

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE ACCESS AGREEMENT

1 Overview

The University of Hertfordshire has a strong track record of success in raising aspirations and thus in widening participation. This is amply demonstrated by our performance in recruiting students from under-represented groups, and consistency in meeting the relevant HEFCE performance indicators. In a broader sense, the University is committed to contributing to the raising of participation rates at national level.

The University's strategy for the post-2006 environment is to consolidate this success through focusing our support for individual students, both financially and pastorally. In the first instance, we shall fix the maximum bursary level at the point where the students from the least well off backgrounds are no worse off than their counterparts under the pre-2006 regime.

To ensure that all students have clear and accessible information about the changes to student funding, the University will invest significantly in a programme of information dissemination.

This access agreement covers all relevant University provision delivered on-campus or in our partner institutions.

2 Fee limits

For 2006/07, the University proposes to charge £3000 per annum for all its full-time eligible undergraduate provision. For subsequent years, this figure will be amended in accordance with DFES regulations for index-linking.

3 Bursaries and other financial support for students

3.1 *Bursaries*

A bursary is a payment made to a student, the level of which is income dependent.

The University will provide a bursary that will be equivalent to 50% of each student's final LEA/SLC/DFES grant assessment, up to a maximum of £1350 per annum in 2006/07.

In subsequent years the maximum bursary level will be index-linked in accordance with DFES regulations. Bursaries will be payable in two equal instalments for each academic year:

- (i) first week of December
- (ii) first week of March of each academic year.

To be eligible, students must be in attendance at the University up to and including these dates.

As a consequence of our successful widening participation activities, approximately 60% of our current students would qualify for a bursary payment and we aim to maintain this student profile.

3.2 *Scholarships*

Scholarships are sums of money made available to students achieving high academic standards in specific areas. They may be subject-specific or donated by a benefactor for a particular programme of study. A student may be in receipt of a bursary and a scholarship: the two are not mutually exclusive.

A number of scholarships will be made available for specific subject areas within the University. We are also considering the possibility of developing scholarships for students on foundation degrees and extended degrees offered through our partner colleges. For up-to-date information on the scholarships scheme, please refer to the University's website: www.herts.ac.uk.

4 Provision of Information to Students.

The University recognises the importance of providing clear and transparent information on the new financial arrangements for students from 2006. It will communicate information on fees, bursaries and scholarships to applicants and potential applicants in several different ways:

- The UH web site will include student finance web pages explaining the University's policy on tuition fees and availability and eligibility of bursaries. Where appropriate the web pages will be linked to relevant external web sites.
- The University's undergraduate prospectus will contain information explaining its policy on tuition fees, bursaries and scholarships.
- A separate leaflet will be available at higher education fairs or in response to enquiries.
- All University Open Days will have designated presentations and question/answer sessions on student finance.
- A facility for applicants to see Student Finance staff on an individual basis will be available.
- Education / Schools liaison activities – the University will continue to provide support in terms of workshops and briefings to schools, colleges and careers offices throughout the region.

Information provided will include factual details and case studies.

5 Outreach work

At the present time, the University spends in excess of £1.2 million on outreach activities. As a result of the University's widening participation strategy, the number of students recruited from our target groups – mature students, students from low participation neighbourhoods and students from social classes III, IV, V – has exceeded our benchmarks. As such, the University's strategy will be to maintain its current outreach provision but not to extend it at this point in time. This will be kept under review.

To ensure a strategic and long-term focus for this activity, the School of Continuing Education and Partnerships was established in summer 2004. The School has an oversight of all our local College partnerships, which is a core element of our widening participation work. Fundamental to our widening participation strategy is the concept of partnership working – we engage with key stakeholders in the region who have an interface with the under-represented groups that we seek to attract into HE. In doing so, we can exploit the natural relationships which already exist and use them as a lever to raise aspirations. However, within the partnership framework, we also engage directly with pupils to provide them with experience of the University environment, to make HE more accessible and to dispel negative preconceptions, particularly in areas where there is a tradition of low participation in HE. The provision of accessible, timely and co-ordinated information about all aspects of HE is vital to our success and we have a raft of communication activities aimed at young people, their parents/carers and teachers.

The University is a key player in the Aimhigher plan for Hertfordshire, in partnership with Connexions, the Learning and Skills Council, LEA, Schools and Colleges

The University has an established programme of support for schools and colleges designed to reach out to groups who might otherwise have been excluded from a University career. Specifically, this includes:

Partnership activities

1. Regular briefings for school/college staff to ensure an understanding of current HE developments (examples include student finance, the UCAS tariff, value of key skills, writing references).
2. Liaison with four Consortium Colleges to foster links and support for students' progression to higher education from further education.
3. Development of the *Unibridge* course, which provides additional skills support to those who need it prior to their HE studies. This is jointly delivered by the University and its partner Colleges.
4. Wide-ranging support for careers activities in schools and colleges.
5. Liaison in respect of over thirty compact agreements (many in 'cold spots') and setting up associated events through the year.
6. Vocational and further education Routes to higher education, based in the further education colleges, including work-based learning opportunities.

Direct interface

7. A range of talks for years 10 to 13 regarding University. These include 'Getting into University' - usually year 11 or 12, 'Admission Tutors View' about personal statements, "Finance" – year 12 or 13, 'The Student Experience' – year 11 or 12, 'Surviving with a child at University'" – aimed at parents.
8. 'Aimhigher' days for year 9 pupils where they work with students on the University campus to explore aspects of going to University.
9. Routine deployment of 'Student Ambassadors' to talk to pupils at schools with low participation rates.
10. School visits to the University by year 9, 10, 11 and 12.
11. Supporting and implementing 14 – 19 pathfinder initiatives and events, for example three schools recently attended a 'Work Related Learning' day – 400 pupils and staff on the University's campus.

12. Summer schools eg *Artscool* – particularly targeted at under-represented groups.
13. University of Hertfordshire students acting as mentors for local primary school pupils – this is targeted at schools which have low rates of progression to higher education. The mentoring programme covers year 6 to 13. The University also runs a well-developed ‘Hatfield Ahead’ mentoring programme, supporting Year 6 pupils with their transition to secondary school.

6 Milestones

HEFCE has well established performance indicators for widening participation. To date, the University has been very successful in meeting the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmarks for widening participation. This is demonstrated by the most recently published figures (2001/02) which are reproduced below:

Participation of under-represented group in HE

Young full-time undergraduate entrants:

from state schools or colleges : from group 97%, location adjusted benchmark 92%
from social class I, II, III, IV, V: from group 37%, location adjusted benchmark 32%
from low participation neighbourhoods from group 15%, location adjusted benchmark 13%

Mature full-time undergraduate entrants:

All undergraduate entrants: no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhood 16%, location adjusted benchmark 12%.

In terms of milestones, the University will aim to continue to meet the HEFCE location-adjusted benchmark performance indicators set out above.

The University plans to maintain and develop its outreach activity (as set out in section 5) reflecting the needs of the local community. The list of activities will change and evolve over time, but the strategy will be enduring.

7 Monitoring arrangements

An annual report on performance in widening participation will be submitted to the Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Group, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Director of Finance. The report will set out the University’s performance against the HEFCE location adjusted benchmarks, and will evaluate the University’s performance on the *AimHigher* activities listed in section d) above. The Group will agree actions to be taken including changes to the *AimHigher* activities.

The Fees, Bursaries and Scholarships Group will report to the Board of Governors and to the Senior Managers Conference (SMC). SMC is an executive group of the university chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and comprising Deans of Faculty and Directors of the Support Services. The final report will be submitted to OFFA through HEFCE’s Annual Monitoring Statement for Higher Education Institutions.