The uses and impact of access agreements and associated spend

Report to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA)
by CFE Research and Edge Hill University

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**RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY
SPECIALISTS IN EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS**

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1| Executive summary

1.1 This report has been produced by CFE Research and Edge Hill University for the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). It is based on findings from research which explored the uses and impact of access agreements and associated spend for widening participation (WP).

Project background

1.2 OFFA is an independent, non-departmental public body that was established under the Higher Education Act of 2004. Following the introduction of variable tuition fees for full-time home and European Union (EU) undergraduates in 2006/07 and the recent fee increases in 2012/13, OFFA's remit has been to promote and safeguard fair access to higher education (HE) and to ensure explicit commitment from Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) to increasing the participation of under-represented groups.

1.3 A key mechanism for ensuring these aims are met has been the use of access agreements, i.e. working documents which are updated annually, in which universities and colleges set out the range of support, both financial and non financial, that they intend to put in place to support the access and retention of students from under-represented groups. More specifically, access agreements require institutions charging tuition fees above the basic rate to invest a proportion of additional fee income in bursaries, other forms of financial support and/or outreach, retention and student success work. OFFA monitors institutions' progress in meeting their access agreement commitments and targets on an annual basis and also supports HEIs by disseminating good practice and advice.

1.4 Currently there is little information available about how the evolution of access agreements has impacted on institutional planning, behaviour and policy priorities and whether it has enabled institutions to be more creative in their approach to WP. This research project will contribute to a forthcoming national strategy on student access and success which is currently being prepared by OFFA and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The project will investigate the effect that access agreements and associated spend have had on WP outcomes and provide evidence of their impact on institutional planning, delivery and approaches to monitoring and evaluation.

Approach

1.5 The research involved a survey of institutions with approved access agreements in place for 2013/14 and in-depth interviews with staff that have strategic and/or operational oversight of access agreements and associated spend in a cross-section of

institutions. Of the 165 institutions invited to take part in the survey, 94 responded[1] (57% response rate). In-depth interviews were conducted with staff in 15 institutions, with steps taken to achieve as representative a sample as possible. For the purposes of analysis, institutions have been grouped into the following four types[2]:

> **Inclusive institutions:** Large, usually teaching-intensive institutions that recruit significant numbers of WP students.

> **Selective institutions:** Large, usually research-intensive institutions that recruit high-attaining students.

> **Specialist or professional training institutes:** Smaller HEIs and colleges that offer only a small range of courses, usually dedicated to a particular profession.

> **Small institutions:** Further Education Colleges (FECs), general colleges and small HEIs that often recruit locally, and with many of their students from disadvantaged groups.

Key findings and conclusions

Variation in WP expenditure across the HE sector

1.6   The resources committed within access agreements often comprise a range of funding sources, not just that provided by additional fee income. Total expenditure on WP varies considerably between institutions, as does the proportion of the total budget represented by the access agreement; the overall spend represented by access agreements varies primarily according to institution type.

1.7   The majority of institutions integrate other sources of funding for WP with the additional fee income committed in their access agreement, and they do not necessarily differentiate activities that are funded by different income streams. It is therefore not possible to understand the impact of access agreements and associated spend in isolation, as it can only be understood fully in relation to the impact of these other funding sources and in the context of wider institutional strategies and approaches to WP.

Impact of access agreements and associated spend

1.8   Access agreements and associated spend have had a positive impact on institutional policies, planning and behaviour in relation to WP and have contributed towards progress made in relation to institutional and wider WP targets and goals, with most HEIs achieving or exceeding their targets.

1.9   The majority of institutions have enhanced their WP offer as a result of their access agreement and associated spend. They also perceive that the requirement to produce an

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[1] One responded to clarify that they did not have an access agreement in place, This institution was discounted from the calculation of the response rate.

[2] These institution types are based on a typology developed by CFE in conjunction with HEFCE for a previous project on the uses and impact of the HEFCE WP allocation. CFE and Edge Hill University. (2013). *The Uses and Impact of HEFCE Funding for Widening Participation.* Bristol: HEFCE.

access agreement has created opportunities to improve the monitoring and evaluation of WP interventions, increase the focus on WP activities, improve the targeting of WP activities and enhance the profile of and level of buy-in to WP among staff at all levels.

1.10   Imbalances in the student population are beginning to be addressed at an institutional and sector level, as a higher proportion of under-represented groups are accessing the most selective institutions and disparities in the rates of retention and success between WP and non-WP students in inclusive institutions are being reduced. The introduction of access agreements and associated spend is perceived to have contributed to this progress.

1.11   Although few would dispute that the introduction of access agreements and associated spend has delivered additionality it is also regarded as just one of a number of drivers that have led to changes in policy and practice at an institutional level and contributed to improved outcomes. Furthermore, on average institutions tend not to agree that access agreements have played an important role in mitigating the impact of variable fees on access to HE, which is one of the key factors underpinning the rationale for their introduction. There may be a number of reasons for this which warrant further investigation. However, the lack of existing evidence to demonstrate that financial aid, such as fee waivers, has a significant impact on widening access, coupled with UCAS data which suggests that students from low income families have not been deterred from accessing HE since fees were raised to £9,000, are likely to be influencing factors.

Impact on institutional strategies

1.12   The introduction of access agreements and associated spend has had a positive impact on strategic planning and priorities at an institutional level and has ensured resources for WP are ring-fenced. In most instances, access agreements are strongly aligned with wider institutional strategies for WP and are perceived to have resulted in more formalised and co-ordinated approaches. Even where WP strategies and access agreements are less integrated, access agreements can help to facilitate comparisons with related work by ensuring a fuller understanding of the wider WP landscape is developed.

1.13   Although access agreements are perceived to have had a positive impact, evidence indicates that overall access agreements tend to reflect rather than drive the development of WP strategies, particularly in institutions where WP has been a core activity for many years.

1.14   Access agreements can be challenging to co-ordinate and implement. Key challenges include working with several access agreements concurrently, putting in place the additional infrastructure required to deliver on a larger scale, and sustaining partnerships in a tightening fiscal environment.

Impact on delivery

1.15   Access agreements have led to an enhanced offer for WP students. Most institutions have piloted or delivered some new activities and all institutions have continued or expanded existing activities.

1.16   There are wide variations between institutions in the level of funding committed in access agreements. However, most integrate their additional fee income with other sources

of WP funding and finance a range of WP activities and student financial support from an integrated budget. Whilst simpler to administer, some institutions find it difficult to disaggregate the impact of the different sources of funding when measuring and reporting outcomes.

1.17   There are also wide variations in the proportion of associated spend committed in access agreements to financial and non-financial support, and the balance of resources allocated to outreach and retention activities. These variations reflect individual institutional priorities and goals and tend to vary according to institutional size, mission, number of WP students enrolled, and funding sources included in the access agreement in addition to additional fee income.

Impact on monitoring and evaluation

1.18   The institutional targets set out in access agreements are largely derived from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) benchmarks. Most institutions assess the level and appropriateness of their targets by reviewing previous performance against national indicators and wider research evidence. The requirement to monitor and evaluate progress against these targets has prompted many institutions to refine their systems and processes so that they are better able to assess the impact of their WP interventions. Nevertheless, monitoring and evaluation still present a key challenge for many.

1.19   Institutions tend to be more focused on monitoring outputs rather than systematically evaluating outcomes. However, there is evidence that this is changing. Small and specialist institutions tend to lack the specialist skills required to undertake evaluative work. When institutions combine multiple sources of WP funding to deliver WP activities, many find it difficult to disaggregate the impact of different WP funding sources upon outputs and outcomes.

Issues for consideration

1.20   When developing the national strategy on fair access and student success, OFFA, working in partnership with HEFCE, should consider the following issues raised by this research:

> **Strategic priority:** The instigation of access agreements and associated spend derived from additional fee income has increased the strategic priority accorded to WP. This is essential in order to prevent WP becoming marginalised in the future and to ensure that it continues to be mainstreamed and embedded in all aspects of institutional practice.

> **Alignment with other strategies:** Access agreements do not cover all WP activity and expenditure, and therefore they do not necessarily provide a comprehensive picture of WP. The requirement to produce an access agreement in addition to a separate Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (WPSA) to different timescales and with different requirements and emphases adds to the administrative burden of institutions. The strategic priority of the access agreement would be enhanced further if it were fully integrated with the WPSA and associated reporting.

> **Whole lifecycle approach:** Access agreements are relevant and important to all institutions, as very few exceed widening access and retention and completion benchmarks. In this context, access agreements provide a useful mechanism for encouraging different stakeholders to work together to maximise outcomes. It may be useful to extend this further by providing guidance which relates to progression beyond undergraduate education.

> **Protecting funding:** Access agreements protect spending for WP in a challenging financial environment, and it is not clear whether the same level of resources would be committed to this area of work by all institutions without them. Committing to set levels of expenditure can help to ensure that funding is used in the most effective way. However, institutional flexibility to address their strategic priorities and the needs of their WP student cohort is essential in this regard. Therefore, guidance should not be too prescriptive.

> **Co-ordinating function for WP activity:** The access agreement has assumed an important co-ordinating function within many institutions and the document covers a wide range of student groups. The notable exception is work to recruit and support disabled students. This may be because the HEFCE allocation has a specific stream dedicated to supporting disabled students and most institutions use this to support their activities. However, it may also be worth considering whether spending and activities to engage disabled students and other equality and diversity groups could be more fully integrated into access agreements.

> **Monitoring and evaluation:** The guidance on access agreements provided by OFFA has emphasised the importance of good quality monitoring and evaluation. Whilst most institutions have developed their systems and processes, small and specialist institutions in particular often lack the skills and capacity to do this effectively. Further guidance and support would be welcomed, including stronger connections between smaller institutions and those with academic research centres.

> **Targets and goals:** There is evidence that institutions are responding to the current monitoring and evaluation requirements by setting targets and goals that are easy to quantify and measure. Further scope to include qualitative measures that demonstrate the distance travelled by students across the whole lifecycle would help to develop a fuller understanding of what works, when and why, for different student groups at different points in their journey.

> **Emphasis on impact and proven-practices:** Institutions have responded to the need to develop and meet stretching targets by implementing and extending tried and tested interventions rather than to experiment and pilot new ways of working. If innovation is to be encouraged then a safe environment needs to be created where institutions can take risks with activities and try things that may not work.

> **Multiple access agreements and associated timescales:** The logistics of working on and with multiple access agreements are challenging. There may be merits in reviewing the timescales for producing access agreements and the opportunities to make revisions. OFFA and HEFCE should also consider what advice the strategy might give regarding the government's requirement for agreements to be annually reviewed; the strategy might also advise on whether there is scope for longer-term agreements with regular reporting and reviews, incorporating flexibility to respond to emerging evidence and changing circumstances.

2| Introduction

2.1 This report has been produced by CFE Research and Edge Hill University for OFFA. It summarises the findings of research into the use and impact of access agreements and associated spend for WP.

Project background

2.2 Since the publication of the Kennedy[3] and Dearing[4] reports in 1997, the term 'widening participation' has been adopted by central government and has featured prominently in policy initiatives aimed at addressing under-representation in HE. Widening access to and supporting student success in HE remains a key priority for Government, HEFCE and OFFA as it makes a significant contribution to increasing social mobility, supporting economic growth and promoting social justice and community cohesion.

2.3 Successive governments have recognised the additional cost of recruiting and retaining under-represented groups in HE. Funding which is designed to help meet these costs has been delivered to HEIs and some FECs by HEFCE since 1999-2000. This includes the 'WP allocation'[5], to support widening access and improving retention and success amongst disadvantaged learners, including students with disabilities, and more recently the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) allocation, which delivers direct financial support to students from low income families. The amount of funding dedicated to WP has steadily increased, with a significant uplift in 2003/04. The HEFCE WP allocation totalled £368 million in 2011-12. The government's contribution to the NSP was £50 million in 2012/13, and this will rise to £150 million by 2014/15.

2.4 WP policy has placed consistent emphasis on the need to mainstream WP activities in order to ensure they become embedded in broader institutional strategies. The aim is to ensure that WP activity is not carried out on the periphery but is instead incorporated into all areas of institutional practice. More recently, emphasis has also been placed on supporting individuals across the student lifecycle, from first aspirations through admission and completion to progression into postgraduate study and/or graduate level employment.

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[3] Kennedy,H. (1997) *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education* Coventry: Further Education Funding Council

[4] Dearing, R. (1997) Higher Education in the Learning Society. London: National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. See http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/ Accessed 20/05/13
[5] The WP Allocation became the Student Opportunity Allocation in 2012-13.

The Office for Fair Access

2.5 OFFA is an independent, non-departmental public body that was established under the Higher Education Act of 2004. Following the introduction of variable tuition fees for full-time home and EU undergraduates in 2006-07, OFFA's remit has been to promote and safeguard fair access to HE and to ensure explicit commitment from HEIs to increasing the participation of under-represented groups. OFFA's work is guided by three strategic aims, to:

> support and encourage improvements in participation rates in HE from low income and other under-represented groups;

> reduce the barriers to HE for under-represented groups by ensuring that institutions continue to invest in outreach and financial support;

> support and encourage equality of opportunity through the provision of clear and accessible financial information for students, their parents, carers and advisers.

2.6 A key mechanism for ensuring that these aims are met is the use of access agreements. The first access agreements were submitted for the academic year 2006/07, and they were initially designed to ensure that all HEFCE and Teacher Training Agency (TTA) funded HEIs and FECs charging fees above the 'standard level' (at the time £1,200 per annum) maintained a bursary system to assist students from low income families. However, in the advent of further reforms to student finance set out in the Browne review and subsequent White Paper 'Students at the Heart of the System'[6] and implemented in 2012-13, the role of access agreements has been enhanced.

2.7 Institutions charging fees above the new 'basic level' of £6,000 per annum for a full-time undergraduate course (up to a maximum of £9,000) are now required to detail their fee limits in their access agreement and describe how they will utilise a proportion[7] of their additional fee income to promote fair access and improve retention and success through financial and non-financial support. Institutions are required to identify areas for improvement and set themselves challenging but reasonable WP targets and goals. These are monitored by OFFA on an annual basis. In this context, access agreements have become one of the main policy mechanisms for ensuring inclusivity within HE in England. Alongside WPSAs, access agreements help to support institutions and enable OFFA and HEFCE to account for institutional expenditure on WP and to demonstrate impact.[8]

2.8 OFFA produces written guidance for institutions across a range of areas, including policy summaries and updates, providing monitoring returns, completing evaluations and sharing good practice, in addition to writing and revising access agreements. Further support is also available through OFFA's policy advisers. The guidance to support institutions in preparing access agreements addresses topics such as fees and

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[6] Browne, J. *et al.* (2010) *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance.* London: H. M. Government; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, (2011) *Students at the Heart of the System* London: BIS.

[7] Up to 30% of fee income over £6,000 for institutions with low numbers of disadvantaged students.

[8] HEFCE are currently working with OFFA to develop an integrated document which will cover the requirements for both widening participation strategic statements and access agreements.

fee levels for new and continuing students, the students covered in the agreement, how to detail outreach and retention activity, how to budget for investment in the NSP and other forms of institutional financial support, and what to consider in relation to monitoring and evaluation. The guidance is not prescriptive. OFFA recognises and understands the need for a flexible approach which accommodates institutional diversity in strategic mission, WP strategy and budget and the demographic profile of student and target populations.

2.9 HEFCE and OFFA are developing a national strategy for promoting access and student success in higher education. The aim of the strategy is to ensure that all those with the potential to participate and succeed in higher education have equal opportunity to do so and can expect equality of outcomes in terms of attainment and onward progression into suitable employment or further study. The development of the national strategy will be based on the latest evidence from both the UK and abroad and will consider how the total investment in WP can be most effectively targeted and used in order to maximise the impact of institutional approaches to widen access and deliver successful outcomes to all students.

Aims and objectives

2.10 There is little current information about how the evolution of access agreements has impacted on the planning, behaviour and policy priorities of HEIs and FECs, or about whether they have enabled institutions to be more innovative in their approaches to WP. This research project seeks to contribute to the national strategy by investigating the role and impact that access agreements and associated spend have had on institutions and WP outcomes.

2.11 The aim of this research is to develop a fuller understanding of the perceived benefits, challenges and impact of access agreements by exploring how they are developed and delivered in HEIs and FECs, with a particular focus on how their introduction has affected institutional policies, planning and behaviour in relation to WP. More specifically, the following research questions were examined:

> how access agreements have contributed to the development of a culture of WP;

> how access agreements and associated spend have delivered change in respect to institutional WP strategies and approaches to delivery;

> where access agreements and associated spend have delivered institutional outcomes and progress for the HE sector;

> the perceived benefits of and the challenges engendered by access agreements and associated spend for institutions and continued progress in relation to wider WP objectives;

2.12 In order to address these questions, the research investigated a range of areas under three key themes:

> **Institutional strategies for WP**: the impact of access agreements and associated spend on the prioritisation of WP, the level of integration of WP objectives within wider institutional strategies, and changes to collaboration and partnership working.

> **Approaches to delivering WP activity**: the extent to which access agreements and associated spend have enabled creative and innovative approaches to delivery, including reaching new target groups, enabling new or enhancing existing activities; and influencing the balance of expenditure between financial and non-financial support.

> **Monitoring and evaluation of WP outcomes**: how institutions are monitoring and evaluating activities and outcomes and performing against both institutional targets and national WP performance indicators.

Methodology

2.13   The research was conducted over 8 weeks and involved two primary methods of data collection: a survey of all institutions that had an approved access agreement for 2013–14; and in-depth interviews with representatives from a sub-sample of institutions. A list of question areas for the research is included in Appendix 1 |.

Institutional survey

2.14   All institutions with an approved access agreement in place for 2013–14 were invited to take part in the survey by OFFA - 165 in total. The survey was designed and administered online by CFE using SNAP webhost. The link to the online survey was initially directed to the person with lead or shared responsibility for developing the institution's access agreement by email. However, it was possible for multiple individuals within an institution to contribute to the final submission if appropriate.

2.15   The survey was designed to explore the relationship between access agreements and wider institutional strategies for WP, approaches to delivering WP activities, and the monitoring and evaluation of WP outcomes. The individual survey responses were pre-populated with key aspects of management information, including the level of WP funding committed in the access agreement, percentage of additional fee income committed to WP, institutional type and region.

2.16   In total, 79 institutions representing all the regions of England submitted a full response to the survey (48%). A further 31 institutions partially completed the survey, of which 15 were considered to be sufficiently comprehensive to be included in the analysis. The total number of responses was therefore 94 and the overall response rate achieved was 57%.

Case study interviews

2.17   A sub-sample of 15 institutions was selected using a typology of institutions (see paragraph 2.19 below) along with management information on the level of institutional spend on WP committed in the 2013–14 access agreement. WP spend quintiles were prepared by ordering the WP spend levels committed in the 165 access agreements in the sampling frame from the lowest value to the highest value, then grouping the institutions into five equal segments. This process ensured that a representative sample of institutional types was achieved. Individual and group interviews were conducted by telephone in order to capture institutional perceptions and experiences that would complement and add qualitative depth to the statistical survey data. The interviews

involved a range of staff working at both a strategic and an operational level with oversight and/or involvement in the development and delivery of access agreements.

2.18   The purpose of the interviews was threefold: first, to gather more detailed, descriptive data about the use and impact of access agreements and associated spend; second, to investigate changes over the longer term since access agreements were introduced in 2006/07; and thirdly, to target questions about specific aspects of an institution, e.g. relating to the type or location of an HEI or FEC. The question areas mirrored those in the online survey but placed much more emphasis on the perceptions of and responses to the introduction of access agreements.

Typology

2.19   Building on a typology developed by CFE in conjunction with HEFCE for a previous project on the uses and impact of the HEFCE WP allocation, all institutions in the sample were categorised as one of four types:

> **Inclusive institutions:** Large, usually teaching-intensive institutions that recruit significant numbers of WP students. These institutions tend to target WP groups as part of their standard recruitment activities and have been doing so since before HEFCE provided dedicated funding for WP. Inclusive institutions tend to have a large number of students from low socio-economic groups (SEGs) and low participation neighbourhoods (LPNs), and as a result they tend to receive the most WP funding from HEFCE. They are more likely to focus their efforts on improving retention.

> **Selective institutions:** Large, usually research-intensive institutions that recruit high-attaining students. These institutions may be highly committed to WP but tend not to have a large proportion of WP students. They are more likely to focus their efforts on widening access.

> **Specialist or professional training institutes:** Smaller HEIs and colleges that offer only a small range of courses, usually dedicated to a particular profession (for example, medicine, education or the performing arts). These institutions are often highly selective, and their specialism means that WP presents a range of distinct challenges. WP activity by these institutions is for the most part related to widening access and addressing under-representation in specific academic courses and/or career types.

> **Small institutions:** FECs, general colleges and small HEIs that usually have a clear interest in social mobility among disadvantaged groups. Much like inclusive institutions, these often target WP groups as part of their standard recruitment activities, but they tend to receive only limited funding from HEFCE due to their size. Many offer both further education (FE) and HE courses, and WP often focuses on progression between the two. They are more likely to prioritise activities to support retention and student success.

Analysis

2.20   The survey data was captured using SNAP webhost and analysed using the statistical software package SPSS. All data is reported as frequency counts, that is the actual number of responses, rather than as a percentage of the sample as a whole because there are less than 100 institutions in the sample. Under each table and chart in the report the base is described (e.g. all respondents) and the total number of responses is provided. Cross tabulations reveal differences across a range of factors including institutional type (defined using the typology above) and level of spend on WP (defined using quartiles rather than quintiles in order to ensure a sufficient number of responses in each sub-category to use as a unit of analysis). The survey findings have been tested for statistical significance[9] to ensure that any differences between groups are genuine, robust and generalisable to the population from which they were drawn and are not a side-effect of sampling error. Throughout the report we mainly refer to findings that are statistically significant. Where findings are not statistically significant but are of potential interest to OFFA, these are clearly identified. Overall, analysis by institutional type reveals the most statistically significant differences. Level of WP spend does not appear to have a significant impact in relation to the use and impact of access agreements.

2.21   The in-depth interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed for the purposes of the analysis. The thematic analysis involved reviewing a small subset of the transcripts to inform the development of a coding frame, which was then used to guide subsequent data analysis. The data was coded using NVivo. Wherever possible, data gathered through the interviews was compared with the survey responses in order to ensure validity and reliability.

Respondent profile

2.22   The profile of survey respondents that forms the sample in this research was analysed to establish the extent to which it represents the larger eligible population of HEIs and FECs. With an overall response rate of 57%, a representative sample has been achieved in terms of both institutional type (Table 2.1) and spend quintile (Table 2.2). (See paragraph 2.17 for an explanation of quintiles and paragraph 2.19 for typology).

Institutional type	No. of responses
Inclusive	32
Selective	29
Small	17
Specialist	16
Total	94

Table 2.1: Survey responses by institutional type

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[9] Post-hoc inferential tests used to calculate the statistical significance of findings included ANOVA, Chi-Square, and t-test.

Institutional type	No. of eligible institutions in population	No. of responses to survey	% eligible institutions
Quintile 1	32	15	47%
Quintile 2	32	13	41%
Quintile 3	32	22	69%
Quintile 4	32	19	59%
Quintile 5	32	20	63%
No data	-	5	-
Total	165	94	57%

Table 2.2: Survey responses by WP spend quintile

2.23 The profile of the institutions that took part in the in-depth interviews by institutional type and spend quintile is outlined in Table 2.3. Overall, the profile of the 15 respondents largely reflects the profile of the sector as a whole, and so the findings from this research provide a robust measure of current views and experiences.

	Selective	Inclusive	Specialist	Small
Quintile 1			1	1
Quintile 2		1	1	
Quintile 3	1	2		
Quintile 4	2	1		
Quintile 5	4	1		

Table 2.3: Sample of case study institutions by institutional type and WP spend quintile (15 in total).

Report structure

This report is structured as follows: this chapter presents the context for the research and details the research methods. Chapter 3 examines how access agreements and associated spend have impacted upon institutional strategy. Chapter 4 details approaches to WP delivery, including the activities and interventions currently supported and the range of target groups and budgets for financial and non-financial support. Chapter 5 explores approaches to monitoring and evaluation and institutional perceptions of the impact that these activities are having and any evidence of impact that is currently captured. Finally, in Chapter 6, we draw together key findings and outline the emerging issues for consideration by OFFA and HEFCE as they develop the national strategy for fair access and student success.

3| Institutional strategies for WP

3.1 This chapter explores how institutional strategic goals and priorities for WP have been shaped and influenced by the changing requirements of access agreements and associated spend. It explores the priority given to WP objectives at an institutional level by considering the:

> involvement and role of senior management in co-ordinating WP strategy;

> alignment of access agreements with WP strategy and wider institutional strategies;

> extent to which access agreements are reflecting or driving WP spend and activity;

> priorities given to outreach, financial support, retention and success.

3.2 Consideration is also given to the impact of access agreements on the planning and co-ordination of WP activities, focusing in particular on the infrastructure required to deliver WP activities, including organisational structures, staffing, equipment and resources, administrative challenges, and collaboration and partnership working. Finally, the chapter summarises the benefits and challenges that access agreements present for the development of institutional level WP strategy.

3.3 The chapter reveals that access agreements:

> **have helped to raise the profile and status of WP:** both within HEIs and across the wider HE sector;

> **have had a positive impact on strategic planning and priorities:** at an institutional level, ensuring resources are ring-fenced for WP;

> **are strongly aligned with wider institutional strategies:** institutions most commonly integrate their access agreement and wider WP strategy and combine all sources of WP income to form a single budget;

> **reflect rather than drive strategy:** they have helped to formalise and co-ordinate rather than transform institutional approaches to widening access, particularly in institutions where WP is a core activity. However, recent changes in the guidance from OFFA have led to an increasing focus on retention and success.

> **are challenging to co-ordinate and implement:** working with several access agreements concurrently, putting the additional infrastructure required to deliver on a larger scale in place, and sustaining partnerships all present key challenges for institutions.

Development and delivery of access agreements

3.4 Middle or senior managers typically have lead or shared responsibility for the production of access agreements. They consult with staff in a wide range of departments, who are then also involved in the delivery (Figure 3.1). The evidence suggests that the extent and nature of the departments involved in the development and delivery of access agreements and associated spend have contributed to them and WP objectives more generally, becoming more embedded and mainstreamed in most institutions.
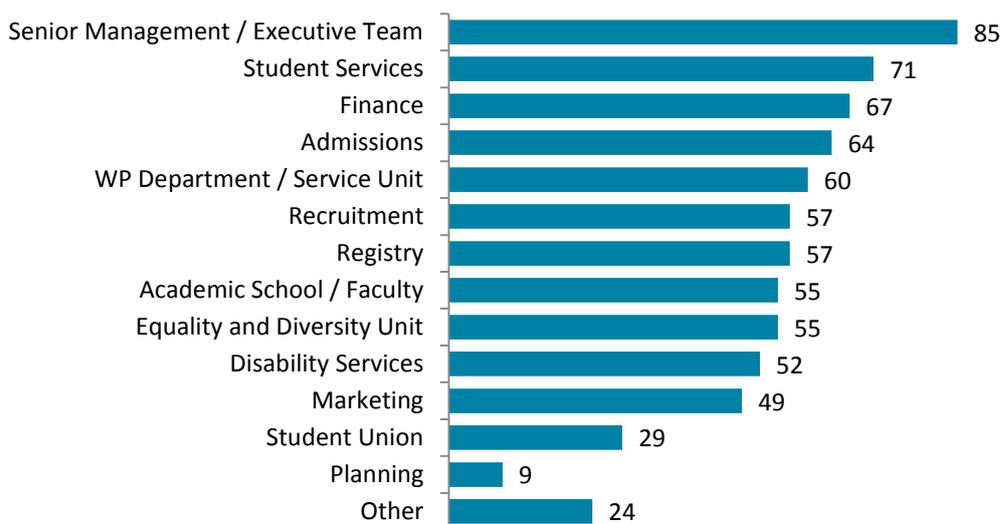

Figure 3.1: Departments involved in the development and delivery of access agreements and associated spend (Frequency. All respondents; base = 94).

3.5 Senior managers fulfil a crucial role in relation to the development and delivery of access agreements and associated spend. The in-depth interviews provided greater insight into the extent and nature of their role and, in particular, the importance of their buy-in to, and involvement in, the development process. Frequently, access agreements are viewed as 'legitimising' documents which help to communicate and reinforce the purpose, role and status of WP to all staff within an institution along with a justification of the associated spend and the importance of achieving (as well as the consequences of not achieving) the set goals and targets.

3.6 When senior managers contribute to developing and reviewing key elements of the access agreement, the profile of WP work across the institution is perceived to be raised. The work of operational and middle management staff working in dedicated WP departments is also given extra gravitas which helps to ensure that WP is viewed as an integral, rather than a peripheral, activity. The greater level of awareness and understanding of WP priorities and goals brought about by the access agreement and the status it is accorded by senior management is also perceived to help initiate new working relationships across institutions, thereby resulting in a much more joined-up and co-ordinated approach.

We have a much better integrated strategy now than we did two years ago. There's more buy-in from SMT. It's a more stringent process we go through to get it agreed internally and the access agreement is seen by a broader range of colleagues. It's given me in my role a better opportunity to take my work to other colleagues. It's raised the profile of WP. It's strengthened commitment to WP. It's easier for me to speak to other colleagues now. In the past I just worked with a few academic schools, now it's much more joined up.

<div align="right">Widening Participation, Selective Institution</div>

The agreements have become more consultative documents. I feel we have achieved greater buy-in to the process, and that in itself, would be a positive in terms of colleagues' perceptions of the value of the work that we do around access and retention.

<div align="right">Student Services, Inclusive Institution</div>

What the access agreement has enabled is a much clearer, more transparent focus, which is in the public domain so we are committed to it in a more quantifiable, measurable way. It's not just a strong value and a mission, but it's actually something where we have to demonstrate what we're doing. So I think that has been very helpful in terms of bringing people on board internally, but also in terms of demonstrating to our partners that we need to achieve together.

<div align="right">Lifelong Learning, Inclusive Institution</div>

Alignment of WP and institutional strategies

3.7 A further key benefit of senior management involvement in the development and delivery of access agreements is the opportunity this presents to ensure that WP is aligned with wider institutional priorities and strategies.

The access agreement would be reported on at major meetings, in strategy and planning and at financial committees. Occasionally it has been at various broader university groupings and council senate.

<div align="right">Widening Participation, Selective Institution</div>

3.8 There is evidence from the survey and the interviews that there is a strong degree of alignment between access agreements and the wider institutional WP strategy and other strategic missions of institutions. Figure 3.2 reveals that nearly two-thirds of institutions (59/92) have fully integrated their WP strategy and access agreement. Around one in five (17/92) have developed an approach where WP forms part of wider institutional strategies which are developed separately from the access agreement. Only one in ten (10/92) report that their institution has a stand-alone WP policy that is delivered separately from the access agreement. Around two-thirds (62/92) of institutions have also combined the funding generated from fee income with other sources of funding for WP, such as the HEFCE WP allocation, to form a single budget. This is discussed further in Chapter 4 (sections 4.21–4.24).
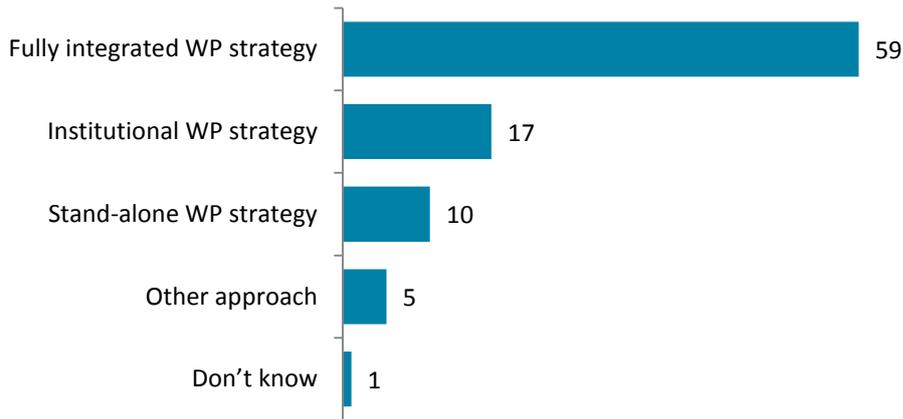
Fully integrated WP strategy — 59
Institutional WP strategy — 17
Stand-alone WP strategy — 10
Other approach — 5
Don't know — 1

Figure 3.2: Type of widening participation strategy in operation (Frequency. All respondents; base = 92).

3.9 There are no statistically significant differences in the approaches detailed in Figure 3.2 by level of WP spend or institutional type. Specialist institutions show a slight propensity towards stand alone strategies that are delivered separately from access agreements, but this difference has not been proven to be significant.

Prioritisation of WP objectives

Level of priority of WP

3.10   Looking across all institutional types, the research indicates that the requirement to produce an access agreement and associated spend has led to only marginal changes in the level of strategic priority given to WP, with institutions on average indicating only a very slight propensity to agree with this proposition (mean = 3.34). However, further analysis reveals that while almost one-quarter (21/93) disagree that access agreements have led to changes in the prioritisation of WP at their institution, nearly half (43/93) agree. (Figure 3.3).

8 | 13 | 26 | 26 | 17 | 3

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 ■ Don't know
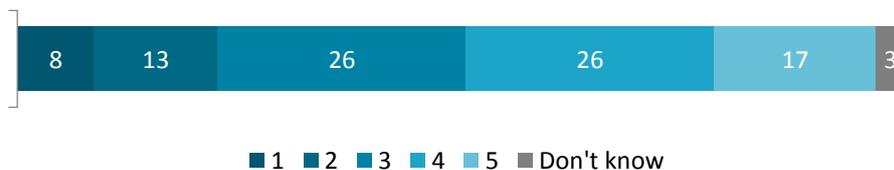
Figure 3.3: Extent of agreement with the statement 'the requirement to produce an access agreement has led to changes in the level of strategic priority of WP' (5-point scale, where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree') (Frequency. All respondents; base = 93).

3.11   Analysis by institutional type demonstrates that selective institutions (mean = 3.96) are more likely than other institutional types to demonstrate some agreement that access agreements have changed the level of priority accorded to WP, especially when compared with inclusive institutions (mean = 3.03) (Figure 3.4).

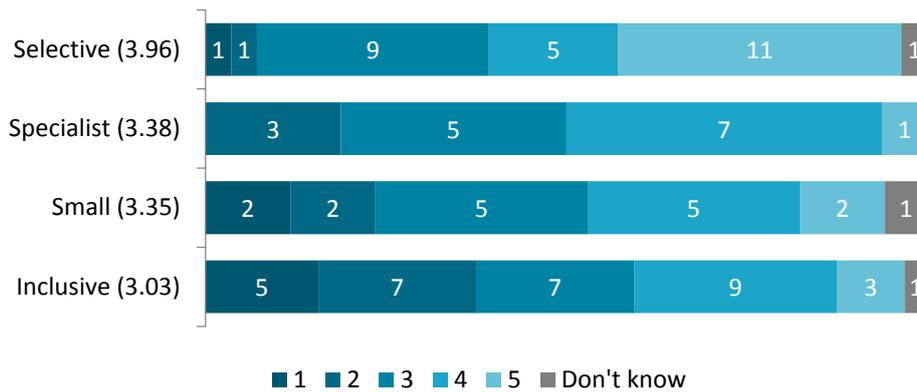|	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
Selective (3.96)	1	1	9	5	11	1
Specialist (3.38)		3	5	7	1	
Small (3.35)	2	2	5	5	2	1
Inclusive (3.03)	5	7	7	9	3	1

Figure 3.4: Level of agreement with the statement 'the requirement to produce an access agreement has led to changes in the level of strategic priority of WP' by institutional type (5-point scale, where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree') (Mean ratings in parentheses) (Frequency. All respondents; base = 93).

3.12   It is perhaps not surprising that the introduction of access agreements and associated spend is more likely to be having an impact on the level of priority given to WP at selective as opposed to inclusive institutions. Although, as the following quote indicates, many selective institutions would argue that they have always shown a commitment to WP, they have traditionally recruited fewer students from disadvantaged groups than inclusive institutions where WP typically forms part of their core mission.

> Long before there was an access agreement, the university was already extensively involved in WP work...every academic department is heavily engaged and investing resources because they believe in it...so if there were no access agreement? I would be inclined to think that there would be very little, if any, change.
>
> <div align="right">Recruitment, Selective institution</div>

In an attempt to widen access to institutions that have low proportions of students from under-represented groups, OFFA guidelines suggest that they should commit 30% of their additional fee income to access measures in their access agreement which is, at least in part, driving changes in priorities and behaviours in these institutions.

3.13   There is also evidence that access agreements have placed greater demands on some, particularly specialist institutions, which also report higher levels of agreement that access agreements have led to changes in the level of strategic priority accorded to WP than small and inclusive institutions. Like selective institutions, specialist institutions tend not to attract large proportions of WP students, but in contrast to some selective institutions, WP is still in its infancy in many institutions of this type. As illustrated below, the introduction of the access agreement and associated spend has prompted a number of specialist institutions to revisit their strategy, and this has supported the evolution of a more co-ordinated approach.

2012/13 was an immature OFFA agreement. We did the best we could at the time. Three years on and we're learning and we have changed the OFFA agreement. Now we are making big changes.

<p style="text-align:right;">External Relations, Specialist Institution</p>

Several years ago I think we had, probably, a very broad brush, shotgun approach to our WP outreach work, which was all lovely-jubbly but we didn't get our priorities right.

<p style="text-align:right;">Finance, Specialist Institution</p>

3.14   There is finally evidence that the introduction of the access agreement has led to a shift in emphasis in terms of the nature, as opposed to the level, of the strategic priorities for WP within some institutions. There is evidence that the requirement to monitor and evaluate performance against institutional targets and goals has caused some institutions to refocus their priorities on bolstering recruitment to their institution rather than on outreach activities such as aspiration raising. Although this appears to be particularly prevalent in the specialist institutions consulted, there is further evidence that access agreements are driving this type of behaviour in other types of institution (see Chapter 5).

The reality is that we've been very focused on raising aspirations and not really focused on entry but, obviously, with the introduction of the access agreement, we've had to reconsider that. So we've introduced some new initiatives that are hopefully going to help bridge that gap to some extent.

<p style="text-align:right;">Marketing, Specialist Institution</p>

3.15   In contrast, inclusive and small institutions have typically demonstrated a long-standing commitment to WP. They tend to target WP groups as part of their standard recruitment activities, and much of their activity in this area pre-dates dedicated state funding for WP and the requirement to commit institutional funding (through additional fee income). As a result, these institutions have a large proportion of students from lower SEGs and LPNs. WP forms part of their core institutional mission, and they are consequently less likely to agree that the introduction of access agreements and associated spend has led to changes in the level of priority accorded to WP overall. However, the recent shift in emphasis in the OFFA guidance towards retention and success for disadvantaged groups appears to have led to a corresponding shift in the nature of priorities, even in this type of institution (see paragraph 3.18 below).

Nature of priorities for WP

3.16   In order to further explore the nature and relative priority accorded to different aspects of WP within the HE sector, survey respondents were asked to rate the level of priority given to outreach, financial aid, retention and achievement in their institution using a seven point scale (where 1 is a 'low strategic priority' and 7 is a 'high strategic priority'). Respondents gave priority scores for two points in time: for the first year that the institution had an access agreement in place and for the year 2013/14 (current access agreement). It is important to note that almost three-quarters of the sample (n = 68) has had an access agreement in place every year since 2006/07 and so are able to

make comparisons between when access agreements were first implemented and current priorities, up to seven years later.

3.17   Figure 3.5 shows that, on average, the use of targeted financial support as a mechanism to widen access has remained a relatively stable strategic priority, scoring a mean score of 5.72 for the first year that an access agreement was in place and 5.94 for 2013/14. Outreach was, and remains, ranked as the highest priority of the four areas. Despite this, there has still been a marginal upward shift in the level of priority accorded to outreach activities, rising from an average of 5.91 in the first year access agreements were in place to an average of 6.31 for 2013/14. The evidence reveals that retention and success/achievement have become higher strategic priorities since access agreements were first put into place, reflecting recent shifts in policy and guidance in relation to these two areas. Improving retention amongst WP groups was ranked an average of 4.38 for the first year that access agreements were in place and has now risen to 5.52 for 2013/14. The corresponding figures for success and achievement are 4.14 and 5.32.
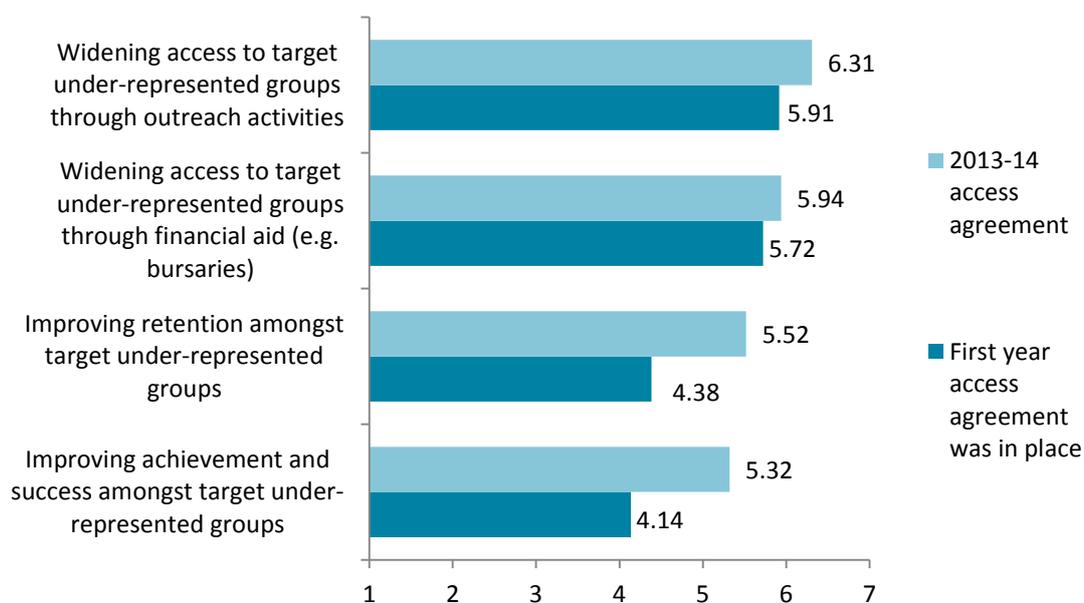
Figure 3.5: Comparison of the priority given to specified activities in the first year access agreement was in place with that given in 2013–2014 (7-point scale, where 1 = 'low priority' and 7 = 'high priority') (All respondents that had an access agreement in place prior to 2013-14. Mean ratings, variable bases).

3.18   As noted above, inclusive and small institutions which traditionally have higher proportions of WP students but experience higher drop-out rates are more likely than other institutional types to give a higher priority to improving achievement and success than other types of institution, although priority levels have risen for all groups since access agreements were first introduced (Table 3.1)

	Level of priority of 'improving achievement and success amongst target groups'	
Institutional type	Mean score for 1st year access agreement was in place	Mean score for 2013-14
Inclusive	4.64	6.16
Small	4.94	5.56
Selective	3.39	4.72
Specialist	3.43	4.50

Table 3.1: Mean scores for improving achievement and success amongst target groups by type of institution

3.19   The level of strategic priority given to each of these aspects of WP impacts on co-ordination of WP activities, financial planning and the extent and nature of activities delivered. The ways in which access agreements have impacted on the co-ordination of WP are explored below. The impact on the targeting of activities, financial planning and behaviour, including the relative balance of WP spend in each of the four areas and the process through which institutions arrive at decisions about the balance of spending, is explored in Chapter 4 (see paragraph 4.32).

Co-ordination and delivery of WP strategies

3.20   The in-depth interviews revealed that the requirement to produce an access agreement and associated spend has had a significant impact upon the co-ordination and delivery of WP strategies in many institutions. In particular, it has led to developments in institutional infrastructure and resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on collaboration and partnership working.

Infrastructure development

3.21   Institutions have been delivering a wide range of WP activities for a number of years, resourced at least in part through state funding such as the HEFCE WP allocation and more recently the NSP. However, the requirement for institutions to spend a proportion of their additional fee income on WP alongside this existing state-funded activity has meant that some institutions have had to develop new infrastructure to work alongside the infrastructure they already had in place. Major changes at an institutional level include the employment of specialist WP staff at managerial, practitioner and/or administrative level to co-ordinate and deliver WP activities and/or to monitor and evaluate progress against WP targets and goals, including those set out in the access agreement. There is also evidence of investment in the development of existing staff and training for student volunteers. The implementation of activities such as campus visits and summer schools in response to shifting WP priorities has also given rise to a number of practical and logistical challenges. Changes in infrastructure which allow class room space, accommodation and/or staff time to be used more flexibly have been implemented in order to address these issues in some institutions.

3.22   Developing new and existing infrastructure has cost implications for institutions, and several alluded to the fact that the scale and scope of their activity is directly linked to available resources. Some institutions reported that their strategic priorities and targets are shaped by resource constraints, but that these were not necessarily always financial:

> We've reached our limit actually, because all the outreach programmes depend on student ambassadors, and also with residential programmes, I've got to get the groups into college accommodation. So, it's actually quite difficult to expand the outreach activity further and still deliver quality programmes. Yes, in an ideal world, I would like to do that because I do know that the outreach is more effective, but actually it's not the finance that's the limiting factor, it's the other things.
>
> <div align="right">Admissions, Selective Institution</div>

> With the outreach, we've got targets that are based on what we can reasonably accommodate at the university and with the team that we've got... how big our rooms are, and the group sizes that we can actually transport to the university, that kind of thing, everything we do with schools requires transport, whether it's going out there and taking student ambassadors or whether it's bringing students in.
>
> <div align="right">Lifelong Learning, Inclusive Institution</div>

Collaboration and partnership working

3.23   Partnership and collaborative approaches are widely adopted in the delivery of WP objectives. Institutions frequently work directly with primary and secondary schools and FECs that are based locally, and sometimes regionally and nationally, in order to raise aspirations and/or attainment and to implement compact and progression agreements that facilitate access to HE for under-represented groups. There is also evidence of collaborative partnerships between HEIs, with many institutions working proactively to sustain the networks and legacy created by Aimhigher[10] and Lifelong Learning Networks[11]. Some institutions are also involved in local, regional and national WP forums and government reviews.

3.24   Although there are a number of risks and challenges involved in partnership working, the majority of institutions also recognise a number of key benefits. The main advantages of partnership working were perceived to be the opportunity to share good practice, develop shared models for training and professional development, reduce potential duplication in delivery within the same geographical area, and gain recognition from OFFA by documenting partnership activity within the access agreement. However, as with the development of institutional infrastructure, time and resources are required in order to establish and maintain partnerships and networks. In the absence of funding for initiatives like Aimhigher this cost is being absorbed by either institutions or individuals:

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[10] Aimhigher was created in 2004 through the integration of two earlier initiatives, Partnerships for Progression (P4P) and Excellence Challenge. The initiative operated until 2011 and brought together a wide range of partners, including universities, colleges, schools, training providers and the Connexions Service, delivering initiatives to WP in HE in England, particularly among students from non-traditional backgrounds, minority groups and disabled persons.

[11] Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) were funded by HEFCE from 2004 and 2012, with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) as key partners. They were designed to allow easier access and progression routes through FE and HE, particularly for vocational learners.

I think the partnership approach was something that we had committed to knowing Aimhigher was coming to an end. Maintaining those links, maintaining those partnerships, making them varied and making them valuable rather than just cursory, that has taken a lot of time and a lot of effort. Therefore, we have had to invest quite considerably in them. I think they're very beneficial, but I don't think I would be the first person to say that we're probably effectively working doubly as hard as a result of that reduced funding and reduced support to make the same sort of things happen.

<div align="right">Student Services, Inclusive Institution</div>

3.25   In some instances, the institutional funding raised through the access agreement provides the flexibility to plug funding gaps:

Until last year we supported the Aimhigher summer school, then we ran our own summer school. Without the structure we have now [access agreement] we would have struggled to have cash to pay for that. We have developed the Aimhigher associates team where we maintain a student-mentoring scheme. Prior to 2012/13 it was voluntary, now we pay for it. We are appointing four interns in September – two with the WP access scheme and two in retention. We have run a common purpose week. It was quite expensive. It is good to experiment with different employability and retention events. We can do this through our access agreement; without it, we couldn't continue.

<div align="right">External Relations, Inclusive Institution</div>

3.26   A minority of mainly selective institutions are cautious about delivering outreach activities in partnerships because they perceive that they are competing with other HEIs in the same locality or region for students. Furthermore, institutions perceive that it is more challenging to evidence the impact of collaborative outreach activity that seeks to raise aspirations generally than the impact of activities that are designed to boost the number of applicants to an individual institution. For these reasons much of the collaborative activity is focused on pre-16 education in some institutions:

We've actually run training seminars for other universities on our model [approach to success and employability for WP groups]. I think that it's going to stop, quite frankly, because we are competing for students, you know, and obviously we've got...to ensure that we hit our recruitment targets[12]. I'd argue too that most of our students are engaged with thinking about employability from the start of their degree. We're not that keen to share that to be honest, you know.

<div align="right">Recruitment and Outreach, Selective Institution</div>

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[12] OFFA does not require institutions to hit metric targets on recruitment. OFFA looks for progress over time and, where progress has not been as much as hoped, asks institutions to provide a commentary that explains the circumstances and context around this.

In order to alleviate this perceived tension, some institutions separate out WP and recruitment activities:

> The things that my widening participation team does are quite distinct. We're not part of any other department so it's completely separate from student recruitment...So the work that my team does is impartial; we're not trying to recruit to [name of institution]... We've made a decision to cut off our impartial WP activities at the end of Year 11, and then our recruitment team takes over for post-16.
>
> <div align="right">Lifelong Learning, Inclusive Institution</div>

3.27   The recent focus in OFFA guidance on collaborative targets has prompted the growth of partnerships between selective and inclusive institutions across wider geographical areas. The key advantage of collaborations of this nature is that the institutions are not perceived to be in direct competition with each other for students. However, collaborative targets can be hard to agree when institutional sizes and missions are very different:

> We collaborate with [name of two universities]. They are very different types of universities, and therefore I feel quite able to just pick up the phone, ask a question, because we're not in competition in terms of our widening participation work.[However] I think the collaborative targets are not as strong as they might be...We all have such different missions and sizes that it's quite difficult to have collaborative targets that meet all of our respective agendas. We are trying to make them tighter.
>
> <div align="right">Lifelong Learning, Inclusive Institution</div>

Benefits and challenges of access agreements

Benefits

3.28   Access agreements are perceived to deliver a range of institutional benefits which impact at both a strategic and operational level. Key strategic benefits include securing the buy-in of senior management, formalising approaches to WP and facilitating the development of a more co-ordinated and joined-up strategy, assisting with the planning and targeting of WP expenditure and activities, and implementing robust systems for monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure strategic priorities and targets are evidence informed.

> The access agreement, the WPSA and our institutional strategy for WP - they're strongly integrated. We've had a WP strategy continuously, that's been there all the time, and that has always had a full student lifecycle approach to it. When the access agreements came along, I suppose the difference is the financial bit which is now dealt with much more directly by the senior management team and our assistant Vice Chancellor.
>
> <div align="right">Lifelong Learning, Inclusive Institution</div>

I would say that it [access agreement] has really increased our targeting of what we do and how we look at the effectiveness of what we do. Especially in January 2014, we will have to show to OFFA the effectiveness of our targeting, that what we do is genuinely aimed at those schools and colleges and students that need it the most. So that's, kind of, focused our mind a lot more since the tuition fees changed, because we know we will have to report on it a lot more to OFFA in the future.

<div align="right" style="color:teal">Recruitment and Outreach, Selective Institution</div>

3.29   At an operational level, access agreements are perceived to effectively raise the profile of WP amongst staff across all departments, ensure staff understand the role of WP units and their role in relation to the achievement of WP objectives, and support the mainstream WP activities. Importantly, access agreements are also perceived to lead to better outcomes for institutions, thereby resulting in improved access, retention and success for specific priority groups:

What we do is focus on delivery and getting out there ourselves - involving our own students in working with young people doing after school mentoring, through residentials and that sort of thing.....We also view that involving our academics in this activity is crucial. We've got 30 to 40 different master classes taking place every year and that involves 50 to 60 academic staff. That's ten percent of our total academic population involved in engaging with young people from lower socioeconomic groups, even before they come.

<div align="right" style="color:teal">Recruitment and Outreach, Selective Institution</div>

3.30   Figure 3.6 (overleaf) provides a succinct summary of the range of unprompted responses that survey respondents provided when asked to list up to three key benefits of access agreements and associated spend. The most commonly cited benefits are the opportunities to improve monitoring and evaluation procedures and/or targeting of activities (n = 22). Raising the profile of WP (n = 21) and securing buy-in to WP at a strategic level (n = 19) were also regarded as key benefits of the access agreement.

Figure 3.6: What are the three main benefits to your institution in co-ordinating and delivering access agreements and associated spend? (Frequency. All respondents. Open responses coded by theme; base = 68).

Challenges

3.31   Figure 3.7 documents the challenges faced by institutions in developing and delivering access agreements and associated spend. It is interesting to note that many of the issues raised have associated benefits as well as challenges which can be realised if the challenging aspects can be overcome. Monitoring and evaluation provides a case in point. Although institutions recognise the benefit of putting systems and procedures in place to assess their performance and the impact of their activities, this is also commonly regarded as the most challenging aspect of the access agreement (n = 28). This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

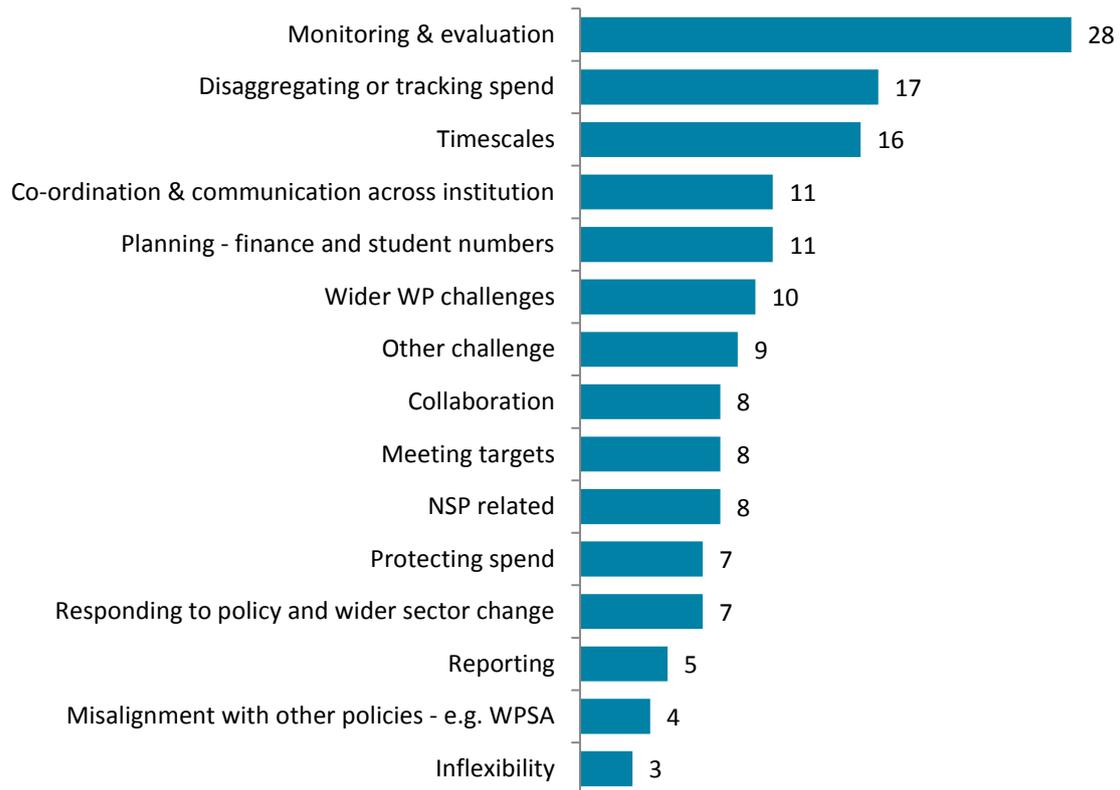| Challenge	Frequency
Monitoring & evaluation	28
Disaggregating or tracking spend	17
Timescales	16
Co-ordination & communication across institution	11
Planning - finance and student numbers	11
Wider WP challenges	10
Other challenge	9
Collaboration	8
Meeting targets	8
NSP related	8
Protecting spend	7
Responding to policy and wider sector change	7
Reporting	5
Misalignment with other policies - e.g. WPSA	4
Inflexibility	3

Figure 3.7: What are the three main challenges to your institution in co-ordinating and delivering access agreements and associated spend? (Frequency. All respondents. Open responses coded by theme; base = 71).

3.32   The majority of other challenges raised by survey respondents and interviewees are administrative and often reflect the size and nature of the institution. Large universities, whether they are research-intensive or teaching-led, tend to have specialist WP departments that work alongside dedicated teams for admissions and recruitment, marketing, finance, planning, and evaluation. Many of the staff working in these specialist roles have the requisite skills along with the appropriate systems and processes in place to respond to the administrative and reporting requirements of funders and regulatory bodies. They feel able and competent to prepare access agreements and, on the whole, can quickly and intuitively respond to information requests, including completing monitoring returns.

3.33   Small and specialist institutions, on the other hand, often do not have the same capacity and capability, and individuals rather than teams assume responsibility for key aspects of WP, including the access agreement. This type of institution tends to regard the preparation of access agreements and monitoring returns as time-consuming and bureaucratic. They are also more likely to find evaluation more challenging (see Chapter 5, paragraph 5.6). The cost of putting the appropriate infrastructure in place is regarded as prohibitive and disproportionate given the relatively small number of students affected by the access agreement and the level of spend committed to WP overall.

> Because we're so tiny, we don't have some of the departments that other institutions have, and obviously we don't have any research staff. So it ends up being people like myself and a few other staff that perhaps haven't normally had to be so involved in this area, having to put in a huge amount of extra time. So, it's been very difficult from that point of view; we've not brought in any extra staff to cope with that, we've just had to do it.
>
> Marketing, Specialist Institution

3.34   Institutions set course fees annually and are, therefore, required to produce an access agreement for each academic year setting out how they will utilise a proportion of their additional fee income for WP activities. Access agreements are currently produced in advance (institutions had just submitted their agreement for 2014/15 to OFFA for approval at the time of writing) and monitoring returns are necessarily completed retrospectively (the most recent published data relate to 2011/12). As a consequence, institutions are working with access agreements pertaining to up to three academic years at one time. Although the guidance for institutions is regarded as clear and helpful, the extent and nature of the tasks involved and the frequency with which they must be completed is perceived to be extremely resource intensive, particularly in terms of staff time, and this is compounded by the requirement to produce a WPSA (see Chapter 4):

> It's a never ending process, because every year is going to have a different challenge and every year is going to have a different demographic student population, and every year is going to have lots of funding constraints. How will we then try and build up a deliverable access agreement? That's where the challenge comes in.
>
> Student Services, Inclusive Institution

> There has been really quite a significant impact in terms of staff time, in terms of developing the thing and monitoring it...The guidance is very clear, I think it's just the sheer frequency of it means that it has become this huge thing.
>
> Student Recruitment, Selective Institution

3.35   Furthermore, some institutions are concerned that the timeframe for producing the access agreement limits the extent to which institutions can evaluate their activities and then utilise the good practice and lessons learned to inform the development of new targets and goals. Although OFFA encourages institutional diversity and is prepared to consider in-year amendments to approved access agreements in response to shifting priorities or approaches, there is also a perception amongst some institutions that the current system is not very flexible or responsive to change.

One of the problems is the timescales. We have had to submit the OFFA agreement for 2014/15 without having seen results from this year. Working with our student union there are some things we would like to change now but we have already committed to them...If something really radical happens you should be able to change your access agreement. Next year we are committed to some things that we have terminated.

External Relations, Inclusive Institution

We've had to write access agreements before we knew what the outcomes were from previous things...We wanted to go back to OFFA and say, 'Well, actually can we change the 2013/14 one?' So we got into some dialogue with them to check whether we could make what felt were quite big changes so it's now wait and see whether that's going to be accepted. If it's not, then, it's a bit difficult for us to plan what we're going to do in 2017 because we've, sort of, changed our minds, really.

Marketing, Specialist Institution

3.36   Those responsible for access agreements would, therefore, like greater flexibility to make alterations if evidence comes to light that alternative approaches and strategies might help them to achieve their targets more effectively and efficiently. There were also calls to reduce the frequency with which new access agreements have to be produced. Although any revised system would need to take account of the fact that fees are set on an annual basis, the possibility of producing an access agreement that covers multi academic years but which is reviewed and updated annually could be explored.

Summary

3.37   There is a strong alignment between access agreements and wider institutional strategies. In this context, access agreements are particularly effective at bringing a range of WP activities supported by different funding sources together into one coherent reference document which can be shared widely. Even where WP strategies and access agreements are less integrated, access agreements can help to facilitate comparisons with parallel or related work, thus ensuring a fuller understanding of the wider WP landscape is developed. They also encourage more evidence-informed and considered responses to the challenges of WP from institutions, although institutional constraints mean that some institutions find the monitoring and evaluation requirements more challenging than others and would benefit from further support and guidance in this area.

3.38   Inclusive and small institutions view WP as a core activity, and on average they neither agree nor disagree that access agreements have led to changes in the level of strategic priority given to WP. In this context, access agreements reflect institutions' long-standing commitment to WP and well-established approaches rather than drive new behaviours. However, the shift in emphasis in the OFFA guidance has resulted in some inclusive institutions becoming more focused on student retention and success. Conversely, selective and specialist institutions recognise that the introduction of access agreements and associated spend has placed greater demands on them to widen access for under-represented groups and increased the priority accorded to WP.

3.39   Collaboration and partnership working is widespread, encouraged by the recent focus in the OFFA guidance on collaborative targets. A number of the more developed partnerships and networks have evolved from the legacy of Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs). Partnership working provides opportunities to share good practice, undertake joint training and professional development and reduce duplication, which all contribute to greater efficiencies. However, competition between institutions is perceived to be a barrier to collaboration by some and can militate against the delivery of activities that benefit HE as a whole, particularly in an environment where institutions are required to evidence the impact of their own outreach work.

3.40   Overall, access agreements are viewed positively across the sector. The key benefits they deliver include more formalised, co-ordinated and embedded approaches to WP that are underpinned by wider institutional and senior management team support. They are perceived to help raise the profile and status of WP and can help to facilitate new working relationships within and between institutions.

3.41   The research identified some challenges associated with the realisation of strategic goals and priorities for WP through access agreements. These include developing the infrastructure to deliver WP activities and the associated monitoring requirements on a larger scale, the annual cycle for the production of access agreements, and a perceived lack of opportunities to amend approved agreements in light of experience and research evidence.

4| Approaches to WP delivery

4.1 This chapter examines approaches to delivering the WP strategies outlined in access agreements. In particular it explores the extent to which access agreements and associated spend have delivered additionality in terms of expanding the extent and nature, as well as the reach, of the activities delivered. It also considers the extent to which access agreements have facilitated greater innovation or creativity in approaches to WP. The chapter then considers the impact of access agreements on budgeting decisions by examining two key areas: the level of integration of additional fee income with other sources of WP funding; and the levels of spend. The factors that influence the balance of spending between financial and non-financial sources of support and between outreach and retention are also examined.

4.2 The chapter reveals that:

> **Access agreements have delivered additionality**; most institutions have piloted or delivered new activities (albeit on a small scale) and all institutions have used additional fee income to continue and/or expand existing activities, concentrating on what is known to work most effectively.

> Two-thirds of institutions integrate additional fee income with other sources of WP funding, financing WP activities from an **integrated budget**. Whilst this approach is efficient and helps to achieve economies of scale, some institutions find it difficult to disaggregate the impact of, and outcomes from, the different sources of funding and are calling for closer integration of different WP funding streams.

> **Institutional budgets for WP vary** according to the institutional size, mission and the number of WP students enrolled.

> Overall there are **wide variations in ratio of funding** allocated to financial and non-financial support and to outreach and retention activities. These variations reflect the individual characteristics and priorities for WP of different institutions as well as the needs of diverse student populations. However, **most institutions are allocating at least 60% of the WP budget to financial support and between 20% and 30% to outreach and retention activities**. The amount of resource committed to management and evaluation costs in access agreements appears to be low, around 10% or less. This could be because institutions are funding this activity in other ways, or because the cost is being fully absorbed by institutions.

Target groups

4.3 The interim report of the National Strategy for Access and Student Success stated that HEIs are targeting a wide range of under-represented groups, including those living in LPNs, those from lower SEGs and those from families with a low household income, along with mature entrants, care leavers, first generation HE entrants, entrants from black and minority ethnic groups (BME) and disabled entrants. The survey results corroborated these earlier findings, with the 15 most frequently reported target groups outlined in Figure 4.1.

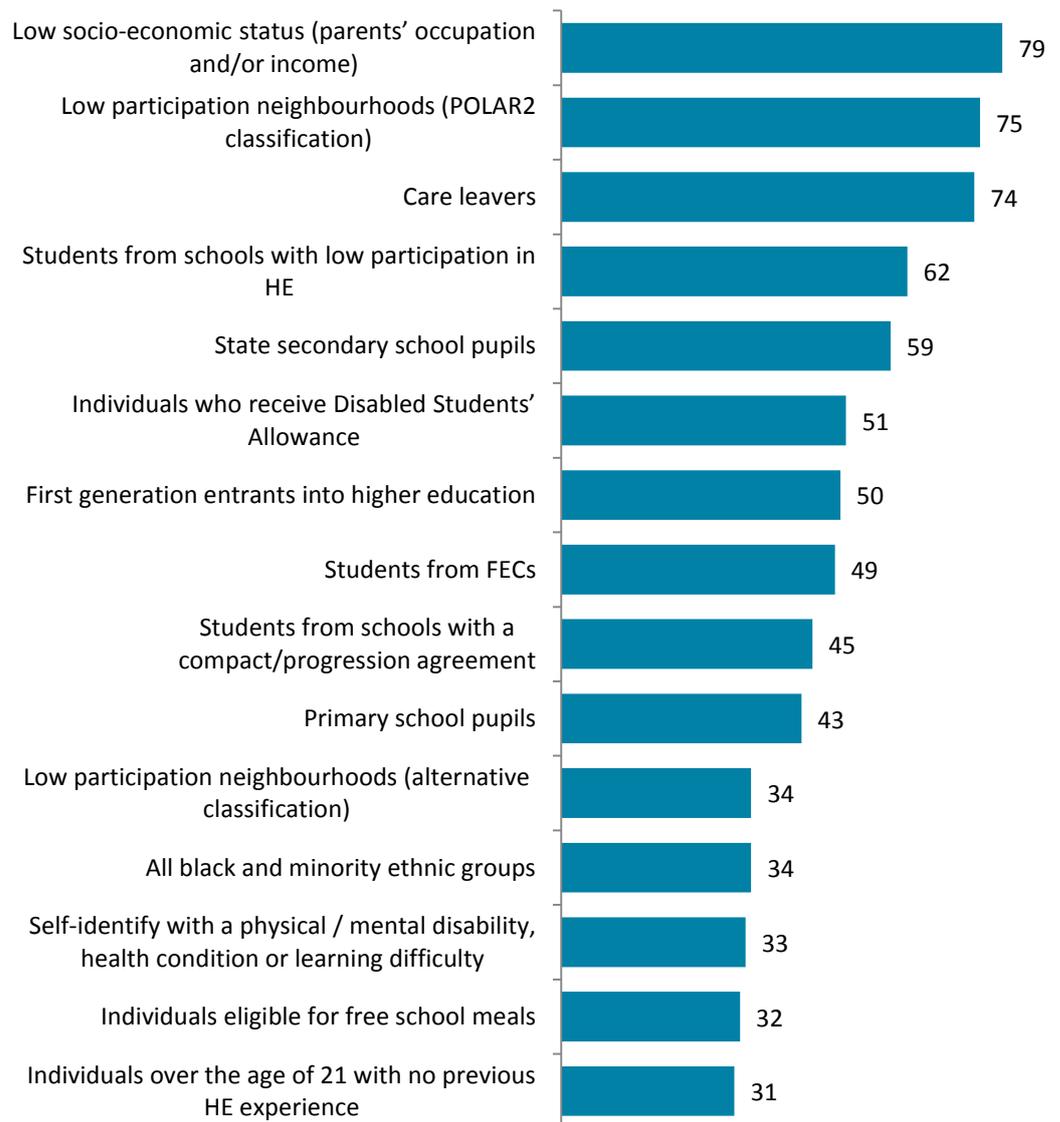| Target group	Frequency
Low socio-economic status (parents' occupation and/or income)	79
Low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR2 classification)	75
Care leavers	74
Students from schools with low participation in HE	62
State secondary school pupils	59
Individuals who receive Disabled Students' Allowance	51
First generation entrants into higher education	50
Students from FECs	49
Students from schools with a compact/progression agreement	45
Primary school pupils	43
Low participation neighbourhoods (alternative classification)	34
All black and minority ethnic groups	34
Self-identify with a physical / mental disability, health condition or learning difficulty	33
Individuals eligible for free school meals	32
Individuals over the age of 21 with no previous HE experience	31

Figure 4.1: Which of the following groups is your institution targeting through its access agreement and associated spend for 2013-14? (Frequency. Top 15 responses. All respondents; base = 94).

4.4 The three groups that figured most prominently included 'individuals with low socio-economic status based on parental occupational classification and/or income' (n = 79), 'individuals from LPNs using the POLAR2 classification'[13], (n = 75) and 'care leavers' (n = 74). 'Low socio-economic status' was further reinforced as a target group by the inclusion of 'individuals eligible for free school meals' (n = 31) and, by association, 'students from schools with a compact or progression agreement' (n = 43), as individuals attending these schools tend to be from lower socio-economic backgrounds. 'Low participation groups,' defined at individual, family or neighbourhood levels, formed a key target group. In addition to POLAR2, 34 institutions targeted LPNs using an alternative classification. 62 targeted students from schools with low HE participation levels, 50 targeted first generation entrants and 31 targeted individuals over the age of 21 with no previous HE experience. Individuals with disabilities featured prominently as a target group, with 51 institutions targeting those in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and 33 targeting individuals who self identify with a range of physical, mental or learning disabilities or conditions.

4.5 Institutions of all types target students from low SEGs and LPNs. However, further analysis revealed some statistically significant differences in the targeting behaviour of different institutional types. Selective institutions show a greater tendency than other institutional types to target first generation entrants to HE (20/29 compared to the total sample 50/94) and those eligible for free school meals (15/29 compared to the total sample of 30/94). Inclusive institutions showed a greater tendency than other institutional types to target 'all BME groups' (15/32 compared to the total sample of 34/94).

4.6 There are some statistically significant differences by WP spend quartile. Perhaps unsurprisingly, institutions with larger budgets (quartiles 3 and 4) are able to target some groups with a greater degree of frequency than those with smaller budgets (quartiles 2 and 1). Figure 4.2 (overleaf) highlights this pattern for the target groups where statistically significant differences have emerged.

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[13] POLAR2 classification is used by HEFCE and measures rates of young people's participation in HE and the number of adults with HE qualifications in different areas.
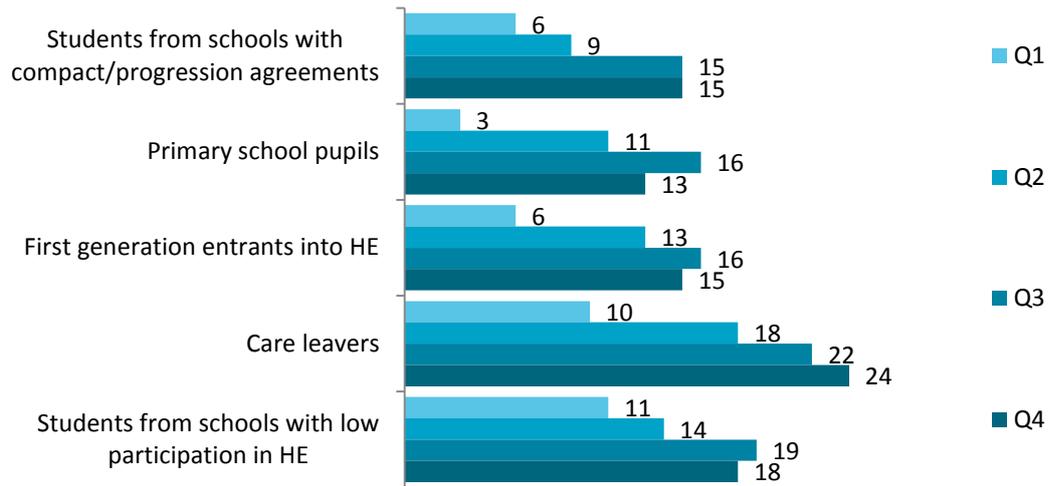
Figure 4.2: Statistically significant differences in target groups by quartile spend. (Frequency. All respondents; base = 94).

4.7 Only 10/94 institutions state that the WP groups targeted through their access agreement are different to those targeted through other sources of WP funding. Nine of these institutions are targeting individuals from low SEGs and LPNs with other sources of WP funding rather than through the additional fee income committed in the access agreements. A handful of the 10 institutions reported that they were targeting new groups with other sources of WP funding that were not being targeted through their access agreements. These groups included students within the institution who are targeted for assistance in progressing from Level 3 to HE courses (4 institutions) and individuals with low entry qualifications (2 institutions).

4.8 The extent to which the introduction of access agreements has impacted on the way in which target groups are defined varies considerably across the sector. A total of 27 institutions disagreed that 'access agreements and the associated spend have prompted our institution to redefine our target WP groups' compared with 30 that neither agreed nor disagreed and 40 that agreed. Although the results are not statistically significant, specialist institutions (mean = 3.62) and selective institutions (mean = 3.13) expressed marginally higher levels of agreement than inclusive institutions (mean = 3.00) and small institutions (mean = 2.80), perhaps reflecting the fact that inclusive and small institutions already have large and relatively diverse WP student populations and that widening access is a higher order priority for selective and specialist institutions.

Activities supported

4.9 The findings suggest that overall access agreements and associated spend have funded activities that would not have been possible otherwise in the majority of institutions. Seven out of ten survey respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with this statement (56/81), compared with just 18 who *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* (Figure 4.3). Further analysis reveals that, on average, selective institutions are more likely to agree that access agreements and associated spend have funded activities that would not have been possible otherwise when compared to other respondents (mean = 4.10, compared with 3.67).
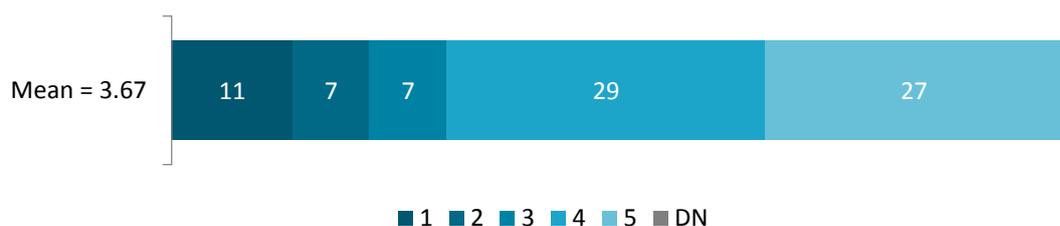

Figure 4.3: Extent of agreement that access agreements and associated spend have funded activities that would not otherwise have been possible. (5-point scale, where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree") (Frequency. All respondents; base = 81).

4.10 In order to more fully understand the extent to which access agreements are driving institutional behaviour in relation to delivery, respondents were prompted to indicate whether access agreements and associated spend had enabled their institution to continue provision at the same level, enhance existing provision, pilot new activity, and/or deliver new activity in relation to outreach, applications and admissions, financial support, and retention and success.

4.11 The analysis reveals that institutions are more likely to report that access agreements and associated spend have led to the continuation or enhancement of existing activities than to the piloting or introduction of new activities. Although most have introduced new activities on a small scale, the additional finance raised through fee income principally enables them to deliver more of what they know or suspect works. Most of the new activity being piloted or delivered is financial support driven by government initiatives such as the NSP, along with institutional scholarships, fee waivers and subsidies.

4.12 The range of activities supported by access agreements is considered in paragraphs 4.13 to 4.16 below.

Outreach

4.13   Institutions most commonly report that their access agreement and associated spend has enabled them to enhance their existing outreach provision, and very few institutions indicate that they are piloting and delivering new activities. The outreach activities that are most likely to have been enhanced by access agreements include work in secondary schools and colleges (69/91), provision of information, advice and guidance for target groups (55/90), campus visits (51/90), summer schools and other residential activities (47/88), mentoring of target groups (45/89) and preparation for HE study/academic skills development (42/88). (See Appendix 3: Figure 6.6 for a full breakdown of outreach activities).

Applications and admissions

4.14   In relation to applications and admissions, access agreements were again found to enable institutions to continue or expand existing provision. The activities that were most likely to be enhanced were advice and guidance in preparing the UCAS form (46/88) and progression routes for non-traditionally qualified students (31/89). The area that was most likely to be piloted or newly delivered was the 'use of contextual data in admissions' (out of 89 responses, 20 had piloted activity in this area and 8 had delivered new activity in this area). CFE's recent research on the uses and impact of HEFCE WP allocations identified a tension here between the policy to lift the cap on ABB+ students and WP objectives (given many WP students do not typically achieve at this level). In this context, some institutions may be less inclined to reduce entry requirements and take account of wider contextual factors in recruitment processes. (See Appendix 3: Figure 6.7 for a full breakdown of applications and admissions activities).

Financial support

4.15   Financial support is one area of WP activity where access agreements and associated spend are adding most value, with institutions commonly reporting they are piloting and delivering new activities in this area. In terms of the delivering of new activities, 39/86 report that they have implemented 'fee waivers'; 38/91 have newly introduced 'match funding for NSP scholarships' (most were already delivering NSP; 1 institution indicated they were not delivering match funding for NSP); 26/92 have provided 'institutional bursaries or scholarships that are not NSP funded' and 20/86 have offered 'free or subsidised accommodation, maintenance or equipment'. There are also a number of existing financial support activities that have continued or been enhanced, most notably the provision of 'institutional bursaries', 'financial advice services' and 'information about fee structures and repayment options'. (See Appendix 3: Figure 6.8 for a full breakdown of financial support activities).

Retention and success

4.16   In terms of retention and success, institutions are more likely to report the continuation or enhancement of existing activities than the piloting or introduction of new activities. The retention and success activities that are most likely to have been enhanced by access agreements include 'career focused information, advice and guidance' (46/88), 'pastoral support and counselling' (40/87), 'academic skills development/study skills support' (39/89) and 'work with employers/employability activities/work placements' (33/89). These areas broadly mirror those that were most likely to be piloted or involve the delivery of new activities, including 'induction services targeted at WP students' (19 out of 90 had piloted and 10 had delivered new activity), 'work with employers/employability/work placements' (17 had piloted and 12 had delivered new activity, out of 89), and 'career focused information, advice and guidance' (13 had piloted and 12 had delivered new activity, out of 88). (See Appendix 3: Figure 6.9 for a full breakdown of retention and success activities).

Creativity and innovation

4.17   Institutions express mixed opinions about whether access agreements and associated spend have enabled more creative or innovative approaches to WP. As outlined above, most institutions have used additional fee income to trial and deliver some new approaches, especially different types of financial support, but this is typically on a very small scale:

> I would say yes to creativity because it [access agreement] did prompt us to come up with some new initiatives...We had reports internally about the value of [name of activity] fee waivers for some time, but it was the access agreement, really, that sparked us to do that. We were having quite a lot of people not turning up to [name of activity], and that was one of the things that we were watching, and thinking, 'The cost is actually quite a barrier.' So it was very helpful to be able to introduce that and find a way of doing it that wasn't administratively difficult.
>
> Marketing, Specialist Institution

4.18   The majority of activity funded through access agreements is not new or additional, but instead is an extension of existing provision. While this is perceived to bring benefits, in terms of the scale of activity it is questionable whether this represents innovation.

> It's [access agreement and associated spend] certainly enabled us to adjust in terms of the scale, yes, I mean to deliver on a larger scale, but to what extent it's innovative I don't know, but certainly there are things that we're doing that we wouldn't have been able to do otherwise.
>
> Admissions, Selective Institution

4.19   A minority of institutions perceive that the requirement to demonstrate the impact of WP activities can actually serve to stifle innovation and creativity because it encourages institutions to deliver activities that are perceived to be 'safer' (i.e. proven to be effective) and more easily measured.

> I think, if anything, there's less creativity and innovation because it's [activities] got to be measurable, you've got to track it, it's got to be evaluated. Some things can't be measured - you definitely cannot tell in five years time the impact of somebody coming in here for a taster day. That is troublesome...it is not promoting creative, innovative approaches, it's making, you know, institutions more insular, more focused.
>
> Finance, Specialist Institution

Expenditure on WP

4.20 This section reviews WP expenditure, providing statistical analysis of:

> the sources of income used to fund access agreements;

> expenditure models for planning and managing WP budgets;

> WP budgets and spend.

Income sources

4.21 The majority of survey respondents indicate that at least one other source of funding, in addition to fee income, is being used to fund their 2013/14 access agreement, and only 7/92 reported no other sources of income were being used. The vast majority are combining state funding for WP with institutional fee income. Of the 92 institutions that provided a response, 86 explicitly referenced funding from the NSP[14], 64 mentioned the HEFCE allocation and 7 reported that they were financing activities with other sources of national government funding. External sponsorship and philanthropic donations are the most commonly utilised source of non-state funding (n = 34) (Figure 4.4).
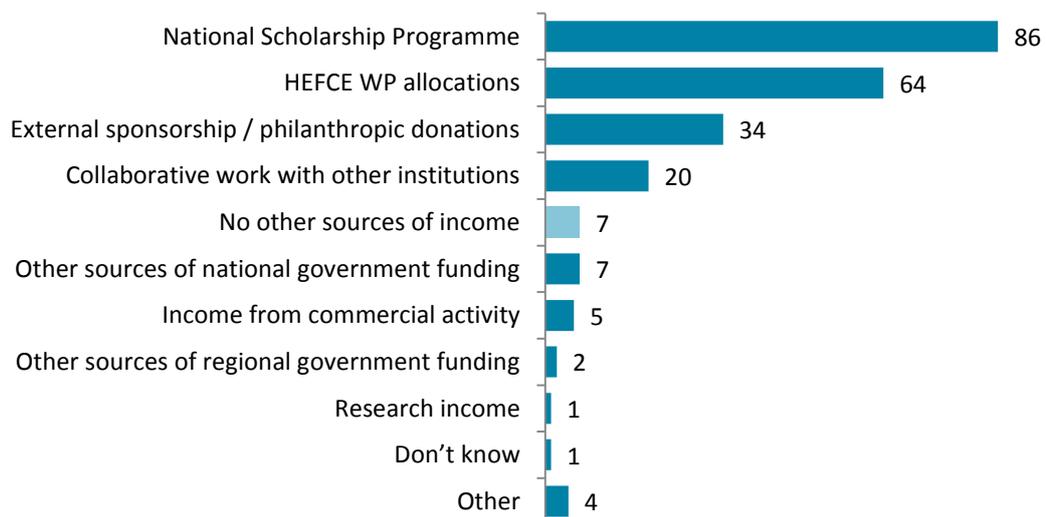

Figure 4.4: Other sources of income that will be used to fund access agreement for 2013-14 (Frequency. All respondents; base = 92).

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[14] It should be noted that all institutions with an access agreement deliver the NSP as a requirement and institutional plans for the delivery of the NSP are included in the access agreement. The Government's contribution to the NSP will, therefore, contribute to the funding for access agreements in all institutions.

Models for planning and managing WP budgets

4.22 Two-thirds (62/92) of institutions integrate additional fee income with other sources of WP funding, and activities are subsequently funded from an integrated budget. One in five (20/92) institutions use additional fee income to fund distinct activities separate from those supported by other funding streams (Figure 4.5). Small institutions are slightly more likely than other types of institution to have an integrated pot of money, but this difference is not statistically significant.
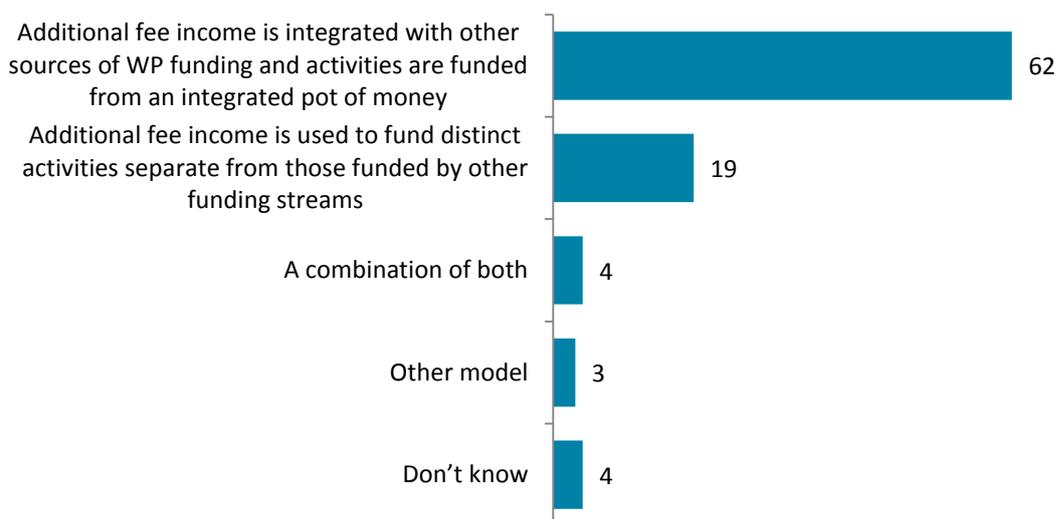

Figure 4.5: The way in which WP budget is planned and managed within institutions (Frequency. All respondents; base = 92).

4.23 Institutions prefer the integrated model because when multiple sources of funding are combined, activities can be mainstreamed and delivered on a larger scale which is more efficient. Furthermore, funding is more straightforward to administer in this way as allocating smaller sums of money from different sources to specific projects is more problematic. Finally, integrated WP budgets underpinned by a comprehensive access agreement which provides a framework for financial planning and budgetary decisions are also perceived to help embed a culture of inclusion and diversity across academic departments and wider institutional structures such as committees.

4.24 However, a key drawback of the integrated approach is disaggregating the impacts and outcomes of different funding streams for monitoring purposes. There is evidence that many institutions experience difficulties when accounting for the different types of expenditure and they are unsure how to align their activities with the different monitoring requirements of HEFCE, OFFA and, in some cases, local government and the EU. In particular, respondents commented that it is difficult to keep track in terms of what has to be produced, when, and for whom and of the different processes associated with WPSAs and access agreements:

The thing that does cause us headaches is that lack of alignment with the WPSA. I know that it is a big stress...there is always that confusion – do we report this in terms of our WPSA money or is it something that we report to OFFA? I think in an ideal world, we would like to see those documents become far more in line, well not even in line, I'd like to see it as being one document.

<div align="right">Student Services, Inclusive Institution</div>

I mean I would have thought that WPSAs and access agreements could be the same thing? The only reason why they exist separately is because the access agreement is all about additional fee income, whereas the WPSA is about the totality of your spend on outreach work...according to our access agreement we don't spend any money on outreach but we do spend £2.5 million a year, and the WPSA was designed to try and cover that off. I would have thought that you could end up with a single document, and that would reduce the headache.

<div align="right">Recruitment, Selective Institution</div>

4.25   The evidence suggests, therefore, that there is widespread support for the proposed integration of WPSAs and access agreements. Some institutions are also calling for more formal integration of WP funding sources. Policy makers could usefully consider what, if any, value disaggregating the impact of different funding sources adds as well as what the relative merits of measuring outcomes based on the totality of funding might be for different parties with a stake in WP.

WP budgets and spend value

4.26   Institutions were asked to provide details of their total WP budget from all funding sources in the online survey, but only 55 out of the 94 institutions were able to provide this information. This data was supplemented by management information supplied by OFFA which was used to determine the total value of the resources committed in their 2013-14 access agreements. The management information was seeded into the online survey, and respondents were given the opportunity to either confirm or amend the value as appropriate. The majority of institutions (n = 81) confirmed that the data was correct, and only 13 institutions chose to amend the figures.

4.27   Taking the 55 cases that were able to provide a figure for both the total WP budget and the total amount committed in the access agreement, we were able to ascertain the WP budget outlined in the access agreement as a proportion of the total WP budget from all sources (see Figure 4.6).
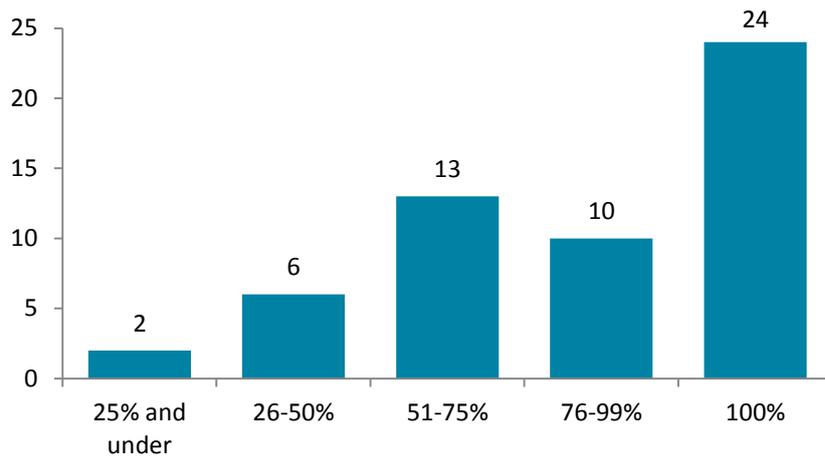
4.28   Figure 4.6 shows that there is considerable variation in the proportion of total WP spend that the access agreement represents. In 24 out of the 55 cases, the WP budget outlined in the access agreement represents the totality of WP funding from all sources. Another 10 institutions accounted for at least three-quarters of their total WP budget in their access agreement. In contrast, the access agreement represents less than half of the WP expenditure in 8 of the 55 institutions. These findings appear to reflect the tendency of many institutions to use the access agreement as an overarching document detailing all WP activity and to combine all sources of WP funding into a single pot. However, it is important to note that 39 institutions were not able to provide an estimate of their total WP budget. Although the amount outlined in their access agreements has been confirmed, it is unclear whether these figures represent their full or partial WP budgets.

4.29   Around one in five institutions fund different WP activities through a range of different income sources (see Figure 4.4 above) and there are at least 21 instances where the access agreement does not cover all WP expenditure and the full range of WP activities undertaken at the institution. The evidence suggests that some institutions only include activity funded through additional fee income in their access agreement, whilst others combine additional fee income with other sources of WP funding such as the HEFCE allocation. The lack of consistency between access agreements in terms of the proportion of WP spend they represent and the sources of funding included makes comparisons difficult. A clearer steer on which sources of funding should or should not be included within access agreements in future guidance, along with further integration of WP funding sources and the monitoring and reporting requirements, would ensure greater consistency was achieved and help to overcome this.

4.30   There is an extremely broad range of WP budgets outlined in the 2013-14 access agreements, ranging from £11,000 to £17.3 million. The distribution of this budget across the 94 cases is outlined in Figure 4.7 (overleaf). The chart shows that more than

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[15] Although this question was asked of all respondents, only 55 were able to provide all the information required to make this calculation possible.

half (54/94) of the institutions surveyed have a WP budget of less than £4 million, and that very few (7/94) institutions have a budget greater than £10 million.
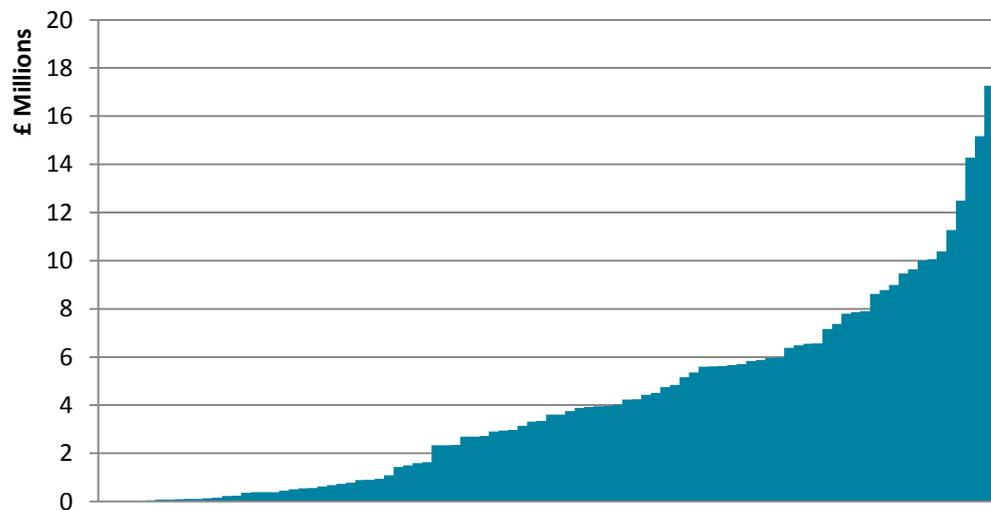

Figure 4.1: Distribution of values of WP expenditure in 2013-14 access agreements. (All respondents; base = 94).

4.31   The values of WP budgets outlined in the 2013-14 access agreements were split into quartiles. Institutions in quartile one have a budget of up to £650,000. Those in the second quartile have a budget of between £650,000 and £3.5 million. Institutions in quartile three plan to spend between £3.51 million and £6 million and those in the upper quartile plan to spend over £6 million. It is interesting to note that analysis by WP spend quartile reveals very few statistically significant differences between the groups. It is institutional type rather than WP budget which appears to have the most influence over policy, planning and behaviour, including the development of access agreements.

4.32   The differences in WP budgets and levels of expenditure reflect a number of variables, including the total number of students attending each institution and the proportion from disadvantaged groups, the value of additional fee income, the value and proportion of WP income from other sources that is included in the access agreement, and the value of the HEFCE allocation. Figure 4.8 shows that institution type, defined in terms including the proportion of students from under-represented groups, is a key determinant of WP spend. Almost all small institutions (16/17) have a WP budget in the lower quartile (up to £650,000). Specialist institutions, which are also characterised by relatively small student populations and low numbers of WP students, also have smaller budgets. Around half (7/16) have a WP budget in the first quartile (up to £650,000) and the other half (8/15) have a WP budget in the second quartile (£650,000 to £3.5 million). Inclusive and selective institutions are larger and dominate the third and upper quartiles. Inclusive institutions are in receipt of greater proportions of the HEFCE WP allocation because of the higher numbers of WP students enrolled, and selective institutions are required to commit higher proportions of their additional fee income to WP activities in order to widen access.
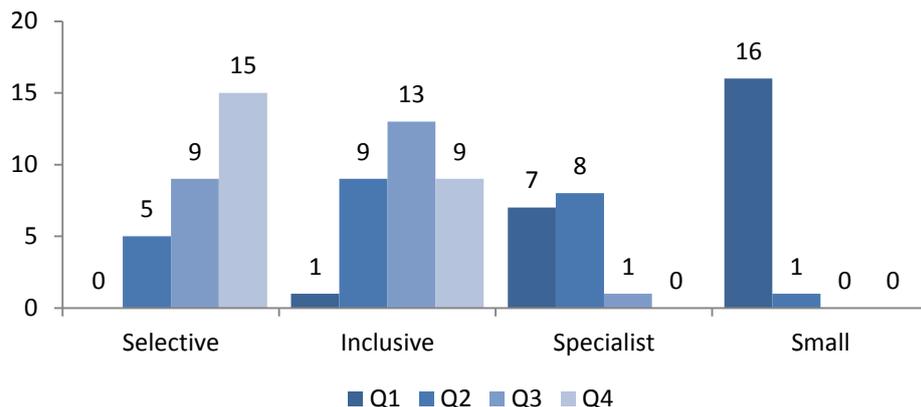
Figure 4.8: Value of WP expenditure outlined in 2013-14 access agreements (WP spend quartiles) analysed by institutional type. (Lower quartile = lower WP spend) (Frequency per quartile. All respondents; base = 94).

4.33 OFFA sets out broad guidelines on WP expenditure levels, expecting significantly higher contributions from institutions with low proportions of students from under-represented groups. The percentage of additional fee income committed to WP reported ranges from 6% to 100%, with the most common allocation being between 21% and 30% (44/94 institutions). Eighteen institutions allocated between 11% and 20%, and a further eighteen allocated between 31% and 40% (Figure 4.9).
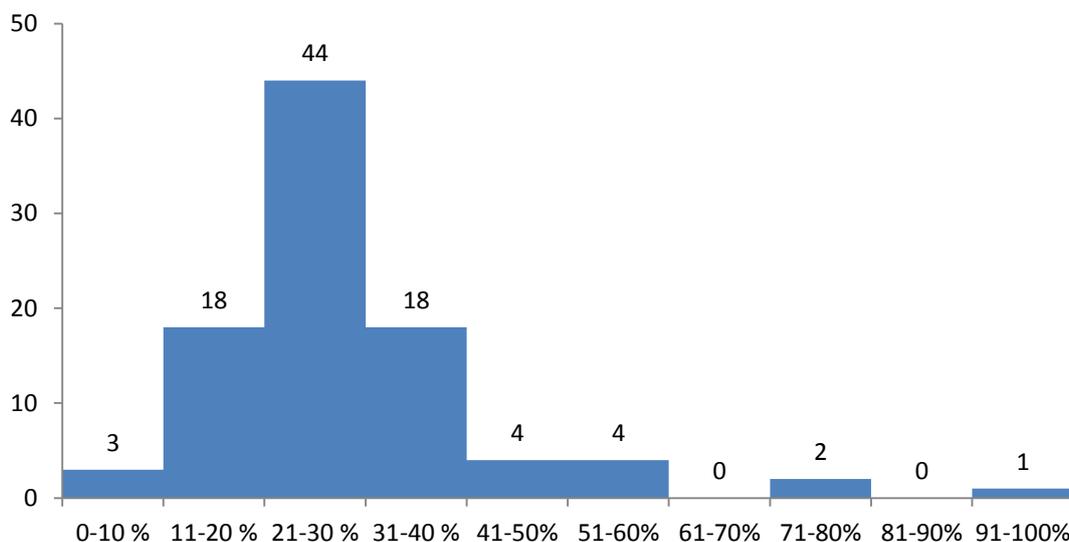

Figure 4.9: Distribution of additional fee income as a percentage of WP spend. (Frequency per band. All respondents; base = 94).

4.34 Further analysis by institutional type reveals that on average small institutions commit the highest proportion of their additional fee income to WP activities (39%) and that specialist institutions commit the lowest (26%) (Figure 4.10 overleaf).
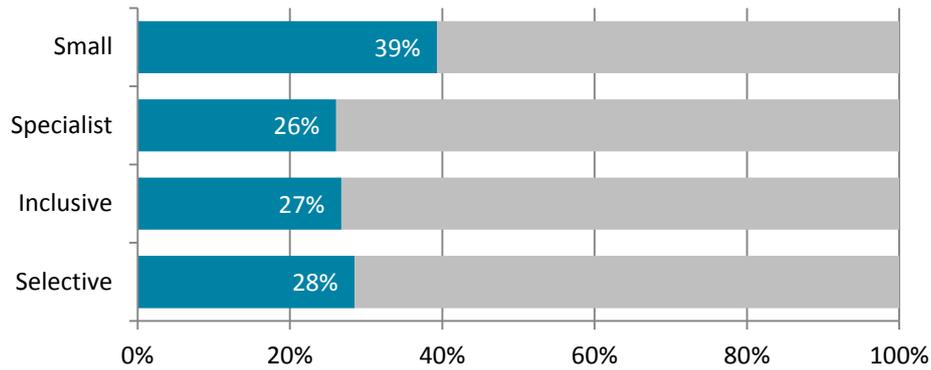
Figure 4.10: Mean WP spend as a percentage of additional fee income, by institutional type (All respondents; variable bases).

Budgeting for financial and non-financial activities

4.35   The institutional survey reviewed the proportion of WP spend within access agreements that was allocated to financial, non-financial and management spend. Most institutions (38/56) allocate at least 61% of the WP spend outlined within their access agreement to financial support for students, and then typically assign between 20% and 30% to non-financial sources of support. The percentage of WP income allocated to management, operational or evaluative costs in access agreements is low. The majority of institutions do not commit any resources to this (35/56), and only one reported that their institution committed more than 20%. These patterns of expenditure can be seen in Figures 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13.
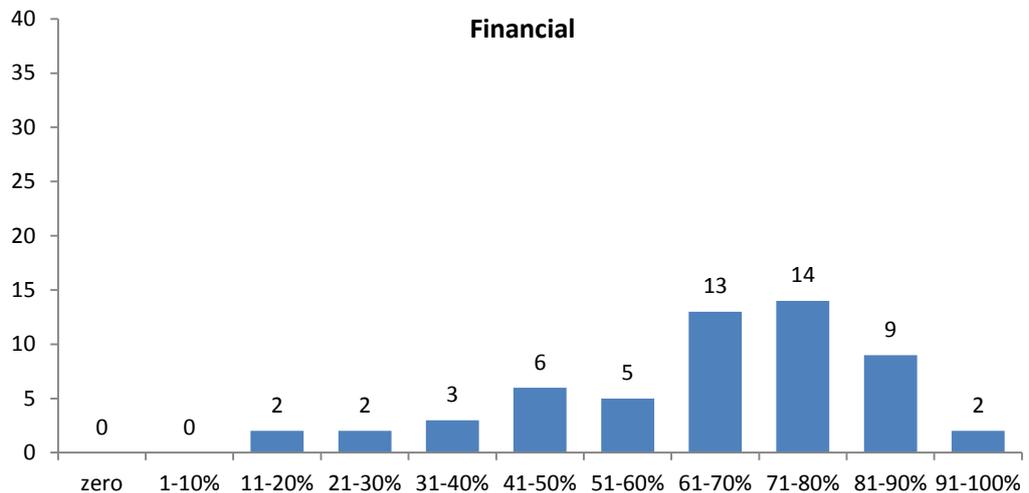
Figure 4.11: Proportion of WP spend committed to financial support in 2013-14 access agreements. (Frequency; All respondents; base = 56).
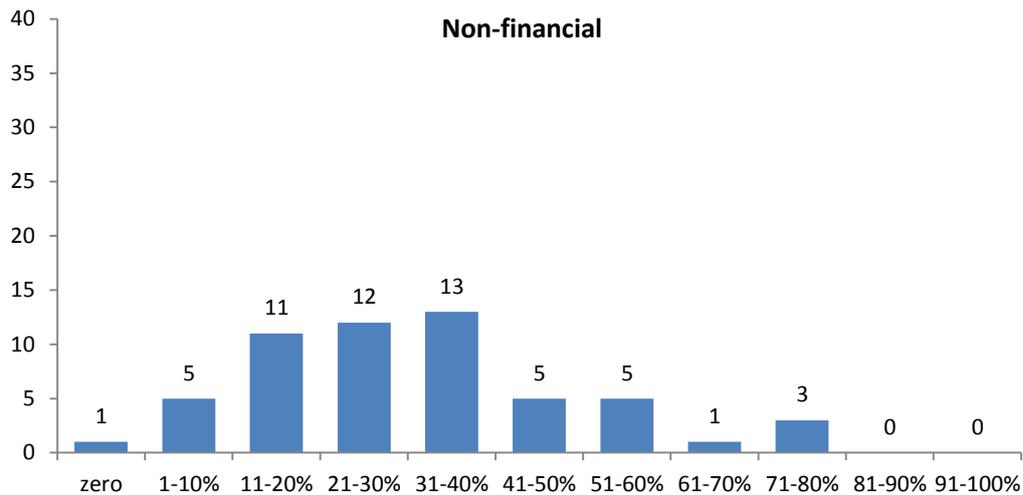
Non-financial

Figure 4.12: Proportion of WP spend committed to non-financial support in 2013-14 access agreements. (Frequency. All respondents; base = 56).
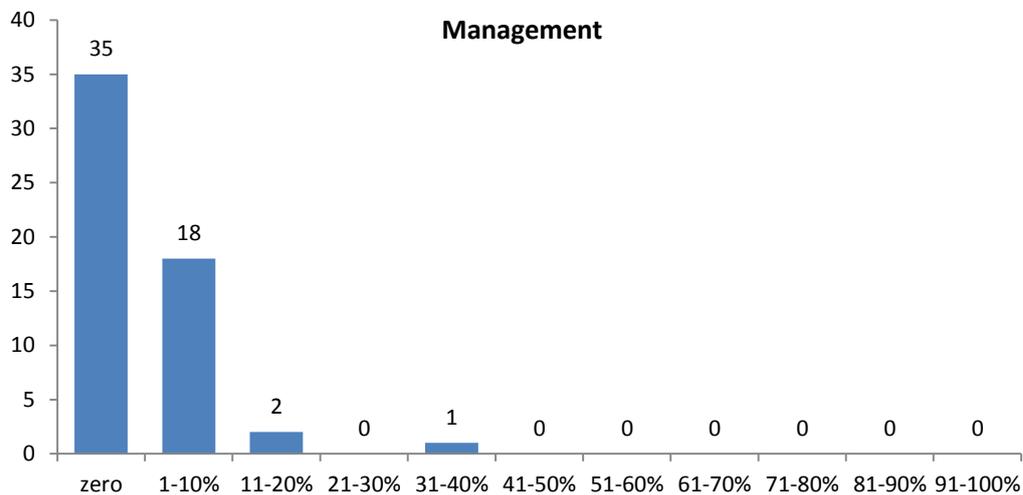
Management

Figure 4.13: Proportion of WP spend committed to management costs in 2013-14 access agreements. (Frequency. All respondents; base = 56).

4.36   When considering the breakdown of spend on non-financial support into 'outreach and access' and 'retention and success,' a greater proportion of the budget is committed to outreach rather than retention in most institutions (35/48). Retention was supported to a greater extent than outreach in only 8/48 cases, despite indications that it is a growing strategic priority.

Outreach and Access

	Zero	1-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
Frequency	0	0	1	4	1	7	6	12	5	4	8
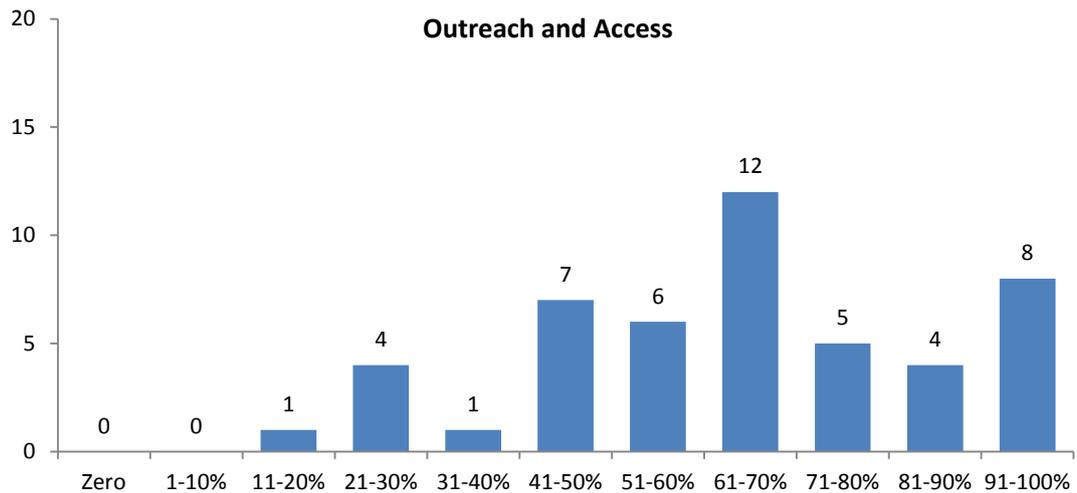
Figure 4.14: Proportion of WP non-financial spend committed to outreach and access in 2013-14 access agreements. (Frequency. All respondents; base = 48).

Retention and Success

	Zero	1-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
Frequency	6	3	3	14	3	11	2	1	4	1	0
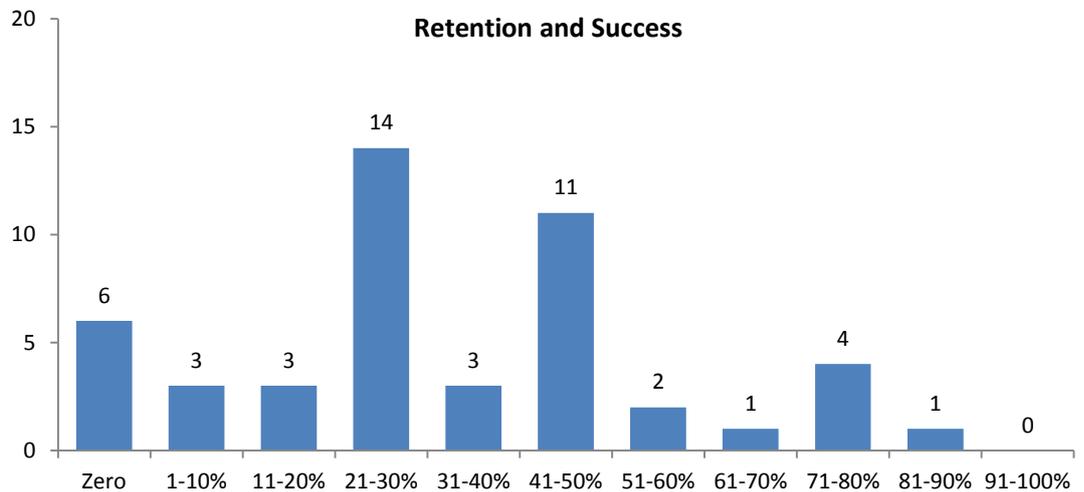
Figure 4.15: Proportion of WP non-financial spend committed to retention and success in 2013-14 access agreements. (Frequency. All respondents; base = 48).

4.37   The in-depth interviews reveal that a range of factors influence decisions about the balance of spend between financial and non-financial sources of support. In addition to the size of the overall WP budget and the resources available to be deployed for certain activities, institutions report that the guidance and requirements from funding bodies and their (mis)conceptions and perceptions of current policy priorities impact on decisions:

> The key change really has been that we've needed to shift our focus away from being about aspiration raising, we've read the guidance...we've realised we have to institute initiatives to try to encourage more entry.

> Marketing, Specialist Institution

4.38 Institutional priorities derived from the demographic composition of the student population and access and retention rates are also a key driver:

> To be pragmatic about it, 47% of our students are from WP groups, so we do not set out to increase that portion of students. This is our market, if you like. Part of it [the access agreement] is to do with making sure that people from a non-traditional background keep applying to us. Secondly, it's to make sure that we are focused on those students, because with them tend to come retention issues, and we have had, traditionally, a retention performance that reflects that high proportion of non-traditional learners.
>
> Operations, Inclusive Institution

> Retention isn't really a problem at [name of institution] and students tend not to leave for financial reasons...The fundamental problem is attracting applicants from under-represented groups and we're confident outreach activity has a significant impact on attracting applications.
>
> Admissions, Selective Institution

4.39 Institutions are, therefore, strongly in favour of retaining the institutional freedom to define their own target groups and to decide on the relative spend apportioned to financial support, outreach and retention. Institutions perceive that they are best placed to understand their potential student market, the factors that influence student choice and behaviour, and the strategies that will maximise access and success rates within their particular institution.

4.40 OFFA seeks to encourage flexibility and recognises that institutional diversity will result in a range of approaches to the access agreement and associated spend. Each institution designs the detail of its access agreement in line with its own evidence of what activities are most helpful in progressing towards its particular aims; alongside this, throughout the year, OFFA staff engage in dialogue with individual institutions to improve their understanding of each one's circumstances so that this may feed into the access agreement approval process. Despite this, some institutions perceive that OFFA guidelines are becoming more prescriptive and dictating what should be included in access agreements without due consideration being made for the unique circumstances of each institution:

> My issue is really where it becomes prescriptive. An external body is saying that we know your circumstances better than you do and we know better what works than you do. OFFA doesn't deliver any outreach activities of its own, it reviews what other institutions are doing but the information it gets is not particularly granular..... The universities are operating in a very particular context.
>
> Recruitment, Selective Institution

> I worry about it becoming more prescriptive and over the past couple of years a number of things have crept in that weren't there in the past, which seems to me to be moving away from the idea that institutions understand their own

contexts best...There are some recommendations that don't recognise local contexts. The HE sector is a broad church, we cover different institutional types and we are very, very different and we do different things for different reasons.

Recruitment, Selective Institution

4.41   Some institutions expressed particular concern that, as they see it, a greater emphasis is being placed on access targets for specific groups, targets relating to the proportion of additional fee income allocated to WP based on HESA Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and collaborative targets. According to these institutions, the perceived drive towards more prescriptive targets and behaviours could constrain the level and type of activities undertaken, and the resulting practice may not be the most effective in terms of outcomes or represent value for money.

4.42   The NSP was rolled out to students for the first time in 2012/13, and institutions must account for how they will allocate their match-funding contribution in their access agreement. Several institutions report that the NSP requirements (which are not set by OFFA) are too restrictive, and particularly the cap on cash bursaries of £1,000. Many would prefer greater flexibility to utilise the government allocation in different ways and/or to be able to distribute this element over more than one year of study because they perceive that this would have a greater impact for recipients, and potentially on wider WP objectives.

I'd like a simple model, to give 3k credit for those living in university accommodation and a 3k cash bursary for those in private accommodation but I can't make it work within the constraints of the model. We're having to play with it to make it work rather than just being able to do it straightforwardly to a model the students' union here have strongly supported.

Admissions, Selective Institution

4.43   The formative evaluation of the NSP[16] is currently in its second year and these, along with a raft of other issues, will be explored in order to ascertain the relative strengths and limitations of the existing model and potential alternatives.

Summary

4.44   Access agreements have delivered additional benefits. Most institutions have piloted or delivered new activities, albeit on a small scale, and report that activities are being delivered that otherwise would not have been possible. However, in the main, additional fee income is being used to continue or expand existing activities and deliver on a larger scale, yet as noted in Chapter 3, delivering on a larger scale can be challenging to co-ordinate and implement.

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[16] See CFE and Edge Hill University (2012) Formative Evaluation of the National Scholarship Programme: Interim report. Bristol: HEFCE for year 1 findings at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2013/nspeval/ Accessed 21/06/13

4.45   Two-thirds of institutions integrate additional fee income with other sources of WP funding and resource WP activities from an integrated pot of money. Whilst this approach is beneficial in a number of ways, institutions find it difficult to disaggregate the impact of the different sources of funding in order to measure impact and outcomes.

4.46   There are wide variations in the level of WP budget (ranging from £11,000 to £17.3 million), reflecting institutional size, mission and number of WP students enrolled. There are inconsistencies in the extent and nature of the sources of funding included in the access agreement and uncertainty, in some cases, as to the total value of WP budgets from all funding sources.

4.47   There are also variations in the proportion of WP budget allocated to financial and non-financial sources of support, and the balance allocated to outreach and retention activities. However, institutions typically allocate at least 60% of their additional fee income to financial support and between 20% and 30% to outreach and rein access agreements in the majority of cases.

4.48   The ratio of funding for the different activities is determined by a range of factors, including the type of institution and the nature of their student population, institutional priorities for WP and the guidance and requirements of funding bodies as well as (mis)conceptions and perceptions of current policy priorities.

5| Monitoring and evaluation of access agreements

5.1 This chapter examines monitoring and evaluation in relation to access agreements. It considers the current requirements, the challenges associated with effectively monitoring and evaluating WP measures, and the ways in which institutions are responding. The chapter finally considers the institutional perceptions of the impact of the access agreement and associated spend on institutional outcomes and on the HE sector as a whole. The analysis reveals:

> **Monitoring and evaluation presents a number of challenges for institutions**, and small institutions in particular. Personal, situational and institutional factors all impact on an institution's ability to determine the impact.

> The introduction of access agreements and associated spend has prompted institutions to **refine their systems for monitoring and evaluating impact**.

> Institutions tend to be more **focused on monitoring outputs rather than systematically evaluating outcomes**. However, there is evidence that some are developing more robust evaluation systems and processes.

> **Targets are largely derived from HESA benchmarks**. Most institutions assess the level and appropriateness of their targets by reviewing **previous performance** and wider **research evidence**. Institutions are concerned with setting realistic and achievable targets.

> The **guidance and support** provided by OFFA on target setting and completing the annual monitoring returns is perceived to be **helpful** overall.

> **Access agreements and associated spend are perceived to have improved the proportion of under-represented groups accessing HE,** particularly at selective institutions. Inclusive institutions are more likely to agree that retention has improved since their introduction, but that access agreements are not the only factor driving this improvement.

> Access agreements and associated spend are perceived to have successfully **increased institutional awareness and commitment to fair access** and ensured **resources are ring-fenced f**or WP. However, all but selective institutions question whether access agreements have played an important role in mitigating the impact of variable fees on access to HE.

Monitoring and evaluation requirements

Monitoring

5.2 In its capacity as a regulator, OFFA has a responsibility to ensure that institutions are meeting their commitments to individual students and are moving towards the milestones and targets set out in their access agreements. Progress is monitored on an annual basis. Institutions are required to report on the proportions of fee income spent on bursaries and scholarships for lower income students, the amount spent on outreach, and the proportion of students receiving a bursary. In addition, each institution is required to complete a self-assessment of progress made against the individual milestones and targets set out in their access agreement. Two-thirds of survey respondents that provided a response reported that the information and guidance provided by OFFA about completing annual monitoring returns was *helpful* or *very helpful* (n = 53) compared with 11 institutions that reported it was *unhelpful*.

Evaluation

5.3 The latest guidance from OFFA[17] for institutions seeking to develop an access agreement emphasises the importance of measuring the progress that is being made against WP objectives and, in particular, of understanding 'what works' in relation to widening access and improving retention and success among under-represented groups. There are a number of challenges associated with measuring the impact of WP activities. Firstly, a wide range of personal and/or situational factors impact on the likelihood of an individual entering and successfully completing HE, and these can mitigate the effects of WP measures. Secondly, outreach activities such as aspiration raising tend to impact on access to HE in general and consequently the specific 'return' for individual institutions is difficult to discern. Thirdly, there are practical and logistical difficulties associated with tracking participants overtime, in some cases from as early as primary school.

5.4 A number of institutional factors present further challenges in relation to monitoring, and evaluation in particular. Earlier in this report we noted that approximately two-thirds of institutions adopt an integrated approach to WP, whereby the access agreement is fully incorporated into the WP strategy and the additional fee income is combined with other sources of WP funding to form a single pot. The extent to which this funding is then mainstreamed and embedded within an institution impacts on an institution's ability to differentiate the distinct contribution that different sources of funding (including the spend associated with the access agreement) make to their WP overall performance[18]. Nevertheless, universities and colleges are now required to evaluate their activities and demonstrate that they have robust evaluation plans in place through their access agreements.

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[17] See http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/How-to-produce-an-access-agreement-for-2014-15.pdf Paragraphs 24-28. Accessed 20/05/13

[18] Also see CFE (2013) The uses and impact of HECE funding for widening participation. Bristol: HEFCE. http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2013/wpusesimpact/ Accessed 20/05/13

5.5 All except one institution that provided a response[19] reported that their institution took steps to monitor and/or measure the impact of activities funded through their access agreement (n = 83). The evidence suggests that the introduction of the access agreement has been a key driver in the development of new or more robust systems and processes for measuring impact and performance against key indicators. Almost three-quarters of those who provided a response *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that 'access agreements and the associated spend have prompted our institution to develop systems and processes to evaluate the impact of their WP activities' (n = 72), and the most commonly cited benefit of the requirement to produce an access agreement was the opportunity to improve the monitoring and evaluation of WP activities (n = 22).

Challenges of monitoring and evaluation

5.6 Although few would dispute the value of assessing the impact of WP activities, the most commonly identified challenge in relation to the co-ordination and delivery of access agreements and associated spend was monitoring and evaluation (n = 28). Smaller institutions appear to find it particularly problematic because in addition to the factors outlined above and the extra administrative and financial burden it places upon them, many do not have the necessary infrastructure in place, including the staff with the requisite skills, and the costs to develop these skills are often prohibitive.

> I think monitoring and evaluation is probably one of our most difficult areas because we don't have any research staff and we don't have automatic in-house places to go for expertise. We've got people that are trying to learn how to do it but we're struggling a little bit with it and that's one of our areas that we definitely want to improve on.
>
> Marketing, Specialist Institution

> It's quite a big job for a small university to do all of this because we don't have a big team of people to work on it.
>
> Lifelong Learning, Inclusive Institution

5.7 This is in contrast to a number of the larger institutions consulted which reported that they had invested in the development of their infrastructure in order to ensure they were able to track and monitor the impact of their access agreement and associated spend effectively. This investment includes commissioning external consultancy to assess the strengths and limitations of existing practice, the development of management information systems and processes, and the appointment of dedicated staff.

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[19] 10 respondents did not answer this question.

> We got in a data support officer because I don't think we had very good data. We've still got room for improvement, definitely, but we have got better data now on tracking students from different interventions.

<div align="right">Strategic planning, Selective Institution</div>

Approaches to monitoring and evaluation

5.8 Previous research into the uses and impact of HEFCE funding for WP concluded that while the routine recording and collection of data to measure the delivery of activities (in terms of the number of participants) is common, robust evaluation involving research and analysis of data to assess the effectiveness and impact of activities is less widespread. For example, institutions commonly collect feedback from participants following a specific intervention such as an event. However, while what is collected offers an effective measure of satisfaction, it does not typically demonstrate impact.[20]

5.9 The findings from this research suggest that the extent and nature of activities to monitor and evaluate the impact of access agreements and associated spend also varies between institutions, and activities on the whole tend to be more focused on monitoring outputs rather than systematically evaluating outcomes.

> Increasingly this year and next we're evaluating to what degree students from disadvantaged backgrounds are accessing our support networks: peer mentors, placement support, learner support with things like mathematics, planning, revision skills, time management, presentations, you know, that kind of thing. We're looking at how the money is spent and how many of our OFFA countable students, as a proportion [of all service users] are accessing those activities.

<div align="right">Student recruitment, Selective Institution</div>

> We are just about to launch a pilot of electronic footprint management looking at student use of libraries and [virtual learning environment]. This will show evidence of engagement that can be linked to retention and success issues.

<div align="right">External Relations, Inclusive Institution</div>

5.10 However, there is evidence that this is changing and, as suggested above, that some institutions are developing more robust systems and processes (see paragaph 5.13 below).

> I've been involved in WP for well over a decade and one of my frustrations is that people, on the basis of very little or no evidence, would plough money into initiatives. So people would say it feels like the right thing to be doing, the teachers says it's good, the students say they enjoyed the experience, but you never actually know whether you've had any impact on that student's

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[20] CFE (2013) paragraphs 6.10 – 6.20

educational trajectory or not, and that to me seems like a pretty big flaw in the premise. Since I took up the post we have made sure that every event is evaluated, qualitatively and quantitatively.

<div align="right">Student Recruitment, Selective Institution</div>

5.11   The majority of institutions have systems in place to monitor participation in outreach activities such as summer schools, taster days and compact agreements, along with recruitment, applications and retention data for WP students. However, it is less common for institutions to capture feedback from either providers or users of WP services and to compare the performance of WP and non-WP students (Figure 5.1).

Category	Value
Monitoring of recruitment data for WP students	75
Monitoring of participation in outreach activities	73
Internal evaluation of impact of WP activities	72
Monitoring of application data for WP students	67
Monitoring of retention data for WP students	64
Performance of WP against non-WP students	46
Feedback from WP service users	46
Feedback from practitioners	32
External independent evaluation	18
Comparison with NSS survey data	11
Other	4
Don't know	1

Figure 5.1: How institution monitors and/or measures the impact of activities funded through access agreements (Frequency. All respondents that take steps to monitor/measure the impact of activities funded through the access agreement; base = 83).

5.12   The most recent OFFA guidance[21] stipulates that institutions must state how they have consulted with students on the design of access agreements, and strongly encourages them also to involve students in implementation and monitoring of agreements, so the proportion of institutions capturing feedback from students is likely to increase in future years. However, the interviews reveal that some institutions are already increasingly incorporating the student voice into their WP activities.

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[21] See http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/How-to-produce-an-access-agreement-for-2014-15.pdf Paragraph 44. Accessed 20/05/13

5.13   The majority of institutions overall also report that they engage in evaluation activity to assess the impact of activities funded through access agreements. Most conduct their evaluations internally (n = 73) but a fifth of institutions report that they commission an external organisation to independently evaluate their activities (n = 18) (Figure 5.1). Further exploration of these issues during the interviews revealed evidence of collaborative research activities and the use of external consultants to review the strengths and limitations of overall institutional approaches and individual activities:

> We are involved in a research project with [institution] on the value of bursaries for improving retention, to see whether it really makes a difference...retention really isn't a problem here and students tend not to leave for financial reasons...but nonetheless it would be good to know that the bursaries do have some impact.
>
> Registry, Selective Institution

> Our Deputy Vice Chancellor brought in an external advisor to have a real review of how we're running WP and outreach. I think up until that point we had quite good people working in the centre running particular initiatives, and then we had school liaison officers out in the faculties. What the report said was that we needed to have a much clearer strategy, but also a much clearer implementation and co-ordination of the activities.
>
> Strategic Planning, Selective Institution

Target and goals

5.14   The most recent guidance from OFFA indicates that the outputs from institutional monitoring and evaluation should be used to assess performance and identify key areas for improvement. This evidence should then be used to inform the development of future plans and the associated targets and milestones.[22] We reported in Chapter 3 that the requirement to produce an access agreement and associated spend is commonly perceived to have helped facilitate a more focused or better approach to targeting within the context of improved strategic planning and co-ordination of WP within institutions.

5.15   Institutions are free to set their own targets and milestones to reflect OFFA's monitoring requirements and wider institutional priorities for WP. The evidence suggests that most institutions assess the level and appropriateness of their targets by drawing on a combination of previous performance data and wider research evidence.

5.16   Many institutions draw on HESA KPIs, including the percentage of students from state schools or colleges, specified socio-economic classes, LPNs, and the proportion of students in receipt of DSA to develop their targets, with most aiming to meet or exceed the benchmarks. However, a minority of institutions report that some of the

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[22] See http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/How-to-produce-an-access-agreement-for-2014-15.pdf paragraph 30. Accessed 20/05/13

HESA performance indicators are not entirely appropriate because they do not take account of contextual factors such as the nature of entry requirements. These institutions have therefore conducted their own research in order to formulate what they regard as more appropriate targets. For example, one selective institution conducted research to ascertain the proportion of state school pupils securing examination grades in subject combinations that reflect the institution's entry requirements, in order to develop an appropriate state-sector admissions target.

5.17   In the previous chapter we noted that in addition to the groups identified in the HESA performance indicators, the majority of institutions also target a range of other groups including care leavers and first generation entrants to HE; some also target groups that are under-represented in their particular institutional context such as BME students, men and mature learners (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.1). Therefore specific targets and milestones for the engagement, retention and success of these groups are also set.

5.18   Our analysis suggests that a range of other factors are impacting on institutional behaviour in relation to target setting, and the extent and nature of the targets in particular. Many institutions are committing considerable resources to WP activities within their access agreements and are acutely aware of the financial implications of failing to get them approved and/or of not making demonstrable progress against their objectives. Institutions are concerned with the need to minimise risk and set targets that are perceived to be realistic and achievable. Therefore some targets may not be as stretching as they could be, and progress towards the achievement of wider WP objectives may be slower as a result.

> I suppose...we're a little bit more political about what activities we decide to, you know, to put the investment into if you like. Because, hang on a minute, if those are the things we're going to be monitoring against we need to make sure the activities we're engaging with are going to try to deliver progress against those numbers.
>
> Student Recruitment, Selective Institution

> We're having to be very [name of institution] specific in all of this, we're being asked to go beyond 30% in the amount of our contribution because of our performance in the KPIs and so on. We've had to be [name of institution] centric because we will be criticised for things which are not entirely within our control...We don't do more of the generic aspiration raising which might be more of an interest nationally, we have to adopt something which is for [name of institution's] benefit.
>
> Student Recruitment, Selective Institution

5.19   Furthermore, some institutions have reacted to the current requirements by setting targets that are easy to measure but not necessarily the best or most appropriate indicators of success. There is a perception that the impact of some activities is difficult to quantify, but that the current requirements limit the extent to which institutions are able to report on the qualitative difference that their work makes at the level of the individual student through, for example, case studies. One specialist institution that had

produced a case study which got picked up by the media believed that if *'we were encouraged to flip into more qualitative measurements, instead of hit this metric target'*, useful information about the interventions that make a difference at different points in the student lifecycle could be captured more effectively and used to inform future strategies and activities.

5.20   Although not all institutions involved OFFA in the development of their targets and milestones, a number of those consulted during the interviews reported that they were engaged in ongoing dialogue with OFFA in order to review and further develop them, and overall institutions perceived the guidance and support from OFFA to be helpful:

> Over the last four or five years we have had discussions about the targets and so OFFA have said 'how have you actually arrived at this state-sector intake?', we've explained it and they've accepted that, and when we developed the LPN target we had regular dialogue with them on that just to make sure that we were in the right place. So we've been in dialogue with them...OFFA are keen that we set demanding targets. We are keen that we set realistic and meaningful targets.

<div align="right">Student Recruitment, Selective Institution</div>

> The guidance has got stronger, more helpful each year and I really, I really feel it has helped.

<div align="right">Lifelong Learning, Inclusive Institution</div>

Performance against targets and goals

5.21   Figure 5.2 illustrates that the majority of institutions perceive that they are performing well against the targets outlined in their access agreement, with the majority reporting that they are on or exceeding target. A substantial minority report that they are unsure how they are performing against their current access agreement or are below target. This may not necessarily be a reflection of poor performance but could instead be due to the stage that the institution is at in their monitoring cycle. There is a time lag between an access agreement being approved and the monitoring return. The latest monitoring data published by OFFA is for 2010-11 and they are currently monitoring how institutions are progressing against the targets in their 2011-12 access agreements. Therefore, it may be too early to say how some institutions are performing in relation to the targets set out in their most recently approved access agreement[23].

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[23] Institutions submitted access agreements for 2014-15 during the course of this research. However, as these were not approved, the most recent access agreement is taken to mean 2013-14.
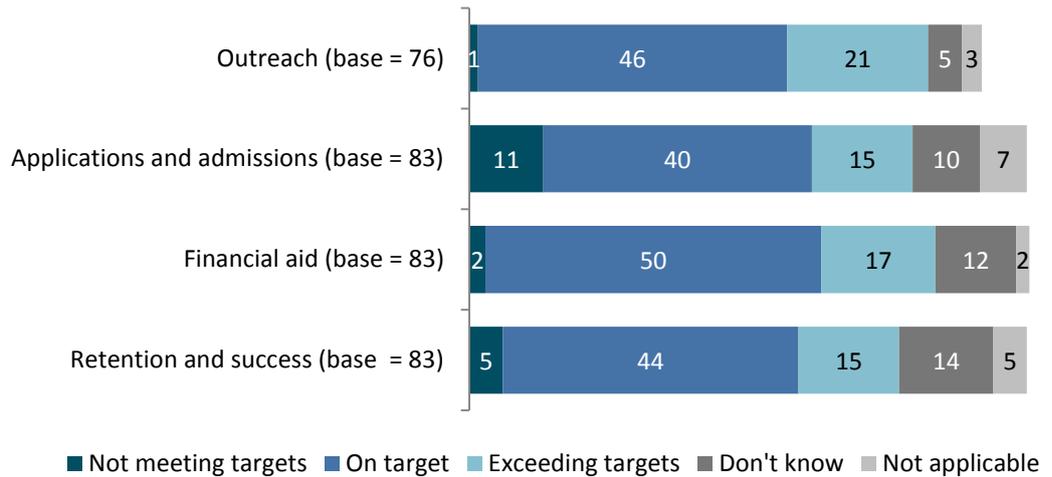
Figure 5.2: How well is your institution performing against the targets and goals set out in your current access agreement? (Frequency. All respondents; variable bases).

Impact of access agreements

Institutional impact

5.22 Just over half of the respondents that provided a response (n = 42) agreed that since the introduction of access agreements and associated spend the proportion of under-represented groups accessing HE at their institution had improved. However, on average institutions neither *agreed* nor *disagreed* that the proportion of under-represented groups being retained, achieving an award, and progressing into further study or graduate level employment had increased. Furthermore, a substantial minority of respondents did not feel able to express an opinion about the impact of the access agreement and associated spend on a number of factors, particularly progression into further study and employment (n = 36) (Figure 5.3).
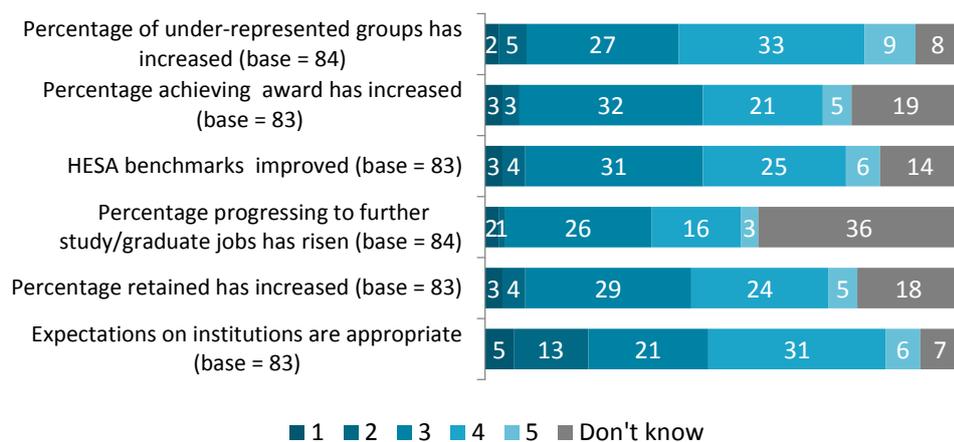

Figure 5.3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with statements about access agreements and associated spend and outcomes for your institution? (Frequency. All respondents, variable bases).

5.23   Further analysis reveals that there are statistically significant differences in the perceptions of different types of institutions in relation to the impact of access agreements and associated spend on institutional outcomes. Previous research concluded that while selective and many specialist institutions are primarily concerned with widening access, improving retention is the main priority for the majority of inclusive and many small institutions.[24] The findings from this research suggest that the access agreement and associated spend has contributed towards the progress made in relation to these strategic priorities in different types of institutions.

5.24   The majority of selective institutions *agree* or *strongly agree* that since the introduction of access agreements and associated spend improvements to widening access have been achieved at their institution (17 out of 24). Only one respondent from a selective institution reported that they *disagreed* with this statement. There may be a number of reasons for this but as the following statement indicates, the implementation of a more strategic, evidence-informed approach - facilitated at least in part by the requirement to produce an access agreement - has had a positive impact, resulting in progress towards WP targets and goals:

> The data goes to the outreach steering group. If the activity is not working we adjust it and if after that adjustment we can't improve it, we stop doing it; if it does work then we look to see how we can improve and grow it. We're trying to ensure not only that the university gets value for money, but that the students and the teachers actually get something that is meaningful...rather than just being a nice experience, which is what I think a lot of WP activities used to be.

<div align="right">Student Recruitment, Selective Institution</div>

5.25   In contrast, less than half of inclusive institutions *agreed* that widening access had improved since the introduction of the access agreement and associated spend (12 out of 28). An equal proportion neither *agreed* nor *disagreed* with this statement. This is perhaps not surprising, as most of these institutions have traditionally recruited high numbers of WP students and widening access is not a key priority.

5.26   Retention is a higher order strategic priority within inclusive institutions. Encouragingly, 18 out of the 26 inclusive institutions that provided a response reported that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that since the introduction of the access agreement and associated spend the proportion of under-represented groups being retained at their institution had increased, compared with just 4 out of 20 selective institutions. Selective, small and specialist institutions most commonly neither *agree* nor *disagree* with this statement. The findings from this and previous research suggest that this is likely to be because retention rates among WP students already compare favourably to the student population as a whole in the majority of selective institutions.

5.27   However, further analysis reveals that although retention rates are perceived to have improved since the introduction of access agreements and associated spend, institutions are more equivocal about the contribution that access agreements have

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[24] See CFE (2013) paragraphs 3.6 – 3.8.

made to this improvement. Access agreements were initially focused on financial support for students from families with low incomes and on delivering outreach, and the emphasis on retention and success rates was only introduced relatively recently. In addition, under the current arrangements for the HEFCE WP allocation there is a dedicated strand for improving retention and success. Finally, retention activities tend to be more embedded and less likely to be specifically targeted at WP students than access measures. As a result, the impact that the access agreement and associated spend has had on retention and success rates is difficult to discern, although most would agree it has contributed.

> Although we have focused on retention in that agreement, there's only [a small] amount of money going towards it...We tend to take [retention] out of the HEFCE money and the things to do with outreach and bursaries comes out of the OFFA agreement from additional fee income. Also those students...need extra support, so if we're going to improve retention we have to do that kind of activity. I think it could be argued that we would be doing that anyway, outside of the access agreement.
>
> Partnerships and Collaboration, Inclusive Institution

Impact on HE sector

5.28   When asked about the impact of access agreements and associated spend on the HE sector as a whole, respondents once again reported that they neither *agreed* nor *disagreed* with a series of statements pertaining to the different ways in which access agreements could have influenced wider WP objectives; although a greater proportion were able to offer an opinion and fewer respondents reported 'don't know' when compared with the previous question about outcomes for institutions (Figure 5.4 overleaf).

5.29   Respondents are most likely to agree that the introduction of access agreements has successfully 'increased institutional awareness and commitment to fair access to HE' (59 out of 81 agreed or strongly agreed with this statement), and that access agreements are 'an effective mechanism for ensuring resources are ring-fenced for WP' (53 out of 82 agreed or strongly agreed with this statement)

5.30   There is a higher degree of uncertainty about the impact of access agreements and associated spend on participation, retention and success rates across the sector as a whole than on the rates within individual institutions: 18 out of 82 do not know whether access agreements and associated spend have led to higher participation rates; 27 out of 82 are unable to say whether they have led to higher rates of retention and success.
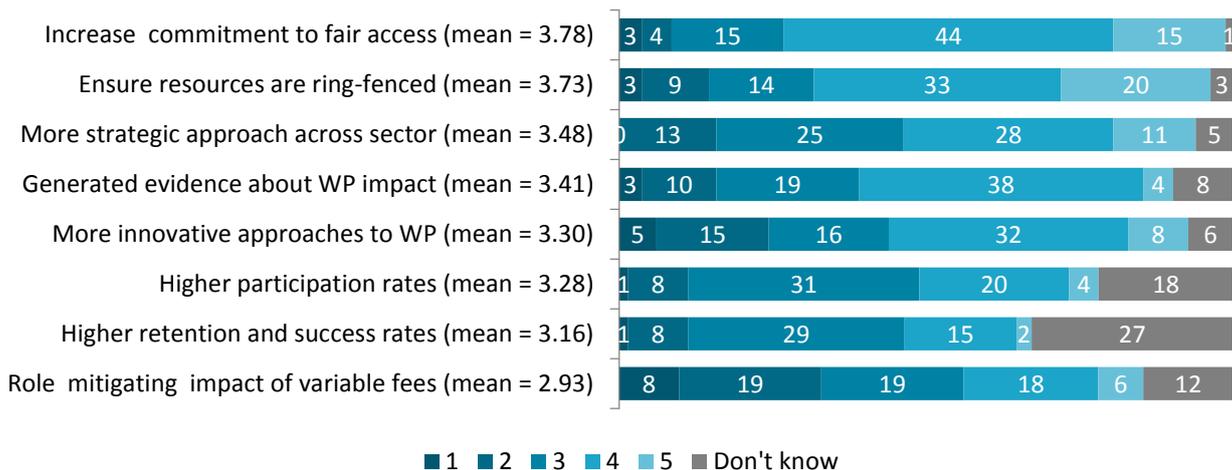
Figure 5.4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with statements about the impact of access agreements and associated spend on the HE Sector as a whole? (Frequency. All respondents; variable bases).

5.31   Similarly, respondents were divided on the issue of whether access agreements and associated spend have enabled institutions to be more creative and innovative in their approaches to WP (mean = 3.30). Although the majority agreed with this statement (40), a substantial minority disagreed (20). There may be a number of reasons for this. We noted in the previous chapter that access agreements and associated spend have enabled very few new activities. The majority of institutions report that access agreements have enhanced or facilitated the continuation of existing activities (see paragraphs 4.11 and 4.17). In addition, the interviews revealed that some institutions perceive that access agreements, and the evaluation and monitoring requirements in particular, are actually constraining rather than encouraging innovation and creativity:

> I think, if anything, over the last three years, there's been less creativity
> because all of that work [WP] has been very funnelled and targeted. It's got
> to be measurable, you've got to track it, it's got to be evaluated. I think that
> has inhibited creativity and innovation.

<div align="right">Finance, Specialist Institution</div>

5.32   Access agreements were introduced in the advent of higher fees to ensure that institutions put in place provisions for students from low income families so that they were not prevented from entering HE on the basis of cost. However, respondents were most likely to disagree that access agreements and associated spend 'have played an important role in mitigating the impact of variable fees on access to HE' (27 out the 82 disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement). Further analysis by institutional type reveals statistically significant differences in the views from different types of institution. Respondents from selective institutions agree that access agreements have helped to mitigate the impact of variable fees on access to HE (mean = 3.75), while all other types of institution, and specialist institutions in particular, disagree with this statement (Figure 5.5 overleaf).

5.33   There may be a number of reasons for this which warrant further investigation, particularly to explain the differences in perception of the different institutional types. However, over the past decade research has suggested that financial aid does not have as significant an impact on widening access as it has on retention and success. Furthermore, early indications suggest that although applications to HE are down overall, students from low income families have not been deterred from accessing HE since fees were raised to £9,000[25]. Finally, most institutions report that mechanisms have been in place to remove financial barriers and to support disadvantaged students for a number of years, some of which pre-date the introduction of the access agreement. All of these factors are likely to influence institutional perceptions of the role and impact of access agreements in this regard.
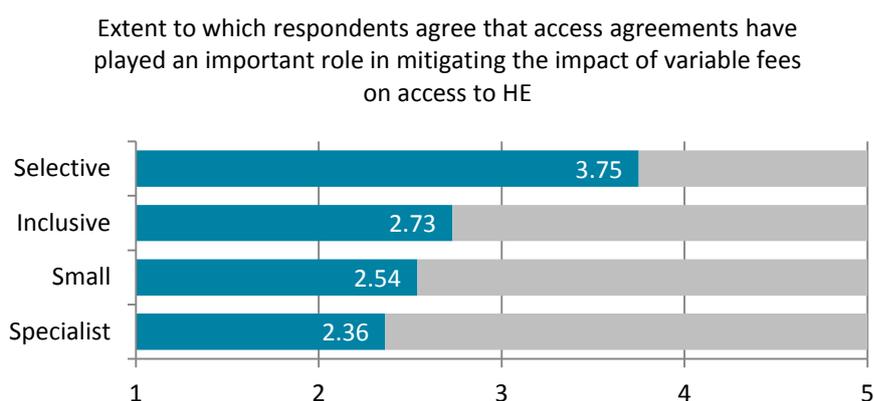
Extent to which respondents agree that access agreements have played an important role in mitigating the impact of variable fees on access to HE

Institution	Rating
Selective	3.75
Inclusive	2.73
Small	2.54
Specialist	2.36

Figure 5.5: Average level of agreement with the statement 'access agreements and the associated spend have played an important role in mitigating the impact of variable fees on access to HE' by type of institution. (Five point scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)(Mean rating. All respondents, variable bases).

Summary

5.34   The institutional targets set out in access agreements are largely derived from HESA benchmarks, although there are some notable exceptions in instances when wider contextual factors are perceived to mitigate the effectiveness of some national measures. Therefore most institutions assess the level and appropriateness of their targets by reviewing previous performance against national indicators and by drawing on wider research evidence, including student feedback.

5.35   The requirement to monitor and evaluate progress against set targets and goals has prompted many institutions to refine their systems and processes so that they are better able to assess the impact of their WP interventions. Nevertheless, monitoring and evaluation still present a key challenge for many, particularly small, institutions as a range of personal, situational and institutional factors all impact on an institution's ability to determine the impact. Currently, institutions tend to be more focused on monitoring

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[25] UCAS 2013 application figures: http://www.ucas.com/news-events/news/2013/2013-cycle-applicant-figures-april-2013 Accessed 21/06/13.

outputs rather than systematically evaluating outcomes. However, there is evidence that this is changing. The guidance and support provided by OFFA on target setting and completing the annual monitoring returns is perceived to be helpful overall.

5.36   Overall, access agreements and associated spend are perceived to have improved the proportion of under-represented groups accessing HE, particularly in selective institutions, and have contributed to improved retention and success rates. This is largely because access agreements and associated spend are perceived to have successfully increased institutional awareness and commitment to fair access and ensured resources are ring-fenced for all aspects of WP. However, all but selective institutions question whether access agreements have played an important role in mitigating the impact of variable fees on access to HE.

6| Conclusion

6.1 Access agreements have been in place since 2006-07 following the introduction of variable tuition fees for full-time home and EU undergraduates studying in England. Initially designed to ensure institutions charging fees above the 'standard level' maintained a bursary system to assist students from low income families, they have since evolved into one of the key mechanisms for safeguarding fair access to HE in the context of further reforms to HE funding that have resulted in substantial fee increases and a greater proportion of the cost being born by individual students.

6.2 Institutions charging fees above the new 'basic level' of £6,000 per annum are now required to detail their fee limits in their access agreement and describe how they will utilise a proportion of their additional fee income to widening access and improving retention and success amongst under-represented groups. OFFA monitors institutions' progress in meeting their access agreement commitments and targets on an annual basis and supports the dissemination of good practice to the sector.

6.3 Prior to this research, little was known about how access agreements and associated spend had affected institutional behaviour in relation to WP. Therefore the aim of this research was to add to the existing monitoring data by developing a fuller understanding of the perceived benefits, barriers and impacts of access agreements and associated spend. In order to achieve this aim, the ways in which access agreements are used by institutions was explored, with a particular focus on how their introduction affected institutional strategies, delivery of WP activities and the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

6.4 In order to understand the different challenges and priorities for WP facing different types of institutions, an existing typology was refined and used for the purposes of our analysis. Institutions were categorised as follows so that statistically-significant differences in the perceptions and experiences of the groups could be identified.

> **Inclusive institutions:** Large, usually teaching-intensive institutions that recruit significant numbers of WP students.

> **Selective institutions:** Large, usually research-intensive institutions that recruit high-attaining students.

> **Specialist or professional training institutes:** Smaller HEIs and colleges that offer only a small range of courses, usually dedicated to a particular profession.

> **Small institutions:** FECs, general colleges and small HEIs that often recruit locally and have many students from disadvantaged groups.

6.5 The findings will add to the evidence base currently being collated to inform the development of a forthcoming national strategy on fair access and student success being prepared by OFFA and HEFCE.

Key findings

6.6   The key findings from the research are summarised as follows:

Impact on institutional strategies

6.7   The introduction of access agreements and associated spend have had a positive impact on strategic planning and priorities at an institutional level and have ensured resources for WP are ring-fenced. In most instances access agreements are strongly aligned with wider institutional strategies for WP and are perceived to have resulted in more formalised and co-ordinated approaches. In this context, access agreements are particularly effective at bringing a range of WP activities supported by different funding sources together into one coherent reference document which can be shared widely. Even where WP strategies and access agreements are less integrated, access agreements can help to facilitate comparisons with parallel or related work, ensuring that a fuller understanding of the wider WP landscape is developed.

6.8   They have also helped to raise the profile and status of WP and ensured the buy-in of staff at all levels to the importance of achieving WP objectives. However, the evidence indicates that overall, access agreements tend to reflect, rather than drive, the development of WP strategies, particularly in institutions where WP is a core activity.

6.9   Despite the positive impact on strategic planning and priorities, access agreements can be challenging to co-ordinate and implement. The key challenges include working with several access agreements concurrently, putting in place the additional infrastructure required to deliver on a larger scale, and sustaining partnerships.

Impact on delivery

6.10   Access agreements have led to an enhanced offer for WP students. Most institutions have piloted or delivered some new activities, and all institutions have continued or expanded existing activities. There are wide variations between institutions in the level of funding committed in access agreements. However, most integrate their additional fee income with other sources of WP funding and finance a range of WP activities and student financial support from an integrated budget. Whilst this approach is beneficial in terms of achieving economies of scale and wider scale delivery, some institutions find it difficult to disaggregate the impact of the different sources of funding when measuring and reporting outcomes.

6.11   There are also wide variations in the proportion of associated spend committed in access agreements to financial and non-financial support and the balance of resources allocated to outreach and retention activities. These variations reflect individual institutional priorities and goals and tend to vary according to institutional size, mission, the number of WP students enrolled, the needs of the student population and the funding sources included in the access agreement in addition to additional fee income.

Impact on monitoring and evaluation

6.12   The institutional targets set out in access agreements are largely derived from HESA benchmarks. Most institutions assess the level and appropriateness of their targets by reviewing previous performance against national indicators and wider research evidence. The requirement to monitor and evaluate progress against these targets has prompted many institutions to refine their systems and processes so that they are better able to assess the impact of their WP interventions. Nevertheless, monitoring and evaluation still present a key challenge for many. Institutions currently tend to be more focused on monitoring outputs rather than systematically evaluating outcomes. However, there is evidence that this is changing. Small and specialist institutions tend to lack the specialist skills required to undertake evaluative work.

Benefits of access agreements and associated spend for institutions

6.13   Overall, most perceive that both institutions and the HE sector as a whole have benefited from the introduction of access agreements and associated spend. The opportunities it has engendered to improve the monitoring and evaluation of WP interventions, increase the focus on and improve the targeting of WP activities, and enhance the profile of and level of buy-in to WP among staff at all levels are perceived to be particularly beneficial.

6.14   Additionally, positive outcomes are perceived. Just over half of all respondents (and around two-thirds of selective institutions) agreed that since the introduction of access agreements and associated spend the proportion of under-represented groups accessing HE at their institution had improved. Around two-thirds of inclusive institutions agreed that since the introduction of access agreements and associated spend, the proportion of under-represented groups being retained at their institution has increased.

Challenges of co-ordinating and delivering access agreements and associated spend

6.15   Many of the challenges encountered by institutions in the co-ordination and delivery of access agreements and associated spend mirror the benefits, with the majority of institutions reporting that monitoring and evaluation presents the biggest challenge as well as bringing key benefits. In addition, developing the infrastructure required to deliver WP activities on a larger scale, working with several access agreements concurrently, sustaining partnerships working in an environment characterised by reduced funding and increasing competition for students, and disaggregating the impact of different WP funding sources upon outputs and outcomes, all present key challenges for most institutions.

Conclusions

6.16   Access agreements and associated spend have had a positive impact on institutional policies, planning and behaviour in relation to WP and have contributed towards progress made in relation to institutional and wider WP targets and goals. Although the co-ordination and delivery of access agreements have given rise to a number of challenges for institutions, on balance the benefits appear to outweigh the barriers. The majority of institutions have enhanced their WP offer as a result of their access agreements and associated spend, and most are achieving or exceeding their targets. Imbalances in the student population are

beginning to be addressed at sector level as a higher proportion of under-represented groups are accessing the most selective institutions, and disparities in the rates of retention and success between WP and non-WP students in inclusive institutions are being reduced.

6.17   It is important to recognise that expenditure on WP varies considerably between institutions, and budgets comprise a range of sources of funding. The government's allocation is largely determined by the size of the institution and the proportion of the student population defined as WP. As a result, the amount of overall spend represented by access agreements varies according to institutional type, and access agreements represent a smaller proportion of total spend in inclusive institutions with large cohorts of WP students and a larger proportion in more selective institutions that typically have lower numbers of disadvantaged learners. Furthermore, the majority of institutions integrate other sources of funding for WP with the additional fee income committed in their access agreement and do not necessarily differentiate activities that are funded through the different income streams. Therefore it is not possible to understand the impact of access agreements and associated spend in isolation. It can only be understood fully in relation to the impact of these other funding sources and in the context of wider institutional strategies and approaches to WP.

6.18   Some of the other sources of funding for WP, such as the HEFCE allocation, pre-date the access agreement and previous research has indicated that this had a substantial impact on organisational culture and attitudes towards WP. Although few would dispute that the introduction of access agreements and associated spend has delivered additionality, it is regarded as just one of a number of drivers that have led to changes in policy and practice at an institutional level and contributed to improved outcomes. Furthermore, on average, institutions tend not to agree that access agreements have played an important role in mitigating the impact of variable fees on access to HE, one of the key factors underpinning the rationale for their introduction. There may be a number of reasons for this which warrant further investigation. However, the lack of existing evidence to demonstrate that financial aid, such as fee waivers, has a significant impact on widening access, coupled with UCAS data which suggests that students from low income families have not been deterred from accessing HE since fees were raised to £9,000, are likely to be influencing factors.

6.19   The guidance and support from OFFA in the production and monitoring of access agreements is widely perceived to be helpful and the expectations placed on institutions are regarded as reasonable. However, the burden placed on institutions could be reduced if there was greater synergy between the requirements of OFFA and HEFCE. Plans to bring together the WPSA and the access agreement are widely welcomed.

Issues for consideration

6.20   When developing the national strategy for fair access and student success, OFFA, working in partnership with HEFCE, should consider the following issues raised by the research:

> **Strategic priority:** The instigation of access agreements and associated spend derived from additional fee income has increased the strategic priority accorded to WP within HE providers. This is evidenced by the significant involvement of the senior management team and institution-wide committees, the development of institutional infrastructure and processes, consultation with students, and the

increased emphasis on monitoring. This level of investment and buy-in is essential in order to prevent WP from becoming marginalised in the future and to ensure it continues to be mainstreamed and embedded in all aspects of institutional practice.

> **Alignment with other strategies:** Access agreements do not cover all WP activity and expenditure, and therefore they do not necessarily provide a comprehensive picture of WP. The requirement to produce an access agreement in addition to a separate WPSA to different timescales and with different requirements and emphases adds to the administrative burden of institutions. The strategic priority of the access agreement would be enhanced further if it were fully integrated with the WPSA and associated reporting.

> **Whole life cycle approach:** Access agreements are now concerned with the whole student lifecycle. This makes them relevant and important to all institutions and not just those with a poor record on access, as there very few that exceed both widening access and retention and completion benchmarks. In this context, access agreements provide a useful mechanism for encouraging different stakeholders from across the institution to work together to maximise outcomes. It may be useful to extend this further by providing guidance related to progression beyond undergraduate education, including into the labour market and postgraduate study.

> **Protecting funding:** Access agreements protect spending for WP in a challenging financial environment, and it is not clear whether the same level of resource would be committed to this area of work by all institutions without them. Committing to set levels of expenditure can help to ensure that funding is used in the most effective way. However, institutional flexibility is essential in this regard. Guidance should therefore not be too prescriptive and should allow institutions to allocate their resources according to their strategic priorities and the needs of their WP student cohort.

> **Co-ordinating function for WP activity:** The access agreement has assumed an important co-ordinating function within many institutions and the document covers a wide range of student groups. The notable exception is work to recruit and support disabled students. This may be because the HEFCE allocation has a specific stream dedicated to supporting disabled students, and most institutions utilise this to support their activities. However, it may be worth considering whether spending and activities to engage disabled students and other equality and diversity groups could be more fully integrated into access agreements.

> **Monitoring and evaluation:** The guidance on access agreements provided by OFFA has helped to focus attention on key elements of WP, direct attention to issues that may not otherwise have been considered, and emphasise the importance of good quality monitoring and evaluation. Whilst most institutions have developed their capacity for monitoring and some larger institutions have developed evaluation capacity, there are still anxieties and shortcomings with regard to the latter, especially amongst small and specialist institutions. While the guidance on monitoring and evaluation from OFFA is viewed as helpful, further support would be welcomed. Stronger connections between smaller institutions and those with academic research centres could be developed.

> **Targets and goals:** There is evidence that institutions are reacting to the current monitoring and evaluation requirements by setting targets and goals that are easy to

quantify and measure. Further scope to include qualitative measures that demonstrate the distance travelled by students across the whole lifecycle would help to develop a fuller understanding of what works, when and why for different student groups at different points in their journey. This could help to inform the development of more targeted strategies and activities by HE providers in the future. It could also help to inform the approaches adopted by providers in the compulsory and further education sectors.

> **Emphasis on impact and proven-practices:** Institutions value being able to tailor their activities to suit their local community, student profile and priorities for WP. However, the need to develop and meet stretching targets in particular has encouraged institutions to implement and extend tried and tested interventions rather than to experiment and pilot new ways of working. If innovation is to be encouraged then a safe environment needs to be created where institutions can take risks with activities and try things that may not work. Effective evaluation and sharing of results and learning would be paramount in such a model.

> **Multiple access agreements and associated timescales:** Currently, the government requires institutions to agree a new access agreement annually. The logistics of working on and with multiple access agreements are challenging for institutions. One of the particular frustrations relates to the lack of flexibility to alter approved access agreements in response to emerging evidence or changing circumstances. If, for example, evidence shows that a particular intervention is not as effective as it might be, institutions would like to be able to change the intervention (although not necessarily the intended outcome). Alternatively, if student numbers change substantially this can have an impact on the funding available for future activity and associated targets, and therefore institutions may need to make reasonable adjustments. There may be merit in reviewing the timescales for producing access agreements and the opportunities to make revisions. OFFA and HEFCE should also consider what advice the strategy might give regarding the government's requirement for agreements to be annually reviewed; the strategy might also advise on whether there is scope for longer-term agreements with regular reporting and reviews, incorporating flexibility to respond to emerging evidence and changing circumstances.

Appendix 1 | Topic areas

The topic areas covered in the interviews and survey included:

> Strategic goals and priorities for WP, including how they have been shaped and/or influenced by the requirement to produce an access agreement, strategy type and level of integration with wider institutional strategies and priority ratings for outreach, financial support, retention and success.

> The impact that the requirement to produce an access agreement has had on the financial planning and strategic approach to delivering WP, including the type and range of activities delivered and the groups targeted.

> Spending associated with access agreements, including sources of income used to fund access agreements, how the WP budget is planned and managed, and spend levels across different areas of activity.

> The impact that the requirement to produce an access agreement has had on institutional approaches to monitoring and evaluating WP activity and on performance against national and local benchmarks/performance indicators.

> Perceptions of the benefits of access agreements and the extent to which they have facilitated greater creativity, innovation and co-ordination in approaches to WP.

> Perceptions of the current and likely future challenges of co-ordinating and delivering access agreements and how these might be overcome.
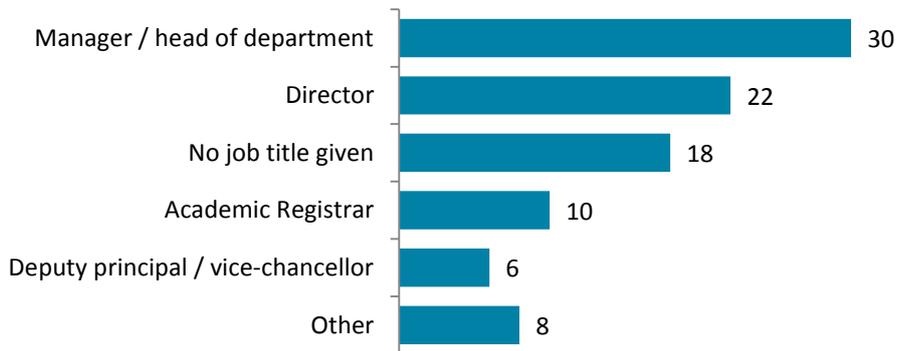
Appendix 2 | Respondent profile

Figure 6.1: Job titles of survey respondents (base = 94).

Job title	Value
Manager / head of department	30
Director	22
No job title given	18
Academic Registrar	10
Deputy principal / vice-chancellor	6
Other	8
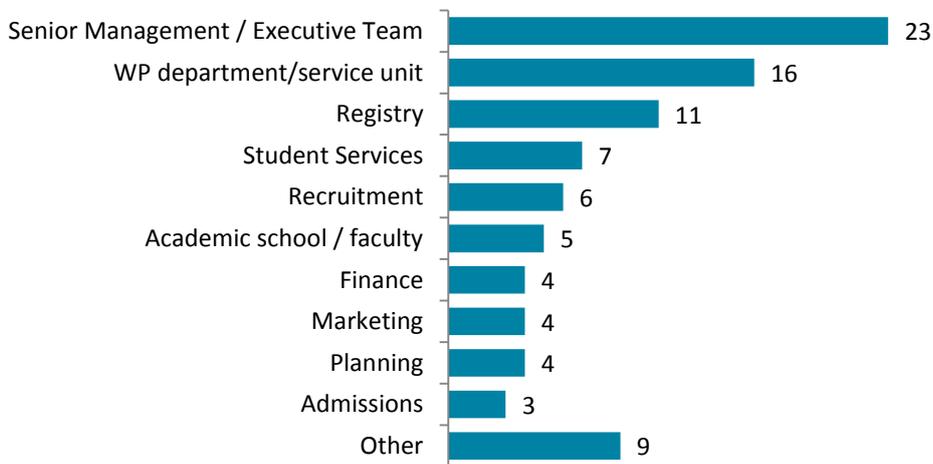
Figure 6.2: Departments in which survey respondents work (base = 92).

Department	Value
Senior Management / Executive Team	23
WP department/service unit	16
Registry	11
Student Services	7
Recruitment	6
Academic school / faculty	5
Finance	4
Marketing	4
Planning	4
Admissions	3
Other	9

Figure6.3: Other departments that are involved in the development of access agreements (base = 92).

Department	Value
Senior Management / Executive Team	73
Student Services	70
Finance	64
Admissions	62
Recruitment	57
WP department/service unit	57
Equality and Diversity Unit	55
Academic school / faculty	52
Disability Services	52
Registry	50
Marketing	48
Student Union	9
Planning	5
Other	15

Figure 6.4: Geographical distribution of survey respondents (base = 94).

Figure6.5: Institutional type of survey respondents (base = 94).

Appendix 3 | Approaches to delivery

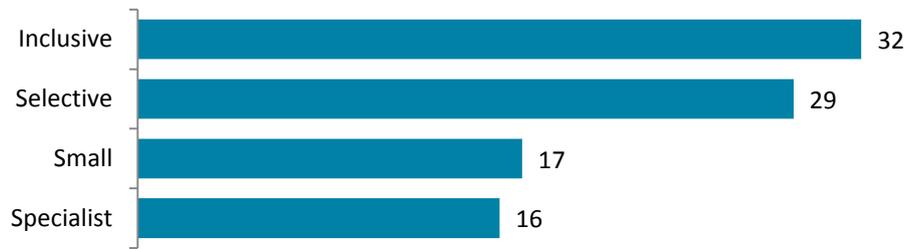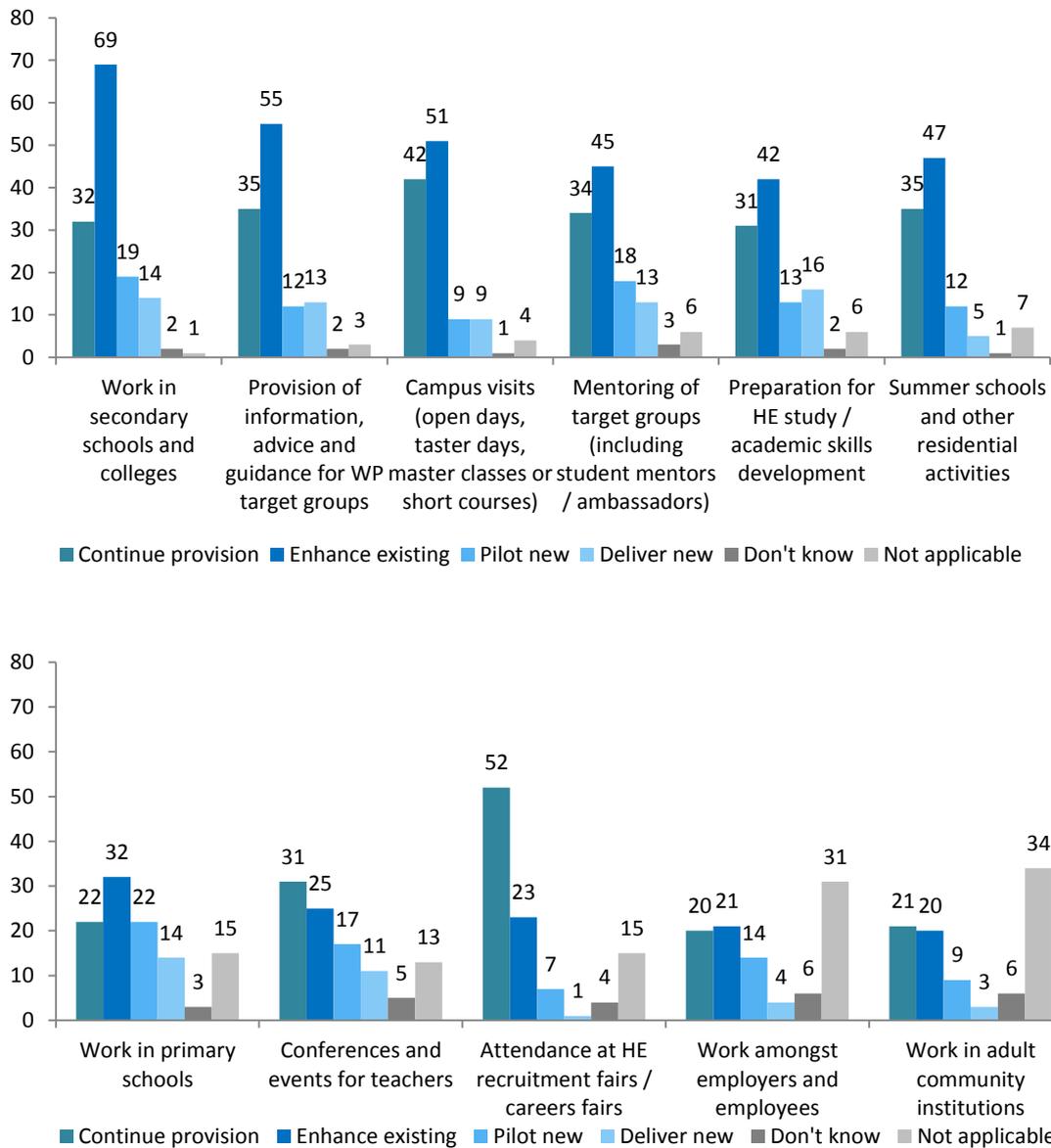**Figure 6.6: 'Which of the following outreach activities have been enabled by the requirement to produce an access agreement?' (Bases vary).**

Chart 1 (top):

	Continue provision	Enhance existing	Pilot new	Deliver new	Don't know	Not applicable
Advice and guidance in preparing UCAS form	39	46	4	2	4	10
Progression routes for non-traditionally qualified students	33	31	10	2	3	21
Use of contextual data in admissions process	24	18	20	8	4	26
Developing methods for identifying merit and potential in selection process	23	14	11	5	1	44

Chart 2 (bottom):

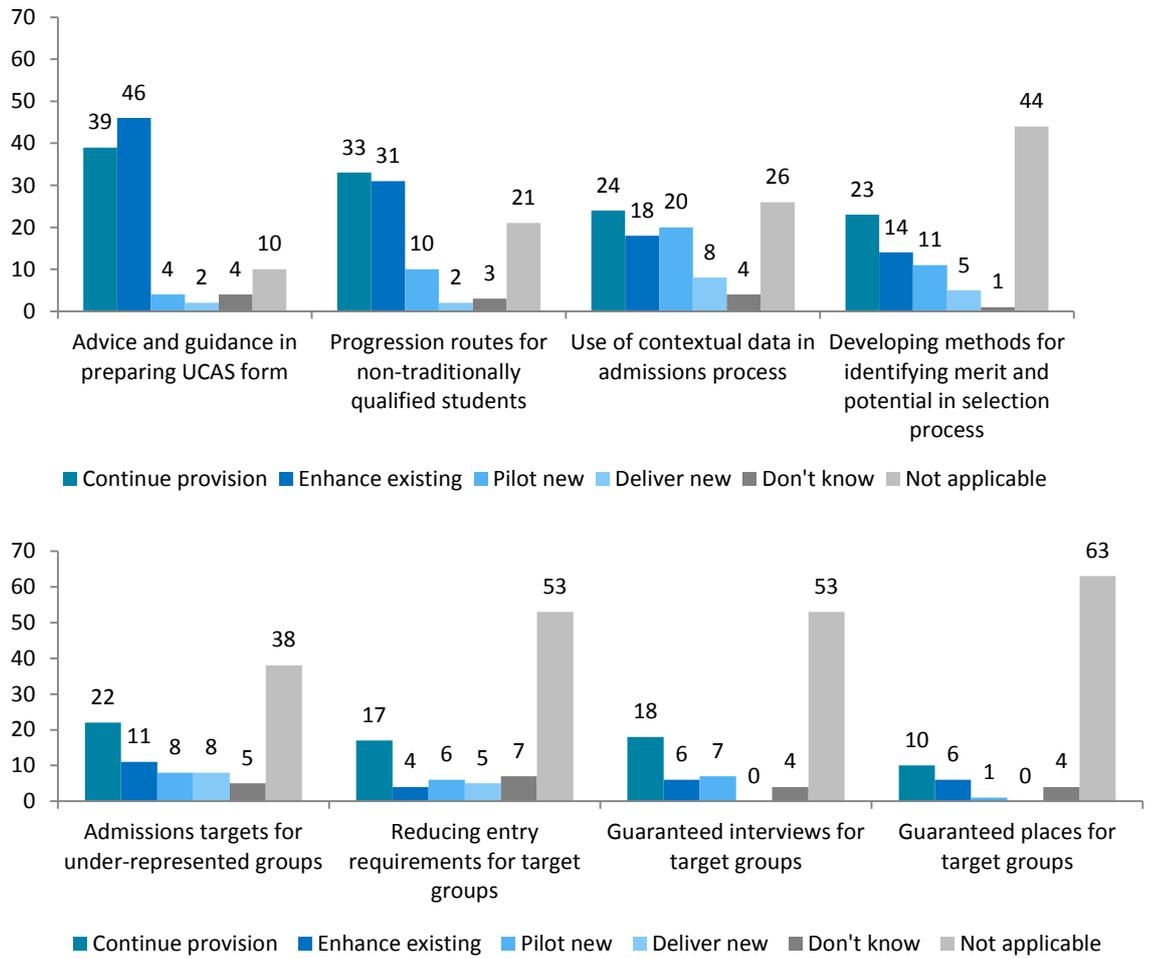|	Continue provision	Enhance existing	Pilot new	Deliver new	Don't know	Not applicable
Admissions targets for under-represented groups	22	11	8	8	5	38
Reducing entry requirements for target groups	17	4	6	5	7	53
Guaranteed interviews for target groups	18	6	7	0	4	53
Guaranteed places for target groups	10	6	1	0	4	63

Figure 6.7: 'Which of the following application and admissions processes have been enabled by the requirement to produce an access agreement?' (Bases vary).

Chart 1 (top):

	Continue provision	Enhance existing	Pilot new	Deliver new	Don't know	Not applicable
Bursaries or scholarships (not NSP)	27	46	11	26	0	6
Match funding for NSP scholarships	25	27	10	38	2	1
Financial advice services	45	40	5	6	2	5
Information about fee structures and repayment options	40	38	5	8	1	8

Chart 2 (bottom):

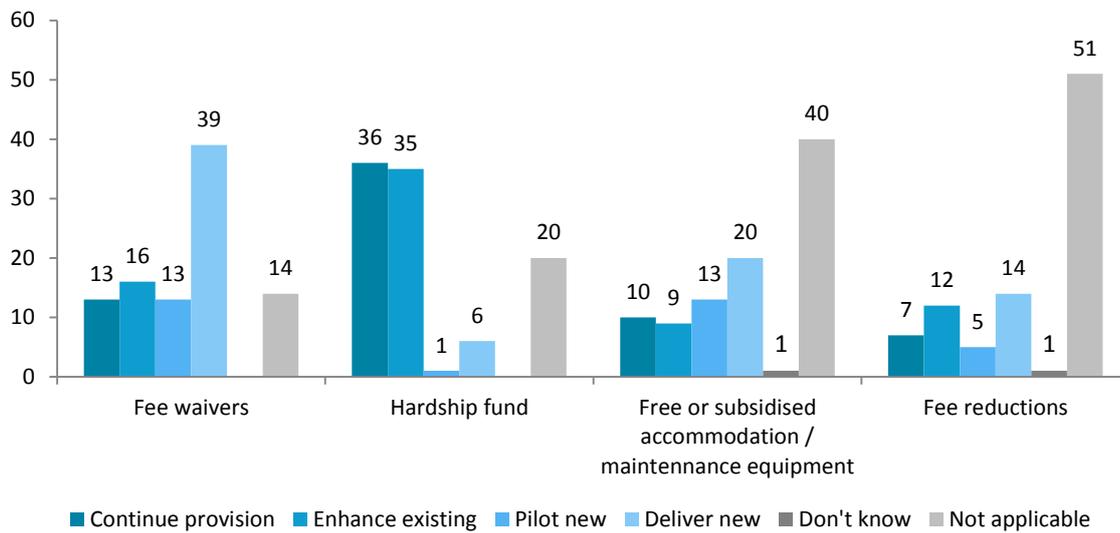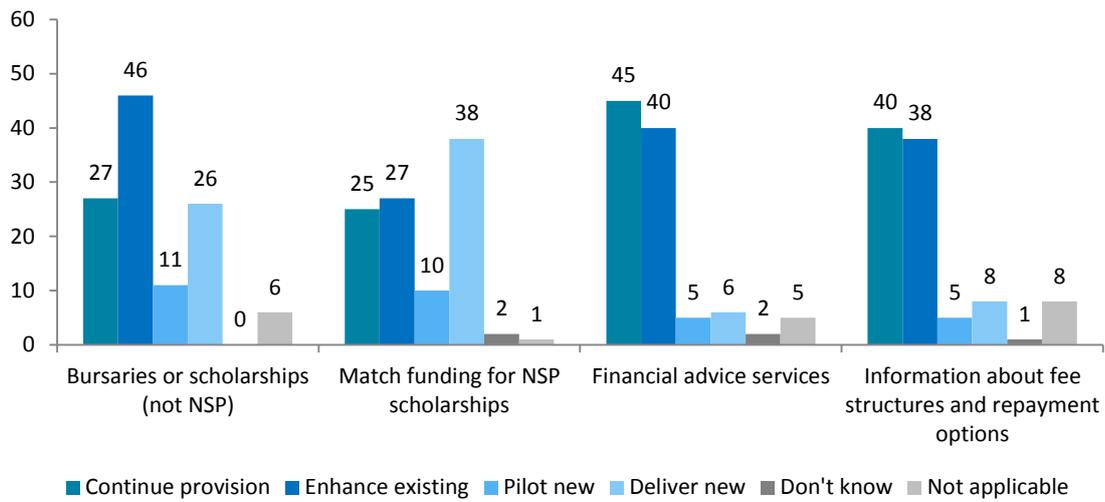|	Continue provision	Enhance existing	Pilot new	Deliver new	Don't know	Not applicable
Fee waivers	13	16	13	39		14
Hardship fund	36	35	1	6		20
Free or subsidised accommodation / maintennance equipment	10	9	13	20	1	40
Fee reductions	7	12	5	14	1	51

Figure 6.8: 'Which of the following financial support activities have been enabled by the requirement to produce an access agreement?' (Bases vary).
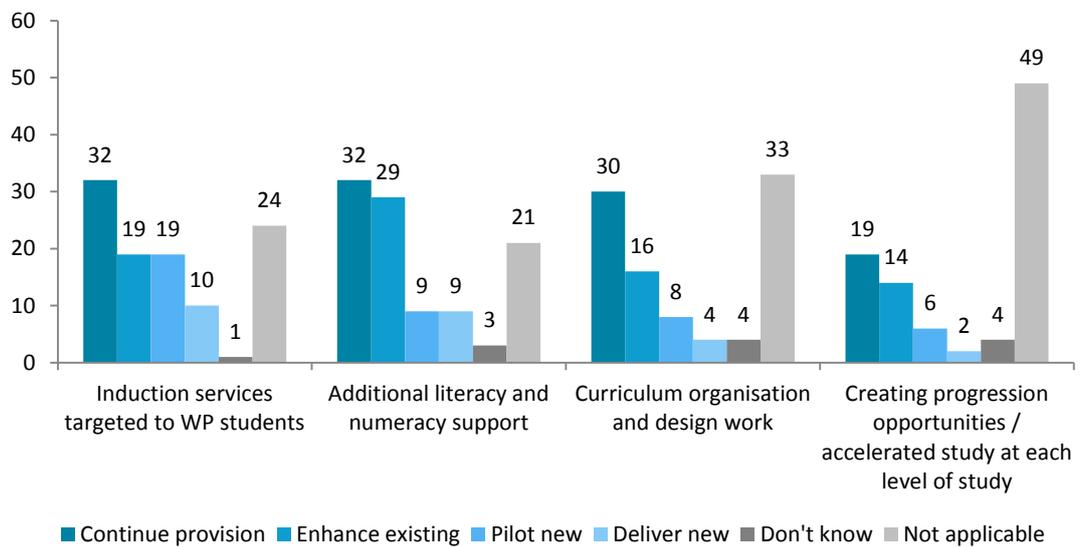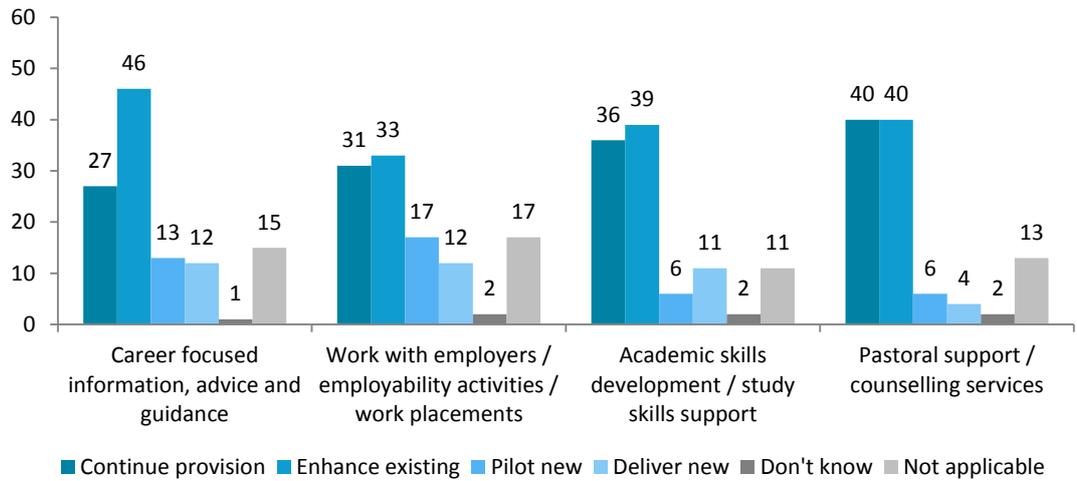
Figure6.9 'Which of the following retention and success activities have been enabled by the requirement to produce an access agreement?' (Bases vary).

Appendix 4 | Bibliography

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Appendix 5 | List of abbreviations

Below is a list of the abbreviations used in this report.

BME: Black and Minority Ethnic

DSA: Disabled Students' Allowance

EU: European Union

FE: Further education

FEC: Further Education College

HE: Higher education

HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEI: Higher Education Institution

HESA: Higher Education Statistics Agency

KPI: Key Performance Indicator

LLN: Lifelong Learning Network

LPN: Low Participation Neighbourhood

NSP: National Scholarship Programme

OFFA: Office for Fair Access

P4P: Partnerships for Progression

POLAR2: Participation of Local Areas 2

SEG: Socio-economic group

SMT: Senior Management Team

TTA: Teacher Training Agency

WP: Widening participation

WPSA: Widening Participation Strategic Assessment