

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY ACCESS AGREEMENT FOR THE OFFICE OF FAIR ACCESS (OFFA)

1. INTRODUCTION

Fair Access and widening participation are a key element of the University's mission which is:

“The mission of Kingston University is to promote participation in Higher Education, which it regards as a democratic entitlement; to strive for excellence in learning, teaching and research; to realise the creative potential and fire the imagination of all its members; and to equip its students to make effective contributions to society and the economy.”
(Strategic Plan, 2002/03 to 2005/06)

Kingston University strongly supports the objective of ensuring that, in the context of the introduction of top-up fees, disadvantaged students are not deterred from entering higher education. The University will continue with a wide range of widening participation (WP) activities over the next five years. These are summarised in section 2 below, the context for the Access Agreement. Our proposals for bursary and scholarship schemes and one additional area of outreach activity must be seen in this wider context.

In summary, we plan to use approximately 25% of the additional fee income to fund activities within our Access Agreement. The largest element will be entitlement bursaries for all disadvantaged students who enter the University who are paying fees and qualify for state support. This will include the minimum bursary support for students on full state support. We will not target particular subject areas. We will also introduce a sub-regional compact/scholarship scheme for students, initially from our Associate Colleges (and later from other targeted colleges, schools and commercial, industrial and public sector organisations.). In this case we will seek applicants and cap the number of awards made each year but with growth in the number of new awards in each year. We will also establish a discretionary fund to complement our existing hardship fund. This will target students who are on the margins of eligibility for bursaries and who have particularly deserving personal circumstances. We will set aside sufficient funds from additional fee income to cover the Student Loan Company administration fee for each statutory bursary (£15). Finally, we wish to ensure that our schemes are well marketed and understood (especially the sub-regional compact/scholarship scheme) and this will be the one additional area of activity and expenditure in outreach activity over and above that described in section 2.

2. CONTEXT

The University has a well developed Widening Participation Strategy that has been in place for over three years. This strategy has contributed to

a successful record of both attracting and supporting students from groups under represented in higher education. The latest performance indicators show that 93.7 % of Kingston's young, first degree students come from state schools compared with a benchmark of 90.9 %; 38.4 % are from the lower socioeconomic groups (benchmark 34.5) and 12.3 % from low participation neighbourhoods (benchmark 10.8). In terms of retention the university also performs well. The figure for full-time Kingston first-degree students who do not continue on to the second year of their course is 9.4 %, against a benchmark of 11.1 % - only slightly above the national average of 8.7 %.

A revised strategy for the next five years is currently being developed. We have, perhaps uniquely, regarded the strategy as one that links with, and overlaps, our Learning and Teaching (L & T) Strategy. It therefore consists of four strands:

- aspiration raising;
- pre-application support and guidance;
- post-application support and preparation for study;
- on-course support for a more diverse student population.

Coordination of the Strategy is based in our Academic Development Centre and is not seen as solely a marketing activity (although there are close links and synergies with mainstream UK Marketing). Strands of the strategy are also clearly identified in our Human Resource (HR) Strategy. The University houses and manages the London South Aimhigher Partnership and our in-house activities dovetail with those of Aimhigher. We do not restrict Widening Participation to undergraduate entry and a number of the areas of work summarised below incorporate initiatives to broaden access to postgraduate, continuing professional development and in-service programmes.

Raising Aspirations and Attainment. The University has an established Schools and Colleges Liaison team which coordinates a range of activities for pupils in schools and colleges from year 7 upwards. This includes, for example, working with pupils, teachers and parents, student ambassador schemes, e-mentoring schemes, summer schools etc. The University's work closely relates to that of Aimhigher which not only includes regional schools, colleges and the universities but also the Strategic Health Authority (e.g. Healthcare Ambassadors and regional developments in admissions tutor training).

Pre-Application Information and Guidance. Although this is inextricably linked with aspiration raising, intending applicants are supported with information on finance, a range of compact and progression agreements and student mentoring activities.

Post-Application Advice and Guidance. Additional targeted financial advice is provided and more specific course related support is arranged through faculties, including summer schools.

Admissions. The University has taken wide-ranging steps to ensure a fair and effective admissions process. A business process review of admissions has been carried out, the HR Strategy supports staff development for all admissions staff, the University participated in the UUK national “Fair Enough” project, is a lead partner in an Aimhigher national project on compact schemes and is participating in Aimhigher Department of Health initiatives. We continue to develop compact and progression agreements and cross-sector subject networks.

Learning and Teaching. As noted above, our Learning and Teaching Strategy and WP Strategy are inextricably linked. We have undertaken a root and branch review of the first year experience, including the year structure, induction, approaches to assessment, academic support and guidance (including a “Mathsaid” programme), ICT supported learning and flexible access to resources to meet personal circumstances. We have established common interest groups, such as for Foundation Degree course directors across our partnerships.

Student Support. We continue to develop our approaches to supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and a more diverse student body in general. This includes new approaches to academic and pastoral support in faculties and improved links to central services, student funding, accommodation, careers and the work of the Student Union.

Curriculum Development. Across the University the first year curriculum and its delivery (teaching, learning and assessment) have been reviewed and revised. Of particular importance has been the development of programmes delivered with partners to support the transition into higher education. Our work complements that recently outlined in the London South Learning and Skills Council Strategic Area Review Consultation (STAR) Document (2004). In this respect our development of Foundation Degrees, working directly with employees and with colleges and employers, target groups who would not otherwise have access to higher education. The University has developed innovative ways of working directly with employers and employer organisations with the incorporation of work-based learning at all levels (e.g. aircraft maintenance engineering with employers and meeting industry training standards). These initiatives are clearly in line with the STAR document’s objectives that “We will increase the availability of clear progression pathways of vocational education and training based on the employment growth sectors through prioritised allocation of resources, including capital, discretionary and recurrent funding. We see this as an important part of the infrastructure’s ability to meet the needs of young people including those Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET)”.

Third Leg Activity. The University’s own Higher Education Initiative Fund (HEIF) programme and the West London consortium (WestFocus), of which we are a leading member, includes programmes for people in all

work sectors and small, medium and large organisations who would not otherwise access higher education. For example, we have a large and growing number of individually designed, work based, Master's level students.

Research, Evaluation and Monitoring. At any one time we have a range of new and pilot activities. All of these have inbuilt evaluation and monitoring. We have a large (charitable funding) research programme to evaluate the effectiveness of e-mentoring both pre-entry and on-course for "widening participation students". We provide a service to all course teams to provide performance indicators and data on all students throughout the complete student life cycle so that widening participation initiatives can be targeted and evaluated.

Infrastructure and Funding. The University has in place a significant infrastructure to support its widening participation work. A senior member of staff in the Academic Development Department heads up the Widening Participation Unit including the Schools and Colleges Liaison Team and a WP Events group. There are Widening Participation Champions in each faculty (senior staff) and Learning and Teaching Coordinators in each faculty (funded from WP premium funding) to support on-course activity. Each faculty has a subsidiary strategy. Mainstream HEFCE funding supports faculty strategy implementation and ongoing central support services. The WP premium/postcode funding is primarily used to support the piloting of new initiatives, the research, evaluation and support service and the L & T Coordinators.

In summary, the University's Access Agreement relating to bursaries, scholarships/compacts, additional hardship funding and additional outreach activity has been designed to build upon and complement all of the above. We believe that our overall strategy will continue to enable us to recruit students from disadvantaged backgrounds above our HEFCE Performance Indicators and to continue to improve on that target.

3. PROPOSED ACCESS AGREEMENT

The University's proposed access agreement is presented below, written against the checklist in the cover pages for easy cross-referencing. Overall it is estimated that approximately 23% of additional fee income will be employed in the various initiatives outlined in the first instance. This gives scope for the University to review its approaches and reach a 25% figure over a period of time, and if considered appropriate.

3.1 Level of fees and fee limits

The University will set the maximum fee of £3000 for all full-time undergraduate courses, including PGCE courses. The same fee will apply wherever courses funded through the University are delivered. This has been agreed with our collaborating partners. The only single exception will be "year zero" additional years in some science and

engineering courses. We believe it is not appropriate to charge for the extended year which is essentially equivalent to an “A” level or Access programme.

3.2 Bursary support for students on full state support

The University undertakes to provide the statutory bursary (£300) support to bridge the gap between full state support of £2.7K and the fee levied by the University of £3K (see also 3.3 for proposals for bursaries above the minimum). PGCE students will be eligible for the statutory bursary but will be ineligible for the university bursary and compact schemes as outlined in 3.3a and 3.3b below.

3.3 Targeted bursaries and type and level of support

The University has agreed to utilise up to 25% of the additional fee income for student support. Four strands of funding have been identified as follows.

a. University Bursary Scheme. This scheme will utilise the local authority means test for state support. All students eligible for state support will be entitled to a bursary. The bursary is likely to be set at three levels depending on student eligibility for the state support. The levels will initially range from £300 to £1000 per annum. These amounts include the statutory bursary of £300 for students in receipt of full state support. Approximately 50% of the University’s students will be entitled to a bursary. Overall, the bursary scheme will form the largest part of the student support fund.

b. University Compact Scheme. The Compact Scheme is aimed at encouraging the progression of students who are first generation entrants into higher education in the university’s sub-region. In the first instance compact members will be the University’s Associate Colleges, but the scheme will be expanded over a five year period to include other colleges, schools, the local Strategic Health Authority and employers (e.g. in relation to Foundation Degrees). The scheme will build upon existing outreach activities and target students one year to 18 months prior to entry to the University. Each student who enters the University as a member of the compact scheme will receive £300 for each year of their course over and above any entitlement bursary. These students will also receive a wide range of services from the University, including enhanced information, advice and guidance on career choice and degree programmes, sources of funding and accommodation. They will be identified by our partners in collaboration with the University. There will be set numbers of compacts available, with targets increasing year on year from an initial 150 new entrants to a steady state of 500 new entrants receiving funding.

c. Variable Fees Fund. The University is aware that students who are not eligible for financial support can still suffer financial hardship for a

variety of reasons. Therefore the University intends to establish a discretionary fund of £60,000 p.a. which will be additional to the existing Kingston University Student Support Fund. The Fund will support students who fall short of the entitlement to the additional university bursary yet who are in financial hardship. This fund will be administered by the Student Funding Service in the same way as applications to the existing fund are assessed and allocated.

d. Administration. In our expenditure plan we have taken account of any Student Loan Company administration fee associated with statutory bursaries.

3.4 Additional Outreach activities

Section 2 describes the wide-ranging outreach programme already in place. We only envisage the need to enhance this in two ways using the additional fee income. These are to ensure that the bursary and compact schemes are well understood, as follows.

- a. Information about Fees and Bursaries. We recognise the need to inform students of the changing nature of the costs of higher education post 2006 and about our bursary scheme in particular. We will build upon our existing financial advisory services to ensure that comprehensive information is available to all potential students, parents and guardians. Student Funding will work closely with the Schools and Colleges Liaison Team to ensure that prospective students have clear, accurate and informative information about bursaries and compact/scholarship opportunities (see b). We will set aside approximately £25,000 p.a. of additional fee income for this activity.
- b. Development, Implementation and Evaluation of the Compact/Scholarship Scheme. It is essential that the University's compact/scholarship scheme is well understood, developed and properly supported in collaboration with the University's regional/sub-regional partners. This will be the responsibility of the Schools and Colleges Liaison Team who play a major role in the outreach activities described in Section 2 above (e.g. the team currently works with over 4,000 students from year 5 upwards in a wide range of partners and collaboration with the University's faculties and schools). We will set aside approximately £75,000 p.a. of additional fee income to ensure that stakeholders are engaged in the aims of the compact scheme and to ensure effective management of the initiative. We will review these costs as the scheme develops.

3.5 Milestones, Objectives and Compliance

Because of our commitment to widening participation we already monitor progress as part of our institutional strategy. We will continue with this

activity, which will be critical if we are to continue to reach our primary targets of year on year improvement against HEFCE Performance Indicators in the context of the new fees regime (see also above, section 2). The headline targets for the University as a whole will be complemented by a number of locally sensitive targets for courses, schools and faculties which are informed by our RAFYR data sets and monitored through regular quality assurance processes.

Our proposals themselves have a number of inbuilt monitorable indicators and milestones, for example:

- meeting the objective of bursaries for all students eligible for state support;
- reaching our year-on-year targets for the increase in students receiving compact/scholarship awards;
- overall reaching our objective of utilising 25% of additional fee income;
- (providing the minimum statutory bursary for those entitled to it at all times);
- monitoring satisfaction with the marketing, administration and value of the various schemes described above.