

## **University of Hertfordshire Access Agreement 2013/14**

### **1.0 Overview**

The University of Hertfordshire has a significant track record of success in raising aspirations and thus in widening participation. This is amply demonstrated by the performance in recruiting students from under-represented groups, and consistency in meeting the relevant HEFCE performance indicators. In a broader sense, the University is committed to contributing to the raising of participation rates at national level.

The University will focus the Access Agreement activity on priority areas relevant to the institution; these are Outreach and Retention, Employability and Success

Analysis of student recruitment and surveys of student opinion carried out by the University and nationally indicate that maintenance bursaries have not been very effective in encouraging less well off students to apply to university (OFFA 2010). The University therefore proposes to direct resources to enhancing outreach activities and the support of students after they have enrolled. A range of additional innovative support initiatives for WP students will be implemented. These include:

- a) A partnership programme directed at schools and colleges previously supported by Aimhigher Hertfordshire;
- b) Retention of mentoring activity and other measures to promote student success;
- c) Additional support for teaching staff and careers advisors;
- d) Enhancement of the Access to Learning Fund;
- e) Enhancement of retention activities.

To ensure that all students have clear and accessible information about the changes to student funding, the University will continue to invest significantly in a programme of information dissemination. This will be particularly important to ensure that the changes in student funding arrangements are widely understood.

This Access Agreement covers all relevant University provision delivered on-campus.

### **2.0 Funding Model**

The University confirmed to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) the intention to set a fee of above £6,000 in its access agreement for 2012/13

The process for identifying the fee levels was extensive and participative. It was led by a specifically convened Fees Group, with representation from Academic Schools, the Students' Union and professional departments, and involved regular interaction with the Chief Executive Group (CEG), the Vice Chancellors Group, Heads of School and the Board of Governors.

Research was carried out internally and externally to aid the decision making process. Much of this research will continue as a longitudinal study on the impact of the fee levels and the additional measures outlined within the Access Agreement.

The final position was determined against a set of clear principles relating to financial sustainability and the need for continued investment in facilities for students. The foremost principle has been set against the determination to present a fair and transparent offer to potential University of Hertfordshire students, concurrent with the values and purpose of the University.

For 2013/14 these principles were revisited and reconfirmed by the Board of Governors, CEG, the Heads of Schools. In addition to student focus group workshops, the Student Union were represented at the Board away day and final approval meeting.

## **2.1 Fee Limits and Fee Income**

The proposed fee levels for new entrants in 2013 are split into four bands with the average being below £8000. The lowest fee, £5,000 is for the provision offered through a consortium with the four Further Education Colleges within Hertfordshire plus Barnet College.

The fee for each individual university based programme has been determined in discussion with Deans and Heads of Schools and falls into one of three fee bands. The value of these bands is £8,000, £8,500 and £9,000 respectively. The majority of the provision is in the lower two bands.

For 2013-14 the estimated number of full time students in each fee band is as follows: 574 will be charged £5000; 817 will be charged £8,000; 2859 will be charged £8,500 and 690 will be charged £9,000

In subsequent years, continuing students will pay a figure increased only in accordance with DfBIS regulations for index-linking.

The proposed fee levels for new entrants to ITT courses ( including School Direct provision) in 2013 will be:

Undergraduate programmes: £8,500

Postgraduate programmes: £9,000

## **2.2 Expenditure on additional access measures**

The University has a good track record of ensuring widening participation and strives to continually increase retention. A significant level of investment, leveling out at over £4.8million by 2016-17 of fee income above the basic will be used to resource additional widening participation outreach and retention activity. This relates to £2.1million expenditure, on direct outreach and retention activities and £2.7 million on NSP, fee waivers and University specific scholarships.

## **3.0 Additional Access Measures**

The University's Student Experience Strategy guides everything we do. All members of the University have a role to play and a responsibility for the strategy. The relationship between student retention and the student experience is such that a positive experience and high levels of student satisfaction should be evident in excellent student retention.

### **3.1 Outreach**

OFFA's guidance document defines outreach work as "any activity that involves raising aspirations and attainment among potential applicants from under-represented groups and encouraging them to apply to HE." (OFFA, 2012, p.16)

As a result of the University's widening participation strategy, the number of students recruited from our target groups has met or exceeded our benchmarks. Following the end of the Aimhigher funding, the University has established an Outreach and Widening Participation department to ensure the continued delivery of support for students from low-participation backgrounds. This includes a Widening Participation Researcher to ensure that the University is effective in targeting areas of under-participation and students who will benefit most from outreach activities.

The University recognises the significant advantages of collaborative work and intends to do this in the following ways:

- a) Be an active partner in the proposed Hertfordshire Widening Participation Board, working with schools, the local authority and the County Council to ensure support for students;
- b) Maintain the consortium arrangements with local FE Colleges as a core element of the widening participation work;
- c) Maintain the innovative partnership agreement with Hertfordshire County Council, which will be to the benefit of learners across the county;
- d) Work closely with key national and local organisations, for example, SETPOINT Hertfordshire, IET, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.
- e) Collaborate where appropriate with other Universities in the East of England in establishing and contributing to the Eastern Region WP Group;
- f) The University's involvement in programmes for Gifted & Talented students will be continued and where possible delivered in partnership with Excellence East, Villiers Park and Hertfordshire County Council;
- g) Establish a Research Group to support schools in the region who wish to evaluate the effectiveness of widening participation activities with their pupils;
- h) Appoint a Community Relationships Officer to support our partnerships with Trust Schools, Academies and the proposed University Technical College

A number of strategic partnerships and support will be maintained. These include:

- a) The establishment of the groundbreaking Hertfordshire WP partnership programme (Ladders of Opportunity). This includes many of the former Aimhigher schools who decided to enter a partnership to support their learner progress into higher education;
- b) The Sponsorship of academy schools;
- c) Being a leading partner in the University Technical College located in Hertfordshire. This would provide high level technical education and support the needs of the regional economy by specializing in Digital and Media Technologies;
- d) Partnership with key consortia of schools;
- e) Continuing our partnership with a new primary school (Hatfield Community Free School) focusing on social mobility and educational achievement;

- f) Enter into formal Trusts with schools to help build sustainable links and progression routes. This has already been successfully done with schools in Harpenden and Welwyn Garden City.

Within the partnership frameworks, we also engage directly with pupils to provide them with experience of the University environment, to make HE more accessible and to dispel negative perceptions, particularly in areas where there is a tradition of low participation in HE.

The provision of accessible, timely and co-ordinated information about all aspects of HE remains vital to our success and the University will further enhance the raft of communication activities aimed at young people, their parents/carers and teachers. This will include the continued collaboration to provide an accredited course designed for teachers and school careers advisors on progression education.

The University will continue much of its established programme of support for schools and colleges designed to reach out to groups who might otherwise have been excluded from a university career. Specifically, this includes:

- a) Regular briefings for school/college staff to ensure an understanding of current HE developments (examples include student finance, the UCAS tariff, value of key skills, writing references);
- b) An extensive Gifted and Talented programme;
- c) Academic support for specific qualifications, for example, the extended project qualification;
- d) Liaison and progression activity with four Consortium Colleges to foster links and support for students' progression to higher education from further education;
- e) Development of a range of courses provided additional skills support for those who need it prior to their HE studies;
- f) Wide-ranging support for careers activities in schools and colleges;
- g) Vocational and Further Education Routes to Higher Education, including work-based learning opportunities and routes for Apprentices;
- h) A range of talks for years 10 to 13 regarding university. These include 'Getting into University' – usually year 11 or 12, 'Admission Tutors' Views' about personal statements, 'Finance' – year 12 or 13, 'The Student Experience' – year 11 or 12, 'Surviving with a child at university' – aimed at parents;
- i) University days for year 9 pupils where they work with students on the University campus to explore aspects of going to university;
- j) Routine engagement of 'Student Ambassadors' and 'Student Mentors' to work with pupils at schools with low participation rates;
- k) School visits to the University by years 9, 10, 11 and 12;
- l) Summer schools, academic assistance and subject masterclasses particularly targeted at under-represented groups;
- m) Provision of support for Looked after Children as they consider their HE options;
- n) An extensive, sector leading, provision of mentoring and coaching activity.

In addition to the range of activities listed, the University actively participates in events specifically aimed at 'hard to reach' ITT candidates including:

- Recruitment events organised as male only – ie staffed by male academics and administrators in order to attract men into primary teaching
- Targeted advertising for career changers – specifically ex armed forces; BME and male candidates

### **3.2 Retention, Employability and Success**

The University has been successful in attracting students from a diverse range of backgrounds. We also recognise that students from widening participation groups often require additional support to ensure retention, employability and success. We have therefore identified this area as an important element of our Access Agreement. The University will ensure that students have a clear sense of identity and engagement with their programme of study and support for their transition into the University through:

- a) A carefully planned and supportive induction period for both new and returning students;
- b) Focus on generic study skills;
- c) Enhanced interaction at Level 4 with academic staff/proctors/mentors;
- d) Early feedback on work and provision of advice for academic success;
- e) Monitoring engagement and attendance as a tool to identify issues students may have that may affect their ability to succeed, including identifying students who may be 'at risk' of dropping out/failing.

The University will also focus on the following areas:

1. Raising retention awareness among all staff;
2. Promoting and sharing good practice within the University in relation to student retention;
3. Supporting, monitoring and informing the retention, progression and achievement performance of the University, its Schools, programmes and subjects;
4. Identifying and removing obstacles to retention, progression and achievement;
5. Evaluation of the impact of the Student Retention activity.

The University has a designated point of contact for Care Leavers in need of additional support as they arrive at university.

The University is also working on specific retention strategies for ITT courses, particularly for students from under-represented backgrounds, such as:

- Identifying specific support activities for male trainees e.g. sports activities organised by male staff
- Focusing on the experience of BME trainees including careful selection of suitable placement opportunities

Employability is a central element of the University's strategy and this will continue to be embedded within our programmes of study. Significant resources will be made available to ensure students have access to careers guidance, employment, placements and internship opportunities.

The University has taken the strategic decision, recognising the significant impact this has on the learning and employability opportunities for students, to waive placement year tuition fees including a year abroad.

The university will offer 30 in-house placement/internships to students from under-represented groups in their sandwich placement year

### **3.3 Part-time students 2012/13 and 2013/14**

No part-time student will pay more than £6750 per academic year. In addition to the existing outreach and retention activities which part-time students can participate in, the Outreach and Widening Participation team will be specifically targeting them during Adult Learners Week and through our contacts with our consortium colleges.

#### **4.0 Financial Support for Students**

The University has offered a generous package of financial support including bursaries to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in the past. This support will be replaced by the measures outlined within this Access Agreement including the National Scholarship Programme allocation.

As a part of the research to devise this agreement, current students, placement students, Student Union sabbatical officers and alumni were consulted on the most appropriate level and type of support within the National Scholarship Programme. These student views have informed the package of support being proposed.

#### **4.1 National Scholarship Programme (NSP)**

The following are the proposed UH NSP measures.

The University has been allocated 394 scholarships worth £1,182,000 (£3000 per student), the University intends to match fund these scholarships in years 2 and 3 of the students' programme.

In addition, the University intends to allocate an additional 256 scholarships funded wholly by the University. This University scholarship will mirror the NSP offering and bring the total number of students (FTE) receiving £6000 over the duration of their studies to 650.

The University NSP will be targeted at eligible UK students on programmes charging fees above £6,000 (excluding programmes with fees not covered by this Access Agreement; for example foundation degrees franchised to partner colleges) and who fall into one or more of the following groups:

1. Are identified to be in the lowest HE participation quintiles 1\* and 2\* with a household income of up to and including £25,000
2. In receipt of incapacity benefit
3. Identified as a Looked After Child (Using the statutory definition)

\*Applicants will be given support to identify which quintile their postcode is located.

The Scholarship will be awarded to part-time students (using the above criteria) on a pro-rata basis

The NSP at Hertfordshire will be allocated in the following way:

##### **Year 1**

All students receive:  
£1000 Fee waiver  
£300<sup>1</sup> towards mentoring

Students can choose between:

a) £1,700 accommodation discount  
or b) voucher payment towards a computer and common software applications, such as a student MS Office licence, vouchers to support subsistence eg travel and food, payments towards additional course costs, materials and books (up to the value of £1700)

**Year 2** students who were:

- i) awarded an NSP scholarship in their first year of study and
- ii) progressed to the next level of study and
- iii) are in attendance on the 1 December 2014

£500 fee waiver

£300<sup>1</sup> mentoring

£500 cash

£200 towards subsistence eg travel and food and/or additional course costs, materials, books etc

**Year 3<sup>2</sup>** students who were:

- iv) awarded an NSP scholarship in their first year of study and
- v) progressed to the next level of study and
- vi) are in attendance on the 1 December 2015

£500 fee waiver

£500 cash

£500<sup>1</sup> towards mentoring, support towards subsistence eg travel and food and/or additional course costs, materials, books etc

<sup>1</sup> Students will be able to opt-out of the mentoring programme and to select an appropriate alternative to aid their educational experience. However, students will be strongly encouraged to participate in the mentoring programme as initial indications from pilot studies at the university have suggested that it has a positive impact on retention and raising attainment.

<sup>2</sup> This will apply to year 3 of study and is not allocated during the placement/study abroad year

If insufficient students meet the criteria for receiving NSP scholarships, the criteria will be broadened until the allocated number of scholarships is awarded.

Students who entered the University in 2012 will continue to receive the NSP Scholarships as outlined in the 2012/13 Access Agreement.

#### **4.3 Access to Learning Fund**

The University will enhance the HEFCE Access to Learning Fund to maintain the 2009/10 level to support further those students most at financial risk and to aid retention. This will be described as the University Hardship Fund.

#### **4.4 ITT students**

New ITT undergraduate students are eligible for the National Scholarship Programme. New ITT undergraduate and postgraduate students will be able to access the University's Access to Learning fund.

### **5.0 Targets and milestones**

#### **5.1 Widening Participation, Retention & Employability**

HESA has well established performance indicators for widening participation, retention and employability. To date, the University has been successful in exceeding or coming close to the location-adjusted benchmarks.

The University believes that it will be a challenge to maintain this level of engagement post the announcement of the introduction of higher tuition fees from 2012 onwards.

As such the University aims to maintain these levels of activity.

These targets are reproduced below:

Participation of under-represented group in HE (HESA Performance Indicators Table T1b: 09/10 entrants)

Young full-time undergraduate entrants:

- from state schools or colleges : 97.4%
- from NS-SEC (social) classes 4, 5, 6 & 7: 39.5%
- from low participation neighbourhoods (based on POLAR2 method) from group 8.2%,

For Full time – First Degree entrants: non-continuation of students (HESA Performance Indicators Table T3a 09/10 entrants)

- Percentage not in HE: Young entrants 8.4%
- Percentage not in HE: Mature Entrants 15%
- Percentage not in HE: All Entrants 9.8%

Leavers obtaining first degrees from full-time courses (HESA Performance Indicators Table E1a 10/11 graduates)

Employment Indicator (including further study): 86.6%

#### **5.2 ITT students**

The targets and milestones outlined above apply to the whole student body, but are not monitored separately for ITT students.

It will be a challenge to maintain the proportion of ITT students from under-represented groups of students recruited in the past. The university has therefore decided to concentrate its outreach and retention activities on maintaining the proportion of male and BME students recruited to ITT provision.

The University will be using the 2010/11 entrant profiles (from the TDA Performance Profiles Data) as a base line which the University will aim to maintain.

In addition, the University will, on a timely and regular basis, collate and disseminate transparent and robust data (both qualitative and quantitative) on students prior to entry, and on the retention, progression and achievement of students at University, School and programme level, that are amenable to analysis by gender, race, age, disability, social background, pre-entry qualifications, and familial experience of HE.

## **6.0 Monitoring and evaluation**

Accountability for the monitoring and evaluation of the Access Agreement will be divided into two areas of responsibility:

- Outreach – the Dean of Students and Head of Outreach and Widening Participation; Reporting to the Recruitment and Admissions Policy Committee (RAPC) or equivalent
- Retention, Employability and Success – Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience and Pro Vice-Chancellor for Enterprise; Reporting to the Student Educational Experience Committee (SEEC)

Regular interim reports will be submitted for consideration by the Chief Executive's Group chaired by the Vice-Chancellor (comprising the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellors, Deans of School and Directors of the Professional Services), and the Board of Governors.

An annual report, led by the Academic Registrar, on the performance of the Access Agreement will be submitted to the Chief Executive's Group for consideration

The report will set out the University's performance against the location adjusted benchmarks, will review the impact of fee bands and bursaries, and will evaluate the University's performance in the activities outlined within the Access Agreement. The Group will agree actions to be taken including changes to the activities.

An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out to ensure the policies and procedures are appropriate and legal.

The final report will be submitted to OFFA through HEFCE's Annual Monitoring Statement for Higher Education Institutions and detailed within the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment report.

Research will be fundamental to monitoring and evaluating the impact of the advance measures within the 2013 agreement. The University will continue to fund the Widening

Participation Researcher whose work will involve collaboration with colleagues in the Registry, Office of the Dean of Students and Marketing and Communications.

## **7.0 Provision of information to prospective students**

The University recognises the importance of providing clear and transparent information on the financial arrangements for students. It will communicate information on fees and scholarships to applicants and potential applicants in several different ways:

- a) The website will include student finance web pages explaining the University's policy on tuition fees and availability of, and eligibility for, additional support. Where appropriate the web pages will be linked to relevant external websites, such as Student Finance England;
- b) The University's undergraduate mini-prospectus will contain information explaining the policy on tuition fees and scholarships;
- c) A separate leaflet will be available at higher education fairs, open days and within the Student Centre;
- d) All University Open Days will have designated presentations and trained staff available to answer questions on student finance;
- e) A facility for applicants to see Student Finance staff on an individual basis will be available.

The liaison activities undertaken by the Outreach and Widening Participation department and by UK Recruitment will be enhanced to provide further support. This will include an increase in targeted workshops and briefings to schools, colleges and careers offices throughout the region. A particular focus will be given to ensuring students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds understand the level of support available to them.

Information provided will include factual details and case studies. The latest data will be sourced from Student Finance England, TDA and NHS.

## **8.0 Equality Act 2010**

The University of Hertfordshire has shown its continuing commitment to equal opportunities since 1991. Our over-arching Equality and Diversity policy articulates a renewed vision for advancing equality and valuing diversity which supports the achievement of the University's Strategic Plan. The Equality and Diversity policy (UPR EQ03, updated 4<sup>th</sup> April 2012) can be accessed on the University's website at the following location:  
<http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/secreg/upr/EQ03.htm>

The policy statement set out in this document summarises how the University will realise this vision, and ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation.

The University is committed to producing Equality Impact Assessments for the areas covered by this Access Agreement, supported by the University's Equality Office.

## **9.0 Summary**

Through this Access Agreement the University is clearly evidencing its commitment to attracting and retaining motivated and highly qualified students, regardless of their background. The University of Hertfordshire already has a significant number of students from households with incomes of £25,000 or less and the University anticipates this to continue under this Agreement.

As the UK's leading business-facing University, the best performing post-1992 institution in the latest Research Assessment Exercise and with a strong position in the UK league tables, the University believes that the fees proposal, NSP and Access Agreement demonstrate how an institution can ensure fair access and deliver high quality degrees whilst ensuring financial sustainability and exceptional value for its students.