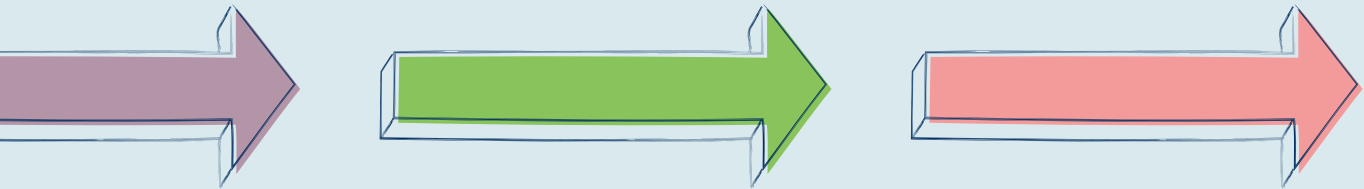# THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Widening Participation Strategy 2018 - 2021
Guiding Principles

Introduction

The University of Edinburgh believes passionately in reflecting, serving and celebrating the multifaceted community of which it is a part.

The Widening Participation strategy wishes to drive this and make this vision a reality: ensuring Edinburgh is an opportunity provider for individuals with the potential to benefit, enabling them to succeed and to join other students, staff and alumni in a commitment to social justice and delivering impact for society.

This University has made progress in widening participation (WP) over the past 10 years, particularly regarding the impact of contextual admissions, our scholarship provision, and national recognition for longstanding outreach programmes. However, in more recent years there have been very minimal increases (and some declines) in the proportion of applicants and entrants from disadvantaged or under-represented groups. Our cohort of students from Scotland's most deprived communities (based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) has seen marginal increases, but also some declines in some Colleges (connected to an overall decline in applications from Scottish students)[1]. We have seen very little change in our overall state school intake since 2005[2] and our student body has become more polarised with over 85% of our Scottish students coming from state schools, while only around 55% of our students from the rest of the UK are from the state sector.

These trends may be having an impact on the experience that students have when they come to Edinburgh. Once starting at the University, we now know that WP students are less likely than the overall student body to participate in extra-curricular activities, and sports in particular[3]. We are also now beginning to see some concerning trends regarding first year non-continuation rates from students from WP groups[4].

A greater effort is now required to make a step change. We aspire to be both a world-leading centre of academic excellence and a place of opportunity for a diverse group of students, including those from some of the most deprived communities and under-represented groups in Scotland. Excellence and diversity are not mutually exclusive, and we should demonstrate to the sector that it is possible to be a leader in both fields. Widening participation and inclusion can be the lens to so much of what we do at the University of Edinburgh, and we will seek to embed it further within our decision making at all levels to enable this to become a whole institution approach to WP.

The Scottish Government agenda[5] has provided a steer to the University to increase the proportion of students from the most deprived communities in Scotland (as based on the SIMD20 indicator), but we are more ambitious in our scope for this strategy and will work to widen access for any disadvantaged or under-represented group to the University of Edinburgh. This will enrich our own student community and the future national and global communities that our graduates will inhabit. We are ambitious in our aims to widen access Scotland-wide, but will also align our UK recruitment activity to our WP agenda. This is a strategy for school students, college learners, adult returners to education and other vulnerable, disadvantaged or under-represented groups.

This strategy seeks to be a starting point in a process of developing a campus of belonging; a University where we do not simply focus on representation or under-representation, but more importantly upon a sense of community and being in the right place, where students from a range of diverse backgrounds can thrive and feel a sense of belonging.

# Main principles of the strategy: a student lifecycle model

Our strategy follows four mutually supportive strands of the student lifecycle.

We believe it is never enough to simply encourage and support students into the University of Edinburgh; we also want to them to succeed in their studies, reach their full potential and to have a chance to participate fully in every aspect of University life.

Moreover, we want to see those same students progressing onto the careers or postgraduate study of their choice that will enable them to become global citizens with the drive and the skills to deliver impact for society.

We will also incorporate into each of these student lifecycle stages a consideration for students with protected characteristics, in particular where these intersect with socio-economic disadvantage.

Aspiration and Early Engagement

Support to Get In

Support to Succeed

Support to Progress
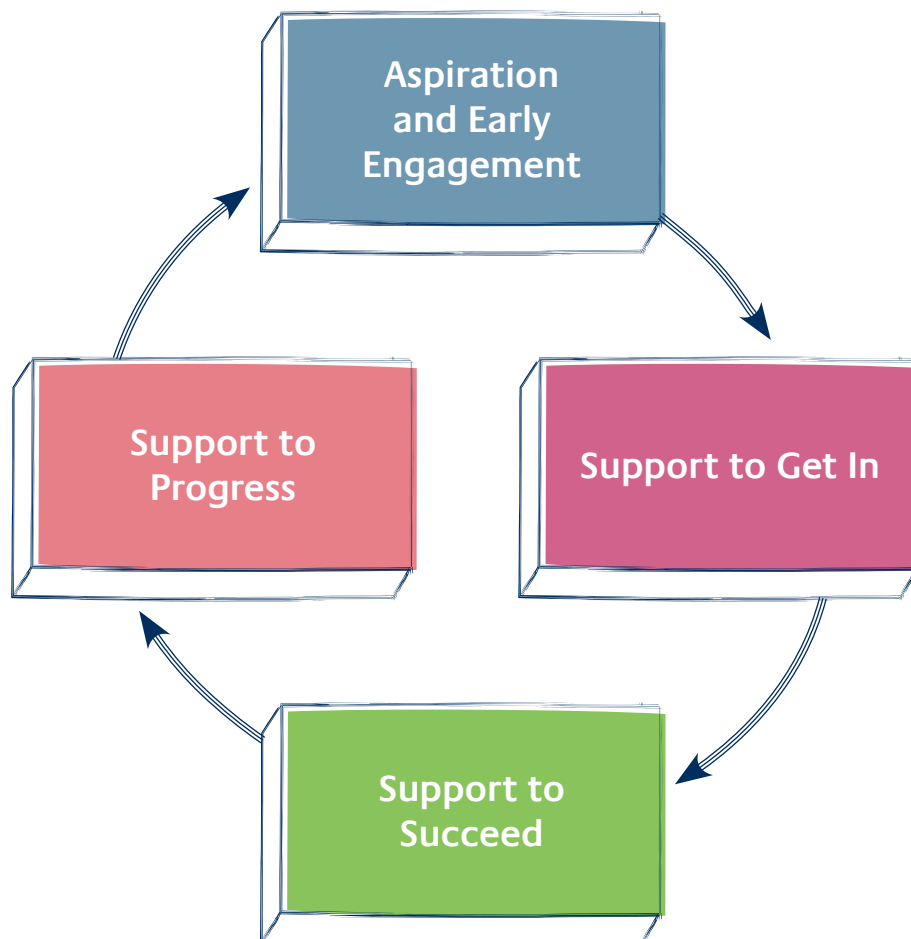
Aspiration and Early Engagement

Early and sustained outreach is vital in raising aspirations, particularly within families and communities where there is no history of members going onto higher education.

To widen access we need to play our part in supporting and growing an applicant pool of disadvantaged students who are suitably qualified for access to university level study. We know this long-term work is a critical aspect of building upon our reputation as a University that cares about widening access and its local communities. Being more targeted and strategic in our approach to working with schools and community groups will allow us to ensure our outreach is of optimum value and impact.

Where we wish to engage:
- At present, we engage significantly with our local communities. All new/revised initiatives will be Scotland-wide initially, thinking larger scale than we have done previously with a focus on the west of Scotland and north of the central belt.
- Our geographic focus should also extend beyond Scotland and should align our WP agenda and RUK recruitment practices.

Who we should engage with/how we define widening participation:
- Primary and secondary school students from disadvantaged backgrounds (based on area deprivation such as SIMD and/ or those in receipt of free school meals) within any school.
- Primary and secondary school students from low progression and low attaining schools (and other individual indicators such as SIMD and free school meals)
- Adult learners and returners to education.
- Vulnerable or more marginalised groups of students such as young carers, young people in care or care leavers, learners with refugee/asylum seeker status, estranged students etc.
- Students from under-represented groups, some with protected characteristics such as disabled learners, those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and cohorts where there are gender imbalances (e.g. men into education, women into computer science).

Key influencers:
- Key influencers of student choice such as parents, teachers, and careers advisers.
- Local community groups (parent groups, community learning, supplementary/community schools).
- Third Sector where relevant (e.g. Stand Alone – charity supporting estranged students).
- Cultural stakeholders: National Museum Scotland, Dynamic Earth, Sports, Youth Parliament etc.
- Alumni role modelling: we will make more effective use of the alumni network we have across Scotland to support our outreach efforts.

Priority areas for action:

Schools partnerships model

We will establish a mutually beneficially partnership model with an identified number of secondary (and primary) schools across Scotland. This will be a dual model with University of Edinburgh staff and students going to those schools and communities, as well as us hosting those school students on our own campus. The partner schools will be recognised across the University, enabling Colleges and Schools to target schools appropriately, and allowing us to monitor and evaluate the impact of these relationships. Attainment raising will be a key element to this model, and working with Education Scotland as well as Moray House School of Education will be vital to develop this in line with national and local agendas around the Attainment Challenge and the Pupil Equity Fund.

Key to the success of this model will be to ensure that schools can benefit from the wide range of activities and outreach on offer across the whole University, and with a focus on connecting partners to these existing opportunities alongside creating new initiatives.
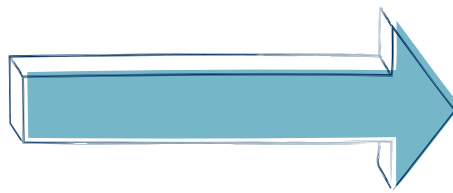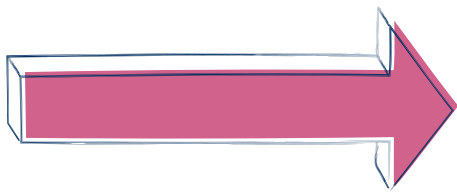
"It painted a new picture of university, not as a scary, intimidating place. I now see the University of Edinburgh as a welcoming and evolutionary place."

(Residential summer school attendee)

Support to Get In

We need to establish a clear and transparent route into the University for learners undertaking a range of qualifications in a range of settings.

Our messages should be clear and understandable for all learners with the potential to succeed at the University and it should encourage those from under-represented groups to see us as an obvious and attractive choice.

Who we should engage with/how we define widening participation at this stage:

- Secondary school students from disadvantaged backgrounds within any school (based on SIMD/free school meals etc.).
- Secondary school students from low progression and low attaining schools.
- College students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Adult learners and returners to education.
- Any applicant from a SIMD20 area.
- Vulnerable more marginalised groups of students such as carers, care leavers, learners with refugee/asylum seeker status, estranged students etc.

Priority areas for action:

Communications

Widening participation should be inclusive and about 'us'. Descriptions of the University as 'world-leading' or 'international' is ostracising and/or intimidating to some groups of people we wish to identify with us. Local balance will help to counteract this and we will utilise more case studies of current WP student stories. Marketing will become more about people, and their diverse stories and experiences, and less about history and buildings.

Our open days are just one example of how we can create a more personalised approach to our interactions with prospective students: an open day should encourage a wider range of students to apply to us. Our open days and outreach activity should reach out not only to school students, but also to college students who may not currently recognise the University as an option for them.

We want to provide clear and consistent information about admissions, and work with the sector to agree on suitable definitions. Terminology is key and at present we can confuse by using a range of differing words such as 'contextual', 'access', 'offer'. There is currently a finite group of applicants from WP backgrounds, so we should ensure that our own information is clear and work with other universities to avoid a deluge of information, which could be off putting.
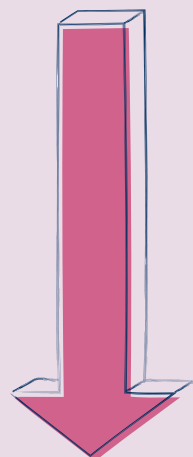
Attracting students to Edinburgh

We have previously led the sector with the introduction of contextual admissions, and more recently with the online presence of our contextual data checker[6]. There is now an opportunity to again take the lead with an early adoption of Access Thresholds and moving to a "guaranteed offer" for any Context Plus applicant who meets the minimum entry requirements.

We have a very generous financial support package, which is well received by students, but not always taken into account within their decision making. We know that the cost of living away from home can influence the choice of institution, while combining excessive hours at a part-time job with a full-time study programme also contributes to stress and poorer retention and academic outcomes.

- We will continue to monitor and review our contextual admissions to ensure it is transparent and fair, and recognises the potential of applicants from WP backgrounds.
- We will clarify, emphasise and actively promote the generous and targeted financial support that is available, not only to potential students, but also to their parents, teachers and other influencers; this includes scholarships and bursaries, as well as discretionary funds.
- We will further evaluate the impact of scholarships and consider whether a smaller number of larger scholarships or free accommodation for Scottish students may attract more students from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply and accept offers.
- Our focus will be on those from low-income and care-experienced backgrounds.
- We want to fund the cost of travel for University of Edinburgh partner school pupils, and also consider how we can enable other WP cohorts to attend other events, such as offer holder visits, to ensure cost of travel is not prohibitive.

Collaboration/Partnership

Collaborating with others will have the greatest impact for WP in the whole sector and will create an 'uncluttered' landscape for students. In order to achieve our vision, we will work in partnership with:

- The college sector throughout Scotland to identify possible progression routes and develop mutually beneficial foundation/bridging courses to enable progression to year 1 or 2;
- Partners in the City Region Deal to deliver access programmes and entry routes that meet the need of the region;
- Other universities, both locally and across Scotland.

Curriculum and clarity

We want to ensure that our four-year degree benefits rather than disadvantages particular groups of students. Areas we will focus on are:

- Consistency of SCQF levels in year 1 (level 7 or 8 or both), and whether this year is genuinely considered to be a foundation year;
- Developing differentiated foundation years that do not increase the financial or time burden for students, but rather explore options for students taking a year of study with the University or accredited by the University in place of their S6 year or equivalent.

Support to Succeed

We want all our students to succeed and benefit fully from a University of Edinburgh degree and University of Edinburgh experience.

We will focus additional support on groups of students who may face continued barriers or disadvantage during their studies, and subsequently find it harder, for a range of reasons, to succeed academically, pastorally, and socially within the University environment.

Who we should engage with/how we define widening participation:

- Students entering the University through WP programmes and access routes.
- Students with non-typical qualifications.
- Students from under-represented or disadvantaged backgrounds (as identified in strands 1 and 2), where we have identified there may be emerging issues around attainment or continuation rates.

Priority areas for action:

Data and evidence to understand our current student needs.
We need a clear and transparent baseline and to collect robust and reliable data on continuation rates and attainment in order to underpin our priorities and measures of success. We will research continued disadvantage and barriers to success, and ensure University staff are aware of these barriers and the actions required, enabling students to succeed.

Transition and induction
Ensuring students feel welcome and a valued part of our community is essential for them to succeed long term.

- We will enhance and scale up programmes such as the Moving On[7] transition programme, run by the Centre for Open Learning.
- We will link current activities such as Moving On, summer schools and peer mentoring programmes so that students from WP groups experience a seamless transition into the University of Edinburgh.

We need to provide additional academic skills support for some of our students who have skills gaps on entry that they struggle to bridge. An example is mathematic skills for students entering.

- We will explore how pre-entry or first year additional skills support can be implemented.

Student Experience
The environment a student experiences once they are here needs some consideration. While we currently offer varying degrees of flexibility in course choice, some choice is relatively unstructured and can be reliant on good personal tutor support. A vision for why Edinburgh is for 'someone like you', what you could study and experience as a student, and how you would be supported, mentored and developed could have more strength in attracting a wider diversity of students. We will work closely with the Students Association and through the developing student partnership agreement to ensure that the needs of a diverse student body are core to our mission.

This strategy will also align with ongoing work around the curriculum to determine whether inconsistency around SCQF levels are creating a confusing or detrimental impact for particular student groups. Widening participation and the needs of particular student groups need to be considered within any curriculum changes or review.

We will work with WP students to emphasise the importance of participation beyond academic and degree requirements and will help WP students to recognise and break through the cultural barriers that make them reluctant/unwilling to engage with the full student experience.

"Yeah, my mum kept being like 'oh, go join societies, you'll meet more people'. I was like 'I physically can't, I don't have the money'. I'm in one club, but it's £25, or something, at the start, but then you need to keep paying for every class you go to. So if you're getting to the end of the month you can't go, even though it's £2 a class, you're like I'd rather save that money and pay for food than go to a dance class."

(Female 1st year Business student, WP,
state school, Scotland-domiciled)
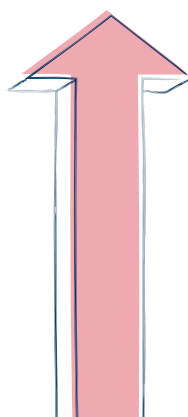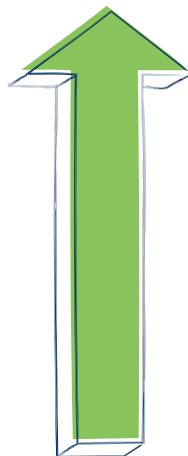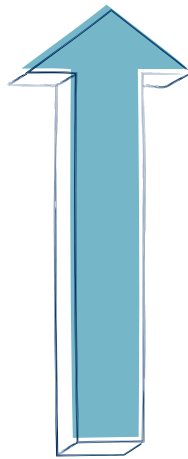
Support to Progress

All University of Edinburgh undergraduates, regardless of background, should be supported and enabled to develop the capability, confidence and opportunity to progress in their chosen career or to further study on graduation.

Throughout the undergraduate journey, targeted information, advice and guidance should be easily available to WP students so they build the skills, expertise, experience and networks to make their next step. A learning and teaching (and broader university experience) which is inclusive underpins the success of all our students: but we must actively ensure these experiences are accessible to all regardless of background and circumstances.

Research on employment outcomes by HEFCE (2016)[8] highlighted the gap in higher professional employment rates in graduates from the least and most advantaged backgrounds, at both six months and 40 months after qualifying. Some postgraduate qualifications have been correlated to better employment outcomes. We should therefore ensure our postgraduate programmes are attractive and free from barriers to WP applicants, wherever they undertook their previous study.

Helping students build confidence, think tactically and to take full advantage of opportunities, including developing their social capital, is a key aim for this strand of activity.

Who we should engage with/how we define widening participation at this stage:
• University of Edinburgh undergraduates from disadvantaged backgrounds identified as having the potential to succeed at postgraduate level.
• University of Edinburgh undergraduates who have entered the University through WP programmes.

Priority Areas for Action:

Data: intelligence and impact
Targeted action to support success is hindered by a lack of robust data on the characteristics that could predict non-continuation in individuals and the degree to which different barriers impact on different cohorts. Baseline data is also necessary to measure engagement of WP students in employability opportunities, monitor progress and to evidence the impact of targeted support.

Edinburgh was an early leader in contextualised admissions for undergraduate study. Better data will help us to understand whether this should be applied for postgraduate study, and will enable us more clearly to define what we mean by WP at a postgraduate level.

More granular analysis, understanding and sharing of existing data is recommended, along with consideration of additional data gathering, including:

• The destinations of undergraduate and postgraduate students;
• Enquiry, application, offer, acceptance and entry data to the university for PG study;
• Engagement of WP students in employability opportunities;
• Making Transitions Personal analysis at institution level;
• Discontinuation rates and reasons;
• Additional contextual information through the postgraduate application form.

Information, Advice and Guidance

To build the confidence, capabilities and social capital necessary for students to progress in a meaningful way, support should be available at programme level, complemented by relevant central and specialist provision.

A wide range of role models and support providers such as peers, alumni and employers should be used to access the appropriate expertise, provide choice to students and enable delivery at the necessary scale. Staff in key roles, such as School Support Officers and Personal Tutors, should have the appropriate awareness and skill set.

There is a need to accelerate, spread and scale-up existing positive practice particularly:

- Mentoring: Students' Association peer mentoring; PG to UG mentoring; PG to PG mentoring; alumni career mentoring;
- Personal Tutor support, through considering tutee allocation, access and training, and using Making Transitions Personal responses at an individual School and Institution level.

Collaboration with other Scottish/UK universities on promotion of PG opportunities would also raise awareness amongst key audiences wherever they may currently be studying.

Finance

The direct financial cost and the ability to take time out from (or for) work, or other commitments to undertake study, are already understood to be barriers to entry and progression, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The impact of loans for postgraduate taught study is uncertain. Consequently, in addition to targeted and tailored support, consideration must be given to financial support and to programme design, including:

- The need to examine evidence from the postgraduate loans and scholarship schemes to better understand what targeted funding could be put in place to address identified barriers;
- Active collaboration and engagement with government and funders on funding packages in support of this agenda.

Both the direct and opportunity cost to students of engaging in personal and career development activities, e.g. society activity, volunteering and work experience, can hinder engagement. Access to small scale flexible funding could have a significant impact. Further consideration by Development and Alumni of opportunities in this area should be pursued.

Accessible by Design

The Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy has had considerable impact on mainstreaming access for disabled students, and a similar approach across other WP cohorts would have merit.

Masters level provision remains designed around a full-time, 9-5 study pattern, with obvious implications for those with work or caring commitments. A reshaping of the part-time and online blended learning offer to increase the flexible opportunities available, would allow more students the opportunity to attend.

Monitoring the impact
of the strategy

In order to ensure the implementation of this strategy we have developed an implementation plan. This strategy directly relates to the Performance Measures for widening participation within the current strategic plan.

We intend for the Widening Participation Strategy Group to continue to monitor the implementation and impact of this strategy and to report directly to appropriate University and College committees. We expect to see a recognition of the four strands of the strategy within College, School and professional service plans.

Further information will be made available on the website: edin.ac/wp-strategy

References
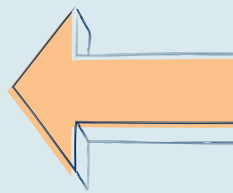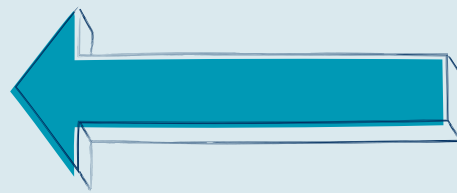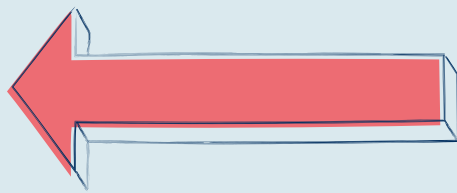
1. Between 2013/14 and 2016/17, 5 to 7% of UoE's entrants were from SIMD 1 (or SIMD20 the most deprived quintile), with SIMD 5 (the least deprived quintile) being close to 40% of the entrants each year. However, the 2017/18 figures showed an increase in SIMD 1 to 8.2%, just under 2% away from the Scottish Government target of 10%.

2. Just over half of UoE's UK entrants are Scotland domiciled and just under half are from RUK. Whilst the state proportion of UFs in the Scotland Domiciled group is 85.7%, in the RUK group it is only 55.8%. As the two groups are counted together in HESA's PI, UoE's overall figure comes out at just under 70% as seen in chart 1 in appendix on page 11.

3. Internal analysis carried out by GASP in March 2016 showed that WP students were less likely to engage with societies or sports (overall by 5%) but this becomes much more extreme for Edinburgh-based WP students (13% less likely).

4. Averaging three years of data, SIMD20 entrants are 50% more likely not to continue than the Scotland domiciled average (11.2% vs 7.4%). Comparing the sessions of entry, SIMD20 cohorts are increasingly likely not to continue (9.4%, 10.9%, 13.2% for the three cohorts).

5. Scottish Government (2017). Implementing a 'Blueprint for Fairness' – A report on with recommendations of the Commission on Widening Access: www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/05/9472/4

6. Contextual data checker: https://admission-checker.is.ed.ac.uk/

7. Moving On: www.ed.ac.uk/lifelong-learning/our-programmes/moving-on

8. HEFCE (2016).Differences in employment outcomes: Comparison of 2008-09 and 2010-11 first degree graduates: www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201618/

9. HESA (2018). Widening participation: UK performance indicators 2016/17 Table T1a: www.hesa.ac.uk/news/01-02-2018/widening-participation-tables
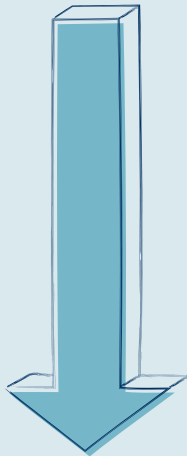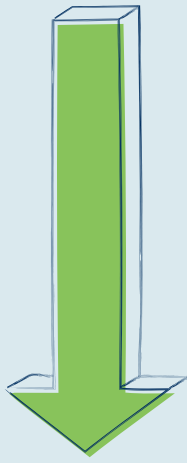
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Updated January 2019

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