

# University of Reading

## Equality and Diversity Information Report: Students 2014-2015

### January 2016

#### Contents

2	Index of data
2	Abbreviations
3 to 4	Executive Summary
5 to 6	Summary of Recommendations
7 to 8	Objective 1
9 to 10	Objective 2
10	Objective 3
10 to 18	Objective 4
19 to 21	Objective 5
22	Objective 6
22	Objective 7
23 to 31	Objective 8

**Data and detailed commentary on students is presented in Annexes 1 – 9.**

1. Applicant data covering applications, offers and enrolment for UG, PGT and PGR study during 2014/15
2. Application data during 2014/15 – Ethnicity
3. The profile of Reading University’s student population for the year of 2013/14
4. Student population by Faculty
5. Student population by Programme Level
6. UG Progression
7. Withdrawal data – All levels
8. UG Degree attainment
9. PG Degree attainment

**Abbreviations used in the report**

AHSS	Arts, Humanities and Social Science
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
DAS	Disability Advisory Service
DSA	Disabled Students Allowance
HARC	Health, Advocacy, Care and Respect advisors
HBS	Henley Business School
LS	Life Science
MHFA	Mental Health First Aid
NSS	National Student Survey
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PGT	Postgraduate Taught
RUSU	Reading University Students’ Union
SC	Science
UG	Undergraduate
UEB	University Executive Board
UoR	University of Reading

## Executive Summary

The University is proud to have a strong history of demonstrating tolerance and promoting equality of opportunity. The University has a diverse range of students and staff and seeks to ensure that all students and employees are able to fulfil their potential and talent regardless of their background.

### Students

As a result of joining up the agendas of diversity & inclusion, access & widening participation and student success there is now a substantial body of ongoing work focussed on ensuring equality of opportunity for all UoR students. This work is referred to at appropriate points within the report but some of the highlights of our Diversity and Inclusion achievements this year include:

- The appointment to a new senior post of Dean for Diversity and Inclusion - this held as a job-share between male and female academic staff at professorial level - to provide greater leadership and coordination of the large and varied efforts across the University to support equality and diversity.
- The formal approval and implementation of BME Attainment Project report – resulting in general awareness raising, enhanced staff training, embedding in quality assurance processes and better data collection and dissemination which make trends in representation, progression and attainment of students protected characteristics visible
- A formal assessment of the impact of the change to Disabled Student Allowance, resulting in the University committing to cover some of the financial shortfall and a commitment to develop more inclusive approaches to teaching, learning, assessment.
- Both of the above raised awareness of diversity and inclusion as a fundamental consideration for curriculum design, and as such it was incorporated as one of the pillars in the emerging curriculum framework, i.e. the approach that will provide an overarching framework for curriculum design across all UG degrees.
- The Student Success Project appointed staff to launch the first two strands of work.
  - Preparations began for the introduction of universal peer mentoring for all new UG entrants in 2015/16 (the STaR<sup>1</sup> mentoring Partnership), aiming to foster a sense of belonging, particularly important for students who may perceive themselves to be in a minority.
  - Preparations began for the introduction of pilots in peer assisted learning (PAL) in 2015/16, aimed at creating an informal peer learning opportunities for UG students – known to be particularly beneficial for students who may be finding it difficult to integrate
- A programme of Mental Health First Aid training was introduced. 36 staff with roles predominantly focussed on student support undertook the 2-day training courses and have reported significant benefits
- Delivery of diversity training to 47 teaching focused staff, called, “What does increased student diversity mean for your teaching?”

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<sup>1</sup> STaR - Student Transitions at Reading

- The Reading Students' Union raised and broached the issue of sexual harassment with their successful 'I heart consent' campaign, leading to further collaborative work to sustain and embed this in the University.
- The Reading Students' Union ran a BAME conference with external speakers and an audience of UoR staff and students- successfully raising the profile of issues faced by BAME students at University
- The newly formed Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Group requested a strategy for Diversity and Inclusion in relation to students which prioritised focus and actions. Consultation and early drafting informed by much of the above took place in 2014/15.

### **Key challenges and future focus**

As outlined above and in the text of this report there is significant work underway relating to student equality, diversity and inclusion focused in particular on enhancing the academic attainment of students with protected characteristics. The areas of particular concern remain: Race/ethnicity, gender, and disability.

Race/ethnicity: the data continues to show significant disparity across most indicators, e.g. offer rates, progression and attainment at both UG and PGT level

Gender: the data continues to show significant disparity across indicators relating to progression and attainment, particularly at UG level

Disability: there is some disparity in attainment levels currently and historically. However, there is a real concern that this could grow to become more significant as a result of the changes to funding accessible to disabled students

The challenges in these areas are complex and this work is likely to take some time to have significant impact on the statistics presented in this report. However it is hoped that there will be some early impact as a result of initial awareness raising.

The main focus for the future will be on completing and implementing the student 'Delivering Inclusion and Valuing Diversity' Strategy. This strategy will include specific targets that will help to focus work. It will prioritise high impact actions in order to deliver on these targets. The Strategy will be agreed by the University Executive Board.

### **Recommendations**

The University's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Group will continue to monitor progress against the objectives and will oversee the delivery of the recommendations made within the report.

**Dr Patricia Woodman, Director of Student Development and Access**

## Summary of progress against last year's recommendations - Students:

Number	Objective	Recommendation	Progress	Status
1	1	Ensure that the new School records of student complaints are reviewed centrally to identify the existence, nature and frequency of any cases involving unfair discrimination.	Ongoing	Ongoing
2	4	Support the already established BAME Attainment Gap Project and review its findings in due course	Project has concluded and its recommendations are being implemented	complete
3	4	Further investigate the patterns of differential male-female progression and attainment at both UG and PG levels.	Done and findings have fed into the draft D&I strategy for students	complete
4	7	Exploring further opportunities to enable staff and students to build up networks and attend learning events which promote equality and diversity.	Ongoing	Ongoing
5	7	Support RUSU to expand diversity training.	Not progressed	Ongoing
6	8	Undertake work to understand the lower UG offer rate for those applicants above 21.	Not progressed	
7	8	Develop a better understanding of the lower offer rates to BAME applicants in general and specific ethnicities in particular at all levels of study.	Detailed data has been produced and analysis is underway	ongoing
8	8	Continue to monitor the gap between male and female representation particularly at Undergraduate level. Be mindful of this gap when planning outreach work with schools.	ongoing	ongoing

**Table of new recommendations for 15/16**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
1	1,7,8	Continue with all carried over and ongoing actions from the previous year (1,4,5,6,7,8)
2	1	The emerging collaborative work with RUSU about student-on-student discrimination and harassment will need nurturing and continued positive engagement from both parties.
3	7	Develop a shorter half-day version of the Mental Health First Aid training in order to roll it out to a much wider variety of staff
4	7	Develop training and resources to promote and support the drive to enhance the inclusivity of our curricula, under the Curriculum Framework Project
5		Complete and implement the student strategy 'Delivering Inclusion and Valuing Diversity'

**The University of Reading's Equality Objectives  
2014-2015**

**Objective 1**

**Oppose any form of discrimination unless it can be objectively justified as genuine, substantial, reasonable and within the law. The University will communicate and raise awareness of the role of staff and students in minimising and challenging inappropriate behaviour and practices and evidence of discriminatory behaviour (including harassment) will be treated as a potential disciplinary matter which may, in turn, result in sanction up to and including staff dismissal or student expulsion in line with our staff grievance and disciplinary procedures and student complaints and disciplinary procedures.**

**Summary:**

- The University's 9 volunteer Harassment Advisors, who provide a service available to staff and students, were contacted regarding 11 separate issues during 2014/15. Three of these matters were reported to concern equality and diversity (both from members of staff). One related to pregnancy, one to disability and one to sexual harassment.
- Of the formal complaints which reached stage 1 or 2 of the student complaints process, one involved issues around disability and another concerned a matter relating to religion. Neither complaint was upheld.
- If not resolved to their satisfaction students may take their complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). In 2014/15, no complaints were submitted to the OIA relating to issues of equality and diversity grounds.
- Of the 44 student academic appeals cases heard by the University Senate three were upheld on the grounds that the University had not provided sufficient support for their disability and 19 on the grounds that their disability or health condition (physical or mental) had affected their ability to submit an extenuating circumstances request before the relevant deadline.
- The issue of sexual harassment and the negative impact of so called 'lad culture' was raised and broached by the Reading University Students' Union, with a successful 'I heart consent' campaign raising awareness amongst students. This triggered a collaboration between RUSU and the University to embed and sustain this work. This has included making the campaign a focal point of part of Welcome Week 2015/16 and implementing training for staff and students, e.g. RUSU training to mandatory new Welfare Officer positions in sports and other societies.

**Analysis:**

The available data shows limited instances of complaints regarding equality and diversity issues.

The University has policies and procedures in place, setting out the seriousness with which it views discriminatory treatment. As part of a substantial project on University policies led by the Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary in the current academic year, key elements of these policies,

and our mechanisms for communicating them, will be revisited with input from the new Dean for Diversity and Inclusion to ensure that information is communicated as clearly as possible.

The University continues to communicate and raise awareness of the role of staff and students in minimising and challenging inappropriate behaviour or practices, including the launch of Values for Working Together and Professional Behaviours in October 2012 which provide a framework within which the University can work effectively towards the achievement of excellence.

The University is confident that it has put in place a range of mechanisms to support staff and students should they need peer or expert support. This support is also provided by the part-time student officers that continue to operate within the Reading University Students' Union (RUSU) to campaign for, represent, support and celebrate their members. They are:

- Disabled Students' Officer;
- Women's Officer;
- Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Officer;
- Postgraduate Students' Officer;
- International Students' Officer;
- Environment and Ethics Officer;
- LGBT+ Officer; and
- Mature Students Officer

The number of student appeals that were upheld on the grounds that their disability or health condition prevented them from submitting an extenuating circumstances request suggests an issue with the rules on late submission of such requests. This has now been reviewed and an approach with greater discretion has now been adopted.

#### **Recommendations and conclusions:**

The evidence suggests that there is no significant evidence of discriminatory behaviour or practices across the University by members of the student population.

The University will also review the reduced contact made with HARC Advisors and Employee Care and work with those involved to ensure they have the support they need.

The University will continue to monitor the situation carefully and continue to develop its strategy for all staff, students and other stakeholders to ensure that this objective remains central to the University ethos.

The emerging collaborative work with RUSU about student-on-student discrimination and harassment is an important step for the University, and has led to an action plan agreed with UEB and an initial report on progress on that action plan to UEB. It will be supported into next academic year by further nurturing and continued positive engagement from both parties.



## Objective 2

**Build on existing work to increase the disclosure of equality related information from both staff and students to allow for better planning, delivery, monitoring and assessment of the outcome of programmes designed to address areas of inequality.**

### Students

2014/15	UG	PGT	PGR	IFP/Foundation	TOTAL
Gender	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Age	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Ethnicity	95.3%	97.6%	95.3%	86.8%	95.8%
Religious belief (new entrants only)	90.6%	97.7%	90.9%	93.6%	90.6%
Sexual orientation (new entrants only)	90.9%	85.8%	85.9%	86.2%	88.4%
Disability*	11.8%	6.1%	6.3%	2.4%	9.8%

\*This figure must be treated with care. Students are only asked to declare whether they have a disability. It is assumed that those who have not declared a disability are not disabled.

### Students – Overall declaring year on year since 12/13

Protected characteristic	Percentage Declaring (%) 2012- 13	Percentage Declaring (%) 2013-2014	Percentage Declaring (%) 2014 – 2015	Direction of Travel
Gender	100%	100%	100%	Maintaining at 100%
Ethnicity	94.9%	95.5%	95.8%	Positive – increasing year on year
Disability	9.5%	9.8%	9.8%	Increased and then maintained
Sexual orientation	Not available	80.8%	88.4%	Positive - increasing
Age	100%	100%	100%	Maintaining at 100%
Religion or belief	Not available	84%	90.6%	Positive - Increasing

#### Analysis: Students

Data for students is obtained on entry from either the UCAS form for Home/EU undergraduates, or from the University's application form for other students.

This is a positive direction of travel with all characteristics either increasing or maintaining at 100%. Ethnicity has seen an increase in declarations as opposed to a decrease for staff.

Sexual orientation and religion and belief have seen the biggest increases at 7.6% and 6.4% respectively.

These gains have been made in PG applications where non-declaration has fallen from around 50% in 2012/13 to 11.1% and 9.6% for PGT and PGR applications respectively. This significant change coincides with the first full year of online applications for PG programmes.

On commencement of study each year students are required to formally enrol or re-enrol and during this process have the opportunity to alter (or input) their ethnic origin (and for the first time in 2013/14 their religion/belief and sexual orientation). The Table above shows that declaration rates for ethnicity (on enrolment) are strong and these are stable at round 95% to 96% over recent years. It is also encouraging to see such high declaration rates for religion/belief and sexual orientation.

Changes to disability status cannot be made by the student but they are invited to contact the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) who will make changes on their behalf.

As noted above declaration rates for student disability must be treated carefully. Students are not invited to declare that they have no disability, only that they have a disability. Where no declaration is made there is an assumption the student is not disabled. Additionally, the University has noted that as the year progresses the number of students with a declared disability increases. This is likely to be as a result of specific learning difficulties, especially dyslexia being identified and diagnosed in order to access additional support and also related to the ability to claim Disabled Student Allowance.

#### **Recommendations and conclusions:**

The declaration rates for students are strong in respect to most characteristics. (We note our caveats above regarding declarations in relation to disability and how these change as the academic year progresses.)

Whilst there are improvements to the declaration rates on sexual orientation and religion and belief for students, the University will continue to take steps to increase the level of declarations.

### **Objective 3**

**Work continuously towards identifying and addressing any unjustifiable inequality in pay and/or reward amongst different groups of staff.**

#### **Summary:**

This section is not applicable to students – please see the staff report for information relating to this objective.

## Objective 4

**Take action to ensure that individuals were selected, developed, appraised, rewarded, promoted and otherwise treated on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities and were provided with equality of opportunity within the University.**

This objective relates to:

- i. **Staff** in terms of appointment and promotion (reward data for staff is set out and analysed under Objective 3 in the staff report), and
- ii. **Students** in terms of progression, retention and attainment (application and admission data for students is set out and analysed under objective 8)

### ii) Students

#### Student Progression, Retention and Attainment

As in previous years student progression retention and attainment continues to be strong. In 2014/15 only 1.7% (reduced from 2.5% in 13/14) of all students withdrew/suspended from their studies.

86% progressed to the next level of their UG studies on the first attempt with only 0.3% (UG) and 5.2% (PG) of those who remained on course failing to gain a degree qualification.

The strong retention record is the result of an extensive network of both general and specific support. This includes:

- All UG students have personal tutors who support their academic and personal development. They are there to support students with difficulties and direct them to sources of more specialist support in the university. The majority of academic staff are personal tutors which creates a culture of support and pastoral care across the Schools in the University. Personal tutors are themselves supported by the Senior Tutor in each School who also offers a higher level of support to students in particularly challenging situations. PGT students are to have personal tutors also from 2014/15 and PGR students have both primary and secondary supervisors to support them on an individual basis.
- The University Counselling and Wellbeing Service provides professional counselling support to students with mental health conditions as well as to other students who are experiencing significant challenges with life at University. The mental health adviser works closely with students and the counselling service to further support students in their lives and studies.
- As further described under objective 5 the Disability Advisers provide advice for disabled students and applicants. This advice and preparatory work is essential to ensure that students with disabilities are equipped appropriately for their time at University. In addition the University provides a network of social and academic mentors who are essential to keeping some students on course and ensuring that others can work to the best of their ability.
- The University has a complement of 50 trained student peer supporters, who offer confidential informal support to other students.

- The University Study Advisors provide one-to-one support and guidance, as well as workshops to enhance all students' academic skills. They also work closely with Schools and provide study skills guidance embedded in the academic curriculum.
  - The In-session English Support programme provides language and study support to all International students whose first language is not English. One-to-one support for writing and speaking as well as a termly programme of workshops is provided. As with the University Study Advisors, curriculum embedded support is also provided to a large number of Schools where there are significant numbers of international students.
- The Graduate School works in partnership with academic schools and departments to provide PGR students with the training and support that they need to carry out their research and to be successful in their future careers. There is an extensive Researcher Development Programme. The Graduate School also provides advice and pastoral support for students to complement that provided by academic schools and departments.
- University policies on suspension of studies, extenuating circumstances and 'Deemed Not to have Sat' are important for supporting students who find themselves in difficulty. These processes provide solutions for students to take time to recover, develop better coping strategies or to put additional support in place in order to return to their studies or their assessment commitments, without incurring the normal penalties.
- The University's policy on 'Academic engagement and fitness to study' introduced in 2012/13, has converted the punitive 'neglect of work' policy into one that is much more focussed on action planning in order to keep students on track, or get students back on track, before they damage their academic record or find they have to suspend in order to rectify the situation. The policy requires Schools to identify when students are not actively engaging with their studies and to begin talking with them to identify what the issues are. It is an opportunity to address mis-aligned expectations of what is required of the student, or to direct him/her to the appropriate professional services for additional support.

**Annex 6, 7 and 8** contain the 2013/14 data on student progression, retention and attainment at UG and PGT level.

**Summary of key observations that emerge from the 2014/15 progression<sup>2</sup> and retention data:**

***Gender***

- There was a 9 percentage point difference in the 'pass at the first attempt' rate of UG male students compared to UG female students (89.6% of female students passed this hurdle in 2014/15 whereas only 81.0% of male students did so). This is a slight reduction from the 10 percentage point gap seen in 2013/14.
- Male UG students were more likely to fail to progress at the second attempt (101 (3.7%) of males in comparison to 53 (1.5%) of females).
- The proportion of male and female students who suspended or withdrew from their studies was comparable across all levels of study.

***Disability***

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<sup>2</sup> Progression data is only available for UG students as there are two (or three) formal points for progression in their three (or four) year programme of study

- The proportion of UG Disabled students in receipt of DSA support who pass at the first attempt was in line with students who had not declared a disability, but there was a 3 percentage point difference for disabled students not in receipt of DSA funding.
- The proportion of disabled students who withdrew from their studies was comparable to non-disabled students: 1.5% compared to 1.7% of students with no disability.

### **Age**

- There is a consistent pattern of UG students over the age of 20 on entry having a lower pass at the first attempt rate than those between 18 and 20 years old.
- As in previous years a higher proportion of UG and PG students over the age of 35 (2.7% compared to 1.7% overall) withdrew/suspended during their studies.

### **Ethnicity**

- The gap between UG 'pass at the first attempt' rate for BAME students and that for white students 10.3 percentage points. This is a reduction of 1.3 percentage point on the 2013/14 gap, but is still a significant gap
- The UG BAME % of students (as a proportion of overall BAME student cohort) failing at the second attempt was similar to that in 2013/14 at 3.5%. However, BAME students made up almost 40% of the students who failed at the second attempt despite constituting only 21% of students
- There were no indications of retention issues corresponding to ethnicity at any level of study.

## **Summary of key observations that merge from the 2014/15 attainment data include (Annex 8):**

### **Gender**

- There was a 10.7 percentage point gap between males and females achieving first class and upper second class degrees (84.4% of females and 73.7% of males). This is essentially unchanged from 2013/14.
- There was a 2.6 percentage point gap between the proportion of UG males and females achieving a first class degree (24.3% of females and 21.7% of female). This gap has closed from 4.6% last year, but is similar to that from 2012/13.
- The proportion of male student achieving a UG third class degree was more than double that of female students (4.1% in comparison to 1.4%). This gap is increasing.
- At PG level there had been a pattern of higher proportions of male students achieving distinction and merit grades, while a higher proportion of female students achieve pass grades. However in recent years this gap has closed to 2.3 percentage points in 2013/14 and -0.7 in 2014/15

### **Disability**

- There is a consistent pattern of UG disabled students achieving slightly fewer first class degree awards than non-disabled students (20.8% as opposed to 23.6% in 2014/15), but similar or higher proportions of Upper second class degrees (59.3% as opposed to 56.5%).
- However, when disabled students in receipt of DSA funding are considered separately to those not in receipt of this additional support, the attainment levels are consistently comparable. The attainment gap in first class degrees exists clearly for disabled student not

in receipt of DSA funding where only 13.6% of disabled students achieved a first class degree in 2014/15 compared to 23.6% of students without disabilities.

### **Age**

- In 2014/15 our youngest grouping of UG students achieved the highest proportion of first class and upper second class degrees (82.0%). However this has not been a consistent pattern in recent years.
- There is a fairly consistent pattern of PG students over the age of 35 being more likely to achieve a distinction grade. In 2014/15 33.7% of students in this age bracket achieved a distinction compared to 25.7% for all age groups.

### **Ethnicity**

- There was an increase in the overall proportion of UG student achieving first class or upper second class degree classification (80.1% in 14/15 compared to 75.2% in 13/14 and 72% in 2012/13)
- There was a 5.7 percentage point gain in the proportion of BAME students who achieved a first class or upper second class degree classification.
- However, there remains a significant difference (16.4 percentage points) in the proportion of UG BAME students who achieved a 1st or 2.1 degree classification (68.0%) in comparison to the proportion of white students (84.4%). This is almost identical to the 16.6 percentage point difference in 2013/14.
- At PG level 67.4% of BAME students achieved distinction or merit compared to 87.4% of all students. This is a gap of 20 percentage points, which is slightly reduced from 23.7 percentage points in 2013/14.

### **Analysis**

The overall picture is one of strong retention, progression and attainment across all students. However there are four areas that warrant further comment.

- i. Disparity between UG male and female students' levels of academic attainment
- ii. Disparity between the academic attainment and progress rates of BAME students and white students (UG and PGT)
- iii. Disparity between the proportion of disabled and non-disabled students achieving first class degree outcomes.
- iv. Higher withdrawal rates amongst older age groups

### **Disparity between male and female students' levels of academic attainment (UG and PGT)**

There is clear evidence for attainment disparity between male and female UG students. This is seen in the gap between 'pass at the first attempt' rates and in the fact that a significantly higher proportion of female students achieved a first or upper second class degree classification. There is evidence that this is a pattern on a national scale<sup>3</sup> and there is also both qualitative and quantitative

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<sup>3</sup> Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2015 (Equality Challenge Unit) p349-350. In 2012/13 a higher proportion of (UK domiciled) male students achieved a third class degrees than female students. Female

research identifying trends in male social and study behaviour that help to, at least partially, understand this pattern. It has been suggested that male students are more likely to spend less time studying than their female counterparts, that they can be less self-aware and reflective, more likely to become isolated, and are generally less aware and less likely to seek out support in a timely fashion<sup>4</sup>.

At PG level there had been a reverse pattern where, although a slightly higher proportion of male students failed their PG degree, a higher proportion of male students achieved distinction and merit grades. However in the last few years this gap has closed to -0.7 in 2014/15.

### **Disparity between the academic attainment of BAME students and white students**

The disparity is evident in the 2014/15 statistics:

- Lower (block 1& 2) progression rates (10.3 percentage point gap) for BAME students
- BAME students constitute almost 40% of UG non-finalists who fail at the second attempt despite only making up 21% of that student population.
- 16.4 percentage point different between the proportion of white and BAME students who achieve a 2.1 or first class degree classification. This is a slightly wider gap than exists in the latest ECU assessment of national data<sup>5</sup>
- Greater proportion of BAME and white students achieving a third class degree (3.2 percentage points difference).
- At PG level fewer BAME students achieved distinction (16.9% in comparison to 37.6%).
- Significantly more BAME students failed their PG degrees (6.1% in comparison to 3.1%).

This pattern is consistent with national trends<sup>6</sup> and can be seen in the Reading data covering the last three years (**Annex 6 and 8**). There has been much research into this phenomenon at UG level revealing that the reasons are complex, and involve multiple factors – structural, organisational, attitudinal, cultural and financial, but that the curriculum and in particular learning, teaching and assessment practices are also important factors<sup>7</sup>.

As a consequent of similar observations made in previous Equality Reports a project was undertaken in 2013/14 the recommendations from which are now being implemented. They focus at achieving the following:

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students were more likely to gain a 1<sup>st</sup> or a 2.1 degree classification and 8.0% of new male UG entrants left HE as opposed to 6.3% of female entrants.

<sup>4</sup> ECU (2012) *Male Students: Engagement with academic and pastoral support services* (July 2012)

<sup>5</sup> Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2015 (Equality Challenge Unit) p78-87. In 2012/13 there was an 15.2 percentage point difference between the degree attainment levels of (UK-domiciled) BAME students and white students in England.

<sup>6</sup> Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2015 (Equality Challenge Unit) p78-87. In 2012/13 there was an 15.2 percentage point difference between the degree attainment levels of (UK domiciled BAME students and white students in England.

<sup>7</sup> Black and Minority Ethnic Student Degree Retention and Attainment (Higher Education Academy) 2012 [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/bme\\_summit\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/bme_summit_final_report.pdf)

- Raising the awareness of the attainment gap, both generally at an institutional level but also to ensure its visibility in regular monitoring and review processes at School and service level.
- Effecting change in a number of targeted areas likely to have impact on the largest numbers BME students.
- Developing staff confidence and skills in supporting an ethnically and culturally diverse student community.
- Strengthening ethnic minority student voice/representation.
- Informing the work of the UoR Race Equality Charter Mark team.

Already the project has led to significant awareness raising, encouraged the Students' Union to be more active in this area, including running a very impactful BAME Conference with external speakers. One of the most important outcomes of the project has been the identification of 'inclusive curricula' as one of the pillars of the University's Curriculum Framework Project, associated work recently exhibited in January 2016 in a Teaching and Learning Showcase on "Diversifying the Curriculum"<sup>8</sup>.

### **Disparity between the proportion of disabled and non-disabled students achieving first class degree outcomes**

Although the proportions of disabled students achieving first and upper second class degrees is broadly consistent with those of non-disabled students, there is a persistent trend of fewer disabled students achieving first class degree outcomes. Furthermore, it is evident that the real disparity exists between students who have declared a disability but are not in receipt of DSA funding. It can be surmised that the additional support (e.g. note takers, academic/social mentors, additional study skills support etc.) that students in receipt of DSA funding are able to access is effective in reducing or even eliminating disadvantage in relation to academic attainment. This is a pattern that exists nationally and has been consistently evident in the annual analysis of degree outcomes undertaken by HEFCE and ECU<sup>9</sup>. This phenomenon is particularly worrying at a time when the threshold criteria for DSA eligibility is about to change significantly, meaning that a much lower proportion of disabled students will be in receipt of this funding in future (In 2014/15 almost 60% of our disabled students were in receipt of DSA).

Consideration of how to embed more effective support for disabled students in mainstream provision, i.e. enhanced inclusive pedagogy and inclusive curriculum, was a second factor influencing the adoption of 'inclusivity' as one of the key pillars of the Curriculum Framework Project. There has also been a reinvigoration of staff training provision.

### **Higher withdrawal rates amongst older age groups**

The age group most likely to withdraw/suspend from their studies were the 35+ group (**Annex 7**). This is predominantly a feature of UG studies although may well be evident in the PG data also; small datasets make this difficult to determine securely. These age groups are the most likely to have other commitments such as families and employment. It is well known that students in this age

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<sup>8</sup> <http://bit.ly/1T8SRJN>

<sup>9</sup> Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2015 (Equality Challenge Unit) p128



group are more likely to find that family or employment commitments conflict with their studies and they therefore are more likely to withdraw/suspend<sup>10</sup>.

In 2014/15 the University established a major strategic project on **Student Success** in order to address the patterns of differential attainment identified in the annual Equality reports, the outcomes of the BME Attainment Project, the monitoring of the attainment of students from underrepresented groups in Higher Education, as well as our growing population of international students. The project aims to build on substantial research in the HE sector in recent years in order to develop better mechanisms to support the diversity of need displayed by students of the University. This project is taking an inclusive approach and has a number of strands which are being implemented or scoped in 2015/16 including developing:

- more effective transition into HE
- more effective integration and greater sense of belonging amongst minority groups
- enhanced engagement in learning
- better monitoring and following up of engagement

Much of this focus has fed into the emerging Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Students with its focus on gender, race and disability and stretching targets on attainment, employment and representation.

### **Recommendations and conclusions**

Substantial action is already underway to address the key issues identified here. The three main mechanisms through which this action is taking place are the:

- the implementation of the recommendations from the UoR BME Attainment Project (2014)
- the Student Success Project launched in 2014
- a focus on inclusive practice in teaching and learning and inclusive curricula within the Curriculum Framework Project
- The emerging Diversity and Inclusion Strategy focussing on: gender, race and disability

These are long-term projects and it will take time to impact on the data patterns presented in this report, but the mere raising of awareness will be an important start and is likely to have some shorter term impact.

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<sup>10</sup> Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2015 (Equality Challenge Unit) p106. A higher proportion of UK domiciled older age groups 'no longer in HE'.

## Objective 5

**Ensure that the University environment is welcoming and accessible to all, in particular:**

- i. Ensuring all stakeholder groups were aware of, and practice, our commitment on mutual respect for everyone;**
- ii. Maintaining an environment that is free from offensive material and suggestion;**
- iii. Make reasonable adjustments and modifications for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (where reasonably practicable); and**
- iv. Providing alternative catering options for those with specific requirements.**

### **Summary and analysis:**

The University takes full and appropriate steps to ensure that the University environment is welcoming and accessible to all. Under Objective 1, we have set out data relating to staff and student complaints which are low in number, and suggest that stakeholder groups are aware of and to a large extent comply with our published commitment of mutual respect.

The University has a raft of policies and procedures, including HR policies, Codes of Conduct, Values for Working Together and Professional Behaviours, the Student Charter and the Regulations for Conduct, which embed the University's approach to equality and make clear our commitment to mutual respect and to ensuring an environment free from offensive material and suggestion. This is communicated to staff and students as they join the University and throughout their time with us.

The University provides information, support and guidance that ensure disabled students are effectively supported throughout their time at the University, as well as through the selection and application stages. Much of the support is provided by the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) or by staff in Schools and Departments with the guidance of the DAS. Support provided includes:

- General information available on the web, including: information on available support for prospective and current students ([www.reading.ac.uk/ready-to-study/support/disability-support.aspx](http://www.reading.ac.uk/ready-to-study/support/disability-support.aspx)); and The Guide to Inclusive Practice in Teaching and Learning, Assessments and Admissions (<http://www.reading.ac.uk/disability/>), demonstrating the type and range of adjustments that may be possible.
- Tailored advice is available to disabled people from pre-applicant stage both at Open Days and Visit Days and through individual appointment. This allows applicants to explore specifically how they may be supported.
- The University recognises that disabled students are likely to require additional visits to the university in order to understand the support available and to ensure that it will meet their needs, either before making an application or in preparing to attend. We therefore offer a bursary to pre-applicants and applicants to pay for disability related costs in visiting the university. For many, this allows a more in depth interview with a Disability Adviser and an opportunity to assess (in depth) suitability of halls accommodation.
- All students who have declared a disability are offered a place at a specific Induction Day for disabled students the September before they start.
- The DAS supports students and applicants to apply for the Disabled Student Allowance

- The DAS assists students in arranging support workers such as note takers. We also offer a specific mentoring system for students with ASDs or mental health difficulties. This involves academic mentoring from a post-graduate mentor and/or social mentoring from a current undergraduate.
- Diagnostic Assessments for dyslexia, dyspraxia and, more unusually, Autistic Spectrum Disorder are arranged on campus.
- Reasonable adjustments to teaching, learning and assessment are made in accordance with the Guide to Inclusive Practice in Teaching and Learning, Assessments and Admissions. Examples include: replacement of exams with coursework, facilitating alternatives to group work, presentations, fieldwork or dissertations for some students.
- Inclusive approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged, e.g. provision of handouts in advance, making lecture slides available through the VLE, permitting or indeed providing recording of lectures.
- Finally the University has a network of 'disability representatives' at School and Departmental level. They are responsible for liaising with disabled students personal tutors, lecturers and the DAS in order to ensure that their specific needs are met.

The data in **Annex 1** shows that 5.2% of applications are from disabled people<sup>11</sup> and there is an exceptionally high conversion rate of these applicants at all programme levels (see discussion under objective 8), such that 7.7% of those that enrol are disabled. The attainment levels of disabled students are broadly comparable to non-disabled students when measured through the conventional lens of the proportion of students achieving first and upper second degree classifications (see data in **Annex 8** and commentary related to objective 4). We therefore draw the conclusion that the environment created in the University is one which is attractive to disabled students and in which they succeed.

2014/15 saw the establishment of a joint initiative between the University and the Students' Union on sexual harassment and 'lad culture' (see discussion under objective 1).

The University's Estates and Facilities Department provides catering, conference, recreational, facilities, space, project, grounds, building and estate management services to the University. They are responsible for the physical environment of the University and the fabric of its buildings. Examples of recent projects include modifications to create new disabled toilets and lowering lab benches in the Knight Building Laboratory to create a disabled workspace.

The University Catering Services (CS) department caters for 900 fully catered students that live in halls of residence and operates full restaurant and café facilities on campus as well as providing the delivered hospitality for meetings, conferences and events. It has made the following improvements during the 2014-15 session:

- The number of gluten free menu items has been substantially increased in response to an increase in the number of celiac customers. Menu items are clearly labelled to allow customers to make informed decisions when purchasing goods without the need to seek assistance; also allergen regulations have necessitated us to investigate all of our products to

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<sup>11</sup> 5.2% of applicants declared a disability at the point of application, however we know that a proportion do not declare at this point but will do so within the first year of their studies.

ensure that we can provide allergen information to any customer, for any of the products that we produce; this is available at any of our units and also available on the Catering web portal.

- Student customers are encouraged to talk to catering team members about any issues or menu ideas. This is done on arrival, through signage, and at weekly customer feedback sessions in Residential halls dining areas and Eat at the Square.
- More non-alcoholic and coffee-related beverage items have been included in our bars to encourage users who do not want to drink alcohol to equally utilise these areas. Wessex bar now offers Milk shakes in addition to the regular offers. This has proved to be very successful. We have also introduced food offers alongside bar wet sales to increase usage and improve on social space.
- Take away items are available in our restaurants to allow people who are fasting or observing other religious activities to purchase food for consumption at a later stage.

A wide and diverse menu has improved sales in line with the growing internationalisation of the University with longer serving and opening hours allowing customers to eat what they want when they want in line with wide and diverse cultural custom. Our culturally diverse Chef team create their own dishes which we retail, providing familiar dishes to our international customer base. They are constantly exploring new dishes and introducing them to our portfolios.

### **Recommendations and conclusions:**

From the information above it can be seen that the University has worked hard to ensure that the University environment is welcoming and accessible. The measures set out above and elsewhere in this report are some examples of how this is being achieved, and the University continues to put in place practices and initiatives that enhance the experience of staff, students and visitors.

## **Objective 6**

**Identify and put in place programmes to enhance diversity of representation on decision making bodies at the University.**

### **Summary:**

This section is not applicable to students. Please see the staff report for further information on this objective.

## **Objective 7**

**Build upon existing work to embed the understanding and promotion of equality and diversity across the University through an ongoing review of learning events and arrangements for both staff and students.**

### **Summary and analysis of data:**

During the 2014-15 academic session the University has continued to build on its diversity activities in relation to promotion and engagement for students:

The 2013/14 Equality Report identified concerns relating to the recognition of support needs for students with mental health conditions. This led to a programme of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training courses being introduced targeted specifically at staff with significant pastoral roles. 36 staff attended two-day MHFA courses.

### **Recommendations and conclusions:**

Having evaluated the MHFA courses we intend to develop a shorter half-day version in order to roll it out to a much wider variety of staff in order to better support the growing numbers of students and staff with mental health conditions.

In 2015/16 the University will be developing training and resources to promote and support the drive to enhance the inclusivity of our curricula, under the Curriculum Framework Project

The University will also continue to seek further opportunities to enable staff and students to build up networks and attend learning events which promote equality and diversity.

## **Objective 8**

### **Take steps to attract and retain quality students and staff from all backgrounds.**

#### **Attracting, selecting and admitting students**

The University adheres to its published admissions policy and procedures for UG, PGT and PGR study (<http://www.reading.ac.uk/Study/admissions/admissions-policies.aspx>). The policy aligns with the UK Quality Assurance Agency's chapter B2 on *Recruitment, Selection and Admissions to Higher Education*<sup>12</sup> and is informed by the Schwartz Report *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice* (2004<sup>13</sup>). The report's principles on ensuring: 'Equal opportunity for all individuals, regardless of background, to gain admission to a course suited to their ability and aspirations' is at its core.

Data on applications, offers and enrolments is provided in **Annex 1 and 2**.

Summary of key observations that emerge from this data:

#### **Gender**

- The university received 42,210 applications for entry to the University in 2014/15. 54.1% were from female and 45.8% from male applicants.
- The proportion of UG applicants made offers in 2014/15 rose sharply to 80.4% from 75.7% in the 2013/14 cycle and having been very stable for several years.
- At UG and PGT levels female applicants were in the majority with 55.2% and 55.3% of applicants, while only 41.1% of PGR applicants were female.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B2.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.admissions-review.org.uk/downloads/finalreport.pdf>

- The gap between UG applications from males and females was 10.4 percentage points (55.2% female and 44.8% male).
- At PGR and PGT level the gender balance of applications is comparable to the national picture.
- As in previous years there is no difference between the proportion of male and female applicants receiving offers for UG and PGT places.
- Enrolment as a proportion of those who applied for a UG or PGT place was also consistent across genders.
- At PGR level only 30.8% of male applicants were offered a place in comparison to 39.4% of female applicants. This is a consistent pattern each year.

### **Disability**

- The University received a total of 2206 applications with a declared disability, constituting 5.2% of all applications. The proportion was highest at UG level with 7.3% of applications declaring a disability.
- Only 2.9% of PGT applicants declared a disability.
- The enrolment rate of disabled offer holders is much higher than the overall enrolment rate at all three levels of study, i.e. at UG it is 8.5 percentage points higher, 15.8 at PGT and 9.7 at PGR.

### **Age**

- Just under half (47.3%) of the applications received by the University are from those aged 20 and under. A further quarter (26.3%) are between 21 and 24, followed by 17.9% who are between 25 and 34 years old.
- The UG offer rate was significantly lower for those aged 21 and over. In each of the three age categories over 20 the offer rate is between 46% and 58% whereas for those aged between 18 and 20 it is 83.3%.

### **Ethnicity**

- BAME applicants form the majority of applications for PGT and PGR programmes; for PGT programmes (66%) and PGR study (65.2%).
- The proportion of total UG applications from BAME applicants is increasing by small amounts year on year (20.6% in 2014/15).
- However, there was a high proportion of unknown ethnicities amongst the UG applicant pool (19.5% in 2014/15 compared to 4.1% in 2013/14).
- The known ethnic makeup of the applicant pool has continued the trend of growth in applications declaring BAME ethnicity in 2014/15, with 42.3% of applications being from BAME applicants
- The ethnic makeup varies substantially according to level of study, but these are broadly consistent across recent cycles:
  - for UG study the majority groups are white (57.2%) Indian (3.6%) followed by Black-African (3.6%);
  - for PGT study Chinese (29.9%), white (29.6%) and Asian - other (8.3%);
  - and for PGR study white (28.9%), Arab (19.1%), Asian – other (9.5%) followed by Black-African (8.1%).
- There are consistent trends of lower success rates on application for particular ethnicities. Only 66.5% of BAME applicants were offered a place as distinct from

75.5% of white applicants. This is a gap of 9 percentage points, which is a significant narrowing of the 2013/14 gap of 17.6

- Offer rates vary considerably with level of study and with ethnicity.

### **Analysis:**

The gender balance of UG applicants is a concern at national level with a growing gap between the proportion of applications to HE from women and men. For example, the UCAS End of Cycle report for 2013/14<sup>14</sup> shows a 14.2 percentage point gap between the male and female applicants (an increase of 3.8 percentage points on 2012/13). The UoR gap (10.4 percentage points) is less than the the national gap.

Although the gender/balance of the applicant pool is not within the University's direct control, it is important that there is an awareness of this imbalance and that for UG it forms one (of several) factors that influence our outreach and recruitment strategies.

The difference between male and female PGR offer to enrolment proportion is notable. However this too is a national trend and comparable to previous recent cycles. The BIS report 'Exploring Student Demand for Postgraduate Study'<sup>15</sup> notes that in every year PGR applications submitted by women are more likely to lead to enrolment. It is possible that this is a reflection of male applicants making applications to more universities than female students and therefore having a lower conversion rate relative to the number of applications made. Data in the recent BIS report reveals<sup>16</sup> a greater disparity between the number of applications made by males and females than the disparity that exists between those who actually enrol as students. This could support the hypothesis that males considering PGR study are likely to make more applications and therefore have a lower conversion rate. The disparity between the proportion of male PGR applicants who were offered a UoR place and female applicants is slightly less than in 2013/14.

The proportion of all applicants declaring a disability has remained broadly stable over the last three cycles. The higher offer-to-enrolment rate for disabled students is consistent across UG, PGT and PGR. This is likely to be partly a product of the fact that we are a campus university and students with physical disabilities will find it easier to access the main facilities that are located within easy distance of each other. It is also the case that disabled student invest significant effort in researching a university's suitability for meeting their needs prior to applying (see comments under objective 5), so when they are made an offer are more likely to accept and follow through to enrolment.

Only 2.9% of PGT applicants declared a disability, however around 70% of PGT applicants are from countries outside Britain and the EU. Two factors are significant here: applicants with significant physical disabilities are less likely to travel abroad to study and fewer international students arrive at UK universities with already diagnosed learning difficulties such as dyslexia, which is the most commonly declared disability amongst our student population.

Across all three cycles UG applicants aged 21 or over were less likely to be offered a place particularly at UG level. This may well be due to these students disproportionately seeking places on degrees that are more competitive to enter e.g. pharmacy, law and management attract some of the

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/eoc-report-2015.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Exploring Student Demand for Postgraduate Study. BIS Research Paper no. 154 (December 2013), p117

<sup>16</sup> Exploring Student Demand for Postgraduate Study. BIS Research Paper no. 154 (December 2013), p178

largest mature student cohorts but tend to be heavily subscribed. This is an area of ongoing investigation.

The disparity between the success rates of white and BAME applicants is a concern despite its significant reduction since the 2013/14 cycle. It is important to look at the trends concerning individual ethnicities, however the complexity of the data and in some cases the small numbers make it difficult to dig below the headline figures in this report. This is an area that we have begun investigating but work is currently ongoing. It is particularly interesting in the light of recent national reports, for example Vicki Boliver's report on "*Why are British Ethnic Minorities less likely to be offered places at Highly selective Universities*"<sup>17</sup> and the seemingly contrasting perspective of the BIS research report on "*Socio-economic, Gender and Ethnic Participation in Higher Education*" which found that all ethnic minority groups in England are now, on average, more likely to go to university than their White British peers<sup>18</sup>.

### **Profile of the University's student population**

Full demographic data for the University's 2014/15 student population is provided in **Annexes 3-5**. The overall picture is of little change, but with some slight shifts e.g. slight growth in the proportion of female students and BAME students.

#### **Summary of key observations:**

- The HESA standard student population<sup>19</sup> increased to 14327 from 13,594 in 2014/15, with 56.1% female and 43.9% male students. This amounts to a 1.3 percentage point increase in the proportion of female students over the last three years.
- There have been small increases in the proportion of female students at both UG and PGR levels. At UG level the proportion of female students was 54.8% in 2012/13 rising to 57.1% in 2014/15. At PGR level the proportion of female students was 46.7% in 2012/13 rising to 49.2% in 2014/15. The gender balance at PGT level has remained stable around 56:44.
- Although female students are in the overall majority, within Henley Business School and the Faculty of Science male students constitute 55.4% and 65.3% of student respectively. The

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<sup>17</sup> V. Boliver 2015, *Why are British Ethnic Minorities less likely to be offered places at Highly selective Universities* in *Aiming Higher: race, inequality and diversity in Higher Education* published by Runnymede <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Aiming%20Higher.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> *Socio-economic, Gender and Ethnic Participation in Higher Education*. BIS research paper no. 186 (2015) [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/474273/BIS-15-85-socio-economic-ethnic-and-gender-differences.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474273/BIS-15-85-socio-economic-ethnic-and-gender-differences.pdf)

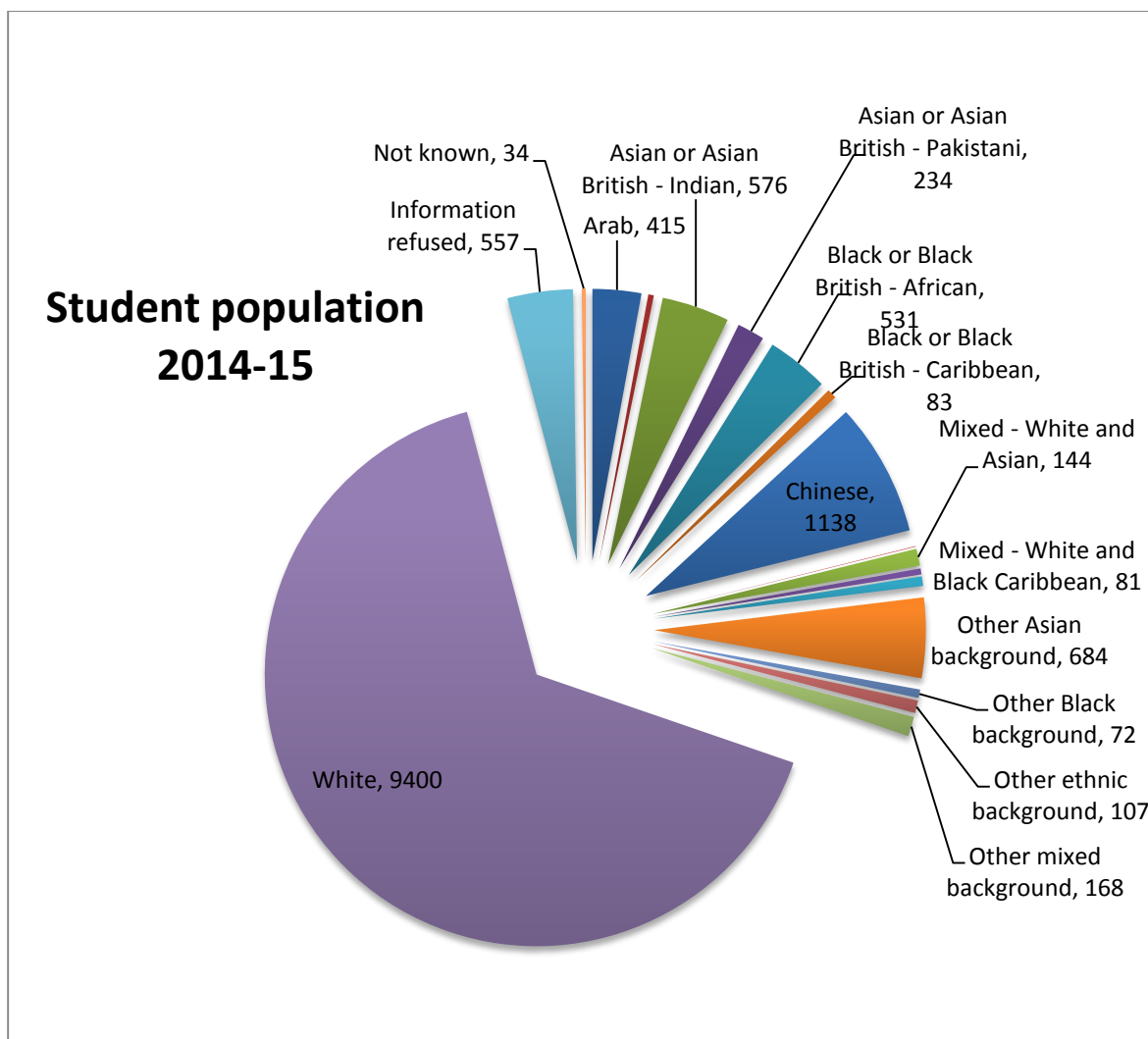
<sup>19</sup> HESA standard population is all students returned to HESA in 2014/15, excluding the following:

- dormant students (ie dormant for the entire academic year)
- incoming visiting and exchange students
- postdoctoral students
- instances where the whole of the programme of study is outside of the UK
- Teaching agency subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses
- Writing up students (ie PGR students those writing up for the whole of the academic year)



gender balances within the four faculties has remained stable over the last three years, although there has been a 1.8 percentage point increase in the proportion of female students in the Science Faculty.

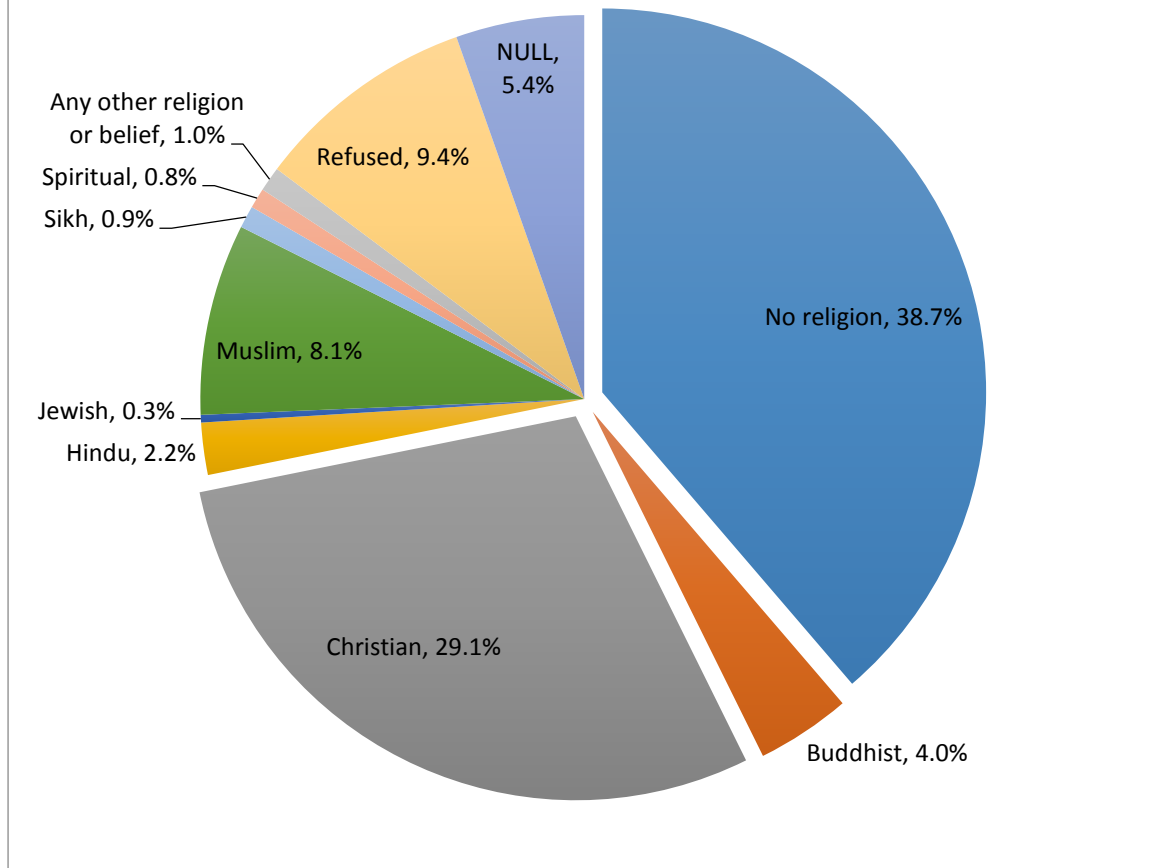
- 9.8% of students studying at the university during 2014/15 declared a disability; the same as in 2013/14. The proportion of disability types is broadly similar to the previous two years with the majority (47.2%) declaring a learning disability. The most significant increases in declarations were in mental health (rising from 0.6% of the student population to 0.73%) and two or more disabilities (rising from 1.36% of the student population to 1.64%). The longer term picture shows a decline in the proportion of disabled students citing a specific learning disability (61.9% in 2010/11 reduced to 47.2% in 2014/15). The Science Faculty had, as in previous years, the highest proportion of disabled students (12.9%), whereas Henley Business School has consistently the lowest proportion (5.7% in 2014/15).
  - In recent years there had been an increase in the proportion of the total student population aged 24 or under and a consequent decline in those aged 25 and over. However the 2014/15 age profile is almost identical to that of 2013/14.
- 30.3% of the University's 2014/15 HESA standard population declared themselves as to have a non-white ethnicity. This constitutes a long term pattern of year on year increase, rising from 23.3% in 2010/11. As with gender there is a varied picture across the faculties. HBS has the largest proportion of BAME students although this has been static for several years, whereas each of the other three faculties has seen significant increases over the last three years.
- There remains a clear pattern of higher proportions of BAME students at PGT and PGR levels making up well over one third of the PGT (39.9%) and PGR populations (43.1%). The UG proportion has risen from 20.9% to 24.2% over the last three years.
- The makeup of the BAME student population is almost identical to that of previous years, with the largest non- white group being Chinese students (7.9%) followed by other Asian (4.8%) and Indian – Asian or Asian British (4.0%). The Chinese and Arab populations have seen the greatest increases in proportions, i.e. the Arab proportion rose to 2.9% from 1.9% in 2013/14 and the Chinese proportion rose from 6.9% to 7.9%.



- The distribution of different religious belief (see Annex 5) amongst new student entrants to the University was consistent with 2013/14 new entrants<sup>20</sup>. The largest grouping is of students who have no religious beliefs, closely followed by Christians. 8% of new entrants declared having Muslim beliefs (Data for new entrants only). The proportion of students of no religion is highest amongst UG students, 43.7%, as opposed to 35% and 30.1% for PGT and PGR respectively. The proportion of Muslim students is highest amongst PGR students, i.e. 24% in comparison to 5.9% and 6.1% of UG and PGT students respectively. A significantly higher proportion of PGT students had Buddhist beliefs (6.9%) than UG (2.1%) or PGR students (1.5%). Overall disclosure rates were strong at 90.6%.

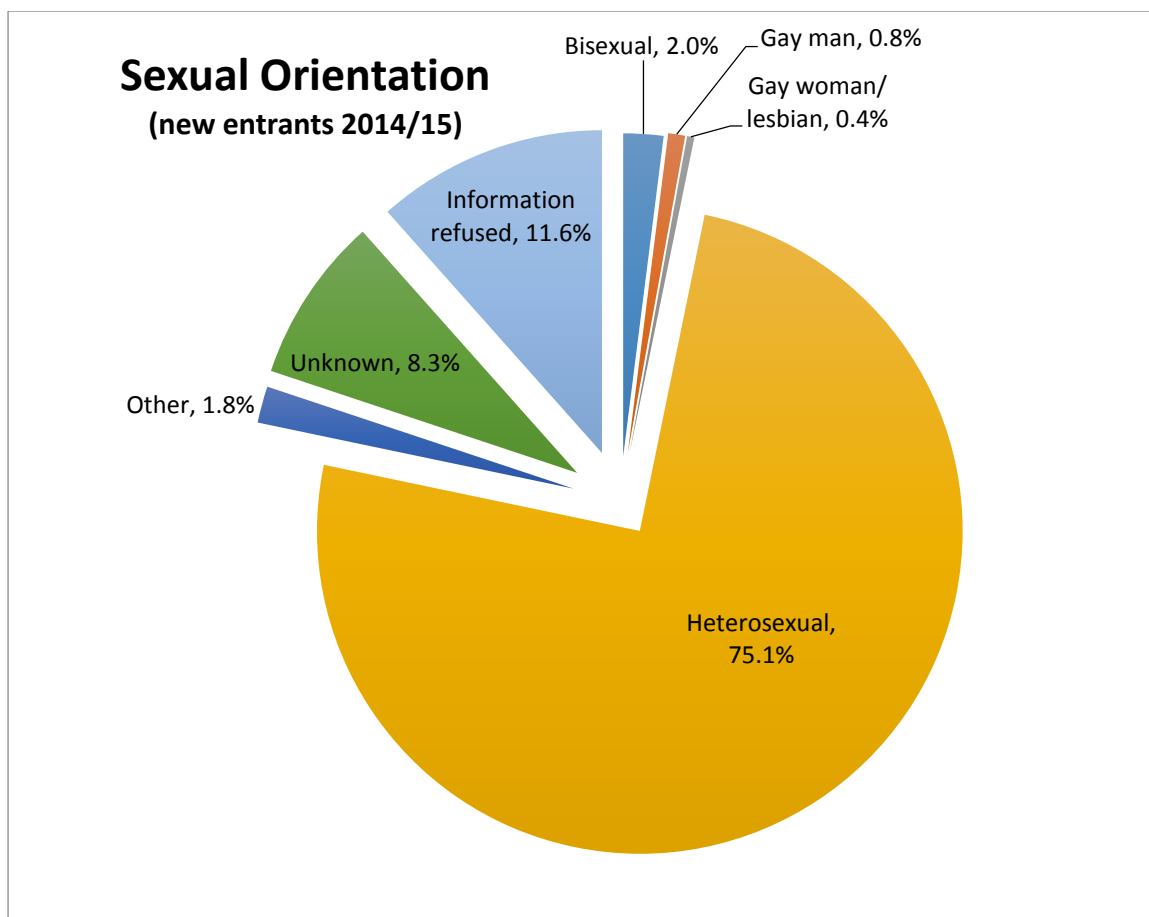
<sup>20</sup> 2013/14 was the first year where data was collected on religious belief. We therefore do not yet have the data for the whole student population.

## Religion and Belief (2014/15 new entrants only)



- Similarly an insight can be gained into the distribution of sexual orientation amongst new student entrants to the University<sup>21</sup>. 75.1% of all new entrants declared themselves to be heterosexual, 20% either refused or made no declaration. Almost twice as many new entrants declared themselves to be gay men as gay women/lesbian. This profile is almost identical to that of 2013/14 entrants. Declaration rates were 88.4%.

<sup>21</sup> 2013/14 was the first year where data was collected on religious belief. We therefore do not yet have the data for the whole student population.



#### Analysis:

The gap between male and female representation in HE is a continuing trend across the sector. In 2013/14 the gap across HE was 12.2%<sup>22</sup>. At Reading, in 2014/15 there was also a 12.2 percentage point gap constituting a year-on-year widening gap. Despite this overriding pattern it is important to note that there is a mixed picture of gender balance across levels of study and across faculties, with female students constituting a growing majority of the undergraduate population as a whole, but male students exceeding females in the PGR community and in the overall majority in the Faculties of Science and in the Henley Business School. It is also encouraging to note small moves towards greater gender balance in the Faculty of Science in 2014/15

The proportion of students in UK HE with a declared disability has risen steadily from 5.4% in 2003/4 to 10% in 2013/14. The rate of increase at Reading is broadly comparable to the national picture. The proportion of disabled students at Reading University (9.8%) is close to the 2013/14 figures for both the UK (10%) and for England (10%)<sup>23</sup>. This is likely to be because we are a campus university and that significant effort and resource is invested in supporting and advising disabled applicants (See comments under objective 5).

<sup>22</sup> Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report 2015: Students (Equality Challenge unit) p30

<sup>23</sup> Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report 2015: Students (Equality Challenge unit) p72

The distribution of disabilities at Reading is broadly similar to the national picture. However at Reading a higher proportion of disabled students have social communication or AS disorders (3.5% as opposed to 2.6%). Significantly more Reading students identify two or more impairments than is the case nationally (13.5% in comparison to 8.6% nationally). Conversely, at Reading a lower proportion of disabled students declare a mental health condition (7.4% as opposed to 12.8% nationally) or suffer from a longstanding illness or health condition (5.3% as opposed to 10.3%).<sup>24</sup> This relatively low rate of mental health declaration was identified in the 2012/13 Equality Report and contributed to the case for introducing the Mental Health First Aid course, the aim being to better equip staff to recognise students suffering from mental health difficulties and to encourage early diagnosis and declaration so that the University's support services are better able to support these students.

The student population as a whole at Reading is skewed towards the 18-20 age bracket accounting for almost exactly 50% of students in 2014/15, however, this is in large part a factor of the weight of the UG student population (67% of students were UGs). The PGT and PGR populations are much more inclusive of age with 59% of PGT students over the age of 25 and 84% of PGR students. The national trend continues to be long term growth in participation of under 21 and 21-24 year olds with a corresponding decline in participation by 25+ age groups<sup>25</sup>. This is exactly the pattern that is evident at Reading. There has been much discussion in the HE sector concerning the decline in mature students' participation, particularly at UG level. It has been agreed that a number of factors have acted together to form barriers to mature student participation. Examples include the governments ELQ policy which led to the withdrawal of provision designed to support mature learners into HE, lack of understanding of the new financial support packages, as well as unwillingness to incur a significant debt.<sup>26</sup>

The Reading student population as a whole is becoming more ethnically diverse with each year. The proportion of white students dropped from 72.2% in 2010/11 to 65.6% in 2014/15. PGR and PGT populations are the most ethnically diverse and this is likely to be a result of increased international student recruitment at all levels of study, but especially at PGT and PGR level. However, analysis of the UK domiciled new UG entrants over recent years also shows an increase in both the number and proportion of BAME students admitted (from 14% in 2010/11, to 19.2% in 2014/15)<sup>27</sup>. The ethnic profile of our student population is typical of a University based in London<sup>28</sup> despite being some distance outside the Greater London Area (and the daily costs of commuting from London to Reading are unlikely to be affordable for most students).

The 2013/14 data provided the University with its first insight into the distribution of both religious belief and sexual orientation of its new entrants and it is therefore interesting to note that the data for 2014/15 entrants is almost identical, showing remarkably stable profiles.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

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<sup>24</sup> Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report 2015: Students (Equality Challenge unit) p141

<sup>25</sup> Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report 2015: Students (Equality Challenge unit) p50

<sup>26</sup> The power of part-time: Review of part-time and mature higher education (2013) UUK Report (<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/UUKreviewofparttimeeducation.aspx#.UuU0oBaQG2w>)

<sup>27</sup> 2016/17 University of Reading Access Agreement, p6  
(<https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Reading%201617.pdf>)

<sup>28</sup> Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report 2015: Students (Equality Challenge unit) p220-221

There have been no substantial changes to the demographics of either applicants to the University or students in attendance. However, there have been small changes, some of which are part of an ongoing evolution, e.g. the growth in BAME applicants and students enrolled. Although this is a national trend, in the University of Reading's case increases will be the result of international profile-raising and recruitment activities, but also of widening participation outreach work, as well as expanded capacity in subjects likely to attract BAME students (e.g. Pharmacy, Business, Law and Biological Sciences).

This analysis above reinforces findings of previous Equality Reports where two areas were identified for further work, namely:

- understanding the lower undergraduate offer rate to applicants above the age of 21.
- understanding of the lower offer rates to BAME applicants in general and specific ethnicities in particular at all levels of study

This work is ongoing.