

University of Sunderland Access Agreement 2012/13

Introduction

The University of Sunderland is one of the highest performing institutions in terms of attracting students from under represented groups. The University's Corporate Plan exemplifies a long term commitment to providing a high quality and inclusive higher education opportunity for learners from all walks of life. Working in close partnership with local Further Education Colleges, schools and community groups the University has made a significant contribution in raising aspirations and attainment through targeted widening participation initiatives in low participation neighbourhoods and with hard to reach groups.

Higher Education Statistics Agency Performance Indicators exemplify the University's overall achievement in widening access. 97.5% of young, full-time undergraduate entrants are from state schools and 42.5% are from Socio-Economic classes 4, 5, 6 & 7, both are currently above the University's location adjusted benchmark. (Higher Education Statistics Agency Performance Indicators 2009/10).

It is difficult if not impossible to assess the impact of significantly higher levels of student contributions on social mobility, particularly in a region with relatively low levels of attainment and participation. Within these challenging circumstances the University will stay true to its mission and vision to promote and provide opportunities for those with talent and potential regardless of background.

In addition, the University will review recommendations from the "Student Retention and Success Programme" funded by HEFCE and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Sunderland is a lead partner in one of the 7 national projects and findings from this and the wider national project will inform the University's retention strategy.

This Access Agreement and planned investment in 2012/13 reflects the University's concern regarding the potential impact of the new fees regime on students from disadvantaged groups. Additional investment is planned to support widening participation activity and retention measures.

Financial support for students will be targeted at promoting access, encouraging students to engage fully in campus life, complete their programme of study, and make preparations for appropriate routes to employment.

The University of Sunderland Fee Package for 2012/13

The University of Sunderland will be charging the following fees for the academic year 2012/13.

Band 1	£8,500
Band 2	£7,800
Band 3	£7,000

This fee proposal is for the transitional year 2012/13 and may be adjusted in line with the market response in the University's access agreement submitted for 2013/14.

(It is anticipated that the University would increase fees each year in line with the guidelines on the basic and higher fee cap set by the Government.)

The “Student Journey” Support Package

This Access Agreement sets out the University's plan to provide an exemplary and supportive student experience accessible for students from all walks of life. It covers the student journey from aspiration building outreach activity with pre and post-16 year old students, through to a life-changing undergraduate student experience, and pathways to fulfilling employment.

The Sunderland package of investment and support:

- 1 Outreach and Widening Participation**
- 2 The Financial Support Package for Students**
- 3 Retention and Success**
- 4 Pathways to Fulfilling Employment**

1 Outreach and Widening Participation

1.1 Activity

The University has worked for many years to raise aspirations and attainment levels in the region and is recognised as an exemplar in working with disadvantaged groups. In addition, the University has worked with colleagues from other universities, further education colleges and other partners across the region to deliver targeted widening participation activity as part of the University's core outreach programme and to support regional Aimhigher widening participation initiatives.

The target audience for this activity:

- Lower socio economic groups 4-8 (National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification)
- Disadvantaged socio-economic groups who live in areas of relative deprivation when participation in higher education is low
- “Looked After” young people in the care system (where the University has particular expertise and experience)
- Disabled learners, or learners with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD)

The Aimhigher cohort in Tyne and Wear and Northumberland comprises some 11,200 pupils in Years 8-13, 50% of which reside within Sunderland and South Tyneside - the University's key recruiting districts. This includes pre-16 students with Level 4 qualifications at Key stage 2 with at least 1 at Level 5, and post-16 pupils with 5 GCSE at A* grades including English and/or Maths.

In addition the University works with large regional cohorts outwith the Aimhigher boundary and with younger age groups in order to raise aspirations. Much work is done with mature students to encourage progression from Access and Further Education programmes through to higher level study.

The University's activity embraces a wide range of proven and innovative interventions:

- Pre-entry information advice and guidance
- Schools Support & Liaison (mock interviews, careers and parents information evenings)
- Student delivered activity: Student Ambassador Scheme; Student Mentoring; Student Associate Scheme
- Compact Schemes
- Campus visits, open days and taster sessions
- Master Classes (including vocational subjects)
- Residential Summer Schools
- Bright Sparks' Science and Technology Club
- Sport Sunderland
- Family Fun Days
- Primary school events
- Work with young people in, or leaving care

The University works in partnership with regional universities and strategic college partners in Sunderland, Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Bishop Auckland and Hartlepool in order to promote and offer a

range of progression opportunities for under represented groups. The University's Partnership Liaison Officers are based at partner colleges and deliver a range of initiatives to encourage progression from access programmes to Foundation Degrees and through to on-campus honours degree programmes.

Over recent years the University has increased the number of Looked After Young People progressing from local authority care to the University. 42 students from care are supported within the university community and the institution is proud to be a recipient of the Buttle UK Quality Mark.

Higher Education Statistics Agency Performance Indicators for 2009/10 highlight the University's achievement in widening access. 97.5% of young, full-time undergraduate entrants are from state schools and 42.5% are from Socio-Economic classes 4, 5, 6 & 7, both are currently above the location adjusted benchmark.

The new fee regime may impact on the University's student profile if young and mature people from disadvantaged groups are deterred from progressing to higher education as a result of perceptions relating to higher levels of fees and deferred payment. Furthermore, the cap on new student numbers introduced in 2009 coupled with the increased demand as a result of a positive demographic influence may also contribute to a dip in participation from hard to reach groups.

There is now likely to be an increased risk associated with widening participation performance indicators and the University is anticipating that participation indicators relating to 2012/13 (published in March 2014) may show a decline. The University will be continuing with its work to support the best possible participation outcomes to ensure that participation levels from disadvantaged groups are restored to 2009/10 levels by 2016/17.

1.2 Outreach and Widening Participation Investment

The University currently invests over £17M per year in widening participation activity.

Aimhigher funding to the value £280K was lost to the University in July 2011. The University will continue to work in partnership across the region and will re-invest as recompense for the loss of this funding stream. A research project carried out with regional partners from local authorities, universities, further education colleges, private training providers, schools and career advisers - "Life after Aimhigher" (Evidence Plus Consulting 31:3:11) has highlighted activities at risk of discontinuation. The University will work with partners to address any shortfall in provision that may impact on participation.

In addition, the University is investing an additional £300K per year in a promotional strategy to encourage local widening participation. This increased investment is

essential if disadvantaged groups are to be persuaded that higher education remains accessible in the new fee regime.

2 The Financial Support Package for Students 2012/13

A profile of the University's student community indicates that over 70% of students qualify for some level of financial support (from families with an annual income of less than £50,020). A large proportion are from families with less than £25K annual income and demand for financial support will exceed what is available.

The University's package of support is targeted primarily at encouraging participation, facilitating student retention and progression, and the provision of access measures for all first year students.

The broad range of support will help inform which measures best support the needs of students from under represented groups. It augments the institutional initiatives already in place to support widening participation, the extensive range of academic and study support interventions on retention, and the student value proposition on employability.

2.1 The Sunderland National Scholarship Programme

Year 1 of the University's National Scholarship Programme will comprise of 157 reduced fee places for eligible first year students (fee waiver of £2K) and a £1K financial scholarship scheme to provide additional support for this priority group of widening participation students during the academic year.

Eligible students will have a household income of £25K or less and will come from Lower socio economic groups 4-8 (National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification) The National Scholarship Programme will be used to encourage learners to come to university where the perceived higher level of cost at entry may be seen as a disincentive.

Competition for this scholarship programme will be high, and the selection criteria will relate to an individual student's potential to succeed. The University will promote this through its widening participation work with Further Education partners across the North-East Region and it will be reviewed during 2012/13. Full details relating to eligibility is available on the University's website.

The £471K of National Scholarship Funding received from the Government to support the scheme will be augmented with substantial levels of additional university investment in other areas of support as detailed in sections 2.2 to 2.8 and will far exceed the matched requirement.

2.2 The Sunderland Scholarship – “Access to the Professions Scheme”

The University has 4 Faculties and 12 Academic Departments. Each Academic department will invest in 10 Sunderland Scholarships (120 in total). This will comprise a £2K fee waiver in year 1, and a £500 financial scholarship award in each subsequent year of study. This initiative will be aimed at disadvantaged students from low income families who aspire to a career in the “professions”. The funding will assist students to support themselves through a range of placement, internship and volunteering opportunities. Students with a household income of less than £25K per annum will be eligible and would be selected at the pre-entry stage using a written submission on why they should be considered. This will be awarded to those students who selected The University of Sunderland as their firm choice during the UCAS admissions process.

2.3 The Sunderland “Live In” Access Scheme

The University will be investing £380K per annum to provide 100 residential accommodation scholarships to allow students to live in university managed accommodation free of charge. This will enable students from hard to reach areas within the North-East catchment area to experience university life. This scheme has been devised to address the University’s retention agenda. The University’s findings as part of the HEFCE/Paul Hamlyn research have indicated that a particular group of local students don’t engage fully with university life as their support network consists of groups of friends and close family. As a result during their first year of study they become vulnerable, disengaging with the student experience and more likely to leave the University without qualifying. The research also indicates that students engaged with campus life through living in residential accommodation are more likely to progress as a direct result of peer and inclusive institutional support.

This will be awarded to those successful students who selected The University of Sunderland as their firm choice during the UCAS admissions process.

Students (with a household income less than £45K) living outside of a “one hour travel to study” radius from specific postcode areas will be eligible for consideration.

2.4 The Sunderland “Get There” Campus Access Scheme

An annual investment of £1.4M will be made available to provide **all** first year students with a financial scholarship in the form of a £500 voucher to be offset against public transport or on-campus accommodation costs. (Students with special accommodation/travel requirements will be given due consideration as part of this scheme). The University’s own research indicates that a barrier to further study is travel costs and that a cash incentive to be used to offset the costs of public transport

would be attractive to students from all constituent groups. Furthermore, this is in line with the University's low carbon environmental policy.

2.5 Sunderland Excellence Scholarships

Students who are predicted to achieve AAB (or equivalent) A level grades will be able to apply for a Sunderland "Excellence" Scholarship. Students who are successful in meeting or exceeding their predicted AAB grade will be awarded £1,000 cash back for each year of study.

2.6 Off - Campus Bursary Scheme

Full-time students studying for a University of Sunderland Foundation Degree at one of the University's strategic partner colleges will be entitled to a fee waiver to the value of £1,200 for each year of full-time study. In addition, full-time off-campus students will also be eligible for the "Get There" and "Pathway to Work" schemes and will be able to apply for one other scholarship scheme - the University's National Scholarship Programme, the "Access to the Professions" Scholarship, the "Live In" Access Scheme or the Sunderland "Excellence" Scholarship (if they meet the eligibility criteria). This will be awarded to those students who selected The University of Sunderland as their firm choice during the UCAS admissions process.

2.7 Sunderland "Pathway to Work" Scheme

All full-time students who enrol in 2012 will receive a "Pathway to Work" payment to assist them in their preparation for employment. The payment of £250 will be awarded to each student at graduation and is to cover the additional incidental costs of seeking employment - travel costs for example. This represents a £458K annual investment as part of the overall student support package.

2.8 Sunderland Care Leavers' Scholarship

This scholarship comprises of a £1,500 cash scholarship for each year of study for successful applicants leaving Local Authority care within the 24 months previous to September 1st 2011. This scholarship will be guaranteed for all who meet the eligibility criteria.

The University's financial support arrangements are primarily designed to ensure that students from disadvantaged groups are not deterred from a higher education experience as a result of higher levels of fees. In addition, the support arrangements include practical financial support for all students (The "Get There" and "Pathway to Work" schemes) in order to encourage higher levels of access and improve retention.

72% of the Sunderland student community are eligible for state maintenance grants or are from under-represented groups. These schemes have been developed specifically to help towards maintaining the University's widening participation success, improve levels of retention by providing financial assistance for students who disengage with their studies due to prohibitive travel costs, and provide ongoing support for students in the new higher education financial climate.

3 Retention and Success

3.1 Retention – Performance and New Developments

The University's Widening Participation Strategic Assessment submission (2008/9-2011/12) highlighted the sector wide correlation between institutional entrant profile and non continuation.

Although the University's retention performance has improved over recent years 2009/10 Higher Education Statistics Agency Performance Indicators still show that the university is performing below its benchmark with some constituent groups. (*Full-time first degree young entrants (10.9% not in HE compared with a benchmark of 9.3%), and 18.4% of mature entrants not in HE compared to a benchmark of 14.2%*).

However, this is a retrospective assessment and relates to students joining the University in 2008. The impact of interventions and initiatives introduced for students joining the institution in September 2010 will not be reported in published indicators until March 2013. Due to a strategic approach to institutional retention the University would expect retention rates to improve over the period 2010/11 - 2011/12.

The University understands the importance of investment in retention initiatives and support for students throughout their student journey. Key activity includes:

- Improved in-year management information and the monitoring of performance via the University's formal academic committee structure
- Local retention plans that identify the behaviour of constituent student groups and the non-completion characteristics of different academic subjects
- Targeted interventions for vulnerable students at different stages of the student journey
- Enhanced access to specialist support through the University's Student Gateway for both on and off-campus students

The University will continue to invest in planned initiatives to promote retention and is looking to meet institutional benchmark levels by 2015 through a year on year incremental improvement. Plans for 2011/12 include:

- More targeted academic support arrangements for students in need

- Significant development in early strategies for new students to ensure they settle into academic life
- Enhanced induction programmes to widen the scope of academic and social activity, including input from Alumni and employers
- Development via academic teams to establish programme identity amongst student cohorts
- The implementation of relevant aspects of the What Works? Student Retention and Success Programme, (a project funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and The Paul Hamlyn Foundation.)

3.2 Investment in Retention

During 2010/11 the University's investment in retention is estimated to be £5.8M and includes:

- A One-stop Shop student "Gateway" to provide easy access to all student support services
- Faculty based Retention/Student Experience officers
- Faculty level Student Tracking and Retention (STAR) groups
- Associate Dean posts specifically focused on the student experience with an emphasis on student progression and retention
- Personal Tutors working with students deemed to be at risk
- Pre-entry and post-entry induction events including calendared social activity
- Staff development and formalised sharing of good practice at subject, faculty and institutional level
- A dedicated contact and support package for Looked After Young People and Care Leavers

An additional £700K will be invested each year in retention initiatives following the findings of the HEFCE/Paul Hamlyn retention project during 2011/12. This will be sustained expenditure over and above the £5.8M the university already invests in this activity.

4 Pathways to Fulfilling Employment

Sector level research conducted by Opinion Panel in 2009/10 highlighted the growing importance of employability for prospective applicants to higher education.

The survey indicates a 4% increase (between 2007/8 and 2009/10) in the number of respondents who highlighted employability, links with industry and an institution's reputation with employers as a key factor in influencing their choice of institution.

Furthermore in a UUK/CBI report "Preparing Graduates for the World of Work" (2009), 32% of respondents stated that each university has a responsibility in developing employability skills and in supporting students as they prepare for their future careers.

In the lead up to 2012/13 the University will be investing even more resource in preparing students for the world of work through wider access to relevant placement and internship schemes, professional mentoring programmes, academic credit for extra-curricular work including volunteering, and a “Pathway to Work” Scheme to encourage students from under represented groups to aspire to working in the professional sector.

Institutional Targets and Milestones

The University will continue to use published Performance Indicators to monitor the number of students recruited from under-represented groups and the number that progress and complete their programme of study. The retrospective nature of published data can be problematic in assessing the impact of more recent interventions and initiatives.

In terms of widening participation the University has acknowledged the higher risk associated with achieving institutional targets and is anticipating a drop in the percentage of students recruited from under-represented groups. This is due to the recent cap on student numbers and the unpredictable response to the new fee regime from potential students and their families from traditionally low participation districts. Targets will be adjusted in subsequent access agreements as the market response to the new arrangements becomes clearer.

Target numbers of beneficiaries of the University’s widening participation work will be reported through Widening Participation Strategic Assessment monitoring returns.

In addition the Pathway to Work initiative will be measured using published Destination of Leavers from Higher Education data (DLHE.)

The University will augment these targets via locally managed milestones at the institutional, faculty and department level.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Progress will be monitored via the University’s Executive, Executive Board and the University’s existing academic committee structure. Academic committees comprise members of the University’s executive team, senior academic staff responsible for widening access and the student experience, delivery teams responsible for widening participation, student recruitment, careers advice and guidance, student support, quality assurance, institutional planning, and also include representatives from the Students’ Union.

The Senior Manager responsible for the delivery of this access agreement is the University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

Information to Prospective Students

The University has a student value proposition based on its corporate mission and values to offer a life changing experience. The University will invest an additional £300K in targeted promotional campaigns to ensure that the “no fees upfront “ message is broadcast widely to constituent groups likely to be deterred by the prospect of higher fees repaid through deferred loan arrangements.

This will include:

- Strategic communications support for the sector in terms of promoting the value of higher education to a wide range of constituent groups
- Tactical promotional activity and communications aimed at hard to reach groups
- Clear information on the generous financial support available in both on-line and traditional print based published materials, and signposting to relevant advice and guidance
- Higher levels of targeted outreach activity in hard to reach low-participation neighbourhoods
- Enhanced levels of engagement with schools and colleges to ensure that the messages relating to deferred rather than up-front graduate contributions are clear.
- Ongoing work with partner colleges to promote widening access and progression from access and Foundation Degrees through to on-campus honours degree programmes
- Engagement with parents and careers professionals to promote the investment and value for money benefits that a higher education can provide
- Engaging potential employers and alumni more fully with the student experience to encourage retention and progression into the “professions”

The University tests its published information with prospective students routinely and consistently as part of its ongoing annual market research programme.

The new financial support arrangements are being researched with potential applicants during 2011/2012 and adjustments will be made to ensure the proposed Sunderland schemes are clearly defined and resonate with the needs of the constituent groups.

In addition the University's brand values and student proposition are currently being evaluated. This includes research activity with potential students, their parents and advisers, and a range of employers to ensure the University is providing a high quality experience relevant and responsive to student demand and in line with employer and skill sector needs.

Undoubtedly much work is required by the government, the sector and individual institutions to ensure that the far reaching changes in higher education funding do not impact on social mobility by deterring students from less affluent families to realise their full potential.

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(Revised 8:12:11)

Table 5 - Milestones and targets

Table 5a - Statistical milestones and targets relating to your applicants, entrants or student body (e.g. HESA, UCAS or internal targets)

Please select milestone/target type from the drop down menu	Description (500 characters maximum)	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones/targets (numeric where possible, however you may use text)					Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)
				2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	
State School (HESA Table T1a)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	97.4	95.7	95.7	96.7	96.7	97.4	
State School (HESA Table T1b)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	97.5	95.8	95.8	96.8	96.8	97.5	
NS-SEC (HESA Table T1a)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	41.9	39.2	39.2	40.2	40.2	43.3	
NS-SEC (HESA Table T1b)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	42.5	45.9	45.9	46.9	46.9	49.3	
LPN (HESA Table T1a)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	25.1	25.5	25.5	26.5	26.5	27.1	
LPN (HESA Table T1b)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	25.9	25.9	25.9	26.9	26.9	27.9	
Non continuation: Young (HESA Table T3a)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	10.9	10.6	10.2	9.7	9.4	9	
Non continuation: Mature (HESA Table T3a)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	18.4	17.8	17	16.2	15.3	14.2	
Non continuation: All (HESA Table T3a)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	13.3	12.9	12.3	11.8	11.2	10.7	
Non continuation: LPN (HESA Table T3b)	HEFCE Performance Indicator	2009/10	10.8	10.6	10.3	10	9.8	9.6	
Projected outcomes (HESA table T5)	HEFCE Performance Indicator Gaining an Award	2009/10	74.6	78.7	78.7	79.7	79.7	82.8	

Table 5b - Other milestones and targets

Alongside applicant and entrant targets, we encourage you to provide targets around your outreach work (including collaborative outreach work where appropriate) or other initiatives to illustrate your progress towards increasing access. These should be measurable outcomes based targets and should focus on the number of pupils reached by a particular activity/programme, or number of schools worked with, and what the outcomes were, rather than simply recording the nature/number of activities.

Please select milestone/target type from the drop down menu	Description (500 characters maximum)	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones/targets (numeric where possible, however you may use text)					Commentary on your milestones/targets or textual description where numerical description is not appropriate (500 characters maximum)
				2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	
Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Schools Based (off campus) Activity beneficiaries	2008/09	21608	22688	23822	24536	25272	26030	All baseline beneficiary targets as per WPSA 2008/09-2011/12 and progress/impact measures are reported in our annual Access WPSA monitoring return
Outreach / WP activity (summer schools)	University Based (on campus) Activity summer school participants	2009/10	230	230	230	230	230	230	Summer school data was not individually listed in the original University WPSA target for on campus provision. The overall target of 9764 beneficiaries (on campus) included all outreach activity. The baseline beneficiary target has now been fixed as 230 and progress/impact measures are reported in our annual Access WPSA monitoring return
Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	University Based (on campus) Activity beneficiaries (other than summer school participants as reported above)	2008/09	9534	10010	10510	10825	11150	11484	All baseline beneficiary targets as per WPSA 2008/09-2011/12 and progress/impact measures are reported in our annual Access WPSA monitoring return less Summer School beneficiaries reported above
Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Activities with Teachers & Parents beneficiaries	2008/09	107	350	400	420	432	445	All baseline beneficiary targets as per WPSA 2008/09-2011/12 and progress/impact measures are reported in our annual Access WPSA monitoring return
Outreach / WP activity (other - please give details in the next column)	Activity with Adult Learner (incl Post Graduate) beneficiaries	2008/09	670	700	750	775	785	795	All baseline beneficiary targets as per WPSA 2008/09-2011/12 and progress/impact measures are reported in our annual Access WPSA monitoring return
Strategic partnerships (eg formal relationships with schools)	Activity that is HE in FE beneficiaries	2008/09	4483	5000	5100	5100	5100	5100	All baseline beneficiary targets as per WPSA 2008/09-2011/12 and progress/impact measures are reported in our annual Access WPSA monitoring return

Student support services	Gateway Activity beneficiaries	2010/11	124500	118300	118300	124215	124215	124500	The WPSA baseline beneficiary target was redefined in 2010/11 following an internal change to the way the data is being captured, to a new baseline of 124500 and progress/impact measures are reported in our annual Access WPSA monitoring return
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