

## Widening Participation and Enhancing Opportunities Strategy 2015-20

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Queen Mary University of London’s five-year Strategic Plan makes it clear that widening participation is at the heart of the College’s vision and ambitions. It sets out Queen Mary’s plans to achieve the highest international standards in education and research, while continuing to serve its local communities through public engagement and the promotion of opportunity to individuals less favoured by financial or social background. These objectives reflect Queen Mary’s ethos, as summarised below:

**“QMUL has a proud record of providing a university education of the highest quality to a diverse population of students, including many from backgrounds lacking financial or social privileges. We celebrate the resulting diversity of our student body and aspire to be recognised as a prime destination for high-achieving students from lower participation backgrounds.”<sup>1</sup>**

This widening participation and enhancing opportunities strategy sets out how Queen Mary will achieve this aspiration. It references existing Access Agreements with the Office for Fair Access, which commit the College to ambitious widening participation targets for the next five years. It demonstrates Queen Mary’s commitment to supporting students from widening participation backgrounds throughout their educational “lifecycle”, from primary school to postgraduate study or employment. It explains the importance of evidence-based targeting to ensure that widening participation and enhancing opportunities work has the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Queen Mary University of London, Strategy 2014 – the next five years’, strategic aim 1 page 6

maximum impact, and it shows that widening participation is an institution-wide responsibility involving the widening participation and outreach team, academic schools and institutes, the Centre of the Cell, the Centre for Public Engagement and external partners.

## **2. KEY PRIORITIES**

The key priorities set out in this strategy reflect Queen Mary's strategic objectives and align closely with the priorities identified in the National Strategy for Access and Student Success published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in April 2014. Queen Mary's priorities are:

- Maintaining a whole-institutional approach to widening participation throughout the student lifecycle and working collaboratively to achieve this
- Developing longer-term and more intensive interventions, ensuring these are embedded and sustainable
- Reviewing the targeting of all areas of work to ensure that it is focused on those who would benefit most. This will be done by:
  - redefining the targeting methodology for outreach work, using school-based and individual indicators
  - refining the targeting for student retention and support work
  - using data about the progression of graduates to support the development and delivery of work focused on graduate outcomes
- Grounding work in available research and data and growing the evidence base through better evaluation and monitoring of widening participation work throughout all areas of the student lifecycle
- Developing work specifically to support informed decisions about progression to postgraduate education and ensuring equality of opportunity to access postgraduate study.

The next three sections detail how these priorities will be taken forward over the next five years. The Action Plan and targets are set out in Appendix 1.

## **3. TARGETING**

Effective targeting is central to the success of work to widen participation to higher education. Over the next five years this will be addressed through work in the following three areas:

### **3.1 Redefining the targeting methodology for outreach work**

Queen Mary's outreach programme will be targeted at selected schools and colleges and the criteria for selection will be evidenced-based and transparent. The selection criteria will reflect the recently updated POLAR (Participation of Local Areas) 3 data, guidance from OFFA, and the need to work more closely with students over a longer period of time. We

will focus on non-selective state schools in key local London boroughs with high levels of social and economic deprivation and low progression rates to higher education. These will be: Barking and Dagenham; Enfield; Greenwich; Hackney; Haringey; Havering; Newham; Redbridge; Thurrock; Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.

All these boroughs include areas identified by HEFCE where higher education participation is still lower than expected, despite the overall progress in higher education participation in London<sup>2</sup> Over the next five years we will prioritise work with schools in these boroughs that have the highest proportion of students who:

- are eligible for free school meals
- come from low-participation neighbourhoods (using POLAR 3 data)
- come from postcodes ranked within the most deprived areas through the index of multiple deprivation (IMD).

Students with disabilities and students with experience of local authority care are cross-cutting priority target groups, and Queen Mary will target additional work at these students.

### **3.2 Refining the targeting of student retention and success work**

Identifying and targeting students once in attendance at Queen Mary requires a carefully balanced approach. We need to ensure maximum support for students from non-traditional backgrounds whilst not “stigmatising” or making assumptions about the needs of these students.

Queen Mary has invested in new information systems to support this targeting. From 2015 students will be asked on enrolment if they are willing for data on their background to be used to enhance the targeting of activities that could support their progress and success. We will undertake academic research (funded through Queen Mary’s Access Agreement) into the factors that impact on the success of students from widening participation backgrounds, and this will inform the type of targeted activities that will be developed.

This area of the Widening Participation and Enhancing Opportunities Strategy sits alongside the Retention Strategy, which also supports student engagement, retention and success.

### **3.3 Using data to support targeting of careers, employability and postgraduate support**

Queen Mary has analysed employability outcomes for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Initial conclusions highlight a need further to explore outcomes for these students. Ongoing analysis of this data will take place as the first cohorts under the 2012 tuition fee arrangements graduate, and their outcomes data is available. Details of the targeted support to be developed for these students are included in sections 4.3 and 4.4.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/wp/ourresearch/polar/mapofyoungparticipationareas/>

## **4. PROGRAMME OF WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES ACTIVITIES**

### **4.1. Outreach Programme—from primary to higher education transition**

Queen Mary's outreach programme will support the recruitment of well-qualified students from target widening participation cohorts. It will be delivered to prospective students, their parent and carers, and other key influencers such as teachers, careers advisers and local authority staff.

The key priorities for the outreach programme over the next five years are:

#### **4.1.1 *Working with students from a younger age to raise aspirations and increase knowledge and awareness of university education and the opportunities available***

Research suggests that an individual's education trajectory is set from a young age, and that early interventions are required to support success<sup>3</sup>. Queen Mary will develop a programme of work to support primary school students, including activities that link to the national curriculum such as a coding club for Year 5 students. The primary programme will focus on students attending the feeder primary schools of Queen Mary's key partner schools.

#### **4.1.2 *Furthering in-depth programmes with key partner schools***

Queen Mary has a long-term relationship with two key partner schools: St Paul's Way Trust School in Tower Hamlets and the Drapers' Academy in Havering. Over the next five years we will continue to develop long-term outreach programmes with these schools, and enhance this activity by focusing primary work on their feeder schools. Students at these schools will have access to a series of initiatives that build engagement with Queen Mary and higher education in general. This in-depth relationship will also allow the development of networks between teachers at these partner schools and academic and professional services staff at Queen Mary. This will benefit the schools and give Queen Mary colleagues greater insight into contemporary changes and challenges in secondary school education.

#### **4.1.3 *Increasing the impact of activities through multiple and targeted interventions***

Outreach programmes that target a broader range of schools and sixth-form colleges will also have a focus on increasing the number of interventions with students. For example, the *Bridge the Gap* access to medicine and dentistry programmes will have year-on-year interventions with the same students from Year 9 onwards. For students attending intensive programmes, such as week-long summer schools, there will be built-in pre and post event sessions to further engagement and support the tracking of participants' outcomes. One-off

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/news/news/2013/NatStrat\\_interim\\_report.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/news/news/2013/NatStrat_interim_report.pdf)

initiatives such as campus visits from school groups will be re-developed with a focus on Year 9 options, to offer a more tailored service to schools and deepen the impact of these activities. Additionally, for a number of key target schools, Queen Mary will offer a campus visit for parents and attendance at Year 9 GCSE options evenings to talk through the importance of GCSE choices for education progression.

#### ***4.1.4 Targeting activities at key under-represented groups, in higher education generally and in specific subject areas***

We will use evidence to identify other under-represented groups across higher education, or in particular subject areas, and develop work to support students in these groups. We will continue with a coherent package of support for care leavers that is adaptable to meet their individual needs, and develop outreach programmes to support transition into higher education. We will look at targeting mature students more specifically, and develop activities to widen participation where there is under-representation in specific subject areas. Examples of this are female students in STEM subjects, and the social diversity of students studying arts and humanities subjects. We will develop pre-GCSE programmes in these areas to ensure that students and their key influencers are aware of the impact of option choices and know about the breadth of subjects available at undergraduate level and the career opportunities on graduation.

#### ***4.1.5 Working in partnership***

Collaboration is already a key part of Queen Mary's work to widen participation, and this will be developed over the next five years. We have established joint outreach work with the University of Warwick and we will build further on this. We will expand our provision through ensuring an integrated approach to widening participation across all parts of Queen Mary, drawing on expertise from academic schools and institutes, the Centre of the Cell, and the Centre for Public Engagement. We will continue to work with external partners where these partnerships enhance Queen Mary's capacity for delivering widening participation and support our priorities. Current examples include work with IntoUniversity, which complements our own primary school programme.

#### ***4.1.6 Development of transition activities***

The transition into higher education is a critical point for many students. Over the next five years we will build on the successful implementation of transition activities for students from local schools and colleges who have accepted a place at Queen Mary. We will actively involve staff and students from local schools and colleges in developing this work, and, crucially, we involve undergraduates themselves in supporting fellow students through their work as peer mentors.

## **4.2 Student Retention and Success**

Queen Mary will ensure that students who have faced potential disadvantage in progressing to higher education get the support that they need to thrive and succeed. Potential changes to the HEFCE Student Opportunity Funding and the Disabled Students' Allowance over the next five years make it even more important that a sustainable programme is in place. The key priorities for this are:

### ***4.2.1 Refine the targeting of work to support students at QMUL***

Queen Mary's 2014-15 and 2015-16 Access Agreements allocate substantial financial resources to support student engagement and success over the next five years. Section 3.2 above describes how this work will be targeted to ensure that it supports the students who will benefit most.

### ***4.2.2 Ensure sustained support for disabled students***

We will ensure that appropriate support is provided to disabled students and that Queen Mary continues to implement reasonable adjustments and fulfil its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

In the light of the proposed changes to the Disabled Students' Allowances scheme we will look at how we can make our curricula more accessible to all students so that we offer the most inclusive teaching experience. Assuming that the funding for Non-Medical Helper's Allowance support is reduced in the way proposed at the time of writing, the OFFA Access Agreement Monitoring Group will review how key activities aimed at ensuring disabled students can successfully engage with their programmes can continue to be funded.

### ***4.2.3 Continuing development of student retention programmes***

The Employment, Retention and Success Project Group (ERSPG) will be responsible for developing and monitoring this work, which will include established programmes such as the Peer Assisted Study Support (PASS) scheme and support for care leavers, and new programmes of work agreed by ERSPG. A new initiative for 2015 is the creation of a specific post to support students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), such as Asperger's Syndrome. This reflects the relatively high numbers of students with this disability at QMUL as an institution that has many Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics programmes, and the vulnerability of this group of students to interruption and early withdrawal.

### **4.3 Financial Support for Students**

Queen Mary will continue to support lower-income students through a programme of bursaries, scholarships and hardship fund support. Full details are set out in the 2015-16 Access Agreement<sup>4</sup>. We commit a high level of resources to student support, and we will monitor this for impact. A survey of students will be carried out every year to track the impact of financial support. We will also carry out research on the correlation between socio-economic background and student success, and this will cover the potential impact of financial support for low-income students.

### **4.4 Careers and Employability**

Queen Mary supports students' graduate outcomes via provision implemented in the Careers and Enterprise Centre. The numbers of students with widening participation backgrounds benefiting from Queen Mary's three placement schemes - QTemps, QInterns and QProjects - is monitored and shown to be proportional to the overall student population. Support for students in receipt of bursaries is being implemented through new schemes such as QMentors, where students will be targeted to receive support from an employer mentor. A pilot of this scheme will take place in 2014-15 and it is hoped it will continue to be funded and further developed. Additionally, QConsult will target key students. This scheme offers students the chance to undertake paid consultancy, during which they receive support from a dedicated careers consultant, corporate mentor, and one of Queen Mary's BERG Management Consultants in the School of Business and Management.

However, there is still a gap in outcomes for students from widening participation backgrounds and a need to strengthen further the support available to these students. This will involve additional investment in existing resources. Two key areas for development are:

- the further utilisation of corporate philanthropy networks to expand targeted experience and mentoring schemes
- ensuring that there is one careers consultant for each academic school, enabling this consultant to identify at-risk students and encourage them to take up and complete schemes.

These enhanced initiatives will be combined with new provision to provide early in-curricular discipline-integrated writing support for all students. A lack of skills in this area has been identified as a major barrier to employment.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Queen Mary University of London, Access Agreement 2015-16', section 4.5 page 9

## 4.5 Widening Participation to Postgraduate Study

Widening participation to postgraduate study has become a prominent issue, especially now the number of students with an undergraduate degree has increased. Queen Mary will address this over the next five years, using expertise and evidence from the Careers and Enterprise Centre.

Data has shown that Queen Mary undergraduate students identified as meeting widening participation indicators - such as coming from a low-participation neighbourhood or low-income family - have progressed to postgraduate study at an equal or higher rate compared to students not meeting these indicators. However, evidence suggests that students within these categories are not necessarily making informed choices about their postgraduate studies.

A number of steps are required to develop meaningful support for widening participation to postgraduate study. Firstly, further analysis is needed to build on the evidence to date about informed decision-making for postgraduate students, and identify the support required for students from widening participation backgrounds. Secondly, based on this evidence, a work programme will need to be developed to support informed choices to postgraduate study. This will require additional resource within the Careers and Enterprise Centre and the Widening Participation and Outreach Team to ensure delivery of information, advice and guidance to a range of audiences including:

- current undergraduate students who meet widening participation indicators and are considering postgraduate study. This will ensure that they make informed decisions about this progression on the basis of the careers they wish to pursue
- staff in schools and colleges with high proportions of students meeting widening participation indicators. This is crucial to ensure that students who are interested in careers requiring postgraduate study, either formally or informally, are aware of such requirements from an early age. It will also help school staff support students with information about any work experience required for such careers.
- students commencing postgraduate study. Offering preparation days to these students before commencement of their degree will ensure that they are aware of the possible career options open to them on completion of their postgraduate course. Each academic school will need a dedicated careers consultant to enable capacity for such activity.

In addition to ensuring students make informed choices about postgraduate study there is the need to enable the development of academic networks. This will be developed through the expansion of the 'QResearchers' project, targeted towards students from widening participation backgrounds interested in postgraduate study. This would allow students to undertake a dedicated piece of further research and liaise with academic staff to support their future network development.

## **5 EVALUATING OUR WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES WORK**

Evaluation and monitoring will be developed by a dedicated Widening Participation Officer, who will coordinate this across all areas covered by the widening participation strategy. All evaluation will be underpinned by robust use of data, and to support this we will subscribe to the Higher Education Access Tracking service (HEAT) to track students who have taken part in outreach activities at Queen Mary.

The Widening Participation team will develop resources to support colleagues across Queen Mary involved in widening participation activity. This will include workshops on targeting and evaluation, and support where required for individual academic schools and institutes.

## Widening Participation and Enhancing Opportunities Strategy 2015-20: Appendix 1

### Action Plan and Targets

This Action Plan focuses on the development of new areas of work, and the delivery of Access Agreement commitments. Full details of ongoing outreach and student support programmes are set out in the 2015-16 Access Agreement<sup>5</sup>

AREA OF WORK	TARGETS
<b>Delivery of Access Agreement commitments</b>	
Recruitment of State School Students	Percentage of state school students to be a full 3 percentage points higher than the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmark for each academic year from 2014-15 to 2019-20
Recruitment of Students from lower socio-economics groups	Percentage of students from National Statistics Socio-Economic Groups 4-7 to be a full 3 percentage points higher than the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmark for each academic year from 2014-15 to 2019-20
Recruitment of students from area of low progression to higher education	Percentage of students from low progression neighbourhoods to be 1.5 percentage points higher than the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmark for each academic year from 2014-15 to 2019-20
Recruitment of disabled students	Increase the percentage of full-time first-degree students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance to 8.5% by 2019-20
Retention	Increase the successful completion rate for full-time first-degree entrants still in attendance at 31 July on year of entry to 92% by 2019-20.
<b>Widening participation to postgraduate study</b>	
Analysis of data to identify need	Carry out analysis of data and focus groups to identify what the issues and potential barriers are for students, and how to address these. By July 2015.
Extension of QResearch project	Identify means of sustaining QResearchers beyond the 2014-15 Westfield funded pilot, and ring-fence a proportion of these academic research internships for bursary recipients. By July 2015.

<sup>5</sup>Queen Mary University of London, Access Agreement 2015-16<sup>2</sup>, section 4 pages 4-9

<b>AREA OF WORK</b>	<b>TARGETS</b>
Development of targeted careers advice	Have in place a full time expert PGT Careers Consultant to undertake targeted information and support work with widening participation cohort students. From 2015-16 to 2019-20.
<b>Development of outreach programme</b>	
Primary school outreach	Develop two pilot programmes for Year 5/6 students (to support reading and computer coding work) and deliver to one primary school. By July 2015. Roll out programme to four additional primary schools by 2019-20 Deliver primary school visit programme to five primary schools in 2014-15, growing to ten schools by 2019-10
Development of new school partnership	Develop a third long term intensive partnership with a local school by 2019-20, to build on the work with St Paul's Way Trust School and the Drapers' Academy
Working with parents/carers	Increase communication with parents/carers of students on existing outreach programmes, and conduct analysis of engagement models to inform future pilot activity. By July 2015. Develop one pilot programme for work with parents/carers by July 2016 Roll out programme to five activities a year by 2019-20
Providing support and expertise	Deliver WP Strategy Launch Event and one further workshop for staff. By July 2015. Produce an internal and external WP communication plan by July 2015. Deliver three events per year to support and update staff on key WP initiatives. From 2015-16 to 2019-20.
<b>Evaluation</b>	
Development of Evaluation and Monitoring Strategy	Produce five-year widening participation evaluation and monitoring strategy. By July 2015. Implement strategy from 2015-16, and produce annual report on relevant findings.
Higher Education Activity Tracking Service (HEAT)	Subscribe to HEAT and allocate a dedicated member of the widening participation team to manage the data to and from HEAT. By July 2015
Evaluation of bursary and other financial support programmes	Carry out long-term research to track the impact of current financial support programmes. Produce full report by 2016-17.
Annual WP Reports	Produce annual WP progress report from Dec 2015.