careers advisors.

We will also work with existing industry connections within the food industry to develop a collaborative action plan, raising aspirations from their workforce and local communities to enter HE. While relevant to all our access targets, we are particularly seeking to increase access for POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2, as well as BAME populations (targets 1, 5 and 3). For example, the Food and Drink Council have established a work stream to address the issue of diversity in the food and farming sector and, when its report is published, we will align with any specific relevant actions.

We are committed to developing these collaborative activities, as collectively we will have a significantly greater impact than if we were to act alone. As described in more detail in section 3.6, any programme of collaborative activity will include the development of appropriate evaluation methodology.

3.3 Success

As described previously, we are implementing a number of changes to our curriculum, to the pedagogic framework and to student support and employability activities. These changes are intended to deliver a greater number of pathways to study, supporting both our access targets and targets 6, 7 and 8 to increase the success and attainment, and progression levels for our students.

Learning hub

The development of an 'RAU' learning hub in Swindon and the investment into the Catalyst programme will enable students who have work or other commitments to participate in HE. Programme options will include: Accelerated degrees; Blended learning opportunities (distance/online learning) and Credit accumulation.

New programmes

Following market research which identified that widening participation would be enhanced by a stronger science offering, we have developed a Foundation programme in Animal Science in partnership with Cirencester College. In addition, we have developed an Integrated Foundation Year to our degree programmes. This will enable students who have not met the academic criteria with a route in to HE based on (for example) their work experience or other relevant criteria.

We have also developed 'top up' programmes to enable Foundation Degree students at the RAU and partner colleges to continue to an Honours degree programme. Academic Board and its sub-committees, and the Access and Participation Strategy and Monitoring Group (see section 3.6) will evaluate the

¹⁶ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/contextual-admissions/>

effectiveness of these initiatives in increasing access against targets 1-5, and in closing the attainment and progression gaps identified in targets 6, 7 and 8.

Curriculum development

To achieve targets 6 and 7, we are in the process of implementing a new curriculum for the 2019/20 academic year as part of our new Teaching and Learning Strategy. This new curriculum is designed to:

- Provide a more effective learning and teaching environment;
- Build academic skills development into the curriculum;
- Create a more developmental and inclusive assessment framework;
- Provide more opportunity for work experience and placements for students (see below);
- Support skills development including practical skills training through our Rural Skills Centre;

This will improve the academic experience of all students, and specifically disabled and mature learners.

An inclusive learning environment is being created through:

- A curriculum that recognises different learning styles as well as the need to present a wider diversity of perspectives e.g. use of global case studies throughout.
- A skills-based approach to classroom-based interactions, leading to enhanced communication and mutual understanding between students and staff from different backgrounds.

The individual elements of this revised curriculum, and the new assessment framework in particular, will be monitored using the data dashboard described in Section 3.6, to evaluate their effectiveness in increasing the attainment of all students, and specifically their effectiveness in closing the attainment gap for disabled and mature students.

Placement opportunities

As part of our pedagogic development, we are embedding employability within the curriculum, and taking a more integrated approach to placements. This will particularly support targets 6 and 7, but also attainment success more generally for students from less advantaged backgrounds.

From 2019, placement opportunities are being introduced for all courses, ranging from 6 weeks to 12 months. The duration of the placement is flexible to allow all students to participate, irrespective of their background, financial status, or other commitments that they might have. In addition, greater liaison will take place with placement providers which will assist in securing appropriate placements with associated support, for target groups of students alongside the student body in general.

Assessment data, feedback and employment outcomes, as reported via the data monitoring dashboard, will be used by Academic Board and its sub-committees and the Access and Participation Strategy and Monitoring Group to monitor the effectiveness of placement provision for all students. Our aim is to ensure that all students benefit equally and that those who choose to take a 6 week placement are no more or less advantaged in their course outcomes, than those who elect a 12 month placement.

Student support

Our disability support and personal tutor system is being improved to support all students, and particularly to support achievement of targets 6 and 7. This will also ensure that other target groups, e.g. care leavers, are able to benefit from a more integrated, holistic support and developmental framework. This will enable greater development and sharing of good practice amongst academic and professional service staff.

This enhancement entails the integration of our disability provision with our Student Support Service. In addition, we are revising our personal tutoring system, to enable a more personalised approach to better meet the needs of individual students.

These changes will be monitored to evaluate the effectiveness in increasing attainment levels for all students and closing the attainment gap for disabled and mature students. The effectiveness of this approach will also be monitored by gathering feedback from students on the impact of these approaches as well as assessing retention, success and progression data.

3.4 Progression

As part of the curriculum review described previously, we have introduced a full review of the employability and placement schemes within the University to ensure that we provide increased opportunities for work experience and placements for our students. These changes to the curriculum have been developed in consultation with industry, to ensure our graduates are increasingly work-ready.

We are working to:

- Embed employability more fully into the curriculum;
- Improve our range of placement opportunities for students across all groups, particularly ensuring that under-represented groups have equal opportunity with placements;
- Fully embed placements and appropriate assessment;
- Encourage more students to consider postgraduate study under our strategic aim of developing thought leadership.

As noted in Section 1.1, we are aware that a significant number of our graduating students start their own businesses but this is not currently reflected in sector outcomes data. We are increasingly seen as a University with strong support for entrepreneurial students, including the introduction of a business mentoring scheme, "Grand Ideas". This scheme supports students in the development of their business ideas, with mentoring from successful entrepreneurs. The Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs (IOEE) recently recognised our success in this area, naming the RAU as one of just 6 University Centres of Excellence within the UK.

Recognising that the HESA Graduate Outcomes survey does not adequately reflect the realities of outcomes for land-based graduates, we plan to introduce a more tailored survey, specific to our context. This survey will be implemented every two years, starting with academic year 2019-20. This will explore in more detail our graduates' decisions and success levels in relation to progression to further study or employment, including self-employment.

3.5 Student consultation

We are committed to engaging with our students. This includes raising awareness of our access and participation priorities and progress, and enabling student representatives to contribute to the formation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of our plan. There have been significant developments in our work with engaging students over the 18/19 academic year. These include the creation of:

- The Student Engagement Committee (SEC), a sub-committee of Academic Board;
- The Staff Student Liaison Group;
- A student-based Access and Participation Panel;
- Changes in the Student Union structure.

As a result we now have an established student voice cycle and an ethos across the institution which actively encourages student feedback, and the implementation of change as a result wherever practically possible. This is critical in supporting a cultural shift at the RAU, noted in section 3.1 strategic measures.

Membership of these groups includes both staff and students.

The SEC has sought to ensure that the student body is consulted and has an academic forum where they are able to raise issues on different matters as well as contribute to discussions in student related issues. The Staff Student Liaison Group provides a forum for students to raise non-academic issues related to their wider experience.

Through these groups, students have provided ideas and feedback in ensuring an inclusive learning and social environment at the RAU, which have fed into Academic Board and our development plans. For example, concerns around student placements have been factored into the plans described in Section 3.3. On a social level, new inclusive extra-curricular activities have been established with our Students' Union and the work of our student mentors, STARS, has grown to include pastoral and social responsibilities.

The Access and Participation Panel, while open to all students, primarily comprises students who are most directly invested in widening participation as relevant to their own circumstances. This group explores both the need for widening access to the institution, and the ways in which this can most positively be brought about.

The Panel is supportive of the key areas of focus as identified from our self-assessment, and has provided a number of practical suggestions that have contributed to the development of this Plan. For example, the Panel strongly believe that the RAU should raise the profile of our subject offering in schools and colleges through delivery of taster sessions, as well as establish a closer link with community groups such as City Farms. These have been incorporated into the strategic measures for access described in Section 3. The Panel also emphasised the importance of continuing to ensure diversity is represented in our marketing materials and at open days.

The Panel will continue to meet regularly and has suggested ideas to further increase student engagement which will be explored, for example through online platforms, and will be actively involved in reviewing the Plan's progress.

Our Students' Union has revised its structure and now has a President who is a sabbatical officer. This, alongside a new Vice-President Academic role, is an important part of our developing engagement with students. We will continue to work jointly with our Students' Union and other student representatives, including on Academic Board, the EDIG, and the student-based Access and Participation Panel, in order to engage students with issues of equality of opportunity.

We have also revised our Tell Us scheme that provides a quick, easily accessible channel for comment, compliments or concerns, to have an option for anonymous feedback. This ensures that all students have a channel they are comfortable with using, to communicate with the University on any matter.

3.6 Evaluation strategy

Strategic context

As a small specialist institution operating in the land use sector the RAU has somewhat belatedly come to address its responsibilities within the widening participation agenda. Consequently there has historically been no formalised, systematic overview of how access and participation programmes are evaluated. The link between feedback from evaluation and the design and delivery of programmes has thus been somewhat lacking.

Since 2018, when the University implemented its new strategic plan, widening participation has been recognised as a top strategic priority. As a result, the link between programme design, delivery and evaluation has become embedded within all access and participation activities. To facilitate this, we continue to use the OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment Tool to assess and inform our evaluation strategies and develop best practice, cognisant that there are current practices in need of development and others not currently in place. Alongside this, we will continue to evaluate the impact of financial support provided to students using the OfS Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit (as has been previously outlined in the Financial Support section on page 16).

Access and participation is the responsibility of the Director for Students (DfS), a senior executive role established for the purpose in 2017. The DfS was recruited from a large multi-faculty University where widening participation issues have been central to their activities for many years. A central responsibility of this position is to ensure partnership working between the Academic Registry, Student Admissions and the Student Support Service, for all of which she has managerial responsibility. The DfS and the Director for Education (a senior academic), are members of the Vice-Chancellors Executive Group (VCEG) and thus work closely together. This enables a "whole institution" approach to access and participation across the student lifecycle. This is overcoming the residual cultural hurdle of some members of the RAU community continuing to view widening participation as 'someone else's issue'.

In addition to defining access and participation as part of the responsibilities of the DfS, the University has strengthened its widening participation approach by appointing a designated Access and Participation Programme Lead who reports to the Head of Marketing and Student Recruitment (line-managed by the DfS). The Access and Participation Programme Lead is responsible for the evaluation of all recruitment-related access and participation activities, and manages members of the Outreach and Recruitment Team who are responsible for achieving the access targets and strategic measures, each programme of work having a Programme Owner.

For success and progression work, the DfS will work closely with the Director for Education to ensure that relevant targets and strategic measures also have Programme Owners. All Programme Owners work across academic and professional service areas to ensure a whole institution approach in which evaluation and the actions informed by this, are joined up across access, success and progression. All staff involved will use the OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment Tool.

Additionally, because the University has not routinely analysed and assessed the impact of access and participation activities, a wider programme of awareness raising and training will be developed. This will particularly target academic programme leads and ensure that key staff are better equipped to collect data in a robust manner, critically evaluate it and then understand how to assess evidence of impact.

Historically there have been limited opportunities for staff engaged in access and participation to come together and reflect on their experiences. To address this, time will be allocated for staff and for members of the Student Access and Participation Panel, to come together and share their experiential knowledge. This will then be used to improve both the University's evaluation strategy and practice through programme development and implementation.

As will be discussed in further in Section 3.7, an **Access and Participation Strategy and Monitoring Group (APSMG)** has been established that will oversee actions and evaluation of this programme of work which will be translated into a SMART APP Action Plan. All evaluations and actions arising from them will be discussed at the regular meetings of this group, for feeding back into the Programme activities.

The DfS and other key staff will also work closely with the new **Data Management Group**. This has been established to ensure successful implementation of the University's strategic and operational plans and to take an evidence-based approach to evaluating performance against all institutional targets.

The Data Management Group is responsible for the collection and analysis of student data and includes the recently expanded planning team (managed within the finance function), the Director for Education, the Director for Students, Heads of Academic Schools and senior professional services staff responsible for Recruitment and Admissions. The Group meets monthly to ensure the institution is making progress towards our strategic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), including our ambitious widening participation goals. It reports to strategic committees including the Vice-Chancellors Executive Group (VCEG), Academic Board and the Student Experience Committee.

Data being collected and evaluated will include:

- Start of year registrations;
- Withdrawals/intermissions by semester and academic year;
- Attainment by semester and at the end of the academic year;
- Student feedback (module feedback; NSS and internal student surveys in years 1 and 2);
- Placement outcomes measured according to type and duration.

The RAU is a member of the Study Higher and GROWS NCOPs which are primarily networks focused on increasing access through outreach activities. Participation in these networks ensures that the RAU can draw from an extensive knowledge base across the sector for undertaking evaluation of access and participation plan programmes.

The RAU is also a member of Landex (Land Based Colleges Aspiring for Excellence), and members of the Landex HE Committee, chaired by the RAU Vice-Chancellor, are now beginning working together and an evaluation project with Advance HE is being planned. There is recognition across the land based sector that sharing data to develop best practice will help address the challenge of lack of diversity and social mobility in our sector's student communities which, not unnaturally, remain predominantly rural in origin. Formal discussions will start in the first part of the academic year (2019-20) with a set of agreed actions being developed by the end of January 2020.

As described previously in section 3.5, when designing, developing and evaluating access and participation activities, the University engages with students to ensure it adequately captures their ideas and experience. Consultation with the Student Access and Participation Panel, which includes Student Ambassadors and members of the Student Union, will be integrated into all of programmes and actively used to shape the way we collect and evaluate data. The recent appointment of a sabbatical officer as Student Union President (previously the role was undertaken by a full-time student) is a positive step as it enables them to have the time to fully engage with the work of the APSMG.

The University is also increasing the engagement of its extensive network of alumni, many of the postgraduates of which are from BAME and have international backgrounds, to act as role models, support work placements and act as mentors.

Programme design

The University has constructed a 'Theory of Change' that is institution wide and encompasses Access, Participation and Success. This enables a process of continuous improvement and self-assessment that both incorporates the OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment Tool and draws upon the skills and knowledge of staff and students across the RAU. The work will increasingly involve academic staff to ensure that they can specifically contribute to evaluating progress towards success and progression targets while at the same time gaining greater awareness of the work being done prior to entry to the RAU.

Our Theory of Change will be included in regular meetings of the APSMG. Historically, there was not in place a clear and detailed specification of the Widening Participation programmes the University delivers, why they are delivered and the best way to meet Institutional targets. While this has been understood informally, in future the process will be formalised by creating an Access and Participation Programme Specification (APPSpec) which will provide detail on each programme of activity delivered, its aims and objectives, and makes the case for each programme in the light of the targets outlined in this document.

Where the University is unable to make the case or finds gaps in its practice, it will make remedial adjustments.

The APPSpec will include a risk analysis as we recognise the need to enhance our expertise in this area and to embed a risk based approach particularly for more highly intensive, costly or longer term activities.

Evaluation design

To date, a combination of formative and summative evaluation has been used to shape the programmes delivered at the RAU. The standard of evidence collated in this way is both Type 1 (narrative) and Type 2 (quantitative and qualitative evidence of pre/post intervention changes).

Both approaches enable assessment of both the success of the programme relative to its aims and objectives, and the effect of the programme on the participants themselves. The benefit of developing both approaches is that they provide evidence of the positive impact of the interventions or, where the benefit is not clear, where targeted adjustments to the programme might be required.

Taking **outreach evaluation** specifically, the University's approach to date has mainly comprised:

- Pre-and post-session surveys of participants;
- Entering participants' details into HEAT17;
- Feedback from ambassadors involved in delivery;
- Informal and formal feedback from teachers and schools.

The University is developing this approach to demonstrate more robustly the impact of outreach, success and progression activities and establish whether planned outcomes have been achieved.

As discussed previously, the University will embed evaluation into all programme activity specifications. This requires all outreach team members to be active practical researchers. In the design and delivery of the programme of activities, this framework is presented through the following structure:

- Overall theory of HEI intervention with schools;
- Distinct propositions about interventions – why we believe the interventions will work;
- Operationalised research methodology – how and when we will gather the data;
- Data collection techniques – the tools to be used;
- Analysis of research activity findings and dissemination within the RAU (and more widely).

This evaluation framework involves working with schools and colleges to gather data longitudinally from participants engaged with the more intensive outreach activities. For some programmes we will contact participants six (and on occasion 12) months after a programme has ended. To overcome any limitations in self-reported data, the University will triangulate its data with that gathered from parents and teachers.

This will establish whether students' motivations, behaviours and outcomes are changing in response to the interventions undertaken. The following areas are of specific interest:

- Motivational dimension – specifically, are expectations of progression increased?
- Behavioural dimension – do students act differently at school and at home e.g. work harder on their course, participate more (and more effectively), read more and organise more efficiently their strategies for study?
- Progression (outcomes) dimension – do they develop and act on plans to progress onto further and higher education and increase their performance in school/college assessments as a consequence of the changes in motivation and behaviour?

As a small, specialist institution the University's evaluation framework involves a pragmatic differentiated approach to ensure cost-effectiveness. In terms of outreach for example, the least intensive activities, for example, presentation to a large group of year twelve students, will be evaluated in a 'lighter touch' way, using short questionnaires only. Conversely, more intensive outreach activities, such as summer schools and the University's compact scheme, are evaluated in greater depth as described above. These more intensive programmes are 'sampled' annually to ensure effective use of staff time and financial resources. This means that in a year when three similar summer schools are being run only one of these would be subject to the rigorous qualitative and quantitative evaluation. Notwithstanding all would receive a level of evaluation, including the capturing of all participant data in HEAT.

¹⁷ The RAU is a member of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) membership service which allows us to target, monitor and evaluate outreach activity.

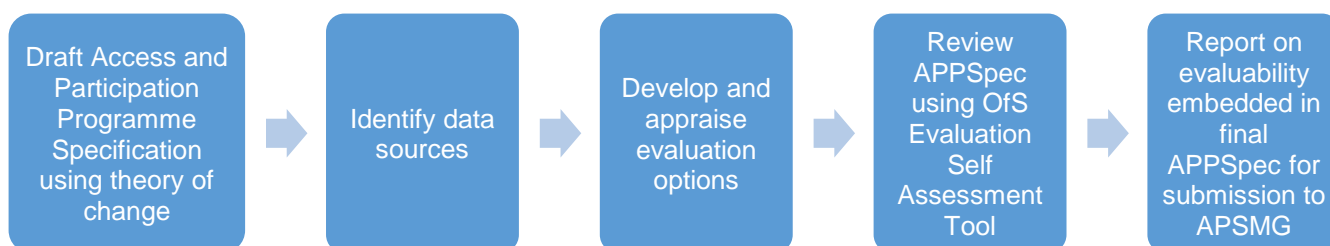
The University does not currently collect 'Type 3' evidence which could demonstrate the causal effect of an intervention. However, the University does plan to collect this type of evidence in the future using academic staff interested in this area of social science research. As an institution the University feels a responsibility to show leadership in this field.

As set out in section 3.2 'Financial Support' we use the OfS Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit to evaluate the impact of this support and make changes to practice as required. We carry out this evaluation every two years, the last being in January 2018.

Evaluation implementation

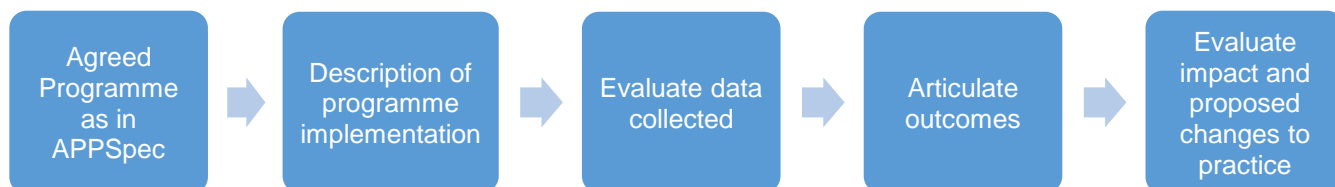
Our APP Programme Specification (APPSpec) will be based on our Theory of Change (see 3.1) and will embed evaluability¹⁸ into its design. This will identify data sources (including results of any evaluation of previous programmes), consider the consequent evaluation options and then test against the OfS Self-Assessment Tool. This assessment will then be included in the APPSpec for submission to the APSMG who will make the final assessment on evaluability.

This is shown in the following logic chain.



The Programme of work is then put in place.

A Programme Review will be carried out by the APSMG using the Access and Participation Programme Evaluation Report (APPER) at the evaluation point agreed in the APPSpec and using the Theory of Change. As shown in the below logic chain, the Programme Owner will describe the programme implementation, evaluate the data collected, articulate the outcomes and then evaluate the impact. This will include recommendations for changes in practice and will be considered by the APSMG who will be responsible for agreeing changes and updating the SMART APP Action Plan (see section 3.7).



The APPER will be shared with the student-based Access and Participation Panel and other University committees and groups, as appropriate. In addition, key findings will also be shared with groups such as the NCOPs identified above, the Landex network and the OfS TASO Centre, to ensure continuous improvement in best practice across the HE and land based sectors.

3.7 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

The APSMG has been established to oversee this programme of work and a SMART APP Action Plan will be used to monitor progress.

The Action Plan will include the following for each individual programme:

- The data to be collected;
- The methods used to evaluate data;
- The mechanisms for discussion and dissemination;
- The agreed actions (continue/change).

¹⁸ <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/WWS-Evaluability-Assessment-Working-paper-final-June-2015.pdf>

The Action Plan will be updated following every programme review and RAG rated. As was described in section 3.6, each target and strategic measure will have a Programme Owner, who has responsibility for each programme and its evaluation.

The APSMG will use the OfS Evaluation Self-Assessment Tool to assess and inform its evaluation approaches.

The success of the APP is central to the University's strategic plan therefore the APSMG will be chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. It will meet every three months and will report to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group (VCEG) and to Governing Council. Council has been closely involved in the development of this APP with two members of Council having been designated as 'Link Governors' to monitor this work. The Chair has determined that there will be quarterly reports on progress with the APP to full Council.

A sub-group of the APSMG, including those members responsible for the operational delivery of the APP, will meet monthly and will be chaired by the Director for Students. This will ensure that progress can be evaluated and immediate action taken if progress is not being made.

We have recently demonstrated that in taking a focussed approach at an institutional level we have been able to bring about significant change and improvement in outcomes. The Institutional Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for 2018-2019 was monitored by a QIP Monitoring Group, chaired by our Vice-Chancellor, and as a consequence we have increased our NSS Q27 outcome from 81.73% to 89.37%.

4. Provision of information to students

Our access and outreach staff visit local and national schools and colleges to deliver HE awareness and attainment-raising activities to targeted students and attend schools/college HE Fairs. This team provides detailed information face to face to prospective students and also to members of staff in schools and colleges. The RAU has introduced an annual Teachers and Advisers Conference, which includes the sharing of information about HE finance and tuition fees, scholarships and bursaries.

Information is provided directly to students through our admissions and support staff, our website, open days, school and college visits, and at offer holder days. Students who enrol at RAU receive a wide range of information, including via a Student Handbook which has a section dealing with student finance and hardship.

Support for student finance is clearly stated on the opening page of the RAU website and links to a dedicated area for student finance. This provides information on tuition fees, the student funding system, scholarships, bursaries and the RAU hardship fund. This information is also summarised in the undergraduate prospectus with links provided. A Student Finance England (SFE) video is hosted on the website for students to hear about financial arrangements for the forthcoming academic year.

5. Appendix

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

**Access and participation plan
Fee information 2020-21**

Provider name: The Royal Agricultural University

Provider UKPRN: 10005545

Summary of 2020-21 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflationary statement:

Subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations we intend to increase fees each year using the RPI-X

Table 4a - Full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£9,250
Foundation degree		£9,250
Foundation year/Year 0		£9,250
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	Capel Manor College 10001148	£6,000
Foundation degree	Capel Manor College 10001148	£6,000
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4c - Part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree		£4,625
Foundation degree		£4,625
Foundation year/Year 0		£4,625
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Targets and investment plan 2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: The Royal Agricultural University

Provider UKPRN: 10005545

Investment summary

The OfS requires providers to report on their planned investment in access, financial support and research and evaluation in their access and participation plan. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in student success and progression in the access and participation plans and therefore investment in these areas is not recorded here.

Note about the data:

The investment forecasts below in access, financial support and research and evaluation does not represent not the total amount spent by providers in these areas. It is the additional amount that providers have committed following the introduction of variable fees in 2006-07. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Total access activity investment (£)	£494,005.00	£474,896.00	£474,896.00	£474,896.00	£474,896.00
Access (pre-16)	£67,586.00	£64,972.00	£64,972.00	£64,972.00	£64,972.00
Access (post-16)	£377,828.00	£363,213.00	£363,213.00	£363,213.00	£363,213.00
Access (adults and the community)	£48,591.00	£46,711.00	£46,711.00	£46,711.00	£46,711.00
Access (other)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Financial support (£)	£234,354.00	£225,734.00	£225,734.00	£225,734.00	£225,734.00
Research and evaluation (£)	£62,625.00	£60,203.00	£60,203.00	£60,203.00	£60,203.00

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Higher fee income (£HFI)	£2,153,330.00	£2,070,035.00	£2,070,035.00	£2,070,035.00	£2,070,035.00
Access investment	17.9%	17.9%	17.9%	17.9%	17.9%
Financial support	8.5%	8.5%	8.5%	8.5%	8.5%
Research and evaluation	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%
Total investment (as %HFI)	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%

