

University of Hertfordshire Access Agreement 2012/13

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). We therefore propose 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 in earlier correspondence to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) the intention to set a fee of above £6,000.

The process for identifying the fee levels has been extensive and participative. It has been led by a specifically convened Fees Group, with representation from Academic Schools, the Students' Union and professional departments, and has 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 level and the additional measures outlined within the Access Agreement.

The final position has been 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.

2.1 Fee Limits and Fee Income

The proposed fee levels for new entrants in 2012 are split into four bands with the average being in the region of £7,500. The lowest fee, £5,800 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 £7,400, £7,800 and £8,500 respectively. The majority of the provision is in the lower two bands.

For 2012-13 the estimated number of students in each fee band is as follows: 600 will be charged £5800; 593 will be charged £7400; 2725 will be charged £7800 and 243 will be charged £8500

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

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 19% by 2015-16 of fee income above the basic will be used to resource additional widening participation outreach and retention activity. This relates to £3.6million expenditure, including £1.6million on direct outreach and retention activities and £2 million on NSP, fee waivers and 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

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. However, the ending of the Aimhigher funding could have resulted in a significant reduction in outreach activity. The University has shown its commitment to this vital work by investing £250,000 more in 2011 to ensure students who would benefit the most from a higher education would be supported, regardless of their background. This additional investment will be continued in 2012 and subsequent years.

In keeping with previous Access Agreements, this outreach work will also be targeted to areas of under-participation and to those students who will benefit most from such activities.

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

- a) Retain and strengthen the close links with the 14-19 Strategic Area Partnership Groups in Hertfordshire. This includes joint projects and targeted activity;
- b) The University's involvement in programmes for Gifted & Talented students will be enhanced and where possible delivered in partnership with Excellence East and Hertfordshire County Council;
- c) Maintain the consortium arrangements with local FE Colleges as a core element of the widening participation work;
- d) Maintain the innovative partnership agreement with Hertfordshire County Council, which will be to the benefit of learners across the county;
- e) Work closely with key national and local organisations, for example, SETPOINT Hertfordshire, IET, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.
- f) Collaborate where appropriate with other Universities in the East of England (See Annex 1)

A number of strategic partnerships and support will also 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 formal partnership to support their learner progress into higher education;
- b) The Sponsorship of both 'old' and 'new' type academy schools. Including the sponsorship of Francis Combe Academy, a school within a low participation area which has benefited greatly from an enhanced level of support from the University.
- c) The potential University Technical College located in Hertfordshire and led by the University. This would provide high level technical education and support the needs of the regional economy;
- d) Support for a University Technical College in Central Bedfordshire, in partnership with Cambridge University;
- e) Partnership with key consortiums of schools such as the BEST partnership
- f) Partner in the establishment of a new primary school (Hatfield Community Free School) focusing on social mobility and educational achievement;
- g) 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 creation of an accredited masters level course designed for teachers and school careers advisors on progression education.

The University was the lead organisation in the Aimhigher programme for Hertfordshire working in partnership with Connexions, the LA, schools and colleges. The University conducted a review of this activity in 2011 to ensure the most successful elements were sustainable beyond the funding period. The review included independent work carried out by York Consulting and the University's School of Education. The data collected from pupils, teachers, partners and other stakeholders has informed the programme of outreach work offered by the University.

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 deployment 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 and subject masterclasses e.g. 'Arts Award' – particularly targeted at under-represented groups.
- m) An extensive, sector leading, provision of mentoring and coaching activity.

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.

We 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;
- b) Focus on generic study skills
- c) Enhanced interaction at Level 4 with academic staff;
- 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

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 will actively participate in the HEFCE initiative 'back on course' providing support to students who have withdrawn from the University.

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.

4.0 Financial Support for Students

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

As a part of the research to devise this agreement, current students 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 248 scholarships worth £744,000 (£3000 per student), the University intends to match fund these scholarships in years 2 and 3 of the student's programme.

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) and who fall into one or more of the following groups:

1. Are identified to be in the lowest HE participation quintile 1* and with a household income of £25,000 or less
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 on a pro rata basis

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

Year 1

1. £1,000 voucher payment towards University provided accommodation or a laptop (3 year full warranty), software and printer from a designated supplier
2. £100 book voucher or similar eg course materials
3. Fresher's pass and/or clubs and society membership up to the value of £100
4. Access to a final year mentor (value £300)¹
5. £500 voucher to support subsistence eg travel
6. £1,000 tuition fee waiver

NB¹ Students will be able to opt-out of the mentoring programme and will be able to select an appropriate alternative to aid their educational experience.

Year 2 students who were awarded an NSP scholarship in their first year of study and maintained a 2:1 average performance in the previous year:

1. £500 cash contribution towards living costs
2. £500 voucher to support subsistence eg travel
3. £ 200 book voucher or similar eg course materials
4. Access to a final year mentor (value £300)

Year 3 students² - to students who were awarded an NSP scholarship in their first year of study and maintained a 2:1 average performance in the previous year:

1. £500 cash contribution towards living costs
2. £500 voucher to support subsistence eg travel
3. £ 200 book voucher or similar eg course materials
4. Access to a final year mentor (value £300)

NB² This will apply to year 3 of study and is not awarded during the placement/study abroad year.

Any funds not allocated because insufficient students obtain a 2:1 average will be used to create extra scholarships in year 1.

4.2 UH Scholarships

The University defines scholarships to be a sum of money made available to students achieving high academic standards. A student may be in receipt of a

government bursary/maintenance grant or NSP and a University scholarship; they are not mutually exclusive.

The main corporate scholarship will be the Chancellor's (Gifted & Talented) Scholarship: this scholarship is worth £3,000 per year for the duration of the students' study, (excluding placement/study abroad year). Eligible students are those that have been identified by their school as 'gifted and talented' and expected to achieve 360 UCAS points or more. Students have to apply and up to 60 of these scholarships are awarded each year. 30 of these scholarships will be restricted to students from under-represented groups.

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.

5.0 Targets and milestones

5.1 Widening Participation

HEFCE has well established performance indicators for widening participation. To date, the University has been very successful in exceeding or coming close to the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmarks for widening participation. This is demonstrated by the most recently published figures (2009/10) which are reproduced below:

Participation of under-represented group in HE

(HESA Performance Indicators Table T1b)

Young full-time undergraduate entrants:

from state schools or colleges : from group 97.4%, location adjusted benchmark 94.9%

from NS-SEC (social) classes 4, 5, 6 & 7 : from group 39.5%, location adjusted benchmark 36.5%

from low participation neighbourhoods (based on POLAR2 method) from group 8.2%, location adjusted benchmark 9.3%.

In terms of milestones, the University will maintain the levels outlined above.

5.2 Retention, Employability and Success

A. HEFCE has well established performance indicators for non continuation. To date, the University has been very successful in exceeding or coming close to the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmarks for non continuation. This is demonstrated by the most recently published figures (2008/09) which are reproduced below:

For Full time – First Degree entrants: non-continuation of students who entered in 2008-09

(HESA Performance Indicators Table T3a)

Percentage not in HE: Young entrants 5.4% Benchmark 8.7%

Percentage not in HE: Mature Entrants 11.5% Benchmark 12.7%

Percentage not in HE: All Entrants 6.9% Benchmark 9.6%

In terms of milestones, the University will maintain the levels outlined above.

B. HEFCE has well established performance indicators for employability. The most recently published figures (2008/09) are reproduced below:

Leavers obtaining first degrees from full-time courses

(HESA Performance Indicators Table E1a)

Employment Indicator (including further study): 86.8% Benchmark 87.3%

In terms of milestones, the University will maintain the levels outlined above.

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 Head of UK Recruitment and Access/Director of Education Liaison; Reporting to the Recruitment and Admissions Policy Committee (RAPC)
- 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 Faculty 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 HEFCE 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.

The report will also be considered and approved at a full meeting of the Governing Body.

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 2012 agreement. Additional resources will be made available to support this work, including research into the impact of the fee levels. The resource will support the research work within Registry, Marketing and Communications and a newly created Participation, Access and Progression Researcher post.

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, bursaries 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, bursaries. 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, bursaries 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 Education/Schools liaison activities will be enhanced to provide further support. This will include an increase in 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 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.

Annex 1: A joint statement agreed between a numbers of Universities based within the East of England.

We recognise that our specific efforts to widen participation will also have an impact on the aspirations and attainment of young people and their progression to higher education more generally.

We consider the promotion of higher education opportunities to be part of our responsibility as a University

To this end, we will work with schools, colleges, local authorities, careers services and others to promote the benefits of participation in higher education.

We will work with other providers of higher education, especially those in our locality and region, to develop a coherent approach to widening participation practice, to ensure that what we do has the maximum impact. By so doing, we seek to increase opportunity, build cultural capital, raise skills and enhance employability

In particular, we will work together to sustain those aspects of the Aimhigher project that we consider to have proved their efficacy in raising aspirations, attainment and progression.