

UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE

Access Agreement

(Applies to new entrants commencing September 2011 until August 2012)

1 Summary

The University of Bedfordshire was created in 2006 by the merger of the University of Luton with the Faculty of Education and Contemporary Studies at Bedford (formerly part of De Montfort University). This was in recognition that “the key needs of Bedfordshire, to improve the participation of its people in higher education and to regenerate its economy, will be best served by a new major access and employment orientated university”.

We are quickly becoming recognised as the provider of higher education at undergraduate level in Bedfordshire and wish to build on our strengths. Our aim is to enhance further our excellent reputation for high quality and vocational distinctiveness in teaching (at both undergraduate and postgraduate level) and in research. We intend to become a key engine for development in our Region.

The following statements capture the ethos and character of our University:

- We enable people, whatever their circumstances in life, to open up new possibilities and achieve goals they may never have thought possible.
- By welcoming students into our supportive community and providing a stimulating learning experience, we enable them to explore, develop and succeed.
- Together we achieve great things.
- The University of Bedfordshire is supportive, inspiring and life-changing.

The main components of our scheme are:

- Home/EU fees set at the maximum allowable for full-time students on Foundation Degree, Bachelor’s and integrated Master’s courses and the PGCE
- Bursaries
- Special scholarships

This scheme shall apply to those students admitted in 2011/12 for the duration of their course.

We will honour our commitments to our students who entered the University prior to September 2011.

2 Fees (Home/EU students)

The University will charge the maximum allowable fee for each of its full-time Foundation Degree, Bachelor’s and integrated Master’s courses (excluding pre-registration courses in nursing and midwifery) and the PGCE, wherever they are located, including courses delivered by the British School of Osteopathy (BSO).

These fee limits will rise by annual inflationary increases announced by the Government.

Separate arrangements apply to students covered by the Government’s policy on ELQ (Equivalent or Lower Qualifications).

3 Fee Income

This fee regime yields a significant income stream for the University, which is used to support students and to improve facilities. Significantly, it is used directly to support students who

might otherwise be deterred from entering HE. We estimate that around twenty per cent of the additional income will be used for this purpose.

4 Financial support for students

The University is committed to investing approximately twenty per cent of the additional fee income each year in direct financial support to students throughout the life of this Agreement. The University scheme and the BSO scheme are operated separately, but all within this Access Agreement.

The University will provide direct financial support to students via a Bursary and Scholarship Scheme. These will only be available to students on full-time Foundation Degree, Bachelor's and integrated Master's courses and the PGCE for which the maximum allowable Home/EU fee is charged. All students who apply for financial support through their Local Authority/Student Loans Company and who are being charged the maximum allowable fee for their course will receive a direct cash payment as described below.

The University has signed up to the model bursary scheme devised by UUK/SCOP (UUK 1/04/77). The University scheme and the BSO scheme will be adjusted annually to compensate for inflationary adjustments to fees and the HEMG.

The University's Primary Bursary Scheme

The primary bursary scheme for students paying the maximum allowable fee will consist of a direct cash payment to the student to support maintenance costs. The amount is set at the minimum rate specified by OFFA for students on a full maintenance grant (currently ten percent of the maximum allowable fee). The scheme is open to all students who apply through the Local Authority / Student Loans Company arrangements. There is no means testing.

The University's Academic and Sports Scholarships

We have established a scholarship scheme that will provide academic scholarships and sports scholarships. These scholarships provide support to eligible students in addition to that provided through the Primary Bursary Scheme.

Four Vice-Chancellor's Scholarships (one per Faculty per year) equivalent to full fees for the duration of the course for students who can demonstrate the highest potential and who might otherwise be deterred from entering higher education because of financial constraints. For academic achievement – students who enter with greater than 280 UCAS tariff points of which 200 must be at level A2 - £1,100 on entry.

For sporting achievement – students who can demonstrate that they are of international standard and who join our special sports squad (£1,100 per annum). And for students who can demonstrate that they are of county standard (£340 per annum).

The University's Partnership Scholarships

For new student entrants to BA/BSc/BEd Honours and integrated Master's courses of the University from partner colleges, £340 on entry:

Bedford College
Milton Keynes College
Dunstable College
Luton Sixth Form College
Barnfield College
Tresham Institute (Kettering)
Oxford & Cherwell College
Castle College (Nottingham)
Leicester College
Grantham College

University Special Scholarships

Some further Special Scholarships are administered separately using funds received through the University's Development and Alumni Office.

The BSO Scheme

The BSO scheme for full-time home students on the Master of Osteopathy (MOst) course consists of a non-repayable annual bursary of £430 to students from households whose income has been assessed through the Local Authority/SLC process as less than £25,625. EU students will receive the equivalent to ten percent of the maximum allowable fee.

In addition, given the BSO's commitment to widening participation for non-traditional entrants, and for broadening access for students from low-income households in its local vicinity, an additional non-repayable annual payment of £215 will be paid to:

- a) any student who is eligible for the £430 bursary and who progresses to the full-time MOst. degree programme from a relevant QAA recognised Access course completed within the past four years

and to

- b) any full-time home student who is eligible for the £430 bursary and whose Maintenance Grant is administered by one of the following local education authorities:
 - o Southwark
 - o Lambeth
 - o Lewisham
 - o City
 - o Tower Hamlets

Notwithstanding the different categories above, the maximum annual bursary available to any individual student under this scheme is £645.

These bursaries will be paid directly to the student upon successful completion of their first term each academic year, conditional upon their continuing to meet the criteria.

Administration of the Scheme

The University scheme is administered by the Registrar's Office, with specialist staff in Student Services who currently administer the University's hardship and scholarship funds working in partnership with the Finance Office.

We see this process commencing on initial contact with potential students. Our Student Recruitment Team gives advice on the funding regime and our Bursary Scheme at this stage. The Scheme is set out clearly both in a published marketing material and on the web. Normally the first payment will be released after proof of registration and engagement by the student. The latter will be verified by our Faculty Student Attainment and Review (StAR) Boards in the first month of the student's course.

Clearly the administration of this scheme will incur a costs estimated to be some £115,000 in addition to the cost of joining the Student Loan Company arrangement. These will also be set against the additional income.

As stated above the scheme for Osteopathy students is administered directly by the BSO.

5 Provision of Information to Students

We continue to conduct surveys and focus groups amongst potential students and our students. These studies have confirmed that we face a significant communication challenge.

We are determined to play our part in ensuring that all concerned understand the student funding regime and our response to it.

Information on the University's fee structure and bursary scheme is published in the prospectus and on the web-site. An information pack is available to all enquirers on request. This pack is also used during Open Days at the University and in visits to Schools and Colleges by the Home Student Recruitment team. It contains considerable detail of the totality of costs which will be incurred by students and will enable each student to assess their own position.

The University generates promotional material which is suitable for student who have no family history of engagement with HE and who have considerable concerns, often financial, about their ability to cope. These materials include case studies showing the costs and benefits of the financial arrangements, including fees and bursaries.

Our current practice, which we will continue to develop, is for our home recruitment team to meet with students in local schools and colleges to review and discuss such materials in the context of their particular needs. The University has identified the key feeder schools and colleges and has a robust programme of engagement with them. Whilst we are confident of reaching the majority of our potential studentship with clear messages about the support which would be available to them, we do not underestimate the challenge.

One-to-one support is also available at Open Days, which is most important for mature students.

Although our primary criteria for success will be the recruitment of students from low-income families, the University has also set process targets in this area. It is committed to increasing the annual number of school and college visits year-on-year.

6 Outreach Work and A Strategy to Maintain Wide Participation

The University has engaged in considerable outreach work among under-represented groups, both through Aim Higher and on our own accounts. We will continue with this level of investment and will develop our outreach capability further.

We have always encouraged and welcomed participation by all who are able to benefit from higher education. Where we have the means to do so we have ensured equality of opportunity irrespective of background, schooling and income. We continue to pursue a strategy of engagement with the local and regional community which enables traditional and non-traditional students to understand and enjoy the opportunities which we offer. This strategy has been successful and the University has a remarkably diverse home student body. Although we believe that disadvantage can be complex and multi-causal, for the purposes of this agreement we have defined disadvantaged students as:

- Coming from a low income background
- Coming from a lower socio-economic group (4 to 7)
- Having a disability.

Of course, many low-income families come from minority ethnic groups. However, our experience locally and regionally suggests that work to include students from social classes 4 to 7 will be successful in drawing students from minority ethnic groups into higher education. The current participation rate of home black and minority ethnic students at the University is around 40 per cent.

Our experience is that to ensure that non-traditional students are both recruited and retained a number of parallel strategies need to be pursued, and this multi-pronged approach lies at the heart of our widening participation strategy. Widening participation policies and practices are embedded in the University at all levels.

Most importantly, we continue to ensure that our curriculum is attractive, relevant and well taught. Working in support of this curriculum, our student support arrangements have been

re- designed to be appropriate for all types of student. This 'package' of provision is then 'sold' to potential students through carefully designed marketing materials and pro-active outreach strategies. A strong programme of staff development ensures continual review and improvement of these strategies. Latterly we have been fully engaged with regional and local initiatives under the Partnership for Progression and Aim Higher banners.

Consequently we currently have an extremely diverse home student population. We meet or exceed the major benchmarks in the area of widening participation. For example, in 2007/08 we exceeded the benchmark for the inclusion of young full time first-degree entrants from state schools and colleges by nearly 3.5 percentage points. We exceeded the benchmark for the inclusion of students from socio-economic classes 4 to 7 by over 7 percentage points. And we met the benchmark for students from low participation neighbourhoods. HESA records, providing a range of data over time, clearly support our assertion that the University has a significant track record as a successful access institution. We therefore believe that it is appropriate to aim to maintain our current level of diversity.

However, there is room for improvement in the recruitment and support of students with a disability. In this area we have just agreed a major programme of change and we have set clear and ambitious improvement targets, which will set us above our benchmark.

We remain committed to the maintenance of the quality of teaching, which is one of our key strengths. Specifically we intend to:

- Charge the maximum allowable for each of our full-time Foundation Degree, Bachelor's and integrated Master's degree courses and the PGCE.
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- Provide direct financial support to students through our bursary and scholarship schemes, which are packaged to meet the needs of potential students of the University.
- Promote understanding of the bursary scheme in the context of HE amongst nationally under-represented groups.
- Maintain the activities currently being undertaken to widen participation at their present level.
- Maintain a substantial portfolio of Foundation Degrees taught in collaboration with FE Colleges.
- Increase the activities required to increase participation from students with a disability, working in partnership with others, notably Aim Higher or its successor.
- Set and meet targets for the participation of nationally under-represented groups in the student population.
- Monitor progress against these targets annually.

We are committed to continuing our successful WP strategies. We are enthusiastic about Foundation Degrees as an additional portal of entry for otherwise disadvantaged students. We remain committed to a substantial programme of development in collaboration with FE Colleges.

Curriculum

The University's particular expertise lies in teaching vocational subjects and preparing students for the world of work. All our curricula are designed to be relevant and accessible to students who have relatively instrumental goals in entering higher education. We have embedded a personal and professional development 'spine' of activity in every course at every level. This involves direct reference to work and employability and enables the students to engage with careers staff and employers as well as academics. Both students and staff are very enthusiastic about this.

For students who have been out of education for some time the University offers a range of Extended Degree programmes over four years in order to provide the student with additional study support and to give them time to increase their confidence.

In order to attract new groups of students into HE we have embraced the concept of the Foundation Degree, most of which are run in collaboration with FE College partners.

Student Support

Our student support arrangements, including learning resources, are designed to cater for a diverse range of students. Attention has been paid to both the materials provided to students and to the face-to-face support. A formal risk assessment of each student is undertaken within academic departments four times a year and additional study support is available for students defined as 'at risk'. Students may also self refer.

Marketing materials

All our marketing materials are designed to be attractive and accessible to all groups of students. The use of both language and image is inclusive.

Outreach strategies

Our recruitment strategy is based on personal contact between our recruitment team and potential students. Each year the University defines a target group of schools and FE Colleges and staff make contact to meet with students and discuss their particular issues and problems. This target group is defined in part by the existing student cohort (and therefore reflects a high degree of diversity) but also by known data on under-participation. The University is playing a lead role in the University Centre Milton Keynes project, which aims to increase participation in HE in Milton Keynes, which is currently below the national average.

Staff development

Staff throughout the University need to be aware of and responsive to the needs of a diverse range of students. A robust staff development programme has been in place for some years and will continue.

The University will continue to invest in its widening participation strategy.

Foundation Degrees

We see Foundation Degrees as a significant route of entry into HE for many students, particularly those currently under-represented. Accordingly we have developed a suite of FDs, most of which are presented in collaboration with our FE Colleges partners. FE/HE liaison officers work to maximise the progression of students from FE Level 3 into Higher Education. Our Dean of Partnerships and Director of Widening Participation lead on this important area.

We currently run 77 FD and HND courses and plan to start more in the next three academic years. While the exact nature of the portfolio will vary depending on student demand, the University is committed to running a suite of courses of this size in order to cater for the local population. All our FDs have a linked progression route to a "Top-Up bachelor's degree, and University academic staff are also involved in teaching the students at the College during the first two levels of study. Students also visit the University to familiarise themselves with the resources and the staff before progressing onto "Top-Up" year.

We will continue to work closely with our partner colleges in helping students to progress onto foundation degrees and successfully complete them before going on to 'top-up' degrees run at the University. We currently have around 1,150 full and part time students on these courses. We estimate that around 75 per cent of these will progress to bachelor's degrees.

Recruiting and Supporting Students with disability

The University is currently under performing in this area of activity. This is in part because, until recently, the estate did not support the participation of students with mobility problems. However, we have now put in place an action plan, which will place us above our benchmark within three years. Specifically we will increase the number of students declaring a disability to over 1,000, and the number of students registering for the DSA to over 500. Our Equality and Diversity Committee is monitoring progress.

However, there are a number of sources of financial support for this activity and we do not currently intend to use any of our additional income from variable fees for this purpose.

7 Milestones

We currently exceed the major benchmarks on widening participation published by HEFCE/HESA. Further detail is given in the section on 'Targets and Monitoring'. We will maintain this position. This is a fundamental part of our University Plan.

8 Targets and Monitoring

We intend to use the targets set out in our University Plan and Widening Participation Strategic Assessment submitted to HEFCE, particularly those relating to the development of higher education in further education colleges through Foundation Degrees. We believe that this initiative is crucial to sustaining the University amongst the top 5 of Access universities in this country. It is consistent with our historic mission and seeks to respond to the increasing tendency of students to study closer to home. We recognise the urgent need to identify different ways of raising aspirations amongst potential students and to provide cost effective routes into higher education.

Our main targets are –

1. To increase intake to Foundation Degrees, should the current cap on intake be lifted, so that when fully operational there will be 1,300 students on Foundation Degrees in total of whom 75% will progress to BA/BSc degrees.
2. To continue to have over 70 Foundation Degrees in partnership with Colleges.
3. To continue to have more than 48% mature students on our full time honours degrees and Foundation Degree courses.
4. To continue to have more than 95% young home students on full-time courses from state schools and colleges (those with known data).
5. To continue to have more than 43% young full-time students from NS-SEC Classes 4 to 7 (those with known data).
6. To continue to have more than 18% young full-time students from "low participation" neighbourhoods.
7. To continue to increase participation in our first degree courses of students in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance to reach the target of over 500 by September 2012.
8. To have growth in selected subject areas – the course portfolio will continue to be reviewed annually.

These will be monitored regularly and reviewed at least annually as specified in our University Plan agreed so that the University can meet its obligations to OFFA.

Similarly the British School of Osteopathy is committed to widening participation. The BSO has set access targets and will monitor progress against these and will provide the University with annual reports on progress so that the University can meet its obligations to OFFA.