

# UNIVERSITY OF LUTON

## Access Agreement

### Summary

The University of Luton has an excellent and well deserved reputation as an access university. To ensure that this is maintained and developed beyond the introduction of the variable fee it intends to take the following action.

#### 1. Fees

The University intends to charge the maximum allowable fee of £3000 per year for each of its full-time BSc/BA programmes (excluding pre-registration courses in nursing and midwifery), wherever they are located.

The University also intends to charge the maximum allowable fee of £3000 per year for the BOST programme delivered by the British School of Osteopathy (BSO).

The University intends to charge the standard fee per year for each of its full-time Foundation Degree programmes, wherever they are located.

#### 2. Fee income

The University estimates that the additional fee income it will receive will be some £2.5m in the first year. It intends to invest a forty per cent in direct financial support to students.

#### 3. Financial support for students

- i) The University will provide direct financial support to students via a Bursary Scheme. It will only be available to students on full-time BSc/BA Honours programmes for which an annual fee of £3000 is charged. It will apply to all UK students only (i.e. those paying home fees). All students in receipt of the full Higher Education Maintenance Grant (HEMG) who are being charged a £3000 annual fee for their course will receive a direct cash payment in excess of £300. The Bursary Scheme will be adjusted annually to compensate for inflationary adjustments to fees and the HEMG. This Scheme will allocate funds directly to students using four income bandings.
- ii) The University intends to sign up to the model bursary scheme devised by UUK/SCOP (UUK 1/04/77).
- iii) The amount directed to the Bursary Scheme each year will be adjusted to ensure that it consists of a minimum of forty per cent of the fee income raised by the fees, adjusted for inflation. The University reserves the right to reduce the bursary payment to any student who is in receipt of a substantial bursary from another source.
- iv) The BSO will separately administer its own bursary scheme for students on the BOST programme. This scheme includes an annual bursary of £300 to all students in receipt of the full Higher Education Maintenance Grant (HEMG), with adjustments annually to compensate for inflationary adjustments to fees and the HEMG.

4. Information on the University's fee structure and bursary scheme will be published in the prospectus and on the web-site. An information pack will be prepared which will be available to all enquirers on request. This pack will also be used during Open

Days at the University and in visits to Schools and Colleges by the Home Student Recruitment team. It will contain considerable detail of the totality of costs which will be incurred by students and will enable each student to assess their own position.

## 5. **Outreach work**

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

### **Milestones**

The University currently exceeds the major benchmarks on widening participation which are published by HEFCE/HESA. Further detail is given in the section on 'Targets and Monitoring'. The University will maintain this position which is fundamental to its Development Plan with its emphasis on excellence as an access university.

### **Introduction**

The University of Luton has always encouraged and welcomed participation by all who are able to benefit from higher education. Where it has the means to do so it has ensured equality of opportunity irrespective of background, schooling and income. To that end it has pursued a strategy of engagement with the local and regional community which enables traditional and non-traditional students to understand and enjoy the opportunities which the University offers. Evidence from our student population indicates that this strategy has been successful and the University currently 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 (III,IV,V)
- 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 III, IV and V 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 39 per cent.

### **The History of Widening Participation at Luton**

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. In 2001 the University defined an ambitious programme of activity in its Widening Participation Strategy and Action Plan 2001-4. Key objectives were:

- To provide effective co-ordination of the expanded widening participation agenda;
- To improve long-term recruitment from students from under-represented groups who are able to benefit from higher education, particularly from within the eastern region and south to London;
- In line with the principles of the Excellence Challenge, to improve the transition of students from school, college and the community into higher education, ensuring that students feel welcomed and supported once at University;
- To provide a positive experience of higher education to all students, including those from under-represented groups;
- To improve student completion and attainment;
- To support staff in supporting an increasingly diverse student body.

The Action Plan provided mechanisms for achieving change and detailed targets. These have guided the University in its activities in the last three years. 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 – the University is 14<sup>th</sup> among all universities for teaching quality. 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 the University currently has an extremely diverse home student population. The University meets or exceeds the major benchmarks in the area of widening participation. For example, in 2002/03 our performance for the inclusion of young full time first degree entrants from schools and colleges exceeded the benchmark by 4 per cent, that for the inclusion of students from social class III m, IV, V by 3 per cent; that for students from low participation neighbourhoods by 5 per cent (HESA Table T1a). 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.

### **A Strategy to Maintain Wide Participation**

The University believes that the new arrangements, which include the abolition of the 'up-front' fee, are potentially advantageous to students, particularly those from low-income families. Moreover, it believes that an increase in fee level is essential to the maintenance of the quality of teaching which is one of our key strengths. However, we understand that we will need to enhance our current arrangements to ensure that our current participation profile is maintained. Specifically, from the start of the academic year 2006/7 we intend to:

- Increase the fee to the maximum allowable (currently £3000 per year) for each of our full-time BSc/BA degree programmes.
- Maintain the fee level for full-time Foundation Degrees at the standard level set annually by the Government.
- Increase the direct financial support to students from low income families through a new bursary scheme which will be packaged to meet the needs of potential students of the University of Luton.
- 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 the local FE Colleges in line with the Development Plan.
- 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 at Luton.

- Monitor progress against these targets annually.

Further details of each of these is given below.

### **Fees**

The University intends to charge the full fee permissible to full-time home and EU students for each year of its entire undergraduate three or four year full-time degree programmes. In 2006/7 this will be £3000, but we are anticipating that this will rise each year with inflation.

However, in recognition of its particular role as a portal to HE for currently under-represented groups we intend to charge the standard level of fee for all two-year full-time Foundation Degrees.

### **Bursary Scheme**

We estimate that the fee of £3000 will yield a significant income stream of approximately £2.5m which the University will use to support all its students and to improve facilities. Significantly, it will also be used directly to support students who might otherwise be deterred from entering HE. Throughout the life of this Agreement 40 per cent of the additional income will be used for this purpose. We estimate that on the basis of the current student mix the total amount distributed in direct bursary support would be £1.011m.

The primary bursary scheme for BSc/BA Honours programmes will consist of a direct cash payment to the student to support maintenance costs. The amount will be directly related to their assessed income, as shown below.

Income	Bursary	Current mix
£0 to £20k (Band 1)	£1,750	38%
£20k to £25k (Band 2)	£1,000	3%
£25k to £30k (Band 3)	£ 750	4%
Over £30k (Band 4)	£ 300	54%

These income groups are based on current Student Loan Company cut-off points for the assessment of fee remission. We are classifying students with an assessed income of less than £20k as from low income families. It is our intention that internal means testing for bursaries should mirror external points of reference for Government assistance. As the Government's future position is not clear, the University's defined bands are subject to change. The Scheme has been designed to give most to the students in most need and is thus consistent with the University's mission as an Access University. In addition, the University intends to develop a small number of packages of support that will be targeted at particular groups of students with particular needs. These will translate some of the financial payment into specific services of at least equal monetary value but which will be of more value to some students. The choice of package will be entirely at the discretion of the student.

Clearly the administration of this scheme will incur a cost estimated to be some £100k in addition to the cost of joining the Student Loan Company arrangement. This will also be set against the additional income.

The BSO scheme for full-time home and EU students on the BOST programme consists of a statutory non-repayable annual bursary of £300 to students from the lowest income households in receipt of the full £2,700 Higher Education Maintenance Grant (HEMG). EU students' entitlement to the BSO scheme will be assessed on the same basis as home students. In addition, given the BSO's commitment to widening participation in HE in the capital, eligibility for the non-repayable annual £300 bursary

is being extended to new, full-time home students in receipt of an HEMG of any amount administered by one of the following local education authorities:

Southwark  
Lambeth  
Lewisham  
City  
Tower Hamlets

The BSO also extends eligibility for this bursary to include all students in receipt of an HEMG of any amount progressing to the full-time BOST degree programme from a relevant QAA recognised Access course completed within the past two years.

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 Bursary Scheme***

The primary Bursary Scheme will be administered by the Registrar's Office, working in partnership with specialist staff in Student Services who currently administer the University's hardship and scholarship funds. The Bursary Scheme administration will be embedded in the student recruitment and enrolment processes.

We see this process commencing on initial contact with potential students. Our Student Recruitment Team will give advice on the new funding regime and our Bursary Scheme at this stage. The Scheme will be set out clearly both in a published marketing material and on the web. At enrolment each student will be given advice on the options available and will be asked to agree the bursary package selected. The funds and other items in the selected package will then be released according to the schedule agreed with the student. Normally the first payment will be released after proof of enrolment and engagement by the student. The latter will be verified by our Faculty STAR Boards in the first month of the student's programme.

As stated earlier, the scheme for BOST students will be administered directly by the BSO.

### ***Promotional Activities***

The University already 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 will be supplemented by additional case studies showing the costs and benefits of the new financial arrangements, including fees and bursaries.

Our current practice, which 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 from which students come to Luton and has a robust programme of engagement with them. We are therefore confident that we can reach the majority of our potential studentship with clear messages about the support which would be available to them. This support will also include our Scholarship Scheme which will continue to offer scholarships on merit.

Although this would not reach all mature students, one-to-one support is also available at Open Days. And, although the University has a large number of mature students, many are taking nursing which is excluded from the new fee and bursary arrangements.

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 doubling the annual number of school and college visits by the end of the period of the Agreement.

### ***Widening participation strategy***

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 are already committed to a substantial programme of development in collaboration with four local FE Colleges and our proposed fee structure recognised the importance of this studentship. We provide more detail of our WP strategies below:

#### *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. In a recent successful initiative 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 the initiative.

For students who have been out of education for some time the University offers a range of Extended Degree programmes. These provide for a 12 module Level One programme (instead of the normal eight modules) 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 the University has embraced the concept of the Foundation Degree, most of which are run in collaboration with local FE Colleges. The details of this extensive programme are given below.

#### *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 in 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. Currently the University is a key member of the Universities for 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, supported by funding from HEFCE.

### ***Foundation Degrees***

The University sees Foundation Degrees (FD) as a significant new route of entry into HE for many students, particularly those currently under-represented. Accordingly it has developed a suite of FDs, most of which are presented in collaboration with one of four local FE Colleges: Barnfield, Dunstable, Bedford and Milton Keynes. These are all Colleges with significant track records in widening participation in their local area. In the case of the first three colleges a FE/HE liaison officer works to maximise the progression of students from FE Level 3 to HE Level 1. These officers meet regularly with the University of Luton Dean of Partnerships to review progress and reduce barriers.

There are currently 23 FDs running and plans to start 22 more in the academic year 2005/6. When fully operational we intend to have c50 FDs running. While the exact nature of the portfolio will vary depending on student demand, the University is committed to running a suite of FDs of this order of magnitude in order to cater for the local population. All our FDs have a linked Level 3 progression route, 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 Level 3.

The University will continue to work closely with its partner colleges in helping students to progress onto foundation degrees and then on to 'top-up' degrees run at the University. The Development Plan envisages growing the FD provision in the Colleges from c.300 students in 2004/5 to 868 in 2007/8. When full operational there will be c1500 students on FD programmes, of whom c1000 will be studying at partner colleges. We estimate that around 75 per cent of these will progress to University of Luton BA/BSc 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 the University above its current benchmark within three years. Specifically we will increase the number of students declaring a disability to 538, and the number of students registering for the DSA to 225 by September 2007. Our current activity in this area and the new Action Plan is being reviewed by the Southern Universities Management Services to ensure that it is sufficiently robust to meet the targets. Progress will be monitored by the University Equalities Committee for Students.

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.

### **Targets and Monitoring**

We intend to use the targets set out in our Development Plan agreed with 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 from 300 in 2003/04 to 868 in 2007/08 and when fully operational there will be 1,500 students on Foundation Degrees in total of whom 75% will progress to University of Luton degrees.
2. To have c50 Foundation Degrees in partnership with –
  - Barnfield College
  - Dunstable college
  - Bedford College
  - Milton Keynes College
3. To continue to have more than 48% mature students on our full time honours degrees and Foundation Degree programmes.
4. To continue to have more than 94% young home students on full-time programmes 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 4,5,6 and 7 (those with known data).
6. To continue to have more than 19% young full-time students from “low participation” neighbourhoods.
7. To continue to increase participation in our first degree programmes of students in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance to reach the target of 538 by September 2007 from the current level of around 350.
8. To have growth in selected subject areas – the course portfolio will be reviewed annually.

These will be monitored regularly and reviewed at least annually as specified in our Development Plan agreed with HEFCE.

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