

Access Agreement 2016/17 for St Mary's University, Twickenham

1. Introduction

The mission of St Mary's University is to prepare its students for flourishing lives, successful careers and social commitment through excellent, research-enriched teaching in a strong community of mutual respect based on our Catholic ethos and identity. The current Strategic Plan (2011-16) outlines its aims to:

facilitate the entry into St Mary's of students whose background usually makes progress to Higher Education less likely (Strategic Objective 1E);

ensure that the student learning experience takes into account diversity and the needs and contributions of the individual. (Strategic Objective 2B).

St. Mary's remains faithful to its founding ethos through its continuing commitment to education, strong links to many of the Catholic secondary and primary schools across the country, and a strong commitment to social justice. This is reflected in the University being an inclusive environment, welcoming students and staff of all faiths and none. It is committed to a holistic approach to education, which forms the person in the widest possible sense.

The University has a new Widening Participation Strategy 2015 – 2020, which is centred around continuing to build a strategic approach to WP. It will do this using evidence from evaluations in order to further raise awareness of, and encourage participation in HE, to further diversify the student body, and to enhance engagement and success in under-represented groups.

The University's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, Student Engagement, Retention and Success Strategy and Employability Strategy also highlight the need to remove barriers to participation and to support students who are under-represented in HE through their studies and to progress to further education and / or graduate employment. This strategic intent has led to the continued success of a well-established programme of widening access activities and a growing programme of targeted activity that supports individual student success at all stages of the student journey from pre-entry through to graduation and employment.

The University is developing a new Academic Strategy 2016-2020 which will explore in more detail options for its wide range of learners through a variety of modes of study. In particular it will propose options for flexible study and for developing programmes and support mechanisms specifically designed for part-time students and those who wish to choose a blended learning approach.

St Mary's University takes an institution-wide view of widening access and participation, and activities and interventions are embedded wherever possible into the wider student experience, both in terms of teaching and learning, and support.

2. Fees, Student numbers and fee income

The University will charge £9000 to fee-regulated, full-time entrants.

Part-time students who are undertaking full time programmes at a lower intensity will be charged pro rata fees. The highest rate that could be charged in cases such as this for 2016/17 would be £6000 for a student taking 80 credits. In most cases, new part-time students will be charged £4500 per year (being 50% of the full-time rate). Foundation Degree courses will be charged at a rate of up to £4500.

All fees are subject to review regarding an inflation adjustment for subsequent years.

We are committing to spend £2,612,518 on measures for Access (£346,000), Student Success (£939,518), Student Progress (£213,000) and Finance Support (£1,114,000). This will make up 21% of the higher fee income that we receive.

3. Access and student success measures

The access and student success record at St Mary's

The tables below outline the access and student success record at St Mary's since 2010/11. Our continuation rates for first degree students after the first year of entry continue to be high and well above benchmark (+2.7%), and the percentage of BME students as a proportion of the St Mary's population continues to grow, rising in 2014 by 2.3% on the previous year. The rise in the benchmark for participation from under-represented socio-economic groups means that the differential figure remains the same as the previous year despite a percentage rise of 1.9%.

The figures for both participation from state schools and colleges, and from low participation neighbourhoods are disappointing and these are key areas addressed by the new Widening Participation Strategy and associated Action Plan. Although much of our outreach activity is focussed on raising aspirations and achievement to encourage access to higher education in general, in an attempt to address the shortfall we will ensure that our outreach activities do target schools in low participation areas and we will increase our work in inner London in particular, including attending HE Fairs at all inner London FE Colleges.

In relation to student success, we will continue to target students from low participation areas for involvement in our pre-entry programme 'Get Set for Success' and provide priority on-course support for targeted students through our Learning Advice team. Further details of our access, outreach, retention and success activity are outlined below.

Ethnic minority students as a proportion of St Mary's student population				
	2011	2012	2013	2014
% BME	20.4%	22.1%	24%	26.3%
% WHITE	77.5%	73.7%	73.4%	70.5%

% INFORMATION REFUSED	2.1%	4.2%	2.6%	3.2%
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% Continuation among first degree students after first year of entry			
	St Mary's	Benchmark	Difference
2013/14	92.1%	89.4%	+2.7%
2012/13	89.6%	89.8%	-0.2%
2011/12	88.6%	88.2%	+0.4%

Year	St Mary's	Benchmark (location adj.)	Difference
Participation from state schools or colleges			
2013/14	93.6%	94.7%	-1.1%
2012/13	95.7%	94.4%	+1.3%
2011/12	96.5%	93.7%	+2.8%
2010/11	95.5%	94.7%	+0.8%
Participation from under-represented socioeconomic groups (4,5,6,7)			
2013/14	37.5%	40.1%	-2.6%
2012/13	35.5%	38.1%	-2.6%
2011/12	37.1%	36.9%	+0.2%
2010/11	35.1%	36.6%	-1.5%
Participation from low participation neighbourhoods (Young Entrants)			
2013/14	5.5%	8.1%	-2.6%
2012/13	9.8%	9.4%	+0.4%
2011/12	7.8%	9%	-1.2%
2010/11	6.3%	9%	-2.7%
Percentage of full time first degree students in receipt of Disabled students allowance			
2013/14	7.1%	7.0%	+0.1%
2012/13	7.6%	6.7%	+0.9%
2011/12	7.0%	6.2%	+0.8%
2010/11	6.0%	5.5%	+0.5%

Access and Outreach

Outreach activity continues to take place with targeted schools and colleges in low participation areas using contextual data relating to postcodes and taking into account factors such as free school meals and GCSE results. Some of the University's outreach work is with cohorts of students from under-represented groups who are selected by schools and colleges in less obviously low participation areas.

Over the past five years we have continued to engage with increasing numbers of students from WP backgrounds through our outreach provision. The majority of our provision to date has been for one-off activities or interventions. However, we recognise the benefit of projects that involve a series of interventions with the same students over a period of time, addressing their needs at different stages. We are shifting the balance of our outreach activities in favour of longer term, sustainable programmes that encompass students from primary to mature level which is something that we will continue to do during 2016-17. We will work to combine activities we offer to provide a varied programme for groups of students. This will include appropriate information, advice and guidance relevant to specific needs of the groups of people involved at each stage. The year 6 Professor Horace Walpole programme was piloted in 2014/15 in order to introduce primary school students to university and we will work with colleagues to further develop this provision. Widening Access through Sport (WASP) is our most established outreach programme and continues to go from strength to strength supporting students preparing for their GCSE PE qualification. Our mentoring programme, established in 2013/14, continues to grow. It enables us to work with students from year 9 upwards helping them understand the progression routes available to them, what university is about and supporting them in preparation for their GCSEs, BTEC and AS/A levels. In addition we continue to explore opportunities for working with parents/carers, other advisers, and communities and employers as we recognise that we can do more to engage these groups.

The number of students we will engage with in 2016/17 remains the same as for 2015/16, however we aim to increase the number of interactions for each student, providing more sustained contact with students to develop their interest and awareness of HE over time. Our milestones reflect this as they now include a target for the percentage of students that we engage with on more than one occasion.

The increase in more sustained outreach work gives us a platform to build up a strong evidence base for this work and we will endeavour to measure aspiration, attainment and destination by increasing longitudinal monitoring. We plan to negotiate data sharing with schools so that measures such as GCSE results and destinations can provide evidence of the value of mentoring and other activities.

St Mary's achieved the Buttle UK Quality Mark during 2014 and will hold the quality mark until it expires in 2017. We annually review our provision so that it meets the requirements of our students from Care Leaver backgrounds. Outreach activity with Looked After Children is organised with other universities through our collaborative partners Aimhigher London South Ltd on two projects – Into HE and Look to the Future.

Our Care Leavers' Service will target Young Carers identified by UCAS and our own internal systems and offer a similar package of support and guidance to that which we currently offer to our Care Leavers and Vulnerable Young Adults. It is the intention to include these students in our 'Get Set for Success' programme and offer a pre-induction meeting with the Care Leavers' Service to discuss their academic and pastoral support requirements. This will be followed up with timely meetings throughout the academic year to discuss progress and any additional support requirements that may need to be put in place. We will also offer financial support to Young Carers through our St Mary's Scholarship and the University Hardship Fund.

Our recruitment of mature students has remained consistent over the past three years but we will continue to ensure that we attract mature students and that on course provision and support is available to them. The new Widening Participation Strategy (2015 – 2020) gives a commitment to enhance the engagement, success and progression of all under-represented groups and is a key driver for initiatives such as those introduced by the Careers Service to target resources and support for mature learners as detailed below.

The National Networks for Collaborative Outreach scheme provides us with an opportunity to continue to build on and strengthen our collaborative arrangements during 2016/17. St Mary's is committed to supporting Aimhigher London South and AccessHE in working towards a single point of contact for London. Additionally we will support the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers as they develop as an organisation.

We remain active members of Aimhigher London South Ltd and Access HE. Membership enables the sharing of good practice at a local and regional level in order to determine what works well and to develop and apply evaluation and monitoring methods to illustrate long term impact. St Mary's is involved in various activities and projects initiated by Aimhigher London South Ltd. and Access HE. In 2014/15 St Mary's involvement in collaborative events included a number of 'Aspire to HE' and 'Skills and Progression' events. In addition we hosted two Looked After Children events. We will continue to participate in and host events in 2016-17.

We regularly attend careers/HE fairs in schools, sixth forms and colleges as well as conducting sessions in schools on a variety of topics and we will continue to do this as this helps us establish new relationships and foster existing relationships we have with schools and colleges, with a particular focus on those in low participation neighbourhoods.

Student Retention, Success and Progression

In January 2014, St Mary's approved a new Student Engagement, Retention and Success Strategy working with the findings of the HEA's Student Retention and Success Change Programme and St Mary's University current involvement with the HEA/Paul Hamlyn Foundation What Works? Retention and Success Project. The strategy recognises the importance of a culture of 'belonging' and of high levels of student engagement in positive retention and attainment outcomes. As an institution St Mary's considers that it has a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that all students are encouraged and supported in reaching their full potential, and to reduce the retention and attainment gaps experienced by students from under-represented groups. The University collects data relating to the attainment of students from under-represented groups and will develop activities and interventions which will focus on the needs of particular groups and students who are identified as needing additional support, both academically and in order to develop a sense of belonging.

The Learning Advisor service, dedicated to offering academic study skill support to under-represented undergraduate students will continue to expand and to develop its work. The service provides advice, support and guidance in response to students' individual needs, through one to one and group appointments, drop in sessions, workshops, study guides, telephone and email services, as well as online study materials. It offers a range of services and resources which address the needs of a diverse student population and which facilitate independent learning.

New projects developed by the Learning Advisors for 2015/16 will include the pilot of a peer mentoring programme for transition into university, which we hope to roll out across disciplines in 2016/17. Learning Advisors will also receive specific training to help them to better support home students for whom English is a second language.

In 2014/15 we developed a database for the Learning Advisor service which is linked to our student record system and allows us to accurately track all students utilising this service and to monitor the effects of the various interventions on student attainment (acknowledging that this is one variable which might affect student grades).

The Learning Advisor service also leads on our 2-day pre-entry residential course, 'Get Set for Success'. The programme, designed exclusively for students from under-represented backgrounds, gives participants the opportunity to meet fellow students and staff, ask questions, take part in activities and challenges, and experience living on campus for a night. The programme is also designed to enable students to become familiar with the University's teaching methods, to acquaint themselves with relevant terminology and to start to think about the transition between their previous educational experience and university study. Workshops are held during the course of the event on a range of topics including becoming independent learners and how university life can set them on a successful career path. There is also a social evening to enable them to start building friendships and get to know current St Mary's students. Feedback on the event is collected and students undertake pre- and post-course questionnaires, primarily focused on determining and growing their confidence about their start at University. The evaluation reports are presented to the Access Agreement group and issues arising are discussed by the Get Set for Success team (Learning Advisors, Widening Participation team, Student Union) in planning the next year's event. Participants from the Get Set for Success programme are followed up by Learning Advisors during the year and offered the opportunity of one-to-one learning advice, and their progress is tracked for the duration of their time at St Mary's.

There will be a review of the 'Are you Ready' campaign in 2015/16, developed for the What Works? Retention and Success project in 3 discipline areas, with a view to rolling it out across the university in 2016/17. The campaign provides a pre-entry website with interactive online information and activities for all confirmed students during the summer to enable them to 'meet' their cohort, ask questions and share views, and gain as much information as possible about their courses before starting university.

The University is also taking the opportunity, for 2015 entry, to review its arrangements for the registration and induction of new students. Registration and induction will be moved to a week before the start of term to give new students time to settle in and undergo induction processes before continuing students register. This development will enhance the University's focus on new students and enable academic staff to concentrate solely on their induction needs. The induction week will include discipline-level inductions as well as activities designed to help new students to find their way around campus, understand what support is available to them and meet other new starters.

The Student Review system, which began in 2013/14 will be rolled out to undergraduate students at all levels by 2016/17. Student Review is designed to support students to reflect on their progress and development, discuss their progress and areas for improvement, review their feedback from module assessments. It helps them to link their learning in their

academic programme and extra-curricular activities to their ongoing academic, career and personal development, identify skills to be developed in order to enhance their academic performance and future employability, and identify potential opportunities for work experience, internships or other employment opportunities. It provides a mechanism which enables them to set realistic, meaningful and motivating targets and goals in the areas of academic, professional and personal achievement.

The Student Review module also provides interactive resources and advice for students and staff, including details of the specialist services (e.g. Academic Liaison Librarians, Careers Service, Learning Advisors, and Student Services) that students can go to or be referred to by their Academic Tutor for additional support. This information is updated regularly and staff and student feedback is collected throughout the year to ensure that it is up-to-date, relevant and helpful.

The University continues to increase the preparedness of students from under-represented groups for the world of work. Students are encouraged to undertake accredited work placement modules as part of their degrees and are supported in doing this by individual tutors from the University and by appropriately qualified workplace supervisors who will promote student learning in the workplace. The placement modules give students the opportunity build confidence and sense of responsibility, gain specific skills relating to chosen career paths, understand what they have to offer to employers, explore career options and boost their CV's. They have the opportunity to explore and discuss their career aspirations, understand the range of experiences that are open to them, develop employability skills, build social and professional networks and understand the value of these. They will also improve their academic outcomes by experiencing theory in practice. This provision is of particular value to students who may not have the social capital or access to networks which might enable them to find their own placements or gain meaningful work experience independently.

The Careers Services contributes to skills development and employability through support for CV and application writing, interview skills and techniques, and securing employment and volunteering opportunities. It delivers one-to-one support, careers sessions in the curriculum, and employer / alumni engagement events throughout the academic year.

The Careers Service (through the University of London Careers Group) provides access to an online community (REACH) designed for students who feel they face barriers to reaching their potential. These may include social background, disability, age, gender and sexual orientation. It provides inspiration and ideas for careers options, signposts to dedicated resources and to answer specific questions as well as information about other sources of information and support groups. In addition, the Careers Service has developed a suite of resources specifically targeted at mature students and those with disabilities at St Mary's to help them prepare for employment.

4. Financial support for students

Following the discontinuation of the National Scholarship Scheme we undertook an evaluation of our financial package, working with representatives from the student body and the Student Union and using the following information:

- The results of a survey to our current scholarship holders showing that 47% of those who responded were partially or greatly influenced by the Scholarships offered in making their decision to come to St Mary's, and 70% would have preferred their awards to be given as either cash, accommodation fee waivers or a combination of cash and fee waivers.
- We have evaluated the progression of students who received funding through the Access to Learning Fund over the past five academic years and have verified that the student progression or completion of those in receipt of an award varied between 93% and 97%.

We have listened to student opinion and are giving our students a choice as to how they receive their scholarship, either as cash or fee waivers. The emphasis of our financial support is to provide the greatest benefit to the highest number of students whilst continuing to provide targeted support to other students e.g. Care Leavers, those identified through our outreach programme and students from Catholic schools in line with our Catholic ethos, mission and values. We will also target Young Carers through our Care Leavers' Service to offer additional support, including financial support through our St Mary's Scholarship.

It is expected that the following Scholarships and Bursaries will be offered in 2016/17:

St Mary's Scholarships

Up to 70 Scholarships of £6,000 awarded as cash or fee waivers over 3 years to students who meet the following criteria:

Successful applicants will be awarded the following:

- Year 1: £3,000 as a cash award and/or tuition fee/accommodation fee waiver
- Year 2: £2,000 as a cash award/tuition fee waiver
- Year 3: £1,000 as a cash award/tuition fee waiver

Successful applicants studying on a part-time course will receive a cash award on a pro-rata basis calculated according to their FTE. For example students undertaking 60 credits of an undergraduate degree with a tuition fee liability of £4,500 would be eligible for an award of £1,500 at Level 1, £1,000 at Level 2 and £500 at Level 3.

To be eligible to apply for a St Mary's Scholarship students must:

- have an assessed annual household income below £25,000, and

- have been offered a place on a full-time or part-time (minimum intensity of 25% of full-time degree) undergraduate degree course or foundation degree course, and
- be ordinarily resident in the UK or the EU at the start of their course, and
- have completed an Application for Student Support through the relevant awarding authority and agree that their financial information can be shared with St Mary's University, and
- not be in receipt of full or part payment of fees through a sponsorship arrangement, and
- be entrants new to higher education in 2016, and
- make/have made St Mary's University a firm choice, and
- register on an undergraduate/foundation degree course at St Mary's University in September 2016

In addition, student applicants must fulfil one or more of the following criteria:

- be a student who has completed an Access course in 2015/16
- be a student with a disability in receipt of a Disability Living Allowance
- be a looked-after child/care leaver, or be a student receiving support from the Foyer Federation, and be 25 or under at the start of the academic year 2016/17
- be a Young Carer¹ under the age of 24 at the start of the academic year 2016/17
- hold Refugee status
- be the first generation² in the family to study in higher education
- be studying in 2015/16 in a school/college in one of the London Boroughs

If the number of applications exceeds the number of scholarships to be awarded, priority will be given to students who fulfil the highest number of additional criteria and have the lowest assessed household income.

Academic Excellence Scholarships

Up to 30 Scholarships of £1,000 awarded, comprising cash, in the first year of study only, to UK & Republic of Ireland students who achieve at least AAB at 'A' level or equivalent and:

- have an assessed annual household income of less than £42,620, and
- have completed a means-tested assessment through the relevant awarding authority and agree that their financial information can be shared with St Mary's University, and
- make/have made St Mary's University a firm choice, and
- register on a full-time undergraduate/foundation degree programme at St Mary's University in September 2016.

¹ Young carers are defined as "young people aged 14-24 who care, unpaid, for a family member or friend with an illness or disability, mental health condition or an addiction" (Carers Trust 2015, 'Supporting Students with Caring Responsibilities', (England version). Caring responsibilities may include practical tasks, physical care, personal care, help with medication, managing family budgets, helping with communication, support for siblings, emotional support.

² neither parent studied at university or holds a higher education qualification

If the number of applications exceeds the maximum number to be awarded, these scholarships will be awarded to students who have the lowest assessed household income at the time of allocating the Scholarships.

Catholic Schools Scholarships

Up to 30 Scholarships of £1,000 awarded as cash in the first year of study only to students who are studying at a Catholic School or College in the UK or EU within a 3 year period prior to the 2016/17 academic year and who:

- have an annual assessed household income of less than £42,620, and
- have completed a means-tested assessment through the appropriate awarding authority and agree that their financial information can be shared with St Mary's University, and
- make/have made St Mary's University a firm choice
- register on a full-time undergraduate/foundation degree programme at St Mary's University in September 2016

and

- are the first generation in the family to study in higher education.

If the number of eligible students exceeds the maximum number to be awarded, these scholarships will be awarded to students who have the lowest assessed household income at the time of allocating the Scholarships.

Care Leavers Scholarships

A cash award of £1,000 will be given to Care Leavers for each year of study and who:

- have been made an offer of a place to study on a full-time undergraduate/foundation degree programme at St Mary's University, and
- are 'looked after' by a Local Authority, or receiving support from the Foyer Federation, and
- are 25 years of age or under at the start of the academic year 2016/17, and
- make/have made St Mary's University a firm choice
- register on a full-time undergraduate/foundation degree course at St Mary's University in September 2016.

St Mary's Bursaries

A bursary of £1,000, paid as cash over 3 years, to all full-time undergraduate students with a household income of less than £25,000, as verified by the Student Finance assessment.

We have calculated that this will benefit around 39% of our student intake. Students will be required to meet the following criteria:

To be eligible to apply for a St Mary's Bursary students must:

- have an assessed annual household income below £25,000, and

- have been offered a place on a full-time or part-time (minimum intensity of 25% of full-time degree) undergraduate degree course or foundation degree course, and
- be ordinarily resident in the UK or the EU at the start of their course, and
- have completed an Application for Student Support through the relevant awarding authority and agree that their financial information can be shared with St Mary's University, and
- make/have made St Mary's University a firm choice, and
- register on an undergraduate/foundation degree course at St Mary's University in September 2016

The bursary is subject to progression to the next level of study and will be paid as follows:

Year 1	£500
Year 2	£300
Year 3	£200

Students who register on a part-time undergraduate or foundation degree course will receive a bursary pro rata to the percentage of full-time study at each level of the course.

Working with the student body, it is apparent that there is an expectation for additional financial support, especially from students with a low household income. It is intended that the package of financial support offered by St Mary's will help meet this expectation.

5. Targets and milestones

The University is setting itself challenging targets in terms of improving its widening participation and retention. It has also developed appropriate milestones for these targets. The milestones and targets are set out in tables 7a and 7b and are contextualised by the data related to our Access and Success record in section 3 of this agreement.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

The University is putting in place new structures to improve the collation and use of data to inform decision making in relation to enhancing the student experience, including the appointment of a Head of Corporate Planning. This will enable a co-ordinated approach to the use of management information across the university, including collection and analysis of data relating to student experience, retention and success. This will be used in both reporting and planning, and for highlighting the success of interventions targeted at students from under-represented groups.

Access and Outreach

The University has produced an Evaluation Plan for its Widening Participation activities, designed to monitor and evaluate the aims of the strategy. The data collected is used to inform our approach to widening participation and to enable us to change and develop activities in response to trends and patterns identified. Measurements will enable us to

identify increased levels of knowledge of HE in participants; changes in the proportion of HE applications who come from lower socio-economic groups; and the extent to which students from lower socio-economic grounds are motivated to study, to remain in post-compulsory education, to progress to Level 3 studies and to apply for HE. Evaluation of activities takes place on both an informal and formal basis, using Kirkpatrick's evaluation model, and looking at short term, medium and long term impact as outlined in the AimHigher Measuring Success matrix. Evaluation will involve the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data.

St Mary's membership of collaborative organisations also affords opportunities to develop and apply evaluation and monitoring methods to illustrate long term impact. For example, Aimhigher London South Ltd use contacts to develop a range of data sharing protocols with several Local Authorities to map the progression and destinations of students who participate in activities and a centralised database provides AHLS member institutions with a consistent evaluative process to measure both the quality and impact of events. AccessHE are also developing methods of tracking destinations across London for those who have taken part in collaborative activities.

Pre-entry and on course

All undergraduate programmes are given a profile of their students in advance of the academic year so that they can make appropriate provision. An interactive Inclusivity Guide is currently being developed to help staff in programmes to provide appropriate support for all their students, and to highlight good practice in pedagogy and student support for students with a variety of needs and from a range of backgrounds.

As described in Section 3 above, we have systems in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the Learning Advisors and to track all under-represented students in terms of attainment and retention. We monitor these students in terms of their usage of employability services (Careers and Centre for Workplace Learning) and can identify those that are not engaging with the services in order to encourage them to do so, as well as to evaluate the benefits of the services to them.

The NSP scholarships officer monitors and evaluates the take up of financial support.

The HEA/PHF What Works? Retention and Success project together with the Student Engagement, Retention and Success strategy will enable the development of institution-wide measures of student belonging and engagement using new and existing evaluation mechanisms, including the UK HES survey (to be piloted in 2015), module evaluations, annual events such as the University Day, and SU and departmental surveys.

Institutional Responsibilities

At an institutional level, the Access Agreement Group, which directly reports to the Planning and Resources Committee (and ultimately to Academic Board) and is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and External Relations), oversees the overall strategy and performance for widening participation in the institution. The group meets at least five times a year to monitor the annual timetable of access and success activities and to receive data relevant to monitoring and evaluation (including financial updates). The Student Union General Manager and a member of the Student Union Executive Committee attend meetings of the Access Agreement Group. Students are represented on every committee of the

university including all those that consider aspects of the Access Agreement, such as the Equality and Diversity Sub-committee, Student Experience Committee (chaired by a member of the Board of Governors), the Student Engagement, Retention and Success Implementation Group and Academic Board. Student Representatives on the Access Agreement Group consult with the Student Executive Committee and other student forums on the business of the Group.

This Access Agreement will be approved by the Academic Board.

7. Equality and diversity

The University is committed to equality and diversity and aims to ‘foster an environment in which all staff and students can realise their full potential through the development of their skills and abilities, regardless of their background’ (Equality and Diversity Policy Statement 2012). In addition, the Student Charter states that the University will provide ‘an environment which promotes equality, diversity and ethical behaviour in all aspects of student life’.

Under the Single Equality Act 2010, our equality scheme objectives (overseen by the Equality and Diversity Sub-committee) identify a number of student focused actions such as improved data gathering, promotion of inclusive practices to enhance the student experience, improved accessibility for disabled students on campus, and measures to improve the achievement of under-represented groups. St Mary’s carries out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) as part of our duty under the Single Equality Act (2010) and the Access Agreement is impact assessed each year.

The admissions policy reflects the mission and values of the University with its commitment to both distinctiveness and inclusivity. The admissions process is overseen by the Registry through a centralised system which enables a consistent, professional and fair decision making process to be maintained. The University considers every application on merit regardless of the applicant’s background.

Support for disabled students is a key priority for St Mary’s. In practical terms, the Access Agreement has provided funding for a new post: the Disability Support Administrator. In addition, students are recruited as part of a cadre of peer support workers by the Dyslexia and Disability Service which helps promote greater understanding of disability in the student body.

A greater awareness of equality and diversity is promoted through staff CPD and St Mary’s awards an annual staff prize for inclusivity. Past recipients include the dyslexia and disability service and the ‘Get Set for Success’ pre-entry programme.

The Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee (EDSC) receives reports regarding the Access Agreement for the purpose of monitoring it from the point of view of equality and diversity and the Student Experience Data Analyst includes data on the impact of access and student success plans on equality and diversity. We monitor the pre-entry programme to see if our access and admissions plans are effective. This data is fed back to Registry, the Equality

and Diversity subcommittee and the Access Agreement group to action in relation to future strategic plans and Access Agreements.

8. Provision of information to prospective students

St. Mary's ensures that it provides clear and user friendly information about its fees and financial support to existing and potential students, outlining what is available in each year of study. This information is disseminated through the University brochures and prospectus, the University website, HE Fairs, pre- and post-application Open and Visit Days. Timely information is provided to UCAS and Student Finance England and the Student Loans Company. Accessible information to existing students is provided through Student Services on the student portal, the University website (publications) and through one-to-one appointments with the Student Funding Officer. Students are able to obtain detailed advice and information about bursaries and scholarships at St Mary's and detailed information about local rent and living costs. Current and prospective students are also able to access the Brightside Student Calculator online to enable them to work out how much money they will have at university, and how much they will need.

The Access Agreements are published on the University external website under publications with a link to the OFFA website. The student portal SIMMSpace and the staff portal StaffNet also publish the Access Agreements.

As well as information to applicants which is provided at the application stage and throughout the admissions process, we have worked very hard on the information that we provide to students as preparation for the registration and induction process. Much work has gone into this, as well as the induction process itself and feedback has been very positive. Feedback gathered from the 'Are You Ready' campaign which provides pre-entry interactive online information and activities will help to inform both the content and format of information which could be made available to future applicants. Furthermore, the pre-entry programme 'Get Set for Success' targets information to under-represented groups. This process of improving information to students generally and to targeted groups in particular is ongoing; feedback is taken into account year on year and improvements are made.

9. Consulting with students

The primary mode of student consultation is through the Students' Union. St Mary's Students' Union (SMSU hereafter) is the representative organisation of students at St Mary's University. SMSU through its elected Executive Members (student officers) and Sabbatical Officers (full time officers) represent students on all University committees and many working groups and also feeds information back to the student body through many different forums such as SU Council, Programme Representatives, website and social media. The University considers this partnership approach as integral to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and the wider student experience.

The Student Union is represented on the Access Agreement Group as well as on related committees such as the Student Engagement, Retention and Success Strategy Implementation Group and the Equality and Diversity sub-committee. The University has created opportunities for the student voice to be included at all stages of the development of this Access Agreement.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and External Relations) and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Resources) periodically attend Executive Committee meetings to discuss aspects of the student experience and this has been relevant to the Access Agreement. Aspects of the Access Agreement also feature on the agenda of the Student Experience Committee, which students are encouraged to attend.

The Access Agreement Group may commission the Students Union to consult more widely with the student body about the implications of the agreement through the Students' Union President and other executive members. In addition, St. Mary's University uses its enrolment/student experience annual survey (carried out in September) to include questions on the impact of tuition fee regulations and the national and institution scholarships on their choice of university. Furthermore we gather feedback from prospective students who take part in outreach activities and open/visit days.

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