Introduction

1. We are committed to the goal of widened participation in higher education amongst all under-represented groups. Our ‘Strategy for 2020’ sets out the Values by which we will achieve all our goals as an institution. In our Values we commit ourselves to equality, inclusivity and the celebration of diversity as the foundation for all we do. The core values of widening participation are firmly embedded within our culture and processes. Our Strategy can be accessed online: www.brookes.ac.uk/about/strategy

Section 1 - Tuition Fees, Student Numbers, and Tuition Fee Income

2. This access agreement is submitted in advance of government announcements on the student finance package and maximum fee cap for 2018-19. We may amend the fees and expenditure set out in this agreement subject to changes to funding rules.

3. For new entrants in 2018/19 our undergraduate tuition fee for full-time home students will be £9,250.

4. Full-time home students studying for Foundation degrees with our partner colleges who are new entrants in 2018/19 will be charged £7,200.

5. Full-time home students studying for top-up Bachelor degrees with our partner colleges who are new entrants in 2018/19 will be charged £7,200.

6. Full-time home students studying for Bachelor degrees with our partner colleges will be charged £7,200. Full-time home students studying for Bachelor degrees delivered jointly by the University and our partner colleges will be charged £9,250 (this currently applies only to equine science programmes).

7. Students studying on programmes of Initial Teaching Training (ITT) will be charged £9,250.

8. Our fees for part-time students will continue to be no greater than the basic fee cap of £4,625 in 2018/19 and hence we have not sought the inclusion of our part-time provision in this Access Agreement.

9. Our fees for students on sandwich placements or study years abroad will be £1,380.

10. We will inform prospective students of the total cost of their course prior to enrolment through, inter alia, the prospectus, relevant sections of our website, and Key Information Sets (KIS). Students will be advised that the fee is expected to rise in line with the regulations published by the Government each year. The relevant section of our web-site may be accessed at: www.brookes.ac.uk/studying/finance

11. Entrants from earlier years will continue to be charged tuition fees (and access other aspects of financial support) appropriate to their year of entry. We will apply annual increases for continuing students in line with an appropriate inflationary measure set by the Government each year (within the appropriate maximum fee cap, and subject to TEF status).

Section 2 – Access, Student Success, and Progression Measures
12. Taking a broad look at our performance across the student lifecycle, we recognise the following particular under-represented groups:

a. Students of Black and Minority ethnicity (BME)

b. Students with disabilities

c. Mature students

d. Students from low-participation neighbourhoods

13. We have examined our performance in respect of access, student success, and progression across each of these groups. Our milestones look in detail at each of these four groups in terms of applications, entrants, retention, good degree achievement, and graduate destinations. This section aims however to give a narrative across the whole “student lifecycle” for each of the four groups.

14. Looking first at BME students, we observe that the proportion of BME applicants has increased fairly steadily since 2010 and that we should be very close to the sector average by 2020. In terms of entrants, the proportion of BME students drops, though we are still on track to meet our milestone. We are working to understand whether the drop is as a result of a lack of offers (for example, do BME applicants apply disproportionately for our most popular courses), or a failure of conversion (i.e. a lack of Firm acceptances from this group). The outcomes of our analysis will help us to target our outreach and conversion work accordingly. Once BME students have enrolled, their retention rates are very good (and better than the sector benchmark for our institution). However, there remains a considerable gap in the “good degree” attainment rates of BME versus White students, although we considerably exceed the sector benchmark (67.6% good degree in 2015, benchmark 64.7%). One of the ways we are tackling this is through an inclusive learning project, which is directly impacting on the diversity of our curriculum. We have recently launched a programme of action research which seeks to directly address the issues faced by BME students, drawing upon their experiences to effect changes to University policy and learning and teaching practice as well as University culture more widely. We also anticipate that this programme will influence BME graduate destinations, where there is a significant but narrowing gap of 4% between BME and White students, and where we miss our HESA benchmark by more than 1%.

15. Students with disabilities form a larger proportion of applicants and entrants at Brookes than the sector averages. Here we plan to maintain current levels of representation. However, at the latter end of the student lifecycle our performance is mixed, though improving. For the most recent year, good completion of disabled students exceeds the University average, and graduate destinations is on target, though still slightly behind the sector benchmark and the University average. We have developed additional enrolment and transition support for students with disabilities, and have developed a variety of activities to support students’ progression into employment. These include working with the Students Union disability group, working with agencies such as employability and My Plus students’ club which support disabled students into employment. We also provide holistic support to students with disabilities through referrals from the team of disability advisors to the careers team. In the coming academic year we will be starting a project to support disabled students with deciding how and when to declare their disability or health condition to employers.

16. The proportion of applicants who are mature has been fairly consistent over the past few years, at around 19-20%. Mature applicants become mature students in far greater proportion, however, forming about 30% of our intake. This is considerably in excess of our HESA benchmark in this area. We have concerns that maintaining this level of mature entrants may be more challenging in future years, as reforms to healthcare funding take effect. We have put significant resource into
attracting mature students, particularly into healthcare, through working closely with local colleges providing access courses, supporting students with taster days, application and interview preparation, and mentoring. The gap in retention rates between mature and young students has narrowed in the most recent year, but is still at over 3%, though we are on target to meet our milestone, and are ahead of sector benchmarks. There is even greater variance between mature and young students in terms of “good degree” (10%), and the gap has widened this year. We are currently investigating reasons for the increasing gap, and will put additional measures in place if needed. We know that students who engage with our study support service, Upgrade, are more likely to have a good degree outcome than those who do not engage. Our mature students are already more likely to engage with this service, and we have been doing work recently to target cohorts where we know there are likely to be additional support needs. For example; we targeted our Operating Department Practice students at the Swindon Campus (most of whom are mature students), for additional support in advance of their foundation numeracy assessment. Students who attended the additional support had results which were 9.3% better than those who did not attend. Possibly because mature students tend to enrol on very vocational programmes (such as healthcare), in terms of graduate destinations mature students outperform young students and slightly exceed the HESA benchmark.

17. The final underrepresented group that we wish to focus on is students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPNs – defined by using Polar3 data). We focus our attention on those from Polar3 quintiles 1 and 2 and observe that some of the HESA benchmarks relate to quintile 1 only. This is the only one of the four underrepresented groups where applicant and entrant numbers are significantly below sector benchmarks, although applicant numbers are on an upward trajectory. Polar3 data is used extensively to target student cohorts for our outreach work, both through targeting schools with large cohorts from quintiles 1 and 2, and through targeting individuals from those postcodes for our more intense activities. Our target in this area is quite demanding, aiming to significantly narrow if not close the gap between our performance and the sector averages. We know that cohorts studying at our partner colleges are more likely to be from quintiles 1 and 2 (and to be in other underrepresented groups), and are working to grow our provision at these colleges, both through increased foundation degree provision, and through higher and degree apprenticeships. With regard to the later parts of the student lifecycle, our performance improves. Retention rates and “good degree” completion for this group are in line with the university average. Finally however when looking at graduate destinations, LPN students are slightly above the University average though we are still a little below the target we have set ourselves.

18. Expenditure on access, student success, progression and financial support for underrepresented students will total £8,439,870. This is made up of:

£1,315,000 on access  
£521,000 on student success  
£292,636 on progression  
£6,311,234 on financial support

19. In respect of collaborative outreach, we continue to be the lead institution for Study Higher which is now part of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) covering specific wards in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Swindon. Study Higher are developing an enhanced progressive activity offering, targeted at students in years 9 to 13 who live in particular areas where higher education participation is low overall and lower than would be expected given GCSE attainment rates. This intensive offering will enable us to ensure our regional outreach provision complements that of the NCOP and extends to broader under-represented groups not covered by
Study Higher. In addition to this intensive programme, Oxford Brookes will be leading on a Study Higher project to support the progression of vocational learners to HE.

20. We continue to develop and grow our partnerships with further education colleges through our Associate College Partnership. We now have over 50 courses delivered in 7 different partner colleges, with some 2,000 enrolled students, many of whom come from underrepresented groups. For instance, we have seen a 70% increase in the number of young students from low Polar3 quintiles between 2012 and 2015. ACP provision plays an important role in attracting mature students. In 2015 54% of the ACP entry cohort were mature.

21. In 2018/19 we will expand our provision further through an additional FE partner, Wiltshire College. We expect to further extend the numbers of students enrolled on our partner college provision, working with colleges and employers to respond to local skills needs, and exploring the opportunities to deliver higher and degree apprenticeships as part of our provision. We are also delivering a programme of tailored support for level 3 vocational learners in our partner colleges focussed onto progression into HE. In addition, we deliver a very successful programme of events for students on Access to HE courses in partner colleges, which has successfully increased the number of students on Level 3 courses progressing to, in particular, Healthcare degree provision both at Oxford Brookes and at our partners. Our ACP partnership goes beyond a standard franchise model, and is a genuinely collaborative partnership, with many similar features to school sponsorship. For instance, our membership agreement goes beyond a typical memorandum of understanding, with each college having a vote on the ACP board, which makes collective decisions on behalf of the ACP. Many of the ACP colleges have a senior staff member from Oxford Brookes on their governing body.

22. We have recently reviewed our work with our target Oxfordshire secondary schools, and their feeder primaries, renewing our target data, and developing more intense programmes which run through the full student career from year 5. Working in partnership with target schools, we aim to deliver sustained and progressive programmes of interventions designed to support identified objectives including raising aspirations and attainment, parental engagement and progression to higher education. Activities include year 5 ‘Time Capsule Days’, year 6 transition workshops, year 8 and 9 decisions workshops, year 10 Passport Days, core subject mentoring, and a variety of talks and workshops for students in all years. Building on our core subject mentoring, we intend to develop further programmes and activities in support of attainment in English and maths, particularly aimed at years 7-9. In 2017-18 we are piloting activities including small group mentoring and tutoring delivered by our students, and will offer it out to all of our schools in 2018 if evaluation demonstrates that the work is successful. We are currently working closely with a number of teachers in our target schools to develop this work. We have invested in research and resulting initiatives to support parental engagement. These include a range of communications which are, specifically, designed to help non-HE experienced parents support their son/daughter’s progression to HE. Students from our target schools are also prioritised for places at all of our other events, including residential.

23. In light of evidence from the HEAT service that intensive contact with students makes them more likely to enter HE, we have developed an ambitious, sustained contact programme, Brookes Engage, with local sixth form and college students. The scheme is now in its third year, and has already shown very high levels of success. Of the first cohort, 78% progressed to university in 2016. This cohort comprised students with at least one, and usually multiple, measures of disadvantage.

24. We currently sponsor The Oxford Academy, and Swindon University Technical College, and are committed to partnership working. We are particularly pleased that 42% of year 13 students at The Oxford Academy secured a place at university in 2016, up for 31% in the previous year. We intend to complement our school sponsorship with a new school governor plan with the aim of
increasing the number of schools with which our staff are involved, as we believe that this is a more effective means of having an impact on a large number of schools than sponsorship. We are currently reviewing our school sponsorship strategy.

25. In August 2016 we began a two-year programme to embed some aspects of access activity in the four faculties, with the aim of increasing the number of enrolments from students from groups underrepresented on particular programmes. Discover Brookes schools are targeted in accordance with their having significant numbers of students with identified characteristics (in most instances, this is significant numbers of POLAR quintile 1&2, and/or BME students). Students have the opportunity to follow a programme of activity based on their elected subject pathway which culminates in a residential summer school. Early indications suggest that this new programme has been well received. A robust evaluation plan has been implemented to measure its impact.

26. Our Discover Brookes programme, as discussed in the previous paragraph, has provided the vehicle through which to drive our work with BME groups. Through the targeting of schools in accordance with their high proportions of students from defined BME backgrounds, we hope to address under-representation both at a University level and in particular programme areas. Following OFFA’s guidance and with careful consideration of good practice across the sector, we are developing an action research programme in support of progression among young white males from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are keen to maintain our success in attracting students with disabilities to study at the University. As part of our commitment to share the best practice we have learned with other HEIs, we co-ordinate a NEON working group on disability for the south of England. Although we run some activities targeted particularly at students with disabilities, including a mentoring programme for students with autism spectrum disorders, we have embedded provision for most students with disabilities in everything we do so that all of our activities are accessible. Our work with mature students through the ‘Brookes Bridges’ programme has been very successful in encouraging adults who were not currently in education, and often not in employment, into further study. We have recently evaluated the programme, and found an excellent progression rate to HE considering the challenging starting points of many of the participants. Pleasingly, this programme received a NEON Outreach Initiative Award in 2016 based on its ability to successfully engage with and support the progression of mature learners.

27. Our investment in access, student success and progression was substantially increased for the 2016/17 access agreement. As a consequence, we established a Student Transitions and Engagement team, involving repositioning of some staff but also some new appointments, to co-ordinate research, identify solutions to current issues, and implement action plans. The new team has focused initially on projects relating to transition to HE for vulnerable groups, supporting inclusive teaching projects, and building capacity for supporting cultural change amongst student support coordinators. The team’s work on transition to university study will continue, but they will also expand their work to provide more support for students during their full university career, especially focusing on helping to foster a sense of belonging and engagement amongst all student groups, working closely with student representatives.

28. Financial support for new entrants will be as follows:

Students with household incomes below £10,000 will receive £1,500 in year 1 and £2,000 in years 2 and 3

Students with household incomes between £10,000 and £24,999 will receive £1,000 in year 1 and £1,500 in years 2 and 3

Students with household incomes between £25,000 and £34,999 will receive £500 in year 1 and £1,000 in years 2 and 3
Community Scholarships – up to £60,000 will be allocated to students from Oxfordshire state-funded schools or from one of our Associate College Partners. The Community Scholarship rewards students who have been an excellent role model within their school/college or community, and/or have overcome personal or social difficulties, with a one-off payment of £1,000. We have recently undertaken analysis of the impact of these bursaries, which shows that 96% of students who were awarded the community scholarship completed the first year of their course, compared with a 92% average across the University.

Transition from Care bursaries – up to £20,000 will be allocated to students leaving the care system. Alongside guaranteed accommodation and a tailored package of support, students leaving care will receive a bursary of £2,000 per year.

We also have a Financial Aid Fund which operates under NASMA guidelines. We are currently allocating £674,000 to this, which we have increased recently in recognition of increased demand. We may increase this further, depending on demand, and are particularly mindful of the impact on students of forthcoming NHS bursary changes.

Section 3 – Targets and Milestones

29. As indicated in section 2 we are focusing on four under-represented groups of students. The resource plan attached to this document sets out the targets for these groups. We have not amended our targets substantially for 2018-19, having done so for 2017-18.

30. We have amended our collaborative outreach target to be more appropriate to the NCOP scheme, as our previous target was specific to NNCO.

Section 4 - Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements

31. The implementation of this Access Agreement is monitored and evaluated through our Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee (AESC) and the Widening Participation Advisory Group (WPAG), which reports to AESC. The AESC is chaired by our Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and the WPAG is chaired by the Associate Dean (Student Experience) from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. There is student representation on both AESC and WPAG. This structure ensures that widening participation is embedded within our institutional governance structure at a senior level.

32. The UK Recruitment and Partnerships Director is responsible for collating monitoring information from the designated senior staff member managing each initiative so that we can satisfy our annual reporting requirement to OFFA.

33. The designated staff members responsible for each initiative are also responsible for ensuring that mechanisms are in place to monitor the effectiveness of the schemes for which they are responsible. Reports on the effectiveness of widening participation initiatives are brought to WPAG for consideration.

34. More broadly in the University the monitoring of widening access performance is embedded in a number of generic processes. For instance the annual planning round includes the review by academic faculties of their contribution to University level targets, in particular those which fall into the “student success” and “progression” categories. Faculties are presented with data in a format identical to the Access Agreement, but reflecting their own specific data. They are asked to investigate any significant deviations below University targets and propose actions that might help re-align performance. In this way variations in attainment by subject can be addressed.
section.

We have increased our capacity for research and evaluation work on widening participation, continuing and building upon the Pioneers Project work which was previously funded through NNCO project funding. This action research project looked at reasons Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls do not progress to particular types of HE, and developed programmes to increase their confidence and awareness of their options. The outcomes of this project have been disseminated across the sector, through conference presentations and papers. The scheme is currently expanding to one focused on action research in order to engage and increase HE participation from white working class male students.

38. Oxford Brookes is a member of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) membership service which assists Higher Education Institutions in England to target, monitor and evaluate their outreach activity. We record data about our outreach and participants on the HEAT database. This is entered into the HEAT longitudinal tracking system which matches records on individual outreach participants to administrative datasets spanning Key Stage 2 data through to postgraduate study and employment. Tracking reports received from HEAT help the University to better understand the relationship between our outreach provision and the attainment and progression of disadvantaged young people. We are able to track student progression to any HEI, including this institution, so that we can assess the extent to which we are contributing to the increased participation rates of disadvantaged young people as a whole.

39. Being part of the HEAT service also enables the University to engage with collective WP sector research. By using data from all members as an aggregate, the HEAT service is now able to explore new multi-dimensional ways of defining under-representation, disadvantage and differential outcomes and the effect that outreach can have on different groups of participants. We are an active member of the HEAT research group.

40. HEAT HESA track findings tells us that outreach participants who engage in a sustained programme of activities, including a campus visit, have higher rates of progression. Similarly, students who engage in outreach early in KS4 in a sustained programme are more likely to attain good GCSE results, evidence that outreach contributes to raising attainment. Sector research tells us that achieving good results at Key Stage 4 is the key determinant in progression to Higher Education and our programme of outreach addresses and responds to the challenges posed in helping to improve the academic attainment of our target schools and their disadvantaged students. We are pleased to report that in the most recently released data, 36% of our outreach participants recorded on HEAT from Polar Quintiles 1 and 2 have progressed to higher education. This is above the HEAT average of 33% and significantly above the UK average of 25%. HEAT track findings also show that outreach participants who have who have already completed degrees at their chosen Universities, 62% achieved a 1st class or Upper Second degree, in line with a figure of 61% nationally.
41. Oxford Brookes has been active in developing the NERUPI evaluation framework, as a collaboration with several other institutions. The framework provides institutions with a tool for mapping their widening participation activities against high level objectives, and suggestions for measuring those objectives. Oxford Brookes is leading on expansion of the framework to cover student success and progression measures.

42. The University also undertakes evaluation of interventions to support current students. Most recently, we have evaluated our study support centre, Upgrade. Analysis shows that the clear majority of students who make use of our Upgrade service belong to at least one of our OFFA target groups. Retention rates amongst students who make use of Upgrade are significantly higher than retention rates of students who do not use the service (94.8% vs 91% for the most recent year available). In addition, students who use the service are more likely to gain a 1st or 2.1 degree.

43. We are committed to evaluating the impact of the financial support we provide for students. We are currently undertaking work to do so, following the methodology developed by OFFA and Sheffield Hallam. We hope to have findings of this research by July 2017.

Section 5 – Equality and Diversity

44. The composition of our Access Agreement is structured around our responsibilities under the Equality Act of 2010. We are actively seeking improvement in recruitment, retention, success and progression for all protected equalities groups and have targeted three of these – age, race, and disability – in our specific targets and milestones.

45. Brookes is actively seeking to increase the representation and distribution of BME people amongst its students, academic and senior staff, and is using the framework of the Race Equality Charter to move this work forward. We are pleased to have been awarded bronze Athena Swan accreditation for our work to support gender equality amongst our staff and students. We have an Equality and Diversity Advisor for students, who works closely with Brookes’ Union and with Human Resources in particular to provide information and guidance, to raise awareness of EDI matters and to contribute to the development of equality objectives. He is a member of the Widening Participation Advisory Group.

46. We were successful in a bid to the Equality Challenge Unit for consultancy support for a project to investigate reasons for low numbers of female students enrolling on our engineering programmes. The project has produced initial findings, and will produce a full report and actions in the coming months.

Section 6 - Provision of information to prospective students

47. We are committed to publishing clear and accessible information on fees, other costs of studying at Brookes, and the financial support available. This information is available on our website (on our prospectus pages, where further information on fees and funding is available on every course page, and on our more general “fees and funding” pages) and via UCAS course profiles.

48. In light of new consumer protection guidance from the CMA, we have established a CMA oversight group, reporting to the University’s Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee. This group will oversee the University’s compliance with information provision legislation.
49. We are also committed to providing accurate and timely information to relevant third parties, including UCAS and Student Finance England.

Section 7 - Consulting with students

50. As mentioned in paragraph 30, students are represented on our principal Widening Participation committees and so are involved in the ongoing development and monitoring of our equality, WP and Access Agreement work. Student representatives were asked to comment on the draft of this document in April 2017.

Contact and Queries

51. This Access Agreement has been compiled by the UK Recruitment and Partnerships Director, Alice Wilby, who may be contacted in the event of queries.