

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College Access Agreement

1. Introduction

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College has a long tradition of commitment to widening participation. In recent years this has been articulated in the University College's vision of itself as the University of the Region. 41% 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.

The total student population at BCUC is over 8,500¹. 30% of students are studying on part-time courses, 11% are studying for either a foundation degree or a higher national diploma/certificate, 4% studying towards a postgraduate qualification, and 44% studying full-time towards an undergraduate degree. Of BCUC's full-time degree students, 44% are over 21 years old, 14% are from low participation neighbourhoods, and 35% are from black and minority ethnic communities.

BCUC offers a growing number of Foundation degrees that also encourage the participation of non-traditional students, for example 22% of students currently studying on full-time Foundation degrees are Asian – Pakistani.

In addition to playing an active role within the local community and developing links with schools, adult education and training providers, the University College has developed formal relationships with a number of the further education colleges in Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and West London.

The University College is also an active participant in the Aimhigher network and 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. It is intended that the Access Agreement will build upon and develop this work.

2. Performance Indicators

The annual Performance Indicator figures produced by HESA show a positive pattern of recruitment and retention in relation to non-traditional students at BCUC. In particular, there is strong recruitment of entrants from state schools, low participation neighbourhoods and lower social classes, while the recruitment of mature and part-time students is in line with the benchmarks set for the institution. Non-continuation rate figures for students from low-participation areas are good, with only a small proportion of these students withdrawing from higher education altogether.

2.1 Participation of young, full-time undergraduate entrants

In all performance measures for young, full-time undergraduates, BCUC performs well in recruiting students from state schools, lower social classes and low participation areas. All measures exceed the location-adjusted benchmarks set for the institution.

2.2 Participation of mature, full-time undergraduate students

BCUC marginally fails to meet the location-adjusted benchmark target for the recruitment of mature, full-time undergraduates with no previous experience of HE and from a low participation neighbourhood.

¹ Based on student enrolments for 2005-06

Includes: UK collaborative partners

Excludes Overseas collaborations, SCPE, Incoming exchange students and research students

2.3 Participation of part-time undergraduates

The participation of all part-time undergraduates exceeds the location-adjusted benchmark for this indicator.

2.4 Participation of students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance

BCUC has a consistent record of recruiting students who are in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance (the most reliable way of calculating the number of students with a disability). For the first time in four years, BCUC has not increased the proportion of students in receipt of a DSA allowance, marginally below the benchmark for the institution.

2.5 Non-continuation rates for young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods

Student retention is a priority area for the University College. For those students entering a BCUC course in 2003-04, the proportion of students failing to progress to the second year was 9%. This is below the benchmark for this indicator.

3. Fee limits

In 2007-08 the University College intends to set a standard tuition fee for home and EU students for entry to all full time undergraduate courses of £3,070. The fee will apply to each year of the course of study undertaken by students enrolling at the University College in the 2007-08 application cycle. Tuition fees may of course be subject to annual inflationary rises.

Students enrolling on BCUC validated sub degree level courses at colleges of further education will either be charged the same fee as students at the University College with entitlement to the same system of scholarships and bursaries or a fee of £1535 which recognises the important role that the University College's partners play in widening participation in their local communities. Where the lower fee is charged bursaries may be available at the discretion of individual corporations.

4. Amounts of additional income to be spent on access measures

£1,000 per student will be designated to support the implementation of the Access Agreement through BCUC bursaries. These bursaries will be universally available and will be promoted widely as part of BCUC's strategy to encourage the widest possible range of applicants.

A further £300 of the income raised from variable fees will support BCUC scholarships. These scholarships will be targeted at new students enrolling at the University College from schools and colleges with which BCUC has developed a formal strategic relationship.

Additional support for outreach initiatives will be targeted specifically at widening participation.

The remaining income from variable fees will enhance the unit of resource as well as supporting initiatives and activities to underpin the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

5. Bursaries and other financial support for students

Although the aggregate levels of bursary and scholarship support will differ between students, every student will receive a bursary of at least £1,000 in the form of cash support or in the case of students enrolled at partner colleges a direct fee reduction of £1,500. Additional targeted support will be available through scholarships.

The allocation of bursary and scholarship payments will be administered by BCUC and students will receive their bursaries in regular staged payments throughout the academic year.

Part-time tuition fees will not be varied in line with full-time fees and students will not be eligible for support from the main BCUC bursary fund but part-time students will be eligible for payments from the BCUC Hardship Fund.

5.1 Types of bursary and other financial support

BCUC bursaries and scholarships have been developed from the following three guiding principles:

1. The approach adopted should support the achievement of the government's target for access to higher education, reducing perceived financial barriers for as many potential students as possible.
2. Bursaries and scholarships should promote widening participation.
3. Information on eligibility should be easily accessible and clear, enabling the majority of applicants to self assess at the initial point of enquiry and all students to know exactly what they will have to pay and what financial support will be in place.

5.2 BCUC bursaries

The heart of the University College's Access Agreement will be a universal bursary scheme, which will provide bursaries to the value of £1,000 for home and EU students.

Clearly this will impact on a wider cohort of students than those specifically targeted through the Access Agreement. Approximately 60% of BCUC students in any one year were in receipt of fee remission under the previous arrangements. BCUC therefore believes that the provision of such an extensive bursary will be the most effective way to implement the agreed guiding principles and ensure that the needs of all students on full state support and students from low participation areas are addressed.

5.3 BCUC scholarships

In addition to the bursary scheme, BCUC intends to underpin and extend its existing work on widening participation through scholarship support for students entering the University College from schools and further education corporations designated as partner institutions. These institutions have been identified through use of HEFCE's POLAR data as those with lower than average achievement and relatively low progression rates to higher education. In these cases the scholarship support will be part of a rich mix of aspiration raising activities and academic support and will be formally defined within an agreed 'Compact' structure. Scholarship support in this instance will provide an additional £300 per year to each of the students from the partner institutions enrolling on a course at BCUC. By 2010/11 it is intended that some 30% of BCUC's students will be recruited from 'Compact' schools and colleges.

Further scholarships will be available through faculties to encourage talented students to accept places at the University College. The number of scholarships and the amount payable will be decided at faculty level and promoted through the BCUC web-site and prospectus.

It is estimated that the combination of BCUC bursaries and scholarships will benefit all of the potential student population who are from under represented groups.

6. Current targeted financial assistance

In addition to the Access to Learning Fund, BCUC provides targeted assistance through the University College Hardship Fund. This fund supports the widening participation policy by providing assistance to students experiencing hardship in the form of individual grants and advances up to a limit of £750. In 2005/06 the fund made nearly 200 awards, helping with accommodation, books and equipment, transport and childcare.

This fund currently stands at £45,000 per annum.

7. Provision of information to students

7.1 BCUC bursaries

Information for prospective students is available in the BCUC prospectus and on the web-site. Information also features prominently at BCUC open days and trained staff and students are available to answer questions about financial support.

A variety of posters and flyers have been produced, highlighting the benefits of BCUC's bursary and scholarship support, targeted at raising aspirations and encouraging progression to higher education.

7.2 BCUC Scholarships

Scholarships are widely promoted within the partner institutions. This is a direct and continuing process as these scholarships are built into an on-going relationship that involves close contact between staff and students in a variety of ways both formal and informal. Information also appears in BCUC's and the further education partners' prospectuses and web sites.

7.3 Faculty Scholarships

These scholarships are highly targeted and promoted directly to students enrolling on HNDs and Foundation Degrees.

7.4 Additional information

Case studies have been prepared, illustrating the net costs of studying at BCUC. These include information on the cost of living including accommodation, transport and subsistence. Information is also provided on the financial support available from BCUC's bursaries, scholarships, subsidies for transport and accommodation and from the University College Fund as well as the support available from the state. These case studies are available on the BCUC web site and in printed form for distribution at open days.

7.5 Training

Training on the financial implications of studying at BCUC is built in to the training programme for the BCUC Student Ambassador group, who undertake a significant element of the outreach work and play an important role at open days. Staff and students who are involved in liaison and outreach work are provided with a full pack of information enabling them to give a clear financial overview to prospective students.

8. Outreach work

The University College has a thriving and expanding programme of outreach provision focused through the School and College Liaison Team and the faculties and is an active and committed member of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Aimhigher partnership. BCUC's Regional Development Unit currently hosts and supports members of staff employed by Aimhigher and works closely with the Aimhigher network in order to ensure that there is a high level of synergy between the two organisations and no duplication of effort.

Activities that are undertaken by the School and College Liaison Team and the faculties include taster days, master classes and visits to schools and colleges to provide information and support through the UCAS process. These 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 activities are funded through Aimhigher and BCUC's Widening Access and Improving Retention budget.

Aspiration raising is also supported through summer schools, funded by BCUC and Aimhigher South East.

BCUC's Student Ambassadors scheme has been recognised as an example of good practice by the Learning and Skills Council. Student Ambassadors are engaged in a variety of supportive roles including acting as mentors and role models for pupils identified by schools as having the ability to progress to higher education but who appear not to be considering university as an option.

It is clear that not all decisions to continue into higher education are based on academic achievement and BCUC has therefore instigated a range of supportive measures.

In conjunction with the BCUC Students' Union, an existing student using text messaging contacts successful applicants from low participation postcodes. The BCUC students who are selected and trained then act as a point of contact between the potential student and the University College. The role involves welcoming new students to the University College, 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 second semester of the first year to encourage and support new students to return after the Christmas break.

A further example of pre entry support included as part of the Access Agreement and directly targeted at widening participation groups is the pre entry residential event 'Flying Start'. This is focused on developing study skills and preparing students with non-traditional qualifications, lower levels of academic achievement, or no family history of higher education, to make a successful transition into the University College.

9. Milestones

9.1 Performance Indicators summary

	<i>From state schools or colleges</i>		<i>From low social classes</i>		<i>From low participation neighbourhoods</i>	
	<i>From group</i>	<i>Location-adjusted benchmark</i>	<i>From group</i>	<i>Location-adjusted benchmark</i>	<i>From group</i>	<i>Location-adjusted benchmark</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
2004-05	96.8	94.1	32.5	33.4	14.3	13.0
2003-04	97.0	94.5	36.3	33.5	13.5	13.2
2002-03	96.5	94.1	35.4	33.2	13.2	12.3
2001-02	97.0	95.0	31.0	30.0	12.0	12.0

9.2 Young students, first-time undergraduates

BCUC consistently recruits the majority of its students from state schools and increasingly from lower social classes. The proportion of entrants from low participation neighbourhoods has been increasing for the last four years and well exceeds the location-adjusted benchmark for 2004-05.

It is therefore proposed that the first of BCUC's objectives will be to increase the proportion of entrants from low participation areas beyond the location-adjusted benchmark to the level of the national benchmark. The University College recognises the challenging nature of this objective in the context of the demographic profile of the south-east but sees its achievement as central to BCUC's mission.

Young students, first-time undergraduates from low participation neighbourhoods					
Baseline 2002/03	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
13%	14%	14%	15%	15%	16%

9.3 Compact agreements

An important element of BCUC's fair access strategy is the development of Compacts with schools and colleges where a significant number of young people have no tradition of higher education and where aspirations and attainment may be low. The Compact agreement

includes links with staff and students at the University College and activities to raise aspirations and achievement. BCUC currently has four formal strategic partnerships in place and will work to develop an additional five in 2006/7 increasing this by a further four each year for the duration of the Access Agreement.

Compact agreements					
Baseline 2004/05	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
4	9	13	17	21	25

9.4 Pre-induction summer schools

BCUC will roll out this programme across all the faculties following the success of the two pilot programmes, aimed at encouraging potential students from widening participation areas to take up places at the University College by providing extended inductions and support for study skills.

Students attending pre induction summer schools					
Baseline 2004/05	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
50	95	120	125	130	135

9.5 Buddying

In conjunction with the BCUC Student' Union the University College will extend the pilot Buddy Scheme to include all applicants from low participation areas and those declaring a disability. Students will be contacted prior to enrolment and supported through to the beginning of the second semester of the first year.

9.6 Outreach Activities

A programme of events is planned, led by student ambassadors, to raise the aspirations of pupils. It is anticipated that this will involve an additional 3700 students by 2010/11.

Outreach activities					
Baseline 2004/05	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
1700	2100	2500	2900	3300	3700

10. Institutional monitoring arrangements

10.1 Young students, first-time undergraduates

This objective will be measured through the regular collection of national benchmark data.

10.2 Compact agreements

The proposed compacts will be formal agreements between the school/college and BCUC and therefore copies of the agreements will provide evidence of progress towards the agreed milestones.

BCUC will also monitor the number of students progressing to BCUC from Compact schools.

10.3 Pre-induction summer schools

The University College will track all participating students and report on the impact of the programme in relation to achievement and retention.

10.4 Buddying

This objective will be monitored through the numbers of students actively engaged in the scheme and its impact in relation to retention. Feedback will be obtained from both Buddies and the target group using an external evaluator. Annual and interim reports will be produced and presented to the Recruitment and Admissions Group.

10.5 Outreach Activities

BCUC will track the number of activities and the number of participants engaged in these activities. Progress will be monitored against the agreed action plan, the level of students' participation and the number of events.

Monitoring in conjunction with Aimhigher South-East will track progression rates into HE for students engaged in these activities.