

## Foreword

The University of Winchester has been pleased to host the REACT project over the past two years. Student engagement is important to us as an institution and, with the Student Union, we have worked hard to ensure that we create the best possible experience for our students: we have not only the 'Student Fellows Scheme'<sup>1</sup>, which has been central to REACT, but also many more initiatives that make Winchester a community of engaged scholars - staff and students together. For example, we are entering our fifth year of the Student Academic Council, where the University's senior managers meet with a representative body of students to discuss cross-institutional agendas, making decisions in partnership, allocating funds and positioning the student voice at the heart of the organisation. As well as continuing to develop its practice as a sector leader for student engagement, Winchester launched this year a 'Centre for Student Engagement', with a mission to ensure that all its students are aware of the opportunities available to them while studying at this university.

The University of Winchester believes in values-led education. As a small and specialist institution, we endeavour to reach out to every student to ensure that all can engage. However, there will always be those who respond less well or face barriers to their engagement and the REACT programme has raised both our awareness of these students and our expectations of measures we can take to encourage them to engage.

The project has revealed that those students one might expect to be 'hard to reach' are often not so, or do not remain so. For example, Claire was a first-year student who had to commute many miles to Winchester; she was also a mature student and carer for both a child and a parent and you can read her story of engagement in this journal. Though one might anticipate that students like Claire might, owing to their complex circumstances, struggle to engage in higher education activities, this is not necessarily the case: the stories told throughout this special issue may help to demolish and clarify some of the assumptions about the so-called 'hard to reach'. Many of those groups of students who have been considered 'hard to reach' are not only engaging with the University and gaining a great deal from this but are also working to make the University of Winchester a better place for all students.

It has been a pleasure to collaborate closely with two other universities that have been championing student engagement in the sector and are at the core of the REACT project - the University of Exeter, with its 'Students as Change Agents' programme, and London Metropolitan University, with its programme of 'Peer Assisted Student Success' - as well as to engage with the thirteen additional collaborative partner universities (Aston, Bristol, Brighton, Buckinghamshire New, Canterbury Christ Church, Edinburgh Napier, Greenwich, Manchester, Newcastle, Newman, Sheffield Hallam, Southampton and University College London).

We are grateful to HEFCE, for funding what has been an exciting and enlightening project, and to the REACT Steering Group - the majority of whom have contributed to this publication - for guiding the processes and outputs of the project. Along with the REACT team, I hope that you will enjoy reading this issue and that we shall all be able to learn from the authors and further develop our own practices to ensure that all students have the opportunity to engage successfully with their university.

Professor Elizabeth Stuart  
First Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Winchester

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<sup>1</sup> Conceived by Tom Lowe, Graham Gibbs and other colleagues three years ago and run (2016-17) by Stuart Sims, Samuel Chivers and Cassie Shaw