

# **WIDENING PARTICIPATION STRATEGY**

**2016-20**

University of East Anglia

February 2016

## Contents

1	The National, Regional and Institutional Context.....	3
1.1	The national context.....	3
1.2	Our regional context.....	4
1.3	Our performance.....	5
2	A strategic approach to widening participation .....	10
3	Access: Preparing for and Entering HE .....	12
4	Student Success: Student Retention and Achievement .....	13
5	Progression Outcomes: Further Study and Employment .....	14
6	Monitoring and Evaluation.....	15
7	Planning and Communications .....	16
	Appendix 1. Maps of Young Participation .....	17

# 1 THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

## 1.1 The national context

The expansion of UK Higher Education (HE) since the 1980s has meant that approaching 50% of 18-21 year olds now participate in HE. Yet significant differences in participation remain between certain groups such young people from advantaged and disadvantaged groups; young people living in different parts of the country; and young men and women<sup>1</sup>. The National Strategy for Access and Student Success<sup>2</sup> outlines the Government's ideal that everyone with the potential to benefit from HE should have the opportunity to do so. This reflects the significant benefits that HE brings to individuals, society and the economy.

Although progress to date has been positive, gaps still remain<sup>3</sup>. For example, 18 year olds living in the most advantaged areas are 2.4 times more likely to enter HE than those in the most disadvantaged areas. In general terms, the more selective and higher ranked a university, the more socially-skewed is likely to be the complexion of the student population. For example, only 3.3 per cent of disadvantaged 18 year olds enter higher tariff providers compared to 20.7 per cent of those from the most advantaged backgrounds. In terms of gender and ethnicity, white disadvantaged males have the lowest entry rates to HE.

Differences also exist nationally in terms of student success and progression outcomes. Some 66 per cent of graduates from the lowest participation neighbourhoods gained a first or upper second class degree in 2013-14, compared with 77 per cent for those from the highest participation neighbourhoods. Female graduates are more likely to achieve a first or upper second. Graduates with disabilities tend to do slightly less well than those without reported disabilities. White graduates have significantly higher degree classifications than graduates from other ethnicities<sup>4</sup>.

Disadvantaged students also generally experience lower professional employment rates which persist across their early careers. Six months after leaving HE, professional employment rates range from 59.7 per cent among the most disadvantaged to 67.4 per cent among the most advantaged qualifiers. In terms of ethnicity, the highest rate is observed among White qualifiers both six and 40 months after leaving HE. The lowest rates six and 40 months after leaving are observed for Chinese and Black African qualifiers respectively.

---

<sup>1</sup> HEFCE 2013 Trends in young participation in higher education

<sup>2</sup> OFFA/HEFCE 2014 National strategy for access and student success in higher education

<sup>3</sup> UCAS 2015 End of Cycle Report

<sup>4</sup> HEFCE 2015 Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics

Female qualifiers have higher employment rates across their early careers, but male qualifiers make considerable gains to catch them up<sup>5</sup>.

In order to support social mobility and drive the Widening Participation (WP) agenda within HE, the Government requires all universities charging more than £6,000 per year for student fees to produce an Access Agreement (AA). These are currently negotiated annually and agreed with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). These set out institutions' approach to WP through, in particular, their approach to outreach programmes and student financial support. Universities also receive an allocation via the teaching grant to support student opportunity for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who may need additional support to succeed. Both HEFCE and OFFA are keen that institutions have long-term, whole institution plans for improving access, success and progression. This reflects the national strategy that WP should encompass the whole student lifecycle: preparing to apply and enter HE; receiving study support and achieving successful completion; and progressing to postgraduate education or to/within employment. We therefore recognise the need for, and value of, an institutional strategy for ensuring a strategic, institution-wide and co-ordinated approach to this important area of University activity. The University of East Anglia (UEA) Widening Participation Strategy for 2016/20 therefore provides some longer-term direction and focus to WP objectives and programmes at UEA.

## **1.2 Our regional context**

We are committed to widening participation to high-quality HE. We aim to enable motivated and able students from under-represented groups, particularly from the East Anglian region but also from elsewhere, to gain the advantages of HE irrespective of their background.

The national pattern of participation is illustrated in Appendix 1 (Figure 5). For the East of England, the young participation rate in HE is 33.8 per cent, which is slightly below the England average (34.2%). The national average is, however, skewed by a London effect and the East of England region actually ranks third highest, after London and the South East, for its young participation rate.<sup>6</sup> However, drilling down within the region identifies some clear 'cold-spots' of participation. For the East there are pockets of low participation across much of the region particularly in Norfolk, eastern Cambridgeshire, west Suffolk and Essex, as shown in in Appendix 1 (Figure 6). Locally there are particular cold spots (less than 20% participation) in the more populated areas of King's Lynn (12.1%), Great Yarmouth

---

<sup>5</sup> HEFCE 2015 Differences in employment outcomes Equality and diversity characteristics.

<sup>6</sup> HEFCE (2014) *Further Information on POLAR3: An Analysis of Geography, Disadvantage and Entrants to Higher Education*. London: HEFCE. p.15.

(5%), Lowestoft (11.3%) and Norwich (8.5%) as well as parts of coastal and rural Norfolk and Suffolk. See Appendix 1 (Figure 7).

### 1.3 Our performance

UEA has a proud record of promoting access to HE, and the social complexion of our student body is much less skewed than many other top 20 universities.

- First, in 2007 in partnership with Essex University, UEA founded University Campus Suffolk (UCS), centred in Ipswich, to help provide better access to HE in this traditionally low participation area of Suffolk. (UCS is now in the process of gaining degree-awarding powers as a fully independent HE institution).
- Second, in addition to the 14,000 UEA students on campus, UEA validates and oversees the quality assurance of provision of HE courses to some 8,000 students in the East Anglian region and a small number nationally through its partner colleges. Students at City College Norwich, and Easton and Otley College go on to obtain a UEA award, students at UCS a joint UEA award with the University of Essex.
- Third, the University has a well-established Outreach Team which co-ordinates an extensive programme of outreach activities centred on schools in low-participation areas in the East of England to raise awareness and aspirations around HE.

The following sections provide an overview of our performance in terms of access, success and progression in relation to WP.

#### 1.3.1 Access

We perform well against the English average for state school, mature students with no previous HE experience from a low participation neighbourhood (LPN) and disability indicators (Table 1). However, for the key young first degree entrants from an LPN low participation indicator we fall below the average. We exceed our location-adjusted benchmarks for all measures.

Performance Indicator	UEA	Benchmark	England
State School	90.4%	86.2% (84.6%)	89.8%
Low participation neighbourhood (LPN)	9.4%	9.6% (8.8%)	11.4%
Mature students with no previous HE & from LPN	16.4%	13.2% (13.1%)	12.8%
In receipt of DSA	9%	6.4%	7.0%

Table 1: 2014/15 access performance indicators. Location adjusted benchmarks in brackets. Source: HESA.

Figure 1 illustrates performance over the past 5 years using HESA key performance indicators (KPI). This shows an overall downwards trend in the number of mature entrants, pulled down by the substantial drop in 2013/14. In terms of young entrants, there is an overall positive trend. For both markers we have generally performed above our location adjusted benchmark. The indicator relating to those in receipt of the disabled student allowance (DSA) is not shown. However, this marker has a clear positive trend over time, performing above our benchmark.

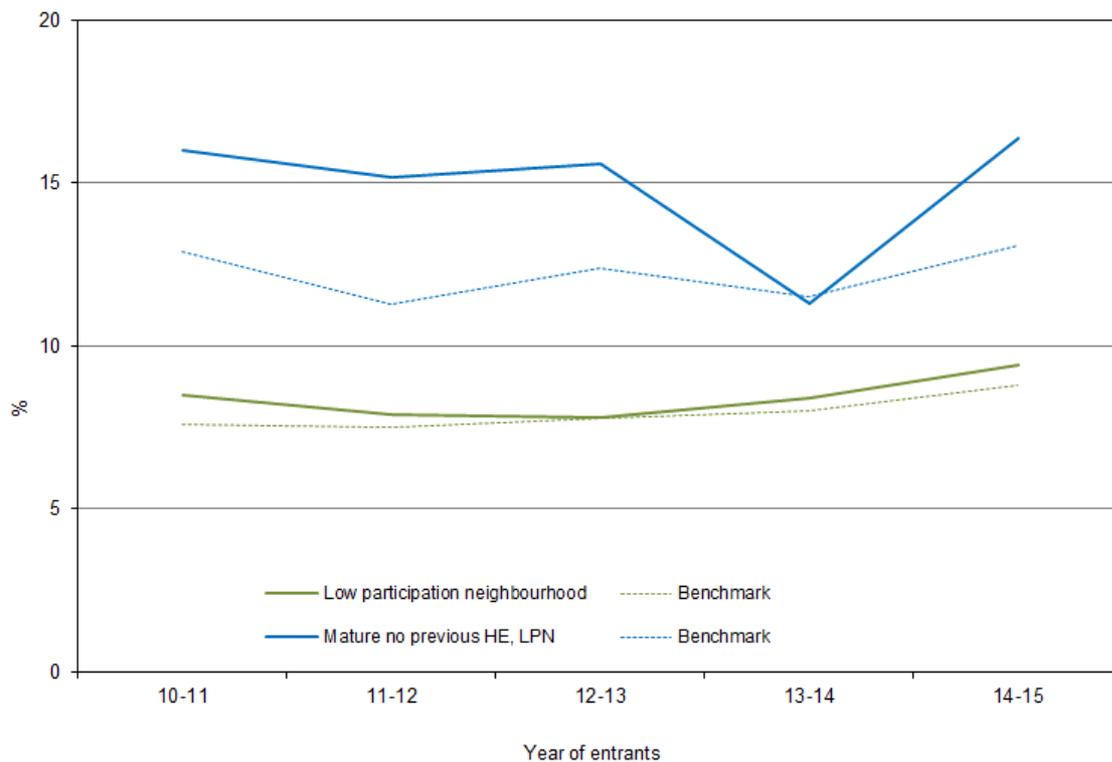


Figure 1: WP access performance indicators and location adjusted benchmarks: proportion of young and mature (no previous HE) entrants from a low participation neighbourhood (LPN). Source: HESA.

There is currently no KPI in relation to ethnicity. UEA has approximately 15 per cent Black and minority ethnic (BME) students within its UK domiciled full time cohort, and initial analysis indicates that we compare favourably to our local (East of England) population, although below national averages.

### 1.3.2 Success

Looking at success in terms of non-continuation, Table 2 (overleaf) indicates that in absolute terms we perform well, falling below the England average for all indicators except for mature students with no previous experience of HE. It is the same picture when performance is compared against our benchmarks. We meet or are below our benchmarks for all indicators except mature students with no previous experience of HE.

<b>Non continuation rate</b>	<b>UEA</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>England</b>
All entrants	4.8%	4.8%	7%
Low participation neighbourhood (LPN)	4.6%	5.3%	7.7%
Other neighbourhood	3.3%	3.5%	5.4%
Mature previous HE	6.8%	9%	10.4%
Mature no previous HE	16.7%	11.3%	12.8%

Table 2: Non-continuation performance indicators for 2012/3 entrants POLAR3. Source: HESA.

Our 2016/17 AA notes that for 'mature students with no previous HE experience, the University does not achieve our benchmarks. Of particular concern is the difference in performance between LPN and other neighbourhoods, and between mature students with and without previous HE experience'. In terms of performance gaps, there is a difference of 1.3 percentage point gap between LPN and those from other neighbourhoods. This is a smaller gap than the England average (2.3). However, there is a gap of 9.9 percentage points between mature students with and without previous experience of HE (against a national gap of 2.4).

Figure 2 (overleaf) illustrates performance over the past 5 years using HESA KPI. Generally non-continuation has improved over time, particularly for young students regardless of neighbourhood and for mature students with previous HE experience. However, for mature students with no previous experience of HE, non-continuation has increased and the gap between those with and without previous experience of HE has widened. Internal data suggests overall non continuation figures should improve.

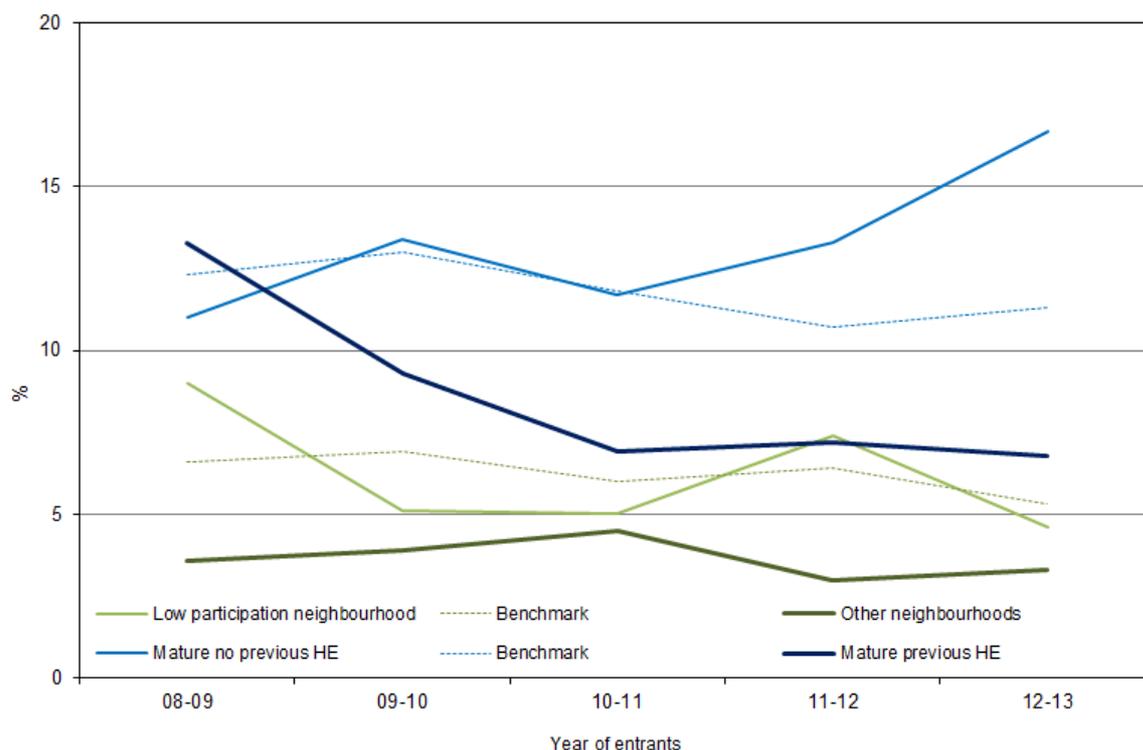


Figure 2: WP success performance indicators: non continuation after 1 year for young and mature entrants. Source: HESA

There are currently no KPI in relation to degree award levels published nationally reflecting the performance of WP students. Internal data indicates that both mature students and those from low participation neighbourhoods are less likely to obtain good honours. However, this is a complex picture. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of degree outcomes across the POLAR participation quintiles. This shows that LPN (Q1) students are more likely to achieve a first that more advantaged quintile 5 students who actually perform below average. However, LPN students are also much less likely to obtain a 2:1, thus skewing the good honours outcome. LPN students are also the most likely of any POLAR group to obtain a 2:2.

There are currently no KPIs relating to gender, disability or ethnicity for student success measures. However, this is an area for analysis now that improved internal data and monitoring is available.

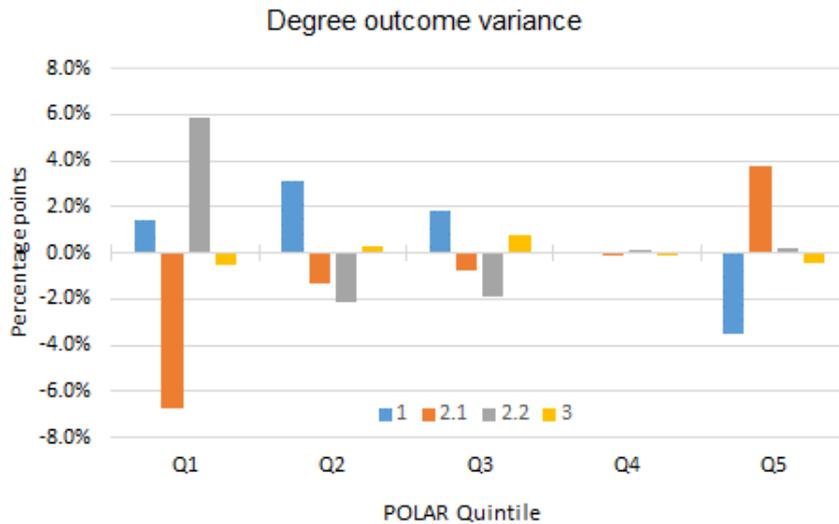
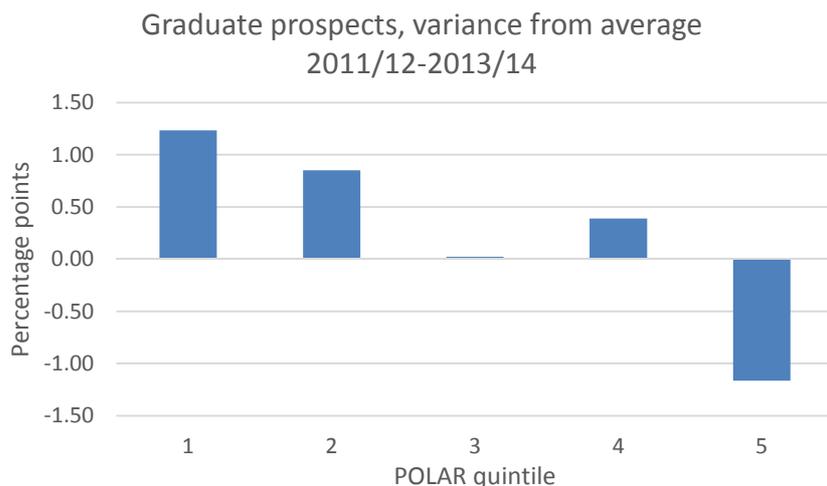


Figure 3: Variance against the average for degree outcomes for 2014/15. Quintile 1 = low participation, quintile 5 = highest participation neighbourhood. Source: UEA internal data.

### 1.3.3 Progression

As with award outcomes there are no KPI's published nationally relating to progression of students from a WP background. For our overall cohort, utilising the HESA employment indicator (including further study), UEA achieves 94.5 per cent, slightly outperforming our benchmark of 94.1 percent and against an England average of 93.1 per cent. Internal graduate prospects data can be used to demonstrate outcomes for various participation neighbourhoods. Positively, average performance 2011/12 to 2013/14 indicates that quintile 1 (low participation neighbourhood) students have slightly better graduate prospects (72.6% against an average of 71.3%). As can be seen in Figure 4 (overleaf), there appears to be a trend with graduate prospects increasing for lower quintiles. There is however year on year variance within this data.



*Figure 4: Variance against the average for positive graduate outcomes over a three year period. Quintile 1 = low participation, quintile 5 = highest participation neighbourhood. Source: UEA internal data.*

## 2 A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO WIDENING PARTICIPATION

The University's strategic approach to WP recognises the importance of, and addresses, the whole student life-cycle: access, success and progression. In order to make improvements across these three broad stages, our approach is underpinned by an emphasis on monitoring and evaluation to prioritise activities and interventions with the greatest impact. This is achieved by utilising data to establish baselines and identify gaps in performance between different groups, and building an evidence-base of effective activities, good practice and areas for improvement.

To achieve our aims we work collaboratively with external stakeholders and internally through adopting a whole-institution approach. Our over-riding priority is for the academic and reputational standing of the University, and in this context we will work to widen participation especially in our home region. Across the eastern region we engage in partnership with schools and colleges, HE providers, local authorities, NHS trusts and other educational stakeholders. Internally, we work to embed WP across key areas of strategy such as learning and teaching, equality and diversity, student support services as well as consulting with our students and other internal stakeholders. In particular, there is significant overlap with the University's Equality and Diversity priorities, reflecting differential access and outcomes for groups from some protected characteristics. We also believe that our values of student support and of the University as a supportive community create a strong sense of belonging are important in underpinning our WP goals.

The Strategy is guided by a set of key principles, which are set within the context of the University's Strategic Vision and UEA Plan (2016-2020). These principles are:

- a. Recognition of the vital importance of the maintenance of **academic standards** to the standing and prospects of the University;
- b. Recognition that **social diversity** of the student population **enriches** the **learning** experience for all students;
- c. Recognition that WP cuts across all aspects of the student lifecycle and the need for **cross institutional** collaboration
- d. Recognition that an **evidence-based approach** is essential to planning and resourcing WP activities, be they internally or externally-focused;
- e. Recognition of the need to provide suitable **academic and pastoral** support for students, whatever their background;
- f. Recognition of the value of **working in partnership** with other education providers.

Crucial in the development of our strategic approach is the question of the best use of resources allocated both under our annual Access Agreement with OFFA and through the HEFCE student opportunity funding. To ensure efficient and effective use of spend we will continue to monitor the balance of spend between access, success and progression.

Flexibility is key, being responsive to our evidence based approach and ensuring WP activity addresses gaps in performance. We are also mindful of future external policy changes that may influence resourcing decisions and impact on activity. For example: amendments to the Student Opportunity Allocation; Disabled Students' Allowance changes; health related courses student numbers and funding; and the implementation of current Green Paper<sup>7</sup> proposals relating to social mobility and the teaching excellence framework.

As highlighted in section 1.3, and informed by more detailed analysis undertaken by our Business Intelligence Unit, there are performance gaps between WP students and the wider student body in terms of student success and progression. We recognise this is likely to warrant a shift in resources to increase the proportion allocated to supporting these areas. This would be in line with the national strategy and would support the goals of UEA's vision and Plan. A key priority going forward is to maintain flexibility to rebalance spend to support all aspects of the student lifecycle responding to the evidence base. We will also look to benchmark our WP performance and resourcing against competitor universities over the five year strategy period.

---

<sup>7</sup> DBIS 2015. Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice. Department for Business Innovation and Skills.

The following sections provide more detail on strategic objectives and priorities under the themes of access, student success and progression outcomes. This strategy then sets out arrangements for monitoring and planning and communications.

### **3 ACCESS: PREPARING FOR AND ENTERING HE**

#### *Strategic Objectives*

- Improve the social inclusion profile of the students we admit and deliver a fair and transparent admissions process;
- Continue to deliver our Outreach programme reflecting the socio-economic and geographical context of our region, and through this broaden aspirations, raise attainment and increase participation rates of under-represented groups.

#### *What We Have Done*

- Built up an Outreach Team, combining professional and dedicated academic staff, and developed an annual programme of outreach events guided by a strategic approach, and continued to validate extensive HE provision in the region;
- Maintained an enviable social profile of students we admit, while progressively improving our entry tariff over a 7-year period.

#### *What We Will Go On To Do*

- Maintain level of expenditure on outreach with smarter evidence-based spend, and focusing on activity that is proven to be effective whilst continuing our innovative approach;
- Keep contextual admissions under review, and monitor the impacts of any changes to admissions policies or course portfolio on the social complexion of the student body;
- Actively consider the balance of our activities between outreach and aspiration-raising work and other measures to widen participation, including through benchmarking analysis;
- Support UCS in its process of acquiring degree-awarding powers;
- Improve the internal and external marketing and communication of our efforts and achievements in this area;
- Work with our associate partner colleges to maximise applicants and to emphasise partnership working;

- Expand 'HE in FE'-validated provision in the region where practicable seeking out potential regional 'HE in FE' partners who fit our institutional mission and partnerships strategy.

## **4 STUDENT SUCCESS: STUDENT RETENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT**

### *Strategic Objectives*

- Maintain our exceptional student experience through an inclusive approach for all students irrespective of background;
- Improve retention rates for all students, with a focus on enhancing the sense of belonging for less advantaged students and narrowing the gap between the least and most advantaged;
- Improve educational outcomes for all students with a focus on good honours while addressing differentials in attainment between under-represented groups, and closing any gap between the least and most advantaged.

### *What We Have Done*

- Maintained high levels of student satisfaction over recent years;
- Introduced some school-specific retention initiatives to support students at risk;
- Invested in additional data-analysis and monitoring capability in the BIU to support addressing good honours differentials in attainment between under-represented groups;
- Introduced guidance on induction and transition support, in part in order to help with retention.

### *What We Will Go On To Do*

- Further improve monitoring of student support arrangements and develop stronger and more strategic capacity for improving retention rates for all students, with a particular focus on enhancing support for less advantaged;
- Maintain our inclusive approach to facilitating student success whilst ensuring less advantaged and under-represented groups benefit from this approach;

- Enhance our focus on the student experience to support retention drawing together all aspects of the student life cycle and good practice from across the sector to close gaps between different groups;
- Review expenditure on student success in the light of changing student numbers and student demographics, building on monitoring and evaluation of activity to increase the proportion of less advantaged students accessing and benefiting from support;
- Focus analysis and tailor initiatives to the particular socio-economic complexion of different academic subject areas;
- Consider how the Advisor System might assist in supporting the academic performance of students from less well-represented backgrounds and develop further strategies to close any gap between the least and most advantaged;
- Actively support UEA partner colleges in monitoring and supporting the retention and achievement of students.

## **5 PROGRESSION OUTCOMES: FURTHER STUDY AND EMPLOYMENT**

### *Strategic Objectives*

- Improve graduate employment outcomes for all students, reducing inequalities in outcomes between under-represented groups, and closing any gap between the least and most advantaged;
- Increase progression to postgraduate study for all students, identifying under-represented groups with an emphasis on narrowing any gap between the least and most advantaged.

### *What We Have Done*

- Invested in the Careers Service to improve graduate employment outcomes for all students, but also invested in a post and activities to support employability for under-represented groups;
- Engaged positively with the Postgraduate Support Scheme targeting under-represented groups.

### *What We Will Go On To Do*

- Maintain our inclusive approach to facilitating student progression whilst ensuring less advantaged and under-represented groups benefit from this approach;

- Review expenditure on employability support in the light of changing student numbers and student demographics, building on monitoring and evaluation of activity to increase the proportion of less advantaged students accessing and benefiting from support;
- Continue to monitor graduate employment outcomes for all students, but for under-represented groups in particular;
- Significant increase resource to support graduate employability through an institution-wide Student Opportunities Programme, and make particular provision to support initiatives for WP students;
- Monitor participation in extra-curricular activities, including UEA Skills Award, by under-represented groups;
- Work to raise the profile of Fair Access to the Professions for under-represented groups;
- Continue to explore and engage with schemes to support PG study for all students, particularly identifying mechanisms to improve access for under-represented groups;
- Encourage progression from our HE in FE partners to Masters and other Level 7 courses at UEA.

## **6 MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Monitoring and evaluation of WP activity is key to support the development of a robust evidence base to target effort and resources. To this end we created a new role in the Business Intelligence Unit to lead on co-ordination of data on access, student success and outcomes, in liaison with dedicated evaluation roles in Outreach and the Careers Service.

- An immediate priority is the further development of robust monitoring and evaluation across the student lifecycle, identifying areas of good practice as well as gaps between the least and most advantaged;
- Develop a WP Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy to reflect all aspects of the student lifecycle, mapping against the institutional structure and coordinated with equality and diversity measures;
- Ensure our milestones agreed with OFFA are stretching but achievable;
- Increase the frequency of meetings of the WP Group to four or five times a year to support the implementation of the Strategy and provide additional momentum;

- Ensure that WP activity at UEA is informed by both good practice and research elsewhere in the sector as well as internal research and evaluation;
- Produce an annual report on WP ahead of the redrafting of the annual Access Agreement;
- Monitor and review the national evidence base on aspiration-raising initiatives and other WP strategies.

## **7 PLANNING AND COMMUNICATIONS**

- Finalise this Widening Participation Strategy alongside the UEA Plan 2016-2020 for final sign-off at the start of 2016;
- Ensure sufficient administrative and academic infrastructure to support strategy implementation, including the appointment of an Academic Director for Widening Participation.
- Review this strategy on an annual basis to reflect any changes in the external or internal environment;
- Develop an internal and external communications plan to raise the profile and awareness of our work and achievements in this area, for example through the use of case studies of effective practice;
- Move the WP Group to a more formal committee structure, ensuring that within the annual cycle of meetings there is sufficient scope to engage and consult with students;
- Develop WP strategic plans associated with the three core elements of the student lifecycle to underpin and advance the implementation of this strategy.
- Map this strategy against other relevant UEA strategies and areas of strategic focus, identifying gaps and opportunities for cross institutional working and shared benefits, for example with the University's Equality and Diversity priorities and Athena SWAN charter mark project.

## APPENDIX 1. MAPS OF YOUNG PARTICIPATION

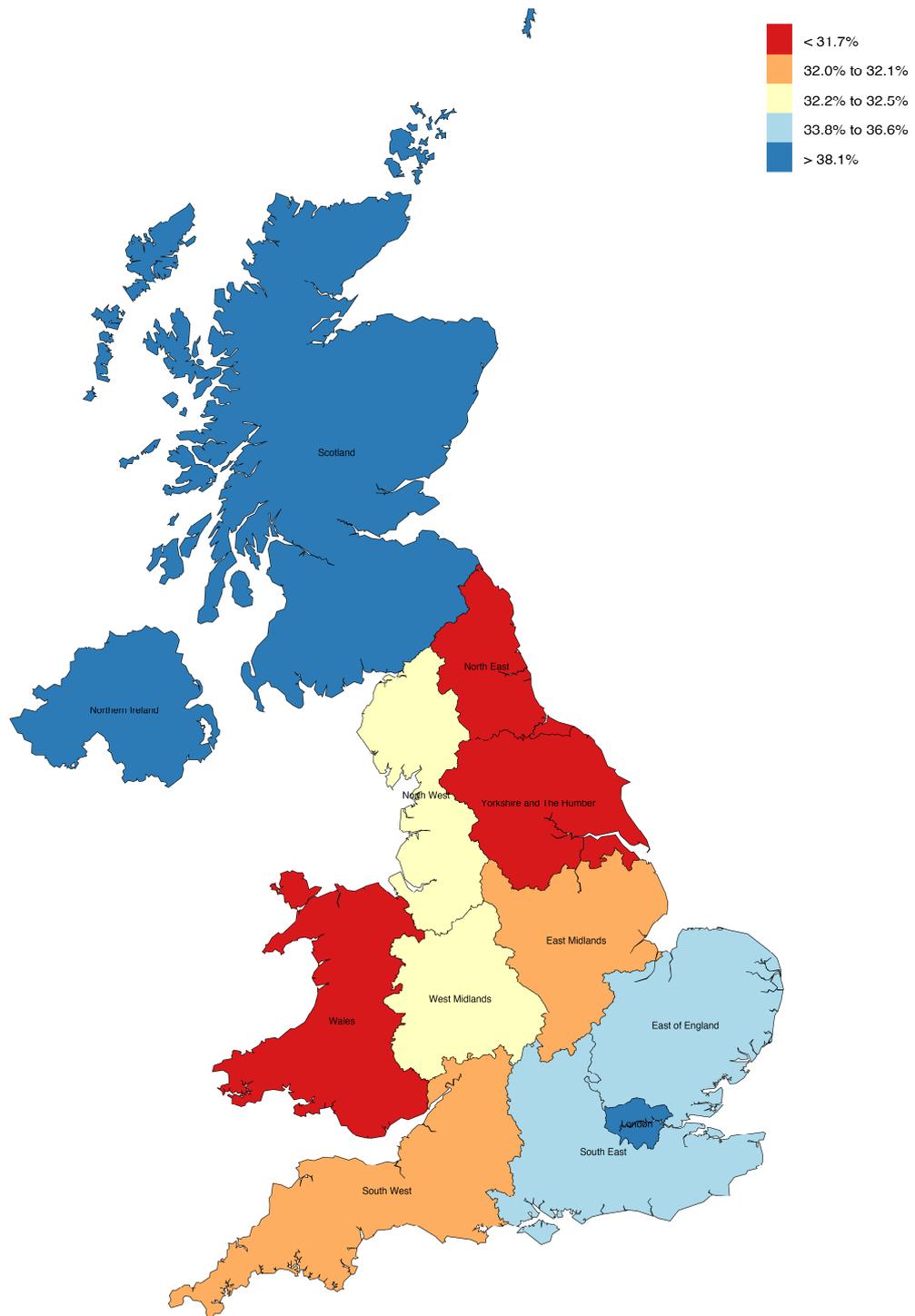


Figure 5: Young participation by region. Source: HEFCE<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/POLAR3,data/>



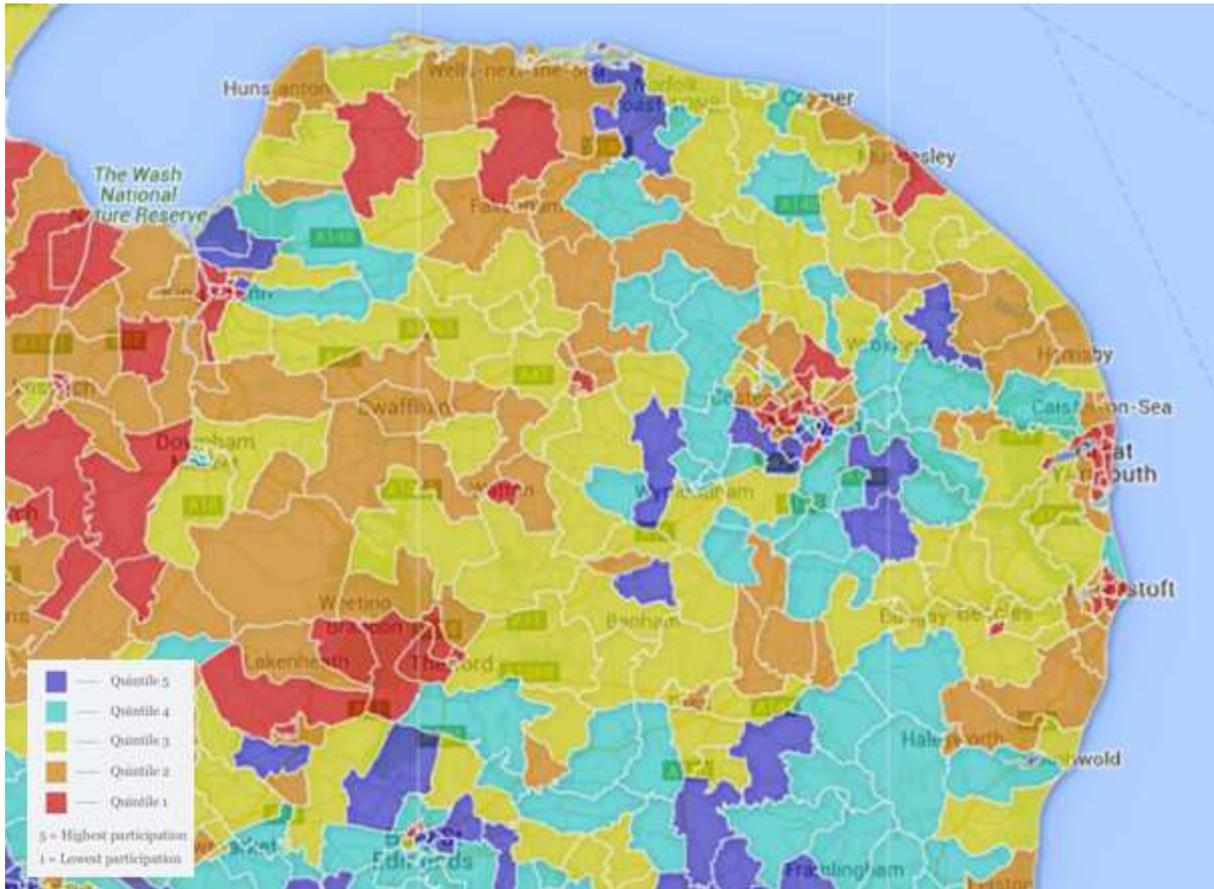


Figure 7: Map of young participation areas. Source: HEFCE<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/POLAR3,data/>