

Widening Participation Strategy 2009-2012

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework for all the widening participation (WP) activity undertaken by Brunel University's WP Office, academic Schools and support services over the next three years. It also provides a context for the additional financial support offered to students as part of the University's Access Agreement.

1.2 Brunel's Mission is "To advance knowledge and understanding, and provide society with confident, talented and versatile graduates." Our Strategic Plan 2008-2012 clearly states that we value community and partnership working. A key element of our Widening Participation strategy is therefore rightly focussed on working with our local community and educational partners to support our mission and drive aspiration to higher education within wider society. In line with our values of integrity and empowerment we are committed to ensuring that all those with the potential to benefit from Higher Education (HE) have the opportunity to do so, whatever their background. We aim to encourage individuals from under-represented backgrounds to aspire to and succeed in HE.

1.3 Our Strategic Plan also focuses on the importance of meeting the needs of our students, given the

2.1 The University's first three-year WP Strategy was drawn up in 2001 in response to HEFCE requirements and new government initiatives to widen participation in HE. These aim to achieve a target of 50% of 18 - 30 year-olds participating in HE by 2010.

in the expanded West, Central and North London (WECAN) Aimhigher area. We will provide additional support to each of our partner Academies in Hillingdon - Harefield and Stockley.

3.4 We will continue to develop aspiration-raising activities for young people through HE awareness visits, master classes, subject taster days, information, advice and guidance (IAG) sessions and summer schools in order to increase further the number of admissions from groups under-represented in HE. We will give ongoing support to academic Schools wishing to run WP activity and to the Brunel Urban Scholars Programme as it enters a new phase in 2010-11 working with Year 12/13 students. The introduction of Urban Scholarships in 2010, funded by alumni and other supporters, will further encourage participants to progress to HE.

3.5 The University will continue to work with national and regional initiatives. We will support and contribute to the Hillingdon Aimhigher Partnership programme, the WECAN Aimhigher Partnership programme and the National Mentoring Consortium (NMC) initiative. We will work alongside charities and trusts to deliver activities to specific cohorts of WP learners, as requested.

Support for students with disability

The support available for Brunel students with disabilities has increased significantly over the past three years. WP funding has been used to improve further the Assistive Technology Centre and to provide pre-induction and induction sessions. In 2008 the Brunel Disability and Dyslexia Service was awarded the Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Support for Disabled Students and in 2009 was declared by the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign to have the best university facilities for disabled students in the UK.

3.6 The University will continue to develop its service to disabled students, in particular by ensuring that an increased percentage of students enter Brunel having already applied for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This will be achieved through targeted outreach activities and an enhanced pre-induction programme.

Looked-after children and care leavers

Since 2007 the WP Office has worked closely with the London Borough of Hillingdon Looked-After Children's Education and Care Leavers' teams to provide an annual guidance weekend for Hillingdon looked-after students. We have now decided to seek The Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for our work with care leavers in order to support further a group of young people who are very poorly represented in HE.

3.7 We will put in place a framework of support for care leavers at the University in order to increase care-leaver enrolments and promote successful progression and employability.

Improving transition, progression, retention and employability

Brunel performs well at retaining students. In 2006/7 the non-continuation rate at Brunel for young, full-time first degree entrants was 6% against a benchmark of 7.5%. Only 3.4% of those from low participation neighbourhoods failed to continue against a benchmark of 8.1%. The following measures aim to ensure that the University continues to exceed its benchmark for the retention of students.

3.8 We will continue to:

Provide HE talks and IAG workshops for students, parents, staff and community groups to prepare students for HE.

Keep under review the financial support available to students from WP backgrounds. The introduction of Brunel Alumni Scholarships in 2009 will offer up to £6,000pa to the 5 applicants from under-represented groups in six West London boroughs who achieve the highest number of UCAS tariff points, paid on the same basis as Brunel Regional Partnership Scholarships (see para 3.6 below).

Work with applicants in specific subject areas to ensure they meet the entry requirements by providing help such as intensive maths and essential study skills sessions.

Support activities to promote successful induction and integration of WP students.

Support the Brunel Academic Skills Centre (ASK), formerly known as the Effective Learning and Advice Service (ELAS) to ensure that students have access to central study skills support.

Organise a minimum of two professional mentoring programmes for WP students across the University.

Work with Disability, Counselling and other student services to enhance the student experience and promote retention.

Access Agreement

3.9 The measures above are underpinned by the Brunel Access Agreement which provides financial support to students in receipt of full grant (£1K pa) and partial grant (£500 pa). In addition, up to 25 Regional Partnership Scholarships worth up to £3,000 pa are offered to high-performing students who attend a maintained school or college in six West London boroughs and who meet one or more of the under-represented criteria: they have a disability; are a care leaver or come from a low-income background.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

4.1 The new strategy will be monitored in line with standard University practices. The Delivery Plan will be reviewed annually by the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee (SPARC) and the annual report will form part of the University's Corporate Planning Statement to HEFCE.

4.2 The University's Access Agreement will be reviewed annually by SPARC and approved by Senate and Council. It will form part of the governance documentation submitted to HEFCE each December.

4.3 The delivery plan will detail the use of resources provided from the HEFCE WP allocation and other income to support the activities in this strategy.