

WIGAN & LEIGH COLLEGE

ACCESS AGREEMENT

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The College has an excellent record of addressing widening participation through a variety of measures, including the extensive “College in the Community” network, which is based mainly in wards across the Borough with widening participation postcodes. As a member of the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance, the College is involved in projects designed to raise aspirations and encourage progression into higher education. For example, current Aim Higher projects involving local feeder schools from targeted wards offer a variety of schemes, which seek to increase knowledge and awareness of higher education progression routes and career pathways.
- 1.2 This Access Agreement is intended to safeguard progression to higher education in the College and the Borough, and build on the College’s record of widening access and participation.

2. Proposed Variable Fee Scheme

- 2.1 The Corporation of Wigan & Leigh College agreed to the introduction of variable fees for directly funded full-time courses from September 2006. This agreement is intended to run for three academic years to the September 2009 intake.
- 2.2 The variable fees scheme has been devised, taking into account the financial circumstances of the existing cohort of UK/EU full-time students. In the academic year 2004/05, 70% of such students had all their tuition fees paid by the public purse, 8% paid partial fees and the remaining 22% were responsible for payment of the full fees.
- 2.3 The College does not have precise information relating to the household income of students in receipt of full or partial fee remission, but the available evidence suggests that the majority of current full-time higher education students are recruited from households with relatively low incomes. The College therefore intends to devote a significant proportion of additional fee income to provide bursaries for full-time students.
- 2.4 The College will charge £2,000 per annum for all full-time directly funded courses, including Higher National Diplomas, Foundation Degrees, First Degrees and Top-up Degrees. The fees will increase in line with the annual rate of inflation.
- 2.5 Fees for part-time directly funded courses are outside the scope of this agreement.

3. Bursaries and other Financial support for students

3.1 The bursary arrangements reflect the views of the Governing Board, which are that the cost of full-time higher education should not act as a barrier to those who are suitably qualified and wish to progress. Additional income from tuition fees should therefore be used to provide direct financial support for students and should be offered in a way which encourages student retention, progression and achievement.

3.2 All students on courses attracting the £2,000 fee will be entitled to an annual bursary of £500. Bursary payments will be made as follows :

- A first payment of £100, following enrolment in each year of study to assist in the purchase of learning materials for the course.
- Subsequent payments of £200 at the end of the spring and summer terms in each year of study to assist in student retention, progression and achievement.

The bursaries are in addition to any other financial support available to students.

3.3 Since 78% of full-time students receive financial support in respect to the payment of all or part of their tuition fees, the bursary will not be means tested.

4. Proportion of additional fee income to be spent on access measures

4.1 Based on current enrolments, it is estimated that an additional £120,000 will be generated through fee income, in the year 2006/07.

4.2 In order to safeguard and promote fair access, the College intends to spend approximately £75,000 in the first year, that is 62.5% of this additional income to provide bursaries. This proportion will remain in place for the remaining two years of this agreement.

5. Publicising fees and financial support

A variety of methods will be employed to ensure that information regarding fees, bursaries and other financial support is widely available. These include :

- The Higher Education Prospectus, distributed from September 2005 to local careers advisers, schools and all who have enquired about College HE courses, including existing final year FE students at the College.
- The main course prospectus, which is distributed to schools and households across the Borough.
- The College website, which is updated on a regular basis.
- The normal school liaison process, which takes place from autumn 2005 through to June 2006.

- Internal Advice & Guidance to existing Level 3 students, who would normally expect to progress into HE programmes.
- Open evenings, open days and information sessions, which take place in October, February and June each year.
- The College Student Advice & Guidance Service, and particularly leaflets and face to face support from staff with expertise in student finance.

6. Institutional Milestones and Objectives

The College will utilise the following milestones and objectives in relation to its full-time Higher Education provision, which fall under this access agreement :

- Recruitment targets: meet the planned recruitment target onto each full-time HE course.
- Retention targets: to improve retention on Higher Education courses by 2% year on year.
- Widening participation: to meet the planned target of 27% for the proportion of students coming from the widening participation categories, from the current base line of 25% for 2004/05. The figure to increase by two percentage points in each of the subsequent years of the agreement.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

The College's Higher Education Committee, a sub-committee of the Academic Board, will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this agreement. The Head of Faculty responsible for cross college higher education will submit termly reports to the Academic Board and the Strategic Management Team, which will include progress towards the achievement of the milestones and objectives listed above.