

ASTON UNIVERSITY

ACCESS AGREEMENT 2009/10

1. ACCESS AGREEMENT AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Widening access is central to the mission of Aston University. The University's Access Agreement sits within a now well-established institutional strategy for widening participation. Aston has an increasingly diverse student profile and continues to meet or exceed its Access benchmarks with respect to under-represented groups. This is achieved through a combination of the professional and vocational nature of its programmes, its excellent graduate employment record and its proactive outreach work with schools and colleges.

Aston adopts a holistic approach to widening participation throughout the student life-cycle, from aspiration raising in primary schools, to provision of a range of academic, social and financial support services whilst in University, through to student graduation and employment. The University is committed to excellence in teaching and has invested in the provision of additional support to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student profile. The University has invested an increasing proportion of its funding directly into enhancing the student learning experience, for example, the establishment of a Learning and Skills Centre in the Library. Widening participation practice is evidence-based, building upon the range of relevant research commissioned and conducted by the University into the experiences and needs of under-represented students within Higher Education.

The publications 'Investing in Widening Participation 2003/04' and 'Widening Participation at Aston University, February 2006' outline how Aston is investing its funding to support its strategy for widening participation, including access (see <http://www.aston.ac.uk/prospective-students/wp/>).

2. ACCESS AGREEMENT: COMPONENT ELEMENTS

The main elements of Aston's Access agreement with OFFA are proposed to be as follows:

(a) Fee limits

- All full-time Home/EU undergraduate students, including those on Foundation Year Programmes, are charged the full tuition fee (£3,225 pa in 2009/10), as this provides the revenue necessary to improve further our academic activities and facilities for students.
- Aston University runs highly successful four-year sandwich degree programmes which enable our students to spend the third year outside the University on professional placement. Sandwich programmes increase the employability of our graduates and underpin our strong links with industry and the professions. Home/EU students on placement will be charged a tuition fee which is 50% of the full tuition fee (ie. £1,610), as this will encourage students to continue to take the option of placements which are academically and vocationally beneficial.
- Home/EU students following full-time Foundation Degrees Foundation Programmes will be charged £1,285 pa in 2009/10.
- Aston University charges Home/EU students on part-time undergraduate programmes pro rata to the fee for full-time students.

(b) Investment of additional income on access measures

This table shows the projected additional income accruing from variable fees for the period 2006/07-2010/11 and the estimated amount allocated to bursaries.

	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Total estimated additional fee income *	£2,826,000	5,660,425	£7,083,000	£8,900,000	£9,111,000
Estimated amount of additional fee income to be spent on bursaries **	£487,840	£930,765	£1,200,741	£1,461,610	£1,500,000
Estimated amount of additional fee income to be spent on outreach	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0

* Based on actual student numbers for 2006/7 and 2007/8, and projections for 2008/9-2010/11.

** Based on actual student numbers for 2006/7 and 2007/8, and projections for 2008/9-2010/11.

The University will maintain its current outreach activity, which is extensive, well-established and forms a key component of the University's Widening Participation strategy. Aston will maintain the level of funding to support a comprehensive range of outreach activity, both within academic Schools and support departments. The additional revenue from tuition fees will be re-invested directly into financial support for students in the form of bursaries and support for academic activities, including improvements to facilities. Given the extent and success of existing outreach activities, the University does not intend to allocate any of the additional fee income to outreach work.

(c) Bursaries and other financial support for students

For 2009/10 the University intends to maintain the maximum means-tested **Aston Bursary** at £800 pa to students paying deferred variable tuition fees. Based on historical trends it is anticipated that about 40-45% of students paying deferred variable tuition fees will be entitled to a means-tested bursary, with about 35% of such students receiving a full bursary. From 2008/9, the University will no longer allocate Bursaries on the basis of the amount of Maintenance Grant received, but will instead use the level of family income to determine Bursaries according to the following scale:

Family Income	Bursary (£)
£18,000 and below	800
£18,001 to £23,000	640
£23,001 to £28,000	480
£28,001 to £33,000	320
£33,001 to £39,333	160
£39,334 and above	0

Aston Bursaries help to ensure that all students continue to benefit from high quality education and that no student is deterred from applying to Aston University for financial reasons. Students are assessed for eligibility through the Higher Education Bursary and Scholarship Scheme (HEBSS) which is administered by the Student Loans Company.

Aston University is committed to the concept of integrated sandwich placement years and year abroad programmes, and has over 50 years experience of offering these degrees, giving our students valuable experience which increases their employability and confidence, enabling many of them to fast-track in their future Graduate careers. Accordingly, the University offers all UK/EU students paying deferred variable tuition fees a **Placement Allowance of £1000** if they decide to take a sandwich placement year, payable in the placement year.

UK/EU students paying deferred tuition fees, who undertake an unpaid sandwich work/study placement or a placement outside the United Kingdom for a whole academic year will receive an additional **Placement Bursary of £500**. This includes languages students on their Year Abroad. The Placement Allowance and the Placement Bursaries can be used to pay tuition fees or to help support students on their placement year/year abroad. Many Aston students are also paid a salary on their placement year.

Full year Erasmus students on study and work placements who are subject to UK support arrangements are not eligible for Placement Allowances and Placement Bursaries as they are not required to pay deferred variable tuition fees.

(d) Provision of information to students

Applicants are informed of the nature and value of tuition fees, bursaries and awards via the prospectus, the University website and special promotional leaflets. Finance talks feature as part of a programme of secondary school visits and HE guidance evenings for parents in schools. The University also provides pre-entry information and guidance on financial matters through Open Days and events for parents and teachers on the Aston campus. Pre-entry financial guidance is provided by the Students' Advice Centre and recruitment staff, and the Students' Advice Centre provides continuing advice and guidance once students have started their course. The University has also invested in the appointment of a Co-ordinator for the Students' JobShop and in research into the level and impact of debt and part-time work upon Aston University students.

The Student Support Unit manages financial assistance for students in the form of funds, trusts and bursaries, all of which are targeted and allocated on the basis of need. This is overseen by the Student Finance Committee, comprising senior academic staff; staff from the University's Finance Department, the Registry and Student Services; and representatives from the Students' Guild.

The University has developed a Guide for Parents which includes information on financial matters - refer to:
<http://www.aston.ac.uk/prospective-students/parents/>.

Students are informed at enrolment and re-enrolment of their position in relation to the information on their HEBSS record concerning their eligibility for bursaries and subject specific awards. Students who the University believe to be eligible are sent personalised e-mails informing them what they needed to do to rectify the position in order to be able to complete their applications, processing and payment of their bursaries/awards. In addition Registry and Student Advice Centre staff were available to provide students with advice, guidance and information.

(e) Outreach work

Aston University's Aimhigher and Outreach Programme

The University continues to build upon its well-established programme of on- and off-campus activities for schools and colleges including:

- Extensive programme of visits to schools and colleges.
- 'Students in Schools' including student tutoring, student mentoring, student e-mentoring, and the Active Community Engagement programme.
- University visit days for younger pupils and a series of Subject Taster Days for Year 12 students. In 2007-8, 53 school visits were held on campus engaging 2,147 students on campus
- Residential experiences for school pupils. In 2007-8, 84 pupils from 10 schools in Coventry engaged in Year 10 Residential Summer School and 43 pupils participated in an Interactive Languages Weekend.
- Master Classes for year 12 pupils in a range of subjects, supporting A level study. In 2007-8 a total of 513 students attended 20 Master Classes in 9 Subject areas from 32 schools and colleges
- Sixth Form Subject conferences. This year over 400 students attended the Subject-specific Sixth Form Conferences in English Language and Politics
- Residential events for school pupils in years 10-12, including those provided through the Aston-led West Midlands Excellence Hub (see below)
- Information for parents through Parents' evenings in schools and on-campus events, eg. Parents' Higher Education Evening, and Teachers' and Careers Advisers' Evening.
- Business Games including the ACCA and Rolls-Royce Business Games; in 2007-8 attracting 282 students to compete on campus
- The University hosted the national 'Pure Potential' Sixth Form Conference with over 500 sixth form students in attendance from across the UK. Aston is one of 8 partners in the Pure Potential Initiative, along with Imperial College, LSE, Manchester, Newcastle, Cardiff, Southampton and Leeds.

Working with Parents

The 'Involving the Family' project works with parents and family members from groups who traditionally do not attend. It provides information about University to raise the awareness of parents of what HE has to offer and offers the parents an opportunity to experience the University with tours of the campus and an opportunity to meet current staff and students. In addition, a Parents Guide to Higher Education (<http://www1.aston.ac.uk/prospective-students/parents>) and a guide for parents new to University (printed) continue to be used for the target groups.

Aston's collaborative work with Aimhigher

The University actively engages in partnership through the Birmingham and Solihull Aimhigher programme as joint-lead of the Aimhigher HEI Collaborative Programme. The 5 HEIs work in partnership to deliver a progressive programme to provide opportunities for 'disadvantaged learners' aged 14-19 to experience HE related activity as part of their school/college guidance programmes and to access both HE students and staff. The University is also an active member of The Aimhigher HE Mentoring programme and has eight years experience of providing student mentors in local secondary schools.

Aston University leads the West Midlands Excellence Hub providing opportunities for Gifted and Talented pupils across the country and coordinates the provision across the 11 Universities in the Hub. The Young, Gifted and Talented programme is a national programme managed by CfBT on behalf of the DCSF. The Excellence Hubs form part of this programme and there is one in each of the nine government of. The YGT programme aims to give pupils aged 4 – 19 the opportunity to participate in a range of activities & programmes designed to stretch them academically and enable them to meet like minded students and discover more about a subject for which they are passionate.

Specific outreach work to promote languages

Aston University is committed to promoting the benefits of learning languages at University and encouraging pupils to continue their language studies in school. This year, over 1000 pupils aged 14-19 have been engaged in a diverse programme of activities including day and residential language events on campus, school visits, on-line discussion groups, cultural days, languages in the workplace events and been supported by Aston language students and graduates.

The activities have been delivered through the Aimhigher and Gifted & Talented programmes co-ordinated by Schools and Colleges Liaison; the outreach programme run by the School of Languages and Social Sciences and facilitated through the Outreach and Widening Participation Office, by building upon the Widening Participation initiative, 'Languages for Life'. The work has been consolidated this year through the nationally recognised West Midlands Excellence Hub and the Routes into Languages (RintoL) programme; both led by Aston.

The Interactive Languages Weekend introduces gifted Year 11-13 pupils to the concept of international marketing in French, Spanish and German. Benefits include pupils gaining 'confidence in speaking French, more awareness of grammar and more information about language degrees', and 'inspiration to continue learning and speaking Spanish because it is a useful skill to have in terms of Business'. For 88% of pupils the event increased their understanding of the subject and for 72% it increased their interest in the subject.

Pupils develop confidence by being encouraged to voice their opinions on topical subjects related to the target language country through the Young, Gifted & Talented on-line debates in French and German, with 248 active postings from pupils aged 11-19.

In addition to languages, pupils are introduced to traditions and culture through a French day and a China Day. A teacher reflected that learning about other

French speaking countries had helped the Year 8 pupils to 'broaden their horizons' and noted the interest of pupils to continue with the French studies.

Through the Aimhigher Modern Foreign Language campus visits, pupils are encouraged to continue with language studies through discovering more about the opportunities available for language students at university level and in the world of work. Pupils experience language study in a non-school environment, enabling access to resources such as specialist recording equipment in the Language Laboratories.

One Language College has produced a video of their University visit, including interviews with student ambassadors, in order to share their experiences with younger pupils back at school.

The campus visits and the use of the Teachers' TV programme 'Why learn a language?', featuring 'Languages for Life', have had an impact upon option choices.

Pupils also met language graduates and learned about the importance of languages within the workplace. Year 8 pupils took part in international marketing activities, business language sessions, and a script writing for a French radio station, resulting in 82% of the pupils agreeing that earning an additional language would be useful in their future career.

Student volunteering – community engagement

The University has a strong tradition of student volunteering, placing students in the local community to raise pupils' aspirations and awareness of Higher Education. In addition to its Aimhigher work with the 14-19 year olds, Aston runs a significant volunteering programme with primary schools, recognising that disadvantage starts at an early age.

In 2007-8, 206 students participated in volunteering opportunities through student tutoring and the Active Community Engagement programme, working in 38 schools and with 18 community organisations such as MENCAP, The National Trust, Childline, Conductive Education, Local Leagues, Young Inventors Project, and Reading Matters.

The University has particularly strong relationships with two local schools in Aston. The University is visible from the grounds of Aston Tower Primary School yet most pupils do not know that the University exists. As part of its community engagement programme the University has developed a special and sustained relationship with this school and extended beyond the deployment of role models in the classroom, enabling on-campus activities which open up University facilities and engage parents in the local community.

Aston Tower pupils, teachers and parents attend a Graduation Ceremony at the University and have the opportunity to meet student volunteers and take part in campus tours. This year 120 pupils graduated and were supported by 110 parents. The Deputy Head Teacher described the occasion as 'certainly one of the school highlights' reflecting that –'all children enjoyed it and were so proud'.

The University works collaboratively to support the aims of local partnerships. The special needs of the inner city are the main driving force behind the Titan

Partnership which is made up of 50 educational and business partners. Aston Pride is the government-funded regeneration programme tasked with bringing sustainable regeneration to Aston.

The 'Aston Olympians' event, organised in collaboration with the Titan Partnership and Aston Pride, enabled 240 pupils from Aston Towers and 7 other primary schools in Aston to access the University's sports facilities and try out new sports such as water polo and work with Aston staff and students volunteers. Each child received a certificate and a t-shirt presented to each school by the Vice-Chancellor. This programme will continue to grow leading up to the London 2012 Games. The event encourages youngsters' participation in sport and complements the schools programme for raising attainment by underpinning achievement in sport. The Titan Director reflects: 'If pupils achieve well in activities like the Olympians, then this impacts upon their levels of confidence and engagement and ultimately attainment.'

The Titan Partnership Business Awards support schools in the local area by linking schools with businesses. Aston deployed student volunteers to work with pupils in the classroom, discussing the best features of their schools and local area and what they would like to see change, linking into the planned regeneration of the Aston area. The pupils then visited the campus to learn more about how the University markets itself, designing their own 'dynamic triangle' inspired by the University logo and focusing on what they considered to be the best selling points based on the campus tour. Pupils built upon this experience in school to work on ways of marketing their own schools and Aston as an area. The Director of Titan reflects that the project has 'resulted in pupils' increased self esteem, knowledge of 'work', and knowledge of the University'.

Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Progress and development of outreach activity is overseen by The Outreach Working Group which reports to the University's Community Engagement Committee.

Funding of outreach work

Given its record of, and plans for outreach activity, the University commits to maintaining its Outreach programme without the need for extra expenditure from additional fee income.

(f) Milestones

Aston University is proud of its success in recruiting students from lower socio-economic groups and from areas where participation in Higher Education is low (Low Participation Neighbourhoods - LPNs), whilst maintaining very high retention rates and without sacrificing entry standards. As can be seen from the attached table, Aston University has consistently met or exceeded its Performance Indicators for Access. For example, in relation to the proportion from social classes 4, 5, 6 & 7, Aston University achieved 36.2% in 2006/07 against a benchmark of 30.9%. Aston also exceeds its benchmarks for students from state schools and for students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods. Aston University has set as its access milestones the HEFCE Performance Indicator benchmarks. The University will continue to aim to meet or exceed all its Widening Participation benchmarks, year on year as they are

published, and will use bursaries to ensure that students are not deterred by the introduction of variable fees.

(g) Institutional Monitoring Arrangements

Aston University monitors the Access agreement and progress against the milestones, through the WPTG. This group, which has high level cross-University representation, is chaired by a Pro-Vice-Chancellor and reports to the Academic Planning and Resources Committee and thereby to the Senate. The WPTG is also responsible for monitoring the use of Widening Participation funding and the fulfilment of the University's Widening Participation Strategy. The University will report on performance in achieving the Access Performance Indicator benchmarks in the Annual Monitoring Statement to HEFCE.

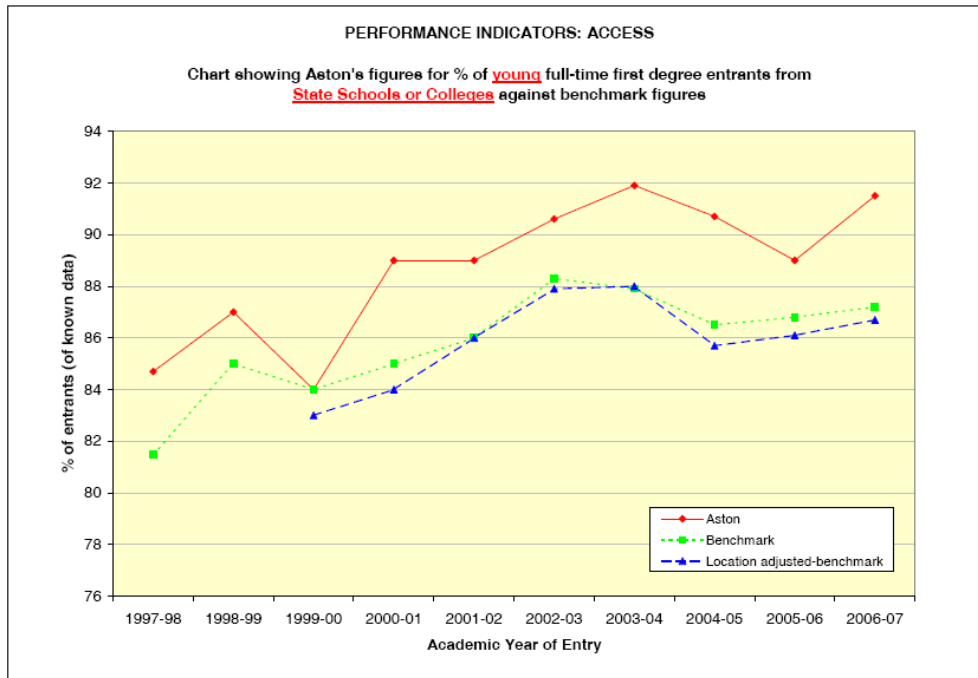
3. CONCLUSION

Aston University's Access Agreement has been developed from a well-established Widening Participation Strategy, which in turn is embedded within the University's Strategic Plan. The additional tuition fee income deriving from the introduction of deferred variable tuition fees, has enabled Aston University to enhance students' Maintenance Grants through the provision of Aston Bursaries, thus helping to ensure that no student considering enrolling upon an undergraduate degree programme need be deterred from doing so for financial reasons. With the additional provision of Placement Allowances and Placement Bursaries, as well as a safety net of hardship funding for students who find themselves in unexpected financial difficulties during the course of their programmes, the University believes that it has put in place a range of financial support for students which will facilitate its continued success in enabling students from underprivileged backgrounds to benefit from first class Higher Education.

Aston University looks forward to the endorsement of its revised Access Agreement by OFFA, so that it can provide early information to prospective undergraduate students about its plans for tuition fees and bursary support in 2009/10.

Participation of students from State Schools or Colleges

T1a: Young Full-Time First Degree Entrants at Aston University

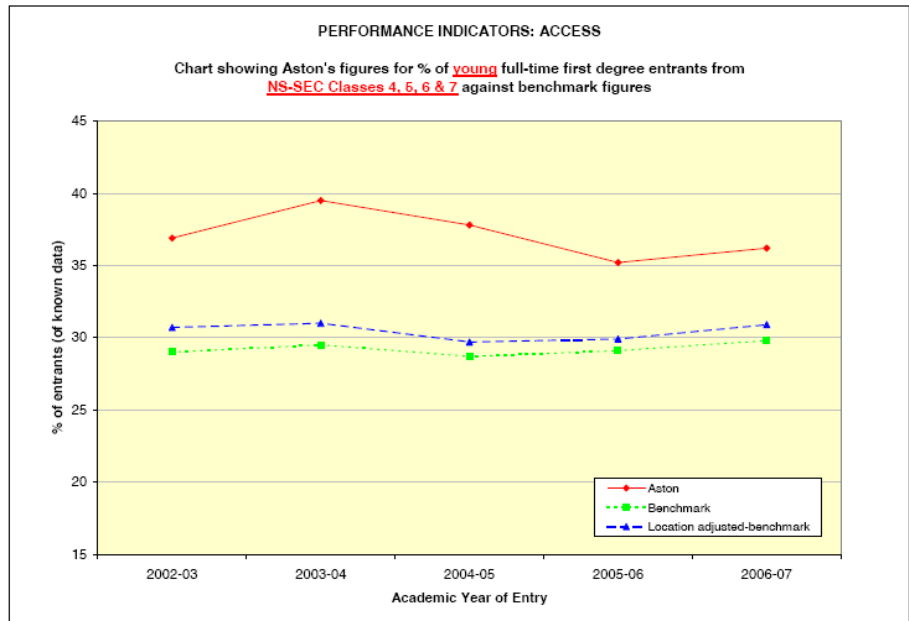


Data taken from HEFCE/HESA publications: Performance Indicators in Higher Education (Table T1a)

	Entrant Population		From State Schools or Colleges				
Year of Entry	Total Entrants	Number of young entrants	Percent of entrants who are young	Percent with known data	Percent from group (of known data)	Benchmark	Location adjusted benchmark
2006/07	1775	1615	91.1%	98.8%	91.5%	87.2%	86.7%
2005/06	1780	1645	92.4%	99.1%	89.0%	86.8%	86.1%
2004/05	1560	1385	88.7%	98.9%	90.7%	86.5%	85.7%
2003/04	1590	1405	88.4%	97.7%	91.9%	87.9%	88.0%
2002/03	1470	1325	90.1%	99.8%	90.6%	88.3%	87.9%
2001/02	1440	1304	91.0%	92.0%	89.0%	86.0%	86.0%
2000/01	1446	1334	92.0%	93.0%	89.0%	85.0%	84.0%
1999/00	1168	1067	91.0%	91.0%	84.0%	84.0%	83.0%
1998/99	1406	1250	89.0%	94.0%	87.0%	85.0%	n/a
1997/98	1418	1269	89.0%	93.0%	85.0%	82.0%	n/a

Participation of students from specified Social / Socio-Economic Classes

T1a: Young Full-Time First Degree Entrants at Aston University

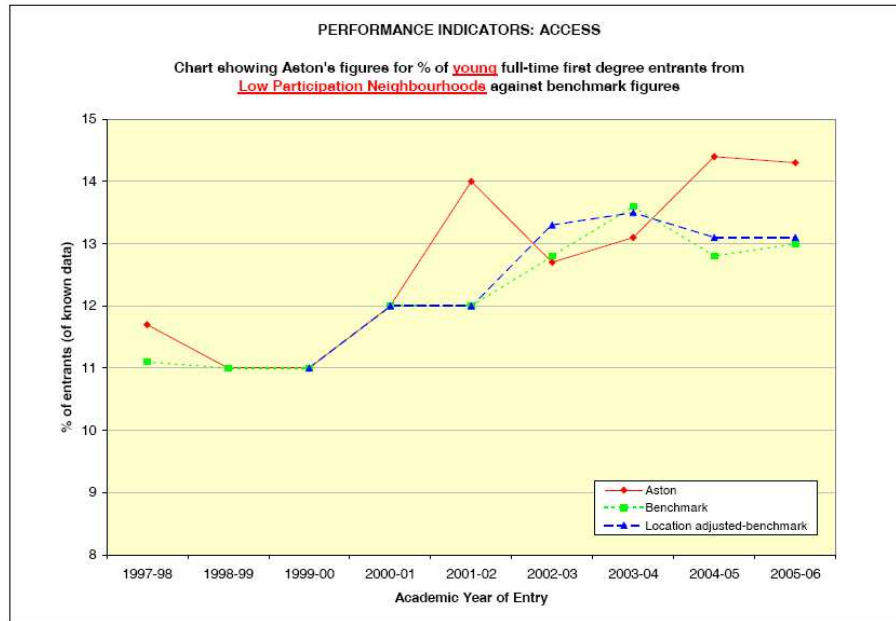


Data taken from HEFCE/HESA publications: Performance Indicators in Higher Education (Table T1a)

Entrant Population		From NS-SEC Classes 4,5,6 & 7					
Year of Entry	Total Entrants	Number of young entrants	Percent of entrants who are young	Percent with known data	Percent from group (of known data)	Benchmark	Location adjusted benchmark
2006/07	1775	1615	91.1%	79.5%	36.2%	29.8%	30.9%
2005/06	1780	1645	92.4%	79.3%	35.2%	29.1%	29.9%
2004/05	1560	1385	88.7%	82.1%	37.8%	28.7%	29.7%
2003/04	1590	1405	88.4%	84.0%	39.5%	29.5%	31.0%
2002/03	1470	1325	90.1%	80.9%	36.9%	29.0%	30.7%
		From Social Class IIIM, IV, V					
2001/02	1440	1304	91.0%	90.0%	33.0%	25.0%	27.0%
2000/01	1446	1334	92.0%	92.0%	31.0%	24.0%	25.0%
1999/00	1168	1067	91.0%	93.0%	33.0%	24.0%	25.0%
1998/99	1406	1250	89.0%	92.0%	29.0%	24.0%	n/a
1997/98	1418	1269	89.0%	92.0%	29.0%	23.0%	n/a

Participation of students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods

T1a: Young Full-Time First Degree Entrants at Aston University



Data taken from HEFCE/HESA publications: Performance Indicators in Higher Education (Table T1a)

The chart does not include 2006/07 data as the postcode indicator used to identify Low Participation Neighbourhoods was changed from Super Profiles to the revised POLAR definitions of low participation areas (POLAR2). Data is not comparable to previous years.

		Entrant Population		From Low Participation Neighbourhoods (POLAR2)			
Year of Entry	Total Entrants	Number of young entrants	Percent of entrants who are young	Percent with known data	Percent from group (of known data)	Benchmark	Location adjusted benchmark
2006/07	1775	1615	91.1%	99.9%	8.7%	8.3%	9.1%
				From Low Participation Neighbourhoods (Super Profiles)			
2005/06	1780	1645	92.4%	93.2%	14.3%	13.0%	13.1%
2004/05	1560	1385	88.7%	93.6%	14.4%	12.8%	13.1%
2003/04	1590	1405	88.4%	94.2%	13.1%	13.6%	13.5%
2002/03	1470	1325	90.1%	93.5%	12.7%	12.8%	13.3%
2001/02	1440	1304	91.0%	96.0%	14.0%	12.0%	12.0%
2000/01	1446	1334	92.0%	97.0%	12.0%	12.0%	12.0%
1999/00	1168	1067	91.0%	99.0%	11.0%	11.0%	11.0%
1998/99	1406	1250	89.0%	99.0%	11.0%	11.0%	n/a
1997/98	1418	1269	89.0%	99.0%	12.0%	11.0%	n/a