



# 2019-20

## Access and Participation Plan

### Arden University

#### Assessment of current performance

Arden University is a specialist provider of higher education by online distance learning and blended learning. Its core mission is to remove the barriers to higher education, inspire new ways to learn and enrich people and their lives. Arden's vision is to be known as the University that made higher education more accessible, engaging and beneficial to people everywhere.

Arden University's **belief** is that everyone, everywhere has a right to higher education. Its **insight** is that many people, at different stages of life, are constrained in their ability to study and to progress – constrained by expectation, geography, financial circumstances, other commitments or even just by time. Arden University is a pioneer in providing flexible study options to students who would otherwise be unable or unlikely to access higher education.

Whilst Arden University does not limit its access and participation strategies to students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, students from low higher education participation, low household income and/or low socioeconomic status, mature students or disabled students, data show that 99.2% of Arden's UK undergraduate students have at least one of these characteristics. Therefore, Arden is a significant and growing provider of access to higher education for the government's targeted low participation groups.

The University has conducted detailed analysis of its achievement with the government's targeted low participation groups in relation to their access to, success in and outcomes from higher education.

#### Access to HE

2016/17 sector data from HESA highlights that Arden University provides a high level of access to HE for the following identified under-represented target groups:

- Students with an ethnicity categorised as BME (48.6%)
- Students with a known disability (13.5%)

- Mature students (over the age of 21) (90%)
- Students with no previous HE experience & from low participation neighbourhoods (12.4%)

Arden University’s core mission to remove the barriers to higher education is reflected positively when comparing data on access to under-represented groups with the sector average. The chart below illustrates this point, with Arden University providing wider access in two of the four target groups, and a comparable performance in the other two.



(UK domiciled, undergraduate students at English providers. Low participation data is taken from T2b and is restricted to part-time students. Source: HESA 2016/17)

The 2016/17 experimental Performance Indicators produced by HESA, highlighted that the University was slightly ahead of its benchmark in attracting students from neighbourhoods with low participation in higher education – the benchmark being 12.1%. However, more detailed analysis shows that a comparatively low proportion of Arden’s full-time blended learning students are from low participation neighbourhoods – 3.9% across the entire full-time population, and 2.5% versus a benchmark of 9.2% for mature entrants (taken from HESA PIs T2a). In year data shows that the percentage of blended learning students from low participation neighbourhoods will increase significantly when students based at Manchester and Birmingham study centres fall into the coverage of the 2017/18 HESA AP Student return.

## Success in HE

Due to the normally longer time spent studying a degree via part-time distance learning compared to a full-time rate of study, Arden University typically uses metrics around retention and achievement of credit over time to measure its students' progression and success. Whilst the University also regularly reviews its two year non-continuation rates against the UK sector performance indicators, its internal analysis of credit achieved over time allows a more detailed and ongoing measure of retention and success. Graduation rates in the HE sector are typically lower for distance learning than full-time study, therefore Arden benchmarks its achievement against the Open University (where data is available) and other part-time providers. Data show that, overall across full-time and part-time distance learning students, Arden students from low participation neighbourhoods are less likely to withdraw than their peers and that on average they obtain a slightly higher number of credits in their first year of study (as shown in the chart below).

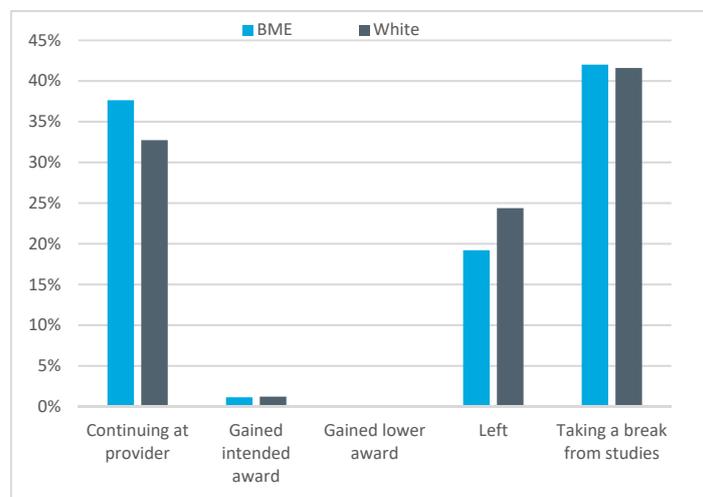


(Average credits achieved by year of study for distance learners)

The pattern of higher attainment and retention for students from low participation neighbourhoods is also reflected in Arden University's blended learning provision. Students identified as coming from low participation neighbourhoods averaged 102 credits in their first year with a withdrawal rate of 15% versus an average of 82 credits and a withdrawal rate of 28% for non-low participation neighbourhood students. However, the chart above also highlights that BME students studying via full-time blended learning typically obtain lower than average credits in the first year of study (85 versus 95 credits on average after 12 months). In addition, BME students studying via online distance learning also achieve lower than average grades. Arden students who have declared a disability have a slightly higher withdrawal rate and obtain slightly lower than average credits in the first year of study, particularly those who are white and/or female. However, it is acknowledged

that this analysis is based on small student numbers (a total population of 16 students with a declared disability), therefore it will be reviewed across the broader student population and over time.

BME distance learning students are less likely to leave their studies. This is highlighted in the chart on the right (source: HESA 2016/17 AP Student), which shows that white students are 5% more likely to leave their course. As previously stated, this positive retention profile is also true of students from low participation



neighbourhoods, however students who are mature entrants or have declared a disability are slightly more likely to leave their course.

### Progression from HE

The majority of Arden’s distance learning students (more than 90%) are already employed and many gain career enhancement during their studies. Due to the extended length of study typical to distance learning provision, DLHE data available for Arden University is currently limited to a small proportion of its student population (98 in the population in 2015/16). However, analysis of it shows that BME graduates have lower employment rates (58% versus 67%) and, of its employed BME graduates, lower proportions are in professional employment (56% versus 77%). In addition, although based on small numbers, the data show slightly lower employment rates for disabled graduates. Employment data does however show that students from low participation neighbourhoods are more likely to be employed (73% versus 63%), and more likely to be in a professional occupation (80% versus 68%), than those not from low participation neighbourhoods. Whilst HESA DLHE data reflects a student’s progression from HE six months after employment, the nature of distance learning provision means that students on Arden courses can expect to benefit from career enhancements during their study.

### Identified Areas for Development

From this data and its overall position of strength, Arden University has identified provisional priorities for action in the following areas:

- Increased recruitment to its full-time blended learning offering for students from low participation neighbourhoods
- Improvement in success rates for full-time blended learning students (of whom BME students currently make up 99.2%)

- Improvement in the level of ‘good degrees’ achieved for BME students studying via online distance learning (first class or upper second class honours)
- Improvement in retention and success rates for disabled students
- Increased employment rates (including proportions in professional employment) for BME graduates studying via distance learning
- Increased employment rates for disabled students studying via distance learning.

As an ‘alternative provider’ Arden University has not historically been required to report on care leavers, so has not previously collected data on this characteristic. The University is currently in the process of collecting and recording data on care leavers to inform the future development of this plan, and will review the levels of access, success and progression for this priority group as soon as robust data is available. Early indications are that Arden has a proportion of care leavers that is broadly in line with the sector average, but a comparatively high proportion of students with caring responsibilities and students from military families (including mature students who are in the military or are a military spouse).

## **Ambition and strategy**

### **Context**

Arden University is a unique organisation that attracts and supports students through individualised admissions and support packages and it is through this highly personalised approach that it has attained its current position of strength as a flexible, access-focused and supportive provider. Consequently, the initiatives outlined in this plan cover the priorities identified from its self-assessment against the government’s identified priority groups and additionally take into account the University’s broader strategic ambitions which reflect Arden’s unique approach to accessing an engaging in HE, including:

- Increasing the number of part-time students accessing higher education
- Providing personalised and tailored learning, supporting students to succeed in higher education whilst working and/or undertaking family commitments, or where they have disengaged from a more traditional academic approach
- Providing emotional support and the ability to access higher education without leaving home
- For distance learning students, providing career enhancement during studies rather than only upon completion.

Arden University has developed a unique learning model, cited as good practice by the QAA in February 2018 and commended by external academic peers, that extends further than just knowledge building. Arden’s students progress through a process of information gathering, engagement, practical application and personal

reflection, ensuring their learning is active, applied and embedded. The University's online content is designed around this model, which emphasises that learning is more about how you source and use information than simply acquiring knowledge. Its blended learning students develop knowledge online and then they apply that learning through problem solving activities in the classroom.

We support people	We do the right thing	We innovate	We take ownership
<p>We support our students to become self-aware, confident, resilient and motivated lifelong learners</p>	<p>We encourage our students ethical outlook, so they are responsible, conscientious and professional in the workplace</p>	<p>We encourage creative problem-solving skills with an innovative, entrepreneurial outlook</p>	<p>Our students are organised, productive, solution and action-orientated.</p>
<p><b>Professional skills</b></p> <p>An Arden student will learn to work within a team, demonstrating effective listening, negotiation and persuasion and presenting skills. They will learn to perform effectively in a professional environment, showing adaptability.</p> <p><b>Effective communication</b></p> <p>Our students graduate with the ability to communicate effectively verbally, visually and in writing, by using a range of media widely used in relevant professional contexts.</p>	<p><b>Responsible global citizenship</b></p> <p>Understanding global issues is integrated into our learning materials, including ethical decision-making and accountability. Our students are open and sensitive to equality and diversity in culture.</p>	<p><b>Reflective practitioner</b></p> <p>Our students undertake critical analysis to reach reasoned and evidenced decisions. We encourage problem-solving skills to find and innovate in solutions.</p>	<p><b>Discipline expertise</b></p> <p>Our successful students will graduate with a critical appreciation of their chosen field and possess a range of skills to operate within their chosen sector.</p> <p><b>Lifelong learning</b></p> <p>Arden students are committed to continual personal and professional development to achieve their goals.</p>

The above table shows how Arden University's core values have been mapped against a set of Graduate Attributes that are embedded into the validated curriculum, ensuring that every student who completes an Arden degree will leave with more than just subject

related skills and knowledge; they will also have range of behaviours and values that will enrich their personal life, professional capability and potential to succeed.

## **Strategic Ambitions**

Our strategic ambitions for the next five years in relation to our identified target groups are therefore as follows:

Target group <b>STUDENTS FROM LOW PARTICIPATION NEIGHBOURHOODS</b>
We will increase the proportion of students studying via full-time blended learning from low participation neighbourhoods to the level achieved for online distance learning provision.

Target group <b>STUDENTS FROM BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS</b>
We will improve BME student success rates on full-time blended learning programmes to be more comparable with the success rates for white students.
We will improve the levels of attainment of first and upper second class honours degrees obtained by BME students studying via distance learning to be more comparable with those attained by white students.
We will increase the level of employment of BME graduates and the proportion employed in professional jobs to be more comparable with employment levels and types for white graduates.

Target group <b>MATURE, PART-TIME STUDENTS</b>
We will increase the number of students studying part-time with Arden University by 5% per annum and through our contribution aim to increase the number of part-time higher education students studying in the UK.
We will increase the ways in which the Arden learning experience provides flexibility and is tailored and personalised to the needs of the individual learner.

Target group

**STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY**

We will provide enhanced support for students' emotional and physical wellbeing to increase student resilience and motivation to succeed in higher education.

We will increase the level of employment of disabled graduates to be more comparable with employment levels of non-disabled students.

### **Collaborative Working**

Arden University has 28 years of experience of successfully working collaboratively with other HEIs to provide flexible routes through higher education. It continues to partner with Anglia Ruskin University, the University of Sunderland, the University of Wales, Birmingham City University, the Royal Agricultural University and Sheffield Hallam University to support students already recruited to complete their studies and succeed in their careers. Arden also has a longstanding, ongoing partnership with the University of Bradford to support the recruitment of part-time distance learning students into UK HE.

The University has a collaborative arrangement with an Access Validating Authority (One Awards) in order to provide flexible routes into higher education. Students who complete an Arden University Access to HE diploma will be supported to progress to degree study whether at Arden or another UK university. In these ways Arden has worked collaboratively with other HEIs over a sustained period of time to support access to and success within HE for a wide range of students.

The University works collaboratively with employers and professional bodies and has an established employer liaison strategy, led by the Director for Corporate Partnerships. The main strands of sustained engagement with employers are around the development and delivery of higher and degree apprenticeships, and the delivery of the University's specialist postgraduate data analytics suite of programmes. As Arden's apprenticeship provision grows, student outcomes will be monitored against the identified low participation groups and any new 'gaps' or priorities will be added in due course. Additionally, employer input is sought across many aspects of the University's operations including programme design and the further development of Arden's 'Graduate Attributes'.

Continuous improvement is systematically ensured within the University, as evidenced by the QAA's citation as good practice of its "highly effective and systematic involvement of staff at all levels in the enhancement of students' learning opportunities" in February 2018. Progress against the initiatives in this Access and Participation Plan will be monitored quarterly by the newly formed Access and Participation Committee in direct reference to student outcomes data and the specific measurements outlined in the next section.

With the launch of its blended learning study centres, Arden has undertaken some initial work providing information to local schools, and now plans to establish a more extensive Schools and College Liaison Programme. This is a relatively new area of work for the University, but is becoming important, given its long-term commitment to mature students.

## **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Arden University has a well-established Equality and Diversity Policy and is committed to providing equal opportunities for staff, students, applicants and all persons with whom it deals. As an independent provider it has not been subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED); however, as part of its registration with the Office for Students, Arden will commit to meeting the general duties of the PSED and the requirement to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Consequently, the University is in the process of drafting and approving a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, with specific objectives. The objectives to be included in the University's new EDI Strategy for 2019-20 were approved by the Academic Board in May 2018 and are as follows:

1. To improve systems to monitor and report data related to the nine protected groups as defined under the Equality Act 2010 amongst staff and students.
2. To increase explicit reference to and promotion of Arden's diverse student population and inclusive culture and practices in its advertising, programme information and student support literature.
3. To design and implement a framework for Equality Impact Assessments.
4. To undertake an initial assessment of potential external accreditations for aspects of equality and diversity that would be appropriate for Arden to explore further.

These strategic priorities align with the University's Access and Participation Plan particularly around the improvements in data and monitoring (Objective 1) and the increased reference to the diverse and inclusive student environment (Objective 2). It is anticipated that that the full EDI Strategy will be approved by the end of 2018.

## **Consultation with Students**

This Access and Participation Plan has been shared with all students of the University via its online platform and with student representatives on academic committees as part of the approval process prior to submission to the Office for

Students. The University will continue to consult with students on its content prior to implementation in 2019-20, particularly via the new Access and Participation Committee. The opportunity for students to submit separate written representation to the OfS has been discussed with the University level 'lead' student representatives (the Student President and elected representatives on the Academic Board, Learning and Teaching Committee and Quality and Standards Committee) and relayed to all students online.

## **Access, student success and progression measures**

The initiatives that Arden will prioritise up to and during 2019-20 to work towards the achievement of the strategic aims set out above are as follows:

### **ACCESS**

In facilitating access to higher education, Arden's planned initiatives and identified priority groups are as follows:

#### **Initiative 1**

Targeted schools liaison programme around UK blended learning study centres to increase the proportion of students from low participation neighbourhoods studying via Arden's full-time blended learning offering (priority group: low participation neighbourhoods).

The University plans to recruit two Schools and Colleges Liaison Officers to take the lead on establishing a liaison programme during 2019-20. This will include specific focus on schools and colleges in identified low participation neighbourhoods that are within easy transport reach of Arden's blended learning study centres. One of the University's priorities is to provide opportunities for students to study from home; therefore, it does not recruit substantial numbers of students to its full-time provision from outside the immediate area, which may limit the opportunities to further attract students from this priority group.

#### **Initiative 2**

Extend and build upon Arden's personalised admissions process to increase the number of part-time students entering higher education (priority group: part-time students).

This initiative is the continuation and expansion of existing work practices in the University's Admissions team that were recently cited as an example of good practice by the Quality Assurance Agency as providing "highly effective ongoing and personalised support... to prospective students at all stages of the admissions

process” to expand the number of part-time students enrolling with Arden University and ultimately to increase the number accessing UK HE. Specific activities during 2019-20 will focus around staff training and sharing of best practice.

## **SUCCESS**

In facilitating success in higher education, Arden’s identified planned initiatives and priority groups are as follows:

### **Initiative 3**

Implementation of individual Coaching Programme for full-time blended learning students to improve motivation, support and consequent success rates (priority group: BME students).

Individual one-to-one coaching for full-time blended learning students is being piloted by the University during 2017-18. The effectiveness of this coaching programme and its impact on student success rates will be evaluated during 2018-19. However, the pilot has been undertaken based on documented evidence shared by other providers that individual coaching leads to improvements in engagement, attendance and assessment submission rates, and Arden’s own evidence of the correlation of these factors to successful outcomes in assessments. Planned activities during 2019-20 will focus on bringing this coaching programme in house, through staff recruitment and/or training, in order to roll out to all full-time students based in UK study centres (99.2% of whom are currently BME students).

### **Initiative 4**

Implementation of two week diagnostic and intensive skills training at commencement of studies on full-time blended learning programmes to ensure the provision of targeted study skills support and improve success rates (priority group: BME students).

Arden University’s Academic Leadership Team are developing proposals to implement an intensive two week diagnostic and intensive skills training programme immediately prior to full-time students beginning an academic programme of study. It is anticipated that this activity will be launched in October 2019 or earlier. Planned activities will depend on the finalised plans of the academic team but are expected to include substantial additional contributions by skills tutors and the development of online diagnostic tools, particularly around literacy and numeracy skills, academic writing, referencing, and motivations to study.

### **Initiative 5**

Conduct of an exploratory research project within the University to identify successful academic support strategies to improve grade attainment, potentially

around greater use of formative assessment and co-remediation, and to test and assess the impact of these strategies (priority group: BME students).

This research project will be carried out during 2019-20 with a view to full implementation of the identified strategies during 2020-21 or thereafter. It will focus specifically on strategies to improve attainment levels of distance learning students, but the potential wider benefits for students across all delivery modes will also be considered. The research will be led by Arden teaching fellows with the oversight and participation of the Director of Learning and Teaching and the Director of Student Achievement.

#### **Initiative 6**

Provision of a new, dedicated counselling service for Special Educational Needs students, to improve retention and success (priority group: students who have declared a physical or mental disability).

The University plans to employ a counsellor within the Special Educational Needs (SEN) team to be in place prior to the start of the 2019-20 academic year in order that this new service can be available to all SEN students from 2019-20. The availability of this service will be published to students on the online learning environment and highlighted directly to all students declaring a physical or mental disability in their enrolment information or at the point at which they declare their disability if this is later.

#### **Initiative 7**

Production and implementation of a Wellness Portal as part of Arden's online learning environment, to provide further support around physical and mental wellbeing including the resilience to study online over long periods of time (priority group: students who have declared a physical or mental disability).

The creation of a Wellness Portal as part of Arden University's online learning environment to bring together and promote the range of supportive resources offered by the University relating to student health and wellbeing is a new initiative planned to launch in 2019-20. This initiative aligns with Arden's ongoing enhancement of its online platform and its core value of **We Support People**. Arden's online learning environment is the cornerstone of its student learning experience and this prominent positioning of student wellbeing alongside students' learning materials and resources, study skills and careers portals will demonstrate the University's commitment to supporting students' emotional wellbeing and promote inclusivity as well as highlighting the range of resources available. It is planned that the Wellness Portal will include provision of SEN support and that a series of promotional communications with a focus on SEN and vulnerable students will be rolled out.

### **Initiative 8**

Continue to increase focus on the provision of a personalised and tailored learning experience, particularly through the increased use of learner analytics, with the aim of giving students greater visibility of their progress and successes and delivering a more efficient, accessible and engaging online learning experience (priority groups: part-time students, mature students, care leavers, care providers, military families).

Planned activities facilitated by learner analytics during 2019-20 include using online behaviour to aid in the prediction of student success so that automated and personalised intervention policies can be implemented in a timely and sympathetic manner, whilst also developing a seamless student journey – particularly when moving between systems and internal departments – to decrease student barriers to success.

### **Initiative 9**

Develop and expand flexible study options for students to improve retention and success (priority groups: part-time students, mature students, students who have declared a disability).

Arden has ambitious plans to build further, even more flexible modes of delivery to reach out to new target groups of students. Planned activities during 2019-20 include piloting a range of alternative delivery methods, potentially to include weekend and evening delivery and various combinations with day time study.

## **PROGRESSION**

In facilitating progression from higher education, Arden's identified planned initiatives and priority groups are as follows:

### **Initiative 10**

Development and launch of an Employability Enhancement Service targeting

- (a) existing students, particularly less successful groups, spanning advice, guidance, tools, services and industry/employer interaction; and
- (b) potentially, a broader 'all welcome' free service to the public, including adults neither applying to nor studying with Arden but who have not typically received effective careers guidance and support.

(priority groups: BME students, students who have declared a disability).

Investment has been earmarked for implementation of this initiative during 2019-20. However, the precise shape of the initiative will be researched, developed and potentially piloted during 2018-19. The project will be led by the Director of Student

Achievement in partnership with the academic team and is likely to include capital expenditure and investment in staff resource.

#### **Initiative 11**

Implement annual career enhancement survey for distance learning students to capture data regarding long term career progression during a programme of study, to inform future development of initiatives and support in this area (priority group: part-time students).

A career enhancement survey will be designed prior to August 2019 and system functionality will be put in place to roll out this initiative for new and continuing students from August 2019 onwards. A series of questions regarding employment, salary and career satisfaction and career goals will be added to initial student data collection at enrolment, which will be revisited annually when they re-register for their next year of study. This will facilitate ongoing tracking of student promotions, salary levels and career satisfaction over the course of their study, enabling the University to identify any programme areas or student groups where in course career enhancement is not being successfully delivered and to identify and plan strategies for improvement.

Additionally, Arden University will prioritise the wider review of data over time to ensure robust analysis, particularly around the success and progression of disabled students and the accumulation of graduate destinations data.

Several strands of activity are proposed, as outlined in the Initiatives above. Some of these are an extension of existing activities or piloted projects, for example in increasing the number of part-time entrants, the implementation of one to one coaching for full-time students and the development of flexible study options and an employer liaison panel.

Other strands of activity will be wholly new for the University, for example the development of a schools and colleges liaison programme, implementation of two-week intensive skills diagnostics, creation of a Wellness Portal, employing a counsellor and launch of a career enhancement survey. Moreover, these activities align well with the University's strategic priorities to increase its blended learning recruitment, to improve success rates and to tailor and personalise the student learning experience.

#### **Monitoring and Measuring Achievement**

Arden University has well established structures for the reporting and systematic review of data on student recruitment and success. Such structure will be further supported through the implementation of a data governance framework to support the accessibility and rigour of data used to monitor and measure achievement. However, it has not previously monitored the performance of specific low participation groups within its overall student body, not least because the majority of

its students (99.2%) are from at least one of these groups. Prior to 2016, it did not routinely consider data on graduate destinations because of its wholly part-time delivery model and the very high proportion of its students that are already in employment. Changes have been made which will ensure systematic consideration of these data going forwards, with appropriate interventions being recommended through various governance and committee channels. Arden University have begun work on enhancing their learner analytics capability for the purpose of ensuring interventions are timely and effective.

It should be noted that approximately one third of Arden's current student population is based overseas, and the UK published data and performance indicators do not cover this proportion of the student body, so whilst the University has always presented its total student population in internal performance data, overseas students are excluded from the data reported and monitored through this new Access and Participation Plan.

The University's Academic Board has established a new Access and Participation Committee which will take the lead in monitoring performance against this plan and will report to the Academic Board, the Senior Management Team and the Board of Directors at least annually. The Academic Standards and Ethics Committee, a sub-committee of the Board of Directors, will monitor the Academic Board's oversight of the plan more frequently on behalf of the Board of Directors and escalate any concerns promptly.

Achievement of Initiatives 1 and 10 will be measured against relevant published HESA data, as indicated in Table 8 of the Resource Plan. With regard to Initiative 10, however, it should be noted that Arden's identified gaps in employment and professional employment rates for students with a declared disability reflect broadly the same gap (for example 3% in professional employment rates after six months) that a HEFCE report published in 2015 'Differences in Employment Outcomes: equality and diversity characteristics' revealed to exist nationally, and consequently may reflect the barriers in labour market. Nevertheless, we aim through this initiative to better support students to tackle such barriers. The University recognises that its gap in terms of reported BME student employment rates (21% for professional employment after six months) is substantially wider than the equivalent national gap reported in the same HEFCE study (13%). Consequently, swifter improvement is targeted for this group. Due to the small size of the current data set we aim to review our current position and make adjustments to these targets as more data becomes available.

Achievement of Initiative 2 will be measured by reviewing Arden's total recruitment to distance learning programmes and its contribution to the total number of part-time entrants to higher education year on year.

Achievement of Initiatives 3 and 4 will be measured using Arden's internal data on student progression and achievement, which is produced and published to senior

committees quarterly. The ways in which we will measure student in course success using internal data are set out in Table 8.

Achievement of Initiative 5 will result in a research output and development of a strategy, the impact of which will need to be evaluated through Arden's internal data on student progression and achievement in 2020-21 and thereafter. The University is currently showing a gap of 11% between the number of BME students and the number of white students who attain first or upper second class honours, which is a smaller gap than the sector wide attainment gap in 2016/17 of 15.1%. It is looking to build on this success by researching successful strategies to close the gap further.

Achievement of Initiatives 6, 7, 8 and 9 will be measured using both published HESA retention data (in due course) and internal data on student progression and achievement, which is produced and published to senior committees quarterly.

Achievement of Initiative 11 will be evidenced by the collation of data and analysis of this in future plans.

## **Investment**

Arden University plans to invest substantially in the key areas of work outlined above. This will include recruitment of additional staff resource around schools and college liaison, coaching, counselling and learner analytics; providing further training to existing and new staff members; deploying its in house IT development and module development teams; and increased spending on collaborative projects. The detailed expenditure expected during 2019-20 is outlined in the Resource Plan.

Arden's distance learning provision is flexible, and students are not constrained to a timetabled programme. They may complete modules at anything up to a full-time equivalent pace. For the purposes of forecasting student numbers in the Access and Participation Resource Plan, therefore, we have used an estimated average of 0.5 FTE, as used previously in all forecasts submitted to and accepted by HEFCE.

The total amount of investment we will make from additional fee income in the outlined Access and Participation Plan initiatives during 2019-20 is £425,000 which is 34% of Arden University's projected higher fee income. 14% of this amount (£60,000) will be spent on initiatives 1 and 2 to improve access to Arden's higher education portfolio for under-represented groups. 85% (£360,000) will be dedicated to initiatives 3 to 9 in strategies to raise attainment levels and improve success for the identified target groups which are currently shown to be under-achieving. 1% of the investment from higher fee income (£5,000) will be made on initiatives 10 and 11 around improved progression outcomes for the BME and disabled students, but this will rise to £65,000 (13%) during 2020-21.

Arden University will therefore invest substantially over and above the required level of investment derived from additional fee income in 2019-20, given its current

position. However, the amount of higher fee income indicated by the resource plan template is based on a traditional university model with students recruited on an academic year starting in October, whereas Arden has intakes throughout the year, meaning that its actual income from higher fees during each academic year will be significantly lower than projected in the resource plan. The total fee income over the four-year period 2019-23 suggested in the resource plan is circa £18.4m; Arden University's actual projected income from higher fees during this period is £16m – the balance will fall into the 2023-24 academic year. Arden's total expected expenditure on Access and Participation strands of activity over the same four-year period is estimated at £2.8m, which is 15.3% of the OfS projected fee income and 17.5% of the actual projected income. This total investment is weighted towards the earlier years, due to the nature of the specific initiatives.

Arden does not plan to invest in any targeted financial support for students from low participation groups until 2021-22 because of the high proportion of its students that are already recruited and supported from these groups. The University has a hardship fund in place to which any student can apply for financial assistance if there is a demonstrable need for it. This is already funded by the University and anticipated expenditure on hardship grants during 2019-20 is £15,000.

## **Provision of information to students**

Arden University's Access and Participation Plan will be published annually on its website and as such will be fully accessible to all student and prospective students and other stakeholders.

The Arden website provides detailed, comprehensive information to students regarding programme fees and the maximum year on year increases that the University may make to these fees. The basis on which annual fee increases may be made is set out in the University's terms and conditions, which are sent directly to all successful applicants in their Offer Packs. Formal offer letters (which are sent electronically) contain a direct link to the University's Tuition Fee information page on its website.

Information on financial support available to students, including where to find information on and check eligibility for government funding, details of the University's partnership with Future Finance, and how to apply to the University's internal hardship fund, is included in student handbooks which are sent directly to all successful applicants in their Offer Packs at the point when they are offered a place.



## APPENDIX 1: Mapping of Strategic Ambitions to Initiatives and Targets

STRATEGIC AMBITION	INITIATIVE DURING 2018-19	TARGETS & MILESTONES
<p>We will increase the proportion of students studying via full-time blended learning from low participation neighbourhoods to the level achieved for online distance learning provision</p>	<p>Targeted schools liaison programme around UK blended learning study centres to increase the proportion of students from low participation neighbourhoods studying via Arden's full-time blended learning offering (priority group: low participation neighbourhoods).</p>	<p>T16a_01 T16a_02</p>
<p>We will improve BME student success rates on full-time blended learning programmes to be more comparable with the success rates for white students</p>	<p>Implementation of individual Coaching Programme for full-time blended learning students to improve motivation, support and consequent success rates (priority group: BME students).</p> <p>Implementation of two week diagnostic and intensive skills training at commencement of studies on full-time blended learning programmes to ensure the provision of targeted study skills support and improve success rates (priority group: BME students).</p>	<p>T16a_03</p>

<p>We will improve the levels of attainment of first and upper second class honours degrees obtained by BME students studying via distance learning to be more comparable with those attained by white students</p>	<p>Conduct of an exploratory research project within the University to identify successful academic support strategies to improve grade attainment, potentially around greater use of formative assessment and co-remediation, and to test and assess the impact of these strategies (priority group: BME students).</p>	<p>T16a_04</p>
<p>We will increase the level of employment of BME graduates and the proportion employed in professional jobs to be more comparable with employment levels and types for white graduates</p>	<p>Development and launch of an Employability Enhancement Service targeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) existing students, particularly less successful groups, spanning advice, guidance, tools, services and industry/employer interaction; and</li> <li>(b) potentially, a broader 'all welcome' free service to the public, including adults neither applying to nor studying with Arden but who have not typically received effective careers guidance and support.</li> </ul> <p>(priority groups: BME students, students who have declared a disability).</p>	<p>T16a_07 T16a_10</p>
<p>We will increase the number of students studying part-time with Arden University by 5% per annum and through our contribution</p>	<p>Extend and build upon Arden's personalised admissions process to increase the number of part-time students entering higher education (priority group: part-time students).</p>	<p>T16a_12</p>

aim to increase the number of part-time higher education students studying in the UK		
We will increase the ways in which the Arden learning experience provides flexibility and is tailored and personalised to the needs of the individual learner	<p>Continue to increase focus on the provision of a personalised and tailored learning experience, particularly through the increased use of learner analytics, with the aim of giving students greater visibility of their progress and successes and delivering a more efficient, accessible and engaging online learning experience (priority groups: part-time students, mature students, care leavers, care providers, military families).</p> <p>Develop and expand flexible study options for students to improve retention and success (priority groups: part-time students, mature students, students who have declared a disability).</p>	T16a_06
We will provide enhanced support for students' emotional and physical wellbeing to increase student resilience and motivation to succeed in higher education	<p>Provision of a new, dedicated counselling service for Special Educational Needs students, to improve retention and success (priority group: students who have declared a physical or mental disability).</p> <p>Production and implementation of a Wellness Portal as part of Arden's online learning environment, to provide further support</p>	T16a_05

	around physical and mental wellbeing including the resilience to study online over long periods of time (priority group: students who have declared a physical or mental disability).	
We will increase the level of employment of disabled graduates to be more comparable with employment levels of non-disabled students	Development and launch of an Employability Enhancement Service targeting (a) existing students, particularly less successful groups, spanning advice, guidance, tools, services and industry/employer interaction; and (b) potentially, a broader 'all welcome' free service to the public, including adults neither applying to nor studying with Arden but who have not typically received effective careers guidance and support. (priority groups: BME students, students who have declared a disability).	T16a_08 T16a_11
Not linked directly to a current strategic ambition but supporting the University's ongoing analysis of its position and future development of its plan	Implement annual career enhancement survey for distance learning students to capture data regarding long term career progression during a programme of study, to inform future development of initiatives and support in this area (priority group: part-time students).	T16a_09

