



OFFA

Access Agreement

For Approval

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Context

The University of Plymouth seeks to deliver research and teaching to world class standards, to foster scholarship and culture, to serve its region in an open and accessible way and to develop responsible and critical students from a diverse social and cultural background.

As part of its regional and widening participation mission the University remains committed to ensuring equality of access to its courses from all sections of the community and will seek to ensure that its admissions, bursary and scholarship policies will remain clear, well articulated and supportive. Our intention in this document is to set out the range of support available to ensure that as wide a range of students as possible will benefit from the education the University can provide.

Fee Limits

The University of Plymouth intends to charge students the £3,000 fee for all courses from 2006 onwards reflecting the quality and reputation of its courses and the major investments in its campus estates. The only exceptions to this policy relate to Access to Science and Access to Technology courses which will charge a standard fee without top-up.

The University of Plymouth confirms that it will provide at least the minimum level of bursary support to students on full state support and intends to adopt the UUK/SCOP model bursary scheme.

As part of its regional mission the University provide HE in FE in partnership with FE Colleges across the SW peninsular, through an indirect funding agreement with the Colleges (Cornwall College; Truro College; Penwith College; Plymouth College of Art & Design; Estover College; Plymouth CFE; S Devon College; Bicton College; Exeter College; N Devon College; E Devon College; Somerset College of Arts & Technology; Bridgwater College; Weymouth College; City of Bristol College.) The partnership is incorporated within the University as a Faculty of the University (University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC) Faculty), with a faculty mission that focuses on widening participation and meeting local need. The Faculty operates within the overall policies and regulations of the University. Colleges will charge a standard fee of £2000 for all UoP foundation degree programmes with the exception of Plymouth College of Art & Design which will levy a charge of £3000. Students enrolling on these programmes will be eligible for the same range of bursary support and scholarship on a pro-rata basis as our standard students. Students moving to a top up level 3 programme at the University will be charged the full £3000 fee with equal access to bursary plus scholarship support.

The students taking University of Plymouth HE programmes at these Colleges will be eligible to the same support pro rata from existing UoP Hardship funds and the UPC Faculty is a party to the main Widening Participation and activities of the University

The University of Plymouth and University of Exeter jointly manage admissions to the Peninsular Medical School. Students are currently allocated randomly to the constituent universities. The University of Plymouth confirms that it will ensure equality of access to the most favourable bursary and scholarship schemes available at each University.

Bursaries and Other Financial Support for Students

The University of Plymouth has a long established record for widening participation in HE both directly into the University and through its network of Partner Colleges in the South West of England. As part of that mission we have set in place a range of bursary and other support measures for our students. These are designed to be flexible and supportive and will be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain appropriate and well targeted.

The plan for entry 2006 is to build on the existing links and routes into HE in order to take advantage of existing processes and administration, thereby minimising incremental administration costs. The University expects its incremental administration costs to be a maximum of 10%. Each element of the support plan is targeted at a distinct group regarded as vulnerable under the new fee regime.

1. £300 Bursary: As laid out in the Government legislation a payment of £300 per annum will be paid to all enrolled students whose family (spouse's) income falls below the defined threshold (likely to be circa £15,000-£16,000 per annum). It is not planned to increase this payment above the Government guideline. Additional tailor-made bursary schemes will generate significant administration cost and burden (thereby draining funds from other necessary schemes). It is anticipated that c.2800 students will qualify for the £300 bursary at a 3 year cost of just under £1million. The University intends to adopt the UUK model Bursary Scheme.
2. Compact schools: An existing scheme has recently been established to encourage "first generation students and/or those from lower socio economic groups" into HE. It is anticipated that circa 200 students can be recruited to HE by entry 2008 (from the south West region) via this scheme which involves offering a one off payment of £500 to each student following enrolment. The annual cost at Year 3 will be circa £100,000.
3. Access Courses: Mature students are an important cohort and very much a part of the University's Widening Participation strategy. A support

scheme will be targeted at selected Access courses throughout the region. Students who are “first generation students and/or those from the lower socio economic groups” will receive a one off payment of £500 to each student following enrolment. In addition funds will be put aside to increase payments to the more vulnerable mature students (particularly the single students); these students in will receive £500 per annum for the duration of the course. The annual cost at Year 3 will be circa £350,000.

4. **Mature Student relocation:** It is recognised that one serious barrier to HE entry, affecting mature students in particular is relocation. It is planned to set up a separate fund to assist those who qualify against hardship criteria with relocation expenses up to a ceiling of £1500. A fund of £50,000 per annum has been identified for this purpose.
5. **Regional student support:** In addition to the compact scheme, funds will be put aside to encourage “first generation students and/or those from the lower socio economic groups”. These students will apply from 6th forms and equivalent colleges from across the South West region. The payment will be a one off £500 payment following enrolment. The cost of the scheme will be capped to £300,000 per annum.
6. **Hardship fund:** The University of Plymouth recognises the importance of **retaining** students who have committed themselves to HE study. The plan is to set up a university “hardship scheme” (in addition to HEFCE funding) with its own qualification criteria, which will also extend to Partner College and part-time students. Strategically it is felt that such a scheme can be more effective in identifying and supporting students from the lower socio economic groups who have a real need (as opposed to perceived or anticipated need). This new fund will be administered by the university’s student funding unit where there is significant experience in these matters. The cost of the scheme will be capped; initially running at £85,000 and increasing to a cost at Year 3 of £250,000.
7. **Disability Support:** The University of Plymouth has a strong record of attracting and supporting students with a wide range of disabilities. Funding already exists through a range of channels for funding disabled students, however experience show that there are always some “who fall through the net”. Given the University’s commitment to disabled students a fund of £50,000 per year will be set aside to assist these students once they have enrolled.
8. **Scholarships:** Whilst it is recognised that scholarships are normally awarded according to academic criteria, the University of Plymouth plans to award a range of £500 per annum scholarships which are payable to every student on the chosen course. This payment will be in addition to any other support payment and will inevitably benefit those from the lower socio economic groups. We will design our scholarship scheme to ensure it articulates well with key issues such as gender and social background. It is anticipated that 10% of enrolling students will be awarded such scholarships; of which 1/3rd are likely to come from the poorest socio-

economic groups. The annual cost at Year 3, for these latter students, will be £134,000.

In conclusion, this package is targeted against the most vulnerable students. It uses existing processes and routes into HE and so does not generate significantly disproportionate administration and associated costs.

Provision of Information to Students

It is of paramount importance that the University's provisions under the OFFA agreement are made known to prospective students in ways that are clear, comprehensive, accurate and timely.

The changes to the national student support system will be fully explained in order that informed choices can be made. Prospective students need to be confident that there is a funding system in place which is adequate for their needs, and additionally that if they select the University of Plymouth, there is a back up of extra support available both as an incentive and as a safety net. The University's Student Funding Unit will provide comprehensive advice to prospective students. This will be done through:

- Written material such as leaflets and entries in University publications
- The Student Funding web pages
- Presentations and question/answer sessions in schools and FE colleges
- Open Day / visit day presentations
- Telephone and e mail enquiries
- One to one interviews

A leaflet will be produced outlining the changes to the Student Support system, explaining the function of OFFA, and describing the University's particular provisions under the OFFA agreement. This leaflet will also indicate total study costs for those taking courses which include additional costs such as fieldwork, placements and studio costs. Focus group research has provided the University with clear feedback about the context and design of such material. This information will also be available as a web page with an associated FAQ system within it, and links to the regional and national Aim Higher web sites. More comprehensive material will be available to vulnerable groups such as young students from low income backgrounds, lone parents and students with disabilities. A dedicated enquiry line will be established for this purpose which parallels our dedicated mature student enquiry service. The University will also undertake to establish a system to deal with complaints relating to eligibility for bursaries and scholarships. The University will also establish a staff development programme to train and enhance the knowledge and skills of both its student support staff and academic staff dealing with student enquiries.

Outreach Work

The University of Plymouth has a national reputation for its outreach, transition and on course activities to widen participation in HE. The main ingredients of outreach work will be expanded with defined target groups. Widening Participation interventions also emanate from mature collaborative partnership working with other South West HEIs, FEIs, Schools, Community groups (Aimhigher); central University of Plymouth team, faculty and partner college WP effort (Institutional).

The University's leading contribution to outreach WP work in the South West is currently funded through Aimhigher, and some of the Institutional WP, Mature, Disability Core Funding Premium monies. The latter also funds transition and learning and teaching WP support initiatives. Providing these funding streams are stable during the lifetime of this agreement, the University intends to continue to maintain the existing menu and volume of WP activity supported via these funding streams as follows:-

The University is the South West Peninsula lead institution within the HEFCE/LSC/DfES funded Aimhigher initiative and manages the Aimhigher Peninsula Programme, to raise aspirations, awareness and levels of achievement in the far South West Peninsula. The University provides central management, administrative and developmental support for the whole programme. Last year, 2003 to 2004 the programme delivered a total of £560 events, reaching 22,928 people in total. The University contributed to all aspects to the programme last year and lead on strands and activity that delivered half the total output. Levels of funding post July 2005, and more significantly post March 2006 spending review are as yet unknown, but policy makers assure long-term viability of Aimhigher work.

The University's own Widening Participation Activities are listed below:

- Tasters (40), residentials (10), EMentoring schemes (with 8 schools mentoring 200 pupils), activities with parents and key influencers (approx. 354 events), visits on/off campus with WP target schools (35 plus).
- WP focussed activities Post 16 through the University's Compact Scheme (90 events organised with 18 target schools).
- Interventions to support prospective target Mature Students through an impartial information, advice and guidance service (500 advice and guidance sessions); Access to HE course liaison visits and open days (65 events); targeted intervention model with certain communities.

- Faculty based subject specific WP outreach activities such as the STOP (Science Technology Opportunities Project) (approximately 20 projects); Access to medicine initiative; Creative Arts WP programme.
- An extensive set of pre-entry and on-course support WP initiatives with disabled students and students with dyslexia (approximately 1700 students in 03-04)
- Outreach projects with other WP target groups such as BME initiatives and action to redress gender imbalance e.g. South West Chinese and Afro-Caribbean Information events; target female taster events in Technology.

The University now intends to dedicate **additional funding generated through fee income to further support outreach work** and extend further actions to support identified target populations pre and on course. The following additional activities which will be developed:-

- Production of customised information resources for target WP groups relating to cost of study, sources of financial support, information gateways etc.
- Set up and ongoing maintenance of customised web sourced information
- Additional outreach events for WP target groups, and key influencers
- Expansion of existing WP schemes such as the Compact Scheme Access to HE Link initiatives; advice and guidance services.
- Expanding access to the menu of existing WP activities to additional schools and other organisations.

The additional costs for these activities over and above existing WP outreach effort include staffing costs linked to WP data management and tracking, WP marketing, web/CD Rom costs, outreach events and research. Costs are higher in Year 1 for set up.

(f) **Milestones and Monitoring**

The University has to date an established record of meeting and exceeding HEFCE benchmarks in terms of Access and Widening Participation. The University will continue to further develop current arrangements for monitoring progress in improving access and the impact of measures within this agreement. The following points are significant:-

- Setting annual targets for Widening Participation activities through Annual action plans and monitoring reports at Faculty and

Institutional level. This will include reporting on additional outreach activities identified within this agreement.

- The University intends to monitor its overall performance on WP, and the impact post 2006 of top-up fees and measures contained within this agreement within this Annual Monitoring Cycle. The University's target performance indicators are listed below.

WP Performance Indicators

Table 1: Participation of under-represented groups in higher education			
	Current location adjusted benchmark (%)	UoP Current Performance: from low participation neighbourhoods (%)	UoP Target Performance: 2008 2010
Young full-time first degree entrants 2002-2003	10.8	11.6	10-12% 12%
Young full-time undergraduate entrants 2002-2003	11.3	12.1	11-13% 13%
Table 2: Participation of under-represented groups in higher education			
	Current location adjusted benchmark (%)	UoP Current Performance: all entrants with no previous HE from low participation neighbourhoods (%)	UoP Target Performance: 2008 2010
Mature full-time undergraduate entrants 2002-2003	10.9	10.8	9.5-11% 11%
Part-time undergraduate entrants 2002-2003	6.2	5.9	5 – 6% 6%
Table 3: Non-continuation following year of entry			
	Current location adjusted benchmark (%)	UoP Current Performance: from low participation neighbourhoods (%)	UoP Target Performance: 2008 2010
Young full-time first degree entrants 2001-2002	10.4	8.5	8 – 9% 9%

- Established committee and reporting mechanisms will be used internally to monitor progress. They include the University's WP Strategic Planning Group, Equal Opportunities Committee, Senior Management Team and Governing Body Widening Participation is the specific line Management responsibility of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic).
- The University will also build on its knowledge of qualitative evaluation data relating to impact of WP interventions, and experiences of WP groups pre, on course and on exit. The new

entrant's survey and deadlines survey will be used to monitor access and information issues.

- In the event of disappointing performance against location adjusted benchmarks, the University will establish a Strategic Group to review and make appropriate adjustments to our bursary and scholarship policies.
- The University will provide a summary annual report to OFFA in July each year.

OFFA.doc.
Mark Cleary 20.12.04