

## ST. MARTIN'S COLLEGE ACCESS AGREEMENT

### INTRODUCTION

1. St Martin's College intends to raise its full-time undergraduate tuition fees above the standard level in 2006/07. In consequence it will submit this Access Agreement to the Office for Fair Access on January 4 2005.
2. This Access Agreement will be operational during the period of the College's new Corporate Plan. This Corporate Plan sets out a clear vision of the future of St Martin's College which will see it delivering "*a distinctive HE experience to learners attracted by the breadth and depth of the curriculum, the support available to them as learners and as individuals, best practice learning and teaching and a focus on employability*".
3. At the centre of this vision will be the College's commitment to foreground the experience of students as members of our learning community. In determining this we have also recognised that that learning community will be enriched to the extent to which we can ensure the fullest possible diversity of learners – in mode of study, gender, age, ethnicity, social and geographical background, and previous educational attainment. Additionally the College recognises that its location – notably its presence in Cumbria as the largest provider of opportunity in HE – will give it special responsibilities in growing participation within that county generally and west Cumbria specifically.
4. St Martin's has a strong track record in widening participation and fair access but it has signalled in its Corporate Plan an intention to build further on this foundation. In its Corporate Plan the College has stated the aim of ensuring

*Through effective outreach, partnership, learner support and innovation in core academic areas, that the College attracts, retains and facilitates achievement in learners from all backgrounds against stretching targets and access policies designed to deliver a student body representative of the society in which we work while making a fundamental difference to regional/sub-regional participation in HE*

5. In that context St Martin's has welcomed the development of an Access Agreement as vital leverage in progressing an ambitious agenda. In targeting the Access Agreement the College has utilised particularly the HEFCE/HESA Performance Indicators to emphasise the importance of improving performance against the indicators for
  - Young FT entrants from NE-SEC classes 4-7
  - Young FT entrants from low participation neighbourhoods
  - Mature FT entrants with no previous HE experience or from low participation neighbourhoods

- Mature PT entrants with no previous HE experience or from low participation neighbourhoods

**FEE LIMITS:**

6. The full-time undergraduate tuition fee at St Martin's College from 2006/07 will be charged for appropriate programmes at a level of £3000 in 2006/07. St Martin's recognises that the marketplace in which it will be operating is a new one and intends to keep its options as flexible as possible. It will review consistently its performance in this marketplace and develop, in discussion with OFFA, its access agreement and fee policies as necessary. In that respect this Access Agreement represents a minimum position.
7. Fees will subsequently be adjusted in line with inflation. The College website ([www.ucsm.ac.uk](http://www.ucsm.ac.uk)) will carry further information on the programmes to which this fee level will apply as well as further details on the implementation of the Access Agreement.
8. The level of bursary offered by the College will be adjusted annually to ensure that support offered to eligible students will not be reduced in real terms by inflation.
9. As required by OFFA the Cover Sheet to this Access Agreement identifies the amount of additional fee income which the College expects this decision to generate and the estimated amount of additional income derived to be spent on bursaries and on outreach.
10. Where students are in receipt of the full Higher Education Maintenance Grant (HEMG) the College will meet the difference - currently £300 - between the level of grant and the tuition fee. In addition, as indicated below, the College will provide further bursaries and scholarships for eligible students.
11. St Martin's will sign up to the model bursary scheme and the bursary support offered to students will be delivered through this scheme.

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS**

12. St Martin's intends to invest all of the additional income derived from fees directly in support of further enhancement of the learning experience of students. It has published a Corporate Plan for 2004/09 which expresses clearly a vision for the future which has the student experience firmly at its centre. All additional income will be invested in the delivery of this Corporate Plan.
13. However, the College also intends to deploy a minimum of 50% of the additional income directly on bursary and scholarship support for targeted students, on outreach work and on additional administrative support for these activities. While acknowledging that the reputation of the College in widening participation might be a justification for a smaller additional investment, St Martin's believes that the realisation of the vision of the Corporate Plan necessitates a strong additional commitment to investment in the mission-critical areas of widening participation and access.

14. In deploying the additional funding the College will seek to minimise funding identified for administrative support so as to focus resource on support of targeted students. It recognises that the proportions allocated to bursary/scholarship support and outreach may vary across the period of the Access Agreement. The College affirms that the allocation of funding to bursaries and outreach activities are additional to previous activities and support.
15. Bursary support for targeted students will be in the form of cash awards rather than fee waivers. Currently the College does not provide bursary support of this kind to students and all bursary investment within the Access Agreement will thus be additional.
16. With regard to the level of bursaries which will be available to eligible students, the College will provide some bursary support to students across bands 1 – 4 of the HEMG profile.
17. Bursaries will be means tested and targeted in line with the intentions of the Corporate Plan on students from lower socio-economic groups and from low participation neighbourhoods. Eligibility against these criteria will be determined by a variety of indicators which will be described more fully on the College website, through advice and guidance documentation and directly from trained college liaison staff. A particular, though not exclusive, early focus for the Access Agreement targeting will be identified areas of low participation in Cumbria – notably the West Cumbrian coastal areas and rural Cumbria.
18. Bursary support will be on a sliding scale and will result in the following level of bursary (including the £300 referred to in paragraph 10) being made available to students
  - HEMG Band 1: £1200
  - HEMG Band 2: £900
  - HEMG Band 3: £400
  - HEMG Band 4: £200
19. The College recognises that using the HEMG as a basis for award of bursary will potentially preclude support for students normally resident outside of England but within the UK. It is the intention of the College to extend bursary support to all UK students who meet eligibility under the targeting strategy which drives this Access Agreement. Further details on the precise criteria to be used will be developed and published as noted above.
20. With regard to scholarships it is the intention of the College that all scholarships offered fall unequivocally within the spirit of this Access Agreement.
21. Thus all scholarships offered will be aligned with the key achievement targets driving the Access Agreement and will be counted within the global bursary investment.
22. It is anticipated that scholarships will focus on students from lower socio-economic groups, low participation neighbourhoods, minority ethnic and disabled students and will recognise potential for achievement in

- academic, cultural and sporting fields. It is anticipated that a single level of scholarship will be available which will provide £1000 per annum. This will be in addition to any bursary support
23. Further details of the Scholarship scheme, including the numbers available in any year, the kinds of scholarships to be awarded and the application process will be available on the College website.

## **PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO STUDENTS**

24. St Martin's recognises that the changes in the fee regime could have a depressive impact on the market for HE simply because of the lack of clear and high quality information available. This will be especially relevant in relation to underrepresented groups with no or limited tradition of HE entry in their families or communities.
25. The College is determined that no student will be deterred from exploring and achieving entry to an appropriate St Martin's programme because of poor information – in terms of quality and accessibility.
26. Preparation for the provision of information following OFFA agreement to the Access Agreement is already underway. Clearly the 2006 Prospectus and the related web-site will provide clear statements as to the proposed fee regime and the associated bursaries, scholarships and related activity.
27. St Martin's considers that this will be insufficient and is currently reviewing all actual and potential channels of communication with prospective students to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose in the new context. This will involve use of focus groups encompassing both potential students as well as information and advice-giving intermediaries.
28. It is intended also that written materials pertaining to what are potentially complex financial arrangements attain a "crystal mark".
29. All promotional material including reference to the financial aspects of study will contain at minimum
- explanation of the mechanics of the fee regime
  - explanation of the bursaries available and eligibility
  - explanation of the scholarships available and eligibility
  - illustrations of the net cost of study for the several campuses of the College
  - FAQs
  - Life cycle case studies of St Martin's students
  - access to further information or opportunities for discussing issues further.
30. While the College fully expects to make use of a variety of paper-based and electronic media to communicate its "offer" it will invest substantially in training and development activities related to understanding of the new fee regime and its implications for widening participation and the College Corporate Plan.
31. These activities will be delivered not only to staff with a core outreach/information role but also all staff in the college who might have a role – however indirect – in provision of advice or answering queries from

- prospective students. The recent restructuring of the College Marketing Recruitment and External Relations service will embed a dedicated central Enquiries Centre into College operation which will become the major locus of support to applicants.
32. It is expected that student ambassadors will play an important role in this activity and the College to explore not only ways of bringing the existing student body into this work but also of providing meaningful certificated enhancement of their current academic programmes for such engagement.
  33. In addition the College recognises that it must work imaginatively with an extensive group of external partners broadly within the "supply chain" for potential students. It already works closely with Aim Higher and has developed good relationships with key FECs and, through the University Education Cumbria project, a wide range of Cumbrian stakeholders. It will extend its development work to key intermediaries likely to impact upon the target groups it has placed at the heart of this Access Agreement.
  34. The College recognises that to deliver the quality of information it believes essential for informed decision to enter HE by groups currently underrepresented will necessitate an active and continuing role in working "on site" with such groups wherever they are within target areas. It sees its outreach staff as essential in providing information to potential students and will invest in their quantity and quality.
  35. A particular concern for the College in communicating its message regarding the St Martin's "offer" will be to work closely with families and family/community - based organisations within targeted low participation neighbourhoods.

### **WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND OUTREACH WORK**

36. St Martin's was founded by the Church of England in 1964 to provide educational opportunity of a particular character in the North West. It conceives of itself as an institution committed from its origins to a widening participation mission. Currently in its 40<sup>th</sup> year, the College has built on that mission and now provides such opportunity to over 13000 students across three campuses in the North West and Cumbria as well as a major site in the East End of London which has a special widening participation role for the College in the area of ITT.
37. It is a record of achievement of which the College is justly proud but it is not seen as a cause for complacency. St Martin's recognises that it still has a considerable distance to travel if it is to achieve its objectives and the Access Agreement expresses this commitment to enhance performance in key areas.
38. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive history of St Martin's activity in widening participation but rather to identify some key aspects which provide the foundations on which the Access Agreement will be implemented and which encourage confidence that the agreement will be delivered effectively.

39. Such foundations include

- During 2004/05 the College will submit an application for Taught Degree Awarding Powers; successful achievement of this will provide the degree of curriculum flexibility and partnership potential central to strong engagement with widening participation
- In 2004/05 the College created a new unified service Marketing, Recruitment and External Relations (MRER) which brought together, *inter alia*, marketing, admissions, recruitment, widening participation and outreach. This restructure has resulted in extra investment in outreach and related capability.
- Following publication of the new Corporate Plan the College has instituted a comprehensive strategic planning process involving faculties and services engaging with delivery of the key objectives of the integrated plan.
- The College has for some time operated an effective Compact Scheme (*Smartpact*) which provides a range of services to targeted feeder institutions and/or individual students so as to support and encourage successful applications from those who feel they may not or cannot achieve a place in higher education.
- By the close of this Academic Year the College will adopt a comprehensive widening participation and retention strategy – *Recruitment to Success* – into which the Access Agreement will be embedded and which will provide the comprehensive implementation structure which will realise it
- College practice in Equality and Diversity is recognised as best practice. Thus the College was the only HEI in the North-West to join other HEI's nationally to review national consultation procedures and practices and was also invited by HEFCE to give critical feedback on national information roll out on equality and diversity Annual Reports may be viewed at [www.ucsm.ac.uk/about/equality/](http://www.ucsm.ac.uk/about/equality/)
- Over the last few years the College has established a strong presence in Cumbria through its two campuses and associated sites. It is currently the largest provider of HE in Cumbria and in the course of the current Corporate Plan will build from this position to ensure that it is the provider of first resort for both young people and returners to education throughout the whole county.

40. Additionally the College is active in outreach, information-giving and aspiration-raising in a variety of ways so as to maximise the opportunity for prospective students and their influencers to engage with Higher Education and reduce concerns about potential barriers. These include:

- Talks and interactive workshops delivered to groups and individuals in schools, colleges and community settings
- Taster events to help raise aspirations and prompt engagement with higher education

- Activities as part of *Smartpact* the St Martin's College Compact Scheme
  - Partnership activities as part of the Aim Higher initiative across Lancashire and Cumbria
  - Written information in our prospectus, on our website and provided in a range of student-focussed publications.
  - The use of trained Student Ambassadors who provide effective 'word of mouth' communication and who also act as role models and mentors
  - Advice and guidance sessions at Open/Visit Days and Interview Days
  - Referral for specialist one-on-one guidance from College Student Services
  - Information provided as a part of a comprehensive pack to all students who have accepted a place at the College (including a guide to finance)
41. Current College core investment in outreach and related activities averages c£175 000 per annum. Additionally St Martin's currently receives project-based funding from Aim Higher – Lancashire and Cumbria – to the value of c£125 000. St. Martin's also participates in several Summer School initiatives
42. In delivering this Access Agreement the College is aware that it will need to augment further its outreach activity and work even more closely with initiatives such as Aim Higher. The current MRER Service Plan and developing Marketing and Recruitment Strategy have identified the expansion of additional outreach initiatives from 2006 including:
- Review and rebranding of all outreach support materials
  - The continued development and expansion of *Smartpact* and the Student Ambassador Programme.
  - Closer working with AimHigher and UEC
  - Increased activities aimed at parents as key influencers in the decision to enter HE
  - Increased activities in local communities in non traditional locations (e.g. community and leisure centres, rural events, WEA etc.).
  - The use of methods of communication designed to be more effective in rural/semi-rural environments.
  - a "first year experience" project focusing on the lead up to entry and the first semester.
43. The initial focus of the additional outreach activities will be on Cumbria – notably the communities of west and rural Cumbria. Activities will target
- Young FT entrants from NE-SEC classes 4-7
  - Young FT entrants from low participation neighbourhoods
  - Mature FT entrants with no previous HE experience or from low participation neighbourhoods

- Mature PT entrants with no previous HE experience or from low participation neighbourhoods

44. The College recognises that it will need to improve its management information generally and baseline data particularly if it is to be able to determine progress in increased participation against the identified target groups. While it will develop more sensitive measures and milestones the initial target is to reach benchmark PIs against identified target groups by 2008/09 and to exceed them by 2010/2011.

#### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND MONITORING

45. The key indicators of success against the Access Agreement will be further refined but will focus on quantified improvement in both process measures such as

- enquiry rates from target groups no base-line data available,
- application rates from target groups
- attendance at outreach events related to target groups
- attendance at taster days

and outcome measures such as

- the PIs for social class entry
- the PIs for LPN entry
- % from identified catchment areas of concern e.g. West Cumbria, family first time entrants to HE
- retention of target groups
- achievement of target groups

46. Internal monitoring of achievement against milestones set will be provided through formal

- monthly report to MRER Senior Management Team
- termly report to Academic Strategy and Planning Committee
- annual report to Academic Board
- annual report to Governing Body.

47. Operational coordination of achievement against Access Agreement is the responsibility of MRER supported by Planning and Management Information. The lead senior manager is the Assistant Principal (Academic Development).



