Solihull College

**Access Agreement**

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Mission Statement

Solihull College aims to provide high quality learning opportunities to meet the needs of individuals, employers and the community.

### 1.2 College background

Solihull College is a large general further education college located in the Metropolitan borough of Solihull. More than half the full time students are from the City of Birmingham which is about 7 miles away. The majority of higher education provision is delivered at the main campus situated close to the town centre. In the north of the borough there is a second campus which delivers a range of vocational FE courses and higher education courses in engineering. The north of the borough has significant economic and social disadvantage. The College has developed strong progression links with schools in the north of the borough.

The College has been delivering higher education courses for more than 20 years and has direct funding for around 420FTEs. Initial demand for higher education courses came from its level three vocational students who wanted the opportunity of progression without moving to a traditional higher education institution.

Currently the College offers degrees, Foundation Degrees and Higher National programmes validated by Edexcel. Degrees and Foundation degrees on offer are validated by a number of partner universities including: Coventry University, Birmingham City University, and The Open University Validation Service. The College also has some franchise courses with both Oxford Brookes University and The University of Wolverhampton. A significant number of our students progress from level 3 vocational courses to higher nationals at the College with the opportunity of progression to a range of University top up degrees.

In line with many FE colleges offering higher education, enrolments have declined somewhat since 2003. Much of this has been attributed to increased competition with local University partners, many of whom have lowered their entry criteria. From 2007 numbers seem to have stabilised and although the current economic situation may result in more students choosing to study closer to home the current lack of availability of student numbers restricts the opportunity for growth in the immediate future.

### 1.3 Student profile

The College is particularly successful in attracting widening participation students and currently almost half the HE student profile are identified as WP through post code analysis. In 2008/9 more than two thirds of students took out a student loan for their tuition fees. Just over half of these were eligible for a maintenance grant. The College recruits more female students than male on full time courses although part time numbers show a gender balance. Around three quarters of students are white – British with the remaining students coming from a diverse range of backgrounds. Half of all full time students are aged between 19 and 24 with 17% falling in the highest age category of 35-60. On part time courses the numbers are more equally spread across all age levels.

## 2.0 Fee Limits

### 2.1 Courses covered by the Agreement

This agreement applies to all higher education courses for which the College receives direct funding from the Higher education Funding Council for England.

Fees on indirectly funded courses will be set by the University providing the funding and detailed within their institution's access agreement.

### 2.2 Students included within the agreement

This agreement is applicable to all home and European students studying a higher education programme at Solihull College.

Students deemed to have ELQ status, as they already have an equivalent level qualification, will pay separate tuition fees. Details of ELQ fees are available from our HE Admissions Officer in Student Services

Students who are classified as overseas students will pay a separate tuition fee; details are available from the International Office.

### 2.3 Agreement renewal

This agreement will be valid for a period of three years from September 2010.

### 2.4 Tuition Fees

The fees payable by new students on full time courses in 2010/11 will be £2000 on HND and Foundation Degree programmes and £2,300 on the BA Fine Art Degree. The fees will be reviewed annually and increases will not exceed £200 in a year. The maximum fee in 2012 will be £2,500.

The increased fees will only apply to new students only, continuing students will pay the same fees as they did in year one adjusted in line with inflation.

The government revises the capped fee annually in line with inflation and Solihull College will review its tuition fees accordingly.

### 2.5 Part time students

Part time students will be charged in proportion to the volume of study.

## 3 Bursaries and other financial support

An obvious barrier to entering higher education is the cost. Student feedback at the College places cost as one of the most important factors in their choice of institution. Solihull College is highly committed to widening participation and believes bursaries will be a significant encouragement to those students. In 2008/9 216 students, approximately two thirds of our full time HE students, applied for student loans and more than half of those of those also received a maintenance grant.

### 3.1 Bursary amounts

1. All students in receipt of the full maintenance grant will receive a £500 bursary.

2. All remaining students are guaranteed £200; or £300 if they progressed internally*. These students will also have their award increased pro rata if they receive partial maintenance grant

*To be eligible for the progression bursary they need to have completed a full time level three qualification within the previous two years.

Example.
Students progressing from internal level three courses in receipt of a full grant will receive £200 College Bursary + £100 progression Bursary + £200 taking them up to the full Bursary of £500.
Students in receipt of a full grant coming to College for the first time to do an HE course will receive a College bursary of £200 + £300 taking them up to a full Bursary of £500.

£500 is the maximum amount of bursary paid to any full time student.

A full bursary will be £500 paid in three cash instalments:
Autumn term £250
Spring term £150
Summer term £100

Bursaries of £300 or less will be paid in a single cash payment.

Bursaries will be paid out from 1st November providing the College has received the full tuition fee amount from the student or has evidence from Student Finance England that their fees are being paid.

Part time students in receipt of tuition fee grant will be eligible for a bursary up to £250. This bursary will be dependant on the amount of grant received so a student receiving the full amount of part time grant will be eligible for a full bursary of £250.

Part bursaries will be paid in proportional instalments over terms one and two.

### 3.2 Hardship Fund

A small percentage of the additional income received will be used to create a Higher Education hardship fund. This amount will not exceed £20,000. Terms for the hardship fund will be available from Student Finance.

### 3.3 Investment in teaching and curriculum

Income generated by the increase in fees will also be used to invest further in teaching and curriculum and other support processes

## 4.0 Provision of Information to Students

Detailed information will be provided to students about the tuition fees that apply to higher education courses and the financial support available. This information will be available on the College website, within the HE prospectus, course leaflets and at interview. The student's offer letter will also specify the fees due for the duration of the programme. Other

means of providing tuition fee information will be through student services, open days, and other College open events.

## 5.0 Outreach work

The College is already engaged in a number of out reach activities to encourage applications from underrepresented groups. It is a College strength that its HE provision serves those who may not have traditionally aspired to HE. It is not intended that the additional income received from the tuition fees will be used to supplement these activities which are already well embedded in college.
Examples of current activity include:

- **Aim higher activities and projects**

The College engages in a wide range of Aim Higher activity and works closely with schools and other colleges in both Solihull and Birmingham.

- **Access to HE provision**

The College offers a range of Access to HE courses at both campuses, with high success rates for direct entry to degree courses in the region.

- **Community provision**

The College plays an important role in delivery a range of courses, including basic skills, to the local community and organisations in the Birmingham and Solihull area.

- **Employer and Individual Adult responsiveness**

A key strength of the College is its work with local employers and businesses and those in work to raise higher level skills and provide the workforce with enhanced opportunities for career advancement and employment.

## 6.0 Milestones

It is expected that the additional income from fees will support:

- Increased progression from level 3 students to internal HE courses
- Improved retention
- Improved success rates
- Opportunities to support students with financial hardship

During the coming year the College will establish baseline data to enable it to set clear targets for progression, retention and student success. Clear statistical evidence of achievement against these targets will be reported to Offa through the submission of the annual report.

## 7.0 Institutional monitoring arrangements

Solihull College will implement annual monitoring of this access agreement in order to report on progress made on the milestones detailed in section 6. The Director of Higher Education will be responsible for writing and submitting the annual report to the Director of OFFA subject to approval from the College Senior Management team and the Finance and Estates Committee of the Governing body.