

Buckinghamshire New University Access Agreement 2012-13

(Applies to new entrants commencing courses during 2012-13)

Introduction

Buckinghamshire New University's (Bucks) primary purpose is to put students first and to work responsively with partners to influence, inspire and nurture talent for professional and creative careers. This informs our approach to the courses we offer, to the recruitment of our students, to their retention once they have joined the University community and to their preparation for what follows graduation. We have a successful story to tell. For example: we provide students wanting to succeed in the creative industries opportunities for networking and for developing cultural capital: we have a range of courses for work-based mature people; our retention of students is improving regardless of their experience prior to joining us.

We have a long and continued commitment to widening participation (WP) and the various activities which support it. We have been demonstrably successful, especially given that the University is based in one of the five sub-regions in the UK with the highest gross disposable household income. Our successes include: 33% of our total student population are from black and minority ethnic communities and 36% of full-time undergraduates qualify for full-state support.

We see our role as supporting our local economy and community as well as the wider UK economy. Supporting this we find that 46% of full-time undergraduates are recruited from within a 20 mile radius of the main site in High Wycombe and 67% from within 50 miles. Strong links have been developed with schools, adult education and training providers. The University has also developed formal partnerships with further education colleges (FECs) in Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

The University has been an active participant in the Aimhigher Network and plans to continue key strands of the work that are in the strategic interests of the University and its regional communities. The University has a proactive and energetic approach to working with local schools and colleges where there are low levels of achievement and progression to higher education.

The following key principles underpin the University's WP strategy:

- targeted activity and provision via a range of measures of deprivation including targeted outreach with students from families or groups with a history of low participation in higher education
- strategic partnerships with target schools and colleges
- monitoring and evaluation of impact of outreach work via subscription to a centralised database and data service
- collaborative regional partnership with Oxford Brookes University and Oxford University to ensure a coordinated outreach programme
- sustained programme of interventions with students at local target schools and colleges
- focussed engagement with mature students wishing to return to study without recent, or with no formal, qualifications

Fee limits

The decision has been taken by the University Senior Management Team after extensive consultation with employees and the Students' Union to set a fee of £7,500 for the majority of its full time undergraduate courses. Courses with higher delivery and equipment costs will have a fee of £8,000 and include art, design & production based courses. We will be offering one new specially designed full-time course in business with a fee of £6,000. This will have a different delivery model from our existing BA in Business Management and it is being developed since we believe participation on the BA may be affected for some groups.

Our partner FECs will be charging from £6,000 to £6,900 with the higher fee being related to a design and make course with higher delivery and equipment costs.

The decision to charge these fee levels has been taken after careful consideration of our target markets and in line with government recommendations in order to maintain the quality of our learning and teaching provision

and to further support delivery of our mission in terms of widening participation, retention, and the continued enhancement of the student experience.

Amounts of additional income to be spent on access measures

The University is committed to maintaining the work it is currently undertaking on outreach and retention activity and have made a significant investment to date in this important area of its business. We have a good track record and a high proportion of under-represented students. However, in recognition of our ongoing high level of commitment to WP, the University has chosen to invest 22.5% of its additional fee income over £6,000 in a range of new access measures in addition to existing activities.

This total fund will be split on outreach and retention activities and the National Scholarship Programme as follows:

Outreach

Based on student recruitment targets being achieved, the amount attributed to outreach work is expected to be in the region of £147,000.

National Scholarship Programme

The University will be matching the allocation of £303,000 from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for the National Scholarship Programme (NSP). This means that the total allocation for the NSP at Bucks will be £606,000. Bucks is committed to ensuring that all eligible NSP prospective students are given advice appropriate to their individual circumstances. The University is intending to offer a voucher scheme which is redeemable against:

1. Fee discount
2. Discounted accommodation or other similar institutional service
3. Cash bursary (capped as cash award of £1,000)

The University will offer the above vouchers as a combination, if desired, ensuring that all eligible students will receive guidance on the voucher scheme appropriate to their circumstances. Each eligible full time student will receive a benefit of not less than £3,000.

The university intends to offer £3,000 of vouchers in year 1, £1,500 of vouchers in year two and £1,500 in year three to ensure that continual support is provided throughout the student journey in order to enhance retention.

The criteria for applying for the National Scholarship Programme is available on the University website from the 1st September 2011

Retention

Based on student recruitment targets being achieved, the amount attributed to retention work is expected to be in the region of £97,000.

Other Financial support

In addition, all students will have access the University's Big Deal Package. The Big Deal enables all students to participate in a range of activities to enhance the student experience without the cost being a barrier to participation and gives students access to free events, free societies, free access to competitive sport including travel and sports equipment and free access to extracurricular classes such as dance or cookery. In addition the University will, through the StudentsqUnion, offer a paid student reps scheme in line with the University's employability agenda. Based upon the most recent monitoring return the Big Deal support is worth the equivalent of £244,000 for OFFA countable students.

Current targeted financial assistance

In addition to the Access to Learning Fund, Bucks provides targeted assistance via the Bucks Advantage Bursary Scheme which holds a fund of £25,000 per annum. This supports the Widening Participation Strategy by providing assistance to individual students experiencing hardship in the form of individual grants or advances up to a limit of £500.

Information for prospective students is available in the Bucks prospectus, the Bucks web-site and on UCAS profiles. Information on financial assistance also features prominently at Bucks open days and trained staff and students are available to answer questions about financial support. Presentations and workshops on fees, finance and bursaries are offered at University Open Days. In addition, these workshops are also offered by the Schools and Colleges Liaison Team and delivered at schools and colleges and other institutions on request.

The University is committed to ensuring that students are aware of, and receive, the financial support they are entitled to. Details of financial support packages relating to both the National Scholarship Programme and the University's bursary scheme will be made available to prospective students via the above channels.

Outreach work

The University has a thriving programme of long term and coordinated development through outreach provision focused through the School and College Liaison Team and the Faculties. The University intends to build upon and enhance through additional funding the work achieved through its partnership with Aimhigher (MKOB) including the employment of at least one member of Aimhigher staff to ensure continuity of outreach work already achieved. It is also our intention to provide increased resource to the outreach effort by refocusing some staff from other areas in line with the WP commitment of the University.

The outreach activities are largely targeted at institutions where there are lower levels of achievement, low levels of aspiration and little tradition of progression to higher education. The University is an active sponsor of a number of local institutions which seek to provide inspirational opportunities for targeted groups of students. These institutions include Cressex Community School, Aylesbury Vale Academy, and the Chiltern Design Academy which reflects the collective desire to provide clear and accessible pathways into higher education particularly in technical and practical areas. We are a co-lead sponsor for the development of a University Technical College in Aylesbury. The University is also engaged in a project with a number of local schools in low participation and low income areas offering professional qualifications at level 12 & 13 which can lead to increased University entry potential and employment opportunities.

Moving forward, the University intends to target its outreach work predominantly with schools and colleges with a high proportion of students from low participation and low income areas and to develop long term strategic relationships with these local institutions in order to provide students with a sustained and progressive programme of interventions. The University has identified that there are five or six key secondary schools with which we will specifically work closely to promote the benefits of higher education and provide support to achieve this aspiration. Progression for young people from these schools into higher education will be monitored and their progression tracked.

The University has entered into a collaborative partnership with Oxford Brookes University and Oxford University to deliver a coordinated outreach programme to targeted schools and colleges across Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire (MKOB). Each institution will continue to support the centralised research, monitoring and evaluation data service provided by Aimhigher MKOB since 2003 in order to ensure continuity of this particularly effective aspect of good practice and to enable us to have a clear insight into the effectiveness of our individual and collective WP activities.

Our outreach programme which includes a range of activities such as campus visits, curriculum enrichment and mentoring will continue to form the backbone of our outreach offer. We have plans for increased and specifically targeted access and outreach activities which include targeting some of our professional and vocational courses which WP students might not normally consider. We have identified specific groups such as Looked After Children and Care Leavers and are actively supporting their aspirations through such events as residential summer schools and follow-up visits. Bucks is also committed to obtaining the **Buttle UK HE Quality Mark** for Care Leavers, and we are monitoring and supporting their progress from first enquiry to award. Additional activities such as subject specific revision conferences will be included as will a targeted pre-entry programme for those students who might have been out of mainstream education for some time.

The University will continue to support the highly successful and effective Student Ambassador programme. Research undertaken by the University and by Aimhigher MKOB has highlighted the value of peer relationships when working with young people. Student Ambassadors will continue to be engaged in a variety of supportive roles, including acting as mentors and role models for students identified by schools as having the ability to progress to higher education, but who appear not to be considering university as an option. The Student Ambassadors are not only financially rewarded but also receive valuable transferable skills which are at the heart of the University's employability agenda.

It is clear that not all decisions to continue into higher education are based on academic achievement and Bucks has therefore instigated a range of supportive measures, designed to allow applicants to make an informed choice prior to any application. Through the Bucks New University, Oxford Brookes and Oxford University collaboration we intend to offer elements of Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) to both students and staff with an IAG remit.

A major vehicle for extending participation has been the implementation of Progression Agreements which ensure that those colleges, that have signed such agreement with Bucks are given full access to those services which would encourage their transition to higher education. The Progression Agreement model is being extended to schools and colleges in both the MKOB and West London as an intrinsic element of our focus on developing strategic partnerships and in an effort to extend both academic and social mobility in these areas.

In conjunction with the Bucks Students Union we continue to utilise the very successful Buddying service delivered by trained students using text messaging to contact all successful applicants, a service which is particularly beneficial to those with no family or low peer higher education participation.

The Bucks students who are selected and trained then act as a point of contact between the potential student and the University. The role involves welcoming new students to the University, answering queries and arranging to meet during Freshers Week to ensure that new students do not become lonely and isolated.

The contact continues until the beginning of the spring term of the first year to encourage and support new students to return after the Christmas break. We intend to enhance this activity around specifically targeted WP groups, for example training the Buddies in the onward referral of particular problems or concerns which may be identified by these particular students. The Buddies again receive training and develop valuable skills in line with the University's employability agenda.

Retention

Retention and Progression activities have formed a major part of the University's strategic Plan. Bucks fully acknowledges that targeted outreach activities need to be followed through with consistent support for WP students once they have enrolled.

Currently at Bucks, retention strategies include:

- Transparency of recruitment data and information of extra costs through UCAS profiles
- Looked after children/Care leavers engagement and support
- Freshers Helpers/Buddying programmes
- Focussed and interactive induction events
- Diagnostic testing of numeracy and literacy at induction
- Fully trained Senior Residents (second and third year students) in residential accommodation
- Effective monitoring of attendance and swift follow up
- Learning Development Unit which provides literacy, numeracy and academic skills development support for current students
- Access to Learning Fund and the Bucks Advantage Bursary Scheme
- Big Deal (Free social and sporting events) encouraging participation in a wider student experience
- Formative assessment and assessment planning
- Personal Tutoring Policy and Tutor Handbook

In order to focus our retention strategy more specifically on our targeted groups, Bucks will invest in strengthening and enhancing current areas of provision as well as providing new additional support in the following areas:

- Employ a designated Learning Development Tutor to work specifically with target groups and as a key link to Faculties, Schools Liaison, Careers and Employability and Accommodation teams. This role will be pivotal in ensuring that young and mature students from our target groups have a visible point of contact in the University who can work with them to provide ongoing support and act as a signpost to the opportunities available to them
- Bucks will strengthen the University and Students Union Money advice function to include a Money Doctors support service to ensure that immediate and visible assistance is readily available to students in need.
- A Head Start programme will run prior to the start of their course, free of charge, to target students who might benefit from an earlier induction and academic skills development programme.

- Diagnostic Skills testing will be specifically for targeted groups in order to provide early intervention through supportive study enhancement programmes.
- Enhancement of the Careers & Employability function will facilitate working closely with the designated Learning Development Unit tutor to ensure that the employability guidance, mentoring, paid and unpaid placement opportunities are made readily available to target group students who may need specific support and advice in orientating themselves in a graduate employment market.
- Bucks is also participating in the HEFCE funded Back on Course project which will enable us to closely monitor students who withdraw early from their courses to better understand the true reasons for this decision and in order to monitor and enhance our provision where appropriate.

Performance

As a University supporting our local communities with very mixed wards in terms of affluence and higher education participation, we have identified two key measures in terms of outreach and retention that we believe will be well supported through the measures and initiatives outlined above. We expect to face greater competition from other universities in attracting students from families or groups that have a history of lower-participation in higher education, but we are nevertheless committed to retain above average performance, and our targets are set accordingly.

We have chosen to measure the percentage of new entrants from low-income families on full-state support as well as using the average weighting describing the participation of students of ~~±High~~ or ~~±Medium~~ risk as defined on the basis of qualifications by HEFCE. Using these as key measures will allow us to measure our success in attracting and retaining students, both young and mature, from less traditional higher education backgrounds whilst retaining the ability to benchmark ourselves against the sector. These measures will be supplemented by monitoring the progress of the initiatives described within this agreement.

In addition to the incremental activities and costs set out in this agreement the University intends to continue its wide ranging existing work in support of widening participation and improving retention provided that the associated HEFCE grant funding for this activity persists.

