

UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE

Access Agreement

(Applies to new entrants commencing September 2012 for the academic year to August 2013)

(One page executive summary to be prepared and inserted once approval achieved)

1 Introduction

In their letter to the Director of the Office for Fair Access, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Minister for Universities and Science set out three key objectives for policy on access to higher education, in the context of the Government's plans for University funding and student financial support. These are to:

- "increase social mobility by enabling more people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter higher education, and subsequently gain employment in the professions and other rewarding, well paid occupations;"
- "make greater progress in extending fair access for applicants..."; and to
- continue to make progress in widening participation to higher education at large, attracting a high proportion of students from under-represented groups".

2 The institutional strategic context for the development of the Access Agreement

- 2.1 The University of Bedfordshire's Strategic Plan 2012-17 is presently under development and is expected to be structured around six core strategic areas: Learning Experience, Student Experience, Global Engagement, Regional Engagement, Research and Enterprise.
- 2.2 The Strategic Plan further identifies four strategic themes; delivering stakeholder benefit; innovating for impact; improving our systems and processes; and supporting long-term sustainability.
- 2.3 The University of Bedfordshire is fundamentally committed by its mission and values to providing access to higher education for learners from backgrounds that are under-represented in higher education and these objectives are manifest in its various strategies.
- 2.4 We are an opportunity university and we seek to promote access for learners from the local area, from the lower socio-economic groups, from neighbourhoods with low rates of participation in higher education, from black and minority ethnic groups that are similarly under-represented, from vulnerable groups such as young people leaving care and from learners with disabilities.
- 2.5 In our view it is of the utmost importance that we meet the needs of learners and of the national economy, to provide all of our students, irrespective of their starting point, with a first rate educational experience, which will give them the best chance of achieving the success they seek and helping them make the best possible contribution to the wider economy. This is what we mean when we say that the University of Bedfordshire's primary purpose is to transform the lives of its students for the better.
- 2.6 This Access Agreement is therefore a significant lever to fulfil our commitments to access and retention which includes recognition of the need to:
- 2.6.1 guide and support each of our potential students in developing a confident understanding of their potential and their prospects;
 - 2.6.2 achieve the effective development of our systems to enhance access to opportunity;
 - 2.6.3 work with networks and communities to expand access to higher education;
 - 2.6.4 shape our provision around high-impact interaction with staff expertise and support;
 - 2.6.5 ensure the development of an effective and attractive learning community across all of our campuses and all learning platforms (including online);

- 2.6.6 ensure the delivery of graduate outcomes with the potential to transform the futures of our graduates;
- 2.6.7 and make our provision as flexible as possible to enhance access.

3 Fee limits and income above £6,000

- 3.1 To ensure the best possible experience and outcomes for our students, we propose to charge the maximum fee permitted for our Honours Degree courses and to make the maximum investment possible in their learning, while keeping the University accessible, so we can secure the success of our students and provide them with an excellent student experience. To ensure alternative routes are also available, we propose to charge at the lower levels of permitted fee for sub degree programmes and accordingly to put in place suitable support structures for students.
- 3.2 We therefore propose to charge £9,000 per annum for Honours Degree courses undertaken full-time.
- 3.3 This fee will also apply to First Degrees undertaken with any of the University's partner colleges, for example the British School of Osteopathy.
- 3.4 In the case of sandwich courses, we propose to charge £4,500 for the sandwich year.
- 3.5 We therefore propose to charge £6,000 per annum for Foundation Degrees undertaken full-time.
- 3.6 This fee will also apply to Foundation Degrees undertaken with any of the University's partner colleges.
- 3.7 We propose to charge the same fee pro rata for Honours Degrees undertaken part-time.
- 3.8 We propose to charge the same fee pro rata for Foundation Degrees undertaken part-time.
- 3.9 We will respond positively to proposals planned for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills HE White Paper that part-time students will have access to fee loans. On the basis of the information currently available, we will put in place fee waivers, subject to University sustainability, to ensure that the proposed pro rata fee levels for part-time students do not deter those from our target groups from taking up opportunities to study with us and with our partners.
- 3.10 In order to promote sandwich year opportunities for those in the target groups, we will provide for a fee waiver of £2000 for up to 200 people in that year of study.
- 3.11 These fee limits noted above are to be increased annually in line with the permitted rises to be set by the Government each year.
- 3.12 Fees for courses in initial teacher education, nursing and midwifery, funded respectively through the Department for Education and the Department for Health are not included in this proposal. With these exceptions, the statements in 3.5 to 3.11 above apply to all students on undergraduate level courses who are eligible for financial support from the Government in the form of tuition fee loans and maintenance loans and who may also be eligible for maintenance grants and participation in the National Scholarship Programme.
- 3.13 At least 30% of the additional funding secured for the University through its proposed fees will be spent on student support (including financial support), access and outreach (including work in partnership with Further Education Colleges, schools and local authorities), and retention (including student attainment).
- 3.14 This is by no means the total expenditure the University devotes to its widening participation strategy, given its mission and its success in recruitment – as also shown in the monitoring returns to HEFCE. However, this relies upon the targeted allocations for widening participation and retention and the Access to Learning Fund. Were these to be reduced the University would need to reconsider the priorities for student support and funded initiatives set out in this document and adjust its spending accordingly.

4 Support for students

- 4.1 We are committed to transforming the lives of our students. We will help those in the greatest financial difficulty to make a good start to their higher education experience. Using a judgment based on a points based system (Annex A) to identify those within the University's target groups most in need, we will provide scholarships of £3,000 for students with a family income of less than £25,000, with help from the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) and as matched by the University. They will receive a start up scholarship package of £3,000. Students will receive £2,000 as payment towards their accommodation costs, or towards cost of travel (e.g. a rail season ticket) or for a range of other support in kind. A further £1,000 will be paid as a bursary on 31st January of the first year of study. We will add a further £400,000 per annum to create an Access Support Fund, which will provide students with a family income of less than £25,000 who have not qualified for NSP support, with a start up package of up to £1,000 distributed on the same principles as the NSP package, of which £500 will be paid as a bursary on 31st January of the first year of study. These start-up packages are provided during the first period of study and will allow students to tailor support to their particular circumstances from a menu of options.
- 4.2 We will create a fund at an initial level of up to £300,000 per annum to provide emergency help for students encountering unexpected financial hardship, where retention may be at risk.
- 4.3 All students leaving public care will be eligible for the NSP and will also receive a bursary of £1,000 in the second and third years of their course in addition to the support they will receive under the NSP. This builds on our work with the Buttle UK Trust.
- 4.4 The University also offers a range of scholarships in addition to those we understand to be countable under this Access Agreement. These include scholarships for academic achievement that are available to students entering with high UCAS tariff points and sports scholarships for students who are at international or county standard. It is our intention to use contextual data with respect to our target groups as defined within this Access Agreement, when allocating these scholarships.

4.5 *British School of Osteopathy*

- 4.5.1 There is a separate British School of Osteopathy (BSO) Scheme of scholarships for full-time students on the Master of Osteopathy (MOst) course, comprising places on the National Scholarship Programme with associated matched funding provided through the School of at least £3,000 per student in line with the University's arrangements.
- 4.5.2 To support further the BSO's commitment to widening participation for entrants from the target groups, and specifically to broaden access for students from low-income households in its local vicinity, an additional non-repayable bursary of £500 will be paid to:
- a) any student who progresses to the full-time MOst degree programme from a relevant QAA recognised Access course completed within the past four years and is in one or more of the target groups
 - b) any full-time home student who is in one or more of the target groups and is resident in one of the following London Boroughs:
 - o Southwark
 - o Lambeth
 - o Lewisham
 - o City
 - o Tower Hamlets
- 4.5.3 To encourage retention, these bursaries will be paid directly to the student upon successful completion of their first term of the academic year, conditional upon their continuing to meet the criteria.

4.6 *Students in partner Further Education Colleges*

For students in our partner FE colleges (see paragraph 6 below) we will contribute £100,000 per annum to a Progression Fund to support a bursary for students progressing from our Foundation Degrees or from preparatory programmes to our Honours Degrees.

5 Access and outreach

- 5.1 It is a matter of the highest strategic importance to the University that we maintain and improve upon our strong track record for widening access. We calculate that 68% of our full-time undergraduate student population currently falls into one or more of the target groups described in paragraph 5.2 below.
- 5.2 Our target groups for wider access are learners from the local area, from the lower socio-economic groups, from neighbourhoods with low rates of participation in higher education, from black and minority ethnic groups that are similarly under-represented and from vulnerable groups such as young people leaving care. We seek to widen access to higher education for learners with disabilities and recognise this as a key feature of our widening participation strategy.
- 5.3 We plan to maintain a broad age range within the student population and we wish therefore to recruit a significant proportion of our students from amongst mature students.
- 5.4 We also want to continue to ensure that pupils from state schools, including those schools facing significant challenges are able to progress to higher education.
- 5.5 The University plans actively to build on its achievement as the lead HEI for Aimhigher. We have:
- 5.5.1 The largest percentage growth in young participation in HE among the 20% most deprived learners in the country at large, except for London.
 - 5.5.2 The largest percentage of UCAS applicants drawn from the most deprived Super Output Areas, an effect attributed both to local demography and to the presence of a local, access-oriented HEI.
 - 5.5.3 An excellent access record in absolute terms, such that:
 - a. 98.9% of our full-time undergraduate students are from state schools.
 - b. 47.5% of our full-time undergraduate students are from NS-SEC 4-7.
 - c. 43% of our full-time undergraduate students are mature students.
 - d. 35% of our full-time undergraduate student population are from black and minority ethnic groups which are under-represented in higher education.
 - e. 12.2% of our young full-time undergraduate students are from low participation neighbourhoods as defined by POLAR2.
 - f. 8.2% of our students have a declared disability.
 - g. We currently have 44 declared care leavers within the full time undergraduate student population. We anticipate that care leavers will fall within our criteria for the National Scholarship Programme. Each care leaver will also receive a bursary of £1,000 in the second and third years of their course.
- 5.6 We have a very good access record assessed against our benchmarks on lower socio-economic groups, and we have been particularly successful in taking in those from NS-SEC 4-7 who then take up professional and graduate careers moving to NS-SEC 1-3 undertaking demonstrable social mobility. We consider we can improve our performance in our access record for disabled students.
- 5.7 We consider the promotion of higher education opportunities to be part of our responsibility as a University. We recognise that our 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.

- 5.8 We are the only University in Bedfordshire recruiting significant numbers of undergraduate students and the only higher education option in many local towns. Our contribution to widening participation is therefore of critical importance and we will work with schools, colleges, local authorities, careers services and others to promote the benefits of participation in higher education.
- 5.9 We work successfully 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.

5.10 Access Partnership Programme

- 5.10.1 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 by creating a new Access Partnership Programme.
- 5.10.2 We are convinced that this is necessary in view of the considerable challenge faced by higher education institutions in communicating the continued benefits of participation in higher education and the arrangements that will pertain from 2012 onwards, especially to learners in our target groups. We will therefore establish this Access Partnership Programme from September 2011, in advance of any increased funding from the new tuition fees.
- 5.10.3 Our Access Partnership Programme will focus on a number of clearly defined target groups. These are: -
- Learners from lower socio-economic groups, defined as NS-SEC 4-7;
 - Learners from low participation neighbourhoods, as defined in POLAR2;
 - Learners from black and minority ethnic groups that are under-represented in higher education;
 - Learners with disabilities; and
 - Learners from vulnerable groups such as young people leaving care.
- 5.10.4 Our Access Partnership Programme will operate within the University's main catchment area, broadly defined as described by; the radius from its main campuses within which the majority of its UK students are recruited; the geography of its UK partnerships and the borders of the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership. We have divided this catchment into four areas. These are:
- i. Nottingham, Grantham, Leicester, Peterborough, Northamptonshire
 - ii. Bedford and Milton Keynes;
 - iii. Central Bedfordshire, Aylesbury and South East Oxfordshire; and
 - iv. Luton, North Hertfordshire and outer North London
- 5.10.5 We recognise that members of our target groups will also be located outside our main catchment areas and that further outreach activity beyond these immediate boundaries may also be required.
- 5.10.6 Our Access Partnership Programme will consist of a number of key elements, directed at members of the target groups, within the defined catchment. These activities, which have been selected on the basis of their proven efficacy, include an engagement framework for schools, a mentoring and progression programme, use of Partnership Officers and progression accords.
- 5.10.7 In addition to the above we propose to extend the Programme further by the initiation of a number of projects in areas such as progression from Apprenticeships and an Access

Research programme to support research and consultancy around social mobility, fair access, and widening participation.

5.10.8 We recognize the complexity of the new student fee and financial support arrangements and the difficulties that will pose for appropriately targeted communication. This necessitates the continued and increased commitment of our Marketing and Schools Liaison teams to systematic outreach and access activity.

6 Partnership: Enhancing existing activity

6.1 We work with a number of partners who are integral to the achievement of our Access mission. These include Further Education Colleges, Specialist Colleges (such as the **British School of Osteopathy – the BSO**) and a range of educational organisations and public bodies which together make up the “Access Partnership”.

6.2 We will maintain and develop these partnership structures, as required to facilitate collaborative working with this range of partners, in order to assist our mutual objectives in widening access. As appropriate we will work with new partners, including third sector organizations, public and private providers who can help achieve the University’s mission.

6.3 Presently, the University’s partner further education colleges are:-

- **Aylesbury College**
- **Barnfield College**
- **Bedford College**
- **Castle College, Nottingham**
- **Central Bedfordshire College**
- **Grantham College**
- **Leicester College**
- **Luton Sixth Form College**
- **Oxford and Cherwell Valley College**
- **Tresham College, Kettering**

6.4 Noting that our partner FE colleges are key providers of our Foundation Degrees, we will contribute £100,000 per annum to a Progression Fund to support a bursary for students progressing from our Foundation Degrees to our Honours Degrees. We will also provide a Progression bursary for those who join Honours degrees in earlier years following study at a partner college.

6.5 Working with our specialist colleges, such as the British School of Osteopathy (BSO), we will ensure that widening participation is part of our joint strategy. We will continue to set targets and monitor progress against these jointly with our partners.

6.6 We will maintain and develop an Access Partnership broadly similar in membership and purpose to the pre-existing Aimhigher partnership which brings together the University, schools, FE colleges, local authorities and other agencies working with young people. However, we consider that significant development capacity will be required to manage the increased complexity in the schools environment and the necessary brokerage involved.

7 Retention

7.1 We consider that our target groups for retention are the same as those for access and outreach.

7.2 We aim to halve the current number of students who do not continue, by means of the measures outlined below, by 2017 – the end of the period of our next Strategic Plan. We intend to do this by raising levels of student progression, perseverance in stage and academic momentum across a target award. To do this we will focus on students’ preparedness for success, their ambition and understanding of potential, and their recognition of their need for support and its availability.

7.3 We will enhance the student experience by means of a significant investment in a Retention Support Fund, starting with a ‘forward investment’ of £500,000 in 2012/13 and rising in future years to at least £1.5 million per annum when the new system reaches its ‘steady state’. This investment will make possible the range of enhancements of the student experience.

7.4 In preparing students for success we will expose target students to increased front-line support, improved forms of “coaching”, personal tutoring – supporting the NUS Charter and develop staff appropriately. In building support networks we will extend 24/7 online systems of support, use of associates and build further opportunities with the University of Bedfordshire Students’ Union. In developing ambition and enhancing the potential of our target students we will give access to work, involve our alumni as role models, provide recruitment and work opportunities while in study and make good use of the HEAR to enhance students’ capacity to communicate and capitalise on their achievements.

8 Course development for wider access

8.1 The University has identified the expansion of opportunities to study part-time as a key feature of its strategies for widening access and supporting retention. We will systematically identify those areas of our curriculum where the opportunity for part-time study does not presently exist and rapidly develop high-quality part-time routes with the aim that a substantial proportion of the undergraduate curriculum should be available for study on a part-time basis by the end of the strategic plan period.

8.2 We note the Government’s intention to significantly expand the range and number of Apprenticeships. We are keen to work with our partners, especially the FE Colleges, to develop progression routes into higher education for those successfully completing Advanced Apprenticeships.

9 Foundation Degrees

9.1 We see Foundation Degrees as a significant route of entry into HE for many students, particularly those currently under-represented. Accordingly we have developed a suite of Foundation Degrees, most of which are presented in collaboration with our FE College partners. FE/HE liaison officers work to maximise the progression of students from FE Level 3 into Higher Education.

9.2 All our Foundation Degrees have a linked progression route to a “Top-Up” bachelor’s degree, and University academic staff are also involved in teaching the students at the College during the first two levels of study. Students also visit the University to familiarise themselves with the resources and the staff before progressing onto the “Top-Up” year.

9.3 We will continue to work closely with our partner colleges in helping students to progress onto foundation degrees and successfully complete them before going on to ‘top-up’ degrees run at the University. We estimate that around 75 per cent of these will progress to bachelor’s degrees.

10 Admissions and the use of contextual data

10.1 The University’s admissions policy, as described in the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment, is to use its best endeavours to ensure that: -

10.1.1 All applicants are treated fairly and in a non-discriminatory manner;

10.1.2 All applicants with the demonstrable ability to benefit from admission to one of our courses are enabled to do so, where a suitable vacancy exists;

10.1.3 All routes into higher education which are of a comparable standard are accorded parity of esteem;

10.1.4 The social background of the student body reflects the institutional commitment to widening participation and fair access.

10.2 We will, further, make use of the contextual data being made available by UCAS for the 2012 applicant cycle which carries information about school average GCSE performance, EMA entitlement (one year only) and residence in a low participation (POLAR2) neighbourhood to inform our admissions decisions. This is in addition to contextual data already available such as that which we use to identify care leavers.

11 Targeting and tracking

- 11.1 Target learners and the target schools and colleges within which they learn will be identified according to a combination of measures drawn from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and HEFCE POLAR2 database. We will target learners from postcodes associated with income deprivation, educational deprivation and low participation in higher education. We will target schools and colleges with high concentrations of such learners, in line with the guidance on targeting previously issued by HEFCE. We will use material provided through HESA and UCAS to assist with evidence and analysis.
- 11.2 We will establish and use relevant databases to record and track the participation of such learners in widening participation activity and their progress into and through higher education. Given the cost and complexity of such an enterprise we are likely to undertake this in collaboration with a number of other HEIs and potentially use the unique learner numbers as available.
- 11.3 We will continue to closely monitor the outcomes of our outreach targets in terms of levels of participation in outreach activity, progression to higher education and success / retention within higher education. We will revise our targets and the nature of our outreach programmes in the light of such evidence.

12 Administration of the Agreement

- 12.1 The University Access Agreement, bursary and scholarship schemes are administered by the Registrar's Office, with specialist staff in Student Services and staff in our Faculties who currently administer the University's hardship and scholarship funds, working in partnership with the Finance Office.
- 12.2 We see this process as commencing on initial contact with potential students. Our Student Recruitment Team give advice on the student funding regime and the arrangements for student financial support, including, in the future, the National Scholarship Programme. Information about these arrangements is set out clearly and accurately in our marketing materials and on the web and is regularly updated.
- 12.3 Clearly the administration of this Access Agreement and bursary/scholarship schemes will incur costs greater than those associated with the administration of the previous Bursary Scheme given the greater complexity and levels of means testing.
- 12.4 As stated above the scheme for students taking Osteopathy awards through the BSO is administered directly by that School.

13 Provision of information to prospective students

- 13.1 We are committed to ensuring that our information is clear, informative, relevant and understandable by our target groups. Beyond the material required by the Key Information Sets, we will extend and focus information to assist our target groups - within our website, at our Open Days and through school liaison, and through the wide range of interaction with staff based in University and at our partner colleges.
- 13.2 The material in this Agreement will be publicized after approval in July 2011 and basic information will be provided on our website with appropriate caveats in the interim.

ANNEX A

Process for establishing which students will receive support under the NSP

The University will decide which students will be in receipt of £3,000 support under the National Scholarship programme after students have registered for their first year. Information will be provided by SLC on those who meet the eligibility criteria (family income under £25,000). The University will notify these students that they will be receiving a minimum of £1,000 support from the University's own funds and invite them to apply for the additional support using a simple form. As far as possible, data will be collated from UCAS and the University's own registration process. Students who are leaving care will automatically qualify for NSP support. Others will accrue points on the basis of membership of the target groups set out elsewhere in the Access Agreement. Students will be ranked with the top 314 receiving NSP support. In the case of students having identical point scores in the end of the range, we will ballot to pick those to receive NSP scholarships.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Points</i>
Care Leaver	Automatic
Physical or mental disability	20
Low participation neighbourhood	15
Socio economic group 4-7 ¹	15
Targeted low participation BME groups ²	15
Mature student ³	10
Student with dependents ⁴	10
Learning Disability	5

¹ Based on UCAS data on family occupational backgrounds

² At present the University's targeted BME groups for increasing participation rates are (in HESA Definitions):

- Black or Black British – Caribbean
- Black or Black British – African
- Other Black background
- Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
- Other Asian Background
- Mixed - White & Black Caribbean
- Mixed – White & Black African
- Mixed - White & Asian
- Other Mixed Background
- Other Ethnic Background

³ 21 or over on 30th September of the year of entry

⁴ Sole or main carer for children, disabled relatives or elderly relatives at the same address

