



## Widening Participation Guidance for Academic Advisers

### Background

Widening participation, or fair access, means supporting those who may be marginalised or underrepresented in UK universities to enter and flourish in higher education. The Government highlights the importance of opportunities provided by higher education for social mobility, professional development, civic engagement and personal growth as fundamental in shaping the economic, intellectual and cultural development of the country<sup>1</sup>. Bournemouth University's [Vision and Values statement, BU2018: Creating, Sharing, Inspiring strategy](#) highlights the importance of interventions to raise aspirations of marginalised learners to engage with higher education.

#### WP students include:

Mature students (over 21 on entry)  
Disability  
Ethnic origin (BAME Groups)  
First Generation to attend university  
Socio-economic groups  
Lower Participating Neighbourhoods  
Care Leavers  
Leavers of state schools

At BU we have a diverse student population and each academic has the opportunity, through the Academic Adviser role, to empower students to reach their personal learning potential, whoever they are. Evidence has shown<sup>2</sup> that rates of non-continuation among widening participation students are higher than the national average and recent research by the Fair Access Research Project at the BU Centre for Excellence in Learning has raised awareness of the importance of *belonging* for widening participation students.

### The Student/Academic Adviser Relationship

Here are some thoughts that may assist your understanding about your students' individual situation and to offer appropriate support and direction:

- Have a conversation with individual students to explore their personal context and background which takes note of any widening participation aspects
- Take note of both your student's verbal and non-verbal communication
- Identify appropriate ways to discuss difficulties or challenges; either, electronically, verbally on the phone or face to face may offer alternative ways of supporting some students that is more comfortable for them
- Be aware of the position of authority you are in and remain sensitive to the impact this may have on students
- Mature students have more life experience but they may also have greater expectations on dealing with challenges without asking for or accepting assistance or guidance. Awareness of this can enable you to facilitate support with subtlety
- Share experiences with other Academic Advisers to enable the advisory relationship to overcome any issues that may arise

<sup>1</sup> Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System (accessed January 2017) can be found at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> HEFCE "Non-continuation rates at English HEIs: Trends for entrants 2005-06 to 2010-11" (HEFCE 2013/07) (accessed January 2017) available at [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201307/name,81697,en.html](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201307/name,81697,en.html)

## Signposting and responsibility

Academic Advisers have a key role in signposting students to resources and advice; awareness of the individual needs of those from a widening participation (or any) background will help you to be effective in providing appropriate support.

- Student Support resources for staff are available at:  
<https://staffintranet.bournemouth.ac.uk/workingatbu/staffdevelopmentandengagement/staffsupportingstudents/>. This includes links to all relevant policies and procedures, sources of support available as well as workshops for staff involved in supporting students.
- Become familiar with the extensive sources of support that you can refer students to. The Student Referral Flowchart provides advice on this and is available at:  
<http://intranet.bournemouth.ac.uk/policy/Student%20Referrals.vsd>
- Signpost students to the student wellbeing website both at the start of your relationship and regularly during your tutorial sessions with them  
<https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/students/health-wellbeing/student-wellbeing>
- Remember not to assume awareness of even the most apparently obvious support options
- Remember that each student is an individual and therefore you cannot support students in the same way or expect them to achieve the same outcomes. For example, someone may be a consistent 2.2 grade student but, for them, this has exceeded their expectations and aspirations because of their multifaceted life and background. It's important to have a positive support model rather than a deficit one.
- Work together in partnership with professional services where necessary, they may be able to offer advice or guidance to you on how to broach raising issues with a student in the most beneficial way
- If you are under time pressure and feel it may impact on your response to a student, briefly ensure they know that you are addressing their need or concern and will get back to them. Alternatively, request the assistance of the relevant professional service to ensure that a student is able to discuss a matter in good time
- It is important that you are aware of the sphere of your role as well as your limitations. The role of the Academic Adviser is to listen, provide initial support and signpost to more specialist services.

The programme of [Fair Access Research](#), focused on Ways of Working is led by [Dr Vanessa Heaslip](#) and [Dr Clive Hunt](#) with [Dr Maggie Hutchings](#), [Dr Sue Eccles](#), Dr Wendelin Morrison, and Karen Powell. The research aims to establish how to best support students from widening participation to succeed at BU.

The HEA has produced a framework and toolkit for enhancing retention and student attainment and progression: [www.heacademy.ac.uk/enhancement/frameworks/framework-student-access-retention-attainment-and-progression-higher](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/enhancement/frameworks/framework-student-access-retention-attainment-and-progression-higher)

The Equality Challenge Unit publishes statistics and research relating to equality and diversity of staff and students in English higher education [www.ecu.ac.uk/](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/)

[BU Student Service links to Student Wellbeing, Disability and Additional Learning Support, Chaplaincy, GROW@BU etc.](#)  
[www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-services](http://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-services)