

# ACCESS AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD AND THE OFFICE FOR FAIR ACCESS

## Introduction

1. The University of Oxford currently operates one of the most generous undergraduate bursary<sup>1</sup> schemes within the UK, providing all students who receive full fee remission from the UK Government with a bursary of up to £2,500 over four years. It established the Oxford Bursary Scheme in 2001, jointly with the Colleges, in response to concerns that students of ability might not be applying to Oxford because of perceptions of a high cost of living in the city and studying at the University.
2. Expenditure on the current scheme by the University and its Colleges, over four cohorts of students, will be in the region of £1m per year at steady state (2005/06). The scheme will be continued for all qualifying students who are admitted to the University before the introduction of variable tuition fees in October 2006 (ie those paying fees under the current regime), and will run parallel to the new scheme – Oxford Opportunity Bursaries - until 2008/09. In addition to the existing Oxford Bursary Scheme, individual colleges make available from their own resources a wide range of scholarships and financial support (for example in the form of hardship grants, travel awards, and other provision). Such additional provision, which falls outside the terms of this access agreement, totals in the region of £3m. Approximately half of it - £1.5m – is devoted to hardship funding.

## Fees payable from October 2006

3. The University has followed the parliamentary and public debate on variable tuition fees closely, and has itself debated the merits of such fees within its Congregation. Such is the financial pressure under which this, and peer UK universities operate, the University's Council has decided to set a fee level of £3,000 per year for Home/EU undergraduates for each of its degree courses. The fees will apply to all three and four year undergraduate courses, and will also include Medicine, on the understanding that the Government will pay the fees of medical students in years 5 and 6.

## Bursaries and other financial support for students

4. The estimated additional income to the University from setting fees at £3,000 per year for all courses, at steady state in 2009-10, will be approximately £18.6m per annum<sup>2</sup>. The University and Colleges intend to devote, again at steady state, funding equivalent to 36% of that fee income - approximately £6.8m – to bursaries for students from poorer backgrounds. In addition to these bursaries, the Colleges will continue to operate a generous scheme of hardship funding throughout all income ranges – not just those covered by the new scheme - on the basis of proven need.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, the term “bursary” will be used to define a financial award made to a student to provide general support for maintenance and living costs, and “scholarship” to define a financial award made to students on the basis of academic merit or to reward other achievement.

<sup>2</sup> Figures prepared under the Government's Transparency Review Costing Method (TRAC) showed that in 2002-03 (the latest year for which data is available) there was a deficit on publicly funded teaching for the University alone of £27.8m. Oxford's Colleges also subsidise undergraduate teaching very heavily.

5. The essential living costs of undergraduates living away from home in Oxford for twenty-seven weeks of the year are estimated to be, in 2006-07, in the region of £5,700. The University and Colleges' bursary scheme, taken together with Government support, will make a significant graduated contribution to the living costs of undergraduates whose family income is lower than £37,425 per annum.
6. For students whose family income is in the lowest bracket, the annual bursary will be set at a minimum of £3,000, which, together with Government support of £2,700, will cover the essential living costs of those students. Hence there will be little or no need for them to take additional maintenance loans from the Student Loan Company. In addition to the annual bursary of £3,000, all students in this category will receive a further £1,000 in their first year at Oxford, paid at the beginning of their course, to help meet their initial costs in moving away from home for the first time.
7. Students whose family income is between £17,501 and £22,499 will also receive significant levels of bursary support, set at a uniform rate of £2,600 per annum. Students in this category will receive a further £400 in their first year to help towards initial costs.
8. The University's plans for bursaries reflect also the concerns that students whose family income is between £22,500 and £37,425 should not be caught in a "poverty trap" as the result of tapering of Government support in this range. Students whose family income is within this range will receive support of between £2,500 and £100 per annum.
9. This scheme for students who enter the University from October 2006 is considerably more generous than the current Oxford Bursary Scheme (which will continue to run for entrants in 2005). Depending on the precise profile of Government provision at the upper end of the third income bracket (family income of more than £30,000 per annum), no new undergraduate in the bursary scheme from 2006 should be worse off in terms of fee and student loan liability than if they had entered university before 2006; almost all will be significantly better off.
10. An illustration of combined Government and collegiate University support, together with the estimated cost of living in Oxford, and the resultant borrowing requirement from the Student Loan Company is shown at Annex A. The schedule of bursaries agreed by the University and Colleges is shown in the table below:

	Oxford Bursary	Government support	Total support available
Family income less than £17,501 per annum	£4,000 in year one, £3,000 thereafter	£2,700	£6,700 in year one, £5,700 thereafter
Family income between £17,501 and £22,499	£3,000 in year one, £2,600 thereafter	Between £2,700 and £1,200	Between £5,700 and £4,200 in year one; between £5,300 and £3,800 thereafter
Family income between £22,500 and £37,425	Between £2,500 and £100	Between £1,200 and £0	Between £3,700 and £100 dependent on Government provision

11. Based on the current constitution of the undergraduate body, approximately 26% of the Oxford undergraduate population will be eligible for support from the new bursary scheme. Over four cohorts of entry, there will be around 1200 students within the first, lowest, income bracket; 400 in the second; and 1000 in the third. It is anticipated that the University's planned bursary scheme and continuing outreach activity will increase the proportions of the student body within each income category, although such increases are not factored into the financial estimates for the scheme.

### **Publicity and availability of information**

12. The schedule of fees and of available bursary support, subject to agreement by OFFA, has been published in the 2006 Undergraduate Prospectus,. In addition, the University publishes, as it has done for some years, a range of pamphlets and other guidance to students on affording university. As now, these will be distributed to all secondary schools and colleges. Information on Oxford Opportunity Bursaries has been promoted widely.
13. The University has studied best practice in the United States, where extensive use of institutional websites is made to provide prospective students with "ready reckoners" to calculate the scale of financial support that they can expect to receive from their university and from public sources. An online model is available on the University website, and shows potential applicants, according to their family income, the support they can expect from Oxford Opportunity Bursaries, from Government sources, and the likely extent of their commitments in terms of living costs and eventual fee liability.

### **Outreach activities**

14. The collegiate University has, for many years, undertaken a large number of access and widening participation activities, designed to ensure that all students with the necessary potential to benefit from an Oxford undergraduate education are encouraged to apply for a place. Some of these have been undertaken using HEFCE Widening Participation and Retention funding, and some using Aspiration Funding. Many more have been funded entirely from departmental and college sources, and the estimate included in the University's Annual Monitoring Statement puts the direct and indirect costs met by the collegiate University for embedded access and admissions activities at around £1m per annum.
15. Experience over the last few years in developing widening participation activity suggests an optimal envelope of direct funding for such activity of around £1m per year (in addition to the embedded activity mentioned above). HEFCE Widening Participation funding is currently set at approximately £650k for 2004/05. On the assumption that this funding stream will continue after HEFCE's current review of T funding, the University will commit £350k per annum from 2006/07 – equivalent to a further 2% of its additional tuition fee income – to maintain the £1m direct funding total.
16. Set out in Annex B are the activities that Oxford currently undertakes to encourage applications from students with the necessary potential within under-represented groups, both to Oxford and more generally to universities throughout the UK. They

are divided between general aspiration raising activity, and activity to encourage applications to Oxford specifically.

### **Institutional milestones and objectives to safeguard and improve access, including institutional baseline data**

17. In 1998, Oxford and Cambridge commissioned a report from the National Foundation for Educational Research into the factors affecting decisions whether or not to apply to the two universities. The report informed a number of the initiatives which the universities have since undertaken to encourage applications from under-represented groups. Changes to the way in which students are funded, with the move from grants to loans, and the introduction of tuition fees, have changed the context in which young people must make decisions about applying to university. The two universities have commissioned a follow-up study, which has now reported. The study indicates that the focus of perception of Oxford and Cambridge, for both students and teachers, has shifted towards academic quality and prestige, and away from social mix.
18. The University has also commissioned, using partial funding from the European Social Fund, the Sutton Trust, and HEFCE, a joint study with Cambridge of the effectiveness of the two Universities' outreach activity. The intention, once the report is available, will be to focus resources on those current activities that are found to be the most effective and efficient in encouraging applications from under-represented groups. The University will review and set milestones for such activity by December 2005.
19. Following input to the Schwartz Review into Fair Admissions to Higher Education, and the publication of that review's final report, a working party was established to undertake a review of Oxford's undergraduate admissions system. The working party's report is due by the end of 2005.
20. The University chooses its undergraduates on a range of criteria, principally on grounds of ability, achievement, and the necessary potential to benefit from the Oxford system of undergraduate teaching. Successful candidates come from across the socio-economic range, and the University has designed its new bursary scheme to ensure, as far as possible, that financial considerations do not play a significant part in the decision of students on whether or not to apply to Oxford. The number of applications it receives from school pupils and college students within the maintained sector has risen sharply since the 2002 admissions round, possibly as a result of the introduction of the existing Oxford Bursary Scheme. For entry in October 2005, 57% of UK applications were from the maintained sector (5,809 out of 10,197 applications).
21. Oxford opposes the decision to use UCAS tariff points (rather than A level points) for establishing performance indicators for the proportion of students recruited from the maintained sector. The University's standard offer is one of three As at A level in appropriate academic subjects, and the preliminary evidence suggests (using data for 2002 school leavers) that the figure for pupils from the maintained sector achieving such grades is 62% rather than the 75% derived using the measure of 360 tariff points. A further factor is the appropriate combination of A level subjects for the particular degree programmes on offer. Oxford is currently developing benchmarks based on

such data, which will give a more accurate reflection of success in recruiting from the maintained sector.

22. To achieve 62% of applications from the maintained sector (if that proves to be the right figure on further investigation) will be challenging, but the collegiate University is committed to this objective. To get there in five years, assuming independent school applications remain at their current level, will require a growth in applications from the maintained sector of 270 per annum (4.25%). The University believes that this may be possible through the planned combination of enhanced bursary support from October 2006 and a continuing programme of widening participation activity.
23. The University already monitors and publishes data on its admission figures. From October 2006, using the procedures required for establishing eligibility for bursaries, information will be accumulated on the numbers and proportions of the student body being recruited from lower socio-economic groups, and hence its performance in this respect will be monitored. This, together with the other work on institutional milestones set out above, will be carried out under the auspices of the University's Educational Policy and Standards Committee (chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education), working with the Oxford Colleges' Admissions Executive. The University Council will monitor the progress on milestones through the regular reports of the EPSC, and University officers will remain in close contact with the Office of Fair Access over those milestones, and on progress in developing new indicators with other institutions.

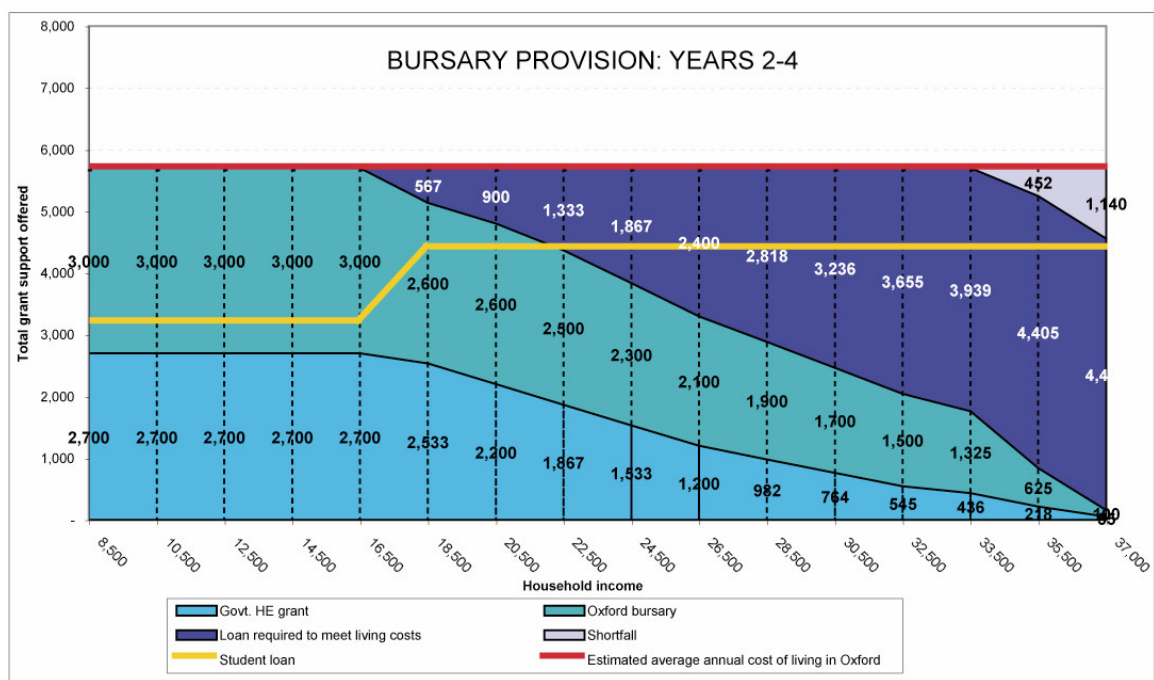
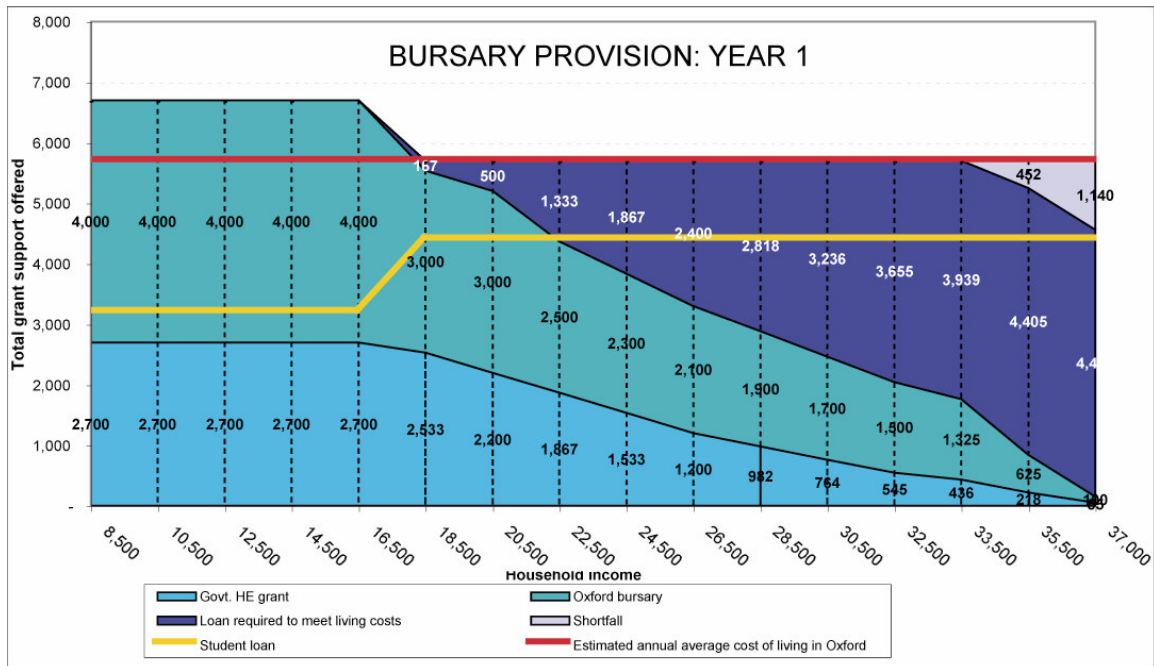
**The total amount to be spent on access measures (including financial assistance); how much of that total expenditure is additional as a result of the access agreement; the relationship between this additional expenditure and the estimated fee income**

24. As noted in the introduction to this document, the University and Colleges already maintain an Oxford Bursary Scheme, which at steady state in 2005/06 will distribute around £1m to students on full fee remission under the present tuition fee regime. This commitment will taper down to around £550k in 2006/07, £300k in 2007/08, and £100k in 2008/09, as the new bursary scheme is introduced. The University's planned financial contribution to widening participation activity in 2005/06 is £175k, in addition to HEFCE WP funding and previously embedded aspiration raising activity. So a baseline of current measures in 2005/06 for widening participation and bursary support is in the region of £1,175k. This figure excludes the hardship funding and other financial provision by the Colleges, referred to in paragraph two, and which will continue in addition to the enhanced bursary provision set out in this document.
25. The University expects variable tuition fees to deliver approximately £18.6m (2006/07 prices) in additional income per year at steady state. Again at steady state, the University and Colleges will commit a figure of approximately £6.8m in direct costs to bursaries. Assuming HEFCE maintains its current commitment to widening participation activity, Oxford will continue to spend £1m per year directly on such activity. This will require a University contribution of £350k from 2006/07, as set out in paragraph 15. Hence the commitment for bursaries and widening participation activity will be a minimum of £7.15m. As a proportion of the additional sum derived from variable tuition fees, this represents 38% at steady state. Additional expenditure

above the current baseline will amount to a minimum of £6m, a figure equivalent to 32% of the extra income from variable tuition fees.

26. The entire package of collegiate University financial support for undergraduate students at Oxford will, of course, be much higher. It will include the £6.8m allocated to the new central bursary scheme, £1.5m in college-administered hardship funding, and £1.5m in college-administered academic scholarships, prizes, accommodation and travel grants (see paragraph 2): a total of £9.8m per annum, of which £3m will be available to all undergraduate students, on the basis of need or ability. In addition, directly-funded and embedded access and widening participation activity will total in the region of £1.35m.

University of Oxford  
September 2005



The University of Oxford undertakes a wide range of widening participation activities both to raise aspirations and to encourage applications from underrepresented groups, coordinated centrally by the Oxford Colleges Admissions Office (OCAO). The OCAO runs an admission information centre, which provides a drop-in service for potential applicants to Oxford, as well as for their parents and carers, teachers and career advisors, and its staff maintain a widening participation database which records all activities undertaken by the office itself, and by Colleges, departments, and student-led groups.

The office leads on the production of publications about the admissions process, and in maintaining a website that provides readily accessible information both about the admissions process and the University's outreach programmes. It also provides advice and guidance to individual colleges seeking to develop their own activities, apart from the visits to schools made already by Heads of Colleges and senior Fellows.

The list below includes activities currently delivered as part of the University's widening participation programme:

- events aimed at younger students to start them thinking about going to university, including a programme of Aspiration Days in Oxford for Year 9, 10 and 11 students from Oxford's specific "target areas"; the current activity level entails hosting approximately 100 visits for about 4,000 students every year, as well as partnership arrangements with specific LEAs;
- a summer school for 150 Year 11 students from underrepresented groups as part of HEFCE's specialist summer school provision;
- jointly leading the Raising Aspirations strand of Aimhigher Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and helping to deliver a range of events for local schools and colleges, including a summer school, "Passport Days" and master classes; Oxford is also involved with the Aimhigher partnership through representation on its Core Partners and Steering Groups;
- a programme of school and college outreach visits targeting maintained sector schools and colleges with little history of sending applicants to Oxford or to higher education generally; Oxford contacts all maintained sector schools and colleges in the UK every year, and involves students and teachers from about 500 "target" schools and colleges a year in visits;
- a programme of summer schools for students from non-traditional backgrounds in Year 12 or their first year at a further education college; there are over 250 summer school places each year available on this Sutton Trust Summer School scheme which is also funded by the University's HEFCE widening participation funding;
- a programme of regional events to encourage students from non-traditional backgrounds to think about applying to institutions like Oxford; as part of this,



the University co-hosts a series of events in sporting or other major venues which attract up to 5,000 students and teachers;

- a programme of events for teachers from schools and colleges with little history of applications to Oxford, including a professional development week (part funded by the Sutton Trust), a study week and a teacher-tutor shadowing scheme. Over 100 teachers will be involved in these schemes, and in addition many subject based events for teachers are organised which focus on specific curriculum areas;
- support for student groups in their initiatives to widen participation; these include the Oxford Access Scheme that targets students from inner city schools, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and the Target Schools Scheme, run by Oxford University Student Union;
- a Further Education Access Initiative which works with over 100 colleges a year, involving visits, conferences and events in Oxford;
- subject specific “enrichment” activities, arranged by departmental access officers, to raise awareness of and encourage applications to particular degree courses from students in the maintained sector.